



Storytellers to the Nation

A History of American
Television Writing

Tom Stempel

\$24.95

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A History of American Television Writing

Jam-packed with hundreds of anecdotes and quotes from in-depth interviews with over forty television writers, this is the first comprehensive history of writing for American television. These writers tell, often in wonderfully funny tales, of their experiences working with, and often fighting with, the networks, the censors, the sponsors, the producers, and the stars in trying to create shows that millions of Americans love (and sometimes hate—the flops are here, too). Not only do we learn about the inside workings of such famous TV writers as Paddy Chayefsky, Rod Serling, Gore Vidal (yes), Norman Lear, and Steven Bochco, but about the many less famous who have written for countless comedy, variety, and dramatic shows over the years.

Here are wide-ranging firsthand accounts of writing *I Love Lucy*, *Your Show of Shows*, *Maverick*, *The Defenders*, *Laugh-In*, *Police Story*, *All in the Family*, *Shogun*, *M*A*S*H*, *Hill Street Blues*, *thirtysomething*, *China Beach*, and many others. Among the stars wandering through the writers' dreams (and sometimes nightmares) are Lucille Ball, James Garner, Carroll O'Connor, Suzanne Somers, Jack Lord, Penny Marshall, and many more.

Rich with insight into American television, *Storytellers to the Nation* puts TV into a wider perspective to show how it, and the writers who have written for it for over forty years, have helped to change and open up American society.



Photo: Alix Roughen

TOM STEMPEL is a professor of cinema at Los Angeles City College, where he has taught film history and screenwriting for twenty years. He is the author of *Frame-Work: A History of Screenwriting in the American Film* (also published by Continuum), *Screenwriting*, and *Screenwriter: The Life and Times of Nunnally Johnson*. Stempel has written on film for the *Los Angeles Times*, *Film Quarterly*, *Film Comment*, and *Sight and Sound*.

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Praise for

Storytellers to the Nation

A History of American Television Writing

Tom Stempel

"It is one thing to effectively document the growth of a profession. But it is far more difficult to track the creative continuity of it within the industry with which it has fought a forty-year war. Mr. Stempel has done both and made it superbly entertaining to boot."

—Edward Anhalt
Screenwriter and Television Writer

"This fascinating chronicle spotlights long unheralded protagonists—the television writers who wrote the scripts, evolved the genres, fought the battles (vs producers, sponsors, censors, pressure groups, et al) that have given us a half-century of prime-time diversion. This is a story that only its writers could provide; they saw it as stars and directors did not—and besides, says Tom Stempel, they're more honest. His vignettes of innumerable story conferences as recounted for him by scores of writers are hilarious and illuminating. Quietly, dryly written, *Storytellers to the Nation* adds up to something monumental. Social historians will take note."

—Erik Barnouw
Author, *Tube of Plenty*
Former Chairman, Writers Guild of America

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TOM STEMPEL

*Storytellers
to the Nation*

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN
TELEVISION WRITING



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1992

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INTRODUCTION

“Was there any?”

That was the reaction of a film historian when I said I was researching writing in American television. He was only partly joking; he knew 25 years ago, when I started researching screenwriting in the American film, that the reaction I got from other film historians was what I was now getting from him. In those days everybody knew directors made movies up as they went along and writers were semi-amiable drunks who occasionally came up with a good line of dialogue.

Much has changed since then. Screenwriters are interviewed at some length in newspapers and magazines. There are at least seven volumes of collected interviews with screenwriters if not in print, at least available in libraries. There are two recent books on the history of screenwriting, and a 1990 book on Ben Hecht begins with the author announcing that the reason for a biography is not that Hecht wrote Broadway plays or novels, but because he was an important screenwriter.¹ This particular West has been opened; there are roads, towns, schools, and even churches; and the historiography of screenwriting has almost become a fit place to raise young'uns. What else could I do but light out for the territories?

The original plan for my previous book, *FrameWork: A History of Screenwriting in the American Film*,² was that it would include a section on writing for television. What I discovered was more than enough material for a book just on screenwriting. What I also discovered as I worked on the book in the mid-eighties was that the volume of good writing was higher in those days in television than it was in film. As I frequently said to my screenwriting classes, “Name me any 11 two-hour feature films this year that are as well written as the 22 one-hour episodes this, or any, season of *Hill Street Blues*. Plus *St. Elsewhere*.” They couldn't do it, nor could I. When Mike Leach, my editor at Continuum, asked me what I was going to write for them next, the obvious answer was a book on the history of writing for television.

Unlike the history of screenwriting, however, there is not much previously published material on the history of writing for television. Most writing about television, I discovered, fits into two categories. The first is the academic writing, which tends to emphasize the role of institutions in television (the Federal Communications Commission [FCC], the networks, the sponsors, the pressure groups). The second is the nostalgia industry, which tends to emphasize massive amounts of information, a good deal of it trivial, and mostly about very light entertainment shows (a nostalgia book can generally be identified by its listing the fictional address of the characters in shows). There are so far no collections of interviews with television writers, although some are interviewed for other books, especially the nostalgia books. There is so far only one published biography of a television writer, Joel Engel's excellent *Rod Serling*.³

To do this book, then, it was necessary to do what the academics call "original research." By habit, training, and interest, this meant my interviewing television writers. I did do background reading of books and articles, as well as materials at various research libraries, but I thought the best stuff would come from the writers themselves. I think I guessed right about that. I ended up doing 42 interviews, which ran everywhere from a few minutes on the phone to five hours, with one and a half to two hours about the average.

The book therefore tells the story of the history of writing for television very much from the point of view of the writers: their adventures, their fun, their agonies, their passions. It cannot, alas, tell the story from the point of view of the writers I was not able to interview (or whose recollections are not published elsewhere). Certain shows I would like to have written about, such as *The Carol Burnett Show* and *Cheers*, to name just two, are not discussed in detail for those reasons. Because of limitations of space and time, I have limited the book primarily to network prime-time fictional television, but several of the writers interviewed have worked in other areas, so occasional side trips for comparison purposes are made to production for syndication, late-night programming, public television and cable shows, and documentaries. Writing for news shows, daytime drama, and game shows is not included.

One unavoidable question with interview material is: How accurate is it? The people interviewed for this book have had, for the most part, a great deal of success telling the nation stories, so they are very good at it—which is one reason why doing the research for this book was such a delight. The writers I interviewed were very aware, and made sure I was aware, that I was getting *their* version of the story. Several times during the interviews, writers would warn me (as you are warned now) "This is how I remember it. So-and-so [or more likely, that @\$#%*&%\$#* so-and-so] will remember it differently." In several cases I have two or more sides to the stories; in some cases, just one. As a general rule, though, I have found over 25 years of interviewing and reading other interviews that writers tend to be a lot more accurate and honest than actors, producers, and especially directors.

In addition to the writers' point of view, there is also my point of view, as both a television viewer and an historian. This book is not just a collection of interviews, which would have been easier to do (and don't think there weren't days I wished I had taken the easy way out), but an attempt to weave the material together into some kind of historical perspective. The structure of the book is generally, but not strictly, chronological. Like television itself, it is a pattern of recurring elements: individuals, types of programs, and themes. The structure of the book is also not strictly narrative, but, inspired by the increasing complexities of both how television is written and what is written for television, the pattern of recurring elements becomes ultimately, I hope, richer and more complex than you might have expected of TV. Avoiding the simpler approach should help the reader understand how good television writing can be.

The recurring individuals and types of programs will be obvious to the reader, and to give you a start on the themes, some of them are: the collaborative nature of television writing; writers and actors (especially stars); writers and producers; censorship; reality and fiction, the various Golden Ages of television writing (yes, there was more than one); the process of writing versus the result of the writing; and the maturation of television and its connection with the increasing openness of American society. (I realize many people are under the delusion that America is turning culturally conservative, but a comparison of what was generally, or institutionally, accepted in the popular arts—such as, in this case, television—in the fifties and the eighties or nineties should dissuade them. The cultural conservatives are certainly fighting a semi-gallant if sociologically ignorant war, and they have even won a battle here and there, but their cause is clearly doomed.)

Most academic writing about television deals with the institutions of television, which is perhaps why a major thread in the fabric of this book is the conjunction (at best) or conflict (at worst) between the institutions and the individual writers. Part of the reason for the power of institutions in American television is that they dominated the development of both radio, and (out of radio) television. One reason, and perhaps the most important reason, for the power of the institutions was, paradoxically, the talent of the individuals who worked for them.

RADIO TO TELEVISION

When Jay Burton returned to New York City in the late summer of 1948, the institutions that were to dominate American television were in place. The television networks grew out of the radio networks, which in turn grew out of corporate giants protecting their control of radio patents. The commercial expansion of television, delayed by the Depression and World War II, began in earnest after World War II. In May 1947, NBC began a regularly scheduled series of dramas, *The Kraft Television Theatre*, although not many people were watching. What television needed was some person and/or show to make owning a television set essential to the American people. Jay Burton was about to go to work for that person and that show.¹

The Texaco Star Theatre

Jay Burton had started in New York years before as a press agent for the Latin Quarter nightclub, writing topical jokes for Earl Wilson's newspaper column; then he wrote for Bob Hope's radio show in Los Angeles. In 1948 Hope had one of many housecleanings of his writing staff and Burton was fired. Burton returned to New York because he had heard that Milton Berle was going to have a regular television show. He called Berle up and said he used to work for Hope. Berle, who admired Hope, hired him.²

Milton Berle was a big star in nightclubs, getting \$15,000 per week, and not quite such a big star in radio, where he was getting only \$2,500.³ He had done a radio variety show for Texaco (written by, among others, Nat Hiken and Danny and Neil Simon), and after a summer tryout on television for Texaco was given a regular show Tuesday night at 8 P.M. on the National Broadcasting Company (NBC): *The Texaco Star Theatre*.

Berle's recollections of the writing of the show have changed over the years. In his 1974 autobiography he wrote that for the first three shows in September 1948 he had only Hal Collins, who did not write new material but merely

organized old Berle material for television. Berle added that the system only lasted three weeks—until they learned they needed writers.⁴ He also admitted in his book that they *eventually* had five writers on the show the first season.⁵ By the time of a 1985 interview, Berle was claiming the budget was too tight the first *two* years to be able to hire any writers at all.⁶

According to Jay Burton, there were six writers on the show beginning in September 1948. Burton wrote gags for the opening monologue and five other writers worked on the sketches: Hal Collins, Bobby Gordon, Jerry Sellen (who did the musical material), Buddy Arnold, and Woody Kling. After the first six months, Burton wrote sketches as well, and more writers were added later. Burton says that Berle “liked writers, respected writers. Only he wanted more [jokes]. I used to write eleven pages [of jokes for the] monologues, used to hold out four, I’d give him seven at first. Then I’d say the next day I wrote four extra pages. He always liked those last four better.” As for writing the sketches, Burton says, “We all sat in a room and pitched.”

From its debut in 1948 to the fall of 1952, the structure of *The Texaco Star Theatre* was that of a vaudeville show, with sketches, musical numbers, and guest acts. The scripts for the shows⁷ are casual to the point of sloppiness, befitting the time pressures under which they were written. Often the monologues were missing from the mimeographed scripts, since comedians like Berle, Burton notes, “wanted to keep the monologues to themselves. They wanted it to be fresh . . . They’d often not do it in rehearsal so the crew wouldn’t hear it.”

The sketches on the show started out at the shorter length of vaudeville sketches, running four to five pages each. By February 1950, the sketches were longer, running fourteen to fifteen pages, similar to the length of sketches from burlesque. Burton attributes this to a combination of more writers on the show and Berle’s wanting longer sketches. In spite of the increased length of the sketches, the format runs basically the same. The sketches do not really tell stories, but are primarily collections of gags, many of them used repeatedly. (As are many of the jokes on the show: Berle often asks his guest stars how it feels to be on a comedy show and they invariably reply, “I don’t know. Someday I hope to be on one.”) There are several slightly changed versions of a parody of *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Burton says the standard sketches were called “Nat Hiken sketches, a sure-fire laugh because the sketch had been tried a thousand times.” Hiken had written for Berle on radio, but not on television. The writers were drawn to the familiar material because, as Burton says, “You knew where the jokes were. It’s kind of insurance. Milton always liked it if he was going to get squirted in the face.” Berle also repeatedly worked in drag. Burton observes: “Milton loved that, what he’d do with his eyes, his very expressive mouth. In drag he looked just like his mother.”

Several of the sketches were parodies of relatively recent movies, but none of them are particularly well observed. Supposed parodies of *The Sea Wolf* (November 30, 1948) and *Mutiny on the Bounty* (June 14, 1949) are the

same sketch. A December 7, 1948 parody of the Hope-Crosby *Road* pictures has Berle as Hope and Buddy Lester as Crosby, but there is very little specifically Hope or Crosby about anything they are given to do or say. Another variation on Hope and Crosby on March 25, 1952, with Mickey Rooney as Crosby, is a little closer to the originals, but not much.

The language in the scripts is very informal. Burton notes, "They wrote as they talked. Nobody had that kind of literary talent. They didn't do fine-tuning." The writing, even in the introductions of guest stars, includes phrases like "I wanna," instead of "I want to." What might seem to be ad-libs were written into the scripts. In one Foreign Legion sketch Berle is calling roll, and when one man flubs his answer, Berle says, "One line he's got—and he can't remember it." One script notes that Berle and a guest star "do a phony breakup," and another has Berle "breaking up, correcting." Burton says, "Milton was good at that. He could get himself up to laugh in a false breakup."

If the writing of *The Texaco Star Theatre* was not particularly sharp, it did provide an opportunity for Berle to become the first television star. The verbal gags were mostly run of the mill, as was Berle's delivery, which is why he was only a moderate star on radio. The material for the TV show provided Berle with very physical and visual humor. The drag scenes and being squirted in the face are only two examples. In a May 23, 1950, sketch, "Suits for Sale," Jerry Lewis as a suit salesman tears Berle's suit off him. In several scripts, there are no specific details of the action, just the note that there would be "business." As Jay Burton remembers, "A lot of the [slapstick] stuff was last minute." Berle worked best as a visual comedian, not in the sense of doing pantomime, but in doing rather vigorous slapstick. This also played to another of Berle's strengths: the immediacy of his live performances—one of the reasons he had been better paid for nightclub work than for radio.

It was that sense of intense immediacy, communicated visually, that made Milton Berle a star on live television in 1948. He quickly became known as "Mr. Television" and is credited with selling millions of television sets. In 1951 NBC signed Berle to a thirty year contract, which guaranteed him \$200,000 per year whether he was on the air or not.⁸ And by the end of the 1951–52 season his ratings had begun to slip. The most obvious reason was that the DuMont network had put on opposite him *Life Is Worth Living*, a half-hour program of sermons by Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, which led to Berle's great line that Bishop Sheen had better writers than he did. The first impact of Berle was over and the Bishop was the hot new face on television. But it was more than that. *Your Show of Shows* had begun in February 1950 and was doing consistently sharper sketches, especially in its film parodies. *I Love Lucy* had started in the fall of 1951 and was doing visual comedy better than Berle did. Berle had invented television comedy, but Sid Caesar and Lucille Ball were taking it further than Berle had.

They were also taking it further than Berle could. Berle had a limited range, as the attempts to change the format of his show proved. At the urging

of the advertising agency that produced the show for Texaco, the show was changed to something resembling a situation comedy. Each program would deal with the problems “Milton Berle” had renting his apartment, getting acts for the show, etc. Berle would play the character of “Milton Berle.” Gags were cut down in favor of “character” comedy, and physical slapstick was almost eliminated. The problem was that Berle was not as good at playing the character of “Milton Berle” as he was at being Milton Berle. The character of “Milton Berle” had never been developed beyond a few superficial characteristics: ego and the reputation for stealing jokes.

The ratings went back up for a while, but Berle was obviously uncomfortable in the new format. In the script for the third show of that season, there are more handwritten notes than on any previous script, and the notes are all jokes to be added. In the fourth show of the season, October 14, 1952, Berle is in the unemployment office, and to identify himself to the attendant he does a complete mini-version of his show:

Texaco Star Theatre—You know—HE DOES THE TEXACO FIRE CHIEF BELL AND SINGS) We are the men of Texaco, I wipe the pipe, I scrub the hub—and here he is—America’s number one—Good evening ladies and germs—Don’t laugh, lady because you too—then Pinza comes on: *SOME ENCHANTED EVENING*—I look ashamed—I fall asleep—Oh, I feel so jazzy, I swear I’ll kill you—and then Bobby Sherwood—OH DON’T FORSAKE ME OH MY DARLING . . .—and then Jimmy Nelson—I’m Danny O’Day—Marfak—Havoline—Sky Chief—and then the girls dance—(HE DOES WALK) A PRETTY GIRL IS LIKE A MELODY—and now, ladies and gentleman, Martha Raye—OH BOY . . . Sing a song—CYNTHIA—Precious memories of Cynthia—She wasn’t pretty, she wasn’t ugly—She was pretty ugly . . . Allen, my little nephews and nieces—There’s one place for me—that’s near you—(HE DOES SIREN) . . . Texaco Men: Oh, the curtain is descending, the best friend your car ever had! BOM POM BOM POM BOM POM! (SINGS CHIMES) BOM BOM BOM—NBC . . . Well?

The attendant replies, “Yeh, but what do you do?” The routine was in the style of the original show, the one that made him a star, not the revised format, but the original format had worn out its welcome with the audience.

There was also a mismatch between Berle and the new head writer brought onto the show, Goodman Ace. Ace and his wife, Jane, had throughout the thirties and forties done a very successful radio show, *Easy Aces*, which they attempted to bring to television in 1949. The show consisted of Ace’s comments on various subjects and Jane’s malapropisms. The show only lasted six months on television. It was not so much that it was too literate for TV, as some have suggested, but that there were not enough visual elements to it.

When asked why he joined Berle’s staff in 1952, Ace replied, “I worked for 15 years [on radio] writing good stuff (*Easy Aces*) and nobody paid any attention to it. Now I can write for a big audience and still squeeze in some clever material.”⁹ Berle complained at the time that Ace’s jokes were “too intelligent

for my audience,”¹⁰ and he later wrote in his autobiography that Ace was wrong for the show and not good for “the sort of comedy that the character ‘Milton Berle’ made people think of.”¹¹

The other writers loved Ace. Just a few weeks into Ace’s first season, Burton wrote a handwritten note on his copy of the script, “Jay Burton, protege of Goodman Ace.” Burton recalls, “I’m crazy about Goody . . . He was the giant. He loved words. He wasn’t interested in big sketches. He liked dialogue . . . Sometimes he looked away from the screen just to listen to the dialogue.” When Goodman Ace left the Berle show in 1955 to go to write for Perry Como, Burton and several other writers went with him. Berle’s show was canceled the following year. NBC continued to pay him on the contract until it was up in 1981.¹² Burton continued to write, primarily for variety shows, trying to avoid situation comedies. He found he “understood variety. Sitcoms are not really show business, singing, dancing. Just 23 minutes.”

Jack Benny

Milton Berle was not the only radio performer to move into television. Jack Benny had been doing a regular radio program for 18 years when he started doing a television series in 1950. Unlike Berle, Benny had the advantage of having created, with his writing staff, a distinctive “Jack Benny” character: cheap, vain, cheap, incensed, cheap, etc. Benny not only played the character on radio, but variations on it in his films. The transition to television should have been easy for Benny, but it was not.¹³ Benny was not only worried about being seen too often by his audience, he felt the subtlety of his humor might not work as well on television.

There were losses for Benny in the transition from radio to television. His writers had developed several running gags based purely on sound effects, most notably the starting of his old Maxwell car (done on radio by Mel Blanc) and Benny’s vault, which was guarded by Carmichael the bear (also Blanc). While these appeared on television, they did not catch the imagination as vividly as they had on radio.

There were also gains for Benny on television. The writers learned to develop material that depended on Benny’s reactions to the action around him. (Part of this may have been Benny’s concern about being overexposed on the new medium.) The plotting of *The Jack Benny Show* is very simple. In the 1957 “Christmas Shopping Sketch,” the sketch is the entire show. Benny goes to a department store to buy presents for his friends. Benny simply reacts to the people he meets. He does as much with an expressive deadpan as anybody since Buster Keaton, and the reactions would simply not work on radio.

The writing process on Benny’s show began with the writers kicking around ideas, which they would mention to the comedian.¹⁴ One of the changes in television for Benny was that because of all the time he had to spend memorizing lines, getting costumes fit, and rehearsing, he spent less time with the

writers than he had on radio.¹⁵ The writers would write the script and Benny would go over it with them, since he worked best, even in radio, as an editor and reactor. Benny, for all the deadpan of his performance work, was a noted laugher, frequently falling on the floor at something in the script, which led to writer George Belzer's line "If a writer doesn't cause Jack to send a suit to the cleaners twice a week, he's not earning his money."¹⁶

Burns and Allen

Unlike Benny, his friend from vaudeville days, George Burns was more involved with the writing of his television show than he had been on his radio show. According to one of the writers, Paul Henning,

In radio George didn't have much of an active hand in the writing. Although he approved the material, he pretty much left it to his writers. When it came to television, you really had to work and use your imagination. This is where George came into his own. He met with the writers on the first day of each episode, worked out the story in detail with them and then went over the completed scripts very carefully.¹⁷

Burns himself has downplayed making the transition from radio to television: "We talked in vaudeville, we talked in radio, we talked in television. It wasn't hard to go from one medium to another."¹⁸ On the other hand, he recognized at the time that there was a difference, telling the writers, "We can't get by with just funny lines. We have to give them stuff to watch, too."¹⁹

The problem for Burns and his wife and partner, Gracie Allen, in the transition from radio to television was slightly more complicated than just providing the visuals. Like Benny, they brought over to television the characters they played on radio and before that in vaudeville: George who asked Gracie logical questions, Gracie who answered with her own tortured logic. Their act was primarily verbal humor. If that had continued on television, Burns would have had very little to do, and the balance between them would have been off. Over lunch, William Paley, head of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), suggested that Burns should open the show with the monologue. Burns thought about this and came up with the idea that he would be like the Stage Manager in the play *Our Town*: not just doing a monologue, but explaining the story, making transitions.²⁰

In the television shows this gives Burns a chance to react, both visually and verbally, to what is going on. In the movies the team made, he showed limited kinds of reactions, mostly exasperation. Burns's reactions get so complicated later in the series that he is also commenting on the show as a television show. In the 1956 "Missing Stamp" episode, he decides not to return the stamp because, he tells the audience, ". . . if I do, our show will be fifteen

minutes short.” In the same episode, he is later watching a scene from the show on the television set in his son, Ronnie’s, room.

While the characters of Burns and Allen and their neighbors the Mortons were brought over into television, none of the scripts or plots from the radio shows were used on television. The plots of the television shows are much more complicated than the radio shows (as well as more complicated than the plotting in the Benny television shows).²¹ In a two-episode story in 1958, “Hypnotizing Gracie”/“Gracie Is Brilliant” Gracie’s trying to find a designer for her dress, gets involved with a hypnotist who hypnotizes her, which makes her mentally brilliant. In an effort to get her back the way she was, the hypnotist inadvertently hypnotizes her neighbor, who ends up with Gracie’s brain.

Given the plot complications and the need to maintain a balance between Burns and Allen, it is not surprising that Burns was more involved in the writing of the television shows. Burns and the writers would sit around the office Monday and not leave until they had worked out the story. The “Hypnotizing Gracie” shows came from the writers’ wondering what would happen if Gracie were the smartest woman in the world.²² The writers would then write the episode while the current episode was rehearsed and shot on Tuesday and Wednesday (unlike the first years of Jack Benny’s show, which were done live with an audience, their show was shot on film but without an audience, so they could have more scene changes the complicated plotting called for). On Thursday and Friday Burns would work with the writers. On Saturday he would put together all the material they had developed during the week.²³ There are constant changes in the scripts, often simply in the wording of a joke, and in some cases optional versions of the lines are given in the scripts. The changes are generally to cut and simplify the material. The pauses that are an integral part of Burns’s timing are all written into the scripts.

The Lone Ranger

Not only were performers like Berle, Benny, and Burns and Allen making the transition from radio to television, so were many dramatic programs. *The Lone Ranger* began as a local radio show in 1933 and quickly became a nationwide hit.²⁴ It was created by George W. Trendle and written by Fran Stryker, who also wrote such series as *Covered Wagon Days*, from which several *Lone Ranger* stories were taken.²⁵ In the late forties Trendle went to the sponsor General Mills and suggested they underwrite a half-hour television show. Trendle kept control of the property, and Charles Larson, who wrote several *Lone Ranger* TV episodes, remembers that Trendle was “the greatest limitation. Trendle was a kind of old-fashioned gentleman with old-fashioned ideas about protecting the youth of America. He was very strict on language, which was very stiff. He would not allow contractions. We had to use ‘shall.’” Among the other limitations Larson mentions were that they

could not have the Lone Ranger unmasked, but when he was captured by the bad guys, Larson recalls it as “the agony of the damned” trying to figure out how not to unmask him. One solution was, “We had Tonto being knocked out and captured a lot.”

Some of the differences in writing for radio and television can be seen in a comparison of the 1938 radio episode “He Becomes the Lone Ranger” and the 1949 first TV episode, “Enter the Lone Ranger,” both of which deal with how John Reid became the Masked Man. The radio program is shorter, only eight minutes of story, while the television episode is 26 minutes. The radio program begins with a sound montage of the Cavendish Gang attacking wagon trains, towns, and ranches—which suggests an epic scope. The beginning on television is a Building-of-the-West montage made up of stock shots (general shots purchased from a film library or studio). The TV story begins with Collins, who will lead the Rangers into the Cavendish ambush, telling the story of the attack on the trading post. With a budget of approximately \$15,000²⁶ there was no way to show the attack. The ambush is shown, as is a long scene of the wounded Reid dragging himself to water, which is not in the radio play at all. There are only a few lines of dialogue in the television version from the radio version.²⁷ There is also not in this television episode, nor in the others, the incessant “Whoa, steady, big fellow,” jingling of bridles, and clapping of hooves that are in all the radio shows. On television we can see Silver.

Other Transitional Programs

While Trendle insisted that the Lone Ranger be as wholesome on television as he was on radio, Marshal Matt Dillon on *Gunsmoke* became more wholesome on television. The radio version of *Gunsmoke* began in 1952, the last days of network radio drama. Dillon on radio, played by William Conrad, was a bit shorter-tempered than on television and not as infallible, which James Arness insisted on for television.²⁸ Miss Kitty also became less hardened in the television version. The character could be suggestive on radio simply because audiences could use their imagination. The network, CBS, wanted to clean up Miss Kitty for the television show, and after the first episodes audiences did not see men going upstairs at the Long Branch.²⁹

Gunsmoke, however, did use scripts from the radio show for the television program in the first few years. Norman MacDonnell and John Meston had created the radio program, but when the series first went to TV, it was put under the control of Charles Marquis Warren, who had done considerable work in Western films. In the first season, 32 of the 39 episodes were based on scripts from the radio show; Warren specifically told his writers to select stories from the radio scripts.³⁰ This worked so well that in the second, third, and fourth seasons, all 39 episodes in each season were based on radio stories. Of the radio episodes that were *not* done on television, many were not done for obvious budgetary reasons. Most stories about the cattle trail that ended at

Dodge City, such as “Brothers,” which is about a herd of 2,000 head, were not done on television, nor was “New Hotel,” about a hotel that is built and burnt down in the episode. Some of the tougher-edged radio stories were not done, such as “Square Triangle,” which portrays a three-way love affair, and “Kitty,” which deals with the town’s dislike of Kitty.³¹ Programs done on both media were often softened for television. In “The Guitar” a mule’s ear is cut off on radio, but on television the mule is merely painted with white stripes.³²

Death Valley Days, which had started on radio in 1930, also used radio material for its television series. Ruth Woodman, who had created the series for radio, supervised the early television version of it, beginning in 1952. On radio the narrator was The Old Ranger, and on TV, as Woodman noted, he “mellowed a bit, of course. No more tobacco juice dripping off his chin, not quite such a hardbitten desert rat. And we could no longer depend as heavily on narration as we did in the old [radio] days.”³³

My Friend Irma, on the other hand, did not use its radio scripts.³⁴ Part of the reason may have been that the radio show was mostly characters dropping in with five minutes of jokes—which worked well enough on radio (several radio shows worked in similar ways, such as Jack Benny’s and Fred Allen’s), but for television stories were needed.

Writers who worked in radio found they had to make the adjustment to television, some of them reluctantly. Sam Rolfe began writing for both radio and movies and he liked writing for radio because he found it “the perfect writer’s medium” because “you had to get character and definition out of the dialogue.” He recalls the advice of an old radio writer who pointed out that in a script that the name of the character speaking was on the left side of the page and the dialogue on the right. The old writer told Rolfe to put a ruler on the left side to blot out the names, and “then read the stuff on the right. If you don’t know who’s talking, you’re writing shit.”³⁵

Richard Conway, another writer who made the transition, wrote 120 episodes of *The Life of Riley* when it moved from radio to television. He tried to

think sightwise. You felt you could do a lot of sight gags. You could be less verbal. In radio you had the narration that connected the scenes, and you also had to explain the sound effects so people would understand them. [In television] you went more for sight gags, but we found you couldn’t bring it off in the short amount of [production] time, so we went back to verbal gags. They had to shoot 45 pages of script in two days, it was a burden on the director and we were limited on the sets. On a *Riley*, we had a scene of Riley going to a jewelry store to buy a present for Peg. Peg was at the store, so we had some sight gags. The director said we haven’t got the time, so we had to do the scene on phone, with Riley ordering the jewelry on the phone.

Richard Powell got this succinct piece of advice from writer Charles Issacs about the difference between writing for radio and television: “When you

have someone writing a letter on TV and they finish it, you don't have to write [the dialogue] 'There.' "

The Ones Who Didn't Make It

Not everyone managed the transition from radio to television. On radio Fred Allen was as popular as Jack Benny. Allen was in many ways the quintessential radio performer. Allen's radio show depended not merely on verbal wit, but literate verbal wit (even to the point of satire), very little of which found audiences in the early days of TV. When Allen tried television in 1950, he appeared to be at ease in front of the cameras,³⁶ but he was not, just as he had not been in front of the movie cameras in Hollywood.³⁷ Unlike Benny, he was not particularly good-looking, and he was not a visual performer in the way Benny and Burns came to be on television.

Duffy's Tavern was a success on radio but not on television. Ed Gardner, the star and creator of the show, had, unlike Benny, Burns, and even Fred Allen, no experience performing before a live audience and did not think visually. When Larry Rhine, who wrote for both the radio and television versions, tried to think of the show in visual terms, Gardner replied, "Just give me the jokes. I'll stand there and do them." Gardner wanted to do what he did in radio: stand with his hat in his hand and read the jokes. The show only ran from April to September in 1954.

The radio writers as well as performers had trouble with the transition. When Catherine Turney, a stage and screen writer, went to work for a show called *Cavalcade of America*, she was assigned to do a show based on a radio play for the series on Eli Whitney, the inventor of the cotton gin. She rethought it for the limitations of early television. The radio script had Whitney looking out the window at a large crowd, but Turney realized the set would only allow for three to four people. When the writer of the radio play read Turney's script, "He loathed me. He was so upset. He was an ear writer. He didn't think in visual terms." Turney saw that the radio writer understood television was going to take over but did not want to learn the new technique.

EARLY FILMED TELEVISION

*I*n 1950 Chicago radio writer Don Brinkley decided to try writing for the movies:

Actually I came out here to bring the industry to its knees. I found it was already on its knees. It was that panic time when the movie studios were in terrible trouble. Television was just beginning to rear its ugly head . . . there was a lot of confusion. So what I had to do was take what was available and I started doing radio again.

Writers already doing movies had it just as bad. Charles Larson, who had started as a junior writer at MGM writing short subjects, says, “The whole Hollywood closed up. Hollywood just died.” Even Wells Root, whose credits included such big pictures as the 1937 *The Prisoner of Zenda*, saw that “There was an active market for writers in television, more than there was for the screen.”

The active market Root refers to was not live television, of which there was very little in Hollywood in the late forties and early fifties. There was yet no coaxial cable connecting the coasts, and no regular coast-to-coast live telecasting until 1951. There was also virtually no filmed production for television by the major film studios, who generally hoped television would just go away. The television market was smaller production companies producing some programs for the major networks, but mostly for the syndication market. Many local stations, to fill up their programming hours, bought shows from syndication companies, which would sell them filmed shows that the stations could then sell to local advertisers. By 1955 local advertisers were spending \$150 million on 150 syndicated programs.¹ Inevitably the budgets for such programs were less than network budgets, which created opportunities for film producers, and writers, experienced in low-budget film production.

One of the first producers to get involved in television film production was

Hal Roach, Sennett's rival in making short comedies in the silent films. In 1949 his son, Hal Roach, Jr., suggested doing half-hour films for television. Their company started that year with a half-hour situation comedy entitled *The Stu Erwin Show*, which they sold to the fledgling American Broadcasting Company (ABC) network. Subsequently they produced *My Little Margie* (which started on CBS and became a radio show *after* it was a success on television), the ill-fated *Duffy's Tavern*, and *Racket Squad*.² Hal Roach, Jr., told *TV Guide* the keynote to his work was "Quality. Give them good entertainment, and you stay in business. But it's not the movie business. It's an entirely different proposition."³

Racket Squad was originally produced in 1950 for the syndication market, but in 1951 was picked up by CBS for a two-year run on the network. Probably because it was written and shot cheaply (\$25,000 per episode⁴) and quickly (44 pages of script shot in two days⁵), an interesting stylistic touch in the writing of *Racket Squad* was dropped after the first few episodes: The stories dealt with various cons run on unsuspecting citizens, which were foiled by Captain Braddock of the Squad. In the first episodes, Braddock narrates the stories, but in the second person, addressing the victim of the con. This supposes Braddock knows everything about the con before the victim tells him, which makes him rather obnoxious. Eventually the narration was changed to Braddock telling the story in the third person—a more conventional approach and therefore less demanding of writers.

Westerns and Jack Chertok

Television audiences very early grew used to filmed Westerns. In 1948, WATV in Newark began running old B-picture Western movies seven nights a week and continued to do so through 1954. Part of the reason was that the films were cheap programming, available for between \$25 and \$500 per showing.⁶ Actor William Boyd bought up the television rights to his Hopalong Cassidy B-Westerns and syndicated them as a series for between \$1,000 and \$1,250 per film.⁷ By 1949 Boyd was a millionaire and NBC picked up the films for network showings. Boyd made additional films for network and syndication.

George W. Trendle's selection as the television producer of *The Lone Ranger* was Jack Chertok, who had produced low-budget features for MGM in the early forties. Chertok hired George B. Seitz, Jr., who had written shorts for MGM, to write and direct the first *Lone Ranger* filmed episodes. Seitz worked with Fran Stryker, adapting the latter's radio scripts for the television series.⁸ The budgets for the *Lone Ranger* episodes in the first few years were \$15,000 per episode, raised to \$18,000 by 1953. Writer Charles Larson remembers the writers were very aware of the budget limitations:

At the end of one season, we were at the end of the budget. Tom Seller said to Chertok, "I can write one with only two people in it." He did one where the

Lone Ranger and Tonto were following the villains. They fall into all kinds of traps but we never see them being set. We were all so dazzled to see how he did it.

According to Larson, the writers would not directly adapt the radio plays but would look at them for ideas for stories. Often story ideas came from material already shot. Before the season would begin, all the exterior scenes would be shot. This footage would be shown to the writers, who would decide who would get to use what, and then the writers would write stories with interior scenes, in cabins and mines, to match the exteriors.

Larson describes Chertok as “a wonderful man to work for. He loved writers.” One reason Chertok loved writers is they could save him money. On one of his non-Westerns, *Private Secretary*, Larry Rhine wrote a seven-page scene that could be shot in one take, which cut shooting time and expense. Chertok loved the scene. Chertok had a group of writers he used, although they were not officially staff writers. Larson started at \$250 per week and later got up to \$300. Sam Rolfe remembers getting “Five hundred bucks a pop [for *The Lone Ranger*] and I could knock one of those things out in a night.” He adds:

I found them [the early shows, not only *The Lone Ranger*] very easy shows to write. . . . It's like you're grunting and groaning, like a train starting up to get that first page going. Once the characters start talking to each other, they take off on their own, and I was always trying to catch up. I had second and third pages beside me, writing notes on what's coming ahead because it would all flash in while I was working and I didn't want to forget it. But it would write itself, particularly the half-hour television.

Chertok was producing other shows as well as *The Lone Ranger* and “his” writers wrote for them as well. One was *Sky King*, a modern Western in which the hero gets around in a plane. As Larson describes the format, “It was extremely rigid. You had to have him in the plane. Something exciting had to happen with the plane.” Once the plane was out shooting aerial footage and came across a plume of smoke. It was a cabin on fire. The cameraman shot it, and Larson was instructed to write a story to fit it. Chertok also produced a couple of seasons of *Cavalcade of America* when it was finally done on film, and Charles Larson managed to set one on an ocean liner even though they did not have the sets for an ocean liner. Larson found the writing process familiar: “We all came out of B pictures. It was kind of like writing B pictures: hurry, rejection, frustration.”

Ziv

When Don Brinkley came out to Hollywood and found it on its knees, the radio production company he started writing for was Ziv, a radio syndication

company. The success of *Hopalong Cassidy* pushed Ziv to try its hand with *The Cisco Kid* in 1950.⁹ It was the first of many successes, all of them made on the cheap. Brinkley describes the company as “really a rinky-dink organization.” The half-hour shows were shot in one and a half days, and they had to be written half exterior scenes and half interior scenes so that all of the one could be shot the first day and all the others shot the second day. Brinkley, who also wrote for the *Highway Patrol* series, relates: “We ground those out like popcorn. The format was easy; you could put him [Broderick Crawford] anywhere.” For the series they tried occasionally to use stock footage of events such as fires, but found it looked cheap. Which was in keeping with the look of the show, because, as Brinkley notes, “What went on film, stayed on film.” One *Highway Patrol* episode was shot near an animal park. In one take, as Broderick Crawford was on the phone, a llama walked by in the background. There was no retake.

Ziv also produced two service-academy series, *Men of Annapolis*, which was syndicated, and *The West Point Story* on CBS. Both were supposedly based on real stories, but writers for the series deny it. Sy Salkowitz got on *Men of Annapolis* because he met the producer, William Castle, at a party. He gave Castle several story ideas for the series, all of them made up. Annapolis did have control over the story content, and writers were not allowed to do stories on events that might tarnish the reputation of the Academy, such as midshipmen going AWOL.

Sam Rolfe wrote for *West Point* and his stories were not based on true cases either. His story editor on the series was a former film editor for Ziv named Quinn Martin, who later produced *The Untouchables* and *The FBI*. Also on the series was a cop moonlighting as a writer, Gene Roddenberry, who went on to create *Star Trek*. Rolfe himself went on to develop *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* As Rolfe says, “We all seemed to be moonlighting on that show.”

True and Semi-true Stories

Allan Sloane wrote *Navy Log*, which unlike the Ziv shows, was based on actual stories,¹⁰ and when *Death Valley Days* came to television in 1952, its original creator, Ruth Woodman, still insisted each story be based on fact.¹¹ Nat Perrin came on the show as producer in the late fifties, and he says McCann-Erickson, the advertising agency producing the show, insisted that “When a writer came in with a premise, he’d have to bring in the documentation.”

Crime shows also based episodes on true stories, notably *Dragnet*, from Los Angeles Police Department cases, and its San Francisco rip-off, *The Lineup*. E. Jack Neuman wrote for the latter. The producer was Jaime del Valle, and when Neuman came on the show he found he had to rewrite eighteen scripts del Valle had bought from other writers. The stories were based on actual

cases, but Neuman recalls he “angled them differently. It was very valuable to me because I studied the San Francisco Police Department. And I wore a wire [recorder] while I was doing it. They didn’t even know I was wearing a wire. So that was how I got all the cop talk right.” Neuman adds that doing the show, “was hard, hard work, because I had to take all of Jaime’s responsibility too.” Neuman became Associate Producer of the show because del Valle was busy entertaining the cops and not doing his work.

There were other producers for writers to deal with as well. Frank Wisbar produced a half-hour anthology series titled *Fireside Theatre*. It was also cheaply done. Catherine Turney says, “It wasn’t too much different [from live television]. You still had the limitations of the set. It was like the early days of talkies, the actors all worrying about the mike boom.” Sam Rolfe says Wisbar offered him “Little pieces of crap and he’d make them sound so great.” Once he tried to get a writer to do a full adaptation of James Fenimore Cooper’s novel *The Spy* to fit into half an hour. Turney adds: “They all had grand ideas like that,” and that the writers were all reading de Maupassant to see what they could steal. Two indications of the industry attitude toward television writers at the time: Turney says the writers on the show were put in the old B-picture writers’ offices and her agent refused to come down to that office.

There were also shows filmed elsewhere. One, done for a New York-based company, was *Captain David Grief*, based on stories about a South Seas islands schooner captain written by Jack London. The show was shot in Mexico when Sy Salkowitz met the New York story editor (there was also one in Mexico to do rewrites). The New York editor took it as his right that of the \$1,300 fee paid the writer, he would get a kickback of \$200. Salkowitz was incensed and went to his agent to complain. His agent told him he should have taken the deal. The New York story editor was later fired and the one in Mexico wired Salkowitz that he had read the first draft and asked, “Where the hell’s the polish?” Salkowitz was baffled, and when the Mexico editor returned to New York he told Salkowitz they had paid him for the story. Salkowitz replied, “You never paid me anything.” After they did pay him, Salkowitz wrote three more episodes.

I Love Lucy

At CBS radio in the mid-forties Madelyn Davis¹² formed a lasting partnership with Bob Carroll Jr. In the summer of 1948 they joined the staff of radio’s *My Favorite Husband*, whose producer was Jess Oppenheimer and whose star was Lucille Ball.¹³ In 1950, CBS wanted Ball to do a television series of *My Favorite Husband*, but Ball, for personal reasons, wanted to do a series with her husband Desi Arnaz,¹⁴ and enlisted Carroll and Davis to help them. Ball liked their writing for radio, she told Davis, because they wrote “visually,”¹⁵ which Davis took to mean, “We had written gags *and* situations, not just

written gags.” To help persuade CBS that audiences would like Ball and Arnaz as a couple, they put together a vaudeville production. The centerpiece was a routine Ball learned from the clown Pepito. Davis says, “He did the routine for her with the props, and then we adapted to it and wrote the dialogue.” The routine—about Ball trying to get into Arnaz’s act—became the basis of the first pilot for what became *I Love Lucy*.¹⁶

The first pilot was done before an audience, like a live television show, recorded by kinescope (filming the show off a television screen). The ad agency for the sponsor, Philip Morris cigarettes, wanted the show broadcast live from New York, while Arnaz wanted to do it live from Hollywood, with kinescopes for the East Coast. Most of Philip Morris’s customers lived in the East, and since kinescopes were very bad copies, the sponsor turned Arnaz down. Arnaz broke the impasse by working out a system to film the show with three cameras while performing it in front of an audience.

What has become the standard method of filming situation comedies was born. For the writers, the three-camera system had distinct advantages. They could include costume and set changes that could take more time to do than could be allowed for in live television. Given the amount of physical comedy Ball was going to do in the series, it was almost essential that it be filmed.

In the beginning Carroll and Davis borrowed storylines from their old *My Favorite Husband* scripts, but learned that television was different. They had to move the characters around and not depend on the sound effects as much. Primarily, they had to learn to think visually, which Davis says they did not have “any big agonizing trouble with . . . because she [Ball] was so visual and lent herself to it so much.” Davis describes the working pattern for making a show a week that soon developed:

We’d get the story line [in a Monday meeting with Jess Oppenheimer]. He started out dictating it in front of us, then later I would type it. Then we would do the story line and then we wrote what we would call the first draft and then we would give it to him for a second draft or a polish. Then we’d have a meeting and then we’d go on and get another story, and then meanwhile while we were working on the next one, he was doing a polish on the one we’d finished. So there wasn’t a lot of this “We need a whole new second act” and “Let’s throw the script out.” Believe me, we would have been off the air. Like they do today, they really push and pull the script a lot, go through a whole massive redrafting over the weekend. We just didn’t have time. We had two weeks off at Christmas, and by the end of the season they were building sets from the storylines. The first season we did 38 shows, because that’s how we did radio. That’s what we thought you did.

What Davis calls the polish, Oppenheimer described as “redictat[ing] the entire script from start to finish into my dictation machine . . . because that way each of the characters consistently spoke the same way. It didn’t have to be *me*, necessarily, but as long as it was filtered through one person’s senses.”¹⁷

Davis and Carroll “did sit down once and tell him we didn’t like that. In a very nice way. We had worked very hard on it. We talked the script out loud, and acted it out. So we didn’t feel that was necessary.” Davis adds, “We worked well together. He taught us a lot. He really taught us how to plot.”

The storylines came from the writers asking themselves each week, “What does Lucy want this week? What does she want and who’s going to keep her from getting it and what’s she going to get into?”

Every once in a while we wrote backwards. We had an idea for a physical routine, and then we wrote out how we got her there. One time we went to a pizza place in Hollywood and the man was making pizza in the window. He’d throw it up to get air in it, and he was very good at it, throwing it up and catching it, and then he’d put it in the oven. So we said, “Ah ha.” We got Lucy to come there, and she practiced. She made pizza in the window. Of course she collected a crowd. And then we worked to how we got there.

Davis found that she, as the one woman writer on the show, got to try out the physical gags they thought up to see if they could be done: “You didn’t want to be on the stage with seventy people all hired and then it didn’t work. Then you had to come up with something in fifteen minutes. Also, we found that by acting it out, we found funnier things than if we had just imagined it.” Once they decided to roll Lucy up in a carpet, but when Davis tried it the rolled carpet was impossible to roll out the door, which made the scene even funnier. On the other hand, they wanted to put Lucy into an office chair on rollers, but discovered it tipped over. They dropped the idea, because they already knew that if the audience thought the gag was really dangerous, it killed the joke.

They wrote down the physical humor in detail. Because it was written all in capital letters, it was known as “The Black Stuff” (a term still used, although some writers refer to it as “The Block Stuff,” referring to the block of prose on the page). The writers worked closely with Ball, letting her “embroider” on the material, with the writers in turn suggesting additional bits. Nor was the dialogue always delivered as written. One of her most famous routines was a supposed commercial for Vitameatavegamin. Davis recalls, “I can remember I was so young then. She was marvelous, but something got a little different in the middle, just by accident and I thought, ‘Well! She changed it.’ I was furious. . . . We had worked so hard on it. I think it took us all day, at least.”

Ball later remembered the physical humor as more ad-libbed than it was, such as one gag in the “Hollywood at Last!” episode. Davis says,

She somehow remembered that as her nose caught on fire accidentally. And that’s not true. We got the idea of that, and all screamed with laughter and all hoped to heaven we could do it. And then they built this marvelous nose. She

had the nerve to set fire to her own nose, which I don't think I would have. . . . I didn't try that stunt. But she did put her nose in the coffee cup. That was her ad-lib, I think in rehearsal or on the show. But it was planned to set fire. That's one of those things I wanted to set straight because it was such a wonderful gag and it worked so well. But it wasn't an accident.

From as early as the unaired kinescope pilot of *I Love Lucy*, it is clear the writers' instincts for what to write for Lucille Ball for television were right. Beyond the slapstick in the imitation of Pepito the clown, the script gives Ball a chance to react comically. Ball's reactions, even in her radio days, were so striking that the writers gave them names, such as "The Spider," which came from Ball's reading a commercial on radio about Little Miss Muffet. In the unaired pilot Ricky gets out of bed first and we see the back of his pajamas have the face of a mule on them. He leaves them hanging over the mirror, so when Lucy gets up she sees them and does a reaction thinking that it is her. She then takes the pajamas off the mirror, gets a look at her real face, and her reaction tops the first gag. In episode five, "The Quiz Show," she is repeatedly squirted in the face with a seltzer bottle. Milton Berle would have simply left it at that, but Ball gives us different reactions to each squirt and varies the pace of squirting the water out of her mouth.

The writers were not, however, only writing for Lucille Ball, but also writing for Desi Arnaz, both as a producer (Davis says he let them wander around the studio prop department to find props to do shows about) and a performer. Arnaz had not shown any great acting skills in the movies he had done. By giving him reactions to Lucy's antics, the writers provided Arnaz the opportunity, as early as the unaired pilot, to show how charming a straight man he could be.

They also had fun with his Cuban accent, again as early as the unaired pilot, although, as Davis remembered in 1990, they never went beyond that:

It never occurred to us to do an "issue." Lucy and Desi wouldn't have known what to do with it. For instance, in all that time we never brought up the fact that he was Cuban and people may not have cared for her being married to a Cuban, because we never discussed that. We never discussed that. It just occurred to me now that we never did. Nowadays you would.

Davis continues, discussing other issues the show did not deal with:

Maybe now you would deal with the fact that she had the baby and they'd been married quite a while. They hadn't had children. You'd probably get into that. Which of course was their real life. But that never occurred to us then. It was enough to have a child on the air, let alone get into the fact of why they couldn't conceive, couldn't have them. We had the public reeling. [Imagine what Philip Morris would have said if we were] talking about how smoking is bad for pregnant women.

In 1952, the second year of the series, Ball became pregnant. On radio the pregnancy would not have been apparent. On television there was pressure to avoid dealing with the pregnancy by “hiding” Ball behind the furniture. There were concerns on the part of the network and the sponsors over the question of “taste.” Fortunately, when Arnaz told Jess Oppenheimer of the pregnancy in the spring of 1952, Oppenheimer’s reaction was that this would give them new material to write about in the second season. Fortified by this reaction, Arnaz became determined to include it as part of the show. To protect themselves, Oppenheimer arranged for a Catholic priest, a Protestant minister, and a rabbi to read the scripts.¹⁸ According to Davis, the advisers never changed a thing. The writers had not written anything offensive in the first place.

In the fall of 1954, the writers sent the Ricardos and the Mertzes on a trip to Hollywood, which enabled them to have several guest stars. The writers made fun of this themselves by beginning their first scene in the Brown Derby Restaurant with Lucy and Ethel pointing out all the stars they are seeing, but which we cannot see. The payoff to the joke is William Holden, in person, sitting down in the next booth. In episode 124, Ball does the classic mirror routine with Harpo Marx. The writers did not even look at *Duck Soup*, in which the mirror routine first occurred, and they did not write out all the detail because Marx knew the routine by heart and taught it to Ball.

In 1956 Jess Oppenheimer left the show and Carroll and Davis became the senior writers, although, as Davis says, “The pattern was set. We were used to doing the full script.” In the middle of the 1956–57 season, the Ricardos moved out of their New York apartment and into a house in Connecticut because the writers found they had run out of stories to do in the apartment.¹⁹

In the fall of 1957, the Desilu company stopped making half-hour episodes of *I Love Lucy* and turned to doing one-hour episodes that appeared once a month. Davis notes how this affected the writing:

It changed it because we didn’t know what we were doing. We wrote the first hour, and we put in musical numbers. It turned out to be way over an hour. We didn’t know how long to do it. We sound rather dumb but we were breaking precedent. To my knowledge there had not been an hour situation comedy. To that point. So, by the time we put commercials in it, our first show ran an hour and fifteen minutes. Desi didn’t want to cut anything, and of course cutting fifteen minutes is a lot. So that’s when he went to the show that followed us, *United States Steel [Hour]* and asked to buy fifteen minutes of their time. He talked to CBS and they said, “Fine.” I think we’re the only hour-and-fifteen-minute show that was ever done.

Davis adds that it took Arnaz to have the nerve to even try to persuade U.S. Steel and CBS to do that.

The other hour episodes do seem overextended. The second episode, “The Celebrity Next Door,” plays like two half-hour episodes, the first half being a

mismanaged dinner Lucy throws for next-door neighbor Tallulah Bankhead (played by herself), and the second half the rehearsal of a PTA show Lucy has hustled Bankhead into appearing in. The half hour was the best format for the Lucy and Ricky characters.

Bob Carroll and Madelyn Davis continued to write for Lucille Ball after the demise of *I Love Lucy*. They wrote for *The Lucy Show* (1962–68), *Here's Lucy* (1968–74), and Ball's last show, *Life with Lucy* in 1986. They also wrote Lucille Ball specials and even contributed to one of her films, the 1956 *Forever Darling*. According to the script, Ball was not playing "Lucy," but Desi Arnaz asked them to write a scene and it came out "Lucy." Madelyn Davis is still amused by the sequence where Ball starts out in the house in the film's character, goes outside and turns immediately into "Lucy." Neither Ball nor the writers could escape their creation.

EARLY LIVE TELEVISION

Abraham Polonsky, who moved from writing movies to writing live television,

kind of liked live television, but live television is a form that makes great demands on the people who make it. You write dialogue a bit differently, because you can't rehearse it as often. And then they have to learn it quickly. And very complicated things get to be difficult to do, whereas in film nothing's too complicated. So you search for other ways of doing things.

Kraft Television Theatre

The Kraft Television Theatre was the first regularly scheduled drama anthology on live television, and it was also the longest-running, beginning in 1947 and ending in 1958. When it premiered in May 1947, it was seen by 32,000 viewers only in the New York area. By 1953 the audience had grown to 22,570,000 in 46 cities.¹ It was so successful in its regularly scheduled Wednesday nights on NBC that Kraft ran a second night on ABC Thursday nights from October 1953 to January 1955. The programming done on *Kraft Television Theatre* show both the strengths and the limitations of early live television drama.

The show produced 650 scripts from 18,845 submitted to it.² Ed Rice, script editor on the show from its beginning, has described the early days: "I was the entire script department for the first year and a half. I had to write one act a day for three days each week, leaving me four days to seek out what would be the next show."³ Since there were no summer replacement programs, the show did 52 productions a year (104 when on ABC as well). Understandably, Rice tended to use previously written material. In its first six years, *Kraft* produced 169 adaptations of Broadway plays, 53 London stage plays, 27 plays not produced elsewhere, 22 classics, and only 40 original television plays.⁴

Another practical reason for selecting theatrical plays was that they were written to be performed in a limited time and, especially, a limited space. *Kraft* did its first few years in NBC's Studio 3H, then moved to its famous Studio 8H, which had heard Arturo Toscanini lead the NBC orchestra on radio and would later see the production of *Saturday Night Live*. Studio 8H was nearly twice as large as 3H, but it was still only 128 feet by 76 feet.⁵ A play with three sets could fit into the studio with a little room to move the cameras, but anything more was generally beyond the scope of the facilities.

"Double Door," the first *Kraft* production, was a broadcast play, all taking place in one room. "Alternating Current," the first original play done on the program (in January 1948), was set entirely in the kitchen of a Senator's house. The 1953 production of "Rip Van Winkle" was based on the acting version Joseph Jefferson toured in during the nineteenth century, and is hurt by the limitations of the stage and studio. The long first act takes place in the town, and the second act takes place up in the mountains. Rip does not fall asleep until the end of the second act, waking up 20 years later in the third. The second act is as long as it is so that changes can be made in the town set during that act.

The limitations of live television are particularly apparent in plays with material that could easily be shown on film. This is especially noticeable when *Kraft* tries to do documentary material, such as the 1956 production "I Am Fifteen—And I Don't Want to Die," based on the true story of a 15-year-old girl who lived in Budapest in 1944. The program begins with filmed inserts of the German bombing, but most of the play takes place in the cellar where the girl's family is hiding. The single set does give a sense of claustrophobia, but actions outside the cellar are talked about rather than shown.

As the series continued, writers learned how to use the limitations of the sets effectively. Meade Roberts's 1953 "The Rose Garden" works well within the confines of a Hollywood garden apartment house. Ben Radin's 1954 "Eddie and the Princess" cuts very effectively between several different rooms in one apartment and even between apartments in one building.

There were also limitations in terms of subject matter. Typical of the time, the show was produced not by the network but by the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency. Ed Rice worked for the agency, and unsolicited scripts were read by an agency reader, who would pass on to Rice or his assistant, Charles Jackson, at the most only three or four of the twenty scripts submitted each week, so the weeding out of unacceptable material began early.⁶ The agency's tendency was to be cautious in order to protect the sponsor. A look at the kinds of plays done on *Kraft* demonstrates that it was never an adventurous show in terms of subject matter. "Double Door" was a 1933 stage play described in a review of its Broadway production as a "grim melodrama . . . after the pattern of the well-made gasping thriller."⁷ "Alternating Current" is a tepid satire of politics, second rate Hecht and MacArthur. Victor Wolfson's 1956 "The Sears Girls" is the same kind of melodrama the movies did in the forties with such films as *Now, Voyager*.

Rod Serling's 1953 play "Long Time Till Dawn," about an ex-con who tries to come back to his hometown seems reminiscent of many Warner Brothers films of the thirties and forties, enlivened by having the leading role played by a not-yet-famous James Dean. But the director may have felt Dean was too intense for the gentility of *Kraft*. One of the director's handwritten notes on the script reads: "Jimmie—too frantic and too high a tension—psychopath schizoid." Only a few months before that production, Ed Rice told *TV Guide* "We can deal with any subject but it must be about people you believe in and not case subjects from a psychiatrist's notebook. We look for matinee-type plays—believable incidents that might happen to people who live down the street from our viewers."⁸

The kinds of plays *Kraft Television Theatre* did changed. In the first year they were mostly adaptations, and in 1949 the show turned to the classics. In 1952 character studies became popular, and in 1953 the show started doing "slice of life" plays.⁹ Here again, the show was running behind the time line of the cutting edge of television drama, since the show was obviously reacting to the success of writers such as Paddy Chayefsky on other shows. Rice said in 1953, "What we plan to do is find more short stories and novels we can adapt for TV. We'll actually be on the lookout also for original plays, and that may eventually become our chief source of story material." He added that the agency might hire writers to work only for *Kraft*, which other producers, such as Fred Coe, had already done.¹⁰ The difference was that Coe was willing to take chances that *Kraft*, because of its institutional nature, was not able to do.

The one exception to this in *Kraft's* history is Rod Serling's 1955 play "Patterns," a corrosive study of ambition and office politics. Ironically, one of the reasons for its power was that the office environment, which was not "authentic" in Serling's original script, was developed based on the J. Walter Thompson agency, the producers of *Kraft*.¹¹ On anything more volatile than office politics, however, *Kraft* was more cautious. Allan Manings wrote a play for the show about the first black family to vote. Writers were not allowed at rehearsals, and while the show was supposed to be in rehearsal, Manings ran into an actor who had been cast in it. The actor said it was a shame it had been canceled. Manings replied, "They can't cancel a show in rehearsal."

The actor said, "Yes they can. The agency decided. You cannot do anything this controversial." J. Walter Thompson and *Kraft* went back to more genteel programming, much in the same way that twenty years later the Public Broadcasting System would be able to get corporate underwriters for uncontroversial drama on their *Masterpiece Theatre*.

Filmed Inserts and Time Stretchers

Kraft Television Theatre was not the only early live show to use filmed inserts. *Man Against Crime*, a detective show starting in 1949 starring Ralph Bellamy, also used filmed inserts in its first years, and in 1952 went entirely to

film. When it was live, the show also found an inventive way to make sure it came out at exactly the right time. The writers were required to write a "search scene" for late in the show. Bellamy would be told before he went on the set whether he needed to stretch the scene. If not, he'd go straight to the clue. If he did, he could spend however much time was needed in the room.¹²

Roscoe Karns, the star of another live detective show, *Rocky King, Detective*, found another way to fill out the time, if necessary. When one show ran short in rehearsal, Karns, whose wife Grace Carney was playing a role in the show, came up with a phone conversation at the end of the show between King and his wife Mabel. Carney played the wife off-screen, and the character stayed offscreen the run of the show.¹³ The final conversation also became a way for the writers to tie up any loose plot points.

Your Show of Shows

In 1945 a young writer named Mel Tolkin came to New York from Canada; his parents had immigrated there from Tolkin's birthplace in the Ukraine. The following year Tolkin, who by now was writing songs, was hired by Max Liebman, producer of the weekly shows at Tamiment, a summer resort in the Poconos.¹⁴ By the summer of 1948, Liebman realized the Tamiment shows were preparation for a different kind of television. Most TV variety shows, he thought, were based on vaudeville or radio, but he was more influenced by the theater, especially "the element of sophistication . . . The show [at Tamiment] was performed in a manner that didn't patronize people."¹⁵ Sylvester "Pat" Weaver, then at an ad agency, saw a Tamiment show and asked Liebman if it could be done every week. Liebman had him see the next week's show.¹⁶ As Tolkin describes what happened next, Weaver "just about lifted it, bodily, for *The Admiral Broadway Revue*," which began in January 1949 as a one-hour weekly show on NBC.

The *Admiral* show was to use some Tamiment material, but also to use "classical material" written by people like Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman for previous Broadway revues. According to Tolkin, there was simply not enough Broadway sketch material to keep a weekly television show going. The star of the show was Sid Caesar, and the conventional revue material was also, the semi-official biographer of *Your Show of Shows* Ted Sennett writes, "too diffuse, too vaguely focused for his [Caesar's] very special talent."¹⁷ What Caesar needed in order to take off was material written for his talents.

Liebman kept the staff of *Admiral Broadway Revue*, and on February 25, 1950, *Your Show of Shows* premiered.¹⁸ Some Tamiment material was used on the new show, but it was mostly new material. The writers were Liebman, Lucille Kallen, and Tolkin, who describes how working on the new show varied from the previous one: "Basically because we wrote the whole frigging show." In keeping with Liebman's idea that the show should be like theater,

Your Show of Shows included music, ballet numbers, and even some opera. What made the immediate impact and lives on in the hearts of the show's fans was the comic material.

Mel Tolkin and Lucille Kallen were the head writers, and shortly after the show began Mel Brooks, a friend of Caesar's, and Tony Webster were added to the writing staff. As Tolkin remembers, he and Kallen did not have much time to supervise as head writers:

First of all, when you write an hour-and-a-half show a week, four or five sketches, three, four, or five songs, there's no luxury of rewriting a whole show. So you just do your best. An idea can be thrown out [discarded] at the very beginning. That goes without saying. It's got to be acceptable to all. Whoever gives it, somebody else can say, "It's only a one-joke idea. It's good, but where do you go? There's no force to it, no kinetic push to develop." Then it's a matter of fixing. I can't think of a whole full sketch being thrown out after it was written.

As the ideas were developed, they would be shown to Liebman and Caesar if they were not in the meeting. Eventually Tolkin and Kallen would read the finished sketch and then, "Everybody dived in and a good sketch became a brilliant one, occasionally."

Lucille Kallen has described the writing sessions this way:

Sid boomed, Tolkin intoned, [Carl] Reiner [who joined the show as an actor but worked with the writers as well] trumpeted, and Brooks, well, Mel imitated everything from a rabbinical student to the white whale of *Moby-Dick* thrashing about on the floor with six harpoons sticking in his back. Let's say that gentility was never a noticeable part of our working lives. Max Liebman was fond of quoting what I think was a Goldwynism: "From a polite conference comes a polite movie."¹⁹

In other words, the conferences were not unlike those of Mack Sennett's "gathering of badly deranged lunatics" in the silent film days.²⁰

Mel Tolkin has been quoted as saying that "with one writer different, it wouldn't have been the same show. Or with one actor different."²¹ He thinks it helped that the writers were all in some way "outsiders": he was from the Ukraine, Kallen was a woman, Brooks was from the Bronx, and Webster was a Catholic. "Most writers are outsiders, if I may talk pretentiously. The result showed: it was an outsider's look at Earthlings' foolish, absurd behavior. We were all a little offbeat. We did have a fresher look." There were differences in the writers as well, which also helped. Tolkin compares Kallen and Brooks:

Basically she would sit with a long yellow pad writing in ink and very often say "No." In addition to being creative, of course, she was a powerful editor. And she'd type it out while we'd walk around. I think Mel Brooks was more in adding

[bits later] rather than sitting in a room, but he was a very brilliant guy, a wild sense of humor.

The great challenge in writing for *Your Show of Shows* was that the performers could do anything. Tolkin says, "When you write for Sid you write old, young, fat, short, any language in the world. Because there was no limit. It was as simple as that."

The writing then for *Your Show of Shows* combined those elements: theatrical sophistication, writers with a wide variety of backgrounds working in collaboration, both brilliant imagination *and* editing skills on the part of the writing team, and writing specifically for talented comic performers with wide acting ranges. The writing went well beyond the simple gags and gag sketches Milton Berle's writers provided for him. The sketches, monologues, and pantomimes gave Caesar, Imogene Coca, and the others not only something to do, but attitudes to play. In the first *Your Show of Shows*, Caesar's monologue is the thoughts of a man going down the aisle to be married. Mel Brooks specialized in creating the interview sketches, where Caesar played a German professor who thought he knew everything, but didn't. That dichotomy provided Caesar with differing reactions to the questions his interviewer, usually Carl Reiner, asked him. Recurring sketches on the show were about Charlie and Doris Hickenlooper, a married couple. The couple did not generally engage in the physical slapstick that Lucy and Ricky did, nor did they generally yell as much as Ralph and Alice Kramden did on Jackie Gleason's program. As Ted Sennett points out, however, "they were truer, more honestly observed, and funnier," than Lucy and the Kramdens.²² Part of what made them seem that way was the attitudes the writers gave them: she was something of a snob, particularly about culture, and he was something of a slob, particularly about everything.

For many viewers, the best of the sketches were the parodies of movies. It is a mark of the sophistication of the show that not only did it parody American box-office successes, but foreign films such as *The Bicycle Thief*. The show felt it could take these on because not only were those films shown in New York theaters, local New York TV stations were filling up their schedules with telecasts of recent foreign films. Tolkin notes that in writing satires of foreign films the idea was that the takeoffs must be funny in themselves, whether the viewer had seen the original or not. The foreign film parodies gave Caesar a chance to speak in a variety of accents and made-up languages. The writers would not try to write out themselves the fractured languages, but would just write "doubletalk," or let Caesar himself dictate it to a secretary (if you think the secretary had it easy, listen to one of Caesar's routines and try to transcribe it).

Mel Tolkin has admitted²³ the writers were a little more malicious in their satires of contemporary films because they felt superior to them. The film satires were especially popular in New York, which then tended to look down

on films.²⁴ Tolkin admits, “There was a certain snobbishness. I felt it. You walk into a restaurant and you hear people the next morning after the show talking about it.” He remembers talking one day about a movie they’d seen and the writers saying, “Movies? I just saw a movie. What a piece of shit it was.” Tolkin says today, “We were talking about *Shane*. Actually we thought it was a good movie. We did do a good job on *Shane*” which in the *Show of Shows*’ version became *Strange*, where the basic joke was, as Tolkin remembers: “What idiot, what schmuck, will risk his life to protect a family of total strangers?” They also did a parody of *From Here to Eternity* called *From Here to Obscurity* featuring the best of many takeoffs on Lancaster and Kerr kissing in the surf. In their version Caesar and Coca are nearly drowned. It not only makes fun of the scene, but as Tolkin is proud to note, “That scene has a brilliant satirical point: that you can’t fuck right near the waves.” The same kind of honest observation that helped the Hickenlooper sketches helped the movie parodies.

As the success of the show grew, more writers were added to the staff, including for one season only in 1952, Danny Simon and his younger brother, Neil. It has also become a legend that the young Woody Allen worked on *Your Show of Shows*, but he did not.²⁵ Shortly after the demise of the program in 1954, Allen did join some of the writing staff, but for a new show.

Caesar’s Hour and The Imogene Coca Show

Ted Sennett in his book is not clear exactly why *Your Show of Shows* was canceled in 1954.²⁶ He notes that some critics felt the show had begun to get a bit stale. He discounts rumors of friction among the cast and staff, as does Mel Tolkin today. Tolkin thinks the network simply believed the show was “too rich, too expensive,” and wanted “to give Max a show, give Sid a show, give Coca a show. They made three. It had to be [the] network. I don’t know of any reason of a split [among the people on the show]. I didn’t feel that.” Max Liebman went into producing what were then called “spectaculars” for the network, but they were not on a par with his previous work.

Sid Caesar got the best of the division of talent. In addition to actors Howard Morris and Carl Reiner (who, as noted, also wrote), he got custody of Tolkin, and the Simon brothers, and added Larry Gelbart, Selma Diamond, Michael Stewart, Sheldon Keller, and later Danny Simon’s protégé Woody Allen. Because the writing staff was bigger than it was on the early days of *Your Show of Shows*, the writing process was slightly different. Tolkin describes it:

Well, there’d be a story conference in which everybody came with ideas, or the staff worked out some ideas. Then the [writers] split up in teams. I was with Shelly [Sheldon] Keller. Then it was brought back and read to Sid. Of course Sid was in the story conference when the ideas were decided. He certainly had

to have a powerful veto. Everybody can prove that a sketch stinks. "It's no good," or "We saw that somebody did it," or whatever it is. But Sid, in a way, did not have to have a reason for veto—for a very good purpose: He has to be the guy sticking his ass out on camera. Now and then you'd insist, "It's a good idea, Sid," but if he didn't like it, you would kiss it good-bye. You can't afford the time to fight it.

Many of the writers who worked on both shows tend to describe the writing on *Your Show of Shows* in this same way,²⁷ but as Tolkin slyly says, "These new ones remember *Caesar's Hour*" (or the specials that came later). Two of the later well-known writers were not particularly vocal at the story conferences. Tolkin says that Neil Simon "seldom opened his mouth, but when he did, it was perfect, whatever he would say."²⁸ As for Allen, who did not work with Caesar until a 1958 special,²⁹ "He almost didn't open his mouth, but when he and Larry [Gelbart] went to their corner somewhere, they came back with fabulous stuff. That goes for the material Gelbart and Neil Simon brought in. I don't recall Woody speaking a lot at story conferences. Gelbart spoke for them."

Instead of Imogene Coca, the leading lady was Nanette Fabray, and the edgy domestic sketches of the earlier show became more conventional situation comedy. The wilder humor was left to Caesar, Morris, and Reiner, and often the movie parodies. The October 25, 1954, show³⁰ opens with a sketch in which Reiner and Caesar are parents of two kids who got into a fight. In the school principal's office, the parents re-create the fight, both kicking and pushing the principal, then ripping his suit. The movie parody in this show is of a World War I flying movie in Caesar's version of German. The setpiece of the sketch is Caesar's description of the aerial dogfight in which his friend was shot down. It is such a tour de force of what Caesar does best that the audience applauds at the end of his speech.

Caesar's Hour ran from 1954 to 1957, while *The Imogene Coca Show* only lasted the 1954–55 season. Coca got Lucille Kallen, Mel Brooks, and Tony Webster from *Your Show of Shows*, and added to the writing staff Ernest Kinoy, who later wrote for the major live dramas, as well as Allan Manings, who had written a few sketches for *Your Show of Shows*. Manings had written satirical revues in college, directed in summer stock, and worked as a standup comic in strip joints, where he did "Freudian analysis of nursery rhymes while ladies with blue veins were ripping their clothes off."

Allan Manings describes the writing process on *The Imogene Coca Show*:

On Tuesdays we used to go to burlesque shows. We used to get in a car and go to New Jersey. Things were intriguing. Being new, I would get there bright and early every morning and Bob [Van Scoyk, my partner, and I] would start to work on something. Then Lucille would work and Tony would work. Mel would come in later and say, "Nothing is working." Because of his relationship with her [working on *Your Show of Shows*], I guess Coca had more faith in him. The

reality was she didn't want to do a show. She wanted to rest. I think NBC wanted her to do a show, badgered her to do a show. The show never really had a focus.

The show also never really had a firm hand from a producer or director, since they seemed to change every few weeks. One new director came in and started assigning jobs, saying, "Now, Mel, you're the belly-laugh writer. You and you, you're the constructionists."

Brooks started screaming, "You mean I don't know how to construct?" The staff was so discouraged about the show that when the producer gave Coca a live fox for Christmas and the fox bit either Coca or the producer, the writers felt that in either case it was "politically correct."

Neither Caesar nor Coca had the same kind of success later on television that they enjoyed in the early fifties. Partly this was the death of variety shows. Mel Tolkin notes of the one-hour stories used on *Caesar's Hour*, "It didn't work because he wasn't using his full talents. He was mostly just the middle-class character of [the] Sid and Coca [domestic] sketches, and for an hour it didn't pay off as well." Caesar himself may have understood his limitations, or he may just have been spoiled by the collaborative process with the writers willing to shape material only for his talents. In the early eighties he was offered a part in a new situation comedy. He wanted to be part of the process of developing the character and the scripts, but was told he could not. In an interview at the time he said, "I told them, 'Fine. You know what you can do with your script,' and I walked out. Twenty-five-year-old boys who were brought up on *Gilligan's Island*."³¹

The show he turned down was *Cheers*.

Mr. Peepers

In 1952 one of the small jewels of early live television was created by producer Fred Coe and writer David Swift. NBC liked the letters of response it got to a quiet young actor named Wally Cox, who had appeared in a Swift one-hour comedy on *The Goodyear TV Playhouse*, so they asked Coe and Swift to create a show for him. As Swift recalled in 1989, "What could you do for Wally Cox? You write *Mr. Peepers*. It's the only thing he could do."³² The show, about a gentle high school science teacher and his friends and associates, was put on as a summer replacement. When it was replaced by another series in the fall, the audience complaints were so vocal (and the ratings of the replacement were so bad) that *Mr. Peepers* was brought back and stayed on the air until 1955.

Unfortunately, by the third or fourth show of the summer, a "schism" developed between Coe and Swift.³³ Jim Fritzell, who had written another comedy series about a teacher, *Our Miss Brooks*, was brought in as an "anodyne"³⁴ between Coe and Swift and the summer's episodes were completed. When the show was picked up in the fall, Julian Claman of Talent

Associates, the company producing *Mr. Peepers*, decided Fritzell needed some help. He assigned a radio writer he knew to work with him. Fritzell and Everett Greenbaum remained partners for thirty years, until Fritzell's death.

Greenbaum remembers that there was no script coming in from an outside writer the first week he was there, so he recalled an incident from his youth in Buffalo in which the schools were closed because of snow. It became an episode in which, because of a school closure, the lessons would be taught by the teachers over the local television station. Peepers's friend, Harvey Weskit, who always seems to be on top of things and who tries to be cool about it, freezes on camera, while Mrs. Gurney, who in the person of actress Marion Lorne would raise fluttering to a high art, worries before the broadcast but sails through it without trouble. Greenbaum thinks that "probably most of" the shows were based on personal experience.

Swift, who liked physical humor (his disagreement with Coe was how physical the show could get: Swift wanted more, Coe wanted less), still told Fritzell what the show was about: "No jokes—just a nice, soft, easy, show."³⁵ There was still physical humor. One running gag was Peepers's opening his locker: he taps a radiator with a hammer, measures the last locker in the row with a yardstick, kicks at the point measured, and his locker opens. The physical humor was a holdover from David Swift. As Greenbaum notes, "David was the teacher of Jim in the way that Jim was my teacher. So a lot of that physical stuff seemed important to Jim to continue." It did cause problems in live television, as Greenbaum remembers:

We took terrible chances. A lot of time things didn't work. I remember we did a show where Peepers's mother wanted him to clean under the bed because there were dust bunnies, and they were supposed to move. Well, on the show they looked like rats running around. We had that kind of disaster. . . . There was one show that had a dog in it. In live television, you simply ran from one set to the next and had to cover it with something else. We didn't realize that on the actual show people would be running faster than they were in rehearsal, and the dog starting chasing every one of them on the show, and barking. You never saw the dog but you heard the barking. There was a disaster.

The problems were not always on such a large scale. The show was live, with a studio audience, which meant that the laughs often lengthened the show, which in turn meant that cuts had to be made as the show was in progress. Tony Randall, whose performance as Harvey Weskit made him a star, recalled why he got the cuts, "They couldn't give the cuts to Wally because he never knew his lines that well anyway. And they couldn't give them to dear old Marion Lorne, because her whole approach to comedy was that gasping, panting, uh-uh-uh thing, and it would have ruined her timing." Randall added that the cuts were never in one place in the script and they were generally given to him right before air time.³⁶

With all the changes in lines, it is not surprising that lines got missed. In “Mrs. Gurney Learns to Drive,” Peepers is riding with his Aunt Lillian (in a car with the passing scenery done with rear projection—unfortunately the action on the rear projection screen does not match the action in the car). She guns her car to pass three cars, with Peepers looking out at each car as they pass. When they go by the last one, Peepers says, “You passed them like they were standing still.” His next line is obviously supposed to be “They were,” but Wally Cox says instead, “We were”—which produces almost no laugh from the audience. Fortunately, his befuddled look at messing up the line fits right into character.

Greenbaum and Fritzell wrote for the show for three years. Greenbaum said in 1989, “It was three years of actual terror, Jim and I wrote forty shows a year. Nobody knew how long it took to write a show. Now they have five or six writers on staff and free-lancers, and they only do 22 shows a season.”³⁷

In the second full season of the show, the ratings for *Mr. Peepers* began to decline and it was decided, probably from a suggestion by Fred Coe,³⁸ that Peepers should marry his girlfriend Nancy. The wedding episode was shown May 23, 1954, and the ratings went up the following season, then declined, and the show was canceled in 1955, replaced by a Western. David Swift, who was brought back as a consultant when Peepers was married, said, “It’s possible, though, that *Peepers*’s quiet humor doesn’t appeal to the average viewer,”³⁹ and Fritzell and Greenbaum said at the time, “You might say ours is an intelligent humor, or humor that makes intelligent people laugh.”⁴⁰

Unlike filmed shows such as *I Love Lucy*, which have been in syndication since their creation, *Mr. Peepers*, which survives only on kinescopes, has not been seen outside of archives since its original showings. Michael Wilmington, writing about an archive screening of several episodes, suggests that one reason it has not been picked up for syndication was that its look (minimal sets, live television bloopers, not being in color) was dated.⁴¹ Its look is dated, but not the characters and their emotions. In the wedding episode there is a brief moment when Mrs. Gurney comes to see Nancy before the ceremony. In a close-up we see both a sweetness and a strange sadness Mrs. Gurney feels. It is the kind of sudden, vivid moment so affecting in live television.

A GOLDEN AGE

“*T*he writer was the star.”

That is the recurring refrain from television writers talking about their experiences with live television. Charles Larson, who wrote for both filmed and live television in the early years, says of writing for live drama, “Even when they were out here [in Los Angeles], they still had the ‘Broadway feeling’ [that] they were the heirs of the Broadway stage. The writer was the star. The filmed shows were the direct descendant of the B picture. The writer was sloughed off.”

Robert Dozier wrote for live television drama in the fifties. He was the son of film producer and former agent William Dozier, and the younger Dozier remembers growing up in a house that was often filled with writers, all of whose “peculiarities were tolerated, such as their drinking and their madness and their insanity, and I think that’s really why I decided that writing was a terrific thing to do, because it was obviously something that would gain you great approbation.”

Living in New York in the fifties, Dozier was impressed with the quality of writing on television and got in to it:

It was a very exciting time. There were maybe fifteen hours of live anthology television drama each week in New York. There was an enormous need for material and there were very few writers. So you would sit down and write something with the almost sure knowledge that if you wrote something halfway passable you would sell it.

You would hope to create a bidding situation, perhaps jack up the price. The prices were not large in those days. I think the most I ever got for a live television show was \$5,000. I could live for a year on \$5,000. My rent was \$85. I had no children and my wife didn’t eat much.

They did not own the material. What they bought in those days was the right to produce it once and rerun it once on kinescope, so the material resided with you. And if they bought the script and wanted to do it and wanted to change

anything that you really objected to, you could say, "Listen, if you wanted to do another story, why didn't you go buy another story? If you want to give it back, I'll give you your money back and I'll take it somewhere else." So the writer had a great deal of strength in those days.

We got fan mail. That was very seductive too. Writers got fan mail. The fan mail I got was very sophisticated. It was intelligent mail written by literate people. And it probably sounds kind of snobbish, but in those days, not many people had that many television sets. They were expensive, and because of that fact, the people who owned them tended to be a better-educated class of people and a more articulate group . . . They enjoyed the anthology dramas.

There was a very healthy competitive thing at that time among writers. Now there were a whole bunch of us, Howard Rodman and myself, Gore Vidal, Eric Kinoy, Paddy [Chayefsky] was the champ, and Bob Aurthur and Manny Rubin and Mayo Simon, a whole bunch of guys. You would see something on a television show, and you would be incensed by it, and you would sit down and rebut it. You'd write your own version. It fed on itself.

We all hung out together at a saloon called Downey's in those days in New York, on 8th Avenue and 41st Street, where you could get an open double cheeseburger and a beer for 90 cents. And none of us had a lot of money in those days. That was a welcome place to be. So it was an exciting time.

The Philco/Goodyear Television Playhouse

From the writers' viewpoint, the best anthology drama to write for was *Philco Television Playhouse*, which ran from 1948 to 1955, and *The Goodyear TV Playhouse*, which alternated weeks with *Philco* from 1951 to 1955. Both shows were produced by Fred Coe, who was the reason writers liked the show.

Coe had worked in professional theater in New York and elsewhere before going to work in the mid-forties with NBC.¹ In 1948 he started *Philco* with a season of adaptations of classic plays, such as *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Coe eventually hired a staff of writers who were to write almost exclusively for him and his productions, which was unheard of in television drama at the time.²

Coe was producing *Mr. Peepers* during the time he was doing *Philco/Goodyear*, and *Peepers* writer Everett Greenbaum compares Coe to MGM's Irving Thalberg, in that both loved writers and neither hogged the credit. Greenbaum says, "We would just talk quietly. He was always very calm, and he'd say, 'Well, now that could be a story.' And we'd always come out with something."

Coe may have been calm with writers, but he was not with secretaries, publicists,³ and certainly not with sponsors or sponsors' representatives. JP Miller, one of the *Philco* writers, remembers Coe coming into the control room once and finding the sponsor's representative there making comments about the show. Coe screamed at him, "What the fuck are you doing here?" and threw him out. Miller says, "He was a producer. He was not a sycophant. He was not a hired altar boy. He analyzed a script with brilliance."

One of the best and most distinctive writers Coe collected for *Philco* was Horton Foote. Foote, born in Wharton, Texas, was an actor and playwright. Foote got into television “through the back door,” as he puts it. His friend, stage director Vincent Donohue was in New York to direct *The Gabby Hayes Show* on television. Donohue asked Foote to write for the show, and Foote wrote Hayes’s introductions to stories about American history. When Donohue moved to *Philco*, he brought Foote with him. Foote found Coe “marvelous to work with,” and that on the show, “Everything was kind of done for the writer.” Unlike some other dramatic shows, the writer was always involved in rehearsal.

Coe “had the courage to do” Foote’s plays, says Foote, which were all set in and around the fictional Harrison, Texas, for what was then mostly an East Coast audience. (Foote was what is called in literary circles a “regional writer,” which generally means that he does not write stories that are or could be set in New York.) His plays were enormously popular on television. “A Trip to Bountiful,” broadcast in early 1953, was such a success that it was transferred to Broadway in the fall of that year and ran 39 performances. It has been performed often on the stage since, and 32 years later was made into a theatrical film. “A Trip to Bountiful” on television managed to overcome the limitations of space (Foote says, “You just used your wits”) to suggest a bus trip with only a few bus seats and inspired acting by Lillian Gish and Eva Marie Saint. Foote says, in his courtly manner, “It was a great privilege to work with people like that.”

Foote’s 1953 play “A Young Lady of Property” also worked around the limitations of live television. In the opening scene the characters stand and talk in front of the Harrison post office in 1925 instead of walking down the street, as they would in both real life and a film. The story builds to a confrontation between the fifteen-year-old Wilma and Sybil, her widowed father’s fiancée, but Foote does not show us the scene. We only hear Wilma’s description of it later to her aunt. Foote explains, “That [scene] was the obligatory scene, but it was cliché. Fred [Coe] asked about that, then defended me [and] my right to do it my way. I wanted to avoid the cliché. I think it’s a more interesting way to do it.” Foote’s method maintains the quiet and nostalgic tone of the play. Foote was also establishing his very distinctive voice; none of the other writers on the show could have written this speech for Wilma:

Well, it’s a long time ago now, but I still remember it [the house]. My mama and I used to play croquet in the yard under the pecan trees. We’d play croquet every afternoon just before sundown and every once in a while she’d stop the game and ask me to run to the corner without letting the neighbors know what I was doing, to see if my father was coming home. My mother always kept me in white, starched dresses. Do you remember my mother?⁴

Foote eventually, like many writers of early live television, shifted into writing for stage and films. He avoided writing weekly series television, saying, "It would be death. You'd be churning things out, week after week after week. You're just bound to go crazy."

JP Miller was another Texas-born writer of Coe's. After attending Yale Drama School, he wrote Broadway plays nobody would read, let alone produce. He did not even have a television set until a friend who was a TV repairman gave him just the picture tube and the tuner of a set. Miller put it in a cardboard box and painted the box purple. Miller watched *Philco* and thought, "Jesus Christ, these people are for real. If I could write for that show, I'd condescend to write for television." Through a friend he got a script to Coe, who liked it and said, "Listen, pappy, you got any other stories?" Miller told him one and Coe said, "Pappy, go home and write it." So he did.

Miller's best-known *Philco* play was "The Rabbit Trap," shown in February 1955. Miller had originally conceived it as a half-hour show, but it did not sell. He then saw a way to do it as an hour show and pitched it to Coe, who liked it. While Miller was working on it, Coe called him up and said a script that had come in from another writer was not working and could he finish "The Rabbit Trap" in ten days. Miller protested that he couldn't, but Coe replied, "Write your ass off, pappy." Coe and Delbert Mann, the director, asked him as he was writing it whom he had in mind for the parts. Those actors were cast before the script was finished. When he brought the script in, its first reading ran exactly the 53 minutes the one-hour program ran minus commercials. There were no changes in rehearsal.

The play deals with Eddie, a young executive, and his wife and their eight-year-old son. On a vacation in the Vermont woods, they build a rabbit trap. Eddie is called back to town by his boss. He goes, but later he tries to tell his boss he has to go back to the trap. The boss says if he does, he's fired. Eddie and his wife find the trap, with signs the rabbit caught in it has escaped. The story is more of an anecdote than a full story, and the writing shows the lack of space for sets. Eddie tells his wife he has been fired only after they are back in the Vermont woods set. We never see the car. Eddie says he did not tell her before because she would have made him turn back, but it seems artificial.

The public's response was, according to Miller, "the most incredible thing that's happened to me in show business. Nobody expected it. It was a nice little show, no car chases, no sex. Everybody saw themselves in it. The phones started ringing off the hook."

In the later film version of "The Rabbit Trap," Miller thinks the casting, different from the perfect casting on television, was off, and the whole film became too slick and glossy. Miller also let the play be done on Italian television. Because of its success in Italy, it was picked up by the Eastern European countries, which played it often but never sent Miller any royalties.

Gore Vidal, by this time the author of several published novels and plays, also wrote for *Philco*. Vidal discovered to his surprise that he liked writing for television, “that it could be taken seriously, and that in spite of the many idiot restrictions imposed by those nervous sponsors who pay for plays, it was possible to do a certain amount of satisfactory work,”⁵ and that television was “a wonderful place to experiment. A writer can tackle anything if he learns how to dodge around forbidden subjects.”⁶

At least once, *Philco* was more hospitable to Vidal’s stinging wit than Broadway or Hollywood. In his 1955 television play “Visit to a Small Planet,” the second-act debate is between Kreton, a visitor from another planet, and the head of the World Council as they exchange Vidal’s witticisms about arms and man. The play was turned down by three sponsors before *Philco* put it on. As Vidal described it later, “With some anxiety we waited for the roof to fall in; to our very real surprise it did not, and most people were pleased with my gentle heresy.”⁷

To make the stage version work for the Broadway theater audiences later, however, he had to dull down the satire and play up the farce.⁸ The head of the World Council is eliminated completely and the story turns on Kreton’s efforts to help two young lovers. The television and stage versions starred Cyril Ritchard. The 1960 film version starred Jerry Lewis—and even the French don’t like it.

Paddy Chayefsky

Paddy Chayefsky was as much a regional writer as Horton Foote, but his region was his native Bronx. After the war he went to Hollywood, where he wrote stories for films, then nightclub routines. His first television work was writing gags for Danny Thomas, but as Chayefsky later described it, “He threw me out.”⁹ After writing some radio drama, Chayefsky’s first television dramatic works were half-hour scripts for *Danger* and *Manhunt*. In 1953 he met Fred Coe and for two years wrote for *Philco/Goodyear*.¹⁰

From the beginning Chayefsky saw the differences between live television and film. For his first hour show, “Holiday Song,” Chayefsky “approached the script as I would have approached a movie,” and the story he came up with was “not a good one for television. It is much too complex and mechanically active [several scenes take place in the subway] and is better suited for a movie.”¹¹ Chayefsky thought another of his scripts, “The Big Deal,” would have been better on the stage because “its sheer weight and power are too much to be handled to television’s fullest advantage.” But he found television gave him a mobility he would not have had in the theater,

I was not confined to a one-scene set, nor did I have to write unnecessary lines of dialogue to justify characters being on the set when they would not naturally be there. I was able to concentrate the action of my story on the people

directly involved. I was even able to catch more literal reality than I could have caught in a stage play.¹²

In both “Printer’s Measure” and “The Mother” Chayefsky is able to use the confines of a few sets to give vivid details about the lives of the characters. In the latter, a sixty-six-year-old woman gets a job briefly in a sewing room at Tiny Tots Sportswear, and we get a sense of the community of workers, who include black and Puerto Rican women.

Chayefsky’s most famous play came out of the poverty in which the shows were produced. As David Swift remembered, “There were no [rehearsal] studios, no offices, no limos. We worked out of hotels. We rehearsed in dance halls.”¹³ The rehearsal space for *Philco* was a room in the old Abbey Hotel used for meetings of a lonelyhearts club. Director Delbert Mann was running the rehearsals of Chayefsky’s “The Reluctant Citizen” when the author wandered off and noticed a sign on the wall that said, “Girls, Dance With the Man Who Asks You. Remember, Men Have Feelings, Too.” Chayefsky told Mann he thought there might be a play about a girl in a place like that. Mann, busy with rehearsals, tried “to get him off my back” by agreeing. Chayefsky wandered back a little later and said that, no, it should be about a man. Mann sent him to see Fred Coe, and all Chayefsky said was, “I want to do a play about a guy who goes to a ballroom.” Coe’s response was typical: “Go write it, pappy.”

Some time later, Mann told Coe on a Monday the next script he was assigned was not very good. Coe called Chayefsky to see how his play was coming. He said it would be done in a couple of weeks. Coe told him they needed it sooner. Chayefsky brought the first two acts in on Thursday and the last act in after the show had started a week’s rehearsal. The show’s original title was “Love Story,” which NBC for some reason objected to. It was shown on May 24, 1953, on *The Goodyear Television Playhouse* with the title “Marty.”¹⁴

Chayefsky was right when he wrote that “Marty” was “the sort of material that does best on television,” and that the play deals “with the world of the mundane, the ordinary, and the untheatrical”—adding in a much-quoted line, “I tried to write the dialogue as if it had been wire-tapped.” He “tried to envision the scenes as if a camera had been focused upon the unsuspecting characters and had caught them in an untouched moment of life.”¹⁵ The play opens on Marty Pilette, a thirty-five-year-old butcher. The neighborhood women ask when he is going to get married. Marty and his friend Angie go to the Waverly Ballroom, where Marty is sympathetic to Clara, a rather dowdy schoolteacher, who has been dumped by the man who brought her. The next day, when Angie and Marty’s other friends give him a hard time about being seen with a “dog,” Marty explodes and tells them

You don’t like her. My mother doesn’t like her. She’s a dog, and I’m a fat, ugly little man. All I know is I had a good time last night. I’m gonna have a good

time tonight. If we have enough good times together, I'm going down on my knees and beg that girl to marry me. If we make a party again this New Year's, I gotta date for the party. You don't like her, that's too bad. When you gonna get married, Angie? You're thirty-four years old. All your kid brothers are married. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

What we get throughout the play are those "untouched moments" of Marty's life. Rod Steiger brings striking intensity to his performance as Marty, particularly in giving us Marty's pain. The small scale of the production and Delbert Mann's use of close-ups give us a sense of the heat of the emotions between Marty and his mother and his friends, and Chayefsky's writing gives us a sense of the world in which they live, which is beyond the physical limitations of the production. We believe as viewers that we are in the middle of the story.

"Marty" was the first television play bought by Hollywood and made into a theatrical film. The television play and the film, also written by Chayefsky, shows the differences between the two media. The film is approximately twice as long as the play, and there are several subplots added. The relationship between Marty and Angie has been developed, and we get more of Angie being upset that Marty would rather be with the "dog" than with him. Shooting the film on location gives us more of the local atmosphere.

What is lost in the film is the intensity of the emotions. Ernest Borgnine's excellent performance in the film does not have Steiger's pain. Borgnine is more open and charming, his pounding on a stop sign in delight after he's taken Clara home could only have been done by Borgnine's Marty and not by Steiger's. Clara is made much more engaging in the film than on television. Partly this is the casting of Betsy Blair, but it is also the extended scenes in the film. Nancy Marchand's television Clara is much less open and not an obvious charmer. There is no question that Borgnine's Marty will be happy with Blair's Clara; it is not such an easy call with Steiger's Marty and Marchand's Clara.

Chayefsky also turned his 1955 television play "The Bachelor Party" into a 1957 film. He recognized early that "The material is more suited to the movies than to television," but thought the television version "came out excellently."¹⁶ The director and actors in the television version gave a consistency to the characters that Chayefsky had missed in the writing,¹⁷ but in the film-script he was able to reorganize the material and keep the focus on the attitudes of the main character, Charlie, through the night of the party. As a result, Charlie's final speech to the groom-to-be, Arnold, which is the same in both versions, plays better in the film because Chayefsky has shown us the feelings that lead up to the speech.

When Chayefsky went back to New York after doing the film of *Marty*, he thought "there was no television anthology left,"¹⁸ but that was not entirely true. *Philco* had stopped, but others continued. What he had learned was that

he could make a lot more money in films than in television. He had been paid \$900 for the television "Marty" and \$13,000 plus a percentage for the film. In one year he had written nine one-hour shows, for which he had been paid a total of \$17,000.¹⁹ Movies had their appeal.²⁰

Studio One

Studio One began on CBS as a radio drama in 1947 and a year later it was brought to television under producer Worthington Miner. Like many early dramas, *Studio One* first did public domain material, such as *Julius Caesar*, which was done twice in the spring of 1949.²¹ Miner could not afford writers to adapt stories and did 39 of the first 44 scripts himself, or so he claimed. Catherine Turney, who did adaptations of Graham Greene and Somerset Maugham, discovered Miner "easy to work with," although, unlike Coe, "he was inclined to take credit for everything." In 1952 Miner moved on to other shows, most notably *Medic*, and *Studio One* was taken over by Herbert Brodtkin.

The major television writer to come out of Brodtkin's regime at *Studio One* was Reginald Rose. Rose had been a camp counselor and a publicist for Warner Brothers.²² In a 1982 interview Rose recalled that he had been trying to sell short stories and a novel without success, but: "The first time I wrote a TV script I sold it and when I sold that first one they said, 'More, More, More!' and I haven't stopped since."²³

For almost two years after that first 1951 sale, Rose wrote mostly half-hour original scripts and hour adaptations, which he described as "uniformly mediocre."²⁴ In November 1953 he showed *Studio One* story editor Florence Britton an outline for a one-hour original, and she urged him to do it. He had been struggling with the outline for some time, but completed the script in two to three weeks.²⁵ The play was "The Remarkable Incident at Carson Corners," in which a group of school children try their school's janitor for murder for pushing a child off the fire escape. Over the course of the trial we learn the fire escape was faulty because the community did not want to pay to fix up the old school. The public response was strong, and kinescopes of the show were shown for years thereafter at schools and civic groups.²⁶ Rose could give up his current job writing advertising copy and write for television full-time. He found television much less stifling than advertising, where he had to use the more genteel term *derrière* in lingerie ads.²⁷

In late 1953 Rose read of reactions of white people in Cicero, Illinois, to news that some new tenants in the neighborhood would be blacks. Rose was appalled. "The inhuman, medieval attitudes of those free, white Americans had so disturbed me that I decided to do a play about them in an attempt to expose the causes behind their mass sickness."²⁸ Rose wrestled for a time with how to condense the story into an hour play. Then: "I woke up one morning and had the entire idea in front of my eyes. It was complete." His idea for

“Thunder on Sycamore Street” was to tell the story by focusing each of the three acts on a different house on the block during the same period of time. In the first act we go into the house of Frank and his wife, Clarice, who are discussing whether the neighbors are with them. In the second act we see Arthur and his wife, Phyllis, who are not as sure as Frank that action ought to be taken. In the third act we meet Joe Blake, the object of the neighborhood action, as he faces up to the crowd.

The problem with the idea, as Rose says now, was that “Everybody knew [you could not do a story about blacks moving into a white neighborhood], except me. Oh, I knew, but I thought I could maybe get it by.” Florence Britton took him to lunch and explained the facts of network life: the hero of such a story could not be black because the South would object. (This was the same year the *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision that outlawed segregated schools.) Rose “felt that a compromise would weaken the play but I decided to make one anyway, hoping that the principle under observation was strong enough to rouse an audience.”²⁹

Blake became an ex-convict but, as Rose rewrote the play, we only learn this in the middle of Act II, so before this we can only imagine what Blake’s “sin” might be. And imagine audiences did. In the mail that poured in after the show’s broadcast on March 15, 1954, viewers felt that the ex-con was a symbol for a black, a Jew, a Catholic, a Puerto Rican, an ex-Communist or fellow-traveler, a Japanese, a Chinese, a Russian, an anarchist, and/or an avowed atheist. Rose wrote, “Not one single person I spoke to felt that he was actually meant to be an ex-convict,” and he thought “perhaps ‘Thunder on Sycamore Street’ had more value in its various interpretations than it would have had it simply presented the Negro problem.”³⁰ A week after the show, Rose got a letter from ten married couples in the West saying events like that could never happen in America.³¹

Later in 1954, Rose served on jury duty in a manslaughter case in New York’s General Sessions Court. Like most people, he grumbled about getting stuck on jury duty, but then

It occurred to me during the trial that no one anywhere ever knows what goes on inside a jury room but the jurors, and I thought then that a play taking place entirely within a jury room might be an exciting and possibly moving experience for an audience.³²

The outline for the play took a week to do, and it was 27 pages long (as opposed to his usual five-page outlines) because he had to work out the dramatic and emotional movements between all the jurors. The script was written in five days, less time than the outline, and the only reason it took that long was that the first draft, done in four days, was fifteen minutes too long and Rose had to cut it.³³ The play, “Twelve Angry Men,” was shown on

September 20, 1954, and like "Marty" effectively uses the limitations of live television to present the emotional intensity of the situation.

Not all of Rose's live television plays were done for *Studio One*. "Crime in the Streets," a tough play about a juvenile delinquent, was turned down by all three networks because, according to Rose, "It dealt sympathetically with juvenile delinquency at a time when juvenile delinquents were considered to be eminently unpopular,"³⁴ particularly by sponsors trying to appeal to middle-class audiences. The Elgin company picked up the show for its *Elgin Hour* drama series, where it was shown on March 8, 1955.

Both "Twelve Angry Men" and "Crime in the Streets" were bought for the movies, as was a third play, "Dino." Rose had relished being treated like a star playwright in live television ("The writer got the reviews and the publicity"), but, as he notes, when the movies "got over the shock of television being invented," they went after the writers the same way they had always gone after Broadway playwrights. For the movie rights and for doing the script for the film *Crime in the Streets*, Rose got \$25,000 plus 10 percent of the profits, whereas he had only received between \$1,800 and \$2,000 for the television version.³⁵

Live Drama Moves West

Not only were the writers moving to Los Angeles, so were the shows. Ten years after it started in New York, *Studio One* moved to Los Angeles. Some people thought that CBS was buckling under to the sponsors of the show, who wanted more stars on it. Harry Ommerle, a CBS vice president, told *TV Guide* it was important to get "top box office names in sufficient numbers" and thought stars would get bigger audiences, which would please sponsors.³⁶ There was another more practical reason: As the movies had discovered forty years before, there was much more space available in Los Angeles. In 1953 CBS had opened its eight-square-block Television City at the corner of Beverly Boulevard and Fairfax Avenue in Los Angeles. The building, and a similar one built by NBC in Burbank, had studios designed as television studios, not just remodeled radio studios. There were other amenities. No longer would actors have to rehearse in ballrooms of old hotels.

Diehard New Yorkers screamed in pain. Producer David Susskind was the most outspoken, describing Hollywood as

a world of lotus blossoms, swimming pools, smog, and indifference, [lacking] the electricity, the tang [of New York]. Even writers and actors who go to Hollywood from New York to do a show fall into the smug attitude. I don't know why.

It's a tired self-satisfaction caused by their tired way of life. We could be at war and they wouldn't know it because all they read is *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Daily Variety* [as opposed to *Weekly Variety*, one supposes, which was of course published in New York]. Their entire horizon is motion pictures and TV.

It induces a torpor, a retreat from creative ideas. . . . Don't be surprised to see a trend from Hollywood back to New York, from film shows back to live.³⁷

Producers were concerned they would lose control of their shows, but that did not happen. Sam Rolfe was a film writer who wrote for *Studio One* and other live shows in Los Angeles. He says it was, "A very simple process. There was one person you worked with. That was the producer. And you did your script." If there were other people, such as a story editor or a network representative, Rolfe worked one-to-one with him as well.

Robert Dozier wrote for live television drama both in New York and Hollywood and found that in California "We were working basically with all the same people, the same directors, the same actors." Dozier even thought the network people helpful:

The people at the networks were not like the people we have who are in the networks today. They were basically a more mature generation. They were showmen. They were not actuaries and accountants, and they didn't have Master's Degrees in Communications from Montana Normal and know everything. And they weren't 24. And they did things just simply because they thought it would be nice to do that. They didn't have 18 people making their decisions for them.

They were people with track records, who had been through the creative experience and understood it, and were sympathetic to it and did not want to hire you for your talent and then pay you enough money to put your talent aside and do what they wanted you to do. They wanted you to exercise your talent.

Playhouse 90

One hour was rather restrictive. Chayefsky and Rose both added material for the film versions of their teleplays. The obvious solution for television was to go to a greater length, which CBS did in 1956 with *Playhouse 90*, produced in its Hollywood Television City. As the name implies, the program was an hour and a half each week. Martin Manulis, its first producer, told *TV Guide* in 1957, "On *Playhouse 90* we're trying to keep that standard [of excellence in the theater]—we're trying to bring theatre into the home."³⁸ Because of the running time and the budgets, Manulis and the producers who came after him (John Houseman, Herbert Brodtkin, and Fred Coe, among others) were able to get many of the best writers of American anthology television, including Tad Mosel, Robert Alan Aurthur, Horton Foote, Reginald Rose, and Rod Serling.

After graduating from Antioch College, Rod Serling wrote for radio and in 1950 made his first television sale to a show called *Stars Over Hollywood*.³⁹ He wrote for several dramatic shows, but scored his biggest success with the January 1955 *Kraft Television Theatre* production of "Patterns." After that play he was able to sell many scripts "out of his trunk," that he had written before but had not sold.⁴⁰

Serling wrote the first two plays produced on *Playhouse 90* when it debuted in the fall of 1956. The first was "Forbidden Area," an adaptation Serling had already written. The second was an original he wrote especially for the series, "Requiem For a Heavyweight." The play deals with the end of the boxing career of Mountain McClintock and his corrupt manager Maish, who has lost money to gamblers betting McClintock would not go three rounds in his last fight. Maish wants to get McClintock to try wrestling to make enough money so Maish can pay off his debts. The writing of the characters of McClintock and Maish is strong and vivid, as is the atmosphere of the boxing world.

The production values also help create that atmosphere because, for all the increase in the space available, the sets still look like something from a cheap B movie, which corresponds to the cheap world of boxing. As in other live drama, there is the intensity of the performances, helped no doubt by everybody's concern as to whether Ed Wynn, playing an old trainer, was going to remember his lines.⁴¹ There is also, as with other live presentations, a lack of precision in the acting that is noticeable in comparison with filmed television, or with film.

Two years later JP Miller wrote another famous *Playhouse 90*, "The Days of Wine and Roses." Miller was working again for producer Fred Coe and just went in and told him the idea: two people love each other, but they come to love the bottle more. Coe's reaction was the usual, "Sounds fine. Go write it, pappy." Coe was still very much on the job. The stars were Cliff Robertson and Piper Laurie, and the director was John Frankenheimer. Miller was distressed as rehearsals progressed to see the actors, under Frankenheimer's encouragement, playing it drunker and drunker. When Coe called him up and asked him how it was going, Miller suggested Coe attend a run-through, which he did. When it was done, Frankenheimer asked Coe, "Isn't that great? Isn't that great?"

Coe replied, "John, you've got the wine, now get the roses." And then he left the room. Frankenheimer understood and pulled the actors back.

The End of Live Drama

The first season of *Playhouse 90* was done live, but beginning in the second season there were occasional filmed shows to relieve the pressures of doing a live show each week. At the beginning of the fourth season, the show was cut back from weekly to every other week. In January 1960, the show was reduced to irregular showings, with the last telecast in September 1961.⁴² Live drama was dying out, replaced by filmed series.

The obvious reason for the decline of live drama was that filmed production values were so much better than live television could provide. The filmed shows also tended to be series, which the sponsors loved because the audience got involved with recurring characters, which would encourage them to tune

in again the following week. Perry Lafferty, a producer and network executive, has suggested that the filmed shows killed off live dramas like *Playhouse 90* because the live shows were anthologies, with a different story each week and a different set of characters, and Lafferty thought “The writers were simply unable to provide that much material.”⁴³ The problem from the writing point of view is that each anthology show had to get the audience involved in the new characters each episode, whereas a series developed audience involvement in the same characters over the life of the series. The hour length also limited the writers in establishing the characters and getting the audience involved as deeply as a longer show could. The anthologies, both live and film, died out in the late fifties and early sixties, to be replaced a decade later by the television movie.

Not all television writers have the same feeling of nostalgia for what television historians like to call the Golden Age of live drama. E. Jack Neuman says

The best of it was really a third-rate movie, the very best. [On *Playhouse 90* I was always thinking about what I could do on a movie set, and how terribly limited and awkward [it was]. The people who were running it at the time, mostly New Yorkers, [had theatrical] aspirations or actual theatre background. They wanted to preserve that “spontaneous” horseshit. I had no use for them. Marty Manulis and John Frankenheimer I thought were both assholes. I had to deal with them all the time. There were several others.

Ann Roberts Nelson, a good old pal of mine at CBS, pulled out one I’d done in ’54 or ’55. Ugh! It looked just fucking awful. It was embarrassing. And it was supposed to be a huge success at the time. I mean, it was something you pin together on film in one day and make it look five times as good. It’s just bad.

No, it was a boring medium, in my estimation. I only had a couple of years of it before I began writing for movies again and then filmed television.

Perhaps it was only “a” Golden Age, not “the” Golden Age.

ENTER THE MAJOR STUDIOS

*T*he Black Market

The reason Abraham Polonsky moved from writing movies to writing live television was that he was blacklisted in Hollywood. Since Polonsky took the Fifth Amendment in his April 1951 appearance before HUAC,¹ he was unemployable in Hollywood. Even while writing in California, he'd kept an apartment in New York and felt, "I'd rather be in New York if I'm going to be blacklisted than out here. This is a company town."

The blacklist also existed in New York and the broadcasting industry. In 1950 the pamphlet *Red Channels* listed 151 people who were supposedly subversive. Shortly after it was published, the Korean War broke out, and as historian Erik Barnouw puts it, "Broadcasting executives were suddenly thumbing the pages of *Red Channels* against a background not of peace but of war."² Those executives then used the book and other sources to keep potentially subversive people from being involved in their shows. The executives' fear was that people such as Laurence S. Johnson, a New York supermarket owner who became a leader in the blacklisting, would create boycotts of the products of sponsors who allowed blacklisted people to be involved in their productions.

As in Hollywood, a black market grew up for blacklisted writers. Abraham Polonsky had two writer friends, Arnold Manoff and Walter Bernstein, who were already working on the black market. Bernstein was working on the program *Danger* when he was blacklisted. The producer of the program was Charles Russell, who was, according to Polonsky, "opposed to all this blacklisting. He had no political position in a positive sense. He just thought it was a nasty, shitty thing to do to people." Russell continued to employ Bernstein and hired Manoff and Polonsky as well.

The three writers agreed that since they were officially unemployable, their best solution was to take over a show. Eventually CBS decided to turn their radio show *You Are There*, which presented historical events as if being cov-

ered by contemporary news reporters, into a television program. Russell was the producer and the three blacklisted writers wrote for it. Polonsky says that, while “working with friends on *Danger* was pleasant, working on *You Are There* was more than pleasant,” since doing their own research into the historical events was educational for them.

There were of course limitations on their activities. They were not allowed at rehearsals, and it varied from show to show as to who knew they were writing. Polonsky again:

. . . David Susskind knew, because we'd go to his office and meet with him. And everybody in his office knew. Charlie Russell knew. Sidney Lumet [the director] obviously knew. He was a close friend of Walter's [Cronkite, the show's host and narrator]. But he knew less than he thought he did. Bill Dozier [then a CBS executive] was not supposed to know, but after we had been working some time, there was a screenplay Charlie had given to Dozier. He had a discussion of the script with Dozier, and Dozier said to Charlie, “Tell Polonsky it's a damned good script.”

Dozier was then transferred to the West Coast and wanted to take *You Are There* with them. When the network refused, he told them he thought there were blacklisted writers working on it, and they sent the show to Los Angeles with him. Dozier then called the writers and asked them, “Can I get you to write the show out here?” Polonsky says, “We wouldn't have anything to do with it,” adding: “It's so typical of the elaborate personal betrayals that happened as a matter of course in this industry. I suppose in all industries, but more here. I suppose the only other place where it's taken with the same nonchalance is Washington. Most places people aren't like that.”

During the first years of the black market, the network was willing to accept pseudonyms for the authors of the scripts, but then, as Polonsky says,

The studios [Sic. Polonsky means the networks, but old Hollywood habits die hard] got suspicious. The rumors go around. So you had to have real people who could show, which is how the fronts came to operate in the business.

I think we were pretty lucky with the fronts, at least we three were, in [terms] of these people we got to help us. . . . With the exception of Leo Davis, who later on became an associate producer, and was a writer by himself, the fronts were not necessarily in the same business we were. Sometimes they were advertising writers.

The most famous one was Walter Bernstein's front, whom we borrowed from time to time. His name was Leslie Slote. Leslie Slote was a p.r. guy for Governor Rockefeller and then for the Mayor of New York, and he finally became a vice-president of RCA over in England. He was the only one I know who enjoyed it. When they called, he said, “I'll meet you at '21.’ ” and they'd get the bill. He'd been a commander in the Navy. You know he had the attitude. He was the greatest of all fronts.

I began to feel sorry for our fronts. It's embarrassing to have someone say, “I

saw your show last night. It was marvelous." It's even more embarrassing to have someone say the opposite. . . .

Polonsky's usual front did not have Slote's panache. After a particular *Danger* episode, the front got a call from a producer wanting him to turn it into a play. The front called Polonsky in a panic and Polonsky said to him, "You go down, tell him you'll do it, get an advance, and then we won't write the play." To avoid meetings, producer Charles Russell made up excuses like: "He's in Florida." "He's got cancer." "He's living in Oklahoma."

Manoff, Bernstein, and Polonsky were not the only blacklisted writers working in New York.³ Allan Manings, after writing for *The Imogene Coca Show*, got a call one day from his agent, who said, "You're in trouble." Manings's name had shown up on one of the lists. Manings prefers not to talk in detail about work on the black market, saying only, "I fronted for some, others fronted for me." He eventually went to Canada to work, then got back into American filmed television in the early sixties. While the "Un-American" writers of *You Are There* were writing episodes for that show that were winning a variety of citizenship awards, Manings came back to write for the quintessential American sitcom, *Leave It to Beaver*.

In Hollywood the black market existed in the early television film production. As with motion pictures, some of the blacklisting came out of the fights among writers over control of their guilds. Richard Powell, a former radio writer, had been active in the Television Writers of America, a guild for television writers organized by former radio writers who felt the Screen Writers Guild did not understand their problems. In the bruising political battle between the two guilds, Powell and others were "red-baited."⁴ Powell wrote on the black market for two seasons on *Topper*, with either the name of the producer or the name of a partner on the script. Powell got off the blacklist by 1958.

There were, of course, writers and writer-producers who were helping writers and actors get off the blacklist. Roy Huggins, who had been a friendly witness before the congressional committee, made a point of hiring blacklisted writers later. When Sam Rolfe was writing and producing *Have Gun—Will Travel* in the late fifties, he discovered that the blacklist was falling apart:

I had one experience I still don't believe. I can show you how absurd that period was. I got one writer, who was on the list, and in those days they cleared certain names on writers, directors, and actors. They called me on this guy and I said, "What's he supposed to have done?"

They said, "Well, he's on this list." He signed for some black cause and they nailed him on it as a Communist.

I said, "Obviously you got the wrong guy because this guy is white."

He said, "Are you sure?"

I said, "Yeah."

The guy at CBS, I could hear him smile, said, "You know, you're right.

O.K.” He was looking for any excuse not to follow these things. The guy’s off the list like that.

Just as the major studios made some anti-Communist movies to try to pacify the right, the smaller television companies tried anti-Communist programs. Ziv had had a success on radio with *I Was a Communist for the FBI* and developed a similar program for television, *I Led Three Lives*, based on a book by Herbert Philbrick, who had reported to the FBI about activities in a Communist cell. An executive at Ziv told *TV Guide* they were “not a corporate knight in shining armor” delivering a message, but: “Our chief purpose is to find good story properties, turn them into good films and sell them. We think *I Led Three Lives* is good, exciting entertainment, and we know darned well we’re selling it.” Not surprisingly, the regional sponsors buying the show included oil and steel companies, utilities, and banks.⁵

The writers who worked on *I Led Three Lives* do not remember it with any fondness. Don Brinkley had written for the radio version of *I Was a Communist for the FBI* and was asked by Ziv to do the pilot for *Three Lives*. He did, but did not like writing for the show. He says it had a “sameness to it. They always seemed to be meeting out on a lake in a rowboat.” Gene Roddenberry, an ex-cop who wrote for the show, had even stronger feelings: “It was fiction. I hate myself for having written two episodes. It was entirely trumped up.”⁶

Movie Stars

When television first started, the major movie studios shunned it, as did the major movie stars. Writer Catherine Turney recalls that on the early anthology shows, “Most of the actors they were getting to play in them were not top drawer, so they were happy to get the work.”

Some big stars did turn to television early and were just as difficult as they had been in the movies. One of Sy Salkowitz’s first jobs was working on a syndicated series made in England called *The Errol Flynn Theatre*. Because of his production experience, Salkowitz was hired originally as a technical consultant, but to deal with all aspects of the production, including Flynn. “A real bastard. He was as unpredictable and terrifying as anybody has ever said.” Once Salkowitz wrote an episode overnight to keep Flynn from flying off to Majorca while the show was in production. The story editor felt he could not come up with the material for Flynn’s introduction until the scripts were complete, but Salkowitz wrote several general introductions they shot to be used if Flynn later wandered off.

Salkowitz also became the unofficial American story editor for the show. The British writers not only took too much time to write episodes, but told their stories at a much slower pace. Salkowitz added two or three scenes per

episode, condensing the other scenes and picking up the pace. He says, “I kind of Americanized it, or internationalized it.”

Bette Davis, Flynn’s stablemate from his Warner Brothers days, could also be difficult on writers. In 1957 Lou Shaw got a script for Davis to do as a pilot for a series at Revue, the filmmaking organization of the giant talent agency Music Corporation of America. Davis called him over one time and pointed to a four-page scene (in a half-hour script) between the two young lovers. She told him it was a great scene, then added, “But where in the hell is Bette Davis in those four pages? This is the Bette Davis show and they’re tuning in to watch Bette Davis and not two young little shits making love or whatever you have in mind.” Shaw says now, “That was ingrained in my mind,” so that when he later did other star vehicles, “My lead was always on the screen.”

One of the early anthologies using stars was *Four Star Playhouse*, produced by a company owned by Dick Powell, Charles Boyer, Ida Lupino, and David Niven.⁷ The function of the story editor on the show was to find scripts for the stars. One story editor, Coles Trapnell, explains, “In some respects it was easier to find stories for them for the half-hour television form than it would have been for making a movie feature, because they would be reluctant to take a chance on a big picture, but they’d try anything that appealed to them on [this].” Boyer, for example, did not care what kind of image he projected as long as it was an image of authority, so Trapnell had him play a fascist in several episodes.

Trapnell said to David Niven one day, “You know, you really have quite a resemblance to Robert Louis Stevenson, if we let that mustache droop down, and put on a fall on the back of your head.” Niven liked the idea and it became an episode about Stevenson’s last days in the South Pacific. Niven also played a barroom drunk in “The Answer” and an Episcopal priest in the Old West in “The Collar.”

In addition to Hollywood veterans like Coles Trapnell and Wells Root, Dick Powell also made room for younger television writers such as Christopher Knopf. Knopf, the son of MGM producer Edwin Knopf, wrote one theatrical film, *The King’s Thief*, which he says “almost ruined eight careers,” then turned to television because he thought that was where the best and the brightest of the younger writers were. He had a point. His fellow writers at Four Star included Stirling Silliphant, Robert Towne, Sam Peckinpah, and Bruce Geller. By this time (the late fifties–early sixties), the live anthology dramas had died out and Powell was keeping filmed anthologies going by casting stars in them. He could provide not only himself, Boyer, and Niven, but also Loretta Young, Van Heflin, Robert Ryan, and Jack Lemmon.

Powell was politically conservative, but would let the young writers write any story if they fought for it with enough conviction. As in live drama, the writers had one-to-one relationships with the producers and the sponsors’ representatives,⁸ and if necessary Powell would run interference with the spon-

sors and the sponsors' representatives for the writers. No wonder Knopf says of Powell that he was "the greatest guy I ever wrote for."

The Majors

It was inevitable the major Hollywood studios would get into producing films for television. Columbia, one of the smaller majors, began to sneak into television as early as 1949, although not under its own name and not on its own lot. In that year it formed an experimental television subsidiary company called Screen Gems. Irving Briskin, a film executive, was put in charge of it in 1950, and his offices were two rooms in an old two-story apartment building. In 1952 *Ford Theatre* was its first show to air, and the following year *Father Knows Best* was the second. By 1956 Screen Gems was spending \$40 million a year on television films and was using between 40 and 60 television writers.⁹

The next well-known studio to get into television was Disney. As historian/critic Richard Schickel points out, "Disney alone of the moguls—and he was not, at the time, a very big mogul—found a way to use the new medium to his advantage."¹⁰ Disney made a deal with Leonard Goldenson, the head of ABC, that involved ABC in helping to finance Disneyland, in return for which Disney was to make an hour weekly program for the network.¹¹ Disney shrewdly used the program to promote Disneyland, with one of the hours a documentary on construction of the park. The *Disneyland* program was, like the park, divided up into different lands: Frontierland, Fantasyland, Adventureland, and Tomorrowland. The Fantasyland and Adventureland programming came from the Disney vaults, and the Frontierland programs were made for the series, the most famous being the three-part "Davy Crockett" shows, which were so popular they were cut into one feature film and released theatrically.

The problem section of the *Disneyland* show was Tomorrowland, since Disney had little experience making science films. He called in Ward Kimball, who had been at the studio since 1934, and gave him a blank piece of paper and a pencil, a gesture indicating he could do anything he wanted. Kimball contacted rocket scientist Werner von Braun and they worked out ideas for the shows based on a series of articles in *Collier's* magazine in the early fifties outlining the possibility of space travel. When the first orbital flight around the moon was made, von Braun called Kimball and said, "They're following our script exactly."

The most spectacular of the Tomorrowland shows was created in a very un-Disneylike way. For "Mars and Beyond," Kimball and the people on the show looked at various books on what life on other planets might be like, then went to a bar across the street and got drunk on stingers. They came back to the studio, drew as many drawings as they could. When they sobered up the next morning, they created out of the best drawings an animated se-

quence of what life on Mars might be like. The actual photographs of Mars many years later disappointed anyone who saw the film.¹²

The success of the Disney show, which started in the fall of 1954, paved the way for the other majors to get into television. The autumn of 1955 brought shows from three major studios to television. *The MGM Parade* and *The 20th Century-Fox Hour*, both anthologies, lasted one season and two seasons, respectively. Otto Lang, the producer of *The 20th Century-Fox Hour*, told *TV Guide*, "Our main problem is the shortage of story material and the pressure of the time element to meet air dates." Lang added that a movie producer has months to develop a script, but a television producer has only minutes.¹³

Warner Brothers

The third studio was a bit more successful, eventually. After Goldenson made the deal with Disney, he had a four-and-a-half-hour dinner with Jack Warner. Warner was reluctant to get into television, telling Goldenson, "Leonard, I made those quickies thirty years ago, and I'm not going to make them again."¹⁴ Warner put his son-in-law, William T. Orr, in charge of the program, called *Warner Brothers Presents*. Instead of making an anthology, Orr and his staff made one-hour series that rotated from week to week based on two very successful and one moderately successful Warners films: *Casablanca*, *King's Row*, and a Western called *Cheyenne*. As if to demonstrate that television was different from films, both *Casablanca* and *King's Row* died rather quickly. *Cheyenne* became a series on its own, and if it had not been for Roy Huggins it would probably have flopped as well.

Roy Huggins was born in the state of Washington, grew up in Portland, Oregon, and was graduated Phi Beta Kappa from UCLA. He missed out on a graduate fellowship in political science because he was thought to be a Communist, which he was not, but he was so incensed at losing the fellowship he joined the Party. He left the Party over the Russian-German non-aggression pact in 1939 and later testified before the HUAC investigators. Huggins wrote magazine stories and novels in the forties, as well as films in the forties and early fifties.¹⁵

Huggins says he

had got to thinking that the future was in television, especially for people whose basic talent was writing. . . . I thought—and I turned out to be right, by the way—that in television the people running the networks were so new at it that they would find someone who could do it and leave them alone. I had long talks with friends of mine in television and they agreed with me that was the way it was working, so when Warner Brothers asked me to come over and talk to them about becoming a producer, I said yes. I took a 50 percent cut in what I was earning per week in order to get into television, because I thought, "I'll be maybe making ten times this in no time." All of which turned out to be true.

Huggins was assigned to *King's Row*, but knew from the beginning that a dark adult drama would not work in its 7:30 P.M. Sunday time slot. When the sponsors of the show sent a long telegram to the studio complaining about *Cheyenne*, all of which Huggins agreed with, the studio asked Huggins to take over the show. He did, but only after he got Warners to "grant me three wishes." The first was to get rid of the comic sidekick of the hero, which he felt was "Republic[s] C Westerns." The second was to get rid of the hero's occupation (he was a mapmaker) on the grounds that "Western heroes do not have occupations" unless they are cowboys or lawmen. The third wish was, "You've got to let me tell stories for adults, because the kids are going to watch it anyway because it's a Western." Warners agreed, and the series ran until 1963.

Huggins's theory on *Cheyenne* was that "A television series can be a series of short movies. That's why I didn't want him to have an occupation. You mustn't put anything into the series concept that narrows the scope of storytelling." This is why Huggins believes that 1955 was "a key year in the history of television. It's the year they not only moved to Hollywood and started using film [there's a certain hyperbole in that, as can be seen from previous sections of this book], but it's the year they started doing the one-hour series on film." The filmed series, with the exception of Disney (and his program was more an anthology), were all half-hour before Warners's series. Huggins credits Leonard Goldenson with realizing that "Television is not radio, and we're doing it like radio [with the half-hour series, which was standard in radio], and it's time we do it like it should be done."

Maverick

Huggins did not last very long on *Cheyenne*. Even when he started on it, he was seeing twists on what he recalls were the

simpleton stories where they would come across some old people in a covered wagon, weeping because someone had stolen all their cattle. *Cheyenne* would say, "I'll get them back for you." And he would get them back, and that would be the end of the story. You said, "Wait a minute. In the first place, this would be an interesting story if when it was over these old folks went off chuckling with their cattle following them, saying, 'Well, we got those guys' cattle, Ma. What'll we do next?'"

After doing a year of the show, Huggins was "so sick to death of the classical Western, I began to yearn to do an anti-Western." He found the key:

On *Conflict* [a Warners anthology show] I did a show in which I used Jim Garner in a small part as a con man. He was under contract to the studio. I didn't discover Jim. What I discovered was something Jim could do that no one

knew about, and that was to play a very wily and funny confidence man. He read lines that were only mildly funny on paper and were very funny in the dailies.

I said, "My God, there's the guy I've been looking for. I'm going to a Western with him. And we're going to make him a bad guy in every way. He's going to dress in black. Bad guys always dress in black. He's going to be outwardly a coward, because he will genuinely avoid trouble and especially gunfights and fistfights.

"He's going to be a gambler; nobody likes gamblers. And he doesn't really gamble. He takes advantage of people. He won't get into a game with true, good poker players." I did that in *Maverick*. People would say, "Hey, you want to join this game?" He'd look at them and say, "No, I don't want to join the game. That's gambling. I don't believe in gambling."

There are rumors that *Maverick* did not start out to be a humorous show because the first episode shown did not have as much of the humor as the later episodes. This had more to do with Jack Warner than it did Roy Huggins. The first script for *Maverick* that Huggins wrote, "Point Blank," had the *Maverick* humor: *Maverick* turns in the girl he loves for the reward, then haggles with the sheriff over the size of the reward. The problem, from Warner's point of view, was that if that was the first episode shown, then Huggins would get creator royalties from the series, and according to Huggins, Warner had laid down the law to William T. Orr: "No royalties will be paid. It will open the door to those goddamned miserable writers. We won't have that." So Huggins found a book Warners owned called *The War of the Cooper Kings* and adapted it into "The War of the Silver Kings," putting as much humor as he could, but not as much as in "Point Blank." "Silver Kings" became the "official" pilot for the series, Warner was happy, and Orr kept his job. After that everybody was willing to let *Maverick* be *Maverick*.

In addition to Huggins, there were other writers on the show, who enjoyed writing for it as much as Huggins. Wells Root, who had been in films since the late twenties, loved Westerns but got few opportunities to write theatrical Westerns. He'd toured the West for many years, keeping a notebook with ideas for Western stories that he was now able to use on *Maverick* and other Warner westerns. Like Huggins, he speaks highly of James Garner: "He was a joy to write for [on] *Maverick* because you know what he'd do with it. He took a joke and gave it extra life and vigor. You sort of patted yourself on the back [when you heard how he read it]."

Another writer on the show as Marion Hargrove, who had written the World War II best-seller *See Hear, Private Hargrove*. He not only wrote funny dialogue, but funny stage directions as well, which Huggins says "helped the mood." Huggins rewrote Hargrove's material, which was "six feet off the ground. I had to bring it down and make it real. It isn't funny if you can't believe it. It's only funny if it's true. Comedy has to be truer than drama."

Not surprisingly, Huggins says he and Hargrove had "a falling out after

every show.” Sometimes they would have a falling out while the show was in the making. In the second season, Hargrove came up with the idea of a parody of *Gunsmoke*. Huggins wrote the story, Hargrove did the script, and Huggins did the rewrite—which Hargrove did not like. Hargrove kept trying to get the director, Leslie Martinson, to add bits, which Huggins kept trying to keep out, such as the marshal patting the saloon woman on the arm every time he saw her. Huggins let Hargrove supervise a cut of the episode, but it did not play well and Huggins had to recut it. Huggins still thinks there was too much of Hargrove’s “shtick” in it, but it is a funny episode that lives in the minds of *Maverick* fans both then and now. It also so upset the makers of *Gunsmoke* that there were rumors they were going to name a villain Huggins, but they did not.

It took eight days to make a *Maverick* episode, which meant that even if they started production in the early summer, it was next to impossible to do a full season of 39 episodes all starring Garner. Huggins’s suggestion was that the network preempt the show from time to time, but the network people were afraid that if it did, people would not come back to watch it. The solution arrived at was to give Bret Maverick a brother Bart and have several episodes a season featuring only Bart. Eventually there was also a cousin Beau, and even the *Maverick* brothers’ Pappy, who was mentioned and quoted in the first seasons but not seen. The problem, and the solution, was that Jack Kelly, the actor hired to play Bart, was not the gifted comic actor that Garner was, so the Bart *Maverick* episodes did not have the kind of witty writing the Bret episodes did. On the other hand, Bart made it possible to do more conventional dramatic stories.

Roy Huggins left *Maverick* after two years, and he was replaced by Coles Trapnell. Trapnell found Huggins “extremely obliging and helpful to me when I came on board [in June 1959]. We talked story ideas over. We had absolutely nothing to shoot and we were going on the air in September.” Trapnell eventually brought over writers he had worked with at Four Star, but the show was beginning to run short of cons for the *Mavericks* to do. Warners had purchased the rights to a book on cons called *Yellow Kid Weil* in 1958 and Huggins used those classic cons, as well as ones he had learned as a student at the Hill Military Academy. They also used ones from the book *Con Men and Con Games*. Trapnell and his writers started stealing from elsewhere, such as “*Maverick and Juliet*,” which borrowed an episode from *Huckleberry Finn*, in which Tom Sawyer gets Huck involved with two feuding families. Trapnell figured if Mark Twain could steal from Shakespeare, he could steal from Twain. Some stories were original. One day, writer Leonard Praskins came in and told Trapnell he wanted to do an episode entitled “*The Resurrection of Joe November*.” Trapnell said, “Fine, what is it?”

Praskins replied, “I don’t know, but isn’t that a hell of a title?” Trapnell agreed and they came up with a story. Trapnell, like Huggins, came up with many stories, but unlike Huggins, who got story credit, Trapnell “had one of

those delightful contracts where I got no residuals and no extra credit, no nothing, so they were welcome to anything they could get.”

Unfortunately Garner left the show after the third season, and the writers were left with Kelly and Roger Moore, who played Beau. They were good at what they did, but they were not Garner.

77 *Sunset Strip* and Its Clones

Roy Huggins was coming up with another show for the studio. He was going to do another one-hour pilot for a private eye show (previous shows in the genre were half-hours) with Marion Hargrove doing the script. The story Huggins gave to Hargrove had a standard villain, but Hargrove came to Huggins one day and said, “You know, Roy, something’s gone wrong with the younger generation. They’re crazy. They are absolutely, totally, frighteningly immoral.” He quoted sociologists about the postwar generation of kids, and told Huggins he wanted to make the killer a young middle-class boy who kills in cold blood. Huggins loved it and Hargrove started on the script.

Huggins then got a call from Bill Orr, who asked him if they could expand the script from the 54 minutes of an hour pilot into 75 minutes to make a theatrical feature. Huggins and Hargrove were happy to do it, although Huggins was suspicious of Orr’s motives. He told Hargrove, “Bill Orr’s up to something. I don’t know what, but this is not on the level. But you’re going to get paid more. So let’s do it.” The film became *Girl on the Run* and got enough of a limited release that the studio could claim it was a film. When 77 *Sunset Strip* was spun off from it, the studio did not, once again, have to pay “those goddamned miserable writers” creator royalties.

Because the film was made as a theatrical film, it was sneak-previewed in the Los Angeles area, which is when they discovered what Huggins calls “the accidental factor in success.” He explains:

The one thing we never ever predicted in our wildest dreams was that this character [played by Edd Byrnes], who was new and who was interesting, was anything except repulsive. After he killed people in cold blood, he combed his hair. At the preview, everyone in the audience under the age of twenty came out, took a look at Efrem Zimbalist Jr. over here and Edd Byrnes over here. And they wanted Edd’s autograph. I never saw a man so shocked, surprised, pleased, flabbergasted, in my life.

Efrem, Bill Orr and I stood there across the lobby and watched this without any understanding. We were absolutely baffled. Now Bill was thinking, “Jesus Christ, we’ve got something.” He was happy. It did prove Marion was right. We don’t know what we’re doing when we’re writing. The audience tells us.

For the series, the character was changed from a killer into a parking-lot attendant who constantly combs his hair and Byrnes became the first teen cult star of television.

One advantage ABC discovered in getting programming from a major studio was being able to clone a hit show. When *Cheyenne* became a hit in 1955–56, Warners followed on ABC with *Sugarfoot* in 1957 and *Bronco* in 1958, both Westerns using young, untried male players in the leads. The success of *77 Sunset Strip* in 1958 brought even more spin-offs: *Bourbon Street Beat* (set in New Orleans) debuting in 1958, *Hawaiian Eye* in 1959, and *Surfside 6* (set in Miami Beach) in 1960. Hubbell Robinson, a producer of the declining live dramas, described the structure of these shows accurately in 1961, when he said:

The ingredients are three or four handsome young Hollywood men, one of them a shocking blond; a busty and beautiful girl; a succession of violent encounters with the not very bright “bad guys,” and a title that involves a number like *Crocodile 8*. Run them all together and you’ve got a hit. Whether you’ve got entertainment that people look at or just stare at is something else again.

By 1959 Warner Brothers was providing eight hours, or 40 percent, of ABC’s prime-time schedule, and four of those shows were in the top twenty.¹⁶ What ABC had discovered in researching its efforts to beat NBC and CBS was that advertisers preferred the younger audiences that were attracted to the action-adventure shows. The younger audiences were not as set in their ways and were more willing to change the products they bought, especially the products television advertised.

Having a major studio and its resources and ruthlessness could be useful in other ways. When the Writers Guild of America struck in 1959–60, the shows that were clones of each other could provide story material. Scripts used for one Warners private-eye show could be used for another, and even scripts for Westerns could be adapted for the private eye shows, and vice versa. Huggins, who was by this time making another attempt at writing feature films, recalls that it was William Orr, Hugh Benson, and one other person who did the “adaptations,” but there were other writers willing to work as long as their names were not used. On many of the adapted scripts, and non-adapted ones as well, the writer credited was W. Hermanos. Hermanos is Spanish for brothers; you can guess what the W. stands for.¹⁷

Huggins left Warners, and after some years he ended up at Universal, which like Warners in the late fifties was a factory. Huggins felt more comfortable in a studio setting. Likewise Coles Trapnell also went to Universal in the sixties, getting “one of those contracts where they could use me as a producer, an associate producer, a story editor, a writer, and I think in the small print it said I could be used to get in early to sweep out the office.” Joel Rogosin, who had followed Huggins on *77 Sunset Strip*, also moved to Universal in the sixties, since Warners television was diminishing at the time. Universal had by then been taken over by MCA, which folded its Revue operation into

Universal. Universal was making a big move into television, where it has remained a force ever since.

Major studios producing television could provide other elements writers could take advantage of. When Everett Greenbaum did an episode of the later-fifties series *How to Marry a Millionaire* at 20th Century-Fox, he remembered Fox had a large computer set from their film *The Desk Set*, so he wrote an episode to use it. Charles Larson wrote and produced for the same studio's series *Twelve O'Clock High* in the middle sixties, and the studio had so much stock footage of airplanes collected for the 1949 theatrical film of the same name that the writers could come up with any situation and be confident there would be footage of it. When Sam Rolfe was making the series *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* at MGM in the mid-sixties, he would get on a bicycle, ride around the backlot, and come up with stories to fit the standing sets. He also used to "scout" sets for movies in production to see what he could use. At the time of *U.N.C.L.E.*, MGM was just beginning to get into television on a big scale and Rolfe found that the craft departments were eager to show what they could do so that they could keep their jobs.

One of the best, and in some ways most bizarre, uses of the resources of a major studio came in a second-season episode of *Maverick* called "The Brasada Spur." The story makes no sense as Bart Maverick finds himself dressed up not in his usual outfit, but in a large coat with a big white hat. He gets involved with railroad men and finds himself on a train that is headed for a collision with a train coming the other way on the same tracks. It is only when the trains crash that Warner Brothers fans can make sense of the plot: it has all been a lead-in to the crash and the brawl that follows, which is from the 1945 Warners release *Saratoga Trunk*. Maverick is in this outfit so that he will match Gary Cooper's stunt double in the film. The train wreck sequence gives the episode a spectacular element that neither live television nor small-scale film production could provide.¹⁸

REALITY/DOCUMENTARY

W

Reality

When the American fiction filmmakers who made wartime documentaries returned to theatrical filmmaking after World War II, their films tended to be more realistic. Many early television writers were World War II veterans themselves. Chayefsky, Rose, Serling, and JP Miller all served in the military during the war, as had Richard Powell, Everett Greenbaum, Allan Manings, E. Jack Neuman, Christopher Knopf, and Sam Rolfe. Even Gore Vidal was first mate of an army ship in the Aleutians Islands from 1943 to 1946.¹ So it is not surprising that early television made attempts to be as real as possible in its fiction. These attempts took three forms.

The first was stories based on facts, such as *Navy Log*, *The Lineup*, and *Dragnet*. *Dragnet* boasted it was based on actual cases from the Los Angeles Police Department. *TV Guide* tried to explain in 1953 how Jack Webb's approach worked on *Dragnet*: "[T]here is no dramatic license taken with the cases. Each is related factually, but in such a manner that even the criminal would not recognize his own case. Webb is dedicated to the idea that the show should do nothing to harm a man who has paid legally for his misdeed."² The magazine does not make clear how the show can be factual and at the same time present the case so the criminal would not recognize it.

Medic was created and written by former *Dragnet* writer James Mosher. Mosher also tried to have it both ways, saying, "It's not a documentary. Each story is based on a number of case histories."³ Each story idea for the show was discussed with a three-man committee from the Los Angeles County Medical Association, and the completed scripts were checked by a representative of the association.

The second form of getting at reality was seen in Paddy Chayefsky's attempt to capture the texture of real life, particularly in his use of dialogue that could have been "wiretapped." This goes beyond Webb and Mosher's "Just the facts,

ma'am" approach to begin to suggest the rhythm of real life, not just the surface facts.

The third form was seen in Reginald Rose's attempts to deal with contemporary social issues. Rose was not alone in this, since many of the other writers wanted to write about contemporary issues as well.

The institutions of television, particularly the sponsors and the networks, were happiest with the first of the three forms. The factual approach seemed real and was not particularly controversial, especially if the cases had been disguised enough so the participants would not sue. Chayefsky's approach was acceptable as long as it brought in the upper- to upper-middle-class audiences who owned the sets in the fifties, but as the audiences expanded, the sponsors and therefore the networks wanted shows with wider appeal, and went to the more glamorous, less realistic filmed adventure shows. The most troublesome, from the viewpoint of the sponsors and the networks, was the third form.

The sponsors were concerned with the question of public taste, especially since there was generally a single sponsor for a show, often with his name in the title. Audiences could be antagonized, and they did hold it against the sponsor, according to one director of television for a large cosmetics company:

You'd be surprised how many people complain to us directly when they don't like a show, and threaten never to buy our product any more. Evidently they believe the program is produced right here in our executive offices. If the public makes us responsible for our shows in that way, then we must retain complete control.⁴

Needless to say, the writers of television in the fifties and early sixties remember some of the more idiotic attempts of the sponsors to protect themselves and their interests. Jay Burton recalls that J. Carroll Naish could not guest-star on *The Buick-Berle Show* because there was then a car called Nash. Don Brinkley once wrote a script about Dr. Samuel Mudd, the doctor who set John Wilkes Booth's broken leg after the assassination of Lincoln, but *Climax!* passed on it because the show was sponsored by Chrysler and there was too much mention of Lincoln in it.

The sponsors involuntarily brought about their own withdrawal from the production of television shows. By July 1957 five of the top ten shows on television were quiz shows,⁵ but the shows were rigged: certain contestants were given the questions and answers before the show. The public scandal over the rigging in 1959 led to sponsors' no longer being allowed direct control over program production. The networks took control of production, and the most stupid of the sponsor restrictions were lifted. However, the networks still had to sell the shows to the sponsors, and the sponsors were still interested in shows that did not offend, so the institutional pressure on the makers of television continued, only now focused in the network censor. The network

ensor's office has gone under many names: Standards and Practices, Programming Practices, Continuity Acceptance, and others. The function is still the same: to protect the public image of the network and the companies sponsoring shows on it.

Even in 1956, when the sponsors still controlled production, Stockton Helffrich, the director of NBC's Continuity Acceptance, listed the special interests that shows on his network had to avoid offending: gas interests, meat interests, florists, bowling and billiard interests (gangsters were not allowed to be shown in pool halls), warehouse interests (night watchmen could not be shown as dirty and warehouses could not be the locations for murder); as well as regional, social, philosophical special interests, such as physical and mental afflictions. Helffrich noted his office was "very active in censoring of racial stereotypes, religious oversimplifications, unkindness toward the physically handicapped, ignorance regarding the emotionally disturbed."⁶

Needless to say, the writers fought back, sometimes at full voice. Charles Larson describes having "long screaming sessions on what we could say or do. A good censor can see filth anywhere." When Richard Conway was writing on *Leave It to Beaver*, he and his partner wrote in a joke that ended with the clean punch line from a very old dirty joke. The lady censor was upset, but the producers, Bob Mosher and Joe Connelly, persuaded her that the only people who would understand that it was the punch line of a dirty joke were those who already knew it. The line was kept. (Unfortunately Conway cannot remember the punch line. Drat.)

One writer used his own instincts about a lady censor to liven up a show. In the script for an action-adventure show in this period, the writer wrote in an implied lesbian affair between the villain's girlfriend and another woman. The studio told the writer he could never get it past the network censor, but he pointed out that he thought the censor was gay herself and would probably think it was a normal affair. Whether the censor was or not, the script was approved, shot, and went on the air.⁷

By 1968 the censorship role had shifted so much to the network that writer-producer Bill Froug could write,

It is always the network *program* department that says that the *sales* department says that the *sponsor* says that they will withdraw their support of any segment containing such-and-such a theme. But sponsors are never consulted. Sponsors simply stand in line like everybody else.⁸

That was a drastic change from the heyday of sponsor influence the decade before. It was also part of an opening up of American television that has some of its roots in documentary film and especially documentary film for television.

Documentary

It is all John Grierson's fault that the first thirty years of network documentaries were so humorless. Grierson, the first great theorist of documentary film, thought documentaries should be educational, but never anything so trivial as amusing. Educational documentaries appealed to television networks for several reasons. From the beginning, network television was a commercial, but the networks and their stations still had a responsibility, under the FCC, to use the airwaves responsibly. What better way to do that than to present something educational? The network insisted upon control of what went out on their air, so Grierson's authoritative point of view was matched by the networks' view of themselves as the authoritative source of entertainment, news, and information.

The documentary units at the networks were originally put under the control of the people running the news divisions, most of whom had come to television out of radio news, so they were used to their work being primarily the printed or spoken word; and Grierson's approach depended very much on narration. In Edward R. Murrow's first documentary series, *See It Now* (1952 to 1955), Murrow is the authority figure telling audiences what they should think about such subjects as Senator Joseph McCarthy. As strong and important as some of these programs were, in terms of technique they were not much more than illustrated radio.

Murrow's tradition continued at CBS. When producer Irving Gitlin started a series called *The Twentieth Century* in 1957, he brought in writers not usually associated with television. For his program on Winston Churchill, Churchill's biographer John Davenport co-wrote the script with producer Burton Benjamin. Hanson Baldwin, the military editor of the *New York Times*, wrote the program on the V-2 rocket.⁹

Robert Drew

In 1954 a picture editor for *Life* magazine was on a Neiman Fellowship at Harvard thinking about whether it was possible to make documentary films that had the informality of the still pictures in *Life*. One night he turned the sound off on Murrow's *See It Now*. The picture alone made no sense. When he turned off the picture and listened to the sound, the show still made sense.¹⁰

Drew began to realize that "The kind of logic that does build interest and feeling on television is the logic of drama. Dramatic logic works because the viewer is seeing for himself and there is suspense." Drew was drawn toward storytelling, but also wondered "what, if anything, all this stuff about storytelling had to do with journalism." From his reading of Walter Lippmann and John Grierson and their observations of the need for education of the

masses in a democracy, Drew came to the conclusion that "Television had gone Grierson one better [in terms of delivering large audiences], and now what were we going to do about it?"

Drew spent the next five years trying to work out the technical problems of his approach. The first time most of the lighter-weight cameras and lighter-weight sound recording equipment worked most of the time was in *Primary*, Drew's film of the 1960 Wisconsin Democratic Presidential Primary between John F. Kennedy and Hubert H. Humphrey. Drew and his filmmakers followed the candidates in and out of cars, walking down the streets, through crowds, and even into their hotel rooms. Drew and the filmmakers collaborated on the editing process. The result was a film that with only three minutes of narration in its 54-minute running time tells the story of the election by putting the viewer into the action and cutting between the candidates. The viewer was not lectured to, or nudged to think one way or the other about each candidate.¹¹

Drew's new documentary storytelling style was what many would come to call *cinéma vérité*, but is more accurately called direct cinema, since it records experience directly.¹² (*Cinéma vérité* uses the same portable equipment, but by the filmmaker asking questions provokes the subject into revealing him- or herself.)

Primary was shown to the executives at the networks and Drew sums up their reaction by quoting one as saying, "You've got some nice footage there, Bob." In other words, "Come back when you have a strong narration and music that tells the audience what to think." The film was shown in a shortened form on several local television stations owned by Drew's boss, Time Inc., and syndicated to other stations.

Drew's direct cinema technique was too striking for the networks to completely ignore it for too long. Later in 1960, ABC commissioned Drew to do a film about Latin America (*Yanki No!*), and in 1963, after Drew's unit was released by Time Inc., a film they were working on was financed and picked up for broadcast, again by ABC. Drew kept in touch with the Kennedys after *Primary* and wanted for some time to do a film about a presidential crisis. In June 1963 he got his wish as his camera people followed Attorney General Robert Kennedy through the attempt to integrate the University of Alabama. Drew's associate James Lipscomb also talked Alabama Governor George Wallace into letting a crew film his side of the crisis. The resulting film, *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment*, was again documentary as storytelling.¹³ Documentarians at the networks understood what Drew was up to. Burton Benjamin, the CBS producer of *The Twentieth Century*, said, "It is obvious to me that they could get closer to the essence of the truth through this technique than you could get through the conventional technique. It just seemed to be a breakthrough."¹⁴

It was not, however, a technique that was picked up generally by the networks. Direct cinema was too free and informal to appeal to the men who

controlled, and wanted to be seen as controlling, network programming. Direct cinema was simply too democratic in letting the audience make up its own mind about the subject. The people running the networks were more comfortable with the older, authoritarian style.

The longer form of documentary eventually gave way on the networks to the magazine shows, although when a documentary is done at the longer length, such as CBS's *48 Hours*, which does use some of the observation technique of direct cinema, there is still the narration to tell the audience what to think.

Frederick Wiseman

If there is little room on the commercial networks for the direct cinema approach, there is slightly more room for it on public television, which is more willing to speak with several voices rather than a single one. One of those voices is Frederick Wiseman, a lawyer who turned to documentary filmmaking in the mid-sixties. His first films, *Titicut Follies* and *High School*, were financed independently, but his films since have been financed at least in part by, and shown on, public television.

Wiseman works in the direct cinema mode, although he prefers to call what he does "reality fictions."¹⁵ Unlike Drew, however, he does not organize his films in a conventional dramatic structure, which is why Drew's dramatic conflict structure was more quickly adapted to fiction television, and Wiseman's influence is more apparent in the multi-character dramas of the eighties. Wiseman's films generally deal with institutions both public and private, and are made up of sequences showing how the people of the institution deal with their "clients," with recurring connecting material showing the operational details of the institution. The meaning of the films comes not from the story or a single crisis situation, as do Drew's films, but from the thematic connections between the scenes.

Wiseman's films often deal with institutions that fictional television dealt with before and after his films, and by placing his films in their historical context one can begin to see the influence not only of Wiseman but also of the direct cinema style in general on American television and particularly on the writing for American television.

Wiseman's fourth film was the 1970 film *Hospital*, shot at New York's Metropolitan Hospital. In the earlier medical shows on television, the doctors never made mistakes, nor did the hospitals. Early in *Hospital* we see Dr. Schwartz on the phone complaining to another hospital that they have sent over a patient to Metropolitan without the proper paperwork. He goes through the entire situation and then has to repeat much of the story when it becomes clear the person on the other end of the phone has not been paying attention. Later on Schwartz, who is the closest to a star the film has but who only appears in a few scenes, is helping a young man who has overdosed on mes-

caline. The doctor is caring, but in a cool, professional way, and he is repeating, almost like a mantra, "You will not die." The man vomits. And vomits again. And again. And when you think he cannot have anymore left, he vomits again. Network television of the time would obviously not show the vomiting as casually as Wiseman does, but network television would also not let a medical show have the loose structure of Wiseman's film, since part of the reason for a medical show is to provide a dramatic structure for stories. And a network documentary would not let the vomiting scene go on so long that it becomes funny, as Wiseman does.

Wiseman's third film, *Law and Order*, was shot in 1968 in Kansas City. The film is not dissimilar to *Dragnet*, in which the citizen Sgt. Friday deals with tend to be, if not completely criminal, at least slightly off-center. In one of *Law and Order's* opening scenes, Wiseman shows a man who has come to the police to get them to arrest his brother-in-law. The man had mentioned to someone that he was going to take the brother-in-law and "throw him in the river," but the other person said, "The cops are paid to do that." Wiseman's cops tend to be more human than Webb's, and unlike Sgt. Friday they cannot always settle the cases. Wiseman puts at the beginning and end of *Law and Order* two different domestic dispute cases in which the cops are unable to provide any solution. In the one at the end of the film, the cop tells the man involved that he will have to get a lawyer to help settle the situation.

The law, in Wiseman's view of the world, may not be able to help. In his 1973 *Juvenile Court*, the entire film is summed up by a scene at the end of it in which one of the teenagers brought before the court keeps asking if he can get justice. Wiseman deliberately does not tell the audience the outcome of one case we spend some time watching, in contrast with the law shows of the time, such as *Perry Mason*, where the case is always solved. What *Juvenile Court* looks forward to are the law shows of the eighties and nineties, in which the practice of law is seen as more complex.

The Raymonds

Alan and Susan Raymond first broke into the public eye as filmmakers on producer Craig Gilbert's 1972 direct cinema/soap opera/miniseries for PBS, *An American Family*, in which American family life was not seen as slapstick farce as in *I Love Lucy* but as slapstick drama; not seen as simple problem solving as in *Father Knows Best* or *Leave It to Beaver* but as virtually unsolvable in its emotional complexity; and not seen as emotionally intense as in conventional afternoon soap operas but as a combination of intensity and languidness. *An American Family* caught the rhythm of U.S. family life that would not show up in American fiction on television until, in a slightly different but just as well observed manner, *thirtysomething*.

In the mid-seventies, the Raymonds moved into Wiseman territory and

made a documentary about the police. In *The Police Tapes* the locale is not Kansas City but the 44th Precinct of The Bronx, an area known as Fort Apache. The style is partly direct cinema. In one scene the police have to break down a door to get a barricaded suspect. They try. It does not give. They try some more. More cops try. Everybody stands back for a bit, then they try again, and they finally get the door open. It generally does not take this long for television police to get through a door.

The film is also partly *cinéma vérité*, in that the Raymonds listen to the police talk about their work. They even directly interview on camera the Police Commander of the precinct, Antony Bouza, who becomes a benign authority figure giving the audience the benefit of his expertise and his sympathies for both the cops and the citizens in his precinct.¹⁶ He is less rigid than Jack Webb's Sgt. Friday, and he looks forward to police in later series.

As does the film as whole. In a scene near the beginning, a sergeant is handling the roll call of the officers on the watch. The camera, in hand-held direct cinema fashion, watches the police, and at the end of the meeting we hear the sergeant say, "Let's be careful out there."

The Influence of Fiction on Documentary

The influence of fictional structures can be seen in television documentary, where documentary filmmakers try to work in patterns TV audiences expect. Aubrey Solomon, a young filmmaker and film historian from Canada, got his first job in television through his work as an historian of Twentieth Century-Fox. In 1976 he was hired as a researcher for the pilot for a syndicated documentary series called *That's Hollywood*, and later was an associate producer on the series. Solomon describes the process:

Well, we followed a format because it was a TV episode: we had a tease (a glitzy, slam-bang first 60 seconds), and then we go into the credit sequence, then we would open up the show. By the end of the first act we had to come up with a big production, or a big explosion, or a big action scene, which holds the interest until the second act, and then come up with another socko ending.

We would do a rough outline and say approximately what we wanted to say. Then we would do our best to find a clip that illustrated [that], but then in the writing of the show, we would finesse the script as we found the clips to find the proper lead-ins and lead-outs, and gag lines that we could make to counterpoint what we'd seen or what was coming up or whatever.

COWBOYS AND OTHER SIXTIES PROFESSIONALS

Westerns

*I*n the late fifties and early sixties, there were still the formula Westerns. Revue, both before and after MCA took over Universal, made filmed Westerns both for syndication and the networks. The writers working on them had to be aware which market the show was headed for. D. C. Fontana wrote for two Revue Westerns, *The Tall Man* for NBC and *Shotgun Slade* for syndication. Fontana notes that the limitations on these half-hour shows were established by Ziv, and since Ziv was successful, other companies followed Ziv's rules. On *Shotgun Slade* a writer was limited to only four major speaking parts, including Slade, and three sets. On the one episode Fontana did, no exteriors were allowed since it was raining and the company could not hold production until it stopped. On the network shows writers could go further in terms of characters and sets, although not much.

There were also several westerns that appealed to adults in varying degrees. *Have Gun—Will Travel* did not start out as a Western. Sam Rolfe received an Academy Award nomination for his first produced screenplay, *The Naked Spur*. According to Rolfe, most movie people thought of television as a “sort of second cousin that you kept in the attic,” but he saw television as “a field for exploration, an adventure.” He met Herbert Meadow, the creator of *Man Against Crime*, who announced he had a great title, *Have Gun—Will Travel*. Rolfe told him, “It’s a great title to create something out of, but it will never go on the air with a title like that. *Have Gun—Will Travel*, what does it mean?”

They developed an idea for a modern adventure series about a man who lives in New York, gets the out-of-town papers, and clips out stories of people in trouble, to whom he sends his card, which says, “Have Gun—Will Travel. Cable Paladin.” They pitched the idea to Hunt Stromberg, Jr., at CBS, who loved the concept but told them to make it a Western. As soon as they got out in the hall they began to think: In 1870 how is a guy in a cave surrounded by Indians going to get a timely message to Paladin and what’s going to be

left of him by the time Paladin gets there? They went back into Stromberg's office, and Rolfe says that, "Hunt said the one thing that solved the problem: 'Dissolve to: . . .'" They could just fade from the man in trouble to Paladin and back. Because of the time period of the show, they also had to change "Cable" to "Wire." Rolfe says, "The first thing that made me a little afraid of the great American public . . . was 50 percent of the mail we got started out 'Dear Wire.'"

Rather than doing simple action stories, Rolfe did "things that guys said you can't do, but I put it in the west." He wrote an episode where a teacher was teaching that Quantrill of Quantrill's Raiders was a bad man, and a Southerner pulls a gun on her to make her stop. Paladin comes to town and makes it clear you cannot tell teachers what to teach—an risky idea to promote at the end of the McCarthy era.

Rolfe was helped, or at least not hurt, by the sponsor's representative on the show. The representative read the scripts and would send long memos tearing them apart to both Rolfe and the sponsor. The representative then would tell Rolfe to ignore his comments and that he was just writing the memos to persuade his boss he was on the job. Rolfe left the show after a year, but *Have Gun—Will Travel* continued to do more than conventional western stories continued under his replacements, Frank Pierson and Al Ruben. Lou Shaw did a first draft script for them they rejected, but when they explained what was wrong with it, Shaw got the concept of the show as a "little morality play" and persuaded them to let him do the second draft, which they used.

Have Gun—Will Travel was not the only Western to put political material into the context of the West. Christopher Knopf wrote an episode of *Wanted: Dead or Alive* about a sheriff who was a nice man, but not up to the demands of the job. Knopf says it was based on "My view of Eisenhower at the time. I'm sure I'm wrong, but that was how I saw it as a kid at the time."

Unlike Sam Rolfe, who by his own admission loved the "mythical history of the West, not the real West," E. Jack Neuman wanted his Westerns to be accurate. In 1957 NBC began the series *Wagon Train*, which ran until 1965. Neuman thought "It was a great, swaggering, Western idea," following a wagon train for a season as it winds its way from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Oregon. Neuman wrote the first three episodes after the pilot, and he "wanted to write it the way it was, not the way everybody thought it was." The first episode he wrote dealt with the whole wagon train having to stop because a spanner nut on one of the lead wagons broke. The studio and network "never thought that we should really do anything authentic. It was Never-never Land. I said, 'No, no, no. The real thing's a lot more fun.'" Neuman had his preference between the two stars of the series. He says that with Ward Bond "You couldn't discuss anything. Also, he wasn't too bright anyhow," but Robert Horton was "very literate" and even wrote a background sketch for the character he played, Flint McCullough, which Neuman used.

One advantage of the *Wagon Train* format was that it lent itself to guest stars, although as D. C. Fontana notes, “If you counted as many guest stars as there were in the season, the wagon train would have stretched from St. Joe all the way to San Francisco in the first place.”

Charles Marquis Warren followed his year on *Gunsmoke* by creating *Rawhide*, which began in January 1959. Warren found George C. Duffield’s diary of his 1866 cattle drive from San Antonio to Sedalia, and as Warren told *TV Guide*, “We are following Duffield’s diary literally and exactly. When he crosses a river, we do. When he is stopped three weeks by rain, we are. When he doesn’t encounter Indians for three months, we don’t.”¹ Warren bridled at the suggestion his show was similar to *Wagon Train*: “No. The *Wagon Train* people come across their exploits and suddenly the wagon train disappears while they tell their story. With us the herd is primary. We’re always up against the elements—flood, fire, dust, thirst—and we never leave them entirely behind.”² Lou Shaw, who wrote on the show in its early years, thinks it was “Basically the same premise as *Wagon Train*, with people coming in and out with a group of people on the move and they have to keep moving, so they had a *raison d’être* for doing the show every week.”

The lead in *Rawhide* was nominally Eric Fleming, who played Gil Favor, the trail boss, and his second-in-command was Rowdy Yates, played by a young actor in his first major role, Clint Eastwood. Shaw says he was told, “Don’t give him [Eastwood] too many lines because he can’t talk. He just looks good in profile when he rides.” Shaw was called in once specifically to rewrite Eastwood’s dialogue and give it to somebody else. Shaw says, “There wasn’t a great deal of respect for Clint Eastwood on the show in terms of being the lead actor.” That changed over the course of the show. By the time Charles Larson was writing for the show,

We thought Eastwood was better than Fleming. We tried to throw things to him. Eastwood could do drama, he could do comedy. Fleming was stiff. We were always told not to make the speeches in his scenes with other people too long. We had to write in short breaks in the other person’s speech so Fleming would have a line. If he just had to stand there and react, he felt jumpy. He didn’t know what to do.

Don Brinkley also thinks Eastwood was much more interesting to write for than Fleming on *Rawhide*, and believes it was partly because of their characters: Yates was young and learning things, while Favor, like the actor, was stolid.

Sy Salkowitz was brought reluctantly onto *Rawhide* in its next-to-last year, 1964–65. Writer-producer Bruce Geller and director Bernard Kowalski had been asked by CBS to do less obviously Western, more “human,” stories, which is why they approached Salkowitz, who admitted he did not know how

to do Western stories. He did two scripts for them, one of which was filmed. Then William Paley, the head of CBS, looked in on an episode of the new, improved *Rawhide*. He immediately called his executives and asked, "Where are the cows?" only to be told "Oh, we don't do cows anymore on *Rawhide*." Paley's response was, "The hell you don't. Fire everyone." As Salkowitz points out, "But Mr. Paley didn't fire his people. He fired our people." Geller and Kowalski were fired and Salkowitz's second script was never done.

When Fleming left the series in the fall of 1965, Eastwood's Rowdy Yates was moved up to trail boss, but William Paley preferred to have older men as the authority figures in the series on his network, so he canceled the show in January 1966,³ and Eastwood disappeared from television into Italian westerns.

In addition to the "trek" Westerns, there were also Western shows set on ranches, where the guest stars either came to the ranch or had the stars come to them (which got them off the ranches). E. Jack Neuman wrote a few episodes of *Bonanza*: "You had the almost stock scene of all four of them [the Cartwrights] riding somewhere, or kicking the shit out of an Indian or something, then you separated them. That made it a lot easier. That was the format." Neuman was brought onto the series by the producer, David Dortort, who was, according to Neuman, "exhausted because they [the leading actors] were all becoming big stars." Dortort particularly needed an episode for Pernell Roberts, who "threatened to quit each week and so on. David asked me if I could do anything with him and I said, 'Sure.'" Neuman suggested an episode where Adam Cartwright would "love and lose." This was not an uncommon storyline on the show, and the sons avoided permanent relationships with women so often that dirty-minded viewers began to get suspicious.

A problem on *Bonanza* was not only the stars, but the network's protection of the franchise. Catherine Turney once pitched a story to the show that called for the father, Ben Cartwright, to have a minor character flaw. Both the producers and Lorne Greene were more than happy to do it, but NBC took the attitude that Ben was "a minor deity," and could not have what Turney calls "one foot of clay."

To get out of his contract at Four Star after Dick Powell died, Christopher Knopf agreed to do the pilot script for a CBS ranch Western, but only if he could bring into it the characters from a similar project of his CBS that had rejected. Knopf wrote the pilot and one episode, then left the company. Nobody was more surprised than Knopf when *The Big Valley* ran for four years.

By the early sixties, one-hour was the standard length for dramatic series. In 1962 Universal created the ninety-minute *The Virginian*, in theory if not in fact based on the Owen Wister novel and its two previous film versions. Writers like Sy Salkowitz had no objection to the greater length, since the first drafts of his hour scripts tended to run an hour and fifteen minutes. With

a ninety-minute script, Salkowitz “used to stretch my muscles and write an hour-and-three-quarters script and then squeeze it down into an hour and a half.” He felt the longer format gave him time to develop some characters.

To create a weekly show of that length, it was necessary to have an executive producer and three producers, each of whom were responsible for an episode every three weeks. Joel Rogosin, who thinks of himself as a producer-writer more than a writer-producer, was with the show for five years, most of which was spent rewriting material for Lee J. Cobb, who played Judge Garth, the owner of the ranch. Cobb would call Rogosin at 8:30 at night to complain about the scripts, and Rogosin would go in about 5:00 A.M. and rewrite the material, taking it to Cobb when he came in. Rogosin recalls, “And he would say things in those wonderful dulcet tones like, ‘Spare me from embarrassing you by publicly saying this shit.’ Which of course it wasn’t. It wasn’t deathless prose, but it wasn’t the other either.”

The Virginian was not the only ninety-minute Western series. In the mid-sixties, CBS wanted a series on “the end of the West,” and asked Christopher Knopf, late of *The Big Valley*, to create it. He selected the Cimarron territory of Oklahoma as the locale, where as he puts it, “The cowboys had it and the farmers wanted it.” Knopf became the Supervising Producer of the show and dealt with the forty writers they used. He thinks the show was

uneven. We had some wonderful, wonderful material and some that was not very good. . . . We always tried to do something wonderful each week. We got our head handed to us sometimes, and sometimes we pulled it out like crazy. . . .

I did not recognize there are certain things you can’t do every week. You have to find a certain level. I was always going for irony. I was going for something where I could flip the story upside down, and at times it was almost too much for the audience who wants to watch Westerns to keep track [of]. It’s not like watching *The Defenders*. Different audience. People who watch Westerns don’t want to have to concentrate, think, and be tested, and we were doing that. *Gunsmoke* did it right. They took one little idea and ran with it.

There were also problems with the network on *Cimarron Strip*. The programming executive at CBS that season was Mike Dann, who, according to Knopf, “liked absolutes.” Knopf wanted more shades of gray. At one point in the season Sy Salkowitz did a script for the show that started out with three enlisted men capturing a sergeant we first think is bad. As the episode progresses, we discover he may not be that bad after all. Dann disliked the episode and Albert Aley was brought in to rewrite it to make the sergeant more “hateable,” in Salkowitz’s phrase. What happened was that the director and the actors “read past the rewrite,” as Salkowitz puts it, and came close to the original idea. Salkowitz had already taken his name off the script and put on a pseudonym, and now Aley did the same thing. Perry Lafferty, then an executive at CBS, saw the episode, called Dann and told him, “They did what they wanted to do, not what you told him to do.”

Dann said, "What are you going to do about it?"

Lafferty replied, "Well, I can't fire them."

"Better than you."⁴ And the staff was fired.

One reason CBS may have been thinking about an "end of the West" series in the mid-sixties is that it was the time of the end of the Western. In 1959–60 nine of the top twenty shows in the ratings were Westerns. By the season *Cimarron Strip* premiered, 1967–68, there were only two.⁵ Like live drama the decade before, Westerns had gone through a cycle and begun to fade, replaced by more urban shows.

Cops

The Naked City began as a 1948 theatrical film, one of the more notable attempts at using location shooting to make films more realistic. In 1958 the film became the basis for a half-hour cop series filmed on location in New York. The next year the series followed the trend of dramatic shows and became an hour show, still filmed in New York. The problem was that many of the best writers had moved to Los Angeles with the change from live to filmed television. The show was then written (and edited) in California, but shot in New York. This usually meant there was great pressure on the writers from the producer Herbert Leonard.

Lou Shaw calls it "a mad show to work for." He once turned in a story idea to *The Naked City* and for several weeks did not hear back from the show. Then one morning at eleven he got a call from Leonard, who said, "We're shooting your show next."

"You are? I thought it was dead."

"Oh, no. Oh, you mean nobody's called you?"

"No."

"Well, start writing it. I'll send a messenger by later tonight to start picking up the pages, because we have to prep it in New York." Shaw told Leonard he had other things going on in his life, but Leonard and his story editor, Howard Rodman, insisted, so Shaw started writing and every three hours a messenger would arrive to collect the pages.

In spite of that, Shaw thinks the episode came off "incredibly well." He calls Leonard an "old-time producer. He was always ill-prepared. He was always going off the cuff, but he had a great flair." Shaw suggested to him an idea for a scene involving thirty people on a fire escape, thinking it would be prohibitively expensive and time-consuming, but Leonard told him to write it and the scene went into the show.

In theory the leading characters were the police officers, but Sy Salkowitz notes that one reason the show was so good was that

Naked City wasn't a cop show. It was a criminal show, because the way you wrote a *Naked City* was to get inside the head of the criminal and tell why he

committed the crime. He usually was not a bad guy. You had at least sympathy for the victim if that guy was being manipulated into being a crook. You had to be careful about your police work, because you had to make it real. You had to bring your action so that it was like a V, [the police and the criminal] starting from opposite points, and met at the bottom, and the criminal was apprehended.

The man who became story editor for the one-hour *Naked City* was Howard Rodman, whose credits in live television included *Studio One*. Sy Salkowitz calls Howard Rodman “probably one of the most gracious and giving men who ever lived. He was known as the writer’s rabbi. If you had a problem, you talked it over with Howard. A problem about anything. But Howard always listened. He was a big bear of a man, a little crazy, and we all loved him.”

Rodman was such a good and distinctive writer that, as Salkowitz says, “Howard made it difficult because you had to live up to Howard.” Because of Rodman’s skills and the chaotic nature of the production of the show, Rodman ended up rewriting many, if not most, of the scripts. Salkowitz says

Bert [Leonard] would say, “It’s a damned fine script [from the assigned writer], now Howard, put it through your typewriter.” Now normally when somebody says that what they mean is they’d like to have the flavor of the writer.

Howard had a problem. Howard might write a line, but the answer to that line was two steps away from what the answer had been in the original script, and the rejoinder to that was another two steps away, so Howard would end up writing his own story, which Bert would shoot because the phrase there was, “We were writing with our backs to the camera.” That’s how tight the schedule was. [They had no scripts done] in advance.

Rodman’s work eventually led to a change in the Writers Guild credit rules. Previously a story editor on a show could write 35 percent of the show and get a writing credit, which meant producers could hire story editors for less money and promise they would make it up in residuals for shows they got credit on. The rule was changed so that a story editor had to write 50 percent to get a credit. The new rule was known informally as the Howard Rodman Clause, although as Salkowitz points out, “This didn’t mean anybody disliked Howard. Everybody loved Howard.” But credits meant money, and credits on *The Naked City* meant even more. Salkowitz again: “Years after, I would get calls saying, ‘We’re looking for a *Naked City* writer. Are you available?’ That was the phrase. Not just me, but all the guys who wrote it.”⁶

One of the shows that Salkowitz then wrote for was *The Untouchables*, which like *The Naked City* was a “criminal show,” and in which “the real color and the real excitement from the show came from the criminals: who were they? what were they doing? what did they want? who were they trying to screw?”

Salkowitz, being from South Philadelphia, did not find the show difficult to write:

I came from an area where “Heyyouovertherecomehere” is one word. So the dialogue was easy for me to write. I grew up with those people. I understood their mentality and their attitudes. I understood their families were sacred. Long before you ever saw *The Godfather* I knew what “Go to the mattresses” meant. And I wrote it. It was fun.

For E. Jack Neuman, who was from Indiana, *The Untouchables* was not fun. He found the show’s format “very cumbersome. Remember you had Eliot Ness and his five dwarfs and then you had Al Capone and his ten dwarfs.” Neuman also objected to the studio’s insistence on using the same stock footage of the truck crashing into the brewery on what seemed to him every episode. He tried to write new action into his scripts. The show was criticized for its violence and Neuman notes that the producers would come to the writers and verbally ask for “All the violence you can give us,” but never put it in writing.

The show was criticized just as heavily for its portrayal of the gangsters as Italian-Americans. Salkowitz remembers that the studio said they would not make changes in the names, “and of course we immediately did. So we started using German names, some Jewish names, Irish names.” On the other hand, “We took our guys into spaghetti joints, drinking red wine, asking about ‘Momma, howsa Momma?’ Two guys, ready to kill each other, talking about when they were kids in the street, the priests used to chase them. They were Italians, no question.”

The Untouchables was produced by Quinn Martin, who also produced *The FBI*, which ran from 1965 to 1974, and the writers again found the criminals were the most interesting characters to write, because as Ed Waters says, the FBI agents were “stick figures.” The reason for this was the involvement of the Bureau itself in the series, the most intensive involvement of any organization in a series based on its exploits.

The Bureau was protective of the image of its agents to an absurd degree. Don Brinkley wrote an early show in the series in which the lead, Inspector Erskine, came down with a cold and had to decide if he would let his assistant handle the case. The script went to the Bureau for approval. It came back with the instructions that FBI agents do not catch colds. They had to disable Erskine some other way. Agents were not allowed to be shown in anything other than a jacket and tie, were not allowed to have their sleeves rolled up, and they were never to be shown drinking coffee or eating doughnuts.⁷ As Charles Larson, a writer and producer on the show, recalls, their objections were usually over “some damned thing that wasn’t important.” While the Bureau did have a rigid view of itself, Larson says, “They let us get away with things. They allowed us to have black agents, which they did

not have at the time. We told them it would be good for their image. They agreed.”

The stories were, in theory, based on real cases. E. Arthur Kean remembers that Charles Larson would give him a case, then tell him to change it as much as possible. Apparently there was a fear the criminals might sue if it was too close. Kean says, “We changed the names to protect the guilty.” Don Brinkley recalls that the Bureau was more flexible later on and that sometimes the writers would work backwards. They would come up with a story, take it in to Charles Larson, and he would rummage through the FBI files to find a case it was close to. Until the last year of the series, the Bureau had to approve every storyline.

The scripts were not only shown to the Bureau, but went up to its head, J. Edgar Hoover. In one first draft script E. Arthur Kean made a typographical error that had Erskine taking a “parting shit” instead of a “parting shot.” Kean, knowing the script was going to Hoover, left it in. Larson, also knowing the script was going to Hoover, had him take it out.⁸

Just as Roy Huggins saw the flip side of Westerns with *Maverick*, he also saw the flip side of cop shows. His inspiration was to try to put a Western in contemporary form, i.e., have a hero who moves around from place to place and has no commitments. He realized audiences would probably think the man was a bum. Then it occurred to him, “But what if he was a fugitive from justice for a crime he had not committed?” He wrote up a three-page treatment called *The Fugitive*, but everybody who read it⁹ thought it glorified a criminal, even though Huggins explained that the voice of the “all-knowing narrator” told you each week that he was innocent. Everybody disliked it but Leonard Goldenson, the head of ABC, who said, “Roy, that’s the best idea for a television series I’ve ever heard,” and it went on the air.

Some years later Huggins ran into Goldenson, who asked him if he had any trouble selling *The Fugitive* before he sold it to ABC. Huggins asked him why he asked, and Goldenson said he had “nothing but trouble” over the series from his network people and from the public, such as the letters the American Legion wrote “saying it was Un-American” for suggesting the American justice system might not work.

Don Brinkley thought at the outset of *The Fugitive* that it was a “one-joke” show, but later, writing for it, he came to appreciate what the situation gives the writer: “The hero wakes up in the morning and he’s in trouble. There’s always Lt. Girard somewhere.”

Lawyers

The most traditional, even conservative, lawyer show was *Perry Mason*, which was based on stories written by Erle Stanley Gardner. Protective of his franchise, Gardner wrote three- to four-page letters on each script complaining of holes in the plots. Sy Salkowitz remembers checking out the original stories

and finding the same plot holes in Gardner's stories. Part of the plotting problems was from *Perry Mason* being what is called a "closed mystery" in which the identity of the villain is not known at the beginning. Salkowitz finds writing this kind of show "probably one of the most difficult techniques in television." He compares it to "peeling back the onion. You unearth the clues, you have to see where they lead, then you peel back another layer, you see what it looks like."

One of the best lawyer series, *The Defenders*, came out of live television. Reginald Rose was sitting around the beach one day with his friend and lawyer Jerome Leitner (who later was the technical advisor for the series), who said that no play, TV show, or movie about the law and the courts had ever been accurate. Rose could not resist the implied challenge and suggested, "Suppose I write a courtroom drama that is accurate. Will you go over it for me?" Leitner agreed, and Rose wrote "The Defender," which was broadcast as a two-part *Studio One* episode in 1957. Jack Gould, a former court reporter who was then the television critic for the *New York Times*, reviewed the first part and criticized the show as inaccurate. Rose wrote a reply, and Gould wrote back, "Dear Reginald Rose. You may be right." Rose cannot recall ever getting a good review from Gould after that.

A series based on the father-son defense team from "The Defender" was pitched to CBS and a pilot was made on film. CBS turned it down. Then in May 1961, John F. Kennedy's new head of the Federal Communications Commission, Newton Minow, made a speech to the National Association of Broadcasters in which he described television as "a vast wasteland." When William S. Paley met with the FCC and was asked what he was doing to improve television, he told them he had a series coming up he thought they would like. It was *The Defenders*, which premiered in the fall of that year.

Even though the pilot had been shot in Hollywood, *The Defenders* was both written and produced in New York. This gave Rose access to writers from live television and the New York stage who did not wish to go to Hollywood. The producer of the show was Herbert Brodtkin and Rose was officially the story editor, but everybody agreed it was Rose's show. Brodtkin said of Rose, "He created it. He lives with it. He provides a consistent point of view."¹⁰

The writers who worked on the show also spoke highly of Rose's individual contributions to their work. Peter Stone said, "He sends you back and back and *back* for rewriting. My first draft never has human beings in it. He is always telling me, 'Go back and put the *conflicts* in.'" John Vlahos said, "In my case, I get so involved with the people, I have practically no story. He's always sending me back to put the *story* in."¹¹

Rose found working with the writers had "its ups and downs. Except for a very few scripts, we had to rewrite everything. They weren't good enough." Rose tried to get the writers to do their best, but often after a first reading with the cast (something often done in live television, but seldom in filmed

drama at the time), it was necessary to rewrite. Rose, in the first season, or David Shaw or William Woolfolk in later seasons, would then start to rewrite scenes not in their order in the script, but in the order in which they were going to be filmed. Rose figures that he wrote sixteen episodes and rewrote most of the others.

William Woolfolk and Rose had been friends since Rose's early days in television when Woolfolk would read and comment on his scripts. Woolfolk was not primarily a TV writer but had written for comic books (*Captain Marvel*) as well as published magazines. Rose talked him into story editing on a part-time basis for the show, then fulltime. Woolfolk and Rose would discuss a story idea with a writer over lunch. Sometimes the idea came from the writer, more often it came from the two of them, and then the writer would do an outline and up to three drafts of the script. Woolfolk was amazed at how many writers came in with outlines and scripts that were totally different from the story that had been discussed. He also had trouble getting writers to turn in material. They kept insisting it was "not right" yet. Woolfolk told them, "Do you want me to go on television Thursday at eight and tell the audience we don't have a show because the script is not right?"

Woolfolk says the actors were sometimes intimidated by the substance of the material. On one show about a phony minister E. G. Marshall, who played the older lawyer, objected to lines given the minister on grounds that they were things his minister had said. Robert Reed, who played the son, was so afraid of this episode that he left for the week of its production and went to Oklahoma. Reed's lines were rewritten for Marshall, and Reed later apologized. On another occasion, Marshall called Woolfolk and said, "I have a scene where I come in a door and I don't have any lines. What do I do?"

Woolfolk replied, "Say, 'Hello.' "

While *Perry Mason* did conventional murder cases, *The Defenders* took on a variety of social issues. Edith Efron wrote in *TV Guide* that the standard Rose script for the show deals with a man who has the law on his side, but who usually turns out to be a bad person, while the person who has broken the law is usually a good person with "noble motives."¹² As the producer Herbert Brodtkin told her, "It's a *liberal* show. I'm a conservative Republican in my personal life, but I'm a reeking liberal in my artistic life. Maybe I do it to shock. I'd call this the most liberal show on the air."¹³

The show was produced not by a sponsor, but by the network, so Rose and Woolfolk had to deal only with the network censors. Woolfolk says Rose found the best way to deal with the censors was make them write down a list of what they did not want. The first thing that would happen was that the censors would realize how ridiculous some of their requests were and drop them. Then it became a matter of negotiating with the network.

These negotiations led to one of the best shows. Rose had an outline for a story in which a black District Attorney turns out to be the villain. The network people were afraid audiences for *The Defenders* would be upset the vil-

lain was black. Rose's attitude was, "What the hell, anybody can be a bad guy." The network stood firm, and Rose finally said, "I'll drop this if you let me do a show on the blacklist."

The three network executives said, "O.K. If you do it with taste."

Rose shot back, "You mean the way you did the actual blacklisting with taste?" There was no reply, but they let him do the show. Rose himself was working on another script, but he called up Ernest Kinoy and asked him if he wanted to do it. Kinoy did and won an Emmy for himself and the star, Jack Klugman, for the 1964 episode.¹⁴

Both Rose and Woolfolk agree Kinoy was the best writer on the show. His scripts came in ready to shoot and in need of very little rewriting, if any. One of his scripts was "The Non-Violent," which was shown on June 6, 1964. The Prestons are called in to defend a young, rich, white man who has participated in a civil rights demonstration led by a black minister. The young man is perfectly willing to spend time in jail, but the minister eventually agrees to the compromise the Prestons work out. The young man is disillusioned by the minister's action. The strengths of the script are that it deals with what was a very hot issue at the time and that it gives the actors, especially E. G. Marshall, James Earl Jones as the minister, and Ivan Dixon as a black lawyer, good scenes to play. Some of the secondary character writing is also good, such as a municipal court judge who says he's not used to hearing the names of Brandeis, Holmes, and Jefferson in his court. The weaknesses of the script include an inevitable didactic quality. Some of the characters are obviously drawn and their dialogue is too "on the nose," too much an obvious statement of how they feel or what their positions are. The episode also suffers from typical early sixties television direction: many big close-ups of the actors as they make their speeches, usually with very simple lighting. The most realistic-looking sequence is the opening sequence of the demonstration, shot with a hand-held camera in the early direct cinema style.

After *The Defenders* Rose decided never to do a television series again. He simply found it "too hard," especially since he, Woolfolk, and David Shaw were doing 35 or 36 shows a year with a staff of three. When Rose left the show, he asked Woolfolk to continue it. Woolfolk told him he was only doing the show because of Rose, and said, "I couldn't survive doing it without you." Woolfolk left television and turned to writing novels. Rose moved into theatrical films and occasional television movies and miniseries.

With several cop shows on the air, and several shows about lawyers, it was natural that somebody would try to combine the two. One bizarre attempt was the 1963-64 ninety-minute series *Arrest and Trial*. In the first 45 minutes Sergeant Nick Anderson (Ben Gazzara) would track down and arrest suspects, then in the second 45 minutes Attorney John Egan (Chuck Connors) would prove they were innocent. Don Brinkley says, "It probably sounded great in the room" when it was pitched to network or the studio, but Sy Salkowitz would not even go that far. He thinks the show was obviously con-

ceived by a Universal executive who had not thought it through. Salkowitz thinks the executive probably just said, "Arrest and Trial! We'll arrest 'em and then we'll try 'em," and everybody at the network said, "Yeah." Salkowitz defines the problem of writing for the show: "If Ben Gazzara made a good arrest, Chuck Connors couldn't get him off. If Chuck Connors got him off, it made Ben Gazzara look like a stupid ass." Salkowitz's solution was to have the suspect a fugitive from another jurisdiction, so all Gazzara had to do was catch him and not have to prove anything against him, and Connors could get him off.¹⁵

Doctors and Other Professionals

Writing about television in the years of the Kennedy Administration, broadcast historian Mary Ann Watson calls *The Defenders* "clearly the jewel of New Frontier character dramas," which she defines:

They were programs based on liberal social themes in which the protagonists were professionals in service to society. This new breed of episodic TV hero struggled with occupational ethics and felt a disillusionment with the values of the past . . .

Unlike the action-adventure series in which the heroes settled their problems with a weapon, the problems of New Frontier character dramas were not always resolved. Poverty, prejudice, drug addiction, abortion, capital punishment, and other issues of public policy did not lend themselves to tidy resolutions. The loose ends of the plot might get tied together, but the world was not necessarily a better place at the end of the story.¹⁶

Among the other series she fits into this category are *Dr. Kildare* and *Ben Casey*, both of which started their runs in 1961 (the same season as *The Defenders*).

Dr. Kildare was in theory based on the older MGM film series of the same name. E. Jack Neuman, who wrote the pilot, looked at one of the films and thought it bore no resemblance to medicine at all. He went to the L.A. County General Hospital to do research and found it crawling with screenwriters: Walter Newman was doing research for the film *The Interns* and James Mosher was researching for *Ben Casey*. The staff used to ask Neuman, "Which screenwriter are you?" He did live like an intern for three months at the hospital, doing "the scut work, and they used to think I was an intern. I learned the feel of what it was like to be a doctor. And that's how I got the idea for really making it very authentic."

He thinks the series got off the track by concentrating too much on the diseases of the week. He suggests, "It's the story of Dr. Kildare, not the story of the disease. They just couldn't get it through their head. They would rack their brain for some great exotic disease or something." Because of this search

for diseases, *Dr. Kildare* became what Lou Shaw calls “more gimmicky,” in the sense that the stories depended on the disease. This meant, however, that the show could do stories that brought to light little-known medical conditions.

David Victor, the series producer, once approached Sy Salkowitz and asked him for “something really unusual.” Salkowitz came up with the first network medical show on sickle cell anemia, a disease that strikes primarily blacks. As Salkowitz puts it, “In a sense I integrated Blair Hospital,” with guest stars Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis. Salkowitz got no negative reaction from the network: “It seemed that everybody kind of thought maybe it was time, but nobody had done it yet.” He was also pleased to read several years later about a young researcher working toward a cure for the disease who developed his interest in the subject from having seen that episode.

The network, NBC, was not always so lenient. President Lyndon Johnson called up Neuman and asked him to do an episode on venereal disease. Neuman wrote it but the network would not do it. Neuman did another story about the birth control pill, but the network again would not allow it. Neuman complained to the *New York Times*, and he got a call from the president of NBC, Mort Werner. Werner told him, “Go after them. Chew their ass. Tear them apart.” Werner had been in favor of the show, but it had been shot down by the Board of Directors.

Neuman thought the other medical series, *Ben Casey*, was “run a lot better than *Kildare* eventually, because Jim Mosher produced it and stayed with it. *Ben Casey* always gave you that hard grit and substance of reality.” Lou Shaw, who wrote for both medical series, says, “In some ways I think *Casey* was a better-plotted show, a better-developed show.” He thinks it had a “much stronger lead” character in Ben Casey, whom Shaw calls a hero “unique for television at that time.” Although Richard Chamberlain had both strength and charm as *Kildare*, Vince Edwards is, in Shaw’s words, “a very intense, inward kind of guy. He hulks, and I think that’s his persona that he’s never gotten away from, really.” With an actor with those qualities playing *Casey*, it was then easier to get him involved in conflict with his boss or his patients, such as the story D. C. Fontana did in which *Casey* is sick and put in a room with a patient who thinks he, the patient, is a leprechaun.

The year 1962 saw the first dramatic series about psychiatry, *The Eleventh Hour*. Sam Rolfe created the series for NBC, and the network insisted on having the American Medical Association seal of approval on the show. Rolfe went to the AMA, and they assigned him a medical doctor to head a panel of between 20 and 25 psychiatrists and psychologists. That number gave them enough different points of view so that the writers could find someone on the panel who could approve a method of treatment they wanted to use in the show, since, as Rolfe says, “There was a great deal of argument and division as to what a psychiatrist or a psychologist could do at that time.” Rolfe continues:

We started with the story. Every time a writer would come in with a story we liked, we would take that writer and assign him with a psychiatrist or a psychologist who did some work in that field. He would be able to call that guy with questions to help direct him along the lines that we went. And we would work it in as accurate as we could make it. We always managed to get the [character of the] psychiatrist or psychologist more involved than they normally would, probably. Some of it we just said was experimental, which turned out to be true in later life.

If the writers found the medical people were helpful, the medical people found the series helpful to them as well. Rolfe once asked the psychiatrist who was the head of the panel why they helped with the show, and the psychiatrist told him:

You have to realize something. We send people now to lecture around the country, to explain psychiatry. How it works, how it doesn't work. We played to empty houses. We send people out now to do the same thing, and they say, "So-and-so, on the panel of *The Eleventh Hour*." We can fill the house. These people now come and listen to what we have to say.

At least you are opening the doors to people who would never even think there's a place to go [for their] problems, to say, "There's a doctor here to help you." That's the up side of this. The bad side is they expect him to do miracles.

The Eleventh Hour only lasted two years because of an odd twist of casting fate. The psychiatrist in the series was played in the first year by Wendell Corey, who was battling alcoholism at the time. He had difficulty completing his lines, and by the end of the first year he was replaced by Ralph Bellamy, who was a better and more reliable actor than Corey. The problem was, he was not as sympathetic as Corey had been. Rolfe says, "Wendell Corey, with those clear blue eyes looking into the camera, worked for the series. Ralph didn't. I guess it was the reaction in those eyes. Never mind they were swimming in alcohol. Everybody thought they were swimming in tears."

E. Jack Neuman followed up *Dr. Kildare* with a series about a different kind of professional, a high school teacher, but *Mr. Novak* was not a comedy like *Mr. Peepers*. Neuman thought, "Maybe I can do something without a stethoscope or a gun or a lawbook." Just as he had gone to the hospital to research *Kildare*, he went to high schools, and he encouraged the writers on the series to go as well. He told them, "I know we all went to high school. Forget where you went to high school. It's different now . . . They'll welcome you with open arms. Just go there for a day. You'll get your story. Take a smell. Talk to the kids. Talk to the teachers. Remember, you're writing about teachers, not kids." Neuman was upset when the writers came in with stories focused on teenagers. He thinks they were just too lazy to do the research required.

Like *The Defenders* and *Dr. Kildare*, *Mr. Novak* got into contemporary

social issues, notably with Neuman's script "A Single Isolated Incident," which played October 22, 1963. The episode deals with the first racial incident at the school and the reaction of the faculty and staff to it. The reaction to the program was strong, even to the point of hate mail coming in. Unlike more obviously liberal shows such as *The Defenders* and *East Side, West Side* (a show about a social worker in New York), *Mr. Novak* attracted a more conservative audience.¹⁷ When Mr. Novak took a drink in one episode, the show got 100 letters a day protesting a teacher drinking, and a professor in Texas organized a protest campaign.¹⁸

The idea that the hero of a television series could be a professional even extended to a series about the military. Gene Roddenberry created a show in 1963 about the Marine Corps called *The Lieutenant*. Sy Salkowitz recalls:

Gene Roddenberry said, "This is not a show about the Marine Corps. This is a show about a junior executive whose corporation happens to be the Marine Corps." Now, we didn't have the phrase yuppie then, but that's what he was. He lived in Oceanside with a couple of other Marine lieutenants. They used to go surfing and they had girlfriends, and all kinds of things. It was wide open.

Television in the early sixties, like American society at the time, was beginning to open up.

SMALL TOWNS, TALKING HORSES, AND RELATED GALAXIES

Realistic Comedies of the Early Sixties

Allan Manings was living and working in Canada, having escaped the blacklist in New York. He and his then-wife had a 40-acre farm where they raised horses. He was told a local mushroom farmer would pay for horse manure. Meanwhile, his occasional work for American television series made by Joe Connelly and Bob Mosher at Universal required a few trips to Los Angeles and long-distance conferences. One day Universal asked if he could move to California. On the same day the mushroom farmer came to buy the manure. He paid Manings \$30 for several hundred pounds. Manings said, "This is what they pay for horse shit here. I'm going to California, where they *really* pay better."

One of the shows Connelly and Mosher created was *Leave It to Beaver*. The show was on CBS in 1957–58, then on ABC from 1958 to 1963. Manings liked the show, but since his writing tried to be realistic, he had certain difficulties with its vagueness, like the kind of work Ward Cleaver did. He asked Connelly and Mosher, "What if he comes home one day and says, 'June, sit down. We have to talk. I got fired today.' She says, 'What, the peanut stand is gone?' What does she say to him?" He never got an answer. The show was also vague about other details: the boys were not allowed to ask for a glass of milk, since it was thought the show might be sold later in syndication to a soft drink company. Likewise, the only food they were allowed to ask for was "The usual" or "Junk" or "Some of that junk."

Richard Conway found other restrictions. Child labor laws limited the use of the child actors, which led to scenes where Ward comes home and asks June what the kids have been up to. She tells him, which kept them from having to shoot scenes of the kids actually doing those things, as well as giving June and Ward more screen time.

As much as he liked the show when he was writing on it, Manings later began to believe that all shows like *Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* were "a terrible distortion" because the average kid's father was not as all-wise as the

fathers on those shows, and he was afraid kids might not appreciate their real fathers. The idealized portrait did appeal to audiences, and not just in the United States. In 1969 Richard Conway and his wife were traveling in the Far East. When the Conways' Japanese guide learned he had written *Leave It to Beaver*, he then introduced Conway everywhere as the show's writer. The guide told Conway the Japanese loved *Beaver* because it was about the family.

If *Leave It to Beaver* was a slightly romanticized view of suburban life, then *The Andy Griffith Show* was a slightly romanticized view of small-town life. Allan Manings describes the writing process on *Leave It to Beaver* as, "Well, I sat in an office and wrote *Leave It to Beaver*." The writing process on *The Andy Griffith Show* was more complicated. At the end of each filming season, producer Sheldon Leonard, the former character actor who had produced *The Danny Thomas Show*, and Aaron Ruben, who also wrote many episodes, would meet in a week-long seminar with the writers they hoped to use the following season. In later seasons, Griffith joined the meetings as well. The writers and producers would toss around ideas for possible episodes, and at the end of the meetings writers would either volunteer for particular ideas or be assigned to them. (Writers Guild rules were later changed so that producers could not get this free use of writers' imaginations.) The outlines and then the scripts were developed from those ideas, then read and approved by Leonard and Ruben, then read by the regular cast and revisions made, with input from the cast.¹

The result of this scriptwriting process was a series of subtler, more complex scripts than those written for *Beaver*. The plots were not more complex, but there was a greater willingness, as the show continued, to slow down the action for character comedy, a hallmark of the Griffith show. Actor Don Knotts has pointed out that while in the beginning of the series the emphasis in the writing was on the plot, Griffith would begin to tell everybody how the people back home talked. Knotts said, "We got a little static at first because they'd say, 'We can't stop the story,' but the more we did it, the more they liked it. Soon they began to write it into the scripts, and that turned out to be one of the things in the show that people identified with the most. . . ."²

One reason the show could do this kind of comedy was that it was shot like a film with only one camera and without an audience present, as opposed to the three-camera shooting of *I Love Lucy*. The tendency in writing an audience show is to go for joke comedy rather than character comedy. The actors and producers feel much more comfortable if the audience is laughing constantly, or at least regularly. The audience show develops a distinctive repeated rhythm in the writing: straight-line, straight-line, punch line. Needless to say, often the jokes are arbitrary and do not come out of the characterization.³

The humor in *The Andy Griffith Show* was found very much in the characters and their typical small-town attitudes, and it is not surprising that one

of the writing teams on the show was Jim Fritzell and Everett Greenbaum, who after leaving *Mr. Peepers* eventually wrote for several seasons on another rural comedy, *The Real McCoys*, before coming to the Griffith show. Between 1961 and 1964, they wrote 29 scripts for Griffith, including one that introduced Gomer Pyle, who was based on a mechanic Greenbaum once had work on his car.⁴ Greenbaum and Fritzell were not involved in spinning off Gomer into his own series: "It was kept a secret from us." They tried writing one episode, but thought the series made Gomer dumber than he had been on the Griffith show. (On the other hand, Rick Mittleman, who wrote for *Gomer Pyle USMC*, thought of the show as *Billy Budd* in comic terms: the innocent versus the nasty sergeant.) Greenbaum and Fritzell did not write for any of the other rural comedies that sprang up on the networks, particularly CBS, after the success of the Griffith show. Greenbaum says, "I couldn't watch them," let alone write for them, since he thought they were simple-minded.

It is possible to do character comedy in a three-camera audience show, as *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, which premiered the year following *The Andy Griffith Show*, proved. Carl Reiner, after the last of Sid Caesar's shows in the late fifties, was sent several scripts for situation comedies. He did not like them, and his wife Estelle told him, "You can write better scripts than these."⁵ Reiner kept thinking, "What do I know about that's different from anything else?" The answer finally occurred to him: writing for a television show. He spent the summer of 1959 developing what he called *Head of the Family*, in which he would star as a writer named Rob Petric who worked for a television show and had a wife and child. Unlike *Beaver* and other "family" shows of the fifties, the audience would not only know what the father did, but see him do it.⁶

Reiner filmed the pilot as a one-camera show, but it did not sell. When he was put together with Sheldon Leonard, Leonard suggested two changes: that the show be done three-camera, and that Reiner *not* play the lead, which was eventually given to Dick Van Dyke.⁷ Reiner had not only written the original pilot, but scripts for thirteen episodes. They were, however, written for the one-camera technique, but Leonard went over them with Reiner. As Reiner recalled, "In two short sessions in his home, he taught me how to make my thirteen one-camera shows into three-camera shows and how to extend scenes and make them more like plays."⁸

Reiner learned fast. He later said, "I was the story editor, head writer, and producer. It was the hardest single job I ever had in my life. The first year I wrote twenty scripts, the second year, about twenty-two."⁹ Like the Griffith show, the Van Dyke show was not written by someone just sitting in an office. Sheldon Leonard again sat in on the story and script discussions. Writer Bill Persky described his presence:

Sheldon would sit behind me in a high chair as I sat at the table. As the reading progressed and the script got progressively worse, Sheldon's breathing

would become deeper and deeper. I sometimes didn't hear the readings, all I heard was Sheldon's breathing! Leonard would then declare, "This script is a disaster," opening up the rewrite session. "O.K., who wants to jump in first?" We'd start on page one and fix it—nobody left.¹⁰

The discussions would go on at some length and then the writers would rewrite. What was being brought together here was a combination of the script-writing style Leonard had developed for his other shows and the intense collaborative process that Reiner knew from *Your Show of Shows*.

Because of that collaborative process, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* helped develop almost as many major television writers as *Your Show of Shows* did. One of Reiner's first teams of writers was Garry Marshall and Jerry Belson. Marshall had written gags for comedians Phil Foster and Joey Bishop.¹¹ Belson, who according to one studio biography began his writing career doing captions for Porky Pig comic books,¹² remembered seeing Marshall on the Desilu lot before they were paired: "Garry was the Willy Loman of comedy. He'd walk around the Desilu lot from show to show with a big bag of scripts."¹³ Marshall and Belson were paired first on *The Danny Thomas Show*, then worked on the first year of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. Reiner described them as "wonderful,"¹⁴ and they went on to write and/or produce, collectively or individually, *The Odd Couple*, *Happy Days*, *Laverne and Shirley*, and *The Tracey Ullman Show*.

At the beginning of the 1963–64 season, Bill Persky and Sam Denoff joined the show. They had written for radio in the late fifties, then for *The Andy Williams Show*. They subsequently became story editors on *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. Rick Mittleman, who wrote for the show when they were story editors, says it was "probably the happiest experience of my half-hour writing," because when the scripts were rewritten by them or by Reiner, they would only improve them. Persky and Denoff went on to write and/or produce, collectively or individually, *That Girl* and *Kate and Allie*.

If *Dr. Kildare* and *The Defenders* were New Frontier dramas, then *The Dick Van Dyke Show* was New Frontier comedy.¹⁵ Not only was Rob Petrie a young professional, like the heroes of the New Frontier dramas, he, like Kennedy, had an attractive young wife who had, at least once, a semi-profession herself (Jacqueline Kennedy had worked as a newspaperwoman and Laura Petrie had been a dancer). Just as the Kennedys showed an interest in culture that helped pull America out of the cultural stagnation of the fifties, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* showed a greater openness than either *Beaver* or *Griffith*. Both of the earlier shows deal with closed-off worlds of suburbia and small towns. *Van Dyke*, like the Kennedys, was very urban and open to possibilities (however limited they might be for the women in the series: Laura was only a housewife during the series, and considerable humor was found in Rob's co-writer Sally in her efforts to find a man).

It is difficult to imagine one of the most memorable of the *Van Dyke* episodes showing up on either *Beaver* or *Griffith*. For their first script for the

show, Persky and Denoff wrote “That’s My Boy??” in which Rob recounts, in flashback, how he became convinced that their son had been switched with that of another couple at the hospital. Sheldon Leonard suggested that the punch line of the episode be that the other couple was black. Persky said they thought it would not be possible, but Leonard ran interference for them with the network and the sponsor’s representative, agreeing to reshoot the ending with a couple of another race if it did not work with a black couple, and even agreeing to pay for the show if they decided not to run it.¹⁶

One reason the show was able to get away with the episode is that it was performed in front of an audience. Leonard depended on the audience reaction to convince the sponsors and the network that audiences would not be upset. He guessed right. The entrance of the black couple got what Van Dyke later said was the longest laugh in the series, and they had to cut 45 seconds of the laugh out when the show was edited.¹⁷ The network received mail “by the satchel,” as Leonard put it,¹⁸ and none of it complained about the show.¹⁹ Leonard used the three-camera technique to show to sponsors and networks that television could deal with the opening up of American culture of the time.

Unrealistic Comedies of the Sixties

Several writers interviewed for this book tell of the famous incident in which Ray Walston, who played the title role in *My Favorite Martian*, complained to the writer of a line in the script, “A Martian wouldn’t say that.” The writers usually quote this story to show how weird actors are, but writers speak of their shows in the same way. One of the ways in which American television opened up in the sixties was in the development of series that did not appear to be realistic: shows about Martians, witches, talking horses, and other such creatures. What the writers of those shows tend to remember about them, however, was how necessary it was for someone writing such a show to find, if not some connection with reality, at least some sense of the world the show was trying to create. Ray Walston was probably not wrong: *this* Martian in *this* world of *this* show would not talk like this, and twenty years later actor William Daniels would likewise persuade producer Joel Rogosin he was right when he looked over his lines as the talking car in *Knight Rider* and said, “I don’t think the car would say this.”

Larry Rhine spent two years in the early sixties writing for *Mr. Ed*, the series about a talking horse. George Burns was one of the owners of the show and would occasionally sit in on the writing sessions. Rhine agrees completely with Burns’s comment, “If you don’t believe the horse talks, you can’t do this show.” Rhine talks about the writers’ approach to the show:

We played the horse as a teenager. We played Wilbur as the father. And Connie Hines as the mother. So consequently, [since] this was in the sixties, we

were able to have Mr. Ed letting his mane grow long, and wanting a pad of his own, meeting a filly who was taller than he and getting buildups, playing the guitar, running away from home, doing all the things that teenagers would do.

Once again you go into realism. . . . We have all these wonderful get-togethers on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Animals don't have that, thanks to us, because we've separated them [from their families]. So we got premises out of that, [one] where Ed wanted to meet his father. We found the father working in the circus. And we had the two of them singing "My Papa."

Richard Powell wrote a rewrite of the pilot, five of the first six episodes, and five episodes a season of *Hogan's Heroes*, a mid-sixties series set in a slapstick version of a World War II German prisoner-of-war camp. There were some concerns at the network as the show was being prepared that it might "trivialize" the war, but as Powell notes, "Once the first ratings came in, then all pressure ceased from the network about that or anything else."

Powell himself tried to ground his episodes in reality by getting "a dramatic plot and then changing it to comedy." He avoided trivializing by not doing "the usual sitcom things, like Colonel Klink's surprise birthday party. I tried to show the German system worked by fear. Everybody was afraid of the upper echelon, so Hogan manipulated Klink's fear of the Gestapo, and the Gestapo's fear of Berlin." Once Powell wrote in a British colonel who was about to screw up one of Hogan's schemes, and Powell had Hogan say, "I think we have to kill him," which got a gasp from the cast as they read the script for the first time. Powell says, "They were shocked because they were discussing a real killing. But that was the sort of thing that was lurking in the background, and if you could fuse some of that reality into there, I always felt you had a better show." It helped that two of the cast members, Robert Clary and John Banner, had been in German camps. On the other hand, Bob Crane was, in Powell's words, "a square Republican" who was often confused by the fairly straightforward storylines: "He liked them, and he did them very well, but quite often he wouldn't understand them."

If *The Dick Van Dyke Show* was at least a partially realistic portrait of an American family, *The Addams Family* came so close to being an idealized portrait of family life that, much to the amusement of its producer, Nat Perrin, a psychologist wrote an article about how it was the best family on television because there was no fighting among the family members. Perrin says that while that might have been wonderful from a psychologist's point of view, it made it very difficult to write the show, because after the first few weeks there was nobody in the family to bounce the comedy off of, since there was no conflict, the way there was later in *All in the Family*. On the other hand, the writers of *The Addams Family* had a distinct advantage in that they could show a very strong sexual relationship between Gomez and Morticia because the show was not taken seriously enough by the censors to bother with it.²⁰

On the surface, *The Munsters* appeared to be a show similar to *The Addams Family*, but the writers of each created their own world. In *The Addams Family*, the family knew it was weird. In the pilot for *The Munsters* the family just did wild things, but for the series the creators Bob Mosher and Joe Connelly decided to have the family think it was normal and play the comedy off their trying to behave normally and other people's reactions to it. Richard Conway says that he and his partner Rowland MacLane welcomed writing on the show, especially as a break from writing Mosher and Connelly's *Beaver*: "We were going from a mild family show to a wild comedy, where you could always have Grandpa blow up the lab or the dog or something." Conway later wrote for the animated version of *The Addams Family*, where they did not have to worry about the expense of sets and props and the humor got more physical.

The 1966 ABC series *Batman* also established its own camp reality. Robert Dozier was asked by his father, William Dozier, the producer of the series, to do an early episode that introduced The Joker. Robert Dozier recalls:

Batman was fun because it kind of released you from the disciplines of ordinary drama, and so you kind of just let it hang out and went with it. Bunny [Lorenzo] Semple [Jr.], who was the story editor, had written the pilot, and was with the show, and later on became a fairly well known screenwriter. He was just outraged at some of the stuff I'd done. It was just too much even for Bunny. He rewrote a lot of it, but he was angry with me. I had Batman trying to prevent a robbery and he and Robin came zooming up in the car in front of a museum and racing out of the car to prevent some horrible thing from happening. A policeman goes, "Excuse me, Batman, but this is a 'no parking' zone."

He said, "You're quite right, officer," and he moved his car. Well, Bunny Semple just went crazy. "That's not Gotham reality."

"O.K., O.K., Bunny. It's not Gotham reality. You know more about Gotham reality than I do."

Once a show was established, its limits were set. When Rick Mittleman wrote for *Bewitched*, the writers were expected to stay with the fixed techniques and special effects for Samantha's witchcraft. In the late sixties Mittleman worked on *My World . . . And Welcome to It*, a show inspired by the writings and drawings of James Thurber. The show was mostly live action, but with some animation in the style of Thurber's work. There was no pre-conceived amount of time to be animated in an episode. Mittleman says, "When you are working on the story, scenes came out as being right for animation."

Unrealistic Drama Series of the Sixties

The opening up of American television also led to an increase in dramatic series that were more imaginative, although the most famous fantasy series of

that period, *The Twilight Zone*, began its run in 1959. By the late fifties the live dramas Rod Serling wrote for were dying out. He had long had an idea for a radio anthology series, and the time was ripe for its development as a television series.²¹ Serling looked favorably on the idea of a show he owned, which he thought would free him from sponsor influence,²² especially at a time when the networks were moving from sponsor-ownership to network-ownership of other shows. It was also just possible in 1959 to get another anthology show on the air, although anthology shows were in theory dying as well, which is why the network insisted on a half-hour rather than an hour series.²³ Serling was enough of a “star writer” at CBS to carry an anthology show. The show could not have been done until the late fifties because it had to be done on film and needed a home at a major studio, where the backlot sets could be used. In addition to that, the growing appreciation of the weird in the semi-mass media of the fifties (science fiction B-pictures, *Mad* magazine) provided soil (and perhaps the fertilizer) *The Twilight Zone* could grow in.

Serling himself wrote, or rather dictated (he learned early he thought faster than he could type), 28 of the first season’s 35 shows, writing each one in 30 to 40 hours. Because he had been thinking about a show like this for some time, he had a backlog of story ideas. The half-hour format restricted the ways stories could be done, so he spent more time writing the story than developing it.²⁴

To get scripts for the episodes Serling did not write, Serling let the world know he and his staff would read submissions from anybody. They were inundated with 14,000 manuscripts in five days, nearly all of them unreadable, and none of which were used. Serling eventually settled on two professional writers, Richard Matheson and Charles Beaumont.²⁵ Matheson was noted as a writer of short stories in the science fiction and horror line, as well as the screenwriter of such films as *The Incredible Shrinking Man*. Only Serling wrote more *Twilight Zone* scripts than Beaumont, and writer William Nolan says, “Chuck was the perfect *Twilight Zone* writer, more than Matheson or Rod Serling, even. Matheson is very much of a realist who can mentally lose himself in those worlds. He doesn’t live in them the way Chuck lived in them.”²⁶

Other writers were called on as well. E. Jack Neuman was working under contract to MGM at the time, so could only do one *Zone* episode, and that on the sly: “[Director] Buzz Kulik and Buck Houghton [who] was a wonderful producer friend of mine came to me . . . Sunday morning and they didn’t have anything to start for Monday. I wrote it that Sunday.”

When *The Twilight Zone* was renewed by CBS as mid-season replacement to start again in January 1963, the network insisted on hour shows. Matheson later noted the problem with that: “The ideal *Twilight Zone* started with a really smashing idea that hit you right in the first few seconds, then you played that out, and you had a little flip at the end; that was the structure.”²⁷

It was a structure that depended not on characters, or even situations, but on a particular kind of limited inventiveness on the part of the writers. The writers had to set up as unusual a situation as possible, but did not have to find a dramatic solution for it. Once writer-producer Aaron Spelling asked Serling how he could turn out so many *Zone* scripts, and Serling replied, "Easy. I don't have to write a third act. The third act is, 'That's the way it is in *The Twilight Zone*.'" ²⁸

Other producers on fantasy series were not as careful about storytelling and budget limitations. Don Brinkley wrote for producer Irwin Allen's *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, and discovered "the greatest limitation was Irwin Allen. He had the most grandiose ideas. He encouraged you to think big, then got upset when he read the script, 'This'll cost too much.'" Brinkley also got rush calls from Allen at three or four A.M. with ideas for changes he'd heard from the elevator man, and Brinkley either tried to talk him out of them, or else just put them in the script.

In 1962 producer Norman Felton approached Sam Rolfe to help him work out the details of a proposed new series. Felton wanted to do something with spies, and had in fact met with Ian Fleming, the author of the James Bond novels, who suggested a series with a Bondlike hero called Napoleon Solo. ²⁹ Felton could not get Fleming to write any more because Fleming feared fouling up his sale of the film rights to the Bond books to Harry Saltzman, who had just produced the first Bond movie, *Dr. No*. Rolfe, trying to help out a friend, took Felton's notes on Fleming's notes and sat down to write:

Before I knew it I had created an outfit called U.N.C.L.E. . . . The first thing I knew, I had a headquarters and I was describing the headquarters. It was just so easy. It was just flowing together for me. I gave him about thirty-some pages. He was very excited. "Gee, that's great. What about some more?" He didn't quite say it [like] that. Norman has a way of pushing you along without pushing you. He sort of draws you along. Before I knew it, I had written something like eighty pages of this thing. I had story springboards. I had written scenes that take place to show how various things occurred.

Rolfe discovered twenty years later that Felton had put Ian Fleming's name on the proposal when he took it to NBC.

Broadcast historian Erik Barnouw has suggested that the series of spy shows which began with *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* in 1964 grew out of the cold war, ³⁰ but Rolfe says he "wanted to get away from the cold war. [It] isn't that I thought the Russians were right or we were wrong," but that he saw his audience watching entertainment shows to get away from things like the cold war. Besides, Rolfe says he did not have anything to contribute to it: "What am I going to say, send more spies in?" His message was slightly different: "I figured it's much nicer to do something where they work together. It's one of the few times where, underneath it all, we can make a statement here," which

is why the U.N.C.L.E. organization has a variety of nationalities working for it, and why it tends to work against individual criminals and criminal organizations rather than countries.

Rolfe, in the two years he was on the show, tried to set the right tone for the series:

The show started out and it wasn't that serious. It had a beat of reality and a beat of absurdity. It's a thing you sense. I don't know how you instill it. You either have it or you don't. And I had it. While I was with the show, I think I for the most part managed to keep one foot in a certain amount of reality.

One trick Rolfe used was to try to get an ordinary human being swept up in the adventures, which provided a realistic counterpoint to the action. Rolfe was discouraged to see after he left that the show tilted more to the absurd side, especially with the gadgets. Near the end of the series, he was living in London with his wife and they saw an episode in which Illya Kuryakin was riding a bomb down to earth. Rolfe turned to his wife and said, "We're spending the last of the royalties, I think. This is not going to go much farther." The show ended shortly thereafter. Rolfe says, "It became a parody of a parody of itself. They were trying to outsmart *Get Smart*, which came on after us."

In 1977 Rolfe prepared a screenplay for a slightly updated version of the show, but MGM decided that since it had sold off its backlot, it would have been too expensive to revive the show. He was not involved in the 1983 television movie *The Return of the Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, saying, "I was so furious with it. It is like somebody set out to figure out what it was that killed *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* in the end, and do that."

One of the spy series that followed in the wake of *U.N.C.L.E.* was *I Spy*. On the surface it was more realistic than *U.N.C.L.E.*, especially in its use of real locations around the world, but it was still a very glamorous look at two American agents, picking up the exotic locations from the James Bond films rather than the gimmicky hardware. The producer was the ubiquitous Sheldon Leonard, of whom Eric Bercovici, one of the writers on the first season, says, "From a story point of view, I thought Sheldon was a wonderfully creative producer," adding that writing a script

is like building a brick wall. The dramatic structure has to be there. And there was this mysterious, secret course that producers take where they learn to identify the keystone immediately. And they go for it and they pull it out. And the whole wall comes down. But Sheldon was very good about that. He wouldn't pull out a brick unless he knew there was another brick to go in.

Leonard, perhaps as a result of the success of the "That's My Boy??" episode of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, cast a young black nightclub comedian, Bill Cosby, in one of the starring roles in the series.³¹ Originally Robert Culp

was to be the lead and Cosby was to be his sidekick. Bercovici suggested doing an episode in which Cosby “had the good thing to do and Culp plays the second banana.” He was told it would never happen, so he wrote “Turkish Delight” with Culp having a romance in the main storyline. Shortly thereafter, Bercovici was told, “Listen, we’ve had an idea. We’re going to have Cosby play the lead, so you’re going to have to rewrite the whole show for that.”

Bercovici said, “Fine,” and simply changed the names over the dialogue. “I didn’t do anything else.” The romantic interest, who had been written as white, was cast with a black actress, Diana Sands.

Bercovici describes the show in its first season as “a very freewheeling show. You could have scenes where they would talk to each other and not make a whole lot of plot sense.” This led to some scenes being ad-libbed, which was encouraged by Leonard, who told the directors to keep the camera on Culp and Cosby whatever they did or said.³² By its third and last season, the writing was almost nonexistent as the stars ad-libbed, driving the other actors crazy because they were given no cues for their own lines.³³

While *I Spy* depended on the chemistry and the dialogue of its two stars, *Mission: Impossible* depended on very complicated plotting, squeezing two hours of story into one hour. When Sy Salkowitz went on the show, his experience at writing for *Perry Mason* was useful:

What you needed to do on *Mission: Impossible* was to figure out what everybody had to do at every particular moment in time. Now we had a technique we used on *Perry Mason* just to keep our ducks in a row, which was a chronological sequence of events, whether you played them or not. You had to know at 10:02 the defendant walked into the room, saw nothing, turned around and walked out and two minutes later the killer came in and killed the guy and four minutes later the defendant walked back in. So, using that chronological sequence of events, you had to lay out what everybody was doing, because your goal [was] to make the solution a little more complicated than it already was.

Mission: Impossible was in miniature what *Topkapi* [a 1964 jewel robbery picture] was. You had to figure an absolutely ingenious way of upsetting the impossible. It was mission impossible: you couldn’t do this thing. Now, you started out by selecting a mission that was impossible. And if it was too easy to beat, you had to make it more impossible. If it was impossible to beat, then loosen up on it, or put a flaw in it someplace. Because all it needed was one chink. That could be the personality of the villain, it could be something in a house that nobody knew was there, it could be anything. But then you build backwards from it, and you say, “O.K., this is how we’ll approach this.”

You had to be a master schemer. Now, some guys have minds like that. I happen to have one. Other guys have minds that go in other directions. I wish mine did. But I’m a great schemer.

The original *Star Trek* series, which premiered in 1966, had been in development by Gene Roddenberry for several years. His assistant, D. C. Fontana, thinks that job was a benefit in writing the shows:

If anybody knew *Star Trek* as well as he did, it was me, because I had been with him from the point in 1963³⁴ when *Star Trek* was little more than half a dozen pieces of paper with some character ideas, the Enterprise, the main concept of the show. As it grew and developed, I was there. I was the person who was taking the dictation and transcribing the dictation tapes into the finalized versions of the format and the scripts. In that time I had sold [scripts to] *Ben Casey* and *Slattery's People*. When it came time to assign writers to the first *Star Trek* scripts, I approached Gene and said I would like to try one. He said, "O.K., fine, because I know you've written. And you know the series better than anybody but me, and what one would you like to write?"

Fontana wrote two *Trek* scripts before deciding to free-lance. The first free-lance job then became a rewrite of another *Trek* script, which led to Fontana being offered the story editorship of the series. Fontana discovered that other writers had problems coming up with stories for the series. They would come in and say, "I see this civilization," but whole civilizations can be difficult to build, especially on a television series budget.³⁵ And Roddenberry was not concerned with civilizations, perhaps because he had already created his own. According to Fontana, Roddenberry would say to the writers:

Never mind about that [civilization]. Who are the people? What is the story about? Who is the story about? And how does that affect our people? Is it about our ship, our people? Is it a problem that is brought aboard the ship and creates a problem? Is it one they go to and become involved in? What is the story about in terms of people?

Fontana adds, "If you didn't tell the stories in terms of people, they just never seemed to work." In addition to creating civilizations, some writers, according to Fontana, "got overly involved in the technology and they wound up telling stories about the technology rather than about the people, and that would almost never work."

Even though Roddenberry had originally pitched *Star Trek* as "*Wagon Train to the Stars*," the story structure was rather different. Fontana describes the format:

We found that we had a major story running and a minor story running. What usually happened was Kirk, Spock, and McCoy would be very intimately involved with the major story. Then supporting characters, Scott and Sulu, Uhura, maybe Nurse Chapel, Chekov, would be involved in the minor story. Or sometimes one of them would move up to the major story and the others would carry on the minor story themselves, so that we were able to give specific scene time to everybody, but they were carrying on a story. It wasn't just the gratuitous, "Oh, we've got to have a scene with Sulu in it, so let's put him in here." They always had a story they were involved in, or they were involved in the major story. I don't know if you can do that on other shows, or anybody else was doing it. But it worked well for *Star Trek*.

Fontana left the series at the end of the second season, but hardly ended all connections with the show. Fontana was involved with the animated series of the same name in 1973–75, and recalls that they were able to be more creative with both environments and creatures, since, “We [did] not have to worry about the costuming or the prostheses, or any of the things you normally have to worry about. You just draw them.” Writing the animation version

was a little harder to do [with] just 21 minutes of story [for a half-hour show] because of so many commercials in the children’s animation. The one thing we did not do was make it a kiddie show. We did *Star Trek*. I thought most of the stories worked well. In only 21 minutes of storytelling we packed a lot of story in. There was very little in the way of subplot, but we did get some very complex stories in.

Fontana also returned to work briefly on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in the late eighties, but thinks the show lacks the relationships between the main characters the original had:

There’s a coldness, I think, in the characters. Sometimes you get a little bit from Geordi and Worf, and Data is very popular, although he can’t be warm. He can be funny, but he can’t be warm.

I think, too, that there are too many characters. I think there are a lot of characters that are each striving for equal time. Marina [Sirtis, who plays Deanna] gets a story, Worf gets a story, Riker gets a story, whereas the way we did it with the subplot, major plot in the original *Trek* I think worked a lot better.

The original *Star Trek* had 54 minutes of story. Most prime-time network shows by the late eighties had 48 minutes of storytelling time. A syndicated show has only 41 minutes of storytelling time. Fontana sees storytelling problems from those syndication limits:

You have a lot less time to tell a good, full story that has relationships and action. You’ve got to have one or the other in 41 minutes. It’s very difficult to have both. You don’t have the plot, subplot as strongly as you did before. Also, instead of a teaser and four acts, it’s chopped into a teaser and five acts. I say chopped advisedly, because that’s what happens. You get an extremely choppy rhythm to the story, because you are telling the story in approximately eight- or nine-minute bits, with maybe a three-minute teaser, and that’s about it. And I think that makes it hard to write the scripts well, because [with] that extreme chopiness, you’re always having to break it off [into] extremely short scenes.

Other writers on the new series have problems with Roddenberry’s view of humanity in the future. Roddenberry, speaking about the characters of the crew of the new *Enterprise*, said, “Our people do not lie, cheat or steal. They

are the best of the best. When you watch the show, you say to yourself, at least once, 'My God, that's the way life should be.' ”³⁶ Tracy Torme, one of the first-season writers, said, “All of these [regular] characters like each other all the time, and for me that was a real big disadvantage.”³⁷ Kasey Arnold-Ince, who wrote “The Final Mission” in the 1990–91 season, agrees, saying that while both she and Roddenberry would like to have a world without conflicts, it does make it difficult to write drama.

Arnold-Ince was asked to put “more character” into her script, which surprised her agent, who thought it was all character. What they came to realize the show wanted was to make the character points and the emotions obvious. Arnold-Ince had originally written a scene between Wesley and Picard in which Wesley’s feelings about Picard as a father-figure were mostly subtext. By the time the show was on the air, with a rewrite by staff writer Jeri Taylor, Wesley was talking openly about his feelings, which made for a more conventional scene, the kind of “on-the-nose” writing that television too often falls into.

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COMEDY/VARIETY

*M*ilton Berle and Sid Caesar were not the only stars heading variety shows in the early fifties. A star was a requirement if only to give such shows some identity. Stars could be difficult to come by, as Nat Perrin learned when he tried to produce a series in 1954 called *Shower of Stars*. In addition to the major studios' not wanting their stars to appear on television, stars wanted to see the script first, but how could writers write for a star without knowing *which* star, since both joke and sketch writing is very much writing-to-order? Perrin ended up with one star, but as he sagely observes, "One star is not a shower. One star is a drizzle."

Stars could be not only difficult to come by, but difficult to deal with, as many writers found out. Nat Perrin worked with Red Skelton on some of Skelton's films at MGM, so when approached to produce Skelton's TV show, he opted for the title of Executive Producer so that someone else "more fluent in Red Skelton's language than I was" had to deal directly with Skelton. Perrin just supervised the writers. Larry Rhine wrote for Skelton later and found that although Skelton took a writing credit on the show, he was never in the same room with the writers. He did not know his writers and did not want to know them. Rhine recalls that once Skelton said, "Who needs writers?" The next time he called up the writers' room for a new line, the writers said, "Let him ad-lib it." The writers were particularly bothered by Skelton's habit of gesturing to his head whenever a line got a good response, indicating he just thought it up himself. Rick Mittleman, who wrote for Skelton in 1962-63, thought Skelton feared people would learn he did not make it up, and he kept the writers out of the studio while the show was being taped. Mittleman was paired with writer Bruce Howard, and together they specialized in pantomimes. Mittleman says writers had to "think physical rather than verbal . . . rather than static." Even the pantomime writers had to bring in ten topical jokes each week, out of which jokes for the opening monologues were assembled.

Red Skelton lasted in a variety show from 1951 to 1971; Red Buttons only lasted from 1952 to 1955, and it was only a variety show the first season, then a situation comedy in 1953–54, then back to a variety show. Buttons went through staffs of writers, but he insisted to *TV Guide* in October 1954 that he was not hard on his writers, because he knew “their job is the toughest.” He said he was happy with the current writers on the show, but a P.S. to the article notes that four of the five writers at the time of the writing of the article had left the show.¹ One of the tales that writers still tell is the perhaps apocryphal story that Buttons came in one day, picked up a new script, held it in his hand, then announced, “This doesn’t feel funny.”

Between *Mr. Peepers* and *The Andy Griffith Show*, Everett Greenbaum went to work on *The George Gobel Show* with some reluctance. He thought of himself as a storyteller and

at first I thought I couldn’t construct such deliberate jokes. And the first two weeks I couldn’t, but then suddenly in the third week I became very brilliant and wrote jokes that are still being used in one form or another. Every time I run into George [Gobel] at Gelson’s [Market], he tells me those jokes. He says, “Remember these jokes? And you said you couldn’t write jokes.”²

Once he got the hang of writing jokes, Greenbaum got back to storytelling by writing sketches for the guest stars. What made this “absolute hell” was that they did not know until two days before the Gobel show aired who the guest star was going to be. Once they wrote sketches for a comic who was replaced at the last minute by dramatic actor George Brent. Greenbaum recalls:

The worst faux pas we made with a guest was Herbert Marshall. We didn’t know that Herbert Marshall had a wooden leg. We wrote a sketch where he’s in a submarine and they tilt the whole submarine up and down, right on the stage. We didn’t know what to do. So, what we did, every time the submarine would dive, we had Herbert Marshall hang on to a pole that looked like a pole on the subway, and he would turn to the camera and say, “I hate this part of it.” It was the funniest thing in the sketch.

The head writer of the Gobel show the first two years was Hal Kanter, who Greenbaum says, “rewrote everything, or put it all together. Sometimes added. Mostly subtracted. He’s quite brilliant.” When Kanter left, “his strong arm was gone. Everybody connected with the show was suggesting jokes and re-writing, [including] George’s relatives.” When a man from the advertising agency suggested changing the straight line to a joke to (a) make the joke senseless and (b) include the name of the sponsor’s product, Greenbaum lost his temper, “and by the time I got home to dinner, I’d been fired.”

In 1955 both Goodman Ace and Jay Burton left Milton Berle’s show and helped create an hour variety show for Perry Como. With Ace in charge of the writing, the writers met from ten A.M. to one P.M. every day,³ then had

the rest of the day off. Burton says Ace did not like to write for more than three hours at a time, and “he just liked to play gin afterwards.” Burton found this an immediate advantage for his social life. With Berle’s demand that Burton be constantly available to write new jokes, “I didn’t have a date for five years. I didn’t know when to make it. On *Perry Como* I could date.”

Ace supervised the writing the same way Kanter did on the Gobel show. He let everybody throw in ideas without his criticizing, but he would write down what he wanted to use. Burton says, “You didn’t know until the end of the week whether your material was in the script.” As befitting the more relaxed style of its star, *The Perry Como Show* had a slower pace. There was generally only one sketch, often fairly long but not physically elaborate. Some of the more domestic sketches could have come out of Ace’s earlier radio show, *Easy Aces*.

The writers also had to come up with material for the crosstalk between Como and his guests, and it had to be so casual that the show, in Ace’s words, “doesn’t seem as if there is any writing in it.”⁴ This leads to the inevitable scenes in which the performers seem to throw out the script and ad-libbed. On the May 16, 1956, show,⁵ the guest is Ronald Reagan, who comes out while Como is apparently having trouble with the cue card boy. Como explains the business of cue cards to Reagan, since Reagan’s show, *The General Electric Theatre*, is on film. The boy drops the cards, and Como offers to let Reagan come back next week. Reagan replies in the script, “Let’s go on this way. This may be funnier than the stuff we had prepared.” We all know where that sort of thing led.

Mel Tolkin wrote full-time for Bob Hope for five years in the late sixties and early seventies. Tolkin and Larry Rhine, who also wrote for Hope, both think Hope was one of the nicest comedians to work with and one who fully appreciated writers. With Hope, however, writers wrote for everything. As Tolkin says,

You work not only for his specials, you work for his gigs, his trips to Vietnam and Korea. You work on dinners, gigs in honor of somebody, charity gigs. Wherever he is, we get a poop sheet that we write jokes [from]: who’s on the dais, something about the man being honored, the occasion, areas for comedy . . . and of course the poop about the places, Vietnam and Korea: the temperature, the animals around, what the soldiers eat, where they hang out.

Tolkin did not go on trips, although there were writers who did, for “the immediate, necessary jokes,” on changes in base commanders, changes in routes, etc. Tolkin says of himself and the other writers who stayed home, “We wrote long distance.”

For the sketches on the Hope shows, producer Mort Lachman would give the writers the subject of the sketch and the names of the guest stars, if known. Each team of writers would then sit down and write a separate sketch based

on the idea. The different sketches would be turned in to the producer, who would put the sketch together using the best material from each sketch. This is why the Hope sketches have always been more a collection of gags than a developed sketch, without the consistency, the narrative build, and the characterization of the best of the sketches on *Your Show of Shows* or later on *The Carol Burnett Show*.⁶

Along with Bob Hope, one of the few comedians working in the fifties who continued to do variety and sketch comedy into the nineties was Johnny Carson. Carson first broke into nighttime television in 1955 as a summer replacement for Red Skelton. The *TV Guide* review of his show could serve as a review for his work since: "Not all his opening monologs come off and his sketches are sometimes unamusingly familiar."⁷ The sketches during his thirty years on *The Tonight Show* often seem the kinds of material he was doing on his daytime show in the early fifties, e.g., his parody of a daytime television movie host that he continued doing long after local stations had given up having movie hosts. The nostalgic element of the sketch material may have been comforting to the *Tonight Show* audience as an antidote to the immediacy of the jokes in the monologue. What made Carson a success was his ability to *react* in a variety of interesting ways to material, both in the monologues and sketches, which was not working. Often Carson is funnier reacting to a joke that does not work than he is in telling a joke that does.⁸

In the seventies, Thad Mumford learned what killed the traditional variety show. He wrote for a series of variety specials, and heard Jackie Gleason, then guesting on one, say that the problem with variety television was that the singers got all the jokes. Mumford wrote for the Captain and Tennille, and he agrees with Gleason, saying, "Toni Tennille thought of herself as a sketch actress and she wasn't. We wrote some very funny things. I don't remember any of them at all, because I was too busy trying to get on a show called *Maude*."

Ernie Kovacs

Ernie Kovacs was to variety television what *The Twilight Zone* was to dramatic television: bizarre, surreal, not of the traditional American middle-class TV, and understandably the begetter of a cult.

Kovacs worked in radio before moving to local television in the early fifties.⁹ His first show was *3 to Get Ready* for WPTZ in Philadelphia, beginning in the fall of 1950, and running from 7:30 to 9:00 A.M. *daily*. Kovacs's experience with live radio helped him, but quickly he began to add visual material, such as "twitching his features in synch with the records (or, sometimes, out of synch with them), then by ad-libbing to goofy props that crew members tossed to him from offstage."¹⁰ When he did write things down, they were very brief descriptions of the actions, or gags, with only a hint of the dia-

logue, if any.¹¹ They were more lists than scripts, and his improvisations from them took him behind the scenes, showing off the mechanics of television.

His shows attracted network attention and he eventually moved to New York, doing the same kind of humor. He created recurring characters, such as Percy Dovetonsils (originally called Percy Moosetonsils), a lispng poet who read sentimental nonsense, and the Nairobi Trio, a collection of three people in gorilla masks playing a piano, a xylophone, and a conductor's baton. These characters were not created—like those of Skelton, Gleason, and others—to be loved, or to be a showcase for Kovacs's performing talents. The humor was in the concept, rather than in the performance, and it was this conceptual humor that made Kovacs a cult figure. It also most likely kept him from being a star of the magnitude of Skelton, Gleason, et al. Kovacs's biographer, Diana Rico, suggests that it was the failure of the network, NBC, to give Kovacs an adequate budget for his shows that kept him from becoming a bigger star, but Kovacs's humor was probably too intellectual to support a large audience, especially in the fifties.¹²

Kovacs is best remembered for a series of eight half-hour specials he did for ABC in 1961–62, the last one airing in January 1962 shortly after Kovacs's untimely death in an automobile accident. The emphasis in the shows is not on the performers, from whom very little is required, and what little is required is not done that well. Kovacs was more interested in the concept of the joke rather than the execution, although here again he was limited by the budgets the network provided. The money went to staging such complicated technical sequences as a symphony of kitchen appliances dancing to music or a poker game set to Beethoven. There are gags running through the show, such as a motorcycle so small it cannot be seen. It gets away from its inventor and we hear its buzz and see its path (through a cake) during the rest of the show.

In Special 7¹³ there are several parodies of the typical Western cliché of a gunfight. Unlike *Your Show of Shows*, which parodied the substance of films and plays, Kovacs is more concerned with the technique and the style. An art film version is all odd angles, ending with the cowboy on a psychiatrist's couch. A Rod Serling version takes place in a misty swamp. A German version is *The Lone Ranger* in German, but the humor is not from any German doubletalk, as it would have been with Caesar, but simply the *idea* of a Western with a German accent.

Diana Rico accurately suggests that Kovacs's influence can be seen in the self-reflexive interest in technique and television itself in such shows as *Laugh-In*, *Saturday Night Live*, *SCTV*, and *The David Letterman Show*. It is not surprising that she also points out his influence on a generation of video artists, well outside the mass media mainstream.¹⁴

Laugh-In

The winners of the Emmy for Outstanding Writing Achievement in Variety for the 1966–67 season were the five writers for *The Sid Caesar, Imogene*

Coca, Carl Reiner, Howard Morris Special. The following year the winner was *Laugh-In*, and ten writers swarmed onto the stage to accept the award. One of them, Allan Manings, said, "I'm sorry we couldn't all be here to-night."

Manings had been approached by the show's producer, George Schlatter, to write the pilot episode of *Laugh-In* but had other commitments. When he and his then-partner Hugh Wedlock joined the staff of the series, he found there were so many writers that only the head writers were at the studio. The others were in a motel. Manings says:

It was kind of jolly. It was like being a stoker on an ocean liner. Some son of a bitch is yelling down, "More coal, Scottie," and you know upstairs they are dancing and laughing and having a hell of a good time. It was that. George had a philosophy that more is more, rather than less is more. . . .

[The head writers] were all in the "better" office, three blocks away, right across from the Smoke House in Burbank. We were in a couple of rooms in a motel that had probably never seen better days, and they would come down. George did have a slaveowner's attitude, a benevolent slaveowner. He would come down and throw coldcuts at the beasts, and ask for more coal. We weren't locked in to the extent that if you left, the guard shot you, but we never went to the studios to see what was going on and only were there in contact with the cast, I believe, in the beginning, at that first read-through (Thursday afternoon). All the writers would be there, seated not at the main table, but well below the salt.

Schlatter or Digby Wolfe, one of the head writers, would come down to the motel and say, "We need runners [running gags]. We need 25 Vikings. We need 16 Martians. We need six quarts of milk." Manings describes it as "Bulk orders were left." He says a first read-through script for a show would run two to three hundred pages, with a single joke on each page. Since there was no narrative structure and only occasional thematic structures, they could shoot much more material than could be used on one show, and the unused material would be kept and eventually used on other shows if, or rather when, needed. For the writers, Manings says, "it really was sitting there and grinding out an enormous amount of material to come up with the stuff." Because so much was written and then not used, Manings says the writers began to feel as if, "You write a ton, and an ounce gets on the air. . . . Not that we are as a breed necessarily competitive. Not that we are not uncompetitive. You said, 'Hey, I did four things funnier than that.'"

Manings did become the head writer/script supervisor and found he was

up at the big house all the time. Had an office there. Had it paneled for me and everything. Got my own secretary, rather than one that was, quote, the writers' secretary. The main thing was that it was continual involvement. Rather than supplying the fodder, it was demanding the fodder. And writing, always writing, always writing.

Because Manings liked to do political material, Digby Wolfe once described him as “the conscience of *Laugh-In*,” but Manings says now, “Retrospectively, it’s looked upon as a show that was so biting. It was about 85 percent *kinderspiel*, and about 15 percent about something—which is, I suppose a hell of a lot.” The network was against having any anti-Vietnam War material, but Manings thinks it was more the show’s sponsor, Ford, which objected, since it was building equipment for the war effort. Manings also wrote a sketch in which a man comes into a drugstore in a hurry to get his medicine. The man gets the medicine and leaves a five-dollar bill. The druggist says the cost is twenty dollars, but the man has already left. The druggist picks up the five-dollar bill and says, “What the hell, four dollars profit isn’t bad either.” The drug industry was upset, but Manings found a newspaper clipping on congressional investigations of the drug industry that showed its markup was twelve to fifteen times the cost of the medicine. He enclosed the clipping in his reply letters and heard not another word from the industry.

In the beginning Paul Keyes, who had worked with Rowan and Martin before, wrote their *Laugh-In* monologues, and David Panich wrote most of the openings announcer Garry Owens did. The performers also contributed material. The writers generally knew who the guest stars were going to be and wrote material to fit them, or more accurately to fit how Schlatter wanted to use them. Manings wrote a bit for the ladylike actress Deborah Kerr in which she simply spoke the (clean) punch lines to the world’s best-known dirty jokes. The censor objected, but it was pointed out that without the rest of the joke, the lines were not dirty. When Jack Benny was the guest star, the writers wrote what Manings calls “almost . . . a book show.” On the show Benny says to Rowan and Martin that he is afraid his slower pace would not fit into the show, and they say it would be great with the girl and the waterfall. The waterfall keeps being mentioned, and at the end of the show, it is announced that the show is five minutes short, and Benny is asked to tell the waterfall story. The obvious punch line to the running gag is Benny getting doused with water, but while the show was being written, Manings told Schlatter he could not ask Benny to do that. Schlatter told him not to put it in the script. When Benny read the script, he himself suggested the dousing. Schlatter replied innocently, “Gee, would you do that?”

Manings says George Schlatter “overflowed with his love and joy of what he was doing. He’s a 240-pound pixie. He loved tweaking noses. And he loved silly.” Working with Schlatter was

a lot like being in the eye of a hurricane. George and I have had a wonderful relationship over the years, very good and very funny. [On the show] he was voracious. He was the quintessential cheerleader. He was wrapped totally in the show. He was wrapped up totally in the need for more and more material. Probably no one that I know of could have run the show better.

The pixie had other skills that helped the show:

He was a wizard at dealing with censorship. He was the man who put in the four [other things] so we would get the “damn.” I watched him throw tantrums over things he did not care whether or not they got on. He literally once threw a chair across a studio because of something. I said, “Jesus Christ, George, let them have it.” But he was protecting something else that he felt he wanted.

Manings found the network censors to be “very decent, but they were gunshy” because the show became not only a hit but an institution noted for trying to break the boundaries. When Manings did a bit about ballistic missiles and had an Eskimo say, “I am sick and tired of these ICBMs,” NBC’s censor Herminio Traviesas said, “I’ve had it with your defecation jokes.” When David Panich created the Farkle Family, the censors picked up on the similarity of “Farkle” to “fart,” but let it and the suggestions of inbreeding, adultery, and incest slip by.

As the show became a hit, Manings says the dealings with the censor

became a game. The last two years—I did four years of the show—it was a wonderful relationship, and I think part of it was a game. They would see how much they would force us to give up. We would see how far we could push. To the best of my knowledge, it was never a grinding relationship. It was never, “You guys are in major trouble from here on in, forever.”

Saturday Night Live

One of the junior writers on *Laugh-In* was Lorne Michaels, who found the material he and his partner Hart Pomerantz submitted to Paul Keyes, the head writer, was rewritten so much that he could scarcely recognize something of his when it got on the air. He vowed if he ever became a producer, he would run a show differently.¹⁵

In 1975 he got his chance with *Saturday Night Live*, and he deliberately picked writers who had not worked in television before, selecting what he liked to call “enlightened amateurs,” claiming that comedy was too important to be left to the professionals. He was also limited by budgetary reasons in his hiring, since the top writer’s fee the first season was \$650 per week, going up to \$700 in March.¹⁶

At the first staff meeting for the new show, on July 7, 1975, Michaels was vague in talking to the writers about what he wanted. He was not so vague about what he did *not* want. As the show’s biographers note of the meeting,

Lorne made it clear that [Carol] Burnett’s style encompassed everything *Saturday Night* should avoid. It lacked subtlety and nuance; it was too broad, too bourgeois, and too smug. . . . There will be more integrity and respect for the writing here, he said. From then on many an idea would be derisively dismissed on the 17th floor with the words, “That’s Carol Burnett.”¹⁷

The irony of Michaels's comments is that, with the exception of being too bourgeois, his writers fell even more deeply than Burnett's writers did into those other traps. Burnett's show was one of the best written on television, and while sketches could be broad, they are also beautifully constructed and written. The Burnett sketches are often more sharply observed than those on *Saturday Night Live*, and the "Mama's Family" sketches present in their own way as dark a view of bourgeois family life as anything on Michaels's show. There is nothing particularly subtle or nuanced about John Belushi's samurai sketches, and Chevy Chase's "Weekend Update" puts anything Burnett's show did to shame in the smug category.

The writing on *Saturday Night Live*, in trying to be as hip as possible, generally only attains smugness. The sketches run too long, even in the first few seasons, and often avoid coming to any point, which is perhaps supposed to be the point, but it makes them agony to watch. Michaels may not have interfered as much with his writers as Schlatter did, but that did not necessarily help the show.

What the writing did successfully do was provide star vehicles for the cast. Harry Shearer, who joined the show as a writer and performer in the fifth season, thought the entire show was unprofessional, and he particularly objected to Michaels's suggestion he use his own name on camera (as Chevy Chase had done). This led Shearer to suspect that Michaels "wasn't in the business of producing shows but in the business of making stars."¹⁸ That Michaels and the show did, with sketches and bits that let the performers demonstrate their talents: Belushi as the samurai everything, Dan Ackroyd as Leonard Penth-Garnell, Bill Murray as the lounge singer, and Gilda Radner as Emily Litella. The stars, and the aura of a live show that pressed the boundaries of television, became the appeal of the show: people watched to see what those people would get away with this week. Sometimes it was funny, sometimes it was just sophomoric, and often it was both. Not surprisingly, it became a cult hit, and while it has had little success in syndicated reruns, it has done reasonably well in cable reruns.

In the show's fifth season the critics and others were complaining the show had burned itself out, and Michaels told one reporter that was the plan: "*Saturday Night* is going to get worse and worse and eventually will never be funny again."¹⁹ He was more right than he knew.

SCTV

The makers of SCTV knew from the beginning that they were not going to be *Saturday Night Live*, which was just as well. *Saturday Night Live* had started the year before Andrew Alexander, one of the producers of the theatrical comedy troupe known as The Second City, made arrangements with Canada's Global TV to do a television program. Harold Ramis, one of the

original writers of SCTV, has said that everybody knew that some of the new forms of comedy would get to television, but as soon as they saw *Saturday Night Live*, they knew that Second City would not do it first. So they began to figure out how to do a show different from *Saturday Night Live* and still do Second City's kind of humor. At a series of brainstorming sessions the makers of the show came up with the idea that since it was being made at a local television station on a low budget, the format should be the daily programming of a local, low-rent television station. The original idea was that a storyline would connect the parodies of television, but after the first show, they all agreed the storyline kept the individual bits from working as well as they could. The station format was enough of a structure, although in later seasons a single storyline might thread through one or more shows, as in the two-part, one-hour parody in 1984 of *The Godfather*.²⁰

Because the show was only shown in Canada the first year (1976–77) and then in American syndication the next four years, the budgets for the shows were very limited. Patrick Whitely, Global TV's overseer of the show's budget, said that "because we were on such a tight budget . . . the material really had to hold up. The writing had to be really good."²¹

Fortunately, the writing was of a much higher quality than on *Saturday Night Live*. The station format concentrated the writing so that SCTV put its satire in specific television forms, such as talk shows (*The Sammy Maudlin Show*), educational shows (*Sunrise Semester*), films (*Ben-Hur*, *The Grapes of Wrath*), and commercials. Within those formats, they could strike at many aspects of media culture. Bringing sleazy nightclub comic Bobby Bittman (Eugene Levy) onto *The Sammy Maudlin Show* to plug the film he directed, called *Chariots of Eggs*, zings not only sleazy comics and talk shows, but arty films, directors of arty films, aerobicize tapes, and closeted homosexuals in the entertainment business. SCTV concentrated its fire, making its sketches much richer and more complex than the one-note sketches on *Saturday Night Live* or the one-joke bits on *Laugh-In*.

Part of the advantage SCTV had was that the show was on tape, not live. Martin Short, who worked on both SCTV and *Saturday Night Live* at different times, thought SCTV was a more creative experience than *Saturday Night Live*: "On SCTV we would have six weeks to write and six weeks to shoot six 90-minute shows. You could be dry for two weeks and make it up in the third. For *Saturday Night Live* you had Monday and Tuesday (to write). If you didn't have an idea, tough."²²

Because of the shooting schedules, material could be shot and stockpiled, as it had been on *Laugh-In*. The McKenzie Brothers segments began after the series was sold to American television and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation wanted to fill the extra two minutes in the Canadian version with "Canadian content." They were done in bulk. After the rest of the cast and crew had left, Dave Thomas and Rick Moranis would put on their tuques

and parkas, sit down on the set and improvise a run of twenty to thirty two-minute bits, of which Thomas estimates only five or six would be used. The rest were thrown out.²³

The other material was written, and the actors were very much involved in both the pitching and the writing sessions. The work would begin with group discussions, which were often like the improvisation sessions most of the cast had done as part of one or more of the Second City troupes. Once the material was worked out, it was written down. The process saved rehearsal time, as Harold Ramis recalled:

There was very little read-through. When things are written by the company, the writing is the rehearsal. You don't write it down until you know you can perform it. The things you write down are the things you worked out. So rehearsal was not necessary. Camera blocking is really what the rehearsal was.²⁴

Another advantage SCTV had over *Saturday Night Live* is that the actors on SCTV were more character actors than stars.²⁵ While the performers on *Saturday Night Live* could do three or four characters, and repeated them relentlessly, the range of the SCTV people was phenomenal. To take only one example, Eugene Levy did, among other characterizations, Hollywood agent/producer Sid Dithers, Stan Schmenge, Lorne Greene, Howard McNear as Floyd the barber from *The Andy Griffith Show*, Bobby Bittman, George Lucas, Ricardo Montalban, and Woody Tobias, Jr., who in turn played Bruno in the Dr. Tongue sketches. Not only did SCTV's cast have the range, they had the precision. Catherine O'Hara's devastatingly accurate Meryl Streep and Martin Short's dead-on David Steinberg made the originals virtually unwatchable for years.

In 1981 NBC picked up SCTV for its stations as a Friday-night late-night show. Since the show was being made in Canada, the network made very few attempts at interfering with its content.²⁶ Two years later the network dropped it (whereupon it was picked up by the Cinemax cable system), claiming that at \$360,000 per show, it could not make a profit. *Saturday Night Live* at this point cost more than that to produce, and was considered by most to be in one of its many "brain dead" periods. The obvious solution, from the viewers' point of view, would have been to give *Saturday Night Live* a merciful death and replace it with SCTV. The problem was that NBC owned *Saturday Night Live* and therefore figured it could eventually make money on reruns of it. SCTV was not owned by the network and rerun money would not have gone to NBC.

MOVIES AND MINISERIES: THE EARLY YEARS

Movies

Television showed movies from its infancy on, but in the fifties the networks did not show them in prime time. Partly the studios were trying to avoid television, and partly the sales of post-1948 films would require additional residual payments under guild contracts. The networks also wanted to establish their own identities with their own programming. In 1961 NBC began a series of post-1948 films in prime time on Saturday nights. By 1964 NBC, now with two movie nights per week, could not get enough theatrical films. Jennings Lang, the head of Universal television, persuaded NBC executives Mort Werner and Grant Tinker that the studio could produce feature films for television.¹ Universal did not make more than a few movies per year for television until 1967–68.

The writers were ready. In the mid-sixties E. Jack Neuman was at MGM and suggested in a memo that the studio should get into making films for television since it had the story properties (having purchased a large amount of story material over the years) and the people under contract. His suggestion fell on deaf ears, and Universal took the lead in making television movies—not surprising, since the studio had taken the lead with 90-minute series. A 1966 Universal movie, *Fame Is the Name of the Game*, became the pilot for another 90-minute series, *The Name of the Game*, which premiered in 1968. This set the pattern for the use of television movies as pilots for series.

Most of the early television movies were in the light-entertainment category. Rod Serling's 1966 film *The Doomsday Flight* was an elementary thriller about a madman who places a bomb on an airliner, and showed little of Serling's talent. Serling's former *Twilight Zone* writer Richard Matheson wrote the highest rated of the early movies, *The Night Stalker* (1972), an inventive idea (a vampire stalks women in Las Vegas) neatly worked out, although it is less inventive once they get to the vampire's traditional scary house. In 1976 Roy Huggins did the story and produced *The Invasion of Johnson County*

based on the same historical incident that Michael Cimino later turned into *Heaven's Gate*. Huggins's version, with a screenplay by Nicholas Baehr, makes the lead a Maverick-type character, which makes the whole tone a lot lighter than Cimino's. Huggins rightly figured it would be easier to sell to the studio if it was lighter.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer did eventually get into making films for television, and like other studios, used them as pilots for potential series. In 1972 Eric Bercovici and Jerry Ludwig wrote and produced *Assignment: Munich*, starring Roy Scheider as Jake Webster, an agent for the Internal Central Bureau who operates under the cover of owning a bar. It is, as Bercovici describes it, a cross between "*Casablanca*, *I Spy*, and *Charade*. That was sort of our fantasy life: owning a bar, having this mysterious background. Our character was obliged to work for American Intelligence, although he didn't like to." When the show became a series, it turned into *Assignment: Vienna*, starring Robert Conrad. The series was made for ABC, which had just covered the Munich Olympics and wanted it set in another city. MGM had neglected to sign Roy Scheider to a contract for a series, and *The French Connection* made him hot in films. The series lasted six episodes.

Not every writer liked the lightweight television movies. Producer Stan Hough asked Christopher Knopf to write a television movie called *Mrs. Sundance*, about the further adventures of Etta Place, the lover of the Sundance Kid. The idea of writing it "just offended my sensibilities," says Knopf, who went to his father for his advice. Edwin Knopf said, "Have you got anything else to do?"

"No."

"Are you a professional writer?"

"Yeah."

"Do it. It's your job."

Knopf wrote it and says, "It turned out to be gold. It was a good script. It was an interesting show to write. No majesty whatsoever, but it was a lovely show." Knopf does not take all the credit for its high ratings: it starred Elizabeth Montgomery, then at the height of her television stardom.

Television movies turned serious early in their history and in effect took up the work of the old dramatic anthology shows. Richard Levinson and William Link had written for series television since the late fifties and by the late sixties were at Universal. They noticed that television series then, such as Universal's *The Bold Ones*, were dealing with contemporary political and social issues. In 1969 they began looking for a television movie project that was more than light entertainment. They found the Broadway play *My Sweet Charlie*, which dealt with the relationship between a black man and a white woman.

NBC turned down the project on the usual grounds that it had very little action and that it did not appear to be a pilot for a future series. Levinson and Link were also told off the record that "We can't have a black man and white girl living under the same roof at nine o'clock at night" (the time the

movies ran) and “We are not in the business of offending our southern affiliates.”² NBC, after three pitches, let them write the script. Levinson and Link wrote later, “After reading the script, NBC no longer seemed to think that a television version of *My Sweet Charlie* would mean the end of the free enterprise system.”³ The film was broadcast on January 20, 1970, to very high ratings and great reviews, and later in the year won three Emmies.⁴

Levinson and Link continued to do television movies of substance. In 1977, for example, they made *The Storyteller* about the writer of a television movie on arson seen by showing a young boy who then sets his school on fire. The film is a thoughtful, if dramatically flat, examination of the influence of television violence. The character of the television writer is a little too saintly, without the juice most TV writers have. The film does show an accurate view of the people and pressures a television writer deals with.⁵

In 1971 William Blinn wrote *Brian's Song*, a television movie that started two separate genres. The first genre was the docudrama, in which a real-life incident was the basis for the film. In this case it was the story of professional football players Brian Piccolo and Gayle Sayers and their professional and personal relationship. The makers of the film insist that it is only 5 percent fiction, the rest fact.⁶ The second genre was what became known as the “disease of the week” story. In this case it was Brian Piccolo’s death at the age of 26 from cancer. Because the film was made for ABC’s new 90-minute *Movie of the Week*,⁷ it runs a rushed 73 minutes, and the rushed quality also comes from the budget limitations, since it was shot in fourteen days.⁸ Several of the supporting characters, particularly the wives of the two players, are not as well developed as they would have been in a longer film. The film holds up surprisingly well, however, in spite of all the other television movies that have followed in those two genres.

Brian's Song was given a theatrical release, and from time to time other films made for television have also been released theatrically. A movie about Scott Joplin was made in 1978 for television. When it was decided to release it first theatrically, the writer, Christopher Knopf, objected, saying he would have written it differently as a theatrical film, but had written it for the limits of television of the time. He did not get as deeply as he would have in a theatrical film into the life in the bordellos Joplin lived and played in, nor did he deal with Joplin’s syphilis. The film was not a theatrical success.

There was the same kind of pushing and pulling with the networks on the content of television movies that there was on series. In the mid-seventies, E. Arthur Kean wrote what was supposed to be a three-hour movie pilot about Detective Headquarters called *DHQ*. NBC passed on it, but CBS decided to do it, with some changes. It was reduced to two hours, the title eventually changed to *A Killing Affair* and one of the subplots—about an adulterous affair between two cops—became the main plot. Kean was told of this by an executive, who said, “Hey, we’re going to save your picture.”

“What picture?”

“*DHQ*. We’re going to make it. We’re going to do it with O. J. Simpson.”

Kean had two reactions. The first was, “This guy can’t act.” The second was, “You’re going to make it a black and white thing [which it was not originally].” Kean told another executive, Paul Monash, “If you’re going to do this ‘on the nose’: ‘Oh, God, we’ve got a white woman and a black man in bed together,’ I don’t want any part of this.” In the seven years since *My Sweet Charlie*, the networks had discovered that television movies needed some kind of hook to grab an audience’s attention.

Monash asked Kean how he thought it should be handled, and Kean replied, “Let’s take this story pretty much the way it is, and in terms of the racial stuff, I just want to throw a few little darts. You’ll be seeing it on the screen. You don’t need to lay it on.” Monash and the others agreed, and Kean remembers there being only about five lines that mentioned the racial material at all.

In the case of Kean’s rewritten script, the network censors still had their say. Kean recalls:

There was the word “slut.” There was also a vital story point. When the man and the woman have just made love, there is real tension in the room. She says, “I don’t like it rough like that.”

He says, “I thought we were really getting it on.”

She says, “No. You were really rough.” They wanted to cut that scene. That was one of the turning points in it emotionally. It had to be there. So [producer David] Gerber went to bat with me. We had the actual censor sitting in the board room. And it was a woman. She was about 55, and she walked in. Now this is the censor, so you figure like a New England schoolmarm sort of thing. The conversation was as follows. She walks in the door. She says, “Gerber, you old motherfucker, how are you?” I was totally unprepared for that. You could have put anything in her mouth but that. I said, “I think we’ve got a chance here.” I knew I was dealing with a human being who understood what it was all about anyway. It was not that she’d never heard the words. She was hardnosed about it. She’s brought two of her lackies there, and they were sitting prim, Jerry Fallwell-faced, saying, “Well, we can’t have this violent sex.”

I said, “This is not violent sex. It’s rough sex.” And I explained what was going on. If you look at the story, you see what this man is going through manifests itself to the point where he doesn’t even know it. She points it out, and he finally gets to see it. They’re saying, “Well, gee, I don’t know. We can’t have violent sex on the air.”

I said, “Well, then don’t do the show.”

She said, “Twice in the story you use the word ‘slut.’ Now we can’t have that either.”

I said, “What’s wrong with ‘slut’?”

They said, “It means a whore.”

I said, “No, it doesn’t.” Gerber has a big dictionary this fat on his desk, one of his pretenses. I said, “You look over there. A slut is an unkempt woman. Yes, go look it up if you don’t believe me.”

Well, they didn't even look it up. I was telling the truth. So they said, "All right. We'll trade you one 'slut' and you get the violent sex scene. You take out one of the 'sluts' and we'll give you the violence." And that's the way it went on the air.

Because the pattern of using television movies as pilots was set early, occasionally an unneeded movie was made. In 1974 Paramount decided to make a series from the 1970 film *The Lawyer*. Rather than use the theatrical film as the pilot, they ordered another pilot. Why do another? The writer of the pilot, E. Jack Neuman, says, "Who knows? There was no reason to make that pilot at all. They had it. They had it all right there, but no, they had to have a pilot."

Not only were there light-entertainment star vehicles such as *Mrs. Sundance*, but star vehicles of a bit more substance, such as *More Than Friends*, a 1978 film starring Rob Reiner and his wife Penny Marshall, the stars of *All in the Family* and *Laverne and Shirley*. ABC was looking for a film for them, and Reiner had a production deal at Columbia with his writing partner, Phil Mishkin.

Mishkin and Reiner met at UCLA in the mid-sixties when Reiner tried out for a play Mishkin had written. Mishkin told the director that under no circumstances should Reiner be given the part. They later became friends and ran acting workshops at the Evergreen Stage, which Penny Marshall attended. She once did a scene from a Mishkin play, *Whatever Happened to Patience and Prudence?* Marshall suggested to ABC and Columbia a film of Mishkin's play.

The play deals with a young woman's relationships with several men while searching for her Prince Charming. Mishkin and Reiner did the screenplay, combining some of the men into one character, Allan (Reiner), and making him a friend of Mattie (Marshall), to whom she returns between other relationships. The film's dramatic question is whether these two are going to be friends, lovers, or both. There are similarities to both Allen's *Annie Hall*, which came out the year before, and Reiner's later *When Harry Met Sally*. . . , especially the latter.

More Than Friends shows its genesis as a stage play, and also the sitcom-writing experience of its writers. The film begins in 1958 as Allan is trying to make out with Mattie at a party. Their long bedroom scene plays like Act I of a sitcom: funny, but funny because of the gags, some of which are related to the characters, some of which are not. In the scene Allan says he knows he's going to be bald. At the end of the scene they agree to be just friends, and he says, "You'll be my girl . . . friend," and Mattie replies, "And you'll be my bald friend." The early scenes of the film are also hurt by Reiner's not being a particularly convincing teenager; his Allan seems stupid, not just adolescent.

The film improves as it goes along, and deals better with the issue of rela-

tionships. When a stage director turns down Mattie as a girlfriend because she is a virgin, she gets Allan to take her to a motel to solve the problem. The motel scene has its quota of gags, but they are more in character. The final scene, in which Mattie, now a television sitcom star, listens to Allan read part of his novel about their relationship, is genuinely touching and within hailing distance of *Annie Hall*. The promotional material for *More Than Friends* suggested it was a thinly disguised autobiography of Reiner and Marshall, but it was based on Mishkin's play and there are considerable differences from their real lives. On the other hand, the feeling for the difficulties of man-woman relationships, although occasionally expressed in obvious gags, comes from observed reality.⁹

Given the nature of the television business, it is not always possible for a writer to get his vision on the screen as literally as he would like. Joel Rogosin produced the 1979 television movie *The Gift*, which was from an autobiographical novel by Pete Hamill. Hamill wrote the script, and the network wanted changes to make the material more dramatic. Hamill made some changes, and then additional ones were made by Rogosin and others. Hamill took his name off the script and used a pseudonym. Rogosin says:

It was very much Pete's, but it wasn't verbatim Pete's, and Pete felt that while we may have lived up to the spirit, we did not live up to the literal words.

Writers like Pete, who have that kind of passion, not that the rest of us don't have [it], but that kind of very personal intense commitment to their work, which reflects them, it's hard for them to deal with the realities [of the business]. It's a business of compromise. The question is, how much do you compromise and in what areas? Because if you are not willing to compromise to some degree or other, you are not going to be working in the business effectively.

Miniseries

Leonard Goldenson, the head of ABC, says in his memoirs that the idea of the American miniseries came about because Marty Starger, the head of network programming, was in London in the early seventies and happened to see some British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) series that told a complete story in a limited number of episodes. Starger suggested ABC might get involved in this kind of programming, which, as Goldenson says, "was a form then unknown in America."¹⁰ It is not clear why ABC had to waste money sending Starger to London to discover the series, since the American commercial networks had already been offered the British miniseries and had turned them down because they were made in black-and-white and the networks insisted on color. The recently reconstituted National Educational Television network, which was now called the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), decided to take a chance on a British miniseries. *The Forsythe Saga*, broadcast

by PBS in the fall of 1969, established both PBS and the miniseries and was the inspiration for American miniseries that followed.

In the early seventies, producer Douglas Cramer and ABC executive Barry Diller approached screenwriter Edward Anhalt to do a long adaptation of Leon Uris's novel *QB VII*. The book tells the stories of Dr. Adam Kelno and Ben Cady, the former a doctor accused by the latter of doing illegal operations in a Nazi concentration camp. The first idea was to show it one hour each night, five nights in a row. As Anhalt said, as he was working on the script, "It's done in the manner of *Forsyte Saga*, the way the BBC did it, but all in one week."¹¹ Then, as Anhalt worked on the screenplay, Cramer and Diller decided they wanted to do it in eight hours rather than five, but ABC decided nobody would watch all eight hours, so it was run at six and one-quarter hours in two parts on successive nights.¹²

Anhalt wrote it differently than the British miniseries. The British series are shown one night a week, one hour at a time, and each hour is written as a complete one-hour piece. Because the American miniseries from *QB VII* on were both subjected to changing lengths and, more importantly, run on succeeding nights, there was no need to write each hour as a single unit.

Anhalt's experience in theatrical films¹³ led him to write the script without worrying about act breaks.¹⁴ He figured there were enough natural breaks in the story where commercials could be inserted. His original approach was to tell the stories of Cady and Kelno by intercutting them, unlike Uris in the novel, who told the story of Kelno first, then Cady, and then the trial. The network executives at first told Anhalt that viewers would not sit through the Kelno material first because they did not know what was coming up.¹⁵ The intercutting did not work at the greater length of the series, and the script returned to Uris's original structure, but with a teaser added at the beginning of each segment that laid out the basic conflict between the two men.

Although *QB VII* was the first planned miniseries of the seventies, *The Blue Knight* was shown first, in November 1973. (*QB VII* was shown in April 1974.) E. Jack Neuman learned he was going on the project in a very Hollywood way. He was walking the picket lines during the Writers Guild strike in the spring of 1973, having a marvelous time listening to Carl Reiner and Hal Kanter make up limericks, when suddenly an unmarked police car drove up and two men "sailed out" of the car. They threw Neuman up against a wall and handcuffed him. One of the men took out a gun, put it to Neuman's head and said, "You're going to write the fucking *Blue Knight*, aren't you, Jack?" It was Neuman's friend and the novel's author, Los Angeles policeman Joseph Wambaugh.

The Blue Knight was produced by Lorimar, which had already signed an agreement with the Guild, so Neuman was able to go to work. Lorimar previously had Rod Serling doing a script of the novel for a four-hour miniseries, but after nine months Serling had not come up with one. Neuman did not

then look at Serling's script, but read it only after he had completed his own. Neuman says, "Rod made every mistake I think I would have made if I'd been in the position he was in. . . . He was trying to think of it one hour at a time." Neuman worked as Anhalt did:

All I wrote was "Fade In" and then four hours later I wrote "Fade Out," and they can split it up any way they want. This is the halfway mark. O.K., and this is the half of the half. I figure if I'm writing it right, at the end of any scene they can make the end of any episode they want. . . . That means that something's happened, something's going to happen, or you're scared to death, or you're interested, you're laughing, or something, but above all you're watching. I never pay any attention to act breaks.

Writing *The Blue Knight* had to be rushed. The first meeting with Lorimar took place in May, and Lorimar had a pay-or-play contract with William Holden for his first television movie. If the film did not start production by the first week of July, they *still* had to pay Holden. Neuman, who had not read the book, got Wambaugh's manuscript and found it a series of vignettes, which Neuman tied together structurally with a single crime and with the love story between Bumper Morgan (Holden) and a college teacher (Lee Remick). He began to write the script, working in a small, windowless office, as the film prepared production. The producer and the director visited Neuman in the mornings and he would describe the settings he would be writing, which meant they were location-scouting without a script, but only from what Neuman told them. He said to them, for example, "We're going to need a hotel. Not second or third class. Let us call it a fifth-class riding academy. Let us call it La Cucaracha. It's got to have some kind of atrium lobby."

Since Holden had been a movie star for over thirty years, Neuman expected problems with him, but Holden's only concern about the script was to make sure the love story was kept from the novel. Neuman says of Holden, "He was the first one on the set and the last one to leave every day."

Miniseries meant that books could be done at greater lengths than they could as feature films, and it even meant that more material than was in the book could be used. *The Company* was a novel by John Ehrlichman, one of Nixon's staff, and was originally bought by Paramount for a theatrical feature. David Rintels wrote the script, but Paramount decided (probably because the success of *All the President's Men* seemed to exhaust the feature possibilities of the story) not to do it as a film but as a television miniseries. Eric Bercovici was brought onto the project by producer Stan Kallis. Bercovici rewrote the Rintels script into the first segment of a miniseries, and notes that the novel contributed "about ninety minutes" of the miniseries. Rintels then worked out the storyline for a miniseries, but the problem as Bercovici remembers it was that "No one quite knew for a long time whether it was going to be three

hours or five hours. Then it was going to be ten hours. When they decided it was going to be twelve hours, they were already shooting when I was writing the last two hours." Rintels and Bercovici shared the miniseries story credit and the teleplay credit for the first and the last two hours, and Bercovici wrote the scripts in between for *Washington: Behind Closed Doors*.

The reason the film kept growing in length is that Bercovici and Rintels arrived in Washington to do their research at just the right time. Bercovici explains, "Everyone felt the need to expiate. They wanted to unburden themselves." The writers brought this back to the meetings with the networks, whose attitude was summed up by executive Brandon Stoddard, who kept saying, "The politics are boring. Let's get into the bedrooms." (Bercovici says that later Stoddard admitted he was wrong and that the politics were "terrific." Now he tells them.) There were constant trade-offs: "O.K., you can have this political scene but we want this bedroom scene."

There were also problems with the legal side of the network, which kept thinking the film was a docudrama and, Bercovici says, "kept asking us to verify scenes we had fabricated." Bercovici and Rintels finally won when the network agreed to have the show billed as "Inspired by" but not "Based upon" the "whole political history of the period." As the Nixon White House tapes have become available, Rintels and Bercovici's tone of paranoid black comedy seems increasingly accurate.

Bercovici not only liked having the length to get deeper into the story and characters, but he loved having Jason Robards as the Nixon equivalent. One day Bercovici was on the set and heard Robards deliver a speech. Bercovici's response was "Who rewrote the speech? He made it a lot better, but who did it?" He went to the script supervisor and read the speech. He realized it was exactly as he had written it. "Jason had said it word for word. But it sure sounded a lot better when he said it than when I wrote it."

Anhalt, Neuman, Bercovici, and Rintels had the advantage of doing the scripts for their miniseries either alone or with a partner. As the miniseries proliferated, different patterns of writing developed. Roy Huggins produced several miniseries for Universal and worked the way he had in series, developing and outlining the story in detail and then letting the writers write it. On *Wheels*, Huggins developed a treatment, then drew lines across the manuscript to show where each of the five two-hour segments were. He then assigned each segment to a different writer, and did a rewrite on the drafts himself to give it a consistent tone. Like the other writers, Huggins did not worry about act breaks and told the writers not to put them in. He says, "If it's good, the act breaks are there. It will break wherever you want it to break. And if it's no good, it doesn't matter."

Huggins felt that Universal was attracted to material that was not especially exciting. He thinks most novels are "loose. They are heavy, cumbersome, cover many years. They are not very good. Some of them are, of course. We

have *War and Peace*, don't we?" He found he had to tighten up the stories, even in the miniseries. He also made changes, although with best-sellers such as *Captains and the Kings*, the changes were limited.

On the 1978–79 miniseries based on James Michener's *Centennial*, the 26 hours were organized and divided up by the producer and writer John Wilder. Wilder wrote several of the episodes himself, and farmed the rest out to Jerry Zeigman and Charles Larson. Wilder told Larson there was no holding back. "If you want to write in snow, write in snow." Helpful advice, since one of Larson's chapters was "The Storm."

Eric Bercovici had a better experience with Pete Hamill than Joel Rogosin had. Bercovici read Hamill's book *Flesh and Blood*, which CBS purchased for a four-hour miniseries. Bercovici thought the book only had enough material for three hours, but knew CBS was committed to four. He talked to Hamill and suggested an additional story line, which Hamill agreed to. Bercovici started writing and ended up with a six-hour script:

Scripts tend to do that. They never get shorter. They always get longer. And I wound up with a six-hour script, which I thought was terrific. I had a meeting at CBS about it where I was defending the six-hour script. I said, "Well, it's six hours. I can't cut it."

They finally said, "Eric, Eric, it's four hours or nothing."

"Oh. Well, if you put it that way . . ." Having spent a few weeks saying I couldn't cut a page out of the script, I then that afternoon cut the script down to four hours.

The trickiest element in *Flesh and Blood* was the incestuous relationship between the boxer and his mother, which everyone was nervous about dealing with. The discussions were very heated. At one meeting at the home of the producer, Gerald Abrams, on "the incest problem," Bercovici opened his briefcase to get a cigar. Everybody in the room froze. When the cigar came out, Abrams said, "Oh, my God, I thought you had a gun."

Flesh and Blood was shot and as it moved toward its 1979 airdate, Donald Wildmon, a minister from Mississippi who in 1977 had formed the National Federation for Decency, orchestrated a protest against the film.¹⁶ The most explicit scene was edited down to a point where Bercovici felt it was simply confusing.¹⁷ Bercovici had already won one round with the network censors, and done it in the usual way. When the character of the boxer first meets his father, Bercovici wanted him to say, "You son-of-a-bitch," but the writer knew "if I just put that one in I'd never get it, so I put four others throughout the script, and I negotiated down and managed to keep the one that was dramatically justifiable."

After wrestling with the networks, Bercovici found it a bit of a relief when in the late seventies he wrote the miniseries *Top of the Hill* about Olympic bobsledders for syndication. Because it was intended to go on at the time of

the 1980 Winter Olympics, there was very little delay, which Bercovici also attributes to the syndication process:

Very unlike a network . . . they decide to make a show. They don't stockpile scripts the way the network does and then decide what to do. They decided to make this show. My recollection is that it was simply a "go" project from the first day. "Hurry up and get it done, fellas." . . . Particularly from a writer's point of view, it's always nice to know that what you are writing is going to be made. I think if you look through the network warehouses you'll find God knows how many unproduced movie-for-television scripts. You go into any executive's office and you're always rather intimidated by the corpses piled up in the corner.

One evening in the early seventies, actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee were having dinner with producer David Wolper and told him about a book a friend of theirs was writing. Wolper thought the book might make a good television movie, but discovered the rights had been optioned by Columbia for a theatrical film. A few weeks later he learned the option had ended. He bought the rights and brought the project to Brandon Stoddard at ABC, who in turn recommended it to Barry Diller and Marty Starger. Starger took the idea to Elton Rule and Leonard Goldenson, who thought it sounded like a good idea. At lunch with Wolper and the author, Stoddard discovered one small problem: Alex Haley had not actually written *Roots* yet.

The project had gotten this far along because Haley was a terrific storyteller with a great story to tell: seven generations of his family, from the time they were brought from Africa to America as slaves. Stoddard admits he "was intrigued with the idea of American slavery from a black's point of view."¹⁸ Fred Silverman, who moved from CBS to ABC after the series was in production, saw the potential problem with it: "Here's twelve hours of a story where the whites are the villains and the blacks are the heroes in a country that is 85 percent white. It doesn't sound like a good idea at first blush."¹⁹ The story and the characters were, however, so compelling that the miniseries overcame the problem.

It did not start out to be twelve hours. The original conception was between five and six hours, but Stoddard kept telling Silverman, "It is so rich. Can we expand it?"²⁰ The writers, primarily William Blinn, who wrote the first three-hour episode, and Ernest Kinoy, were writing behind Haley and even occasionally ahead of him, which made the network executives nervous. When the film was completed at the twelve-hour length, the question was how to run it. Even *QB VII* could fit into two nights. *Rich Man, Poor Man*, which ran twelve hours and was broadcast in 1976, the year before *Roots*, was broadcast on successive weeks over a two-month period. It was Silverman who decided to run *Roots* over eight successive days, and its success established the broadcast pattern for later miniseries. This in turn helped confirm the narrative pattern of not breaking up the miniseries into hour segments as the British had done.

There were some complaints that, except for Haley, none of the writers on *Roots* had been black, so on the sequel, *Roots: The Next Generations* (1979), the producers made an effort to hire black television writers. There were not a lot working steadily in the business to choose from. One of them was Thad Mumford, whose credits included PBS's *Electric Company*, Flip Wilson specials, and sitcoms such as *Good Times* and *All in the Family*.

While Mumford was on *Maude*, his agent got a call from producer Stan Margulies, who wanted Mumford for a segment of *Roots: The Next Generations*. Mumford recalls:

I was terrified of the idea. Flattered, but terrified because *Roots* was more serious, and I in no way felt capable of handling this. And I did everything in the world I could to not do it. I said to Stan, "I have a[nother] job,"

"Well, we'll wait for you."

"I don't feel I can."

"Well, we'll give you all the help we can get." If I had said, "I have cancer," they'd say, "We'll give you an iron lung." They really wanted me to do this thing. That's where I partnered up with Dan [Wilcox], because I was not going to do this by myself. So we wrote an episode [episode five, about Alex Haley's father getting out of Cornell and returning to Palmerstown]. We both had other things, so we would write this at night, and we ended up getting a Writers Guild [Award] nomination for our script, which was more important than an Emmy nomination because it's your peers.

The head writer of the miniseries was a veteran of the original *Roots*, Ernest Kinoy, and he laid out the stories for each episode in what Mumford says was "a very detailed and wonderful way." Their episode was based on only seven pages of the book and Kinoy worked from Haley's notes as well as the book. Mumford and Wilcox got notes from Kinoy on their script, but Mumford knows that Haley read the scripts and thinks some of the notes may have come from Haley via Kinoy. Haley also told them stories, of course. Mumford agrees with everybody else that Haley is "a great storyteller."

The 1980 miniseries *Beulah Land* is not great storytelling, nor did anyone connected with it ever think it might be considered such. Producer David Gerber saw the success of *Roots* and thought *Beulah Land*, based on two novels by Lonnie Coleman, might be "the flip side of *Roots*,"²¹ a romantic Civil War saga of a plantation told from the view of the white people involved. The difficulty of doing such a piece was suggested by the comments of Arthur Unger in the *Christian Science Monitor*: "The trouble with *Beulah Land* is that [it] doesn't know its place. Perhaps it was barely passable as a good old-fashioned summer print 'read' about 10 years ago. But as an electronic mass entertainment . . . liable to insult or mislead Americans of all colors, it quite simply has no place in the television of the 1980's."²²

The writer Gerber hired to write the script was JP Miller, and Unger's comments suggest the problem of trying to get a script from the material. The

novels are basically traditional Civil War romance, and *Roots* had all too recently vividly exposed the inaccuracies of that traditional genre. Miller tried to overcome those problems by working with an historian of the period, Tilden Edelstein. The scenes with the slaves can be defended on grounds of historical accuracy, but they were still deeply offensive to the black actors who read the script and were cast in the film.

Part of the problem was a question of timing. *Roots* had raised the hope of both black actors and their fans, black and white, that as a result of the success of the two miniseries, more, bigger, and better roles would open up on American television. By the time the script of *Beulah Land* was being circulated for casting, the promise of *Roots* was already not being fulfilled. While the script of *Beulah Land* seems merely insensitive and not racist to a white film historian reading it in 1990,²³ black actors in 1979 felt differently. The black actors and others agitated for changes in the script and enough were made that Miller took his name off the credits.

An example of the changes occurs early in the film. In Miller's script, Roscoe, the white overseer of the plantation, comes to whip the young black boy Floyd, who has gotten the young white master into trouble. Floyd's father, Ezra, stands by and watches, afraid of Roscoe. The scene is obviously intended to establish that Roscoe is evil, and it does so very effectively. The scene offended James McEachin, the actor playing Ezra, on the grounds that it made Ezra seem a coward.²⁴ As the scene finally appears in the film, Ezra holds off Roscoe with a hot poker, telling him he will punish Floyd himself by making him sharpen all the knives on the plantation. At the end of the scene, Roscoe just cracks his whip and stalks off. Historically it is unlikely that a slave like Ezra could have gotten away with such behavior without severe punishment, but the appeal of the scene as it stands to contemporary black audiences is understandable.

Whatever historical accuracy there may have been was outside the tone of the kind of story *Beulah Land* was and is. Among its many considerable achievements, *Roots* had made it impossible for the *Beulah Land* lightweight approach to that material to work artistically on film or television ever again.²⁵

POLICE STORY

JP Miller, who has written several scripts for producer David Gerber, thinks that although Gerber is no Fred Coe or Herbert Brodtkin, he is “a brilliant producer” with a “mind full of firecrackers, all ready to go off.” Like many producers, “He doesn’t use three words. He uses three million.” Miller once taped a three-hour conference with Gerber and “couldn’t understand a word of it,” but realized Gerber had still gotten his point across.

Gerber. Gerb. The Gerb. Writers love him. And they hate him. They think he’s full of shit. And they like him because of it. And anybody with those qualities, they can’t *not* talk about, as E. Arthur Kean does in the following aria:

David Gerber is Harry Cohn. There’s more Harry than there is Jerry Wald.¹

When you are in his presence the Gerb is, number one, a brilliant entertainer. He says, “Listen, kid, I’m going to fuck you over, but it’s going to be so good you’re going to thank me for it.” Now that’s his attitude and a lot of the time he pulls it off. He has a very black side. I’ve never really seen it, but a lot of people have told me about it.

The best thing you can do with David is say, “David, fuck you.” And if you do that, whether it’s in those words or in your attitude, he will respect you and you’ll get along. If you’re a doormat, you’re dead with Gerber.

By God, where Gerber’s around, things happen. This is not Aaron Spelling, who sucks his thumb. I don’t mean to knock Aaron. I terribly disagree with his taste. He really is gracious and stylish, whereas Gerber is the Brooklyn street bum that he was. One reason I will always tend to like him is every day you see him beat up [director] Marvin Chomsky. Anybody who can do that isn’t all bad. Marvin should be beat up every day.

He’s got a college degree. I think he’s trying to create his own legend, and he has a lot of fun doing that. I think it’s part of his real enjoyment in the business.

And the writers who really like him and really hate him like him and hate him because he produced *Police Story*, the series that permanently changed how police were portrayed on television.

By 1972 Gerber had spent ten years in television and was now an independent producer at Columbia. He found in the Columbia story files a proposal for a show about a special investigation squad called *Police Story*. What impressed Gerber was that it was not idealizing cops as Jack Webb had done on *Dragnet*. One cop on the squad was just as bad as the killer they were chasing, which was why the proposal had been turned down by all three networks. He met with the author of the proposal, Joseph Wambaugh, whose realistic novels about cops had been best-sellers. The two men got along—a condition that would not last—and Gerber went about trying to sell the idea.²

In a typical Gerber move, he called E. Jack Neuman. Neuman had written and produced an unsold pilot at Fox under Gerber and Neuman had to order him not to talk to the director and editor. Gerber now asked him, “How’d you like to do a great police series?”

Neuman replied, “I’ve done all the cops I want to do.”

“With Joe Wambaugh. He’s anxious to buy you some lunch.” You can understand why Gerber is considered the greatest salesman in Hollywood. Neuman and Wambaugh met and Neuman says Wambaugh “had an idea I’d had for a long time. I want to tell the story of the cop, not the crime. That was the whole trick.” Wambaugh and Neuman went to see Larry White, the appropriate executive at NBC, and pitched the idea for the series. White’s reaction was, “I’ll take it. Now, who do you see in the lead?” Neuman and Wambaugh insisted it was an anthology.³ White resisted at first, then agreed to buy it as an anthology.

Neuman’s idea was that he would write and produce a two-hour movie, and they would do nine two-hour movies each year. He would produce all of them and write one or two of them. Neuman even considered setting several of the films not in Los Angeles but in other cities around the world, although he says now that Gerber never understood that part of the concept.⁴ Gerber, thinking like a producer, realized the show would be easier to produce and sell if it was set in Los Angeles (although the studio, much to Wambaugh’s irritation, kept deleting references to real L.A. police divisions, apparently for legal reasons). This also would give the show a crucial edge in its access to stories of Los Angeles policemen.

Neuman wrote the screenplay for the two-hour movie pilot and went skiing in Switzerland. He soon got a desperation call in Gstaad from Gerber, who said, “You’ve got to come home. The actors won’t come out and do [the script].” Neuman flew home to learn that Gerber, thinking the speeches in the script were too long, had cut them, but in the process cut everything the actors needed to create their characters. Neuman simply gave the actors the original screenplay and told Gerber to stay off the set and away from the actors. After that, Neuman says, “It went fine.” Neuman did not want to produce an hour series, so he did not stay with the show when it went to series.

The two-hour movie was made in January 1973 and the Writers Guild

strike lasted from March to June, during which time no scripts could be prepared, or writers even assigned. The day the strike ended, writers began to get calls from Stan Kallis, co-executive producer with Gerber. Kallis set up a meeting of writers to see the pilot and listen to Gerber, Wambaugh, and Liam "Bill" O'Brien, whom Kallis had picked at Gerber's request as story editor. Art Kean remembers walking into the room and realizing that in addition to the production staff there were "ten of the best writers I know. I was really flattered to be in that company. Sy Salkowitz was there. Bill O'Brien. Jerry Ludwig. Eric Bercovici. Bob Collins." Gerber told them, "We haven't got a word on paper and we're on the air in six weeks."

Salkowitz remembers Wambaugh at that meeting saying, "Play the emotional jeopardy, not the physical jeopardy." Salkowitz says that "crystallized that show for me There were three or four of us who kind of looked at each other, because up to that time nobody could do that. [That's the difference between that] and any other cop show." Ed Waters, a writer and later executive story consultant on the third and fourth seasons of the show, says the idea was later expressed as "the cop works on the case, and the case works on the cop."

Unlike many creators of shows, Wambaugh stayed connected with the show for the full four-year run, although not without fireworks. As early as July 1973, when he read the first set of scripts, he criticized the writing. He often threatened to walk off the show, and both NBC and Columbia wanted him off, but Gerber insisted they keep him,⁵ even though Wambaugh's most ferocious attacks were directed at Gerber. Wambaugh today takes a more benign view of Gerber, saying that "David Gerber deserves a lot of credit for the series, as does Stanley Kallis." As JP Miller says of Gerber, "When he sells a thing, he also knows how to put on the show."

A major Wambaugh contribution to the series was bringing cops in to tell their stories. Wambaugh listened to the stories first. Liam O'Brien, who coordinated the interview process, says that if Wambaugh then

liked the story, he would call me up, and give me a briefing over the phone. I'd say, "O.K., send the guy up," or, "No, that's no good." Either one. If he sent the guy up to the studio, he'd come up about 6:30 or 7 o'clock at night and sit down and tell you the whole story. I would say, "Go home and put that down on paper the best you can. Don't worry about the words, anything. Just put it down so I don't forget it."

Then I had a group of writers, whom I'd worked with on other shows. They came, eagerly, to *Police Story*, and I would sit down with them and give whatever this cop had given us. [Sometimes we'd] have the cop there, so the two of us would cross-examine the cop again. We paid the cop, and paid him well, you know. And we went from there.

The cops were paid \$50 for the story, and every effort was made to hire the cop whose story it was to serve as the technical advisor on that particular

episode. As tech advisor the cop was paid between \$900 and \$1,350 per episode.⁶ E. Arthur Kean says of the cops, "They had their own language. They had their own attitudes. [It gave us] insight. Good writers love it when they find that kind of truth. We jumped all over it, [and] we got it on the air."

The interviews led to the creation of two recurring characters by Sy Salkowitz, Tony Calabrese (played by Tony LoBianco) and Bert Jameson (played by Don Meredith). Salkowitz had lunch with two detectives who handled robbery cases and one of the stories they told that day dealt with their relationship with a junkie who was their informant. Salkowitz put that at the center of his episode "Requiem for an Informant," but he based the bank robbery on several other cases they told him about. The two detectives became the models for Tony and Bert, although he found he could not use the cop's black humor, since it "took away from the importance of the moment." That kind of humor would only come to television later on *Hill Street Blues*. Salkowitz, following the two original cops, made one of them Anglo and one ethnic. The casting department proceeded to cast Don Meredith in the part Salkowitz had written as ethnic, and Tony LoBianco as the Anglo. Salkowitz "put it through my typewriter and switched the dialogue. There are the same lines, but I put it in ethnic." The characters were so popular they were brought back in other episodes.

After the interviews with the cops, the writer would then work out the story, usually in collaboration with Liam O'Brien, whom the writers on *Police Story* describe as close to a saint. Art Kean feels O'Brien respected not only the writer's work, but the writer himself, although Kean admits he could be hard on it too, since, "When you're doing that staff stuff, you just run out of patience. You run out of decency. You just run out of everything. It just grinds you down, so it can happen to anybody. But Bill was great, and I only worked with Bill."

As the stories were developed, the treatments and then the scripts were sent to Wambaugh for comment. As expected, Wambaugh could be hard on the technical accuracy, or lack of it, in the scripts. On the script for "Vice, 24 Hours," Wambaugh wrote to Stan Kallis that vice officers do not carry guns as they did in the script, and he also noted, "He pulls a search warrant out of his hat like a rabbit. . . . You cannot get a warrant for suspicion of being an asshole." Wambaugh summed it up by saying, "I don't want these cops on my police department nor on my television show."⁷ Wambaugh objected not only to technical flaws, but procedural flaws. On "Contract on a Cop" he wrote "DELETE this fucking REPORT TO THE COMMISSIONER [a recent film]-style Mexican standoff where two guys point guns at each other like little kids. In real life, you start jerking the trigger the moment you THINK a guy has a gun."⁸

Wambaugh also complained when he thought writers were getting preachy. On one script he wrote, "More paternalistic, cop propaganda . . . Leave off the Jack Webb stuff about taking care of THEM. You know, *them*, the dumb

civilians? Sounds pretty corny.”⁹ Wambaugh wrote up a list of “cop clichés” that he gave to O’Brien to pass on to the writers. He also kept making suggestions to make the scenes truer to his police experience. On one script he noted, “Do you REALLY think a cop would imply to another cop’s wife that something might be dangerous? He’d lie even if it were, and tell her it’s a piece of cake.”¹⁰ On the other hand, he recognized that sometimes the truth seemed too much. On “Monster Manor” he objected to a grandmother shooting an eleven-year-old full of dope: “I don’t think this works. It’s just too macabre. Once again, never mind that it’s true, it doesn’t *seem* true.”¹¹

For all his critical comments on their scripts, Wambaugh appreciated the writers. Of Robert Collins he wrote, “He just can’t miss. Every Collins script is off-beat, right-on, and sparkling.”¹² He felt the same way about Jerry Ludwig: “What can I say but that it’s another Jerry Ludwig jewel. Jerry and Bob Collins could put me right out of business. With these guys writing all of them, you wouldn’t really need me.” (In that memo he then proceeded to criticize their scripts.)¹³ He was also aware his comments could wound the writers. In notes on a script based on an experience of Wambaugh’s, he told Liam O’Brien and Ed Waters of the writer, “He’s a fine writer and might be tight-jawed about being totally rewritten. Just tell him I’m nuts, ego mad, see myself as Sundance Kid, etc. Tell him *anything* you can think of to keep *his* ego intact.”¹⁴

Wambaugh was very aware that the show critiqued traditional macho attitudes of both cops and other cop shows. Three years after the pilot movie, he recalled discussions about how the film showed “another potentially frightening side to this macho kid stuff wherein you could kill another human being (not in war but on the streets of your city, your neighborhood perhaps), and drink beer, notch your gun, etc.”¹⁵ During the series he objected to Gerber’s calls for more action, as in this comment: “Goddamnit, there’s ENOUGH fucking macho fistfights, etc., in this piece. And this one (Douglas Fairbanks and Cary Grant) is right out of *Gunga Din* but not out of *Police Story*.”¹⁶

He also objected to casting macho types rather than good actors. In one of his more vitriolic notes, he wrote “Is somebody over there fruit for these macho personalities to the extent that they be cast in important roles? . . . I wish the guy(s) responsible for casting he-men instead of qualified actors would hurry up and come out of the goddamn closet instead of acting out his (their) fantasies at the expense of what used to be the best dramatic show on television.”¹⁷ (Wambaugh, looking at these notes fifteen years later, wrote “These letters are proof (80 proof) that booze and correspondence don’t mix.”)

Wambaugh was also aware of the larger social implications of the show. He objected on one script: “Don’t like the inferences that a ‘well-connected’ guy doesn’t do time. Implies a corrupt system and that’s not true. It’s a liberal, easy system, not corrupt.”¹⁸ In an earlier note he wrote: “ONE OF THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS I HAVE IN INTERVIEWS WITH OUT-OF-STATE JOURNALISTS IS CONVINCING THEM THAT COPS DO NOT STEAL OR TAKE GRAFT IN LOS ANGELES AND MOST

OF WESTERN AMERICA. IT'S A BITCH CONVINCING EASTERNERS AND SOUTHERNERS." ¹⁹

While on the L.A. police force, Wambaugh had worked in the predominantly Latino East Los Angeles area, so he wrote some of his most detailed notes on Mark Rodgers's script "Spanish Class." He admitted it was "one of the best things he's done," but "Having said that, I also believe we should perhaps seriously consider not shooting it." He thought that when the script went out for casting there would be complaints from Mexican-American groups. He lists six pages of things he thinks might be considered insulting to them. He writes:

I liked the good fun of the story. I don't believe the barrio is half so wild and wooly, but I could suspend my disbelief for a good rowdy story. My real problem is that I see a charge of malice being leveled at us for the way EVERYONE turns so readily on the Establishment symbols in the story. . . . Am I biased because of my love for the Eastside and the culture? Perhaps. I know I would feel the same way if we made this a ghetto story.

If it were made into a ghetto story, he was sure blacks would object. If it were Irish dockworkers, he would not mind, but "I don't think the blacks and Mexicans can take it yet. Not when it goes this far. They haven't got enough of a middle-class, respectable image as yet to withstand this kind of raucous portrayal of an 'Eastside Saturday Night.'" ²⁰

Most of the excesses in the script were smoothed out and the episode was shot and shown without complaint. The problem with it, as with another Rodgers script two years previously, "The Violent Homecoming," which also deals with the Mexican-American community, is that both scripts have the feeling of having been researched rather than felt. The community is seen from the outside, even though the technical advisor on "Spanish Class" was a Latino. "Spanish Class" is the better of the two, because it does have some of the rowdy quality Wambaugh liked and the acting is much better than in the earlier show.

If *Police Story* was limited in dealing with the multi-cultural elements of Los Angeles, it was also limited in its portrayal of its women characters. The women were seen very much from the male cop's perspective, either as criminals (a hooker in Salkowitz's "Informant" script) or as wives or lovers. The wives on *Police Story*, unlike Rocky King's Mabel twenty years before, at least actually appear, but they are inevitably leaving or threatening to leave. At the end of the classic "The Wyatt Earp Syndrome," which was more accurately entitled "The John Wayne Syndrome," until Wayne threatened to sue, ²¹ the cop's macho behavior has become too much for his wife, and he comes home to find her gone. There are occasional policewomen, such as Barbara Altoon in "Monster Manor," but Altoon is less developed a character than the men, and more of a story function: she gets inadvertently arrested when the "manor"

is being used by Vice as a sting operation for hookers just as she visits one of the cops who lives there. *Police Story* is very much an “old boys’ network” show and that element hurts the show in its portrayal of women.

The “old boy” quality of the show helps it in other ways. At its best, *Police Story* gets inside not only the emotions of the men doing the job, but also the male political structure of the police system, something that no police show had done before, and few have done since. Inevitably in the stories there is some kind of political pressure on the police we are following from other branches of the department. In Ed Waters’s 1975 “Officer Needs Help,” Billy’s captain indicates after Billy’s fourth shooting in recent months he may be doing his job “too good,” and later the department insists Billy see a psychiatrist, which results in his slowing his reaction time in another shooting.

One of the best of the “office politics” *Police Story* episodes is E. Arthur Kean’s 1974 “Incident in a Kill Zone.” Kean kept seeing tapes marked SWAT in Liam O’Brien’s office and asking about them, since SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) teams were not well known at the time. O’Brien kept telling him, “Ah, there’s nothing in that.” Kean finally listened to one of the tapes, a story told by Richard Kelbaugh, who later became a television writer himself. Kean said to O’Brien, “Bill, you’re out of your mind. This stuff is visual, it’s cinematic.” The approach Kean took was: “What would happen if Richard Nixon was running a SWAT outfit?” Kean saw his main character, Sgt. Sherman, as “a [movie] director, a director running a SWAT team. ‘All for me. What do I get out of this?’” Sherman constantly makes questionable calls in the field and his second in command, Yates, usually has to save the situation. Yates’s supervisors support his actions, but Sherman is not only not disciplined, but promoted to lieutenant and given a desk job. Yates comments, “We’re all the time saying the department doesn’t have a sense of humor.”

The writers admired Wambaugh, the authenticity of his work, and the opportunity to work in that vein. The writers generally did not see Wambaugh’s notes, which were passed back to them by O’Brien, who managed to persuade them to change without making it a heavy-handed “Wambaugh wants the following.” Sy Salkowitz did hear directly from Wambaugh once. Salkowitz had written a 90-minute *Police Story* based on the Metro Squad, but the information he had received from the cops he talked to was wrong, and he got a note from Wambaugh saying, “That’s not how the Metro Squad works and they wouldn’t function that way.” Salkowitz remembers, “I had to redo quite a bit because they were so used to me being right all the time they had got complacent and had not sent Joe the first draft.” Because it was supposed to be the final draft they had sent him, Salkowitz had to be paid additional money for another rewrite.

Art Kean’s experiences with Wambaugh were more direct more often. He would often get calls from Wambaugh complaining that “No cop in the world would do what this guy’s doing.”

Kean would say, “Joe, that’s exactly the way the guy who lived through it told it to me.”

“Ah, shit.”

Writers liked *Police Story* because, as an anthology, it was of necessity, in Eric Bercovici’s phrase, “a writer-oriented show.” This meant, for example, the writers could take an interesting character or situation and follow it out without having to worry about continuing characters or plotlines. Sy Salkowitz came across a fingerprint expert, who told Salkowitz about a murderer who left a palm print the expert was able to lift. At that time the police did not automatically take palm prints, but the expert asked them to start on everyone arrested. One day he found a match, got to the jail just before the man was let go, and arrested him for murder.

In Salkowitz’s script “Fingerprint,” the expert is named Charlie, he has been with Latent Prints for eight years, and is thinking about a transfer. He arrives at the jail just *after* the man has been released, so he has to chase him down on foot. Charlie is a little too old and out of shape for this, and the problem is compounded by not having a cop car to bring the man in. He tries to get a cab to take them back to the jail, but the cabbie refuses. Charlie decides he’s better off staying in Latent Prints.

Art Kean explains one of the most important reasons why writers liked writing for *Police Story*, or any other anthology:

You didn’t have any asshole [star] actor to put up with, none of the Jack Lords or the Joe Pennys, impossible people, because they don’t last [on *Police Story*]. They do one show and they behave like an ass, they’re never asked back. And they were banging down the doors to get on *Police Story*.

In my first show, I killed off a leading man at the end of the third act. That’s unheard of. But we could do things like that, which meant we could create genuine suspense. We could tell stories.

One of Kean’s best episodes, the 1974 “A Dangerous Age,” demonstrates his point. It was unusual for a *Police Story* in that it was not based on any particular story from a policeman. The main character, Arch Tatum, an aging cop with suicidal thoughts, is based partially on the character of Kilninsky in Wambaugh’s novel *The New Centurions*, and partly on Wambaugh himself, who struck Kean as self-destructive. After hearing Arch and Vinnie, the ex-cop who runs a bar frequented by cops, talk about a cop who committed suicide, we see Arch investigate a case of a family suffocated from the fumes of a hibachi in a closed space. Later we see Arch shopping and without any expression on his face, he puts a hibachi and charcoal briquets into the shopping basket. Vinnie later saves Arch when he tries to commit suicide. Because this is an anthology show, we do not know, when Arch buys the hibachi, whether he’s actually going to commit suicide or not. And while he survives this attempt, the ending leaves us with the feeling that Vinnie may not save him the next time—which might not be that far in the future.

David Gerber could also be a problem for writers during the editing. Kean wrote an episode called “The Six Foot Stretch” that was shot, but then did not show up on the air. Kean asked O’Brien what the problem was and was told that Gerber was mad because the episode was eight minutes short. Kean said, “It can’t be.”

O’Brien replied, “Well, by the time Gerber got done with it, it was eight minutes short.” Kean had written the script so the film would cut between two teams of detectives, but the show was cut so that each team’s story was told separately. Kean and the episode’s director, Michael O’Herlihy, screened the cut. Kean said, “I wrote this and I don’t understand it.”

O’Herlihy replied, “I shot it and I don’t understand it. Where is all this stuff I did?”

Kean now says, “We did some fighting and we all got together and kind of ganged up on them and they rather reluctantly said, ‘Well, we’ll see what we can do.’ The next thing I knew it was on the air. So some of it got back in, but some of it didn’t.”

Kean says of Gerber’s interest in editing:

Bill [O’Brien] kept saying, “We’ve got to protect this show from Gerber because he fucks everything up.” David does belong to what I call the “butcher block” school of film editing. I shot [directed] a show for David and [producer] Chris Morgan called me and said, “You want to see Gerber’s cut?”

I said, “Dare I?”

He said, “Well, when you see the cafe scene, you’re going to get whiplash.” He [Gerber] says, “It’s gotta have topspin, where’s the topspin, get it over there, get it going, Jesus Christ, where are we?” He gets nervous if you have a scene where two people are saying something that’s important.

And yet, he’s in love with film, and he was passionate about it. I watched [*One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*] with him one evening. Now this is not a Gerber picture; there are no tire squeals or gunshots or any of this stuff. He was saying, “Jesus, this is so well edited.”

I thought, “How does this man know?” He doesn’t know anything about editing, but he did recognize good stuff. I saw then how much he loved film. He loved the making of pictures.

According to Liam O’Brien, one of Gerber’s ideas that irritated Wambaugh the most was Gerber’s insistence on doing potential pilots for other series on *Police Story*. Both *Joe Forrester* and *Police Woman* began as spin-offs from *Police Story*. According to O’Brien, Gerber thought that if you could do *Police Story*, you could do *Police Woman*, which was exactly the kind of show that *Police Story* was trying *not* to be: a traditional star-driven, glamorized view of crimefighting. E. Arthur Kean came up with a Christmas story that fit the show. He says, “It [the series] was a fairy tale, so I wrote a fairy tale,” which Angie Dickinson, the star of the series, told Kean was the best episode they had ever done.

Wambaugh went on to become involved with the series of *The Blue Knight*. Joel Rogosin was the producer of the series the first year and recalls that Wambaugh and the network “wanted two different things.” Wambaugh’s vision was what one network executive describes as “ashcan drama,” meaning that it was sordid by network standards. Rogosin says that it would be “possible to do it today, but not then,” and that the network said, in effect, “Clean it up or we ain’t going to do it.”

Gerber continued to produce other shows, including several crime shows, for which he used several *Police Story* writers. In the early eighties Gerber pitched the idea of a new series on the FBI to ABC, and the network put it on as *Today’s FBI*, at least partially because of what was perceived as the more conservative trend of the times.²² One of Gerber’s producers was Sy Salkowitz, who says the Bureau was “oftentimes was a pain in the ass because they didn’t want to see any warts on their officers.” Coming after the accounts of the FBI’s misdeeds in the Hoover years, such a clean-cut approach was simply not believable. Salkowitz says that he did try to get “more into the nitty-gritty. A little of my experience with *Police Story* rubbed off. I tried to play some of the emotional jeopardy.”

He still had to deal with Gerber and his calls for action. Salkowitz says, “We had a phrase called ‘Gerber’s trashcans.’ He owned a bunch of tin trashcans which he would set up on the curb and then have cars doing chases bump into them and knock them all over hell and make all kinds of noise. Very effective.”

When Salkowitz left *Today’s FBI*, Gerber hired Liam O’Brien and Ed Waters to come in during the last ten weeks to try to save it, but Waters says it was “unsavable.” The problem he found was that there was no characterization and that the dialogue between the main characters was “interchangeable. It was just a bad concept.” When Salkowitz was developing the show, the Bureau wanted it to have a woman agent, since the Bureau was under orders to hire more women. In his research visits to Bureau offices he met “a very good-looking blond young girl who was a full agent. I said to them, ‘Hey, this is terrific, and they said, ‘Yeah. Use these agents.’ ” The problem was that no specific character was created for the woman. The actress cast in the role, Carol Potter, has not (until her recent work in Fox’s *Beverly Hills 90210*) had the success she deserves because of her resemblance to Jane Fonda, but nobody connected with *Today’s FBI* ever thought out what could be done with an FBI agent who looked like Fonda, then still the *bête noire* of the American right.

Liam O’Brien found on *Police Story* that as soon as he developed writers, their reputations (like those who wrote on *The Naked City*) were such that they went, in O’Brien’s phrase, “up the hill” to other series. He then used his talent-spotting abilities to find and develop new writers, such as Michael Mann, who became so good at doing research that even Wambaugh was hesitant to criticize the accuracy of his pieces.²³ Mann went on later to de-

velop *Miami Vice*. John Sacret Young came onto the show as a researcher. He started doing research on one episode and ended up writing it. He was on *Police Story* for a year, then was pulled away by another show. He later co-created *China Beach*.

One show that *Police Story* writers worked on both before and after *Police Story* was its antithesis, *Hawaii 5-0*, which was created by Leonard Freeman, who thought of the show as a “documentary,” according to Eric Bercovici. Art Kean tells of the sort of thing Freeman would like:

You’re on the 25th floor of a highrise. There’s a woman there with a baby in her arms. This ugly looking guy boots the door. He comes in. He slaps the woman around, picks the baby up, throws it off the lanai and says to the woman, “Now, you bitch, you’re going to die.” That is a 5-0. That’s when Lennie would say, “Wow, we’re going to go with this.”

As an earlier quote in this chapter from Kean suggested, writers for *Hawaii 5-0* were not particularly fond of its star, Jack Lord. One day Eric Bercovici was rewriting an episode and ended the big fight scene with the villain knocking McGarrett off the cliff, then looking down and saying, “McGarrett is dead.” He turned in the script: “They got hysterical. Lennie was having a big contractual problem with Jack Lord at the time, and kept threatening him with Steve Forrest. Lennie said, ‘By God, we’ll shoot it the way it is.’ However, the next day they said, ‘Could you give us the real page?’ which I’d already rewritten.” The legendary status of that original last page among television writers explains why writers preferred working on *Police Story*.

LEAR AND MARSHALL

“*T*alent, like gout, sometimes skips two generations.”

That is not the message you want to get in a fortune cookie when you are the son of Carl Reiner, are in your early twenties, and have had only minor success so far as an actor. It was, however, the second time in a year Rob Reiner got that fortune, and he would get it again two years later. No wonder he was wandering down Sunset Boulevard in a daze when he ran into his once and future partner, Phil Mishkin.

Mishkin and Reiner proceeded to put on a stage production called *An Evening of Dirty Plays*. This naturally attracted the attention of television producers, and in 1970 they were brought onto a new show for Andy Griffith called *Headmaster*, about a progressive school in Los Angeles. The producers wanted young writers to deal with what Mishkin calls “real now, happening problems.” Their episode on kids and drugs was creamed by the critics, especially for not being particularly relevant. Mishkin agreed and thought his and Reiner’s episode was “embarrassingly unreal” and that other episodes by older writers were better.

In the summer of 1971, Reiner and Mishkin were brought onto a series starring Shirley MacLaine. Mishkin says he and Reiner, whom “they’d brought in to do all the young, happening, with-it stuff came up with this wonderful story about this old, curmudgeon sidewalk chalk artist and it had not one young person in it—which disappointed everybody.”

Reiner and Mishkin did pick up some worthwhile advice from the avuncular producer of the series, Sheldon Leonard, who told them, “Now a TV show, young men, is like a trip on the freeway from San Diego to Los Angeles. You can get off at a few exits, but you remember your final destination is Los Angeles.” Leonard compared the theater and television audiences: “That [TV] viewing audience is very fickle and they have *schpilkes*¹ in their pants and they can get up and turn off the set. In theater you have a captive audience. In television you’ve got to keep them sitting in that seat.”

At the end of their summer vacation on *Shirley's World*, Reiner and Mishkin returned to their regular job: working on Norman Lear's *All in the Family*.

Norman Lear

Norman Lear broke into television in the early fifties, and with his partner Ed Simmons wrote for Martin and Lewis on *The Colgate Comedy Hour*. In the late sixties Lear read in *Variety* about a new British television show, *Till Death Do Us Part*, which featured a Cockney named Alf Garnett arguing politics with his son-in-law. Lear remembered growing up on just such battles with his father and considered the possibility of an American version of the show.²

Lear did two pilots for the series in 1969, both of which were turned down by ABC. In 1970 he did a third pilot, and having seen some *Headmaster* episodes Reiner and Mishkin had written, asked them to write an episode for the new series. One *Headmaster* episode featured Reiner in an acting role and Lear cast him as the son-in-law.

The premise of the series and the character of Mike allowed Reiner and Mishkin to bring some "kids of the sixties" qualities to the series. The seventh episode, "Now That You Know the Way, Let's Be Strangers," was based on an incident that happened to Mishkin and his wife, Julie, when they were not yet married but were, in his words, "significant othering." They visited Mishkin's sister, who was married and had children, and did not want the unmarried couple sleeping together in the same bedroom. Mishkin thought it hypocritical not to. Reiner and Mishkin pitched the idea to Lear of Mike and Gloria's two unmarried hippie friends spending the night and Archie's reactions. During the first seasons, Reiner and Mishkin would pitch their story ideas only to Lear and did not even have to deal with the show's story editor.

Over the summer of 1971 *All in the Family*, a slow starter in the ratings in the spring, became an enormous hit. Reiner and Mishkin wrote additional episodes. As Mishkin remembers, they did not look at episodes of the British show. "We had a whole bunch of the short precis of [them], but nobody ever used them. They didn't seem to translate in terms of what we eventually wound up doing." The third episode of the second season was their first flashback episode, titled "Flashback—Mike Meets Archie." Mishkin thinks it was director John Rich who suggested doing a flashback of the first meeting, which was the only information they were given.

The first-act "curtain" was a duet/duel of Archie and Mike talking out "God Bless America." As originally written, there was dialogue after they sang, but at the Friday run-through (the show was then a "Wednesday–Tuesday" show, with the first reading Wednesday, Thursday and Friday run-throughs, Monday on-camera rehearsal, and Tuesday dress rehearsal and tap-

ing, so Friday was the first run-through without scripts), Norman Lear fell off his chair laughing and told them the end of the song was the end of the scene. Lear at the time had a medical problem with his lip that made it hurt when he laughed, and Mishkin says, "This is a strange thing for a man dealing with comedy. He'd say, 'Don't make me laugh.'"

From the beginning, *All in the Family* was dealing with subject matter not previously dealt with in American television, at least certainly not in the explicit way this show was doing it. In the second season Mishkin alone wrote an episode about Mike becoming impotent. Just six years before, *Ben Casey* did a show on male impotency in which the subject was never named; as historians Horace Newcomb and Robert S. Alley put it, "Euphemisms alone counted for ten minutes of dialogue."³ The *All in the Family* episode had its share of euphemisms, but they did not count for ten minutes of the dialogue. In trying to explain the problem, Archie says, "Let me put it this way, he's stuck in neutral." The line got a laugh that went on so long it had to be "desweetened" (reduced in length in the editing process). Mishkin would love to take credit for the line, but admits when people compliment him on it that it was in fact ad-libbed by Carroll O'Connor during rehearsals.

Mishkin doesn't think "you were trying to get away with as much as you could" with controversial material, but "you were trying to push the envelope." He adds, "You didn't pre-censor yourself. You'd say, 'Yeah, let's try it. What's the worst thing that can happen?' Norman was the arbiter. If it made him hurt [his lip], you knew you did something good." Lear, like Schlatter on *Laugh-In*, had material put into the scripts for trading purposes with the network censor. Mishkin describes the meetings between Lear and the censors as "almost eyeball to eyeball, Khrushchev and Kennedy."

The British series included a liberal cousin, Maude, whom Lear was dying to get into his show, and he already wanted Beatrice Arthur for the part. For a December 1971 show, Mishkin pitched an idea to Lear of having everybody in the family get sick, which had happened in his family. It was not at first a story, just scenes of people complaining. Mishkin then suggested adding a visiting professor of Mike's to whom Archie could react. A few days later, Mishkin recalls, Lear said to him, "I know what it is. It's Cousin Maude."

Mishkin had already written one draft, and story editors Bernie West, Don Nicholl, and Mickey Ross were all put on the script. Mishkin was not involved in the March 1972 episode that laid out the structure of the series *Maude*. Mishkin says:

I thought I deserved some of that "*Maude* loot" and Norman convinced me that I was young and had a great future and I didn't need to be in the arbitration. He said, "You're not getting anything. The character was already created."

I said, "Yeah, but it was in my show and I did write some of it." He talked me out of it. Oh, sure, I've been eternally grateful to Norman.

Mishkin was by then on staff as a writer, which involved rewriting other scripts as well as developing his own. One such show was “The Blockbuster,” in which Archie decides to sell his house, only to discover the realtor is trying to integrate the neighborhood. It was Lear’s idea originally and, as Mishkin says, Lear wanted to

do it and wanted to get it right. He was constantly having Mickey [Ross] and Bernie [West] and Don [Nicholl] and I rewrite it. It was mainly Mickey and Bernie. There were two lines that Mickey or Bernie said. The night that it was finally shot, Norman waved to us. We were sitting on the side of the stands [where the audience sat] and Mickey or Bernie said, “I think he wants us up in his office to rewrite it again.” And then one of them says, “You know what my idea of hell is? It’s rewriting ‘Blockbuster’ for eternity.”

Reiner and Mishkin’s first flashback episode worked so well that in the third season Lear and/or John Rich suggested they do a two-part episode on Mike and Gloria’s wedding. Reiner and Mishkin got into developing the story of the wedding being on, then off, then on, and discovered that it did not really hold up for a full hour, but by then everybody was committed to a two-parter. Mishkin feels that “Storywise it falls apart, but [has] several of the nicest scenes and the most touching little scene.” The latter was based on an experience of Mishkin’s as a child. He had gone to Boy Scout Camp, gotten homesick, and called his father, who drove up and brought him home. In the episode, Archie reminds Gloria of a similar incident, then says, “I want you to know, if you feel the same way [on the honeymoon], you don’t have to feel ashamed.”

Since Reiner was acting in the series, his writing method with Mishkin changed. Mishkin recalls:

It got to a point where I would do one act, he would do another one. Where I would do the whole rough first draft. He would take it [and work on it]. We would very rarely be in the same room during those days. Whereas the first few things we wrote together, we were always in the same room and I was at the typewriter and he’d be pacing, or if he was writing in longhand, I’d be pacing. But then it got to the point where we’d only do that after we had a draft to work off of.

Phil Mishkin was writing for other shows when Larry Rhine and Mel Tolkin came on *All in the Family* in its sixth season. The writing process on the show had become much more complex. Partly this was because the show had become an institution and, like most institutions had developed its own staff and its own methods. Partly the writing changed because of the difficulty of keeping a continuing series fresh. Tolkin notes, “The show was set, but it was still difficult, because, after five years, most shows start getting tired. Ideas

run thin. Repetition.” To keep it good and fresh, Tolkin found he and the other writers “just worked [our] butt[s] off.”

Ideas still came from Lear and the other staff writers, but the show also depended on ideas and scripts from other writers, although outside scripts, as well as ones developed in-house, were thoroughly rewritten.⁴ The idea was first seen by the producer, Mort Lachman, and then sent up to Lear. If the idea was from someone or some team on the staff, then they were generally given the assignment to do it, although the whole staff may have helped with the development of the idea. The writers then wrote a four- to five-page outline. After the outline was accepted by Lear, the script was written, with “jokes added by other teams,” as Tolkin puts it. There was a final conference with Lear and the writers of the script. Lear improvised at the conference and transcripts of the conference were later provided to the writers, who found that Lear often contradicted himself several times. The writers were encouraged not to follow Lear’s suggestions completely literally, but to use them to provoke their own imaginations.

The show was by this time a “Monday–Saturday” show, with the first readings on Monday morning. The script being done the following week was read, and after lunch there was what Tolkin calls “an immense ripping of the script” by the actors. He remembers, “I never heard such brilliant, intellectual reasoning for changing” material as came from the entire cast. Larry Rhine remembers that after the reading he would watch Carroll O’Connor walking up and down outside eating an apple, and then come back with detailed comments on the script. Rhine says he has not come across any other actor who was as good at making suggestions for changes as O’Connor was. After the script was “ripped to pieces,” in Tolkin’s phrase, the writers of that script were sent off to rewrite it.

Also Monday morning the script being produced that week was read, and in the afternoon it was “put on its feet” in rehearsal. If it was felt the script needed a few more jokes, or if the writers had written in the script “JTC,” meaning “joke to come,” the current script was sent back to its writers. On Tuesday, the script was played before a small group of writers, producers, and agents, and more rewrites came out of that; and on Wednesday there was another run-through for an inside audience, with more rewrites afterwards. On Thursday the show was acted out for the writers, and Thursday night the writing staff stayed late doing revisions as necessary. This included suggestions from the actors and the director. On Friday the show was done on stage with props, and the rewriting was minimal.

By this point in the run of *All in the Family*, the show had gone to two tapings on Saturday before two separate audiences, one taping at about five, another about eight. There was dinner between tapings at what Tolkin remembers as a “long, long table” at which Norman Lear presided. Occasionally lines were changed, but often an actor such as O’Connor would insist the line was good but his own reading was off and rather than change the

line, he would try to improve his reading. Tolkin says of these Saturday sessions, “I don’t recall any panicky changes, just a line did get a laugh or didn’t get a laugh. If a scene doesn’t work, that’s a problem, but by Saturday we’d tried it on audiences so that we were certain the scenes were already working very well.” After the second taping, pickup shots (brief shots of reactions or line readings that were not caught in the first tapings) were done. With all the rewriting, writers hardly recognized some of the scripts, even though their names were on them—not an unusual occurrence in television.

Other Lear Shows

The enormous success of *All in the Family* led to other Lear-produced shows that dealt with social issues in the same kind of high-intensity way. *Maude* was a direct spin-off in 1972 of *All in the Family*, and dealt with Maude involving herself in politics, having an abortion,⁵ and going through menopause. These subjects created difficulties for some of the “with it, happening, now” younger writers, such as Thad Mumford, who was 24 when he started on the show. An older writer asked him, “Why do you want to write this show [*Maude*]? You’re too young. You don’t know how to do this. You have to live a little bit.” Mumford was at the time “really offended” but thinks now the writer was right. Even though Mumford was on the show for parts of two seasons and wrote “some funny things, I was still never a part of the show because there were things to write about that I just really didn’t know how to relate to. Again, I was really getting by on glibness, and that’s not enough when you really want to write with substance.”

Just as Lear spun off *Maude* from *All in the Family*, he spun off *Good Times* from *Maude* in 1974. He tried for some time to develop a series about Maude’s maid, Florida, and her husband and their children. Lear asked Michael Evans, who played Lionel on *All in the Family*, if he had any ideas. Evans and his playwright friend Eric Monte came up with a couple of scripts, then Monte did some scripts himself. Lear asked Allan Manings to read the scripts to see if anything could be done with them. Manings liked the basic idea and wrote a new script based on the characters in the previous scripts. Lear called Manings at 1 A.M. after reading the script and said, “I just have to thank you. This is a wonderful piece of work and we can go right to the floor with this.” Manings says now, “You don’t get that often. Now, fourteen rewrites later, I said to him, ‘Whatever happened to “I love this”?’ He said, ‘Oh, no, no, you must understand. I loved it for what it was going to become.’”

Manings stayed on as producer, with Monte as staff writer. Manings’s idea for the show was “To present an entire black family” (the original title had been *The Black Family*), a family with both a mother and father present. Manings thinks the show was

misunderstood, and that may reflect the way people watch television. People believed that family was on welfare. Maybe it was a white American view of black people, [but] even black people wrote in, "Why must we always see black people who are unemployed?" The reality was, the father was never out of work. He had shitty jobs, as befitted a man with a Mississippi grade school education, but he was continually trying to move forward. I saw the show, and I think Norman agreed, as a show about immigrants. It was my family, coming to America, and a family striving to make life better so the children will not have to go through it.

Manings thinks the show was misunderstood and/or neglected by audiences and critics "because people saw Jimmie [Walker] and not the show." Walker's stardom surprised people connected with the show as much as Edd Byrnes's stardom had to those working on *77 Sunset Strip*. Manings structured the show in the expectation that the younger son, Michael, played by Ralph Carter, would become the spokesman. Manings says,

He is the kid who has grown up out of the Civil Rights Movement, has the courage to say these things. I also said, "America will not accept any militancy coming out of John Amos's mouth. It'll be too threatening." It was really a belief. Not that he hasn't the right to say it. Of course he does, but they ain't going to watch this. That's a threatening black man.

Manings tells what happened:

In looking for the part of J.J., we had great difficulty finding [an actor]. I had seen a comic in New York, Jimmie Walker, and my wife Whitney had said, "That's your boy, young man."

I said, "No, he's a standup comic. He's not an actor." I prefer to work with actors whom I would bend. And she kept saying, "He's your man." Finally I showed Norman a piece of tape of Jimmie on *The Tonight Show* or something, and that was that. Now I was right. He was a comic. We did the first show. He heard the first laugh. He played the audience from there on in. Now when the show was over, I said, "O.K., hell of a nice show, friends. Now we're going to stay and do it without the audience."

They said, "Why?"

I said, "Because I can't edit anything because you're always looking out there." So I said, "I'm going to sit here and when you say the joke looking at the actor, I'm going to go, 'Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.'"

He said, "Oh, I didn't know you wanted singles. I'm sorry I hit homers."

But he took off. I thought the young kid would take off. And he took off.

Manings's idea that the show should be about a complete black family did not survive Jimmie Walker's stardom. John Amos, who played the father, wanted a greater salary increase than the producers and the network were willing to pay, and he was written out of the show in 1976 by having his

character killed off.⁶ Esther Rolle, who played Florida, was unhappy with the idea of J.J. as a role model, and was temporarily written out of the show in 1977.⁷ The net effect was to throw the storylines even more to Walker's J.J.

Manings was also responsible for the most non-Lear of the Lear shows, *One Day at a Time*. Manings's contract with Lear called for him to do a pilot, so Manings wrote up an idea he had been pitching for years: the life of a recently divorced woman. Manings and Lear wrote the first pilot, which was not aired. In it Ann Romano has only one daughter (Mackenzie Phillips), has a woman friend she confides in, is just moving in, and is already a nurse. Neither Lear or Manings wanted the woman to have a profession, but wanted her to try several jobs. There was also a moving man in the pilot who pinches Ann's ass. She tells him, "Do that one more time and you'll be singing soprano."

The man tells his partner, "She loves me."

The partner says, "She just threatened you."

The man replies, "Yeah, but where did she chose?" Lear thought he was too rich a character to lose, and he became Schneider, the building superintendent. Actor Pat Harrington took one look at the detailed description of him in the script and said, "I know this man."

Like *Good Times*, *One Day at a Time* went through changes, with the daughter Julie getting married in 1979 and leaving the series in 1980, Barbara getting married in 1982, and Ann remarrying the following year. Manings thinks "Well-written shows survive these things very easily." He says that in "those first hopeful days" when the show is being developed, he tries to work out where the stories and the characters will be in five years. Sometimes the show does not work out as planned, as happened on this one:

One of the things got lost early on, and [it was] my fault as much as anyone else's. In the pilot the Barbara character, Valerie Bertinelli, has made the boy's basketball team and I wanted to carry that through, as this little, trailblazing girl, but it fell out immediately because she was so adorable that everyone kept saying, "[She's] the prettiest thing that ever happened." She became less of that and more of a pretty girl who is trying to get along, and the [character of the] sister became the more whiny problem.

Not every Lear show was a hit. In 1977, Lear produced a series for syndication called *All That Glitters*, which proposed a role-reversed world in which women were in charge. The show was an "idea comedy," but unlike the best of Lear's shows it found its comedy only in ideas, without the characterization of *All in the Family* and *One Day at a Time*. Richard Powell wrote for the show and says that Lear was not originally supposed to have any input, but "when we started, his input was considerable." Powell thinks that for a variety of reasons Lear was not at his creative best on this show. Mel Tolkin describes Lear at his best:

Demanding, but not difficult. It's difficult when you write your guts out and he writes on top of the script that it's not good. But then he says on another script, "It's wonderful." There are notes on the side of the script in pencil, in his writing, what he needs, what's necessary, where it goes wrong. And his opinions were damned good.

His opinions on *All That Glitters* were not.

Lear's Influence

Norman Lear's shows in the early to mid-seventies accelerated the opening up of American television. There were other contributing factors as well. In 1973 Rick Mittleman wrote for an aborted series based on the 1969 film *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*. The film deals in brilliant comic terms with the changes in sexuality among the upper middle classes. It was quite legitimately rated "R." Mittleman thinks one reason the possibility of a series based on the movie was even considered was because of a change of executives in the television industry. Mittleman found the executives younger, a reason they might have been drawn to such material. The newer executives also tended to make decisions by committee. One way of finding a consensus was to pick already-popular material such as a hit film. The executives tended to be in Programming, however, and the writers and producers still had to deal with Standards and Practices. This conflict between the two branches would only increase over the next decades. The television version of *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* got caught in the squeeze and died after three episodes.

Lear's success with "ethnic" shows led to similar shows. In 1976 Phil Mishkin worked on a show called *Viva Valdez*, about a Latino family in East Los Angeles trying to hold on to its traditional values in a changing world. Mishkin describes the complexities of doing the show:

One of the trickiest problems was to keep the show on the air, to make it homogeneous and yet true to the subject that we were talking about, and those were the problems that for the first time faced me directly. I had nobody else that was telling me [how to do it]. There was no Norman Lear there. I was the main guy there. There were executive producers whom I was trying to tell how to do stuff. And I had a nice group of writers named Sol Weinstein, Harold Albrecht, Bernie Kahn, Earl Barrett.

We wrote some wonderful scripts, and Marcy Carsey, who was an ABC executive at the time [and who later produced *The Cosby Show*], made a comment, "I wonder how scripts that make me laugh out loud when they cross my desk turn into such shit when I see them on the screen?"

One of the problems was that we used a cast of Latino actors who were constantly at odds with us over authenticity. It was one of the great us-against-them fights that I was ever involved in. No matter what show I've ever been involved in, there's always an us-against-them. It's always, "Those writers are giving us

bullshit that we can't say." "Those damned actors can't say our bullshit." But in that case it was also ethnic mix. It seemed to give them the right to say, "You Jewish writers don't know what the hell you're talking about." I think we weren't all Jewish, but I remember somebody said to me, "Write it Jewish and their Latino accents will make it funny and Latin." That was a certain kind of ethnic divisiveness that I didn't hold with.

We also had a problem with Justicia and Nosotros [Latino advocacy groups] constantly saying, "We have to have more Latinos working on the show. We have to be able to see the scripts." And I can understand that. Boy, can I understand that. On the other hand, it made it awful hard to be funny.

We tried to [get some Latino writers for the show]. We tried to break some in. We had some apprentices, but they never worked out. They hadn't come up from the start. Still and all, we were trying to do a comedy. And they were not the people [to write comedy]. It's a profession writing comedy. It's a tough one. Just because a guy is a good writer or a good Latino writer didn't mean that he could do a good Latino comedy.

The audience just didn't buy into that confusion. Maybe they never would have. Maybe it could have been the funniest show in the world and we still never would have gone with an audience because people are just downright unwilling to accept an ethnic mix like that. It's a problem that's not going to be solved until we solve it outside of this.

Mishkin knew the importance of a strong producer like Lear in handling that kind of material. He once worked on *Chico and the Man*, which was produced by James Komack. Mishkin came up with an idea for a show in which Chico finds a statue that he brings back to the garage. The statue starts to bleed and garage business picks up. Komack loved the idea, according to Mishkin, and said, "I will fight tooth and nail for this show." Mishkin says Komack backed down "as soon as he got the first message of any kind that he had a fight on his hands."

The network thought the idea was sacrilegious and made fun of Catholics, but liked the basic idea, which Mishkin compares to "throwing away the baby and keeping the bathwater." Mishkin continues:

You know something? I'm such a whore. I'll do it because I still think there's something in this story. So I researched some Aztec, Mayan imagery and there's one earth mother, who is the equivalent of the Virgin Mary.

I wrote the script, and naturally it did not have the same kind of [impact], tell[ing] the guy to believe in an Incan statue. It took the guts out of it, and they never shot it anyway, because it was a dishonest little story. There are no miracles in that [religion]. I tried to save it. I tried to give it resuscitation, but it's just not the same thing. It's brain dead. And maybe that's my final comment on television: it's brain dead.

Garry Marshall

By 1970 Garry Marshall and his partner Jerry Belson had written hundreds of episodes of television shows. When Paramount decided to make a television

series out of Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple*, the studio asked them to do it, and they became producers as well.⁸ Phil Mishkin wrote for Marshall as well as Lear:

It's as different as Garry Marshall and Norman Lear. It was much more table to [*The Odd Couple*]. The rewriting was done at the table as opposed to notes and then take it upstairs and do [the rewrite]. [For] *All in the Family* I found there was an awful lot of rewrites [from] notes given at the table, but the actual lines pitched out [Mishkin is here using the term "pitched" to mean a line suggested rather than in the more traditional sense of telling a proposed story to a producer or story editor] were not taken down by the secretary, [who] then goes and types it up. With *The Odd Couple* it was definitely done at the table and Alice James, Garry's script assistant [would take down the lines].

I thought that was the best way to do television. You sit around the table with funny people and that includes the stars, in that case, Tony [Randall] and Jack [Klugman]. [Writer] Harvey Miller was there, Garry was there, Jerry Belson was there. Jerry would just come in one day a week, but he's one of the funniest people extant. And Harvey was incredible. So sitting at the table trying to pitch with these people, [you have to be] terrific. Some guys are just not good at that [who] are much more funny, but they just can't get it in there.

Harvey Miller was one of the great pitching guys. That would fool you, make you think that it was funnier than it was because he was so funny. He also had this confidence: "I'm saying it's great." Then the guys would go, "I got it, I got it, I got it." [The actors would] say the line, it stinks. "It's funny, huh?"

That's the way a show gets pitched, and then there's one entity at the table [who] is the man who nods, it's in or out. In that season I worked on *Odd Couple*, it was Harvey. If Garry was ever at the table, Harvey would defer to Garry. Everybody would defer to Garry Marshall. Garry wasn't a great pitcher, but if anybody understands comedy, I think Garry is probably the top. Maybe Robbie [Reiner], Robbie or Garry.

Garry's contribution was knowing the two people out in the audience who were watching the show. He called them Mae and Vern. They lived in Oklahoma. What he would say is, "Mae, come in here. You the writers?" He'd do this thing in a sort of half-Bronx, half-Oklahoma accent. (Garry has this way of talking. I think [comedian] Phil Foster taught them all how to speak. Everybody winds up sitting at the table and talking exactly alike.) He says, "Oscar just said [something]." Garry said, "It's not funny. Mae doesn't think it's funny." And he knew, he knew. Sometimes you'd be surprised. You'd go, "Garry, that's cheap. It's not funny." And all of a sudden, you'd go to show night, and the audience they'd bus in from Farmer's Market [a gathering place for tourists in L.A.] was hysterical at the line, because that was Mae and Vern. So he saw Mae and Vern in these [people], he knew what was right and what wasn't.

Rick Mittleman had similar experiences with Marshall and Belson on the show:

They were very, very creative in the meetings. You'd come in with two-line ideas and they'd go with it. Garry Marshall drove the meetings. Jerry Belson was

more of a kind of sniper. He'd be lounging around, usually in a reclining position. Then when you got into a problem, he'd come up with a solution to the stalemate. He was also strong on the floor in rehearsals, coming up with funny stuff for the actors to do.

Mishkin defines Belson's contribution:

He was the chief cynic. And Jerry made Tony Randall laugh And when I was there, Jerry would come in and his deal was, after he saw the script, if he was bored or tired, [he would say], "It looks good. It looks nice. I'm going. I consulted." Jerry must have come up with some funny lines, but I don't remember him ever struggling.

Unlike the Norman Lear shows, *The Odd Couple* did not deal with controversial material. In "The Hideaway" Oscar finds an Eskimo quarterback, but Felix wants the man to accept a music scholarship, which turns out to be offered to him because the Conservatory needs a token Eskimo. Jerry Belson told how the story changed: "When we started rehearsing the show, it was supposed to be a black kid, but it got so preachy and so un-Odd Coupley, that we changed it to an Eskimo. We thought it couldn't possibly get preachy, trying to compare whites to the Eskimo . . . while we didn't strike a blow for civil rights, we did strike a blow for comedy."⁹

The Odd Couple was a one-camera show during its first season, but in the second season switched to three-camera. Marshall had wanted three-camera from the beginning, but it was only the clout of Randall and Klugman that allowed the change.¹⁰ Belson was reluctant to make the change because he thought it was a more serious show about divorce and thought the one-camera technique caught more of the New York atmosphere. He changed his mind after seeing the show shot three-camera, deciding that the crucial element was the characters and the actors' ability to play those characters directly to the audience.¹¹ Belson recalled later, "Oddly enough, whereas the first dozen shows or so seemed funny on paper, when they aired they didn't seem as funny. When we did some of the later ones in front of a live audience, it started changing things. You begin to write a little broader and get bigger laughs."¹²

A potential problem with the Garry Marshall method of rewriting at the table was the tendency to keep changing the material. Harvey Miller thought there were some scripts that were better in their first draft forms than in their "improved" forms.¹³ Mark Rothman had a chance to prove this when he produced *The New Odd Couple* in 1982, with the roles taken over by an all-black cast. He went back to the original drafts of several of the scripts from the first series and used material from those drafts. He said later, "[The material] worked. The studio audience tells you if it works, and it did."¹⁴ The revised scripts, however, did not reflect a particular black point of view. There

was also a problem because the original scripts were written specifically for Randall and Klugman, and while the new cast was good, they simply brought different qualities to the roles that the old scripts did not take into account.¹⁵

Marshall's biggest hit, *Happy Days*, began as a 1972 episode of *Love American Style* he was not involved with, called "Love and the Happy Days," which starred Ron Howard.¹⁶ As a result of his role, Howard was cast in the film *American Graffiti*, which along with the Broadway success of *Grease*, persuaded ABC that the nostalgia boom for the fifties had begun.¹⁷ Marshall produced a second pilot in which a minor character called The Fonz was pushed more into the story to contrast to Howard's Richie Cunningham, and the show got on the air in 1974.¹⁸ Phil Mishkin wrote an episode for the show called "She Goes All the Way," about a girl with a "reputation" that Richie had helped her get by lying about her. Mishkin says it turned out to be a "fairly explicit subject for television circa 1974" and it was "kind of daring for that show. Not that anybody said that show was going to be relevant. It was going to be a comedy about the fifties." It was a show not about the real fifties, but about the nostalgia industry's vision of the fifties, in which a nice, middle-class family like the Cunninghams would actually *like* a motorcycle rider in a black leather jacket.

In the third season, the writers, according to Marshall

whipped up one [script] about a couple of bimbos from the wrong side of the tracks who the boys date. We were late and I didn't want to take a chance, so I asked Penny [Marshall, his sister, whom he had hired for a recurring role in *The Odd Couple*] and Cindy [Williams], who I knew very well, to play the characters. The first time they were on the show, the camera operator, Sam Rosen, said, "Come here." He showed me a two-shot through the camera of Penny and Cindy standing in their costumes and said, "That's a series."

I always was looking around and saying, "What's not out there?" There were no blue-collar women at all. I said I thought it's time for blue collar and took a shot at it.¹⁹

Marshall had already begun, as Carl Reiner and Sheldon Leonard had before him, to develop writers, and writers into producers. He said later:

I realized that, as "the boss of a sitcom," it was just too hard to turn out one show every week, and that to turn out another sitcom was just suicide. So I started developing writers. . . .

I always took a couple of solid writers who were ready to run a show, and a couple of beginners. And then on every show I always had an older writer, somebody from the old days, who had written for Jack Benny and Bob Hope. The kids would say, "Here's a new idea," and the old-timers would say, "We did that. On Eddie Cantor, we did that."

I took writers who had no phones, they lived in vans. I said, "Who cares how they live, as long as they can write." I had a lot of writers who went through

that period with me. They became very powerful, you had to give them producer work, then you had to give them shows, they were too good to all be on the same show. They had trained well enough to go out on their own. So we started making up shows.²⁰

After *Laverne and Shirley* had been on for two years, Marshall brought in Phil Mishkin to supervise it. The emphasis on the show by this time was not so much on the blue-collar element as on the physical slapstick, and the storylines were created the way Davis and Carroll had created stories for *I Love Lucy*: look for some physical action that can involve the characters, and then build a story from it. One week Mishkin's wife, Julie, came in and pitched an idea about industrial spies. Chris Thompson, one of the producers, said, "Oh, we can do them falling into the beer vat." Mishkin says, "That's how you said yes to a story." He adds, "Then in my season we copped out by having [them] just do a talent show. When in doubt, you did the talent show."

Marshall, because he had so many shows on the air, was not around as much as he had been on *The Odd Couple*. Mishkin remembers one of the few times Marshall came in:

We had our run-through and then our table and the rewrite, sitting around this table in the Paramount conference room. We ordered from Nickodell's or Oblath's, and everybody would be eating. Oh, we ate well. Then, after you finish eating, or while you're eating, you're starting to do your rewrite and your pitching. Garry is the one who started using apprentice writers. Young writers, before they get paid, but they're writers. They're in there pitching. Now I'm the supervising producer of his show, which he doesn't have much to do with anymore, but he comes by the conference room once, and he says, "Phil, I want to talk to you."

"What's the matter?"

He says, "I notice the apprentices are sitting at the table eating with the regular writers. Make them stand up and eat. If they eat standing up, they'll work much harder to become real writers. Marty Nadler didn't have a meal sitting down for a year. Now he's producing." The logic of it was so true.

Now, how do you do that? So I started saying, "Everybody, listen up. It's getting a little crowded around [the table], so we're going to have to start like not having everybody sit here, so who's [it] not going to be? Well, the girls and the script supervisor, they've got to sit there. The writers. They're writing. I guess, boom, boom, boom." One, Jeff Franklin, who was an apprentice during my reign at *Laverne and Shirley*, is now one of the richest men in show business. I can't believe it. I just cannot believe it. On that day I got him up out of his seat so he couldn't finish his meal from Oblath's.

By the time Thad Mumford worked on the Garry Marshall show *Angie* in 1979, Marshall was even less in evidence. Mumford thinks Marshall saw the scripts, but "He was never there. He might have been there [after] we left. 'All those guys gone? O.K., I'm coming over now.' But I met him once."



Jack Benny and his gang could do visual humor, although this take-off on "Our Gang" is not exactly vintage Benny.

It probably did not take *all* of Milton Berle's six writers to come up with the lines on the blackboard.





Lucille Ball doing one of her greatest routines; somewhere off-camera a young Madelyn Davis is upset that Ball is not getting the words *exactly* as they were written.



Your Show of Shows doing what it did best: parodying great movies, in this case *Shane*.

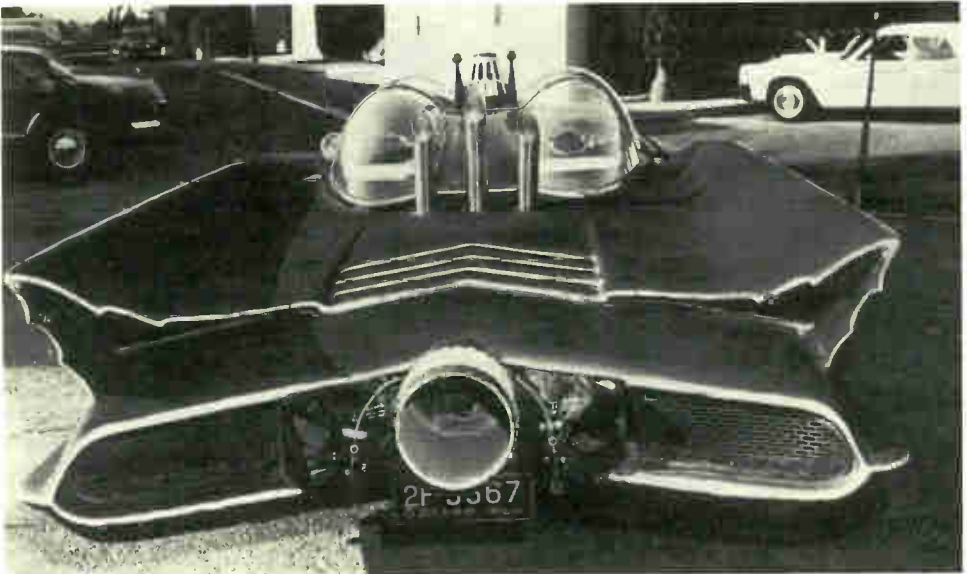
Two Sixties doctors: LEFT: A smiling Dr. Kildare and . . .
RIGHT: . . . a hulking Ben Casey. You do not write the same for both.





Lawyers, part 1: *The Defenders* had intelligent writing, simple sets, and a picture of Lincoln on the wall.

“Gotham reality”: where do you park the Batmobile?

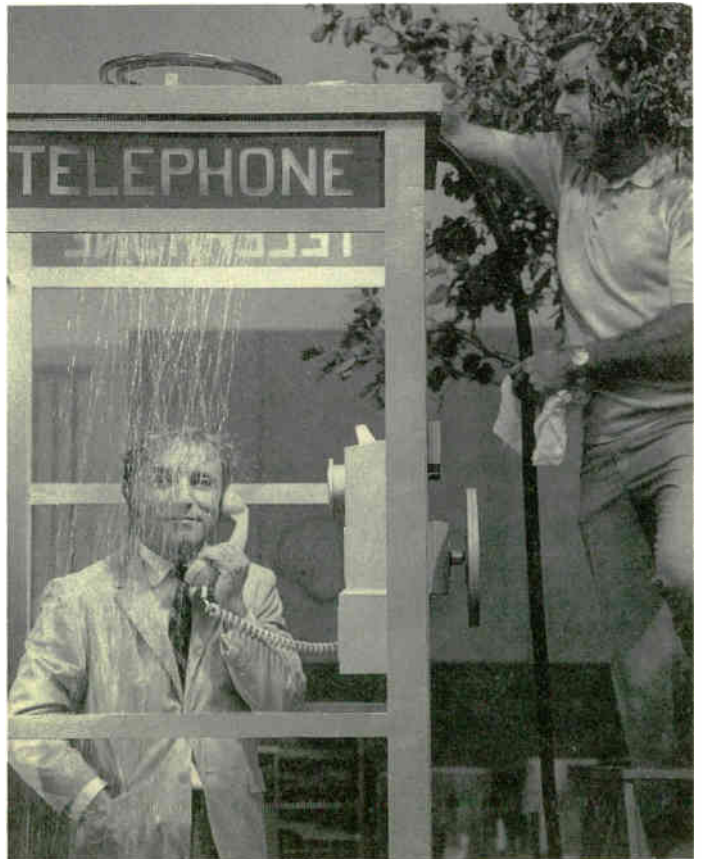




George Burns was right: to do *Mr. Ed* you really have to believe the horse talks.



Actress Theresa Graves, some time between *Laugh-In* (note the chains) and *Get Christie Love!* (note the long-sleeved dress).



Laugh-In kinderspiel:
Bulk orders were left.



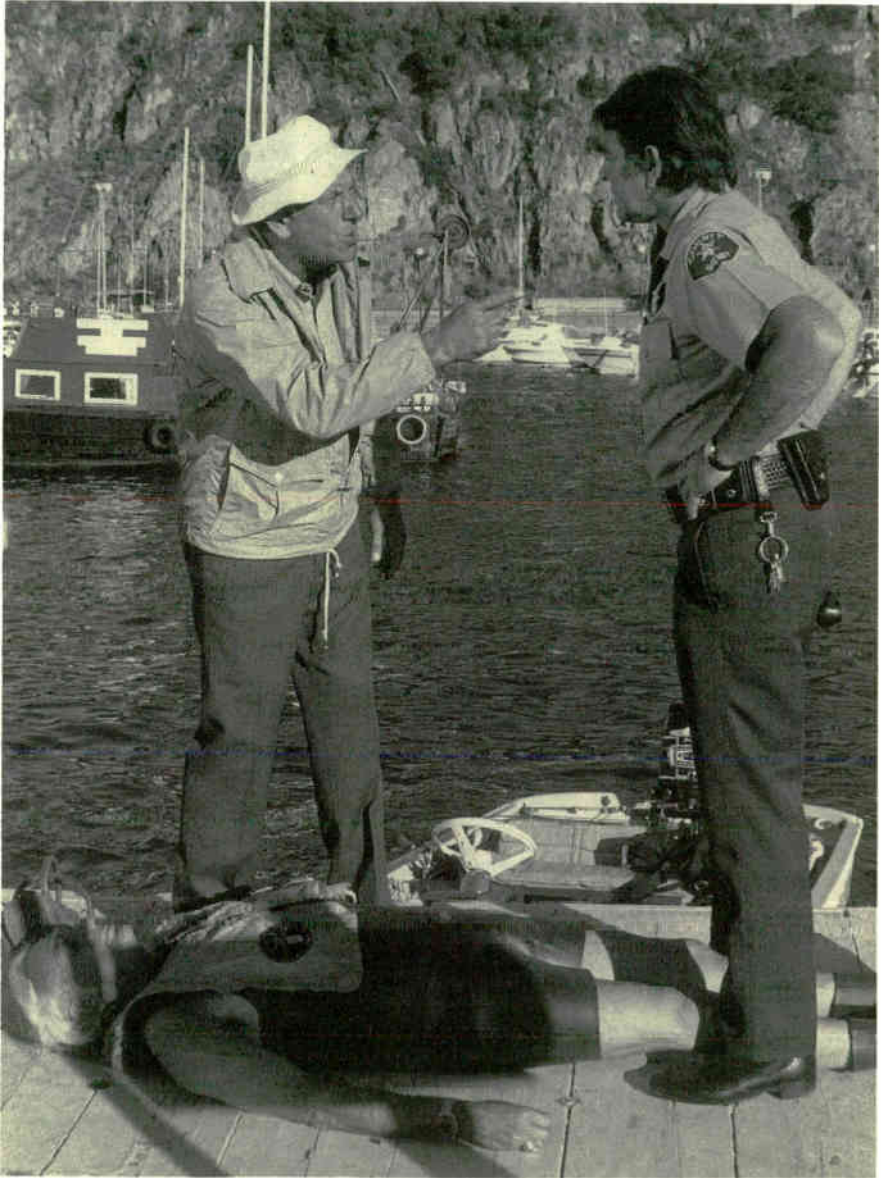
The SCTV crowd: How many characters can these people play?



The M*A*S*H: crowd: Caught for once with their scripts.

M*A*S*H: "The Interview," written by Larry Gelbart and others.





Jack Klugman as Quincy, lecturing somebody as usual; offscreen it was the writers.



Lawyers, part 2: *L.A. Law* had intelligent writing, slightly more elaborate sets, and the USC Trojan Marching Band instead of a picture of Lincoln.



All right, one picture of a writer: What better than Eric Berco-
vici practicing what E. Arthur
Kean calls Bercovici's "You say that
again and you die" look, which he
uses on network executives.

Dr. Kildare not smiling: Richard Chamberlain in *Shogun*.





Hill Street Blues: A world in which Nydorf (Pat Corley, right) could be a coroner.

The reason Sam Whipple (right) is smiling is that he knows what Whoopi Goldberg (left) does not yet: That the network is calling to thank her for saying “bitch” instead of “ho” at the second taping of *Bagdad Cafe*.





Michael and Elliot are paying particular attention to what Miles Drentell is saying because Ken Olin and Timothy Busfield know that *David Clennon* can “cut two diametrically opposed thoughts completely clean” in a single speech.



Dana Delany and the “moral weight” she brought to *China Beach*:
Playing for keeps.

MTM AND M*A*S*H

MTM

Although it was the best thing he ever did for America, with the possible exception of resigning as vice-president, Spiro T. Agnew's contribution to the development of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was minuscule. There were others who did more. Much more.

First, of course, there was Mary Tyler Moore. In April 1969, after some time away from television, she co-starred in the special *Dick Van Dyke and the Other Woman*, which reminded both viewers and executives how good she was. CBS wanted her to appear in a series. Moore's husband, Grant Tinker, got a firm commitment from CBS to thirteen episodes without a pilot, to be developed by Tinker and Moore's production company. The company was called MTM and it was one of a group of independent television production companies (such as Norman Lear's Tandem/TAT) that started and flourished in the seventies. The Federal Communications Commission in 1970 changed the Financial Interest Rule and Syndication Rule so that independent producers would retain the syndication rights and not have to repay the networks profits the producers made on the syndication of their programs.¹ Because the independent companies were smaller and more intimate, they could and did create a more cordial atmosphere for individual artists to work in, ushering in a second Golden Age of television writing.

It is not surprising that Grant Tinker would work out such an effective business and artistic organization. His TV experience included work at advertising agencies, a network, and two major studios.² While at 20th Century-Fox he supervised a show called *Room 222*, a gentle, one-camera comedy about high school. The show, like *Mr. Novak* a few years before, dealt with issues such as prejudice and drugs, but in a less shrill manner than Lear's comedies. The show was created by James L. Brooks, whose previous credits were primarily David L. Wolper documentaries, and it was written and produced by Allan Burns, whose writing credits included *The Munsters*, *He &*

She, and *Love American Style*.³ They had not worked together as a team when Tinker asked them to come up with a show for Moore. All he told them was that she was to be a single woman living in Minneapolis, since he knew that if she were married, the show would invariably be compared to *The Dick Van Dyke Show*.

Brooks and Burns's original idea was that she would be divorced and working as a researcher for a newspaper gossip columnist. Burns later recalled the divorce angle "as being something that was interesting." It was just at the beginning of the women's movement, and, Burns said, "We might not feel it necessary today to explain why a woman at age thirty-one is not married but at that time—curious isn't it how that would change now?—we thought it was necessary to explain."⁴ Burns also realized that most writers in the industry had divorce stories that might be usable for the show.⁵

CBS had other ideas, since this was six years before Lear's *One Day at a Time* on the same network. When Brooks and Burns pitched the idea, the executives were horrified. As Burns was fond of recalling, they were told certain subjects were "forbidden" on the network, among them divorce, Jewish people, people from New York, and mustaches.⁶

This of course is where Spiro Agnew comes in. The focus of the show shifted from the single woman's social to working life, and Burns and Brooks felt that the researcher job could not carry the show, so they looked for other work. In 1969 Agnew's informal function as vice-president was castigating the news media. Brooks had worked at CBS News in New York as his first job in television, and Mary Tyler Moore thinks that Agnew's speeches and discussions of them may have helped Burns and Brooks decide to set *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* in the newsroom of a local television station.⁷

The newsroom setting makes the show more similar to *The Dick Van Dyke Show* than originally intended by picking up the earlier show's connections between the home and the workplace, but like *Room 222* the workplace is more of a family surrogate than on the Van Dyke show. Brooks and Burns also created a backstage family by hiring writers they either knew or had worked with before.⁸ The writers on the Moore show became a series of what Burns calls "interlocking friendships over many years."⁹ Just as Lear and Marshall's organizations expanded to create spin-off shows from *All in the Family*, so did MTM.

The writing process on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and the other MTM comedies was, in Phil Mishkin's word, more "communal" than on the other comedy shows. Whereas on the other shows the writer would discuss the idea in brief terms and then go off and write either the story or even a script, on the Moore show, Mishkin remembers, "The scripts were much more written in the room, even before you sat down to write your story." He met with James L. Brooks and Ed. Weinberger, one of the producers, and worked out the story in detail, then brought back the script.

Mishkin was used to working on the rewriting during the week the show

was done, but on the Moore show, “I remember the first time they read the draft they said it was terrific. They loved it, and then [said], ‘Look, the way we work, we won’t even need a rewrite [from you]. We take it [and do the rewrite] ourselves from here. See you around.’” Mishkin attended the filming, and he says, “They shot a show that barely resembled the script that I gave them. There was a lot of stuff that they kept because a lot of lines that were in my script were lines that we got from the pitching session. It’s nothing that I’ve ever been surprised by, [but] I know a lot of people who work television are continually shocked that their child is molested so radically.”

The Mary Tyler Moore Show was what Grant Tinker called “character comedy,”¹⁰ which is one of the reasons for the changes in the rewriting. Allan Burns thought that the creators of the series knew the characters better and the thrust of the show, and even scripts written by staff writers were heavily rewritten during the rehearsal period.¹¹ Steve Pritzker, one of the early staff writers on the Moore show, felt that having the staff writers involved as they constantly were on the rewrites, the rehearsals, and even the shooting “made a big difference in the nuances” of the characterizations,¹² which was a change from the tradition of the three-camera audience show’s being less subtle than a one-camera show, where, as Pritzker points out, “You just write it and ship it” and the director is more in control.¹³ And in spite of having his “child” molested, Mishkin thinks the Moore show and that kind of writing holds up better than the work on *All in the Family*. He says, “I watch those old *All in the Families* and they were so topical that they don’t seem to have the lasting, universal appeal, except for the ones where he [Archie] is doing his stock figure stuff. But the characters in *Mary Tyler Moore* . . . hold up better.”

Mishkin’s experience writing another MTM show, *Paul Sand in Friends and Lovers* captures how the emphasis was put on character. Mishkin pitched an idea about two guys, one of them the character played by Paul Sand, having a fight over something. What struck Brooks about the idea was how adult men do not back down. As they discussed the scene in which Sand is using his wit to quiet a man talking in a theater, Brooks said, “The more he feels this power of his intellect, the worse it gets for him, because people are laughing. You get the feeling that you could say nothing that’s not funny. And then all of a sudden the reality hits him”—that there is going to be a fight.

For all the concern about character, there was still the desire to be funny. Mishkin recalls the pitch meeting on the same episode:

They were struggling with the ending. Everybody was trying to make the thing be true-to-life. When you’re doing TV, the dirty word is “That’s too sketchy,” meaning it’s not real. (I remember somebody else I was working with said, “You know what sketch is? Sketch is anything that the producer didn’t suggest.”) At one point, struggling to get Paul Sand a way out of this situation, somebody says, “He brings a vicious dog along.”

"Nah, that's sketchy."

He says, "But we all were laughing."

Jim [Brooks] was one of the first ones that said, "Nah, it's sketchy." I remember he just all of a sudden stopped and he goes, "But it's funny. Guys, we're doing a comedy. This made us laugh." We went for the dog.

The writers on the MTM shows were aware of the differences between their shows and Lear's shows. This was especially true of the writers of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Treva Silverman recalled the episode where Mary's parents have come to visit and Mary's mother says to her husband, "Be sure to take your pill," and both Mary and her father reply in unison, "I will." Silverman said:

That almost gets by and then people say, "Did I just hear what I thought I heard?" And very casually we hear that Mary takes the pill. We've exonerated all the women who ask, "Oh, suppose my mother finds out?" A show on CBS about people she loves and respects, here's a woman taking the pill. And that was influential in a very private way, I think.¹⁴

In spite of the efforts of Agnew and his acquaintances to reverse the opening up of American public life, especially as seen on television, the writers of even "softer" shows than Lear's were able to handle subjects American television had not touched before. The emphasis on character made those issues pleasantly acceptable to American audiences. Pleasantly, because the shows were always funny, and filled with the family business atmosphere that mirrored the activities of their creators. Allan Burns attributed at least part of this to working in the three-camera technique, saying,

Doing hour-long one-camera shows and half-hour three-camera shows is an entirely different way of working. One is conducive to the interplay of a family of players and producers and the writers' concept and the other is the reverse So it's not conducive to the same spirit. Enforced sociability went with the three-camera shows.¹⁵

Not entirely. In the late seventies MTM moved into hour shows, and at least in some of them in the eighties, the same kind of "enforced sociability" seemed to exist among the writers, and that, particularly on *Hill Street Blues*, changed American television as much as the MTM shows had in the seventies.

*M*A*S*H*

Battle Circus, a bland 1953 theatrical film about a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, or MASH, unit in the Korean War, was not an artistic success, and

it should be noted (you *will* learn why later) that theater plumbing was not strained by the meager crowds that saw the film.

In the late sixties, Dr. H. Richard Hornberger, a doctor who had served in a MASH unit in Korea, and a co-writer, W. C. Heinz, wrote a novel based on the doctor's experiences. It was called *M*A*S*H* and, after being turned down by seventeen publishers,¹⁶ was published in 1968 under the pseudonym Richard Hooker. Producer Ingo Preminger bought the film rights before publication,¹⁷ and signed former blacklisted screenwriter Ring Lardner, Jr., to adapt the book.

The book is not an easy one to adapt.¹⁸ It is very episodic, with each story self-contained in a single chapter, and with only the surgeons continuing throughout the book. The writing is repetitive, the dialogue bland, and there is very little characterization. The first part of the novel is almost a conventional service comedy, the gore of the operating room coming in only halfway through.

Lardner's screenplay¹⁹ improves on the novel considerably. Lardner takes several incidents from the novel and runs them throughout the script, such as the story of the doctors' Korean houseboy, Ho-Jon. He establishes the operating room gore early in the script and intensifies it as the story continues. Lardner also adds characterization, as with Corporal "Radar" O'Reilly, who is a trick (sensitive hearing) in the novel rather than a character. The script is more intellectually complex than the novel, although it does expand on the novel's tendency to humiliate the characters, specifically in creating the scene not in the novel in which head nurse Major Houlihan is exposed in the shower.

The director Preminger hired was Robert Altman, whose direction of *M*A*S*H* is seriously flawed. One story element demonstrates the problem. In chapter seven, Hooker tells the story of Ho-Jon, the houseboy drafted into the Korean army, who comes back to the unit as a patient. Hawkeye gets the recovered Ho-Jon into his old college. Lardner runs Ho-Jon's story throughout the film, with Ho-Jon returning as a patient in the third quarter of the script. The climactic football game, which in the novel has no motivation, is played to raise money to send Ho-Jon to college. After the game, the doctors learn that Ho-Jon has died while the game was on, and we see his body being taken away as the doctors play cards in the foreground.

Under Altman's direction, only a bit of Ho-Jon as a patient appears in the film, and then much earlier and with no information that Ho-Jon is the patient on the table when the electrical energy fails. Altman's letting the actors play the patient scene so casually meant the scene could not be used in its proper place, because the doctors would seem even more heartless than he has already let them be. The football game then becomes unmotivated in the film, and the impact of Ho-Jon's body being taken away is lost because we cannot identify it. The sloppiness of Altman's direction has left the film much less intense than it should have been with Lardner's script and more the

conventional service comedy it was not supposed to be. The film is one (of unfortunately many, particularly American, films²⁰) that succeeds in spite of its director rather than because of him.

The film of *M*A*S*H* did succeed, grossing a total of \$36,720,000 (on a budget of \$3 million²¹) in film rentals by 1990.²² It is not surprising that it occurred to somebody at 20th Century-Fox that there might be a television series in the material. The studio asked Gene Reynolds, who had produced *Room 222*, to put together a pilot, and he remembered talking the year before with Larry Gelbart about working on something together.

Gelbart wrote for several comedians and eventually for Bob Hope both on radio and then on television.²³ By the time Reynolds talked to him, Gelbart, who by now was writing for stage and screen, was working in London. Reynolds and Gelbart met in London and laid out the story for the pilot, deciding what to keep from the film and what to cut (primarily the third doctor, Duke, on grounds that two, Hawkeye and Trapper John, were enough for a series). Then, Gelbart said, "Gene went back to America and I scribbled it out and sent it to him."²⁴

Gelbart is being modest. What he did was return to the Ho-Jon story from the book and make that a self-contained episode, but with changes. Ho-Jon going into the Korean army was dropped, as was Ho-Jon returning as a patient. In the pilot script Hawkeye and Trapper are trying to raise money so Ho-Jon can go to Hawkeye's college. In Gelbart's script, Hawkeye and Trapper auction off a weekend in Tokyo with Lt. Dish, a beautiful nurse. The party raises \$1,800 for Ho-Jon (who presumably goes off to America, although he appears as a recurring character in the first year of the series). Gelbart said of the pilot, "No one was thinking in terms of a series. We were just thinking of a successful half-hour that we could film and that the network would find attractive enough to schedule."²⁵

The tone of the pilot film is more conventional comedy than the theatrical film, especially in some of the gag lines. On the other hand, Gelbart liked working with the characters, particularly Hawkeye. He said later, "It was special for me because it was the first time that I ever tried writing a character, Hawkeye, who would speak as I do, act as I do—or at least as the idealized I do. After years of writing material that would conform with a performer's image, I was able to try molding one of my own."²⁶

Once the series was picked up, Gelbart turned to his collaborators and said, "Now what do we do?"²⁷ Most television series take several episodes to define themselves (and some get canceled before, or more painfully, just as they find their groove), and this happened with *M*A*S*H*. While the show was set in the Korean War of the fifties, Gelbart said, "We all felt very keenly that inasmuch as an actual war was going on, we owed it to the sensibilities and the sensitivities of an audience to take cognizance of the fact that Americans were really being killed every week."²⁸

They did not want to make a traditional service comedy. The first episode

the series into a much more complicated character. Gelbart, when asked about writing "Hot Lips," said, "The trick in portraying women is to write them blindfolded, to forget they're women. In short, write them as people."³⁶ Nevertheless, Gelbart specifically asked Linda Bloodworth and Mary Kay Place to be the first women writers on the show.³⁷ In the second season, actress Loretta Swit sat down with Bloodworth and Place and discussed Houlihan's entire life for six hours.³⁸ The script that developed out of the meeting, "Hot Lips and Empty Arms," was the first to show Houlihan's unhappiness with her relationship with Frank Burns.³⁹ In the fifth season, Bloodworth (who later would create *Designing Women*) wrote "The Nurses," which is primarily about Houlihan's relationship with the nurses who work for her. By the last seasons, writer Dennis Koenig would admit that writing Houlihan was tricky for him because, not being a woman, "certain things may escape my consciousness."⁴⁰

In the sixth season Major Frank Burns was replaced as well. Neither the writers nor Larry Linville, who played Burns, were happy with him as a continuing character, since he was difficult both to write and to play. Like Blake he was a shallow character and a very obvious target. Greenbaum and Fritzell went to lunch again, this time with David Ogden Stiers, who had been hired as the replacement. They liked the Boston accent he did and they created Charles Emerson Winchester, a much more formidable counterpoint to Hawkeye and B. J. Out of the lunch meeting came Winchester's love of classical music, which provided material for several episodes. Winchester's upper-class status gave Greenbaum and Fritzell a new variation on the mail shows: Winchester does not write letters home, he dictates them into his tape recorder.

The mail, or in Winchester's case the tape, shows performed another service. From the third season on, apprentice writers were hired to come up with story material. The younger writers, whom the older writers referred to as "The Bar Mitzvah Boys," would turn the story material over to the older writers, or in some cases write the scripts themselves. Story bits that did not make an entire show were saved and used in the mail shows. Several of the younger writers went on to write full-time for the show and later have their own series.⁴¹

One writing team that came on in the eighth season did not go through the "Bar Mitzvah Boys" experience. Thad Mumford and Dan Wilcox wrote the episode "Are You Now, Margaret?" as what Mumford calls "a job audition." They were also trying for a staff job on another show, so they ended up having to do "about two-thirds of the [M*A*S*H] script overnight." The script was turned in on Wednesday and the next Monday they got the job. The script won a Writers Guild Award, but as Mumford points out, "The bad thing about doing something like that very well overnight is that this keeps alive the myth that you can do that, and that you come to expect that, Oh, the boys will take care of it.' Even though there are women now, they will call us boys."

shot after the pilot, "Henry—Please Come Home," was much closer than the pilot to conventional sitcom, but it was not shown until the tenth week. Burt Metcalfe, the associate producer, said, "We kind of kept hiding that one, pushing it back because we weren't terribly happy with it."²⁹ The third and fourth episodes come closer to hitting the mix of comedy and war than the second. The third episode, "To Market, to Market," has the doctors selling Henry Blake's desk to buy drugs for the patients, but the mix of comedy and war is not yet handled with the subtlety of later episodes. In the fourth episode, Alan Alda develops a serious edge in his performance as Hawkeye that is not there in previous episodes and this gives the series a moral weight for the rest of its run.

As the first season progressed, changes were made in the recurring characters. Lt. Dish and Spearchucker, a surgeon from the movie, were eventually dropped. Corporal Klinger, who dresses as a WAC to try to get out of the Army, and who was originally written for only a single episode, became a regular to provide what Gelbart called "a color to the show that nothing else was doing—just an absolute piece of madness every week."³⁰ Gelbart and the other writers were also adjusting the characters to the actors. Gelbart said that for the first seasons he was "constantly, literally, on a bicycle back and forth between my office and the sound stage, orchestrating the script for them."³¹

From the beginning, the writers experimented with both form and content. *M*A*S*H* was shot as a one-camera show without an audience and took advantage of the fact. In the pilot, there is a quick montage of shots of Hawkeye in various locations trying to persuade Lt. Dish to go along with the raffle. The pilot episode also includes a voiceover narration by Hawkeye in the form of a letter to his father. Gelbart later used this form in two first season episodes entitled "Dear Dad" and "Dear Dad . . . Again," in which several brief storylines were used in one show, a device used by the writers throughout the series. In an episode called "Sometimes You Hear the Bullet," a friend of Hawkeye's is introduced and later in the episode is killed, which upset the network on the grounds that a show should not kill off characters the audience likes.³²

In the third season of *M*A*S*H*, Jim Fritzell and Everett Greenbaum joined the writing staff. Greenbaum had been put off by the movie's graphic operating-room sequences, but the chance to work with Gelbart was irresistible. He describes Gelbart as having "a mind like quicksilver. Larry is like a supernatural being. His mind is so brilliant, and he raises you up to his level." He also appreciated Gelbart's dealing with the network, recalling the season they started with a script about bedpans. The network censor called and said he did not want to see or hear about bedpans. "Larry's reply was to call up and have him fired, and get a different censor. Instead of getting a different script, he got a different censor. . . . You have clout when you're in the top ten."

At the end of the third season McLean Stevenson, who played Col. Blake,

was written out of the show. As Greenbaum remembers, "McLean made a lot of difficulty for everybody. He kept saying he doesn't want to be one of six, he wants to be one of one, meaning stardom. And we would constantly be writing him out of [an episode of] the show because he had an engagement to perform at Las Vegas where he could cash in." Greenbaum and Fritzell wrote the script for "Abyssinia, Henry," in which Blake is discharged and sent back to the States. They did not write his death in the original script, but Gelbart asked them to do a page with the scene in which Radar O'Reilly reads the notice that Blake's plane has gone down. Gelbart, who directed the episode, kept the final scene from the cast and crew, then gave them a talk before shooting the scene about how in war people are there and then gone. The reading of the message was a surprise to the actors, and their reactions were strong. Greenbaum recalls,

If you remember when they were reading that, one of the people in the room dropped an instrument on the floor and they left that in. I always remember that . . . and Alan [Alda] is such a wonderful actor that you could see the tears coming over his mask. And the nurses too. And the biggest tears of all were McLean Stevenson's from his dressing room. . . .³³

It was simply unheard of to kill off a major character in a comedy. Writer Sy Salkowitz was in one of his occasional administrative jobs at the time as Vice President, Prime Time Television, for 20th Century-Fox—which made *M*A*S*H*—and he told the show's producers he did not think they should do it. He suggested they talk to the network, which they did. Salkowitz suggested to the CBS representative in Los Angeles that "This time, why don't you be the villain and not me?" The CBS man simply passed the buck to New York, which made no decision, and the ending stayed. The response was enormous. Greenbaum estimates that he got 5,000 letters from people, most of whom hated the episode. Greenbaum says that "some [people] like it." For the first daytime syndication runs, Fox cut the scene of the reading of the message, but the episode became so famous that for later syndication runs the ending was restored.³⁴ (Stevenson apparently did not hold Blake's death against Greenbaum and Fritzell. In 1975 he asked them to write a special for him, although when he met them, he said, "I heard one of you died.")

A problem in writing Henry Blake was that he was basically a shallow character, wavering between slightly competent and slightly not. The decision was made to replace him with a stronger counterforce to Hawkeye, a regular army Colonel. In the third season Greenbaum and Fritzell wrote an episode about a crazy general whom Henry Morgan played beautifully. Morgan was now cast as Colonel Sherman Potter. Gelbart had Greenbaum and Fritzell go to lunch with Morgan and "find out everything you can about him." The writers discovered Morgan loved horses, so this was written into Potter's char-

acter in an early episode, "Dear Mildred." The episode used the letter form again, this time to explore Potter and his attitudes. Greenbaum

The advantage is that you don't have to tell a story. The harder script is working out the story. It's sometimes easier to tell six little or four little stories, than to tell a whole beginning, middle, and a whole script A lot of ideas can't work into a story, and this use them.

Blake was not the only character missing at the beginning season. Wayne Rogers, who played Trapper John, left the show. Gelbart and his staff were just as creative in replacing him. Hawkeye were similar, so Trapper's replacement was B. J. Hunnicutt. Unlike Hawkeye, he was married, and not only married but happily so. Greenbaum and Fritzell had never seen the actor Mike Farrell before them, "This actor is an open-faced American sandwich. . . . He is as open, honest, Midwestern."

Larry Gelbart's final episode came from a suggestion by Greenbaum who was inspired by an Edward R. Murrow Korean War documentary in which Murrow asked soldiers what they thought of the war. Greenbaum wrote the show by writing questions newsman Cleve Roberts asked the cast replied in character, and the show was cut together from the episode. Gelbart said of the episode,

To me it said, in a way I had never been able to express, that I had work on the show because I couldn't improve on that The show is that it says, "Written by Larry Gelbart," whereas, in fact, it was written by everyone, Roberts and whoever else was there. The shows that do not say "Written by Larry Gelbart," that are totally written by me, so maybe there is a little TV god who sits somewhere and figures out the credits.³⁵

Sy Salkowitz recalls Gelbart's departure:

Gelbart came into my office and said, "I can't stay." I went and shut my door and said, "You're not getting of here sign [a contract]." Larry said to me, "You're a writer. I'm going to tell you I can't stay episode of *M*A*S*H*." I said, "I understand." So Larry left.

In addition to adding new characters of more depth, the writers explored the regular characters in greater depth. Margaret Houlihan moved away from the caricature she had been in the movie and the

Mumford and Wilcox often worked from the research that had been developed over the life of the series. "Depressing News," in which Hawkeye receives 500,000 tongue depressors instead of 5,000, came out of research, as did "A War for All Seasons," which showed a whole year of the war in a curious way. Mumford recalls

There were certain things that we got in research about how important the Sears Roebuck catalogue was. It seems strange that you could, in the middle of a war, order things from a catalog and actually get them there. So that was one of the themes, about how the catalogue became very helpful, even medically. There were certain utensils necessary to build a kidney dialysis machine that had come from the catalogue.

Mumford and Wilcox also did an episode featuring the recurring character of Sidney Freedman, an Army psychiatrist. The work on the character "had been done . . . before," by Gelbart, Burt Prelutsky (who wrote the first two Freedman shows), and Alan Alda (who wrote two others). Mumford describes the character as "a very odd person in the mix of larger-than-life characters whose essences were based on the tensions which were produced by war. It was a wonderful idea to have a man sit back and just look at them and," Mumford says, stroke his chin.

In the tenth season Mumford and Wilcox got promoted to producer status, which Mumford casually describes as "just a raise. It's for your next job," i.e., enables you to go into your next job at a higher level than you came into this one. Several of the writers were also producers, and Mumford says, "By that point we had worked together so long and so well that people's opinions sort of had the same weight."

As it must to all television series, the end came to *M*A*S*H*. Because of the popularity of the show, a final episode was written that eventually grew to a two-and-a-half-hour running time. That Mumford tells how it developed:

First it was to be written by two writers, Elias Davis and David Pollock, who were very much the story editors on the show. Then we all got pissed off because we thought this was going to be very historic. What ended up, I think, hurting the piece [was that] they bowed to our requests and our concerns and made us all part of it. Alan [Alda, who was one of the writers and the director] was the person who was the constant, and we all spent time with Alan.

The division of labor was not, "You write one scene here." We would write a certain number of pages. It was like a relay. You pick up from page 22 and you go to page 35, and I know that in the end, even though there are moments in the script that are very good and scenes that I think we're all proud of, it could have been better if one person or two people had written it. It would have hurt egos, but I think it suffered from the attempt to acknowledge all of our egos.

There are excellent elements in the show. Hawkeye's breakdown and the eventual revelation of the causes of it are well developed, as is the storyline of Winchester teaching a group of Chinese musicians Mozart. The show is too long, and it may be the writers had been too used to working in the half hour format. Several of the storylines, while they might have fit into a half-hour episode, seem extended at two-and-a-half hours. A bigger problem is that the mixture of the comedy and the drama—one of the strengths of the series—is overbalanced to the dramatic and the sentimental.

Twentieth Century-Fox was making too much money off of *M*A*S*H* to let it die a natural death.⁴² After Trapper John was written out of the series, the studio and CBS developed a series about the character. At the suggestion of its writer-producer Don Brinkley, the show dealt with Trapper thirty years later, since Brinkley felt the immediate post-Korean War time was "a very dull era. It was civilian medicine. We are losing the color of the war, the excitement of the war." When *M*A*S*H* ended its run, Larry Gelbart came back and developed *AfterMash*, a 1983–84 series about Col. Potter, Klinger and Father Mulcahy at a veteran's hospital. Everett Greenbaum wrote for the series and discovered Brinkley was right: "You lost the straight line. You lost the war. The urgency was gone." The show lasted 28 episodes.

Fox tried again in 1984 with *W*A*L*T*E*R*, a spinoff featuring Radar O'Reilly as a cop. The studio at first thought of making Radar a teacher and the show a cross between *M*A*S*H* and *Mr. Peepers*. Greenbaum worked on that one as well: "At first they [the studio] started thinking properly of what kind of person he should be in civilian life. He could have been a wonderful teacher. Then the studio wanted him to be a policeman so they could do another cop show. Their minds are on tracks that do not change."

The spin-offs were disasters, with the exception of *Trapper John, M.D.*, which became more of a conventional contemporary medical series as it continued. None of the spin-offs managed to recreate the unique world of *M*A*S*H*. Like the best of American series television, *M*A*S*H* created a world of its own, full of compelling characters, both one-shot and recurring. The characters, as the writers developed them, grew on the audience in ways that only characters in a TV series can, segment by segment over a long period of time.

It is not surprising that the final episode of *M*A*S*H*, "Goodbye, Farewell and Amen," drew high ratings. Ratings, however, can only tell that sets were tuned in. It takes a different form of ratings to show how much the audience was concentrating on the final episode. In New York City, the show ran until 11 P.M. In the few minutes after 11, the water flow in Water Mains One and Two increased by a total of 320 million gallons, which Department of Environmental Protection engineers estimated meant that in those minutes one million people were flushing their toilets.⁴³

CORONERS AND OTHER SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES PROFESSIONALS

*I*t was not surprising that CBS came to Don Brinkley in the late seventies to create a show around the character of Trapper John. From 1969 to 1976, Brinkley wrote and produced what was until then the longest-running medical show in television history, *Medical Center*. *Medical Center* was very much in the tradition of the earlier medical shows, where everything was, in Brinkley's words, "clean and perfect" and the doctors were never wrong. Also, like the earlier shows, it treated controversial material, such as an episode about a transsexual, over which the network people were, Brinkley says, "fighting out one point here, one point there, one thing here, one thing there, one cautionary statement here, and so forth." Brinkley had the same kind of experiences on *Trapper John M.D.*

Since *Trapper John M.D.* was developed out of *M*A*S*H*, Brinkley assumed it would be rowdier than *Medical Center*:

The pilot script and the pilot film actually were much wilder than the show itself became. They wanted it as close to the *M*A*S*H* quality as we could get in its own format. And as soon as it hit the air, they started saying, "Let's tone it down, let's tone it down. Let's make it a little more like *Medical Center*," which is what we didn't want to do. [We wanted it to be] wilder and crazier and brighter and more irreverent. We managed to maintain most of it, but some of the wildness was gone. It was just eroded away. They had a tendency to do that: Buy something, then as soon as it gets on the air, change it. They feel more comfortable with it that way.

The characters were certainly different from those on *Medical Center*. Brinkley suggested doing Trapper thirty years later: "He had been the maverick in his youth, [and] now he was the chief surgeon, representing the establishment, and along comes a kid right out of Vietnam, who's just like he was

when he was in Korea, who was the Greg Harrison character [Gonzo Gates]. They [the network] loved that." But Trapper John was not a conventional establishment figure. He was, for example, divorced, and as Brinkley puts it, he could not make either his marriage or his divorce work. The network thought audiences would not believe he was a good doctor if he was divorced. Audiences loved it, and the shows with his ex-wife had some of the highest ratings of the series.

There were limitations on what could be done with Trapper's character. Partly this was the tradition that leading characters of a series do not change. Partly it was the difficulty of dealing with Pernell Roberts, who played Trapper. He complained a lot, saying, "This script is a piece of shit." Brinkley invited him to sit in on the story conferences, but he never showed up.

The writers were therefore more willing to develop the other characters. Dr. Stanley Riverside II started out as the typical hospital bureaucrat, Trapper's antagonist, but Brinkley says that actor Charles Siebert was so good at getting inside Riverside that the writers found they wanted to develop his character, and over the course of the series he fell in love, got married and had a child.

Don Brinkley wanted *Trapper John M.D.* to be darker and grittier, but both the network and his partner resisted and Brinkley did not have the kind of clout that Gelbart developed on *M*A*S*H*. He and the series were still able to do strong shows about contemporary issues. He recalls a show about Physicians for Nuclear Responsibility, a group that called for banning nuclear weapons, "a damned good script" written by Deborah Zoe Dawson and Victoria Johns. The network insisted they show the other side—to which Brinkley replied, "Pro-nuclear attack? You want to be in favor of it?" The network suggested they show the government was trying to do something, so Brinkley ended up quoting "whoever was in charge of civil defense at that time here in L.A. He was asked in one interview, 'What about the panic situation?' He said, 'Panic is an element we do not recognize.'" The network said that made them "look like horse's asses."

Brinkley replied, "Well, they are. This is a quote. I'm giving you an absolute direct quote from one of these guys." Brinkley says, "So it went around and around and around and finally we got the show through, but it was a long two weeks, I'll tell you: phone calls, bells, whistles."

Sy Salkowitz had similar experiences on a slightly earlier medical show he worked on, *The Doctors* (1969–73), in which the medical teams worked with what was called "space age medicine." The writers were using the subject to press for more adventurous material. Salkowitz says of the show, the changes in medical shows, and the changes in television in general:

One, most importantly, was that the audience was getting more and more and more sophisticated, and more demanding. The second was, my own stature, if

you will, as a writer was ascending and therefore I could push certain stories that I could not have pushed ten years before, because I had more muscle now.

The producers knew that if the ratings didn't stay up, their shows were going to get canceled quicker than quicker, because that was starting to happen. So they were also pressing the boundary lines, if you will. The program people at the networks started pushing on the limitations that they had before, and they were always in constant battle with the censor. The censor was an anchor and they were the sail, and it was always that strain.

Salkowitz compares it to the audience for the moon landings of the period, noting that the television audience decreased with each successive landing:

And that's how our audience is. They say, "We've been there already. Now show me Mars." So you keep pushing against it. . . .

Now writers themselves don't understand that they themselves are pushing and shoving, because from the good writers there is always something that the censor or somebody says you can't do. In almost every script, somebody says, "Oh, we don't want to talk about that." But the good writers are always pushing against the walls that hem them in. The bad writers [just say] "Where do you want the comma?"

Producers don't like writers like that. I was privy to a conversation between a couple of producers about another writer. One of them said, "There's no excitement working with him. He asks you where you want the comma." That's the phrase. And I've never forgotten that. They self-censor as they go through that script. They hand you a script, totally undramatic, but absolutely nothing wrong with it. The censor loves it.

Quincy, M.E.

When Lou Shaw was freelancing, he would spend several hours every day coming up with ideas for series. He would write them up and, no matter how "half-assed" Shaw thought his own ideas, he would register them with the Writers Guild of America, west (the guild keeps a record of when and by whom material was created). One of them, in the mid-seventies, was about a coroner he called Quince. Shaw remembers, "The whole idea struck because at that time medical shows were very popular. Murder shows were very popular. I said, 'What if you had a medical detective?' " He decided on the name Quince because "K's were very much in fashion at the time: *Kolchak*, *Kojak*. I said, 'I don't want to use another K.' "

And nothing happened. Then Shaw went to work at Universal, writing for such shows as *McCloud* and *Columbo*. One day he was talking to Glen Larson, the producer of several shows at Universal. Larson told him, "Boy, they are looking for another detective show on the wheel [*NBC Mystery Movie*, which included *McCloud* and *Columbo*]."

Shaw said, "I've got a great one. It's about a coroner called Quincy." He told the idea to Larson, who said he could sell it to Universal in five minutes. Shaw, who wanted his own show, says, "He put out his hand. 'Fifty-fifty partner all the way.' I said, 'You got a deal.' He got all the way to the door and he stopped like Columbo and turned around and he said, 'Quince? Sounds like jam. What would you think if we called it *Quincy*?' I said, 'Glen, I knew you'd make a contribution.'" Larson came back about an hour later and said the studio had agreed to make a two-hour pilot. The executives felt there was no way to persuade the network (Universal's shows were done almost exclusively on NBC at the time) without a pilot, so the studio would finance the pilot as "inventory," i.e., without any network financing.

The script was written but then got hung up on casting. As written, Quincy was a young, fairly hip coroner, and the original choices were actors like Anthony Franciosa or Robert Wagner, but nothing happened. Then Shaw heard that the black actor James Earl Jones was interested. He spent a day with Jones and by the end of the day he was wildly excited about the possibility of Jones doing the part. Shaw went into the office of an executive at the studio and told him Jones was interested. The executive said, "Let me ask you something, Lou. This beautiful blonde is dead. And James Earl Jones puts on the gloves and goes in alone to do an autopsy on the blond body. I don't think that would work, do you?"

Shaw, who has dealt with other industry executives whom he thinks were bigots, says of this executive, "He's not a bigot. He's so far from being that. He was being a hardnose" about what an American TV audience in 1976, the year before *Roots*, would accept. Shaw and the executive were probably right, but wouldn't Jones have been wonderful as Quincy? (As an indication of the changes in American life, consider that when Jones starred in the 1990 series *Gabriel's Fire*, the series was at first shot in half-shadows, but research showed that audiences disliked the style and wanted to *see* the characters.¹)

Jack Klugman had just finished *The Odd Couple* and every studio and network was trying to get him for another show. He read the Quincy script and met with Shaw and Larson. According to Shaw, Klugman thought the script was "fabulous," but wondered "if those girls would go for a balding, fat, middle-aged Jew like me." Shaw realized they had given him the "hip" Quincy script. Klugman told them he did not think the script was for him. Shaw persuaded Larson that Klugman would be "spectacular" in the part and they rewrote the script. With Klugman attached, Universal got a commitment from NBC for a firm six episodes to air.

Shaw had his own show, but he also had Klugman. At the first meeting on the first show, Klugman praised Shaw, hugged him, and gave him "wet kisses." Shaw told Universal executive Frank Price about this, and Price said, "Lou, wait 'til the second show." Shaw says, "Second show, Klugman started throwing out scripts and firing people." It was up to Shaw to deal with Klug-

man, because Klugman disliked Larson from the beginning. Klugman respected Shaw, but they still had what Shaw calls “creative fights.” Shaw just

did not want to stay and face it. It was too hard, too bitter, too angry. . . . There was no way of dealing with it because he’d scream and I’d scream. He’d say, “I could go up there to the Tower and have you fired right now.”

I said, “Well, until you do, I’m the producer. Why don’t you try acting instead of producing. You’re not doing too well in the [producing] department.” We’d have conversations like that. He was just out to get rid of anybody who would get credit.

Shaw’s Quincy was intended to be

a humanitarian who solved murders medically by the sheer brilliance of his medical skills. That to me was the unique franchise of *Quincy*, and I think it went away from that. It got a little preachy, it got a lot of other things, that I didn’t like particularly, but Jack had this wonderful charismatic ability to carry the show. But I felt it went away from that kind of medical detective that I first created.

Shaw says that the show “would have failed without him. I think Klugman was the show. I feel I made my contributions. Obviously, we all did, Glen and everybody, but Klugman in his own way was fighting for an integrity that he felt the show didn’t have. I disagree with that.” Shaw and Klugman still keep in touch, but Shaw says, “I was happy not to work with him after that.”

The show still needed writers. In 1978 Aubrey Solomon and his partner Steve Greenberg did a treatment for a miniseries that impressed Klugman enough to call them to pitch some story areas for *Quincy*. One led to a teleplay, and that in turn led to a rewrite on another script. They found that Klugman was in effect the producer of the show. Solomon recalls:

No doubt about it. When we got there, he had set up a unit that was totally without any supervision from Standards and Practices or from the studio itself. That was a unique situation. He had fought and screamed and probably thrown so many fits in the first year that he’d won that freedom. We were fortunate to come in after that struggle had been waged. We were no part of it.

Because of Klugman’s clout, Solomon says they never had any interference on any subject matter they wanted to do,

but it was always very funny to send scripts to Standards and Practices and get back virtually no suggestions. And even when we did get them back, we would toss them in the garbage. With impunity. They would send us little things. I

remember we used an expression, “chinks in the armor,” and they somehow thought that was offensive and said, “Take out ‘chinks.’”

Occasionally we would throw things into the script just to give them something to complain about. We were doing a show about V.D. and Steve put something in about “The Pussy Patrol” and everybody knew that was going to get a little “x.” So we would throw them a few scraps to get upset about, knowing full well they would cut them.

The writers worked out storylines with Klugman, who was, according to Solomon, “the ultimate decision maker in terms of story content.” This would also lead to rewriting on the set:

Very often he would be sitting in the bungalow or his trailer between scenes and he would say, “The character says something like this,” and he’d go into this tirade, and we would just take our tape recorders and fashion something out of that. On the V.D. show, on location, we were chauffeured around in a limousine trying to find a [copy] machine to [copy] our handwritten scene.

Solomon adds,

The downside of it was there was no one who could say to him, “This is a little over the top.” Generally, he improved everything we did. Sometimes he went a little too far. But largely the success of the show was due to his input, and his ability to know within himself what was right for the show and the character. And if he came off as foaming at the mouth too often, that was his choice.

Generally he tightened the stories. He had a terrific story sense, and a good sense of mystery. A good feeling for what is an interesting crime, and the motives behind the crimes. All this input helped us.

I think his strengths largely outweighed his weaknesses. He was open. He would listen to suggestions. But my recollection is that sometimes he would overdo things.

Because Klugman was impressed with their work, Solomon and Greenberg were asked to become story editors for the show, which meant dealing with other writers. Klugman criticized established television writers in interviews, and this made it difficult for Solomon and Greenberg to get “quality writers,” who simply did not want to put up with the actor’s behavior. Most of the writers Solomon and Greenberg dealt with were younger, more inexperienced writers, and most of the shows were written by the staff writers. Solomon estimates that he and Greenberg wrote about nine shows a year, and the other story editor, Robert Crais, did four or five, and only a few outside assignments were needed to make up the 22 shows. Solomon says they “found that the material we were getting was not sufficient to develop the stories the way Jack wanted them. Because it was the type of show that, unless you were on the inside, you really didn’t have a good feeling for what Jack wanted.” He further

notes that this has become the pattern, since most series in the eighties and later “discovered that unless you have in-house writers, you are going to do a lot of rewriting. And as result, most shows now have six producers, who are all former writers, and they write all the shows.”

Lou Shaw felt that the concept for the series was virtually unlimited and could have continued for twenty years because there was “an endless source of material” in the medical detective work a coroner does. Aubrey Solomon, who wrote off and on for the show for three seasons, is not so sure it could have lasted. When he and his partner came on the show in its second season of one-hour episodes [its first season had been 90- and 120-minute episodes to fit the “wheel” concept], the development of ideas was relatively easy. The story ideas came from research in articles in newspapers and magazines. Their first episode, which hooked Klugman, was based on a piece Greenberg had read about a man who developed a “Death System” for the CIA using snake venom, and it became the kind of medical detective story that Shaw envisioned for the show.

One difficulty in coming up with ideas was that Klugman began to want to deal with issues, not just cases. The writers tried for years to come up with an abortion story, but without success. Klugman finally decided that the issue was so divisive that no matter how it was done, it would alienate half the audience. On the other hand, the show did an episode on the unfairness of kidney transplants being given only to those who could afford them. Solomon learned several years later that the episode was shown in Washington and helped lead to Medicare paying for kidney transplants. (He heard this from the director of the show, Ray Danton, who later had a kidney transplant himself and was told by the people at the hospital of the connection.)

By the end of the run of the show, in its fourth and fifth seasons, it was becoming more and more difficult to find story ideas. The last script that Solomon and Greenberg wrote for the show was developed from an investigative reporter’s story on possible death from breathing problems caused by hairspray. The writers could not track down the original reporter, and the technical advisor on the show felt the issue was not really proved without further research. The episode was not filmed.

Other Universal Series

Before, during, and after his involvement on *Quincy*, Lou Shaw wrote for most of the Universal dramatic series of the seventies, and he wrote mostly for producer Glen Larson, his co-creator on *Quincy*. He met Larson when he came to pitch a story for *McCloud*. The producer of the show, Michael Gleason, warned him that when he pitched to Larson, Larson would end up with a totally different story. At the meeting, Shaw warmed up by telling Larson about meeting a waif-like girl hitchhiker on the way to the studio that day. When he started to pitch the story, Larson told him they were going to

do a story about the girl instead. Gleason later reminded Shaw he had been warned.

Larson wanted Shaw to work full-time on *McCloud*, but Shaw had many other commitments as a free-lancer on such shows as *Columbo*, *Kolchak*, *Ironside*, *Chase*, and *Barnaby Jones*. Larson said, "What the hell are you talking? Are you doing all those shows?"

"Yeah."

"Where are you on them?"

"Well, I just got a story O.K. on *Columbo*. *Kolchak* is in good shape because I'm doing a rewrite. I don't remember. I'll have to look at my calendar."

Larson told him he was only to work on *McCloud*, but Shaw said, "Nah, I couldn't let them down. I like them all." He would agree to come on *McCloud* if he could produce as well, and Larson agreed.

Shaw liked *McCloud* because it was an open mystery and the length, 90 to 120 minutes, let him write a movie each episode. He saw that other writers used to the one-hour format had trouble adapting to the greater length. Shaw also liked the humor of the character, since he had worked in comedy as well as drama. He learned not to write jokes for Dennis Weaver as *McCloud*, since Weaver and the character were not joke-tellers. The comedy had to come out of the character and the confrontation with other characters.

Shaw also wrote for another spoke in the mystery wheel, *Columbo*. He compares writing for the two shows:

Columbo was harder to develop plots [for] than *McCloud*. [For] *Columbo* you needed four or five major clues that turned out awry, [a place where] he said, "I gotcha," and the guy said, "No, because da-da-da-da," and suddenly, oh, it makes sense. And then you nail him on the big one. Peter Fischer was the story editor, I remember, on *Columbo* at the time. Very excellent story editor. He's the boss on *Murder, She Wrote*. He did the same kind of format really on *Murder, She Wrote*. That was his favorite kind of format, the old *Perry Mason* type: four, five suspects, and the one you suspect least is usually the obvious one.

The *Columbo* character, like the *McCloud* character, was so etched. If you really understood it, it was pretty hard not to write a great line of dialogue for him. It would just pour out. Now *McCloud* was taciturn. *Columbo* was verbose. You could write him a page, page-and-a-half scene. He'd stop, "Aw, sorry. I'm sorry, sir. One last question."

Shaw discovered what he considered the "secret" of writing *Columbo* and Peter Fischer confirmed it. Shaw says:

The secret was: you don't tell the audience, but at a certain point you as the writer know there's a magic moment when in his heart *Columbo* knows who did it. And nothing changes. But it does. As a writer, there's a whole attitudinal thing that occurs, and if you didn't find that spot, I don't think the scripts worked.

It was always mystical. From that point on, the whole thing solidly moves into the new gear, and that becomes like the second act, or whatever you want to call it. That's the major turning point in *Columbo*: when he knows.

It's interesting, watching so many *Columbos* later, they never had that point. The shows would be flat when they didn't have that point. I think Peter understood that and his shows were better because of it. When he was off the show I didn't think it was as good.

Since not every show at Universal was as classy as *Columbo*, *McCloud*, or *Quincy*, Lou Shaw kept trying to get off the lot, but Larson or Frank Price kept pulling him back in. In 1977 he wanted to go, and Price told him that if he would do a two-hour episode of *The Six Million Dollar Man*, he'd let him out of the rest of his contract. Shaw had never seen the show, but whipped up the script and did two more, without, apparently, the problem Sy Salkowitz had two years before on the show: how bionic to make him. The bionic man got less and less bionic as the series progressed because the more invulnerable he was, the less interesting the stories were. The producers told Salkowitz to think of him as having the strength of five men rather than a thousand, which he had in the pilot.

Lou Shaw did not get off the lot after *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Price then told him that if he would do three *Nancy Drew Mysteries*, he would let him go. The show had been canceled, but still had the three episodes to complete, but no scripts. Price made the offer on Thursday with no scripts ready to shoot the following Monday. He did a script over the weekend, then two more. A few weeks later he got a call to come up to Frank Price's office, where an NBC executive told him, "They liked the way you've taken *Nancy Drew* and changed the attitudes of everyone. They're picking up the series and they want you to go along as executive producer."

Shaw said, "Are you crazy? What are you talking about? I didn't make any change. It's a young girl and a detective." He admitted that not only had he never read the books, but he had never seen the show nor read any of the other scripts. The show stayed canceled.

Glen Larson created a show called *Switch* about an ex-cop played by Eddie Albert and an ex-con played by Robert Wagner, who create a detective agency. Larson used Shaw to run interference with Albert during a dispute. All Shaw did was listen to Albert's complaints, which satisfied the actor. Larson later asked him what he'd said, and Shaw replied that he had not said anything, but "I give great nod."

Shaw tells how Larson got him to write on *Switch*:

I got into this very weirdly. I was producing *McCloud* and producing and writing *Quincy* at the same time. So I was a little busy. I get a call from Las Vegas and Glen said, "Look, I got the ticket. You've got to catch the plane in three hours and come to Las Vegas."

"Glen, I can't."

He said, "You gotta. I don't want to lose the show. They don't like the stories, and I'm in real big trouble. We're shooting this show right here now. You've got to come." Now as I get to the airport I get a call paging me. It's Glen, "I forgot to tell you one little thing."

I said, "What?"

He said, "They're expecting you to come in with a perfect story."

They're calling "Last Call." "Glen," I said, "It's a half-hour ride." And he's off the phone. Now I come up to the [Las Vegas hotel] room. I meet Glen. He says, "Have you got a good story?"

"Glen, this is crazy." We go into the room. I knew them to say hello, but I didn't know them well. And they're standing there, "Make us laugh" kind of thing.

I'm sitting next to Glen on this little couch. "Tell them the great story you told me." Now, I was so angry on the plane I wasn't thinking. He didn't have the script on time. Somehow or other in that relationship with Glen, it was always my fault, whatever happened. Anyway, I must say in that framework, it was a lot of fun, this you might guess. But anyway, I start saying, "I have this idea that a woman shows up late with a little boy and leaves him with the Eddie Albert character and just runs away. And the Eddie Albert character takes it for granted that it is the R.J. [Robert Wagner] character's illegitimate son."

Eddie says, "What a great idea."

R.J. says, "I love it. We could raise it."

"And—" and Glen gave me a hit, and you hear it on the tape [Shaw recorded the story meeting], pow, basically [Glen was telling Shaw,] "They were hooked, you understand?" and he didn't want me to say another word, because they were starting to build the story, and he knew I didn't know where I was going. So I'm sitting there and I went, [coughs]. Now they're building the story.

Glen said, "Great. Great." Hugs and kisses, we leave.

I said, "O.K., you're out of that one."

He said, "Oh no, you've got to stay here and write it."

"What do you mean? I've got to stay here in Las Vegas and write it? What about the *Quincy* I'm writing and the *McCloud* I'm writing?" Klugman, I think, had just thrown out Glen's script, or something like that. So I said, "I can't. I can't. Glen, I can't."

He said, "You gotta. The whole show. They want you to write it."

So, anyway, that's how I ended up writing [for *Switch*]. And by the way, I'd never read a *Switch* script, and I wrote two *Switches* back to back. And to this day I've never seen a *Switch* show.

Shaw got away from Universal and Larson and was in San Francisco producing and directing a stage show of Tom Lehrer songs. He got a call from Larson, who said he desperately needed help on *The Fall Guy*,² a show about a movie stunt man/bounty hunter. Shaw insisted he had not seen the show, but Larson said, "Oh, you can always write them. Just write one." The network liked the one so much they asked him to do a second. Larson then got him to write and produce seven of the next season's 22. At one point while doing those, he got into a fight with Larson while the network people were

there, and when Larson fired him, one of the network executives said, "If it gets to that, I think you'll be the one to go, Glen. I'd be very cautious." Larson talked Shaw into staying and Shaw brought in for some episodes writers he'd worked with before, such as Aubrey Solomon and Steve Greenberg. Solomon describes working with Shaw as a producer:

We got along very well with Lou. He's a good friend and he's a great storyteller, and he loves just to have someone he can talk to and just enjoy their company. And we enjoyed working with him.

Lou is a funny kind of producer, because he'll spend three weeks trying to get act one right, and then you'll have two days to figure out the other three acts, so a large part of our time is spent working on that first act.

Glen Larson also created *Knight Rider*, but by the time Joel Rogosin came on the show as a producer in later seasons he was no longer actively involved. Rogosin says, "We used to send Glen *Knight Rider* scripts. I think his contract demanded that. And I never heard from him. Never. Nobody ever called up and said, 'We got the script. We didn't get the script. We like it. We don't like it.' And frankly, I'm sure he didn't care. He's very, very comfortable, Glen, with his residuals and royalties."

Producer Cy Chermak once told Sy Salkowitz that to be a successful producer, "You always had to have a writer in your pocket that could be thrown in at the last minute to fix something, or give you something in a hurry." Lou Shaw was Glen Larson's "pocket writer," as Shaw admits:

Glen, as a high-flying producer, never wanted me to leave because he had in me someone who could do whatever is necessary. And to me it was very good, because it becomes a little gold mine. In my heart I know if I have to write a two-hour script based on no plot, whatever it needs, I can do it Glen could always talk me into anything, I must say.

The Rockford Files

There are at least two versions of how *The Rockford Files* was created. In the first version³ producer Roy Huggins and writer Stephen J. Cannell were on the spot with a cop series called *Toma*. In the spring of 1973 the fourth show of the series would not make its airdate and ABC needed something to fill in. Cannell had an idea that *Toma* could hand off a case to a private investigator. *Toma* would appear at the beginning and end, but the rest of the show could be shot while another *Toma* episode was being filmed. Cannell and Huggins decided to throw in anything that would undo the private-eye clichés: private eyes did not have relatives, so Rockford had a father; they had sexy secretaries, so Rockford had an answering machine; they had seedy offices, so Rockford worked out of a trailer at the beach. Cannell only had five days to do the

screenplay and found himself writing fifteen to twenty pages a day. He had “so much fun breaking all the rules” that the screenplay ended up 90 pages long, half again the length for an hour show. ABC wanted to cut it to an hour and take out the humor. Cannell and Huggins refused, and Universal, the producer of *Toma*, decided to do *The Rockford Files* as a 90-minute TV movie and pilot.

Roy Huggins remembers the development a little differently. The star of *Toma* was Tony Musante, an intense New York actor, and Huggins ran the stories he came up with for the show by Musante and Musante’s wife before he had them written. When Musante’s wife said she thought one was not a particularly *Toma* story, Huggins filed it away. A week later he got a call from his old *Maverick* star, James Garner, who told him, “Roy, I’ve decided I’m going to go back into television.”

Huggins replied, “Yeah, but you don’t like Universal.”

Garner said, “I’ve decided I’ll even work at Universal if you can come up with something.”

Huggins, remembering his *Toma* story, said, “Hold your horses, James, I may have something.” He reworked the story, making the character *Maverick* as a private eye. He gave the story to Cannell, who wrote the script. (The credits for the movie read “Teleplay by Stephen J. Cannell. From a story by John Thomas James,” which was Huggins’s pseudonym.) ABC passed on the movie and Universal took it to NBC, which bought it and the series.

As Huggins points out, what he brought to the show was the combination of action and humor that was a hallmark of his work on *Maverick*:

The character [of Rockford] was the guarantee that it would be funny. Any guy who is the reluctant hero, who can argue with the girl over who’s going to pick up the check, who turns all the clichés upside down is going to be funny. And the guy was sneaky. A guy who’s waiting for the heavy to come in and puts soap all over the bathroom floor so that he will have an easier time winning is funny. So it’s going to be funny whether it is action or not action. Because it isn’t verbal wit. It’s character wit.

The *Rockford Files* series goes beyond the character wit Huggins refers to. Particularly in the writing of Cannell, David Chase, and especially Juanita Bartlett, Rockford’s attitudes toward the police, the FBI, the CIA, the Mafia, or any other American authority figures present a consistently anti-authoritarian viewpoint. This was usually present in traditional private-eye shows, but *Rockford* takes it a step further. It also goes further than Huggins did in *Maverick*. In the Western, the authority figures were those of the past, while on *Rockford* they are contemporary. In other series, representatives of the Federal Government and the Mafia are both treated seriously. In *Rockford*, they are not. They are smart, because, as Bartlett says, “There’s no triumph in overcoming a stupid person. So we tried to make them human.” They have hu-

man failings, especially the bureaucrats, whether legal or illegal. Bartlett's insights "just come from dealing with them, the idiocies of bureaucracies. It's from life. And it doesn't get any better. It seems to be getting worse."

Juanita Bartlett had written for Garner before. After trying unsuccessfully for years to sell scripts, she finally broke in on Garner's show *Nichols*. She remembers sitting watching the first dailies of Garner saying her lines, and, recalling that she had been rejected by *Lassie*, she turned to the producer, Frank Pierson, and said, "Do you realize what it means to sit here in the projection room and hear my words coming out of Jim Garner's mouth? My first dailies could have been 'Arf.'" Bartlett says now of writing for Garner:

Instead [of *Lassie*] I have this marvelous actor. As Steve [Cannell] said, when you're in the series business, you never have enough time, and invariably there would be a line that you'd think, "There's a better line. There's a better line in there. I just don't have time to find it." And you go to dailies and it would come back at you as the wittiest, most wonderful line anybody could ever have written. Because Jim knew how to deliver it. He's such a joy.

Bartlett says of working with Garner on *Rockford*, "We were as enthusiastic in the sixth year as we were in the first . . . There wasn't anybody on that show who would not have been ready to do murder for Jim Garner." As opposed to Jack Klugman on *Quincy*.

Juanita Bartlett describes the writing process on *The Rockford Files*:

We would sit down and we would have story meetings and if I had a story to do, we would work on mine. For the first two years Steve and I pretty well [did most of the scripts]. Steve's faster than I am, so he wrote more. "You're up . . . I'm up . . . You're up . . . I'm up." We did have some outside writers. Most of those we rewrote, which is not a reflection on the writer necessarily. It's just a fact that if you are working on a show, you know those characters so well that it's just easier. You give the outside writer an opportunity to do the second draft and the polish, and if it's not there, then you go in and do the fine tuning and make sure that it's *Rockford*.

Then David Chase joined us, and there were three of us who put the stories together. And usually we would start either with a character that we liked, [or] sometimes it would be a situation.

An episode that I wrote called "Trouble in Chapter 13" was the result of a cover story in *Time* about Marabel Morgan, the woman who told you to wrap yourself in cellophane and greet your husband that way. What you looked for were characters that would generate some kind of heat with *Rockford*. *Rockford* was a character who was totally without bullshit in him, and didn't appreciate it in others. And if you put him with somebody who was 99 and 44/100th percent bullshit, you knew you were going to get something, so that's pretty much the way we did it.

Bartlett tells of the genesis of one of the show's most memorable characters:

On one occasion we were sitting there and I had to do it. I was up at bat and he [Stephen Cannell] said, "Well, do you have any ideas?"

I said, "No."

"Any characters you are dying to write?"

"No."

It was just nothing. So he said, "Why don't we go for something really unique, really unusual. The hooker with the heart of gold." And that's how the Rita Capkovic [character was created, which won Rita Moreno an Emmy in 1978]. It started out as a gag.

I said, "Oh, that's wonderful, Stephen. The hooker with the heart of gold?" As a matter of fact, the *Nichols* that I wrote was about a saloon keeper who was a little more than a saloon keeper. My first *Toma* for Roy was about a madame, a kind of Xaviera Hollander character. *The Cowboys* that I wrote was about a lady with a shady reputation. I thought, "What is it? Why do I keep writing about these people?"

I have some story [meeting] tapes that are so funny and so dirty because when we were putting together the Rita show, Steve and Dave [Chase] would do everything in their power to get to me. They are so filthy with what they are saying, and you can hear me on the tape saying, "All right. Are you guys finished? Fine. Now can we continue? Can we get this out of the locker room?" They were trying to make me laugh. And I was not going to laugh at their filthy jokes.

An example of how the staff on *The Rockford Files* collaborated can be seen in the development of "So Help Me God," which deals with the abuses of the Federal Grand Jury system. Bartlett had been developing another script and was stuck for a "B" story (the "A" story is the main story of the episode, the "B" story is a subplot). One morning David Chase came down the hall with a copy of *The New Yorker* and he showed Bartlett a story on the grand jury system, suggesting it might make the "B" story. Bartlett read it and said to him, "This isn't the subplot. This is one on its own. I love this." Bartlett says today, "Of course I know as much about law as I do about hooking, so when I finished the script, I sent a copy to the ACLU and the ABA and asked if they would read the material and tell me if I had made any horrendous gaffes." There was one step in the procedure she had missed, and that change was made. The show received numerous awards from lawyers' groups.

The Rockford Files, with its own lighter touch, managed to deal with issues as well as attitudes, blending them together so that the episodes never appeared to be preaching, unlike many of the *Quincy* episodes. *Rockford* was moving away from dealing with issues as issues and toward integrating them into the storylines and conventions of the show. In addition to being highly entertaining, the show was part of a transition from earlier shows like *The Defenders* and *Dr. Kildare*, which dealt with an issue a week, to the more integrated later shows like *Hill Street Blues* and *China Beach*.

MOVIES AND MINISERIES: THE LATER YEARS

Given the success Paramount had with Eric Bercovici's work on the miniseries *Washington: Behind Closed Doors*, it is not surprising they thought of him when they purchased the rights to James Clavell's novel of feudal Japan, *Shogun*. Bercovici was sent a copy of the massive novel with instructions "Read this tonight." He got through the first three hundred pages, and then was told at the studio the next day not to bother. Paramount assigned the project to others.

A year later, Bercovici was called by the president of Paramount and told to meet with Clavell. Bercovici had begun to develop an idea of how to do the film version of *Shogun* the year before:

So I went over and met with James for the first time and I told him my idea of how to do *Shogun*, which was to change the whole view of the book. The book is written from God's point of view: you know what everybody is thinking, characters are speaking Japanese, Portuguese, Latin, English, Dutch, everything. Obviously, you can't do that. However, I wanted to shift the emphasis and tell the movie from Blackthorne's point of view and have him understand, and have the others understand, only what he understands by having the Japanese speak only Japanese. But James was [saying], "But what about all the scenes where Toranaga and all the Japanese are sitting around talking all that wonderful political stuff?"

I said, "It's got to go. You can't do it." He looked rather grumpy at that, and I said, "I didn't get this job."

He said, "Meet me at the house tomorrow at ten o'clock." So I go up to his house, and I knew that I had displeased him. I rang the doorbell and he opened it and he was a totally different James Clavell. He was a smiling man. He had torn up a copy of the book and torn out everything I said I was going to leave out of the script. He handed me this. He said, "By God, it works."

At that point I entered into this mystical relationship with James Clavell that continues to this day. Mystical in that he started to place all his faith in me, without question. And when you are working for someone who likes what you are doing, you do better work with encouragement. He encouraged me mightily.

Bercovici did no research on his own while writing the script, relying on the novel. When he went to Japan as producer of the miniseries he spent a week with a Japanese historian who corrected what Bercovici calls “the misinterpretations of Japanese history.” In spite of that, there were battles over the history during the production, sometimes over very trivial matters. When the crew was getting ready to shoot a scene with swans in the background, some of the Japanese assistants were taking away the swans, saying at this period in history they did not know how to clip swans’ wings. Bercovici, who took the attitude that it was drama, not history, had them replace the swans.

Since Bercovici wanted to tell the story from the point of view of Blackthorne, the English navigator, he wanted to keep the Japanese speaking Japanese. He wrote the entire script in English, then had his assistant, Chiho Adachi, translate the Japanese characters’ dialogue into Japanese. Bercovici himself translated Blackthorne’s Japanese speeches so they would be in awkward Japanese. He turned the script in to Deanne Barkley, the head of miniseries for NBC, who read it and said, “It’s terrific. Go.” Bercovici points out that among executives “there is a reluctance to read in Hollywood [and New York], especially something like [the size] of the New York phone book.” He thinks no other executive, either at NBC or Paramount did read it. The network’s censors read it and there was what Bercovici felt were relatively minor negotiations about content, specifically the pissing scene, the decapitation, and a few uses of the word “bastard.”

The shooting schedule ended up helping keep the Japanese language in the miniseries. The original schedule was upset when the actress first hired for Mariko wanted to add “another zero” to her contract. While they searched for another actress, they shot the shipwreck scenes first, using as many as eight cameras, and scenes with the English crew of the ship. This resulted in “endless, endless footage,” which was processed in Japan and sent back to Paramount and NBC. Bercovici is convinced that after the first month of this, nobody at Paramount or NBC was watching any of the dailies. The first time anybody at the studio or the network realized that much of the film was in Japanese was when they saw the first cut, and Bercovici began to get calls from the executives asking him if *any* of the rest of the show was in English. There were constant debates with the network executives, who wanted to subtitle the Japanese scenes, but Bercovici eventually prevailed, pointing out that it would make Mariko’s translations redundant. Bercovici adds,

They also kept changing the format. Originally it was three hours, two hours, two hours, two hours, and three hours. Then it became three hours, one hour, two hours, three hours, one hour. [It ended up three, two, two, two, and three.] We kept changing the format, changing the focus, and saying, “What are we going to do about the Japanese?” The whole end of that show was done with an endless stomach cramp.

In addition to writing the script, Bercovici also ended up having to write a sea shanty. In the script he had just written that Blackthorne sings a shanty. When they got to Japan they realized they did not have one, and the tapes Paramount had UCLA send of historical shanties did not work. Bercovici told director Jerry London he would write one.

I wrote it in a car. It was inspiration out of desperation. Richard [Chamberlain] had to learn it, and it was fairly Keystone Comedy, because I had this shanty in my head. I said, "Get me a piano." [If] I can pick it on the piano, I can write it down. First we had to find a piano. Not that easy to do. They finally found a piano and I wrote the music and the lyrics down. Since I was too shy to sing it myself, I gathered a few people and taught them the song. So we all sang it together so we could make a tape to give to Richard, because they were certainly more on key than I was.

As the writer and producer, Bercovici was involved in the post-production phase and beyond. For the first run of the miniseries in 1980, he wrote the "legends" setting the scene, as well as the narration for Orson Welles to deliver. For the second run, NBC wanted more legends and subtitling and Bercovici supervised those, as well as writing more narration for Welles. Bercovici was also involved in writing and cutting different versions of the film. While they were in production he was told they would have to prepare a two-hour version, so he cut the script down to a two-hour version that was filled with "telephone booth scenes" (although there were no telephone booths in feudal Japan) in which characters describe what happened in the scenes that had been cut: "Oh my God, you should have seen what just happened. It's incredible." Bercovici kept insisting that this version made no sense. Gary Nardino, an executive at Paramount agreed, but insisted there be a two-hour version. Bercovici still thinks the two-hour version is "dreadful."

Then, there are three other versions. We then made a two-and-a-half-hour version that at least filled in some of the holes. Not all of them, but some of them, which NBC played as three hours. That was a little bit better. Then there was a Japanese version, 2 hours and 47 minutes. In the two-hour version and also the two-and-a-half-hour version we took out most of the Japanese-language scenes. In the Japanese version we took out most of the English-language scenes. None of them is any good, I don't think. The twelve hours are the twelve hours. That I am happy to have my name on. The rest of it is nothing terribly valuable.

At least Eric Bercovici had the advantage of having all the historical characters in *Shogun* safely dead when he wrote that miniseries, and the only people who complained were Japanese historians and Jesuits who did not like the way the missionaries were portrayed. E. Jack Neuman did not have it so easy on his 1982 miniseries based on Albert Speer's autobiography, *Inside the*

Third Reich. Speer was still alive and Neuman spent a year with Speer in Germany, asking questions.

Speer was totally frank with me about everything. He never evaded a question, never eluded anything. And I began to understand a very, very complex man, and in spite of myself, after a couple of years I began to grow fond of him. But I did not make him a great sympathetic man on the screen at all. I told the story of the worst Nazi of them all, because he knew better. And I think the audience understood that.

Neuman had first developed an interest in doing a miniseries of *Inside the Third Reich* when he read in a literary trade journal that the book had sold 19 million copies. He then learned that the book had been optioned at different times by several different companies for a total of \$300,000 in options, but had never been filmed (Neuman also learned by accident that Speer had not kept the money from the book but turned it over to the United Jewish Relief). The book was by then un-optioned and he went to the head of NBC, John McMahan, who told him to do it, even though Neuman wanted to do it as a ten-hour miniseries. A deal was made to do it at Paramount, and then both McMahan and the head of Paramount were fired. The new head of NBC, Fred Silverman, wanted to do it, but as Neuman found out, "Some guy in New York had decided to de-fang Freddie and also decided they didn't want *Inside the Third Reich* at their network." The problem, Neuman discovered, was that the senior executive at NBC did not believe Speer.

Neuman managed a meeting with him and asked him if he believed Erich Fromm, Telford Taylor, Simon Weisenthal, and William Shirer—all of whom Neuman had also talked to. The executive said he did, but still did not believe Speer. Neuman's agent, Frank Cooper, knew how much work Neuman had already put in on the project, and he managed to get it away from NBC and Paramount and took it to Brandon Stoddard at ABC, who said, "Let's go, baby." Stoddard did insist on cutting Neuman's script from ten hours to five hours, which is all he felt he could give the film.

Neuman did not get much help from either the author or the main character in his next miniseries, the 1985 *A Death in California*. The four-hour film was based on Joan Barthel's book about a true-life crime, in which Hope Masters, a Beverly Hills socialite, has a love/hate relationship with the man who killed her fiancé and raped her. Neuman called Barthel, "who didn't want to have anything to do with me." He hired a researcher to pull together all the coverage of the case, and he talked to nearly everybody connected with the case. "I stayed away from Hope herself, because I figured she was a flake anyway. I finally met her after the picture was made. Absolutely fucking gorgeous. She made Cheryl Ladd [who played the part] look like a tramp. But a flake, a real flake. She was still going to visit the guy." According to Neuman, the murderer still has a suit against him and ABC for defamation of character,

and Neuman says, "I'm sure he's going to knock on the door one day when he gets out of the slam."

Neuman's next movie was also based on a true story, told in an article by Michael Daly in *New York* magazine, about a Queens mother who becomes an undercover agent for the DEA when she discovers her son is hooked on drugs. The network, CBS, only wanted a two-hour movie, but Neuman persuaded them it had enough material for three hours. He thinks it could have even gone longer, since Daly had done enough research for more, and Neuman had difficulty getting *Courage* down to three hours.

For his four-hour 1990 movie *Voices Within*, about a woman with multiple personalities, Neuman looked at the two famous films on the subject, the 1957 theatrical film *The Three Faces of Eve* and the 1976 television miniseries *Sybil*, but felt they were both "pretty dull pictures," done with the same formula, starting with a troubled person coming to the psychiatrist and then flashing back to when the person was sane. His version started out with the young woman "young, vibrant, pretty, and successful, with all the confidence in the world about life. Slowly but surely you find out that there's more than one of them." Neuman had some reservations about the final results, since he did not think Shelley Long, who played the lead was "quite up to it," but he thought Lamont Johnson directed it "very well." Neuman produced it and thinks "the trick is to ride it through and make them keep their nose on the script. You know, even Monty [Johnson] has a tendency to [do] a little creating or something. 'No, I'll do the creating Monty, thank you. Just do what it says.' They don't like that but I'm not bashful a bit. A blithe personality I'm not."

Not every television movie of the eighties had a serious subject. *Midnight Offerings*, a 1981 two-hour movie written by Juanita Bartlett and Stephen J. Cannell, puts a witch in conflict with a college girl with supernatural powers. Bartlett and Cannell, who had worked together on *The Rockford Files*, sat down on a Sunday to work out the story. Bartlett is fascinated by the occult and has an extensive library on the subject. Cannell admitted he knew very little about it, so Bartlett explained such things as what witches do, and Cannell, like a kid with a new toy, wanted to include everything. Bartlett told him it would be too gimmicky. Bartlett, talking of this and *Rockford*, says what she misses most no longer working with him is "the laughing. I have laughed my way through so many story meetings with Steve."

In the eighties, as in the seventies, there were also star-vehicle television movies, and two that E. Arthur Kean wrote were star biographies as well. He was somewhat reluctantly drawn into doing the 1982 two-hour film *Mae West* because he hoped to be able to direct it as well. At the first meeting with executives at ABC, he told them, "I am not going to tell lies about this woman. Now, that's the deal breaker." They assured him they did not want him to do that, and he went to work on the script. Ironically, because of the network's insisting that the material be as raunchy as possible, Kean had no

problems with the network censors. "They didn't dare censor this, because it was about censorship." Kean found himself fighting with "the ABC guy," Stu Samuels, who

wanted to do all the stuff I said up front I'm not going to do, so we continually went around about this. He just wanted to make it more crass, more commercially viable. I said, "No. We're lying about her. We can't do that. She's recently dead. Too many people know her and love her and we can't offend these people. It's not right."

He said, "Aw, fuck this. Come on, we're making pictures, guy." That was essentially the attitude.

Kean thinks the arguments with Samuels led to his not directing the film. Kean was sent a copy of the shooting script, and he did not recognize a third of the pages.

There were also changes in the characterization. Kean had written West's mother as a duchess who falls in love with an Irish stable boy, which shows West what can happen when a woman is overcome by love, thus motivating West's determination not to be at the mercy of men. Piper Laurie was cast in the role, and she, in Kean's words, "decided she knew more about writing than I did." She changed the duchess into what Kean calls "a nasty little guttersnipe . . . a nice, feisty woman [who] had nothing to do" with the original characterization and therefore changed the dynamics of the story.

Kean did not have much better luck the next year with *Rita Hayworth: The Love Goddess*. Kean's old producer from *Police Story*, Stan Kallis, asked him to work on the project, which already had a script by a woman writer. Kean read it and thought it was "stillborn. It was essentially two hours of the same scene [of] Harry Cohn [dumping] on Rita Hayworth." Kean read the biography the script was based on, then called Kallis and said, "Stan, I don't know who this lady is, but somehow, she has studiously gone through this biography and removed all the good stuff." Kallis agreed and Kean worked out a storyline.

The production of *Rita Hayworth* came about in the first place because of Lynda Carter's big success with the *Wonder Woman* series, which started on ABC but moved to CBS. Carter's CBS deal included television movies, but by the early eighties the network, Kean says, was "stuck with this commitment with her and they wanted to dump it. They just wanted it over with." David Susskind said he could produce the film for a million dollars, and the network agreed. There was a rush to get the film done and Kean went into the first production meeting with only an outline, from which he explained the story and the characters. Kean recalls that the unit production manager, who handles the minute details of the production ("and these people are not known for their generosity, or their humanity, and their effulgence," Kean notes) said, "Now we've got a story to tell." Kean felt "very good that this guy

shot after the pilot, “Henry—Please Come Home,” was much closer than the pilot to conventional sitcom, but it was not shown until the tenth week. Burt Metcalfe, the associate producer, said, “We kind of kept hiding that one, pushing it back because we weren’t terribly happy with it.”²⁹ The third and fourth episodes come closer to hitting the mix of comedy and war than the second. The third episode, “To Market, to Market,” has the doctors selling Henry Blake’s desk to buy drugs for the patients, but the mix of comedy and war is not yet handled with the subtlety of later episodes. In the fourth episode, Alan Alda develops a serious edge in his performance as Hawkeye that is not there in previous episodes and this gives the series a moral weight for the rest of its run.

As the first season progressed, changes were made in the recurring characters. Lt. Dish and Spearchucker, a surgeon from the movie, were eventually dropped. Corporal Klinger, who dresses as a WAC to try to get out of the Army, and who was originally written for only a single episode, became a regular to provide what Gelbart called “a color to the show that nothing else was doing—just an absolute piece of madness every week.”³⁰ Gelbart and the other writers were also adjusting the characters to the actors. Gelbart said that for the first seasons he was “constantly, literally, on a bicycle back and forth between my office and the sound stage, orchestrating the script for them.”³¹

From the beginning, the writers experimented with both form and content. *M*A*S*H* was shot as a one-camera show without an audience and took advantage of the fact. In the pilot, there is a quick montage of shots of Hawkeye in various locations trying to persuade Lt. Dish to go along with the raffle. The pilot episode also includes a voiceover narration by Hawkeye in the form of a letter to his father. Gelbart later used this form in two first season episodes entitled “Dear Dad” and “Dear Dad . . . Again,” in which several brief storylines were used in one show, a device used by the writers throughout the series. In an episode called “Sometimes You Hear the Bullet,” a friend of Hawkeye’s is introduced and later in the episode is killed, which upset the network on the grounds that a show should not kill off characters the audience likes.³²

In the third season of *M*A*S*H*, Jim Fritzell and Everett Greenbaum joined the writing staff. Greenbaum had been put off by the movie’s graphic operating-room sequences, but the chance to work with Gelbart was irresistible. He describes Gelbart as having “a mind like quicksilver. Larry is like a supernatural being. His mind is so brilliant, and he raises you up to his level.” He also appreciated Gelbart’s dealing with the network, recalling the season they started with a script about bedpans. The network censor called and said he did not want to see or hear about bedpans. “Larry’s reply was to call up and have him fired, and get a different censor. Instead of getting a different script, he got a different censor. . . . You have clout when you’re in the top ten.”

At the end of the third season McLean Stevenson, who played Col. Blake,

was written out of the show. As Greenbaum remembers, “McLean made a lot of difficulty for everybody. He kept saying he doesn’t want to be one of six, he wants to be one of one, meaning stardom. And we would constantly be writing him out of [an episode of] the show because he had an engagement to perform at Las Vegas where he could cash in.” Greenbaum and Fritzell wrote the script for “Abyssinia, Henry,” in which Blake is discharged and sent back to the States. They did not write his death in the original script, but Gelbart asked them to do a page with the scene in which Radar O’Reilly reads the notice that Blake’s plane has gone down. Gelbart, who directed the episode, kept the final scene from the cast and crew, then gave them a talk before shooting the scene about how in war people are there and then gone. The reading of the message was a surprise to the actors, and their reactions were strong. Greenbaum recalls,

If you remember when they were reading that, one of the people in the room dropped an instrument on the floor and they left that in. I always remember that . . . and Alan [Alda] is such a wonderful actor that you could see the tears coming over his mask. And the nurses too. And the biggest tears of all were McLean Stevenson’s from his dressing room. . . .³³

It was simply unheard of to kill off a major character in a comedy. Writer Sy Salkowitz was in one of his occasional administrative jobs at the time as Vice President, Prime Time Television, for 20th Century–Fox—which made *M*A*S*H*—and he told the show’s producers he did not think they should do it. He suggested they talk to the network, which they did. Salkowitz suggested to the CBS representative in Los Angeles that “This time, why don’t you be the villain and not me?” The CBS man simply passed the buck to New York, which made no decision, and the ending stayed. The response was enormous. Greenbaum estimates that he got 5,000 letters from people, most of whom hated the episode. Greenbaum says that “some [people] like it.” For the first daytime syndication runs, Fox cut the scene of the reading of the message, but the episode became so famous that for later syndication runs the ending was restored.³⁴ (Stevenson apparently did not hold Blake’s death against Greenbaum and Fritzell. In 1975 he asked them to write a special for him, although when he met them, he said, “I heard one of you died.”)

A problem in writing Henry Blake was that he was basically a shallow character, wavering between slightly competent and slightly not. The decision was made to replace him with a stronger counterforce to Hawkeye, a regular army Colonel. In the third season Greenbaum and Fritzell wrote an episode about a crazy general whom Henry Morgan played beautifully. Morgan was now cast as Colonel Sherman Potter. Gelbart had Greenbaum and Fritzell go to lunch with Morgan and “find out everything you can about him.” The writers discovered Morgan loved horses, so this was written into Potter’s char-

acter in an early episode, "Dear Mildred." The episode used the letter form again, this time to explore Potter and his attitudes. Greenbaum says of the letter form,

The advantage is that you don't have to tell a story. The hardest part of a script is working out the story. It's sometimes easier to tell six little tiny stories, or four little stories, than to tell a whole beginning, middle, and an end for a whole script A lot of ideas can't work into a story, and this is a way to use them.

Blake was not the only character missing at the beginning of the fourth season. Wayne Rogers, who played Trapper John, left the show as well, and Gelbart and his staff were just as creative in replacing him. Trapper and Hawkeye were similar, so Trapper's replacement was B. J. Hunnicut, who unlike Hawkeye, was married, and not only married but happily so. Greenbaum and Fritzell had never seen the actor Mike Farrell before. Gelbart told them, "This actor is an open-faced American sandwich. . . . Just write him as open, honest, Midwestern."

Larry Gelbart's final episode came from a suggestion by Gene Reynolds, who was inspired by an Edward R. Murrow Korean War documentary in which Murrow asked soldiers what they thought of the war. Gelbart "wrote" the show by writing questions newsman Clete Roberts asked the cast. The cast replied in character, and the show was cut together from their responses. Gelbart said of the episode,

To me it said, in a way I had never been able to express, that I had finished my work on the show because I couldn't improve on that The irony of the show is that it says, "Written by Larry Gelbart," whereas, in fact, truthfully it was written by everyone, Roberts and whoever else was there. There are many shows that do not say "Written by Larry Gelbart," that are totally written by me, so maybe there is a little TV god who sits somewhere and figures out those credits.³⁵

Sy Salkowitz recalls Gelbart's departure:

Gelbart came into my office and said, "I can't stay."

I went and shut my door and said, "You're not getting of here until you resign [a contract]."

Larry said to me, "You're a writer. I'm going to tell you I can't write one more episode of *M*A*S*H*."

I said, "I understand." So Larry left.

In addition to adding new characters of more depth, the writers also explored the regular characters in greater depth. Margaret Houlihan developed away from the caricature she had been in the movie and the first season of

the series into a much more complicated character. Gelbart, when asked about writing "Hot Lips," said, "The trick in portraying women is to write them blindfolded, to forget they're women. In short, write them as people."³⁶ Nevertheless, Gelbart specifically asked Linda Bloodworth and Mary Kay Place to be the first women writers on the show.³⁷ In the second season, actress Loretta Swit sat down with Bloodworth and Place and discussed Houlihan's entire life for six hours.³⁸ The script that developed out of the meeting, "Hot Lips and Empty Arms," was the first to show Houlihan's unhappiness with her relationship with Frank Burns.³⁹ In the fifth season, Bloodworth (who later would create *Designing Women*) wrote "The Nurses," which is primarily about Houlihan's relationship with the nurses who work for her. By the last seasons, writer Dennis Koenig would admit that writing Houlihan was tricky for him because, not being a woman, "certain things may escape my consciousness."⁴⁰

In the sixth season Major Frank Burns was replaced as well. Neither the writers nor Larry Linville, who played Burns, were happy with him as a continuing character, since he was difficult both to write and to play. Like Blake he was a shallow character and a very obvious target. Greenbaum and Fritzell went to lunch again, this time with David Ogden Stiers, who had been hired as the replacement. They liked the Boston accent he did and they created Charles Emerson Winchester, a much more formidable counterpoint to Hawkeye and B. J. Out of the lunch meeting came Winchester's love of classical music, which provided material for several episodes. Winchester's upper-class status gave Greenbaum and Fritzell a new variation on the mail shows: Winchester does not write letters home, he dictates them into his tape recorder.

The mail, or in Winchester's case the tape, shows performed another service. From the third season on, apprentice writers were hired to come up with story material. The younger writers, whom the older writers referred to as "The Bar Mitzvah Boys," would turn the story material over to the older writers, or in some cases write the scripts themselves. Story bits that did not make an entire show were saved and used in the mail shows. Several of the younger writers went on to write full-time for the show and later have their own series.⁴¹

One writing team that came on in the eighth season did not go through the "Bar Mitzvah Boys" experience. Thad Mumford and Dan Wilcox wrote the episode "Are You Now, Margaret?" as what Mumford calls "a job audition." They were also trying for a staff job on another show, so they ended up having to do "about two-thirds of the [M*A*S*H] script overnight." The script was turned in on Wednesday and the next Monday they got the job. The script won a Writers Guild Award, but as Mumford points out, "The bad thing about doing something like that very well overnight is that this keeps alive the myth that you can do that, and that you come to expect that, 'Oh, the boys will take care of it.' Even though there are women now, they still call us boys."

Mumford and Wilcox often worked from the research that had been developed over the life of the series. “Depressing News,” in which Hawkeye receives 500,000 tongue depressors instead of 5,000, came out of research, as did “A War for All Seasons,” which showed a whole year of the war in a curious way. Mumford recalls

There were certain things that we got in research about how important the Sears Roebuck catalogue was. It seems strange that you could, in the middle of a war, order things from a catalog and actually get them there. So that was one of the themes, about how the catalogue became very helpful, even medically. There were certain utensils necessary to build a kidney dialysis machine that had come from the catalogue.

Mumford and Wilcox also did an episode featuring the recurring character of Sidney Freedman, an Army psychiatrist. The work on the character “had been done . . . before,” by Gelbart, Burt Prelutsky (who wrote the first two Freedman shows), and Alan Alda (who wrote two others). Mumford describes the character as “a very odd person in the mix of larger-than-life characters whose essences were based on the tensions which were produced by war. It was a wonderful idea to have a man sit back and just look at them and,” Mumford says, stroke his chin.

In the tenth season Mumford and Wilcox got promoted to producer status, which Mumford casually describes as “just a raise. It’s for your next job,” i.e., enables you to go into your next job at a higher level than you came into this one. Several of the writers were also producers, and Mumford says, “By that point we had worked together so long and so well that people’s opinions sort of had the same weight.”

As it must to all television series, the end came to *M*A*S*H*. Because of the popularity of the show, a final episode was written that eventually grew to a two-and-a-half-hour running time. Thad Mumford tells how it developed:

First it was to be written by two writers, Elias Davis and David Pollock, who were very much the story editors on the show. Then we all got pissed off because we thought this was going to be very historic. What ended up, I think, hurting the piece [was that] they bowed to our requests and our concerns and made us all part of it. Alan [Alda, who was one of the writers and the director] was the person who was the constant, and we all spent time with Alan.

The division of labor was not, “You write one scene here.” We would write a certain number of pages. It was like a relay. You pick up from page 22 and you go to page 35, and I know that in the end, even though there are moments in the script that are very good and scenes that I think we’re all proud of, it could have been better if one person or two people had written it. It would have hurt egos, but I think it suffered from the attempt to acknowledge all of our egos.

There are excellent elements in the show. Hawkeye's breakdown and the eventual revelation of the causes of it are well developed, as is the storyline of Winchester teaching a group of Chinese musicians Mozart. The show is too long, and it may be the writers had been too used to working in the half hour format. Several of the storylines, while they might have fit into a half-hour episode, seem extended at two-and-a-half hours. A bigger problem is that the mixture of the comedy and the drama—one of the strengths of the series—is overbalanced to the dramatic and the sentimental.

Twentieth Century-Fox was making too much money off of *M*A*S*H* to let it die a natural death.⁴² After Trapper John was written out of the series, the studio and CBS developed a series about the character. At the suggestion of its writer-producer Don Brinkley, the show dealt with Trapper thirty years later, since Brinkley felt the immediate post-Korean War time was "a very dull era. It was civilian medicine. We are losing the color of the war, the excitement of the war." When *M*A*S*H* ended its run, Larry Gelbart came back and developed *AfterMash*, a 1983–84 series about Col. Potter, Klinger and Father Mulcahy at a veteran's hospital. Everett Greenbaum wrote for the series and discovered Brinkley was right: "You lost the straight line. You lost the war. The urgency was gone." The show lasted 28 episodes.

Fox tried again in 1984 with *W*A*L*T*E*R*, a spinoff featuring Radar O'Reilly as a cop. The studio at first thought of making Radar a teacher and the show a cross between *M*A*S*H* and *Mr. Peepers*. Greenbaum worked on that one as well: "At first they [the studio] started thinking properly of what kind of person he should be in civilian life. He could have been a wonderful teacher. Then the studio wanted him to be a policeman so they could do another cop show. Their minds are on tracks that do not change."

The spin-offs were disasters, with the exception of *Trapper John, M.D.*, which became more of a conventional contemporary medical series as it continued. None of the spin-offs managed to recreate the unique world of *M*A*S*H*. Like the best of American series television, *M*A*S*H* created a world of its own, full of compelling characters, both one-shot and recurring. The characters, as the writers developed them, grew on the audience in ways that only characters in a TV series can, segment by segment over a long period of time.

It is not surprising that the final episode of *M*A*S*H*, "Goodbye, Farewell and Amen," drew high ratings. Ratings, however, can only tell that sets were tuned in. It takes a different form of ratings to show how much the audience was concentrating on the final episode. In New York City, the show ran until 11 P.M. In the few minutes after 11, the water flow in Water Mains One and Two increased by a total of 320 million gallons, which Department of Environmental Protection engineers estimated meant that in those minutes one million people were flushing their toilets.⁴³

CORONERS AND OTHER SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES PROFESSIONALS

*I*t was not surprising that CBS came to Don Brinkley in the late seventies to create a show around the character of Trapper John. From 1969 to 1976, Brinkley wrote and produced what was until then the longest-running medical show in television history, *Medical Center*. *Medical Center* was very much in the tradition of the earlier medical shows, where everything was, in Brinkley's words, "clean and perfect" and the doctors were never wrong. Also, like the earlier shows, it treated controversial material, such as an episode about a transsexual, over which the network people were, Brinkley says, "fighting out one point here, one point there, one thing here, one thing there, one cautionary statement here, and so forth." Brinkley had the same kind of experiences on *Trapper John M.D.*

Since *Trapper John M.D.* was developed out of *M*A*S*H*, Brinkley assumed it would be rowdier than *Medical Center*:

The pilot script and the pilot film actually were much wilder than the show itself became. They wanted it as close to the *M*A*S*H* quality as we could get in its own format. And as soon as it hit the air, they started saying, "Let's tone it down, let's tone it down. Let's make it a little more like *Medical Center*," which is what we didn't want to do. [We wanted it to be] wilder and crazier and brighter and more irreverent. We managed to maintain most of it, but some of the wildness was gone. It was just eroded away. They had a tendency to do that: Buy something, then as soon as it gets on the air, change it. They feel more comfortable with it that way.

The characters were certainly different from those on *Medical Center*. Brinkley suggested doing Trapper thirty years later: "He had been the maverick in his youth, [and] now he was the chief surgeon, representing the establishment, and along comes a kid right out of Vietnam, who's just like he was

when he was in Korea, who was the Greg Harrison character [Gonzo Gates]. They [the network] loved that." But Trapper John was not a conventional establishment figure. He was, for example, divorced, and as Brinkley puts it, he could not make either his marriage or his divorce work. The network thought audiences would not believe he was a good doctor if he was divorced. Audiences loved it, and the shows with his ex-wife had some of the highest ratings of the series.

There were limitations on what could be done with Trapper's character. Partly this was the tradition that leading characters of a series do not change. Partly it was the difficulty of dealing with Pernell Roberts, who played Trapper. He complained a lot, saying, "This script is a piece of shit." Brinkley invited him to sit in on the story conferences, but he never showed up.

The writers were therefore more willing to develop the other characters. Dr. Stanley Riverside II started out as the typical hospital bureaucrat, Trapper's antagonist, but Brinkley says that actor Charles Siebert was so good at getting inside Riverside that the writers found they wanted to develop his character, and over the course of the series he fell in love, got married and had a child.

Don Brinkley wanted *Trapper John M.D.* to be darker and grittier, but both the network and his partner resisted and Brinkley did not have the kind of clout that Gelbart developed on *M*A*S*H*. He and the series were still able to do strong shows about contemporary issues. He recalls a show about Physicians for Nuclear Responsibility, a group that called for banning nuclear weapons, "a damned good script" written by Deborah Zoe Dawson and Victoria Johns. The network insisted they show the other side—to which Brinkley replied, "Pro-nuclear attack? You want to be in favor of it?" The network suggested they show the government was trying to do something, so Brinkley ended up quoting "whoever was in charge of civil defense at that time here in L.A. He was asked in one interview, 'What about the panic situation?' He said, 'Panic is an element we do not recognize.'" The network said that made them "look like horse's asses."

Brinkley replied, "Well, they are. This is a quote. I'm giving you an absolute direct quote from one of these guys." Brinkley says, "So it went around and around and around and finally we got the show through, but it was a long two weeks, I'll tell you: phone calls, bells, whistles."

Sy Salkowitz had similar experiences on a slightly earlier medical show he worked on, *The Doctors* (1969–73), in which the medical teams worked with what was called "space age medicine." The writers were using the subject to press for more adventurous material. Salkowitz says of the show, the changes in medical shows, and the changes in television in general:

One, most importantly, was that the audience was getting more and more and more sophisticated, and more demanding. The second was, my own stature, if

you will, as a writer was ascending and therefore I could push certain stories that I could not have pushed ten years before, because I had more muscle now.

The producers knew that if the ratings didn't stay up, their shows were going to get canceled quicker than quicker, because that was starting to happen. So they were also pressing the boundary lines, if you will. The program people at the networks started pushing on the limitations that they had before, and they were always in constant battle with the censor. The censor was an anchor and they were the sail, and it was always that strain.

Salkowitz compares it to the audience for the moon landings of the period, noting that the television audience decreased with each successive landing:

And that's how our audience is. They say, "We've been there already. Now show me Mars." So you keep pushing against it. . . .

Now writers themselves don't understand that they themselves are pushing and shoving, because from the good writers there is always something that the censor or somebody says you can't do. In almost every script, somebody says, "Oh, we don't want to talk about that." But the good writers are always pushing against the walls that hem them in. The bad writers [just say] "Where do you want the comma?"

Producers don't like writers like that. I was privy to a conversation between a couple of producers about another writer. One of them said, "There's no excitement working with him. He asks you where you want the comma." That's the phrase. And I've never forgotten that. They self-censor as they go through that script. They hand you a script, totally undramatic, but absolutely nothing wrong with it. The censor loves it.

Quincy, M.E.

When Lou Shaw was freelancing, he would spend several hours every day coming up with ideas for series. He would write them up and, no matter how "half-assed" Shaw thought his own ideas, he would register them with the Writers Guild of America, west (the guild keeps a record of when and by whom material was created). One of them, in the mid-seventies, was about a coroner he called Quince. Shaw remembers, "The whole idea struck because at that time medical shows were very popular. Murder shows were very popular. I said, 'What if you had a medical detective?' " He decided on the name Quince because "K's were very much in fashion at the time: *Kolchak*, *Kojak*. I said, 'I don't want to use another K.' "

And nothing happened. Then Shaw went to work at Universal, writing for such shows as *McCloud* and *Columbo*. One day he was talking to Glen Larson, the producer of several shows at Universal. Larson told him, "Boy, they are looking for another detective show on the wheel [*NBC Mystery Movie*, which included *McCloud* and *Columbo*]."

Shaw said, "I've got a great one. It's about a coroner called Quince." He told the idea to Larson, who said he could sell it to Universal in five minutes. Shaw, who wanted his own show, says, "He put out his hand. 'Fifty-fifty partner all the way.' I said, 'You got a deal.' He got all the way to the door and he stopped like Columbo and turned around and he said, 'Quince? Sounds like jam. What would you think if we called it *Quincy*?' I said, 'Glen, I knew you'd make a contribution.'" Larson came back about an hour later and said the studio had agreed to make a two-hour pilot. The executives felt there was no way to persuade the network (Universal's shows were done almost exclusively on NBC at the time) without a pilot, so the studio would finance the pilot as "inventory," i.e., without any network financing.

The script was written but then got hung up on casting. As written, *Quincy* was a young, fairly hip coroner, and the original choices were actors like Anthony Franciosa or Robert Wagner, but nothing happened. Then Shaw heard that the black actor James Earl Jones was interested. He spent a day with Jones and by the end of the day he was wildly excited about the possibility of Jones doing the part. Shaw went into the office of an executive at the studio and told him Jones was interested. The executive said, "Let me ask you something, Lou. This beautiful blonde is dead. And James Earl Jones puts on the gloves and goes in alone to do an autopsy on the blond body. I don't think that would work, do you?"

Shaw, who has dealt with other industry executives whom he thinks were bigots, says of this executive, "He's not a bigot. He's so far from being that. He was being a hardnose" about what an American TV audience in 1976, the year before *Roots*, would accept. Shaw and the executive were probably right, but wouldn't Jones have been wonderful as *Quincy*? (As an indication of the changes in American life, consider that when Jones starred in the 1990 series *Gabriel's Fire*, the series was at first shot in half-shadows, but research showed that audiences disliked the style and wanted to *see* the characters.¹)

Jack Klugman had just finished *The Odd Couple* and every studio and network was trying to get him for another show. He read the *Quincy* script and met with Shaw and Larson. According to Shaw, Klugman thought the script was "fabulous," but wondered "if those girls would go for a balding, fat, middle-aged Jew like me." Shaw realized they had given him the "hip" *Quincy* script. Klugman told them he did not think the script was for him. Shaw persuaded Larson that Klugman would be "spectacular" in the part and they rewrote the script. With Klugman attached, Universal got a commitment from NBC for a firm six episodes to air.

Shaw had his own show, but he also had Klugman. At the first meeting on the first show, Klugman praised Shaw, hugged him, and gave him "wet kisses." Shaw told Universal executive Frank Price about this, and Price said, "Lou, wait 'til the second show." Shaw says, "Second show, Klugman started throwing out scripts and firing people." It was up to Shaw to deal with Klug-

man, because Klugman disliked Larson from the beginning. Klugman respected Shaw, but they still had what Shaw calls “creative fights.” Shaw just

did not want to stay and face it. It was too hard, too bitter, too angry. . . . There was no way of dealing with it because he’d scream and I’d scream. He’d say, “I could go up there to the Tower and have you fired right now.”

I said, “Well, until you do, I’m the producer. Why don’t you try acting instead of producing. You’re not doing too well in the [producing] department.” We’d have conversations like that. He was just out to get rid of anybody who would get credit.

Shaw’s *Quincy* was intended to be

a humanitarian who solved murders medically by the sheer brilliance of his medical skills. That to me was the unique franchise of *Quincy*, and I think it went away from that. It got a little preachy, it got a lot of other things, that I didn’t like particularly, but Jack had this wonderful charismatic ability to carry the show. But I felt it went away from that kind of medical detective that I first created.

Shaw says that the show “would have failed without him. I think Klugman was the show. I feel I made my contributions. Obviously, we all did, Glen and everybody, but Klugman in his own way was fighting for an integrity that he felt the show didn’t have. I disagree with that.” Shaw and Klugman still keep in touch, but Shaw says, “I was happy not to work with him after that.”

The show still needed writers. In 1978 Aubrey Solomon and his partner Steve Greenberg did a treatment for a miniseries that impressed Klugman enough to call them to pitch some story areas for *Quincy*. One led to a teleplay, and that in turn led to a rewrite on another script. They found that Klugman was in effect the producer of the show. Solomon recalls:

No doubt about it. When we got there, he had set up a unit that was totally without any supervision from Standards and Practices or from the studio itself. That was a unique situation. He had fought and screamed and probably thrown so many fits in the first year that he’d won that freedom. We were fortunate to come in after that struggle had been waged. We were no part of it.

Because of Klugman’s clout, Solomon says they never had any interference on any subject matter they wanted to do,

but it was always very funny to send scripts to Standards and Practices and get back virtually no suggestions. And even when we did get them back, we would toss them in the garbage. With impunity. They would send us little things. I

remember we used an expression, “chinks in the armor,” and they somehow thought that was offensive and said, “Take out ‘chinks.’ ”

Occasionally we would throw things into the script just to give them something to complain about. We were doing a show about V.D. and Steve put something in about “The Pussy Patrol” and everybody knew that was going to get a little “x.” So we would throw them a few scraps to get upset about, knowing full well they would cut them.

The writers worked out storylines with Klugman, who was, according to Solomon, “the ultimate decision maker in terms of story content.” This would also lead to rewriting on the set:

Very often he would be sitting in the bungalow or his trailer between scenes and he would say, “The character says something like this,” and he’d go into this tirade, and we would just take our tape recorders and fashion something out of that. On the V.D. show, on location, we were chauffeured around in a limousine trying to find a [copy] machine to [copy] our handwritten scene.

Solomon adds,

The downside of it was there was no one who could say to him, “This is a little over the top.” Generally, he improved everything we did. Sometimes he went a little too far. But largely the success of the show was due to his input, and his ability to know within himself what was right for the show and the character. And if he came off as foaming at the mouth too often, that was his choice.

Generally he tightened the stories. He had a terrific story sense, and a good sense of mystery. A good feeling for what is an interesting crime, and the motives behind the crimes. All this input helped us.

I think his strengths largely outweighed his weaknesses. He was open. He would listen to suggestions. But my recollection is that sometimes he would overdo things.

Because Klugman was impressed with their work, Solomon and Greenberg were asked to become story editors for the show, which meant dealing with other writers. Klugman criticized established television writers in interviews, and this made it difficult for Solomon and Greenberg to get “quality writers,” who simply did not want to put up with the actor’s behavior. Most of the writers Solomon and Greenberg dealt with were younger, more inexperienced writers, and most of the shows were written by the staff writers. Solomon estimates that he and Greenberg wrote about nine shows a year, and the other story editor, Robert Crais, did four or five, and only a few outside assignments were needed to make up the 22 shows. Solomon says they “found that the material we were getting was not sufficient to develop the stories the way Jack wanted them. Because it was the type of show that, unless you were on the inside, you really didn’t have a good feeling for what Jack wanted.” He further

notes that this has become the pattern, since most series in the eighties and later “discovered that unless you have in-house writers, you are going to do a lot of rewriting. And as result, most shows now have six producers, who are all former writers, and they write all the shows.”

Lou Shaw felt that the concept for the series was virtually unlimited and could have continued for twenty years because there was “an endless source of material” in the medical detective work a coroner does. Aubrey Solomon, who wrote off and on for the show for three seasons, is not so sure it could have lasted. When he and his partner came on the show in its second season of one-hour episodes [its first season had been 90- and 120-minute episodes to fit the “wheel” concept], the development of ideas was relatively easy. The story ideas came from research in articles in newspapers and magazines. Their first episode, which hooked Klugman, was based on a piece Greenberg had read about a man who developed a “Death System” for the CIA using snake venom, and it became the kind of medical detective story that Shaw envisioned for the show.

One difficulty in coming up with ideas was that Klugman began to want to deal with issues, not just cases. The writers tried for years to come up with an abortion story, but without success. Klugman finally decided that the issue was so divisive that no matter how it was done, it would alienate half the audience. On the other hand, the show did an episode on the unfairness of kidney transplants being given only to those who could afford them. Solomon learned several years later that the episode was shown in Washington and helped lead to Medicare paying for kidney transplants. (He heard this from the director of the show, Ray Danton, who later had a kidney transplant himself and was told by the people at the hospital of the connection.)

By the end of the run of the show, in its fourth and fifth seasons, it was becoming more and more difficult to find story ideas. The last script that Solomon and Greenberg wrote for the show was developed from an investigative reporter’s story on possible death from breathing problems caused by hairspray. The writers could not track down the original reporter, and the technical advisor on the show felt the issue was not really proved without further research. The episode was not filmed.

Other Universal Series

Before, during, and after his involvement on *Quincy*, Lou Shaw wrote for most of the Universal dramatic series of the seventies, and he wrote mostly for producer Glen Larson, his co-creator on *Quincy*. He met Larson when he came to pitch a story for *McCloud*. The producer of the show, Michael Gleason, warned him that when he pitched to Larson, Larson would end up with a totally different story. At the meeting, Shaw warmed up by telling Larson about meeting a waif-like girl hitchhiker on the way to the studio that day. When he started to pitch the story, Larson told him they were going to

do a story about the girl instead. Gleason later reminded Shaw he had been warned.

Larson wanted Shaw to work full-time on *McCloud*, but Shaw had many other commitments as a free-lancer on such shows as *Columbo*, *Kolchak*, *Ironside*, *Chase*, and *Barnaby Jones*. Larson said, "What the hell are you talking? Are you doing all those shows?"

"Yeah."

"Where are you on them?"

"Well, I just got a story O.K. on *Columbo*. *Kolchak* is in good shape because I'm doing a rewrite. I don't remember. I'll have to look at my calendar."

Larson told him he was only to work on *McCloud*, but Shaw said, "Nah, I couldn't let them down. I like them all." He would agree to come on *McCloud* if he could produce as well, and Larson agreed.

Shaw liked *McCloud* because it was an open mystery and the length, 90 to 120 minutes, let him write a movie each episode. He saw that other writers used to the one-hour format had trouble adapting to the greater length. Shaw also liked the humor of the character, since he had worked in comedy as well as drama. He learned not to write jokes for Dennis Weaver as *McCloud*, since Weaver and the character were not joke-tellers. The comedy had to come out of the character and the confrontation with other characters.

Shaw also wrote for another spoke in the mystery wheel, *Columbo*. He compares writing for the two shows:

Columbo was harder to develop plots [for] than *McCloud*. [For] *Columbo* you needed four or five major clues that turned out awry, [a place where] he said, "I gotcha," and the guy said, "No, because da-da-da-da," and suddenly, oh, it makes sense. And then you nail him on the big one. Peter Fischer was the story editor, I remember, on *Columbo* at the time. Very excellent story editor. He's the boss on *Murder, She Wrote*. He did the same kind of format really on *Murder, She Wrote*. That was his favorite kind of format, the old *Perry Mason* type: four, five suspects, and the one you suspect least is usually the obvious one.

The *Columbo* character, like the *McCloud* character, was so etched. If you really understood it, it was pretty hard not to write a great line of dialogue for him. It would just pour out. Now *McCloud* was taciturn. *Columbo* was verbose. You could write him a page, page-and-a-half scene. He'd stop, "Aw, sorry. I'm sorry, sir. One last question."

Shaw discovered what he considered the "secret" of writing *Columbo* and Peter Fischer confirmed it. Shaw says:

The secret was: you don't tell the audience, but at a certain point you as the writer know there's a magic moment when in his heart *Columbo* knows who did it. And nothing changes. But it does. As a writer, there's a whole attitudinal thing that occurs, and if you didn't find that spot, I don't think the scripts worked.

It was always mystical. From that point on, the whole thing solidly moves into the new gear, and that becomes like the second act, or whatever you want to call it. That's the major turning point in *Columbo*: when he knows.

It's interesting, watching so many *Columbos* later, they never had that point. The shows would be flat when they didn't have that point. I think Peter understood that and his shows were better because of it. When he was off the show I didn't think it was as good.

Since not every show at Universal was as classy as *Columbo*, *McCloud*, or *Quincy*, Lou Shaw kept trying to get off the lot, but Larson or Frank Price kept pulling him back in. In 1977 he wanted to go, and Price told him that if he would do a two-hour episode of *The Six Million Dollar Man*, he'd let him out of the rest of his contract. Shaw had never seen the show, but whipped up the script and did two more, without, apparently, the problem Sy Salkowitz had two years before on the show: how bionic to make him. The bionic man got less and less bionic as the series progressed because the more invulnerable he was, the less interesting the stories were. The producers told Salkowitz to think of him as having the strength of five men rather than a thousand, which he had in the pilot.

Lou Shaw did not get off the lot after *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Price then told him that if he would do three *Nancy Drew Mysteries*, he would let him go. The show had been canceled, but still had the three episodes to complete, but no scripts. Price made the offer on Thursday with no scripts ready to shoot the following Monday. He did a script over the weekend, then two more. A few weeks later he got a call to come up to Frank Price's office, where an NBC executive told him, "They liked the way you've taken *Nancy Drew* and changed the attitudes of everyone. They're picking up the series and they want you to go along as executive producer."

Shaw said, "Are you crazy? What are you talking about? I didn't make any change. It's a young girl and a detective." He admitted that not only had he never read the books, but he had never seen the show nor read any of the other scripts. The show stayed canceled.

Glen Larson created a show called *Switch* about an ex-cop played by Eddie Albert and an ex-con played by Robert Wagner, who create a detective agency. Larson used Shaw to run interference with Albert during a dispute. All Shaw did was listen to Albert's complaints, which satisfied the actor. Larson later asked him what he'd said, and Shaw replied that he had not said anything, but "I give great nod."

Shaw tells how Larson got him to write on *Switch*:

I got into this very weirdly. I was producing *McCloud* and producing and writing *Quincy* at the same time. So I was a little busy. I get a call from Las Vegas and Glen said, "Look, I got the ticket. You've got to catch the plane in three hours and come to Las Vegas."

"Glen, I can't."

He said, "You gotta. I don't want to lose the show. They don't like the stories, and I'm in real big trouble. We're shooting this show right here now. You've got to come." Now as I get to the airport I get a call paging me. It's Glen, "I forgot to tell you one little thing."

I said, "What?"

He said, "They're expecting you to come in with a perfect story."

They're calling "Last Call." "Glen," I said, "It's a half-hour ride." And he's off the phone. Now I come up to the [Las Vegas hotel] room. I meet Glen. He says, "Have you got a good story?"

"Glen, this is crazy." We go into the room. I knew them to say hello, but I didn't know them well. And they're standing there, "Make us laugh" kind of thing.

I'm sitting next to Glen on this little couch. "Tell them the great story you told me." Now, I was so angry on the plane I wasn't thinking. He didn't have the script on time. Somehow or other in that relationship with Glen, it was always my fault, whatever happened. Anyway, I must say in that framework, it was a lot of fun, this you might guess. But anyway, I start saying, "I have this idea that a woman shows up late with a little boy and leaves him with the Eddie Albert character and just runs away. And the Eddie Albert character takes it for granted that it is the R.J. [Robert Wagner] character's illegitimate son."

Eddie says, "What a great idea."

R.J. says, "I love it. We could raise it."

"And—" and Glen gave me a hit, and you hear it on the tape [Shaw recorded the story meeting], pow, basically [Glen was telling Shaw,] "They were hooked, you understand?" and he didn't want me to say another word, because they were starting to build the story, and he knew I didn't know where I was going. So I'm sitting there and I went, [coughs]. Now they're building the story.

Glen said, "Great. Great." Hugs and kisses, we leave.

I said, "O.K., you're out of that one."

He said, "Oh no, you've got to stay here and write it."

"What do you mean? I've got to stay here in Las Vegas and write it? What about the *Quincy* I'm writing and the *McCloud* I'm writing?" Klugman, I think, had just thrown out Glen's script, or something like that. So I said, "I can't. I can't. Glen, I can't."

He said, "You gotta. The whole show. They want you to write it."

So, anyway, that's how I ended up writing [for *Switch*]. And by the way, I'd never read a *Switch* script, and I wrote two *Switches* back to back. And to this day I've never seen a *Switch* show.

Shaw got away from Universal and Larson and was in San Francisco producing and directing a stage show of Tom Lehrer songs. He got a call from Larson, who said he desperately needed help on *The Fall Guy*,² a show about a movie stunt man/bounty hunter. Shaw insisted he had not seen the show, but Larson said, "Oh, you can always write them. Just write one." The network liked the one so much they asked him to do a second. Larson then got him to write and produce seven of the next season's 22. At one point while doing those, he got into a fight with Larson while the network people were

there, and when Larson fired him, one of the network executives said, "If it gets to that, I think you'll be the one to go, Glen. I'd be very cautious." Larson talked Shaw into staying and Shaw brought in for some episodes writers he'd worked with before, such as Aubrey Solomon and Steve Greenberg. Solomon describes working with Shaw as a producer:

We got along very well with Lou. He's a good friend and he's a great storyteller, and he loves just to have someone he can talk to and just enjoy their company. And we enjoyed working with him.

Lou is a funny kind of producer, because he'll spend three weeks trying to get act one right, and then you'll have two days to figure out the other three acts, so a large part of our time is spent working on that first act.

Glen Larson also created *Knight Rider*, but by the time Joel Rogosin came on the show as a producer in later seasons he was no longer actively involved. Rogosin says, "We used to send Glen *Knight Rider* scripts. I think his contract demanded that. And I never heard from him. Never. Nobody ever called up and said, 'We got the script. We didn't get the script. We like it. We don't like it.' And frankly, I'm sure he didn't care. He's very, very comfortable, Glen, with his residuals and royalties."

Producer Cy Chermak once told Sy Salkowitz that to be a successful producer, "You always had to have a writer in your pocket that could be thrown in at the last minute to fix something, or give you something in a hurry." Lou Shaw was Glen Larson's "pocket writer," as Shaw admits:

Glen, as a high-flying producer, never wanted me to leave because he had in me someone who could do whatever is necessary. And to me it was very good, because it becomes a little gold mine. In my heart I know if I have to write a two-hour script based on no plot, whatever it needs, I can do it . . . Glen could always talk me into anything, I must say.

The Rockford Files

There are at least two versions of how *The Rockford Files* was created. In the first version³ producer Roy Huggins and writer Stephen J. Cannell were on the spot with a cop series called *Toma*. In the spring of 1973 the fourth show of the series would not make its airdate and ABC needed something to fill in. Cannell had an idea that *Toma* could hand off a case to a private investigator. *Toma* would appear at the beginning and end, but the rest of the show could be shot while another *Toma* episode was being filmed. Cannell and Huggins decided to throw in anything that would undo the private-eye clichés: private eyes did not have relatives, so Rockford had a father; they had sexy secretaries, so Rockford had an answering machine; they had seedy offices, so Rockford worked out of a trailer at the beach. Cannell only had five days to do the

screenplay and found himself writing fifteen to twenty pages a day. He had "so much fun breaking all the rules" that the screenplay ended up 90 pages long, half again the length for an hour show. ABC wanted to cut it to an hour and take out the humor. Cannell and Huggins refused, and Universal, the producer of *Toma*, decided to do *The Rockford Files* as a 90-minute TV movie and pilot.

Roy Huggins remembers the development a little differently. The star of *Toma* was Tony Musante, an intense New York actor, and Huggins ran the stories he came up with for the show by Musante and Musante's wife before he had them written. When Musante's wife said she thought one was not a particularly *Toma* story, Huggins filed it away. A week later he got a call from his old *Maverick* star, James Garner, who told him, "Roy, I've decided I'm going to go back into television."

Huggins replied, "Yeah, but you don't like Universal."

Garner said, "I've decided I'll even work at Universal if you can come up with something."

Huggins, remembering his *Toma* story, said, "Hold your horses, James, I may have something." He reworked the story, making the character *Maverick* as a private eye. He gave the story to Cannell, who wrote the script. (The credits for the movie read "Teleplay by Stephen J. Cannell. From a story by John Thomas James," which was Huggins's pseudonym.) ABC passed on the movie and Universal took it to NBC, which bought it and the series.

As Huggins points out, what he brought to the show was the combination of action and humor that was a hallmark of his work on *Maverick*:

The character [of Rockford] was the guarantee that it would be funny. Any guy who is the reluctant hero, who can argue with the girl over who's going to pick up the check, who turns all the cliches upside down is going to be funny. And the guy was sneaky. A guy who's waiting for the heavy to come in and puts soap all over the bathroom floor so that he will have an easier time winning is funny. So it's going to be funny whether it is action or not action. Because it isn't verbal wit. It's character wit.

The *Rockford Files* series goes beyond the character wit Huggins refers to. Particularly in the writing of Cannell, David Chase, and especially Juanita Bartlett, Rockford's attitudes toward the police, the FBI, the CIA, the Mafia, or any other American authority figures present a consistently anti-authoritarian viewpoint. This was usually present in traditional private-eye shows, but *Rockford* takes it a step further. It also goes further than Huggins did in *Maverick*. In the Western, the authority figures were those of the past, while on *Rockford* they are contemporary. In other series, representatives of the Federal Government and the Mafia are both treated seriously. In *Rockford*, they are not. They are smart, because, as Bartlett says, "There's no triumph in overcoming a stupid person. So we tried to make them human." They have hu-

man failings, especially the bureaucrats, whether legal or illegal. Bartlett's insights "just come from dealing with them, the idiocies of bureaucracies. It's from life. And it doesn't get any better. It seems to be getting worse."

Juanita Bartlett had written for Garner before. After trying unsuccessfully for years to sell scripts, she finally broke in on Garner's show *Nichols*. She remembers sitting watching the first dailies of Garner saying her lines, and, recalling that she had been rejected by *Lassie*, she turned to the producer, Frank Pierson, and said, "Do you realize what it means to sit here in the projection room and hear my words coming out of Jim Garner's mouth? My first dailies could have been 'Arf.'" Bartlett says now of writing for Garner:

Instead [of *Lassie*] I have this marvelous actor. As Steve [Cannell] said, when you're in the series business, you never have enough time, and invariably there would be a line that you'd think, "There's a better line. There's a better line in there. I just don't have time to find it." And you go to dailies and it would come back at you as the wittiest, most wonderful line anybody could ever have written. Because Jim knew how to deliver it. He's such a joy.

Bartlett says of working with Garner on *Rockford*, "We were as enthusiastic in the sixth year as we were in the first . . . There wasn't anybody on that show who would not have been ready to do murder for Jim Garner." As opposed to Jack Klugman on *Quincy*.

Juanita Bartlett describes the writing process on *The Rockford Files*:

We would sit down and we would have story meetings and if I had a story to do, we would work on mine. For the first two years Steve and I pretty well [did most of the scripts]. Steve's faster than I am, so he wrote more. "You're up . . . I'm up . . . You're up . . . I'm up." We did have some outside writers. Most of those we rewrote, which is not a reflection on the writer necessarily. It's just a fact that if you are working on a show, you know those characters so well that it's just easier. You give the outside writer an opportunity to do the second draft and the polish, and if it's not there, then you go in and do the fine tuning and make sure that it's *Rockford*.

Then David Chase joined us, and there were three of us who put the stories together. And usually we would start either with a character that we liked, [or] sometimes it would be a situation.

An episode that I wrote called "Trouble in Chapter 13" was the result of a cover story in *Time* about Marabel Morgan, the woman who told you to wrap yourself in cellophane and greet your husband that way. What you looked for were characters that would generate some kind of heat with *Rockford*. *Rockford* was a character who was totally without bullshit in him, and didn't appreciate it in others. And if you put him with somebody who was 99 and 44/100th percent bullshit, you knew you were going to get something, so that's pretty much the way we did it.

Bartlett tells of the genesis of one of the show's most memorable characters:

On one occasion we were sitting there and I had to do it. I was up at bat and he [Stephen Cannell] said, "Well, do you have any ideas?"

I said, "No."

"Any characters you are dying to write?"

"No."

It was just nothing. So he said, "Why don't we go for something really unique, really unusual. The hooker with the heart of gold." And that's how the Rita Capkovic [character was created, which won Rita Moreno an Emmy in 1978]. It started out as a gag.

I said, "Oh, that's wonderful, Stephen. The hooker with the heart of gold?" As a matter of fact, the *Nichols* that I wrote was about a saloon keeper who was a little more than a saloon keeper. My first *Toma* for Roy was about a madame, a kind of Xaviera Hollander character. *The Cowboys* that I wrote was about a lady with a shady reputation. I thought, "What is it? Why do I keep writing about these people?"

I have some story [meeting] tapes that are so funny and so dirty because when we were putting together the Rita show, Steve and Dave [Chase] would do everything in their power to get to me. They are so filthy with what they are saying, and you can hear me on the tape saying, "All right. Are you guys finished? Fine. Now can we continue? Can we get this out of the locker room?" They were trying to make me laugh. And I was not going to laugh at their filthy jokes.

An example of how the staff on *The Rockford Files* collaborated can be seen in the development of "So Help Me God," which deals with the abuses of the Federal Grand Jury system. Bartlett had been developing another script and was stuck for a "B" story (the "A" story is the main story of the episode, the "B" story is a subplot). One morning David Chase came down the hall with a copy of *The New Yorker* and he showed Bartlett a story on the grand jury system, suggesting it might make the "B" story. Bartlett read it and said to him, "This isn't the subplot. This is one on its own. I love this." Bartlett says today, "Of course I know as much about law as I do about hooking, so when I finished the script, I sent a copy to the ACLU and the ABA and asked if they would read the material and tell me if I had made any horrendous gaffes." There was one step in the procedure she had missed, and that change was made. The show received numerous awards from lawyers' groups.

The Rockford Files, with its own lighter touch, managed to deal with issues as well as attitudes, blending them together so that the episodes never appeared to be preaching, unlike many of the *Quincy* episodes. *Rockford* was moving away from dealing with issues as issues and toward integrating them into the storylines and conventions of the show. In addition to being highly entertaining, the show was part of a transition from earlier shows like *The Defenders* and *Dr. Kildare*, which dealt with an issue a week, to the more integrated later shows like *Hill Street Blues* and *China Beach*.

MOVIES AND MINISERIES: THE LATER YEARS

Given the success Paramount had with Eric Bercovici's work on the miniseries *Washington: Behind Closed Doors*, it is not surprising they thought of him when they purchased the rights to James Clavell's novel of feudal Japan, *Shogun*. Bercovici was sent a copy of the massive novel with instructions "Read this tonight." He got through the first three hundred pages, and then was told at the studio the next day not to bother. Paramount assigned the project to others.

A year later, Bercovici was called by the president of Paramount and told to meet with Clavell. Bercovici had begun to develop an idea of how to do the film version of *Shogun* the year before:

So I went over and met with James for the first time and I told him my idea of how to do *Shogun*, which was to change the whole view of the book. The book is written from God's point of view: you know what everybody is thinking, characters are speaking Japanese, Portuguese, Latin, English, Dutch, everything. Obviously, you can't do that. However, I wanted to shift the emphasis and tell the movie from Blackthorne's point of view and have him understand, and have the others understand, only what he understands by having the Japanese speak only Japanese. But James was [saying], "But what about all the scenes where Toranaga and all the Japanese are sitting around talking all that wonderful political stuff?"

I said, "It's got to go. You can't do it." He looked rather grumpy at that, and I said, "I didn't get this job."

He said, "Meet me at the house tomorrow at ten o'clock." So I go up to his house, and I knew that I had displeased him. I rang the doorbell and he opened it and he was a totally different James Clavell. He was a smiling man. He had torn up a copy of the book and torn out everything I said I was going to leave out of the script. He handed me this. He said, "By God, it works."

At that point I entered into this mystical relationship with James Clavell that continues to this day. Mystical in that he started to place all his faith in me, without question. And when you are working for someone who likes what you are doing, you do better work with encouragement. He encouraged me mightily.

Bercovici did no research on his own while writing the script, relying on the novel. When he went to Japan as producer of the miniseries he spent a week with a Japanese historian who corrected what Bercovici calls “the misinterpretations of Japanese history.” In spite of that, there were battles over the history during the production, sometimes over very trivial matters. When the crew was getting ready to shoot a scene with swans in the background, some of the Japanese assistants were taking away the swans, saying at this period in history they did not know how to clip swans’ wings. Bercovici, who took the attitude that it was drama, not history, had them replace the swans.

Since Bercovici wanted to tell the story from the point of view of Blackthorne, the English navigator, he wanted to keep the Japanese speaking Japanese. He wrote the entire script in English, then had his assistant, Chiho Adachi, translate the Japanese characters’ dialogue into Japanese. Bercovici himself translated Blackthorne’s Japanese speeches so they would be in awkward Japanese. He turned the script in to Deanne Barkley, the head of miniseries for NBC, who read it and said, “It’s terrific. Go.” Bercovici points out that among executives “there is a reluctance to read in Hollywood [and New York], especially something like [the size] of the New York phone book.” He thinks no other executive, either at NBC or Paramount did read it. The network’s censors read it and there was what Bercovici felt were relatively minor negotiations about content, specifically the pissing scene, the decapitation, and a few uses of the word “bastard.”

The shooting schedule ended up helping keep the Japanese language in the miniseries. The original schedule was upset when the actress first hired for Mariko wanted to add “another zero” to her contract. While they searched for another actress, they shot the shipwreck scenes first, using as many as eight cameras, and scenes with the English crew of the ship. This resulted in “endless, endless footage,” which was processed in Japan and sent back to Paramount and NBC. Bercovici is convinced that after the first month of this, nobody at Paramount or NBC was watching any of the dailies. The first time anybody at the studio or the network realized that much of the film was in Japanese was when they saw the first cut, and Bercovici began to get calls from the executives asking him if *any* of the rest of the show was in English. There were constant debates with the network executives, who wanted to subtitle the Japanese scenes, but Bercovici eventually prevailed, pointing out that it would make Mariko’s translations redundant. Bercovici adds,

They also kept changing the format. Originally it was three hours, two hours, two hours, two hours, and three hours. Then it became three hours, one hour, two hours, three hours, one hour. [It ended up three, two, two, two, and three.] We kept changing the format, changing the focus, and saying, “What are we going to do about the Japanese?” The whole end of that show was done with an endless stomach cramp.

In addition to writing the script, Bercovici also ended up having to write a sea shanty. In the script he had just written that Blackthorne sings a shanty. When they got to Japan they realized they did not have one, and the tapes Paramount had UCLA send of historical shanties did not work. Bercovici told director Jerry London he would write one.

I wrote it in a car. It was inspiration out of desperation. Richard [Chamberlain] had to learn it, and it was fairly Keystone Comedy, because I had this shanty in my head. I said, "Get me a piano." [If] I can pick it on the piano, I can write it down. First we had to find a piano. Not that easy to do. They finally found a piano and I wrote the music and the lyrics down. Since I was too shy to sing it myself, I gathered a few people and taught them the song. So we all sang it together so we could make a tape to give to Richard, because they were certainly more on key than I was.

As the writer and producer, Bercovici was involved in the post-production phase and beyond. For the first run of the miniseries in 1980, he wrote the "legends" setting the scene, as well as the narration for Orson Welles to deliver. For the second run, NBC wanted more legends and subtitling and Bercovici supervised those, as well as writing more narration for Welles. Bercovici was also involved in writing and cutting different versions of the film. While they were in production he was told they would have to prepare a two-hour version, so he cut the script down to a two-hour version that was filled with "telephone booth scenes" (although there were no telephone booths in feudal Japan) in which characters describe what happened in the scenes that had been cut: "Oh my God, you should have seen what just happened. It's incredible." Bercovici kept insisting that this version made no sense. Gary Nardino, an executive at Paramount agreed, but insisted there be a two-hour version. Bercovici still thinks the two-hour version is "dreadful."

Then, there are three other versions. We then made a two-and-a-half-hour version that at least filled in some of the holes. Not all of them, but some of them, which NBC played as three hours. That was a little bit better. Then there was a Japanese version, 2 hours and 47 minutes. In the two-hour version and also the two-and-a-half-hour version we took out most of the Japanese-language scenes. In the Japanese version we took out most of the English-language scenes. None of them is any good, I don't think. The twelve hours are the twelve hours. That I am happy to have my name on. The rest of it is nothing terribly valuable.

At least Eric Bercovici had the advantage of having all the historical characters in *Shogun* safely dead when he wrote that miniseries, and the only people who complained were Japanese historians and Jesuits who did not like the way the missionaries were portrayed. E. Jack Neuman did not have it so easy on his 1982 miniseries based on Albert Speer's autobiography, *Inside the*

Third Reich. Speer was still alive and Neuman spent a year with Speer in Germany, asking questions.

Speer was totally frank with me about everything. He never evaded a question, never eluded anything. And I began to understand a very, very complex man, and in spite of myself, after a couple of years I began to grow fond of him. But I did not make him a great sympathetic man on the screen at all. I told the story of the worst Nazi of them all, because he knew better. And I think the audience understood that.

Neuman had first developed an interest in doing a miniseries of *Inside the Third Reich* when he read in a literary trade journal that the book had sold 19 million copies. He then learned that the book had been optioned at different times by several different companies for a total of \$300,000 in options, but had never been filmed (Neuman also learned by accident that Speer had not kept the money from the book but turned it over to the United Jewish Relief). The book was by then un-optioned and he went to the head of NBC, John McMahon, who told him to do it, even though Neuman wanted to do it as a ten-hour miniseries. A deal was made to do it at Paramount, and then both McMahon and the head of Paramount were fired. The new head of NBC, Fred Silverman, wanted to do it, but as Neuman found out, "Some guy in New York had decided to de-fang Freddie and also decided they didn't want *Inside the Third Reich* at their network." The problem, Neuman discovered, was that the senior executive at NBC did not believe Speer.

Neuman managed a meeting with him and asked him if he believed Erich Fromm, Telford Taylor, Simon Weisenthal, and William Shirer—all of whom Neuman had also talked to. The executive said he did, but still did not believe Speer. Neuman's agent, Frank Cooper, knew how much work Neuman had already put in on the project, and he managed to get it away from NBC and Paramount and took it to Brandon Stoddard at ABC, who said, "Let's go, baby." Stoddard did insist on cutting Neuman's script from ten hours to five hours, which is all he felt he could give the film.

Neuman did not get much help from either the author or the main character in his next miniseries, the 1985 *A Death in California*. The four-hour film was based on Joan Barthel's book about a true-life crime, in which Hope Masters, a Beverly Hills socialite, has a love/hate relationship with the man who killed her fiancé and raped her. Neuman called Barthel, "who didn't want to have anything to do with me." He hired a researcher to pull together all the coverage of the case, and he talked to nearly everybody connected with the case. "I stayed away from Hope herself, because I figured she was a flake anyway. I finally met her after the picture was made. Absolutely fucking gorgeous. She made Cheryl Ladd [who played the part] look like a tramp. But a flake, a real flake. She was still going to visit the guy." According to Neuman, the murderer still has a suit against him and ABC for defamation of character,

and Neuman says, "I'm sure he's going to knock on the door one day when he gets out of the slam."

Neuman's next movie was also based on a true story, told in an article by Michael Daly in *New York* magazine, about a Queens mother who becomes an undercover agent for the DEA when she discovers her son is hooked on drugs. The network, CBS, only wanted a two-hour movie, but Neuman persuaded them it had enough material for three hours. He thinks it could have even gone longer, since Daly had done enough research for more, and Neuman had difficulty getting *Courage* down to three hours.

For his four-hour 1990 movie *Voices Within*, about a woman with multiple personalities, Neuman looked at the two famous films on the subject, the 1957 theatrical film *The Three Faces of Eve* and the 1976 television miniseries *Sybil*, but felt they were both "pretty dull pictures," done with the same formula, starting with a troubled person coming to the psychiatrist and then flashing back to when the person was sane. His version started out with the young woman "young, vibrant, pretty, and successful, with all the confidence in the world about life. Slowly but surely you find out that there's more than one of them." Neuman had some reservations about the final results, since he did not think Shelley Long, who played the lead was "quite up to it," but he thought Lamont Johnson directed it "very well." Neuman produced it and thinks "the trick is to ride it through and make them keep their nose on the script. You know, even Monty [Johnson] has a tendency to [do] a little creating or something. 'No, I'll do the creating Monty, thank you. Just do what it says.' They don't like that but I'm not bashful a bit. A blithe personality I'm not."

Not every television movie of the eighties had a serious subject. *Midnight Offerings*, a 1981 two-hour movie written by Juanita Bartlett and Stephen J. Cannell, puts a witch in conflict with a college girl with supernatural powers. Bartlett and Cannell, who had worked together on *The Rockford Files*, sat down on a Sunday to work out the story. Bartlett is fascinated by the occult and has an extensive library on the subject. Cannell admitted he knew very little about it, so Bartlett explained such things as what witches do, and Cannell, like a kid with a new toy, wanted to include everything. Bartlett told him it would be too gimmicky. Bartlett, talking of this and *Rockford*, says what she misses most no longer working with him is "the laughing. I have laughed my way through so many story meetings with Steve."

In the eighties, as in the seventies, there were also star-vehicle television movies, and two that E. Arthur Kean wrote were star biographies as well. He was somewhat reluctantly drawn into doing the 1982 two-hour film *Mae West* because he hoped to be able to direct it as well. At the first meeting with executives at ABC, he told them, "I am not going to tell lies about this woman. Now, that's the deal breaker." They assured him they did not want him to do that, and he went to work on the script. Ironically, because of the network's insisting that the material be as raunchy as possible, Kean had no

problems with the network censors. "They didn't dare censor this, because it was about censorship." Kean found himself fighting with "the ABC guy," Stu Samuels, who

wanted to do all the stuff I said up front I'm not going to do, so we continually went around about this. He just wanted to make it more crass, more commercially viable. I said, "No. We're lying about her. We can't do that. She's recently dead. Too many people know her and love her and we can't offend these people. It's not right."

He said, "Aw, fuck this. Come on, we're making pictures, guy." That was essentially the attitude.

Kean thinks the arguments with Samuels led to his not directing the film. Kean was sent a copy of the shooting script, and he did not recognize a third of the pages.

There were also changes in the characterization. Kean had written West's mother as a duchess who falls in love with an Irish stable boy, which shows West what can happen when a woman is overcome by love, thus motivating West's determination not to be at the mercy of men. Piper Laurie was cast in the role, and she, in Kean's words, "decided she knew more about writing than I did." She changed the duchess into what Kean calls "a nasty little guttersnipe . . . a nice, feisty woman [who] had nothing to do" with the original characterization and therefore changed the dynamics of the story.

Kean did not have much better luck the next year with *Rita Hayworth: The Love Goddess*. Kean's old producer from *Police Story*, Stan Kallis, asked him to work on the project, which already had a script by a woman writer. Kean read it and thought it was "stillborn. It was essentially two hours of the same scene [of] Harry Cohn [dumping] on Rita Hayworth." Kean read the biography the script was based on, then called Kallis and said, "Stan, I don't know who this lady is, but somehow, she has studiously gone through this biography and removed all the good stuff." Kallis agreed and Kean worked out a storyline.

The production of *Rita Hayworth* came about in the first place because of Lynda Carter's big success with the *Wonder Woman* series, which started on ABC but moved to CBS. Carter's CBS deal included television movies, but by the early eighties the network, Kean says, was "stuck with this commitment with her and they wanted to dump it. They just wanted it over with." David Susskind said he could produce the film for a million dollars, and the network agreed. There was a rush to get the film done and Kean went into the first production meeting with only an outline, from which he explained the story and the characters. Kean recalls that the unit production manager, who handles the minute details of the production ("and these people are not known for their generosity, or their humanity, and their effulgence," Kean notes) said, "Now we've got a story to tell." Kean felt "very good that this guy

is so moved,” and while they were casting and scouting locations, he whipped up a script in about a week. Susskind called up him and said, “Art, you dazzle me,” which was followed by a similar call from Stan Kallis.

Three or four days later Kean learned the company had not acquired the rights to use any of Hayworth’s movies, and furthermore they did not think they could get them, with the possible exception of the “Put the Blame on Mame” song from *Gilda*, and while Kean would be allowed to use the number, he could not use the scene. And they needed the revised script the next day. Kean recalls:

I remember in the middle of this saying, “This is a catastrophe. Why am I having so much fun?” I was having a wonderful time with no known reason. So I remember saying, “O.K., I can solve this,” and I left. I came back in two or three days, and I’d solved it all. And Susskind called and said, “Art, you did it again. You dazzle me. It’s absolutely wonderful. How do you do these things?”

I said, “I don’t know, but I did it. And I’m very glad.”

When they read the “Put the Blame on Mame” scene they called me and said, “We can’t do this! We can’t do this! You’re showing the scene.”

I said, “Have you finished reading the scene?”

They said, “No.”

I said, “Well, you call me later.” She’s in the gown and she does the whole number, and when it’s over, you expect maybe somebody to say, “Cut,” or whatever, but it’s the wrap party [at the close of shooting] and she was performing it for everybody, and that got into the key confrontation with Harry Cohn. And that worked very well.

The director hired, James Goldstone, was not enthusiastic about Lynda Carter. He told Kean, “She can’t act. She can’t sing. She can’t dance. This picture’s going to be a disaster.” Kean thinks that Carter is “a nice lady,” but at the first cast reading of the script, she was mumbling. He thought she was just nervous, but “little did I know that was the top of her form.” At the reading, Kean thought the show might work, but he went back after seven days of rehearsal for the final read-through, and felt it was like a funeral: “Goldstone had in seven days destroyed everybody’s spirit.” Kean describes David Susskind at this point as “suicidal. Everyone was way down, and I knew we were on our way to a catastrophe.” Kean later said on a radio interview that he felt that Goldstone had ruined the film without changing a word. What he meant was that, for example, the big final confrontation scene, which was supposed to be a big screaming match, was played quietly. At the industry screening of the film Goldstone introduced Kean by saying, “His dialogue is so easy to cut.” Kean had to be restrained by his wife.

The original screenwriter asked for a Guild arbitration on the writing credit, and Kean was “in the odd position of arguing to protect my screen credit, which I am considering removing.” Kean’s sole credit stood, and in spite of

his opinion of the film he has received heavy residuals from both the domestic cable sales and overseas sales.

In the early eighties, Christopher Knopf wrote two biographical films rather different from Kean's. For the first one, Procter and Gamble approached Knopf and his partner, Stan Hough, about sponsoring a four-hour miniseries based on the lives of the apostles Peter and Paul. Basing the script of *Peter and Paul* on the Acts of the Apostles from the Bible, Knopf was getting "constant, constant feedback" from a variety of religious advisors. The Catholic advisors took exception to his reference, straight from the Bible, that Joseph, Jesus's brother, took over running the church after Jesus's death. The Catholics contended that Mary remained a virgin all her life and had no other children. The Catholics also insisted that the film had to show Peter in Rome, although the Bible never says he went to Rome, only to Babylon, which the Catholics insisted was a code word for Rome. Knopf felt that the constraints on him and his collaborators made the film "stodgy. I think it was written a little stodgily. Everybody else added their stodginess to it. I think the problem was that we were totally inhibited from breaking away from the Bible and adding any theatricality to it. We just stayed with what the Bible had." On the other hand, Knopf says that "extremely religious people" liked the film very much because it was so literally the Acts of the Apostles.

Knopf had almost no problems with the Catholic Church on his next film, three years later, the 1984 *Pope John Paul II*, which dealt with the early life of Karol Wojtyla. Knopf worked primarily through the archdiocese of New York. He had problems instead with CBS, which thought the film was too slow. They also may have thought they were going to get a different kind of film. One CBS executive knew that Wojtyla had been anti-Nazi during the war and expected this to provide some action scenes. Knopf explained to him that Wojtyla's activities were confined to an underground theater group and told the executive, "I can't put a gun in the Pope's hands."

The executive replied with the classic show-business phrase, "Isn't that negotiable?"

Knopf told him, "I don't think so."

Ed Waters ran into network problems as well on his first television movie, the 1981 thriller *The Intruder Within*. He says that compared to writing for episodic series, television movies are "an easier form, but it's a much dicier game. If you are doing episodes, if you are any good, you know they are going to be on. When you're doing movies for television, maybe one in three gets on, or that was the average in those days. And you're dealing much more closely with the network. They're really controlling it." With this film, the production company came to him and wanted to do what was essentially a remake of *Boom Town*, the 1940 Clark Gable-Spencer Tracy movie about oil wildcatters. Waters looked at the film and did not think there was much story there, but decided an interesting story could be done on an offshore oil rig. ABC then generated an internal memo describing the film as a horror

movie. The producer, John Furia, Jr., gave Waters a chance to back out, since it was not the film he had intended to write. Waters decided to do it since he had never done a horror story before, but the script was changed after he left to make it more of a rip-off of the current theatrical hit *Alien*.

As the eighties progressed, there were more and more co-production deals, which involved more than just network influence. In the early eighties David Simons talked to Christopher Knopf about the possibility of a TV movie about a real Cambodian teenaged girl who came to America in 1970 speaking no English and who went on to win a spelling bee four years later. The show, which was finally called *The Girl Who Spelled Freedom*, was written for the British production company Marble Arch for broadcast on CBS, but the network decided it was "too soft" and did not run it. Disney was starting a two-hour anthology show and got hold of the script and made a co-production deal with Marble Arch's successor, ITC. The ITC executive put in charge of the project hated the script. Knopf prevailed, and the show went on to win a number of awards, several of which the executive happily accepted. Knopf notes, "He loves those plaques."

In the mid-eighties, Sam Rolfe moved from television movies into miniseries. He had not done miniseries before that because "Nobody ever asked me." In the case of the 1985 miniseries *The Key to Rebecca*, Taft Entertainment had Rolfe under contract and asked him if he could do a script from the book. Rolfe believes the book's author Ken Follett is "a marvelous book writer, and I don't think he'll ever want me to write anything else of his, and I don't think I ever want to touch anything of his." The main character in the book, a German agent in World War II, is told to go to Cairo and just generally help win the war. Rolfe told the executives at Taft, "You can get away with writing this because, somehow or other, in a book you're just looking at the words and a good wordsmith can just carry you along." On the screen, he said, "You're going to be watching this, and the [dramatic] flaws are going to jump out at you." The company agreed and Rolfe went to work.

So I really had to lay in a lot of stuff to make that work. It was a bitch. Ken Follett hated me for that. First of all, I had to give the guy a mission. Do something, and not just steal things until you get the right one. I had to find a way to get him directed to what he wanted.

I also had to work up the relationship between the man and the woman, which I think I did rather well. Some of the best dialogue I've written. I stuck in a couple of those scenes between the protagonist and the woman he uses in this. I had to cut down on the sexual stuff, not because I wanted to, but because that's what you had to do in television. I just had to reshape an awful lot of things. People who are in the know congratulated me on making that story work. Never mind it was a best-seller. Making it into a screenplay is a whole different ballgame.

The Key to Rebecca ran 200 minutes, and the following year Rolfe wrote what became a five-hour miniseries, *On Wings of Eagles*. Based on Follett's

nonfiction account of H. Ross Perot's attempt to rescue two of his employees held hostage in Iran, the project was originally to be a theatrical film, but Taft at some point decided to do it as a miniseries. Rolfe did not know it was to be five hours when he began writing. He wrote "my normal long first draft, and then when they said, 'Let's find some more,' I just wrote another exceptionally longer [draft, with] incidents, people, and things. [I] just took it and made it longer than it had to be, and just cut it back down."

The material was not very dramatic: the team arrived in Iran with a plan, the plan was clearly not going to work, and through events they had not planned, they were able to rescue the hostages. The material could well have been written as a black-comedy adventure, but Perot was insistent that his men appear to be "heroes." Rolfe did not object to this: "My whole story depends on them being heroes. And secondly, I think they were very brave to do it. Even if it didn't work out [as planned], it's a gutsy thing to try to do." Perot showed up in the middle of the mission, which could have been a stupid thing to do, but it was easy enough to make it look heroic as well. Rolfe invented several incidents to make it more dramatic, doing "a lot of creative work in there. But the thing that made it tough was that it was based on a story that's supposed to be true, and the characters really did live. But everybody sort of approved of it and it turned out very well, I think."

When Rolfe was interviewed for this book, he had just finished a script for a television movie on redwoods. His script was two hours and the company wanted to stretch it to three, but he told them it would just be speeches and no drama at three hours, but better and more dramatic at two. He accepted the assignment reluctantly, telling the company, "Don't give me a subject like that. Give me an ax murderer, give me a war, give me something I can sink my teeth into. You give me redwoods and it's tough." He describes it as "one of the toughest things I've ever written."

Eric Bercovici had more lively subject matter when he wrote the 1986 three-hour movie *The Fifth Missile*, based on the book *The Gold Crew* which shows what happens when war games on a Trident submarine get out of hand and two officers try to avert a nuclear war. When the script was completed, it was sent to the Navy with a request for cooperation. The Navy told Bercovici they knew of the book, did not approve of it, and would not cooperate. When Bercovici drove up the submarine base at Bremerton, Washington, to look around, the sentry told him, "We've been expecting you. Get out of here." MGM had developed the project but turned it down, and they told Bercovici that if he set up a co-production that included MGM, they would be willing to be part of it. He set up a co-production in four days with European financing—which meant the film was shot on sound stages in Rome and at the Italian naval base at Taranto.

After moving out of television and into theatrical films in the sixties, Reginald Rose returned in the seventies to work in the longer forms. In 1979 he did *Studs Lonigan*, a six-hour (originally planned for eight) adaptation of

James T. Farrell's trilogy, and in 1982 he did an original miniseries, *The Rules of Marriage*, about a marriage that breaks up. He said in an interview at the time that he was shifting from writing about issues, as he had in the early days of live television, to writing about relationships. He noted that Paddy Chayefsky had gone the other way, from relationship television plays like "Marty" to theatrical films about issues like *Network*.¹

Rose returned to issues with the three-hour 1987 television movie *Escape from Sobibor* about the biggest and most successful escape from a concentration camp. The final film was a bit unbalanced, spending all but the last ten minutes on the preparations for the escape. The film was originally to have a second part, which was to run two hours, dealing with the escape. The script was written, but Rose says, "The CBS executives did their biennial dance," and a new set of executives came in who did not want to do it, since it was not their project and they did not want to see a project from the old regime turn into a hit. The first part became the complete film.

In 1988 the creators of *Shogun* collaborated again, this time on the eight-hour miniseries called officially *James Clavell's Noble House*. The material does not lend itself to a miniseries as well as *Shogun* does (but not many novels do). The plot deals with attempts to take over or ruin the Hong Kong banking house of Struan's, so there is a lot of exposition in dialogue about banking in general and "Hong Kong rules" in particular. The story also does not lend itself to Bercovici's approach to *Shogun*. The major character of *Noble House* is Ian Dunross, the *tai-pan*, or boss, of Struan's. He is already on the inside of the world of the story, and is protecting his world rather than exploring another one.

There is also a certain amount of back-story about the bank to get it, since its history was told by Clavell in his earlier novel *Tai-pan*, which was made into a dreadful theatrical film in 1986. *Noble House* does work better as a miniseries, and *Tai-pan* probably would have as well. The characters in *Noble House* are interesting, and the Hong Kong scenery is, as usual, spectacular, as are the sequences of the fire on the floating restaurant and the collapse of an apartment building (although the major characters seem to remain superhumanly cool through both disasters).

Shogun, in 1980, had been a co-production involving Paramount, Toho, the Ashai National Broadcasting Company of Japan, and the Jardine Matheson Company. The trend in movies and especially in the more expensive miniseries throughout the eighties was toward that same kind of co-production, as in the cases of *Peter and Paul*, *Pope John Paul II*, *The Girl Who Spelled Freedom*, and *The Fifth Missile*. This meant an increase in the kind and variety of executives involved in the production of the films. The impact of the American networks did not necessarily abate.

When *Noble House* was first published, there was a slight interest from NBC, but they turned it down since they were not sure the business storyline was that interesting. Clavell then worked out a deal with the Beta Taurus

company of Munich to develop the project. Bercovici's first script was for twelve hours, but there were no takers for three years. Then CAA, the agency handling the material, sold the project to Dino De Laurentiis and his De Laurentiis Entertainment Group. But there were still no network takers. Finally, Bercovici went to a meeting with Brandon Tartikoff and Susan Baerwald of NBC for what he thought was to be a discussion of cutting the series down to eight hours. There was very little discussion. Baerwald said, "Yeah, Eric can cut it down to eight hours."

Tartikoff replied, "Can I have it on the air in February?" It was agreed it could be done, and Bercovici walked out of the room with an agreement to do the show. As did other writers in their dealings with the networks, Bercovici suspected that, as usual, there were things going on behind the scenes that he simply did not know about.

PROFESSIONAL STATUS

The Guild

Since television evolved out of both radio and the movies, unions connected with both showed interest in organizing the writers of the new medium. As early as February 1949, some writers in the Authors' League of America (ALA), but without the backing of the ALA itself, were trying to organize a Television Writers Guild.¹ The Radio Writers Guild (RWG), a branch of the ALA, later in 1949 called for a joint effort with the Screen Writers Guild (SWG) to work out representation for TV writers,² but many radio writers felt the SWG did not understand the problems of television writers, particularly the question of residual payments. Radio had for years paid writers additional payments when shows were rebroadcast, but there was nothing equivalent in the motion picture business. In June 1949 the SWG stated it would seek residual payments for writers when theatrical films were shown on television.³

By 1954 television writers were covered by the Writers Guild of America, a merger of the SWG and RWG that broke away from the ALA. Richard Powell says that at the time of the merger the film writers treated the television writers as "stepchildren." The conflict between the television and screen writers was not smoothed over by the reorganization and continues in some degree to this day.

The guild got agreements in principle on residuals in the early negotiations, but it took the six-month strike in 1959–60 to get the money as well as the principle. By the middle of 1991, the guild had collected over \$700 million in residuals for its members, the largest source of which was television reruns.⁴ One writer interviewed for this book noted that he gets about \$20,000 in residuals and royalties per year, and judging by some of the houses I interviewed people in, other writers make a lot more than that. Because the television business can be so cyclical, residuals are necessary to keep writers in the business during the slow times.

Throughout the fifties and early sixties, the screenwriters' branch of the guild was the most powerful branch. In 1965 Christopher Knopf was the first television writer elected president of the WGAW (Writers Guild of America, west). The vote was on branch (screen vs. television) lines, and he beat screenwriter Michael Blankfort by seven votes. Knopf does not think his guild involvement has created any negative network or studio reaction to him as a writer.

Knopf, who has been through several guild strikes, thinks, "You have to strike for everything. Nobody hands you anything, unfortunately." He sees the changes in the industry now, as the conglomerates take over the networks and the studios, and he wonders "whether the strikes are going to work anymore. You're striking Coca-Cola [the one-time owner of Columbia], Cap Cities [the owner of ABC]. You're not striking Louis B. Mayer or Lew Wasserman."

Many younger writers entering the industry in the seventies and eighties did not come in with high opinions of the guild. Because the guild services those writers already working, it does not particularly help those trying to break into the business. Writers who struggle for years to make a sale suddenly find the guild representative there insisting they have to join. Younger writers are often ignorant of the history of writers in Hollywood and the guild's efforts on their behalf, and do not appreciate those efforts.

Joseph Dougherty, a writer on *thirtysomething*, felt that way when he was asked to join. The first season of the show was shortened by the 1988 WGAW strike, the longest strike in the history of the guild (154 days), in which the studios tried to reduce residual payments for one-hour dramas on the grounds that one-hours were not selling well in syndication. (The issue was finally settled with a change in the formula for computing residuals, a slight win for the guild, or at least not a loss.)

Dougherty became "weirdly radicalized" when the strike was in its fourth month and a tentative contract was put to the vote. Dougherty was attending a Writers Guild of America, east meeting in New York and astonished himself by going up to the microphone to speak. He called for the members to vote the contract down, and was booed by the East Coast writers, who thought the issues were not of importance to them. Dougherty returned to his seat and looked up to see that the next speaker, supporting his position, was Budd Schulberg. Dougherty said to himself, "I think I've just done something cool," and says now, "Budd Schulberg and I are up there with these union guys. It was great." He adds:

Schulberg was astonishing. He just simply stood there and in five sentences reminded people of what it was like before, when you didn't tell people you were going to a meeting. When you couldn't park in front of a house, because this was when the Disney people were going around taking pictures of license plates of people who were picketing. He said, "There was a time when you couldn't even get together in a house."

The 1988 strike continued until August, and as typical of guild strikes, it produced both hardship and fun. Lydia Woodward recalls how she spent the 1988 strike:

After *St. Elsewhere* ended, we had a wonderful . . . writers' strike, which was a great reprieve from working, [from] having to feel guilty about not working. We got to go to the Dodger day games, which was fun. I joined up with a bunch of writers that we all kind of met in the strike line and other places and we played softball every week. It was a wonderful five months, what can I tell you? I was so depressed when it was over and we had to go back to work.

The 1988 strike was perceived by many writers as an attempt to destroy the guild, as President Reagan had destroyed the air traffic controllers' union earlier in the decade. George Kirgo, the guild president, did not go that far, pointing out that the guild was valuable for bookkeeping of residual payments and for arbitration of writers' credits.⁵ Even so, the studios' behavior, in Joseph Dougherty's words "radicalized a lot of writers who had not been radical before. . . . I think the studios burned a lot of bridges with a lot of good writers, who now simply do not trust them and just will not go there."

Speed

In 1954, when the dispute over which guild would represent television writers was in full bloom, Cy Howard noted that one reason why radio writers would be better for television is that the new medium needed writers who could write fast, adding, "Screen writers simply cannot write that fast."⁶ In early television, Richard Conway notes, the saying was, "Get the script in by Wednesday, or we'll have half an hour of organ music on Friday." On some shows, Conway remembers, "We were so busy putting out scripts, we hardly got out of the room. We had one script in a drawer in case of a tie. . . . We'd have to do a script overnight. Somebody's sick and they're featured in this week's script, so you have to rewrite for the sets and the outside people [actors] you have."

Allan Manings is blunt about what the time pressures can do to a writer: "If I'd never written series television, I'd be a much better writer. The time constraints are so pressurized to get that damn show on, that when you come to a situation where you have essentially the same situation, you tend to solve it the same way." Manings also quotes writer Hugh Wedlock on the perils of late-night rewriting sessions, particularly on comedies: "At three o'clock in the morning either nothing is funny or everything is funny."

On the other hand, many TV writers feel they need a deadline and even thrive on the pressures of television. Mental speed and agility, and not just speed at writing, is essential for television writers to maintain their position in the industry. When writers freelance, they often keep several scripts in mind

at the same time, as Lou Shaw did. Robert Ward was a novelist before he got into writing TV, and he was astonished to discover he could keep in mind several different scripts for different episodes for a series he was writing and producing. He allows as how some of them had what one of the show's producers called "The cringe factor"—you cringe when you see the results. Ward adds,

It's obvious the pressure is bad. What's not so obvious is that having a long time can be bad. Sometimes under pressure you come up with stuff that would never come up if you didn't have the pressure, which I think is why people force themselves to work at the end of deadlines. "O.K., I got six weeks. That means I can do nothing for five-and-a-half weeks. O.K., now I've got three days, now I can be creative."

Ed Waters made his major contribution to the *Kung Fu* series at deadline time. Waters "basically got them [the wise little sayings of Master Po] from deadlines. People thought I was deeply versed in Eastern philosophies and so forth. I had a few things [books] around, but basically it was 'My God, we have to do something here,' and you came up with it."

Juanita Bartlett also has to have deadlines, but notes that you can concentrate so much on the script "you can't see problems. If you can put it away for a week or so and then get it out and read it again, it'll pop right out at you and you'll find it, but you never have that two-week grace period."

Joseph Dougherty was a playwright before he started working for television, and has become a faster writer because of his television work. He would write the first draft of a *thirtysomething* episode in two to three weeks, and found non-television writers "just slackjawed" at his pace. Dougherty feels

You have no time to second-guess yourself on a first draft. You have to just try it. If you do the first draft [like that], you write some horribly clunky stuff, but if you get a good riff going, you're doing it . . .

I think if you've been doing it for a while and you're comfortable with the scenes and the characters and the physical limitations of the production, you can fall into the *thirtysomething* trance, which you do. If you kill yourself and it takes you months, you're not doing it right. It really should come easily.

As Dougherty discovered, television writers learn to let the time pressures of television work for them. One of the fastest writers in television—Lou Shaw—says,

I didn't get agonized or eaten up. I've seen a lot of writers eaten up alive by that kind of pressure. It wasn't even that kind of pressure on me. The only pressure on me was: How do I do all three shows simultaneously? Because I do get very concentrated when I'm writing. I get very monomaniacal on that one show. But if I've got to do three at the same time, it gets a little tough.

Dealing with the Bosses

Because of the institutional as well as time pressures, writers' dealings with their bosses, whom Phil Mishkin calls sarcastically "the brain trust of television," are often not smooth. Not even close to smooth.

When Richard Powell worked with the networks developing pilots for series, he began to think it was like being surrounded by Pygmies in Africa who want to look at your Jeep, and "while they have no idea at all what makes it work, they will infallibly reach in there and extract the part [whose absence] makes the whole thing not work. It's amazing how they manage to hit on that." Allan Manings quotes the head of the BBC as once saying, "In America you have the writers, you have the directors, you have the producers, you have the actors—every bit as good as ours. What you don't have is the people who will let you do it."

When E. Jack Neuman was writing and producing at MGM in the early sixties, he followed Reginald Rose's approach and insisted the network and studio people write everything down in a memo, since he felt that as soon as they started to write down their complaints, they would realize how stupid they are. E. Arthur Kean says, "When you're dealing with episodic television, you're just getting the notes," which is why he prefers doing television movies, where he can talk to people directly. Kean quotes a lawyer as saying, "You can't cross-examine a note." He adds:

A writer has to learn to cultivate every possible power of intimidation. The master of that in my view was Eric Bercovici, who has grown this fierce countenance. He looks like he can murder you at any moment. It's wonderful in a network meeting to have that kind of presence. And he uses it brilliantly. And it's all a fake. And I love it. It's marvelous the way he does that. "You say that again and you'll die."

You can see why producer Gerald Abrams might have thought Bercovici had a gun in his briefcase.

Both Joel Rogosin and Sam Rolfe have noted similar changes in network involvement since the early sixties. Then, the networks were relatively passively involved in the creation of the shows, but in the following years there were increasing layers of executives, with, as Rogosin says, more and more people being copied on the memos and more and more people in the story conferences. Rogosin and Rolfe agree that often the executives are very bright, but Rogosin notes that the network representatives to a show are usually middle-management types whom the network is developing for advancement—which means they are less concerned about the quality of the show and more about their own careers. Both Rogosin and Rolfe agree the executives are bright and can be creative and make contributions, but, like Powell's Pygmies, they suggest changes that will hurt the script. Rolfe notes that most of them studied

film in college and tend to think in visual rather than narrative terms. He sits in story conferences with them and is “reminded of a bunch of kittens batting at bright-colored moths flying by,” who say things like “Hey, that’s a gas. Let’s stick this in,” without any sense of how it will connect to the story. Rolfe adds, “It’s so much fun they want to play with it.”

Although there was less involvement from Standards and Practices in the eighties as the networks cut back network staffing and at the same time were in competition with the more open cable channels, writers still had to deal with some censorship from the networks. As Phil Mishkin says, “They had practices, but they sure didn’t have standards.” Robert Ward recalls that on *Miami Vice*, NBC “would get bent out of shape if a character took drugs or if a character was drinking too much.” He says the network was so puritanical they would not even allow jokes on the subject, as if to joke about it meant one was not serious about the war on drugs.

On *thirtysomething*, Joseph Dougherty says,

They leave us almost completely alone. The fights we’ve had have been kind of pathetic. We get Standards and Practices notes and we fight about them and we trade-off and some things we get and some things we don’t and some things we put in there just to get. Usually, you put in at least one “Jesus” and a “God damn,” so it comes back in the notes and you change it to “Jeeze,” and you answer the note.

We went to the mat with “God damn” in the episode [broadcast] February 5th, [1991,] because it’s actually about blasphemy. They said, “You can’t say, ‘God damn.’”

We said, “We have to. We have to say it this time.” I wrote it in the script twice, so the first thing we said was, “Well, we’ll only say it once.”

They came back and said, “Well, we can’t.”

We said, “Will you look at the scene? It’s Elliot and his mother. It’s about God. It’s about religion. It’s about blasphemy. Look at the scene.”

They came back and said, “O.K. You can say, ‘God damn’ once *if*, immediately after that, another character says, ‘It’s blasphemy and against one of the Ten Commandments.’” Scott Winant [a producer] told me this on the phone.

I said, “O.K. Call the network and tell them I will definitely write a line of dialogue where [she] says, ‘It’s against the Ten Commandments,’ *if* the next time somebody is killed on an ABC detective series, somebody standing over the body says, ‘It’s a shame she’s dead. It’s against one of the Ten Commandments, too, did you know that?’” So we got it. . . . They backed down on the Ten Commandments part of it. [In the episode as broadcast, Elliot’s “God damn” is part of the conversation and Mom replies, “Please don’t curse at the table. Don’t take the Lord’s name in vain.”]

Dougherty thinks the worst part of dealing with the networks was that they were worried about the characters being wrong, whether it was a political opinion, or an opinion about a product or a procedure. The *thirtysomething*

writers assumed their characters could be wrong, but the network got very nervous. Dougherty wrote a scene where Nancy said something that was wrong, as a later scene made clear, but a network representative called after reading only the first scene and Dougherty had to tell him, "Read on."

Dougherty says that, as expected, "They're bad on sex too. There was a terrible fight about the concept of orgasms, which was I think the biggest fight we ever had here." The network's first reaction was that an orgasm could not be shown, but the show negotiated with the network to find a way to do it. After the show was shot and delivered to the network, they cut the end of the scene off. Unfortunately that was a setup for another joke, the punchline of which they left, but which made no sense at all on the air.

Writing for cable channels is not necessarily easier than writing for the networks. Aubrey Solomon wrote a special on Howard Hughes for cable and found that the dramatic structure was the same, down to the act breaks. "They don't break for commercials, but ultimately that show is going to be syndicated somewhere, so you are going to need the commercial breaks." He feels that as at the networks, cable executives do not "know what they want until they see it. You can give them any number of variations that they can say yes to, but somehow there is something nagging at the back of their mind that says, 'This isn't quite it.'" Solomon says it can then be "hell" trying to figure out what the "it" is.

Solomon also worked in his native Canada, and the first thing a producer there told him was that it was "a kinder, gentler nation," which he says it was in terms of having fewer hassles with the Canadian network, since the network had fewer executives involved. This also meant less input and critical evaluation of the scripts, and Solomon thinks this was both a blessing and problem in that sometimes he missed not having somebody pushing him to make it a little better.

In 1986 Phil Mishkin worked on a half-hour show for HBO called *First and Ten*. A major difference he saw was that all the scripts for the order of twelve episodes were written, and then shot together like a movie. Because of the way the material was cut together, scenes a particular writer wrote ended up in different episodes. While the writers were being well paid, Mishkin says often "you wind up seeing a scene that was taken out of your episode and put into somebody else's episode, or stretched to a point that you didn't feel like you were getting fair recompense."

Mishkin stayed with the show through 1988, and sometimes he stayed with scripts through the preparation stages, which called for rewriting for production changes: not getting the set or location they originally wanted, or changes in actors. One character was written as white, but when the producers found they could get O. J. Simpson, the scripts were rewritten to make him black. There was also a lot of what Mishkin calls "ancillary writing to be done, mainly what they called 'TV versions.' I would have to take a script and take

out the ‘fuck yous’ and put in ‘Get out of here’ or ‘Lay off’ for subsequent usage in commercial television. For syndication some scenes would have to be redone. I guess it’s like dubbing a foreign film.”

Writer–Producers

One way writers could get a little leverage in their dealings with the bosses was to become bosses themselves. By the time television production moved to Hollywood, the tradition of writers becoming producers was well established in the motion picture industry.⁷ The tradition became even more established in television, especially series television. Because of budget limitations in series TV, the major characters, sets, and locations were generally the same each week, and the function of the producer was to develop scripts. Nat Perrin, who started in the thirties as a screenwriter with the Marx Brothers and then moved into producing films, got into TV in the early days more as a producer than as a writer, but this often involved rewriting other writers’ scripts, which he did not particularly enjoy, but felt he had to do as part of his responsibility as a producer in order to improve the show. Perrin’s description of his “producing” Red Skelton’s show makes it sound easier than it was: “I would look at the material [the writers brought in], and say, ‘Keep going, boys.’ Or, ‘It needs a little work.’ Tough job. The higher up you go, the more money and the less work.”

Some writers either could not do that, or else did not want to. Many preferred to spend their time writing. Everett Greenbaum compared writing and producing to his days as an officer in naval aviation during World War II: “I loved the flying. I was not a leader of men.”

Most writers became producers to maintain control of their material as best they could, although most writer–producers realize they do not have as much control as they would like, but as Don Brinkley says, “You at least get your licks in.” Christopher Knopf, however, says that “sometimes protecting your own material is not necessarily a good thing. Sometimes material should not be protected. Sometimes you should listen to somebody else [if] they’ve got a pretty good idea.” That collaborative process is why writers often become producers. Sam Rolfe was drawn to both writing and producing and would alternate years at each:

One year I would be nothing but a writer, the next year I would be nothing but a producer. I still think it’s a great way to live, if you can do it. Now as a writer, it’s a nice, lonely, sole life. You sit by yourself and you work and you write and you think and you wander, and it’s almost bucolic in the way you live. It’s relaxing and it’s good. When you’re a producer, you’re never alone. You’re tumbling, you’re mixing, you’re always dealing with people. You’re in a roomful of people and people are waiting for you to talk, and people are looking for you to say something, and so your mind starts racing and it pushes you, because you have to come up with things.

Every writer–producer can list the disadvantages of doing both. Eric Ber-
covi starts off with: “Grief. Lack of sleep. Phone calls that wake you up at
three o’clock in the morning saying, ‘We’re pulling the plug.’ ” Thad Mum-
ford continues with: “Alcoholism. Gray hair. Ulcers. Kidney problems. Failed
marriages. It’s a lot of work.” It is even a lot of work, maybe even more, on
shows that are not that good. Lou Shaw worked fifteen- and sixteen-hour days
on *The Fall Guy* to “do it properly . . . for it to be accepted by *its* public.”

Phil Mishkin learned that producing could make for tension around the
home *and* the office when his wife came in to pitch a script for one of his
shows. He was afraid he would be accused by his staff of nepotism, and was
relieved when the first draft his wife turned in pleased the story editors. Then
on revisions it became, “Will you understand this, *dear*? That it’s nothing
personal? That if you were Jane Austin you would be getting this?”

The collaborative process that the writer–producer is part of involves the
writers working on the series. As Robert Ward puts it, “It’s better not to be
rewritten. It’s better to be able to be the guy who can rewrite somebody else.”
Robert Dozier became a producer on writer–producer Jerry Thorpe’s series
Harry O, and he discovered producing was not as simple as he thought it
would be. When he was asked later at a college seminar what quality, as a
producer, he valued most in a writer,

out of my mouth came, “Obedience.” I said, “I said that? I actually said that.
Stet. Let it stand. That’s exactly what I mean. God, I really said that?” You get
that way when you’re there, and things aren’t coming in right, and if they’re not
right, you fall into the trap: you’re the only one who can do it right. It’s the trap
that everybody falls into: you end up rewriting 50 percent of everything. It should
all sound alike. And if it doesn’t sound like you, it doesn’t sound alike. So I
went into it, because I thought, “I won’t have to write for a while.” I did more
writing in those two years than I’ve ever done in my life.

In addition to dealing with other writers, the writer–producer has to deal
with the director. Roy Huggins is of the opinion that one reason to become
a producer is to protect your material from the director. Some writers want
to become directors, but most television writers prefer producing rather than
directing, since control in television is held more by the producer. Given the
time and money pressures of TV, the director has little opportunity to “be
creative” in the ways that can disfigure theatrical films. He simply has to
shoot the material as best he can, which may well be why the best American
television in the eighties and nineties was often better than American films.

Sam Rolfe has had several opportunities to direct, but turned them down,
not only because he does not want to get up at four in the morning, but
because he values having another mind to challenge his. If a director tells
him the scene cannot be done the way Rolfe wrote it, and Rolfe cannot
persuade him otherwise, Rolfe will make the changes since “if he says he

can't, it's not going to come out the way I want it. I've got to listen to him. He's the guy that's got to do it."

Writer-producers also have a collaborative relationship with the actors, unless they can avoid it. Roy Huggins did exactly that on *The Lawyers*. The first pilot starred Guy Stockwell, who came into Huggins's office when it looked as though the show was going on the air. In Huggins's words, Stockwell "did something that I really, really appreciated, because most actors won't do this." According to Huggins, Stockwell said, "Roy, I'm not a piece of meat hanging on a hook. I'm an actor and I just came in to tell you I expect to be part of the decision-making on this show."

Huggins replied, "Jesus! Boy, am I glad you told me this. Because I don't want you to be part [of the show]. I don't want actors to tell me how to do this, because it's very difficult *without* the actors telling me what to do. But they often do, and very few of them are honest enough to come and tell me beforehand. So don't worry about it. You're off the show." Huggins says now, "I must confess that I was not very kind about it, because he was not kind in his approach to me." Huggins says Stockwell started to back-pedal, but Huggins replaced him with James Farentino.

On *The Line-up* in the late fifties, E. Jack Neuman had to take over producing from Jaime del Valle, and he learned how to handle actors from the experience:

They couldn't go to Jaime because he was either unavailable or smashed or gone or something, so they would come to me. There were two grown men (Warner Anderson, Tom Tully) playing leads in the series, and one would come to me and say, "You know he's got 185 lines and I've got 162, and I'm supposed to be the senior officer." Or vice versa.

I'd say, "Get the fuck out of here." That's the way I learned how to say that to actors.

"I'm going to call my agent."

"Get on somebody else's phone, not mine. I don't give a shit who you call. Get out of here." This is the way I found out how to handle that pouty, little-child bullshit that actors are inclined to do. And of course both of them were making a pisspot full of money [on the series, as opposed to their earlier work on Broadway or as character actors in movies].

When Phil Mishkin took over as producer on *Laverne and Shirley*, he had known Penny Marshall earlier, which did not make things easier:

It's just that it's hard to work with somebody who was once an equal and is now one of the two major [stars] in the number-one show in America.

One time, my first or second week there, she and Cindy had me called down from the office to the set, and gave me what-for about some scene that had come down to them. "What's going on? What are you guys doing? Who cooks up this stuff? I mean, Phil, aren't you on top of these things? I mean, that's why we

hired you.” Then one of them held out a cigarette. I don’t know if it was Penny. I smoked at the time, and I was expected to light it, after being bawled out. I lit Penny’s cigarette, or Cindy’s, and then they gave me another, “Get with it, will you?” and I turned around [and] left. It came back to me, from Alice James [Garry Marshall’s script supervisor] that the girls skittered away laughing that they had Phil lighting their cigarette and shaking. Those mean, whatever you call those kinds of people. It was a very nasty little thing. So I had to deal with that.

When Ed Waters was hired as producer of the Robert Blake show *Baretta*, his friends gave him an escape ladder he could roll out the window if necessary. Waters learned there was no controlling what happened to the script after it left the office, because Blake would change everything on a whim, sometimes to a point where it was impossible to cut the footage together. Blake was notoriously difficult with people he thought were “the suits” (executives), but Waters says Blake did him “a great favor. He used to chew tobacco, and he used to spit it on the carpet when he came in to talk to people. When he came to talk to me, he’d spit it out the window.”

Roy Huggins

Beginning with his work at Warner Brothers in the fifties, Roy Huggins created his own method of developing stories for the series he ran as producer or executive producer. He would spend hours driving in his car, thinking up stories, recording them on tape. Back at the office, he would then dictate the stories to a story assistant, who would type them up in a narrative form that included only suggestions of dialogue.

I then bring in a writer. I don’t hand him this transcript. I now tell him the story, and it’s once more put on tape, and it is once more transcribed, so that the writer gets a transcription of the second draft. Because I’ve thought it out and I’ve refined it.

I found many writers who would change my story. Not many, but a few, and they would always change it for the worse, and it wouldn’t work any more. In other words, they were doing what producers do, and I would say, “Hey, don’t do that. Here’s why that doesn’t work. So go back to the original.” And if you look at my record, you will find the names of writers that I never used again. Those are guys I had to rewrite completely. I mean, they just didn’t do it. They got the story all worked out. They gave me back junk. Or something I didn’t want to use. When I say junk, I’m talking like a producer. They gave me back things that, who knows, maybe what they did was one way of doing it, but it wasn’t my way of doing it. And then I would rewrite them, never with credit. I wouldn’t even ask for credit, unless the rewrite was so complete that it went back to my story and their version wasn’t my story. Then I would ask for credit and I would usually get it. I’d use a pseudonym [John Thomas James].

Joel Rogosin went to work as a producer at Universal in the early sixties to “mind the creative store” on Huggins’s shows when Huggins wanted time to

work on his Ph.D. Rogosin considers Huggins a “very talented, bright creative man” whose “filing cabinet is filled with versions of stories which he had originated and told and retold until they were at a stage when he was comfortable enough to pitch them to a writer.” Rogosin remembers that there were writers who resented Huggins’s method of working, since Huggins took credit—which he was certainly entitled to—on the stories. Rogosin says,

They resented it because there are a lot of people like me around who gave stories away. A writer would come in with something that didn’t work and I would tell him something else, and I frankly, and this is no reflection on Roy, never took credit. It was my sense, and wrongly I think, in retrospect, that it was part of the producing function. As a result, Roy has a lot more writing residuals than I do.

Huggins thinks only one writer ever improved on his stories: Juanita Bartlett, with whom he worked on several series before *The Rockford Files*. He says, “She was absolutely wonderful. But she changed the stories! And made them better! So I discovered something important: I didn’t really object to having my stories changed; I only objected to having them fucked up.” She says it was “a little intimidating” the first time she worked by Huggins’s method, because she was putting into script form his vision, not hers, and she felt an obligation to protect that vision.

Not every writer was impressed with Huggins and his method. Don Brinkley had difficulties cutting through Huggins’s associates and getting direct answers from him. Sy Salkowitz is even more vehement about his two experiences with Huggins. The first one occurred in the sixties at Fox. Salkowitz had written a story for story editor Marion Hargrove and they were now going to meet Huggins. Salkowitz recalls:

It was so hot we were baked, and we were kept waiting about 25 minutes in the outer office. When we were finally allowed in, Mr. Huggins was stretched out on his couch, wearing a pair of tennis shorts and some kind of light pullover. I’m wearing a shirt and jacket because that’s the first time I’m meeting with the producer. When we walked in, Mr. Huggins was being handed, on a tray, a glass of ice water, which he takes and he drinks and he hands [it] back to the secretary. She leaves. [Huggins] never says, “Would you like some water? Would you like a cold drink? Would you like anything? Kiss my foot?” Nothing. Then [Huggins] proceeds to tell me how he really doesn’t like my story at all, doesn’t think they should go ahead with it. My thought was, a simple phone call in the coolness of the beach would have taken care of that.

In the early seventies Salkowitz was working at Universal. Glen Larson asked Salkowitz to look at the pilot he had done for a rip-off of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* called *Alias Smith and Jones*, with the idea of Salkowitz writing some episodes. Salkowitz liked it and went to talk to Larson, only

to discover that Huggins was now the executive producer, which Larson himself had only found out the night before. Salkowitz continues the story:

Understand what my frame of mind is: I do not care to work with [him]. Had I known up front I was going to work with him, I would have said no, but I've at least verbally agreed with Universal to do it. At the moment, there are three secretaries hovering around him. One is holding a microphone to his mouth so that every word he says is recorded. Another one is pouring him a cup of coffee, and another one is handing him a note on some outside business. The secretary disappears with the outside business. The other one, with the microphone never left his mouth as Roy Huggins said to me, "I'm going to do the story, you're going to do the screenplay."

Now I expected this, because Roy Huggins's pseudonym is John Charles Thomas [sic. The actual pseudonym is John Thomas James], which you will find on practically every damn episode he ever did, because he gets a lot of residuals. Now he lays out a story and I'm listening to it and taking notes. One would think, by the way, that the recording is being done to hand me a cassette to take home so I don't forget anything. Wrong. The recording is being done so he has a record of the fact that he created the story and nobody can ever contest that. I have to go home with my own memory.

Now at some point during that meeting, he gives a story point and I interrupt him. I say, "Roy, that won't work."

He's incensed. "Of course it will." This was called "The Macready Bust" and I say, "Roy, it won't work. It's going to come out [of the script]. So let's not even bother with it, since it's going to be something else. I don't even think you should have it in." He insists it's going to work. So I say O.K.

So I go home and I write the first draft, and the thing that didn't work still doesn't work and I leave it out. I send in the first draft and I get a call from Glen saying, "We think you did a terrific job. Roy says, 'Thank you very much,' and he feels that he can do the final work on it quicker than he can tell you and then you can go home, etc." Now I want you to understand that I have been known to write a 60-minute script from scratch in 24 consecutive hours. So he thinks he can do it quicker than telling me. But O.K.

Salkowitz was given the succeeding drafts of the script and noticed that the story point he left out was now in, then out, as well as other changes. He also noticed

a very interesting thing on the front page. It says, "Story by John Thomas Charles [sic. see above], Screenplay by Sy Salkowitz and John Thomas Charles," then it says "John Thomas Charles and Sy Salkowitz," and the last draft I did says "Written by John Thomas Charles."

I'm off it. I asked for arbitration and I knew how it was going to come out: "Story by John Thomas Charles, Screenplay by Sy Salkowitz." Period. Mr. Huggins was incensed. He wrote that entire thing from word one. How could the Guild possibly ever have given me credit?

Glen once called and said, "You want to do another one?"
I said, "Not on your life."

Mr. Huggins's credits include *Maverick*, *The Fugitive*, *Run for Your Life*, and *The Rockford Files*. Mr. Salkowitz's credits include *The Naked City*, *The Untouchables*, *Mission Impossible*, and *Police Story*. Mr. Huggins and Mr. Salkowitz did not, I believe, socialize.

Aaron Spelling

When Aaron Spelling acted in *Dragnet*, Jack Webb let him visit the set to learn about production, since Spelling wanted to write for television. Spelling soon connected with Dick Powell, who was being talked into hosting *The Zane Grey Theatre*. Spelling suggested that Powell do humorous and historically informative introductions to each week's show. Powell liked the idea, and Spelling, who knew very little about the history of the West in spite of coming from Texas (he later told interviewers that being "from a Jewish family in Dallas you don't ride a lot of horses"), went to the library and researched the introductions. Spelling ended up producing six series at Four Star.⁸

Christopher Knopf wrote for Spelling's shows at Four Star and thinks Spelling was "incredibly bright. He could keep four things going at once. . . . He always had an idea. His ideas were superficial, but he would allow you to dig deep if you wanted to, but he always had an idea that would get you going in some sort of direction if you were stuck. He was fun. He was pleasant to be around."

The only time Knopf did not find Spelling "fun" led him to learn why Powell valued him so much. Knopf had mentioned an idea for a *Zane Grey Theatre* episode, and Spelling pitched it to Powell. When Powell asked whose idea it was, Spelling claimed it as his. Knopf heard of this and complained to Powell that Spelling was a thief and asked him why he kept him around. Powell replied, "I'll tell you why. I got you and Dick [Richard Alan] Simmons and Bruce Geller and the rest of you, and you're all trying to win Emmies. He's keeping me on the air. He's doing twenty hours while you're doing two." Knopf had to admit that was true. He now adds:

I've always felt Aaron was superficial. I'll tell you something. If you put a gun to Aaron's head and said, "You will write an opera that the New York Opera will accept, in three months," he'll do it. He'll do whatever he has to do. He had to be what he's been [in order] to do what he's done. I think if Aaron ever said, "O.K., I'm going to concentrate on something and dig in deep," I think he'd do it. He just hasn't had to. He's had great success with trivia. It's very entertaining and I've enjoyed it.

The term Spelling himself has used for the kinds of shows he does, and which writers love to quote against him, is “mind candy.”

Ed Waters had “spent my whole career never writing anything for Aaron Spelling,” when he was “gulled” into writing for *T. J. Hooker* after they told him they wanted it to be more like *Police Story*. He went on the show and “quickly found out they had no intention of doing that.” He tried to use some stories of patrol cops that had not been done on *Police Story*, but the mind-candy tone of the show worked against them. E. Arthur Kean was approached to write for another Spelling cop show, *Macgruder and Loud*. He was told it was going to be “gritty street action,” but Kean told them he knew it was going to be “gritty Rodeo Drive street action” and wrote them “a fairy tale.”

Both Rick Mittleman and Everett Greenbaum wrote for Spelling’s hit *The Love Boat*. Mittleman calls it “pleasant, lightweight writing,” and Greenbaum says, “If I had known what the residuals were like on that show, I would have written as many as I could have, under a different name.” Greenbaum describes writing for the show:

It’s very complicated. You had to write all the stories, and they all had to allow for the boat to leave and to stop in Acapulco, or wherever it was going, and all the stories had to fit the stop and the layover. And you couldn’t interfere with the characters. You couldn’t interfere with one another’s stories. It helped if you helped one another’s stories. It was quite complicated. Everything has to come out at the end.

E. Arthur Kean wrote an episode for a Spelling show called *The New People*, in which a group of young people are stranded on an island. The main titles for the show establish the premise of the series each week. When Kean went in to look at the rough cut of his episode, he thought the first and second reels had been reversed, since the second act of the show played first. He was told by the producer that Spelling felt there was more “island” material in the second act and he was afraid that with the first act the audience would not know they were on the island. Kean pointed out that the titles establish that, but Spelling’s cut went on the air.

Ed Waters thinks that kind of writing, which Spelling demands for his shows, is too obvious, so that “first you tell the audience what you are going to do, then you do it, then you tell the audience what’s been done.” Spelling’s insistence on this kind of storytelling may be a major reason for the success of many of his shows, since there has always been a segment, of varying size, in the American television audience that wants “mind candy.”

The Longer View

Television writers not only move “up” into the role of producer, but some of them move even further “up” to work as executives for studios or networks.

Sy Salkowitz has served in several executive capacities, and when he went to Fox as a vice-president for development, he listened to pitches from writers. He felt many of them had not bothered to work out the story, and when he asked them to do it he never heard from them again. He also saw situations that confirmed what Allan Manings heard from the head of the BBC. Salkowitz had to remove producers from shows because they were not letting the writers be as good as they could be.

Being in the business for a long time can also change a writer's perspective. Sam Rolfe looks at the changes in forty years of television:

We started out in television and we were doing what was essentially crap. Now I see we were doing art. Yesterday's crap is today's art. *Have Gun—Will Travel* and *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* are considered very classy shows. Well, they were just ordinary, everyday [shows]. I think today's art is tomorrow's crap because people are taking this whole thing so much more seriously than it really deserves to be taken. It is essentially the ordinary man's escape from the vicissitudes of life.

Everybody expects it now to educate people and to raise their consciousness and do all sorts of things which it is not equipped to do. What it is is a mild diversion. Now you can say things and you may be able to instill messages into it, but they have to be under the entertainment you are getting to people, or they're not going to tune you in, so your message is useless. It does me no good to come out with a marvelous, important thing if we only want to get remarked on by the critics.

I really felt like the Marx Brothers at the beginning, the Keystone Kops running up and down on the street banging into each other as we developed this thing. Now it's being taught scientifically in schools. They are turning out hordes of people to do this thing. You know something? In the end I don't think they are turning out any more product than we did with a small group at the beginning. We did 39 episodes a season. Now you're doing 19. That's a season. I think they are still turning out essentially about the same amount of material. The only thing is, they're using ten times as many people to do it.

Rolfe has read analyses of his stuff that "stagers" him as to what the analyst thinks was in his mind. He sees himself as "an old-fashioned yarn spinner. I tell the tale. That's all I do. I didn't know I was trying to change the world until I read the interpretations of some of the things I've done." He continues, "The big summation for me is that the fun has gone out of the game. It's become too serious."

UNSOLD PILOTS AND FLOPS

Unsold Pilots

*P*robably thousands of the ideas for television series are pitched in any given year, for one simple reason: a successful television series can make a fortune, at least some of which gets back to its creators and writers. Writers, of course, pitch ideas to producers, studios, and the networks, but networks, studios, and producers also pitch ideas to writers. Most ideas pitched die early.

As many as a few hundred survive to a stage where enough money changes hands for a writer to write a script for a pilot film, which is supposed to demonstrate what the show is going to be like. It is relatively easy to tell by reading a script if it is not going to work, but it is not so easy to tell if it will work on film. Many scripts for pilots die relatively early, but many are made. In the 1991–92 “selling season,” the four networks (including Fox) commissioned a total of 120 pilots.¹

Writers who have been in the pilot-making business for some time have noticed that networks have increased their involvement in the process over the years. In the early days, Roy Huggins says, there was “a kind of unstated agreement” between him and the networks that he would be left alone on the pilots, but with each new incoming group of executives “the arrogance of power grew” and there was less and less respect for the producer. Phil Mishkin swears that on every project pitched to the networks, the executives will protect themselves by writing what he calls “the yes–no memos,” one memo saying the network should pick up the show, another explaining why it should not.

Some writers love writing pilots. E. Jack Neuman developed a taste for it early on, not only because of the royalties a creator of a show got, but because of the challenge of figuring out what the format of the show is going to be and what its hundredth episode is going to be like. His formula for grabbing the audience’s attention was to “let the audience know, in the most dramatic way, as quickly as you can, and in the briefest way you can, how your pro-

tagonist, how your series' lead feels about God, marriage, politics, money, all of the important things."

The odds of success for a pilot are not large—which is not necessarily a terrible thing for a writer. When Don Brinkley was between *Medical Center* and *Trapper John M.D.*, he and his partner spent three years writing pilots that did not sell. Brinkley describes it, only half-facetiously, as "the best period of my life. I would write these pilots, we would produce them, we'd make lots of money, they wouldn't sell, and we'd have no responsibility after that. We'd go on to the next one."

As noted, most pilots die, some thankfully, some not so thankfully. What follows are some stories about unsold pilots, which provide another perspective on the history of writing for American television.

In 1959 E. Jack Neuman wrote and produced a pilot for a private-eye show called *Carter's Eye*, and Neuman is very explicit on why it did not sell: "Tom McDermott didn't have any brains." McDermott was what Neuman calls the "boy wonder" of the advertising agency Benton and Boles, and in those days the advertisers and their agencies decided which shows got on and which did not. McDermott instead went for a Western with a man with a withered arm.

In 1961 Sam Rolfe did a pilot called *Hurricane Island*. CBS executives had seen a movie about dinosaurs and liked the idea of a series about travelers shipwrecked on an island with prehistoric terrors. Rolfe was "amazed at how many kinds of stories I could come up with in that situation," the special effects were workable on a series budget, but the project suddenly died. Rolfe was told that William S. Paley's children were afraid of dinosaurs.

In 1960 Lou Shaw heard there was one more script needed for the series *The Rebel*, so he called the producer, Andrew Fenady, who said he had all the scripts he needed. Shaw said, "Geez, I hope they don't work, because I've got a great pilot idea that would be the greatest spin-off on *The Rebel*."

Fenady had Shaw, who actually had no idea at all, drive over to his office. During the 45-minute drive, Shaw came with an idea about the first real detective in the West, "a Sherlock Holmes out West." Shaw pitched it, and the series story editor David Victor started to say, "This will be a great dram—" and Fenady said, "This is funny." As Shaw remembers it, Victor shifted in mid-sentence: "This will be a great dram—comedy."

Shaw looked at Victor and said, "Comedy?"

Victor said to Fenady, "Oh, I was talking to Lou just a minute ago what a comedy this will be."

Fenady said, "All right! This is going to be terrific. And I got a better idea."

Shaw said, "It's going to be hard to beat this one." Shaw had no idea where he was at this point. The script was written, the pilot made, and the pilot sank without a trace.²

Sam Rolfe was upset that he let his agency, Ashley Famous, talk him into accepting a "developed by" instead of a "created by" credit on *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, because it meant he lost creator royalties not only on *Man*, but

on its spin-off, *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.* While still a client of the agency, Rolfe wrote a pilot called *The Long Hunt of April Savage*, but by the time ABC wanted to do it as a series, Rolfe had left the agency and refused to do the series on the grounds that it would make money for his former agency. ABC passed on the series without him.

Richard Powell originally wanted a black woman to play the lead in his 1967 pilot *Mrs. Thursday*. The network, ABC, said there would be no creative interference, but insisted on a white woman being cast in the lead. On the other hand, the 1971 E. Jack Neuman pilot *Crosscurrent* starred black actor Robert Hooks as a police lieutenant. Hooks was hot at the time, but the executive at Warner Brothers forgot to hire Hooks for a series when he signed him for the pilot.

Two years later Neuman wrote a pilot called *Stat!* about a hospital emergency room. When asked why it did not sell, Neuman says, "Damned if I know. They were wild about it. Christ Almighty, it was exactly what they wanted."

In 1973 Eric Bercovici and Jerry Ludwig wrote and produced *Wheeler and Murdock*, and the director was Joseph Sargent. Everyone, including Sargent, whom Bercovici describes as "terrific," liked the script, and as Bercovici and Ludwig kept rewriting the script, it kept getting longer. Sargent insisted they not cut it, and that to fit it into the 47 minutes required, he would have the actors "talk fast." The first cut ran 75 minutes, and when it was cut to 47 minutes it made no sense. The longer version was finally released in syndication as a television movie.

For a 1973 special, Rob Reiner and Phil Mishkin wrote an episode called "Sonny Boy," about a middle-aged son trying to get out from the control of his mother. (Carroll O'Connor originally wanted to do a piece by Chekhov, but Mishkin was glad their script was chosen: "So I've always been able to say we beat out Chekhov for one job. I used to say [mimicking network executives], 'Chekhov and who? Who's he writing with?') The special's producer, Bob Precht, felt the idea might work as a pilot, so Reiner and Mishkin rewrote it. The part played by O'Connor went to Allen Garfield, whom Mishkin thinks was "not quite right. He was a little heavy for the part." They went with Garfield because he was a better actor than the others tested, but he was simply not funny in that part. The other casting was wrong, as well. Mishkin says, "It was the worst case of casting I was involved in. It was [the] decisions that we made, and yet we made the wrong decision on every single one of them."

Allan Manings also feels there were casting problems, although of an opposite kind, with the 1976 pilot *Roxy Page*. The half-hour comedy dealt with an ambitious young singer trying to make it on Broadway, and NBC insisted on casting Janice Lynde, whom Manings felt was too good-looking and too good a singer for the audience to believe she would have any difficulty at all becoming a Broadway star.

The 1979 pilot *Pleasure Cove* came from a suggestion by NBC executive Paul Klein, who wanted a show about a resort where your dreams could come true. Lou Shaw was called in to write the two-hour movie pilot. Shaw's agent paired him with David Gerber as producer on the show, telling Shaw, "You want to get on the air? That's the best route." Shaw says now, "So the whole show was a present to Gerber. He came within an inch of selling it, I must say. Just didn't go. Go fight City Hall."

For the 1981 pilot *Quarrel*, Sam Rolfe returned to the spy business, but is not sure why he wanted to make this one more realistic and darker than the *U.N.C.L.E.* shows. "It may have been a different stage in my life. It was just, I think, mostly at that point I felt that there was nothing on the air that dealt in that area. I think I was also a lot more disillusioned about the possibility of [the United States and Russia] working together."

In 1982 Robert Dozier wrote a pilot script called *Streets of Beverly Hills* that had not yet been made when he was interviewed in October 1990. It had, however, just been optioned yet again. In the course of the recent negotiations, MGM discovered its options had lapsed and that it did not actually own the property:

You cannot imagine the bullshit we went through with their Business Affairs [people]. The lady from MGM called my agent, "Well, we have this old piece of shit here from Robert. Maybe there's some life in it. Maybe we could—"

My agent called and I said, "Jeff, nobody goes through old scripts. Number one, they're dead. So something's up, so just say, 'Yeah, we'll talk.' And find out what's going on." Well, we found out they'd sold it to ABC and they're negotiating with Walter Matthau to do it.

I said, "Jeff, we have a cannon at their head. Let's not fire it. Let's just make a very good deal." So we did. Then Walter Matthau backed out and it didn't work. But in the meantime we'd made this terrific deal if it did go on the air. Then they renewed the option the following year, and they just renewed it again. Now they are developing it as a half-hour sitcom. I'm not sure it will bear any resemblance to what it was I did, but I don't really give a shit because the beauty part is that I'll have a great deal of money, and the real beauty part is I won't have to have anything to do with it. I wish them well.

Dozier also had casting problems on his 1983 pilot *Inspector Perez*. He was trying to get something racially different on the air, but was disappointed with José Perez's performance in the pilot. He thinks that Perez suddenly wanted to be a real cop, even though the show was "make-believe." Dozier says, "I had the feeling he didn't want to embarrass himself in front of his cop friends in Spanish Harlem. The charm he had in *Steambath* [Perez played the bath attendant, who is more or less God] just wasn't there. I don't know where it went. It was written for that. It needed the charm."

Technically, Lou Shaw's 1986 television movie *Dalton: Code of Vengeance II* is not an unsold pilot, since the show was eventually picked up by NBC,

which ran two of the four pilots and two episodes, but the episodes were probably all or part of some of the pilots, if Shaw's experience is any indication. He was working at Universal for what he now calls the last time, and the studio had made five hour shows, he recalls, that were "so bad that Universal called NBC and asked that the show get canceled" even before it was on. The five shows were not even completely edited and most of them were too short for the hour format. NBC did not want to throw away the money it had spent, so it asked Universal to see what it could do, which is what Universal turned around and asked Shaw.

Shaw resisted, but Universal assured him that whatever he did would be buried where nobody could see it. Shaw looked at the five episodes: "One was worse than the other." Shaw took the two worst hours, which had no storylines in common, and changed the story by adding voice-over narration. He was given no money for reshooting, but could recut. The editors found what Shaw describes as "garbage" footage of the hero, an ex-Special Forces veteran of Viet Nam, doing martial arts. Shaw used that as the frame for the two hours, putting the narration over it. Shaw says the work was "really hard . . . and it took every skill I had." The network finally ran it in sweeps months [the months the most extensive ratings are taken for the networks] opposite the miniseries *North and South Book II*, and as Shaw says, "It nearly beat it." Shaw later learned Universal had received "huge compliments" on how well it turned out.

Sometimes it is difficult to save even a better pilot. Joel Rogosin got called in late in the process on a 1986 pilot *Lily*, which Shelly Duvall, whom Rogosin liked very much, both produced and starred in. Rogosin says of his experience,

I don't know that it worked as well as it ought to have worked as a concept. I don't know that the material, which was written by a very talented, bright young writer, Andy Borowitz, was as strong as it should have been. I don't know that the show was as good as it should have been. I don't know that the story they elected to tell for the pilot was the most appropriate choice.

Rogosin notes that, in situations such as this, he is often brought in after the pilot is written and the commitment made, so his input is limited to what the creators are willing to discuss. In the case of *Lily*,

They were very, very responsive to discussions of the material. However, by the time I got to it, it had already gone through a lot of discussions, so there's a limit . . . People worked very hard, and when the network looked at it, they obviously didn't feel it was something they wanted to make a further commitment to, with all the best intentions all around.

Flops

Not all series that get beyond pilots stay on the air. In the 1986 “selling season,” for example, 103 pilots were made but only 36 became series, and only 13 of those lasted more than a season.³ But then, most television shows are flops, either creatively or commercially, and are canceled sooner or later. What follows are some stories about flops that writers have been involved in, which provide yet another perspective on the history of writing for American television.

Roy Huggins has probably had as many hit shows on television as anyone, but *Cool Million*, in the 1972–73 season, was not one of them. Herb Schlosser, an executive at NBC, brought to him an idea about a private eye who does not take cases on for less than a million dollars. Huggins believed “that was rather romantic and unrealistic, but I thought, ‘What the hell, maybe I can do something with it,’ so I took it on. But I took it on without conviction, and it did not succeed.”

Phil Mishkin had the experience of both writing and acting in the thirteen-episode flop *The Super* in 1972. Mishkin and Rob Reiner took an idea by producer Gerald Isenberg about the tenants of an apartment building and focused it on the building superintendent. What Mishkin calls their “really wonderful pilot script” interested Richard Castellano. Castellano had just made a big impact in the theatrical film *Lovers and Other Strangers* and was about to appear in *The Godfather* as well. Mishkin thought Castellano “was the part,” but was appalled when Castellano insisted that his girlfriend play his wife. Reiner said to Mishkin of her, “She can’t act. She’s not good looking. She’s not very smart. She’s nothing like the part. Aside from that she’s perfect.” She was too young to be the mother of the super’s sons as written, so one of them was turned into the super’s brother, and Mishkin took the part: “I didn’t mind the fact of becoming a TV star.”

As the rehearsals progressed, there was “such tension on the set, trying to make the part work for her. It was a process of cutting out the part, cutting the part down, cutting it down until it was down to nothing.” Castellano saw this happening and was not happy. The director arranged to show the dress rehearsal of the first show on closed-circuit cameras to the executives at ABC. The executives told the producers to get rid of her. The word got back to Castellano, who threw a desk through a wall, aiming at director Hal Cooper, and then threatened another executive as well. Both Castellano and his girlfriend stayed on the show, but it was shot one-camera without an audience.

Mishkin liked working with Castellano as an actor, which made things difficult for him as a writer:

Working with Castellano as an actor was strange because I knew that the man was bringing in other people [which] was ruining my scripts, but, on the other

hand, he was wonderful in the show, and he was wonderful to work with [as an actor]. I was working with a real professional actor in the sense of a man who was available, who gave you something. He let you take a scene, which was really interesting. I felt good about that part of it. So I was schized out.

Mishkin was the co-creator of *Free Country*, another short-lived series he is much prouder of. In 1978, since he and Rob Reiner already had a contract at Columbia to develop shows, they pitched an idea for an unconventional sitcom about Mishkin's grandparents, who came to this country in the early years of the twentieth century. Mishkin calls it a "saga, the first continuing sitcom." The first five episodes ran in the summer of 1978, but it was not picked up. Mishkin thinks it may have been too ethnic, along with the problem that it was

not fish or fowl. 'There was something basically wrong with doing a zany sitcom [about this kind of subject]. We were trying to do bringing the bed up the steps. In a certain way I can understand how our Chicano friends were feeling about *Viva Valdez*. They were saying, "Hey, to us it was not a laughing matter," but unless it is, it isn't going to be a matter at all. . . . It wasn't a bad show. Some people that have seen them, still talk.

Sam Rolfe still thinks the 1978 series *Kaz*, about an ex-cop/ex-con turned lawyer, is one of the best series he was ever connected with. Some time after it was canceled, he was told by a network executive that they should not have killed it because it might have caught on. Rolfe thinks the reason it was canceled was that in interviews the star, Ron Liebman, was, "being very smart-mouthed about the network, and everybody got very sore at this and said, 'Who needs this?'"

The following year Rolfe worked on *Big Shamus, Little Shamus*, about a hotel detective and his thirteen-year-old son. The star here was Brian Dennehy, whom Rolfe admires because "He's professional. He shows up ready to work, doesn't bitch, takes it and tries to make it work. It's always a good experience to work with a guy like that. You try your best for him." Rolfe pointed out to Lee Rich, the head of the production company, that the problem was that the audience was not even sampling the show. He said, "This is humiliating. If they're not even going to look at you and say, 'You're bad,' or, 'You're good.'" The production company asked the network to pull the show.

In 1979 Robert Dozier was the executive producer on a series produced at Paramount called *Sweepstakes*. Dozier did not think much of the people at Paramount, although he did like executive Gary Nardino, of whom he says, "He was kind of an animal like Gerber. I got along with him." The other executives kept trying to change what had started out as a comedy-drama into what Dozier calls "a little kind of slapstick piece of shit." It ran for ten episodes.

Dozier left Paramount (“If my children ask, ‘What do you do for a living, Daddy?’ I don’t want to have to say, ‘I deal with people who have no concept of right or wrong’”) and went to work at Universal—“Another great mistake I made in my life, although compared to Paramount, working for Universal was like working for the Medicis,” i.e., they are ruthless, but occasionally they will support an artist. Dozier and Herman Groves developed a thirteen-episode miniseries about a prizefighter, but it ran afoul of a network executive whom Dozier describes in his most printable language as “this little pig-faced swine, with a bouffant hairpiece . . . he was known in New York as Bill Paley’s pet rock . . . he was an accountant, an actuary, who acceded to high places by kissing ass and trying not to do the wrong thing, I suppose, but he angered up the blood just to have to sit with him.” The executive had the scripts rewritten and virtually nothing of Dozier’s appeared on the series as he wrote it. The series, *The Contender*, ran five episodes. Dozier shortly got out of the business and moved to Bear Valley, California. He gets more satisfaction now out of making furniture in his basement than he did writing for television: “Besides, nobody tells you when you’re done, ‘Take three inches off this, and I want three more knotholes in it here.’”

In 1980 NBC bought the rights, and the scripts, of a raunchy Australian show about the sexual activities of the residents of an apartment building. Allan Manings was under contract to Paramount at the time, and tells what happened:

They got some of the best writers in town, David Lloyd particularly, who I think is really one of the finest, if not currently the finest, half-hour comedy writer. David said, “I will not write this shit, but I will do a show based on it.” It was a highrise with a lot of people and their relationships.

David got Bob Ellison and Barry Kemp involved, and Bob Ellison, who had worked with me on the [David] Frost show [in 1971], said, “Can you come in and help us with this and produce a few of these?”

I said, “Sure. I’ll work with you guys again.” The network wanted to make it sleazier. They wanted to call it 69. It was only a compromise to get it called *Number 96*, believe me. They wanted to have 69 with the two letters whirling, whirling, whirling in space so that they got mixed together.

Conceptually what I wanted to do with the show was to make it as upscale as possible. It should be about wealthy, sophisticated people, because to do a show that was essentially to deal with the sexual peccadillos, my belief was that you can have powerful people doing these things. America watching television accepts it because they are looking at people they are not in contact with. It’s a little further away. Much as *Dallas* works because very few of us hang out with oil millionaires daily. . . . They wanted it to be as blue collar as possible.

I must tell you, the show is seen as a cult show by people. Twelve episodes were written, six aired. Of the six episodes that aired, no two went on at the same time or the same day. It was such a running hassle, I can’t tell you. One time NBC said, “We’re going to write a promo for the show for just the stations that’ll buy the show. It’ll never air.”

So I said to Bob Ellison, "Let us do it." Bob and I wrote a piece where we had everyone in the cast in a hot tub, to send up the whole ugly thing. They ran pieces of it on the air, and the only joy I had was that they had not contracted with the actors and had to pay them a tremendous amount of money.

I remember taping the first show, where the earthquake hits, and there's a couple in bed, and the woman is running wrapped in a sheet. The Paramount executives said, "Pull the sheet down more. Let us see."

As can be imagined from that last story, the writers and producers found themselves

too uptight for the network. . . . Programming wants it to be as sleazy as possible, but they haven't got the agreement of Standards and Practices. Then you say [to Programming], "Go to bat with us."

I don't believe in sleaze. I don't believe television moves forward by being raunchy as much as it would by dealing with ideas.

In 1981 Joel Rogosin was brought onto the series *Foul Play* after significant changes had been made from the pilot in the relationships and histories of the main characters. He says now, "I'm not sure that those changes were for the good. I think there were some things in the pilot that I think they probably should have kept." According to Rogosin, the two stars, Barry Bostwick and Deborah Raffin, were not "as harmoniously matched as they might have been. [They were both] well intentioned and caring and talented and energetic, and each felt they had a certain . . . vested interest to protect, and those vested interests might not have been compatible."

Sometimes the actors in a series could get along too well. In 1981 Eric Bercovici was asked to create a show for James Arness. In *McClain's Law* Arness plays an older cop paired with a younger cop. As Bercovici sees it, that conflict between the cops "somehow just melted away, because aside from everything else Jim and Marshall Colt [the young cop] really liked each other and you could see it on film. Nobody wanted to pursue the mild animosity between the characters. That's what softened it up. And I can hardly blame anybody but myself for that."

The writers on the 1984 series *The Mississippi* had to deal with a star in charge, in this case Ralph Waite. The show was shot along the river, but the scripts were written in Los Angeles. Waite was changing the scripts as they came out, although Aubrey Solomon contends his scripts were not changed as much as ones he had written for other shows. Solomon thinks the story editors were feeling that they were not trusted by Waite, and Solomon says that if that was the case, "then they had to doubt why they were there creatively." Waite had other writers and story editors brought in in an attempt to control the show, but Ed Waters, who came in for the last nine episodes, thinks the problem was in Waite's concept of the show:

Ralph Waite contributed to the demise of his own show, I think, by trying to make himself a leading man. That's a personal opinion. I think Ralph was a good actor, but I don't think he's the man to carry a show. I think that show had the potential, when it worked right, to build up the guest characters into important roles, with Ralph filling in the framework. But when he took control, I think he became more central to the stories, and I think that failed to hold the audience.

By 1984 *M*A*S*H* was over and Thad Mumford had gone to work at MTM. One of the shows he worked on was *The Duck Factory*, a half-hour situation comedy about an animation studio. He tells why he thinks the show did not go more than thirteen episodes:

Grant Tinker [the former head of MTM] didn't like the show. He had just gone to NBC. I don't think we did the best to make him like it. This show was shot like *M*A*S*H*, with one camera, without an audience, and it took place inside. Now, ordinarily when you shoot a show with one camera, it's because you need to go outside and take advantage of life and not the studio walls.

People are trained to look at certain kinds of things. He would get a print from *Night Court* and it would have lots of audience laughs and cheers, and then he would get our print that had no laughs on it, and I think it very much didn't work [for him], and [he had] all the other executives to look at it and see why it might be funny. I don't have any proof, [but] I just know from what was told us, Grant soured on the show early, and I don't think he was ever able to dissuade it [his sourness toward the show].

I think if it had been given some time it could have become a pretty good show. I think that, not just in terms of people catching it, but the things that we realized didn't work about it, [such as] the actors had less rehearsal. I think we would have changed the format and shot the show with an audience, but we just didn't have the time.

In 1985 Glen Larson asked Lou Shaw to lunch, telling him, "We've got a series." Shaw went reluctantly to lunch, where Larson said that Brandon Tartikoff, the head of NBC, had come up with an idea.

Shaw said, "Give it to me."

Larson said, "It's about a short detective."

"Yeah?"

"That's it."

"No wonder he's the head of the network. A short detective. That's exciting."

Shaw and Larson wrote a pilot script. Shaw liked the actor cast, Joe Pesci, but Shaw came to realize he was wrong for the part. "He was not in our mind when we wrote it. We were thinking of a Dudley Moore . . . Pesci's different. He's ethnic, he's a lot of things. But he's not what you'd call a charming guy who's going to knock women over, and that was the character of the guy." Shaw had been through this before with Quincy, and in that

case had time to rewrite it for Klugman. With *Half Nelson*, the first scripts were written before Pesci was cast, and the Writers Guild strike of 1985 made it impossible to rewrite them for the actor.

One of the most difficult types of series to bring off is the science-fiction series. In addition to the regular series difficulties, there are usually budgetary restraints as well. There is also the problem of creating and presenting a believable world to the series audience. D. C. Fontana, who has written for several science-fiction series, suggests some of the problems the writers face:

You have to introduce people suddenly to [the world]. Here's the ship, or here's the technology you have to deal with, and here are the people, and they do this, letting the technology take care of itself. Which is what *Star Trek* basically did. We didn't stop and say, "This is the transporter. This is how it works." They got in, they beamed down. O.K., you got the idea of how it worked when you saw it work, so you didn't have somebody standing there explaining that.

Fantastic Journey, a 1977 series about a scientific party marooned on an uncharted island where a man from the twenty-third century has the key to time travel, was put together in a hurry. Fontana came on as story editor in December 1976, with the first show going on the air in February 1977, and had to deal with the changes that had been ordered, which included changes in the cast. In the first hour episode, two supposedly regulars had to be "sent back in time," off the show, and a new alien character was added. In the second episode, the villain that Roddy McDowall played in the pilot and first episode had to be transformed into a "nice" guy so he could continue on the series. Fortunately Fontana was working with several free-lance writers who could all work on their episodes at once. Fontana thinks the series was finding its way by the sixth episode, but by then the ratings were so bad it was dropped.

The 1980 science fiction debacle *Beyond Westworld* started as a Lou Shaw pitch to MGM (where the *Westworld* films had been made) in which *Westworld* had been destroyed and the robots were on the loose. It was pitched to CBS, where the then-head of development liked the script written for the pilot. But a new head of development was appointed, and he did not like it. Shaw agreed with his comments and rewrote the script. The people at the network loved it and said, "Do the pilot." The problems now came from the studio, since its owner, Kirk Kerkorian, was, as usual, trying to sell the studio and did not want to spend any money on anything. Shaw hustled some extra money from the head of MGM-TV, six episode scripts were prepared, and the pilot was shot. It was shown to William Paley, who reportedly loved it, but the head of programming was now the first head of development whom Shaw had dealt with, and he wanted to go back to the original idea, which by this time only he liked. Shaw went quickly from having a pilot everybody loved, and six scripts, to having nothing, "With two weeks to get it all set up."

Two writers he brought in were old *Quincy* hands, Steve Greenberg and Aubrey Solomon, who says of *Beyond Westworld* that it “was changing every five minutes. . . . And the high cost of production meant that MGM was constantly involved with the scripts for financial reasons. I don’t think any of our stories were excessive for budgetary areas, but because of the special effects and the action, there were constant changes and requests for cuts and slim-downs in terms of action.” Solomon, who lives in the San Fernando Valley near Universal, compares the experience of working at MGM and Universal: “It’s a much longer drive to [MGM]. You think I’m kidding. It was the rainy season. It took me an hour and a half to get to work.” Seriously, he adds, “We had been in a very organized situation at Universal, where the producers really knew what was happening. . . . Universal is more an example of controlled chaos. This was uncontrolled chaos.”

One of the legendary flops in the history of television was the 1984 series *Jessie*, which starred Lindsay Wagner as a police psychiatrist and ran for seven episodes. Appropriately, the story of this series begins with Aaron Spelling’s dog. In 1967 Eric Bercovici was writing a World War II story for the anthology show Spelling produced. One day Spelling asked Bercovici to write in a part for his big white dog, Adam, which Spelling used to bring to work. Bercovici says, “I didn’t quite know how to take that,” but he wrote in a scene when the main characters come across a dog in the woods and kill it and go on. Bercovici turned in the script and the dog was never mentioned again. As for Bercovici’s relationship with Spelling, Bercovici says, “After I killed his dog, [it] went downhill,” and he did not work again with Spelling until *Jessie*.

In 1984 Bercovici got a call from his agents, who told him that Spelling wanted to talk to him. With some trepidation, Bercovici went to Spelling’s office and was “treated like the old friend I wasn’t.” Spelling insisted that only Bercovici could do the series he had in mind, which would star Lindsay Wagner. Bercovici had no idea who Wagner was and a meeting was arranged at CAA. Bercovici met Wagner, looked into her eyes and did not like what he saw. He told his partner about the meeting and his partner told him not to be ridiculous.

Spelling’s original idea was that Wagner would be a psychologist, but she wanted to be a psychiatrist, so, as Bercovici says, “We gave her an M.D.” Bercovici began to write the pilot script. He had about 90 pages done, which he found agonizing to do. He gave them to writer Jerry Ludwig and said, “Tell me they’re as bad as I think they are.”

Ludwig read them and said, “Finish the script. It’s on the air.”

“It can’t be.”

“It’s on the air.” Everybody congratulated him on the pilot script and the shooting of the pilot went reasonably well. There was one small problem, however. Bercovici explains:

Lindsay had wanted to do the show about holistic medicine, which ABC had instructed me to totally ignore. Lou Erlicht, the head of ABC, was saying [to me], “You, listen, you chicken shit, you tell that Lindsay Wagner. You tell her that show is not about holistic medicine.”

I kept saying, “Lou, but—”

He says, “I’ll tell her. I’ll look her right in the eye and I’ll tell her.” We go to New York. We got to ABC for a meeting, Lindsay and her mother, to meet Lou Erlicht and he’s going to tell her off. Hooray. We get into the office and he says, “Lindsay, I’m going to look you right in the eye and I’m going to tell you that you’re a beautiful woman.”

I said, “The war is over.” It’s finished. Sure enough, they bought the series. And it was a nightmare. The very first day of production, she was talking to me about holistic medicine. We called it the “h” word. You couldn’t say the “h” word in the office. She hated the scripts, hated them.

Bercovici preferred not to do an show about holistic medicine for two reasons. The first is, he knew very little about it and from what he did know he did not think it was very dramatic. The second reason was that ABC kept telling him it was an action show. Did Wagner know what ABC wanted? Bercovici says, “I was at the meeting with her [when they told her]. But she decided to do her own show.” According to another account, ABC executive Ann Davis told Wagner, “You realize this is an action show,” to which Wagner replied, “You realize I don’t do action.”⁴ Bercovici continues:

What happened at the end, it quickly reached the point where it was impossible. It was impossible to get on with writing the scripts. She was trying to get everybody fired. [Ed Waters, one of the writers Bercovici brought on the show, says that Wagner was hiring her own writer and “doing the scripts the way she wanted them.”] She tried to get all the writers fired.

It reached the point where my lawyer was saying, “Don’t quit. Don’t quit. Make them fire you.” MGM was willing to fire me, but they can’t find anyone willing to take the show. I finally said, “Give it to Gerber. He’ll do anything.” So they gave the show to Gerber and I was then removed from the show, and a lot of people called me names.

At least some ABC executives felt badly about how Bercovici was treated. Bercovici says today, “Gus [Lucas] told me a year ago he goes to church every weekend and Peter [Roth] goes to temple every weekend to beg forgiveness for what they did to me on *Jessie*.”

Gerber only had a few weeks to get the show on, so he called on his old professionals to help bail him out. One was Sy Salkowitz, who did two scripts for the series, one produced and one not produced. As usual, Salkowitz pondered the concept of the show: how do you get the psychiatrist involved in the cases? He made the villain in one a corrupt cop, a rip-off of a *Police Story* episode he had done, but the character was too dark for Gerber, and *Jessie*

was dropped before Salkowitz could do a rewrite. Salkowitz says now that Gerber “must have thought I’d lost my touch. And maybe I had.” Which did not stop Gerber from calling Salkowitz after the latter’s surgery several years later and saying, “What do you mean you had surgery? Suppose I need you to come up here and do a rewrite for me?”

Gerber was not upset Salkowitz had ripped off a *Police Story* episode. Gerber told Morgan Gendel for an article about *Jessie* that, in view of the short time he had, he gave *Police Story* scripts and cassettes to writers to show them “the kind of quality we did on *Police Story* and say, ‘This is the kind of thing we want.’”⁵ When the article appeared, Gerber wrote to the *Los Angeles Times*, “When asked, I told him clearly the story in question was being taken from an original file case, the same file upon which the *Police Story* script was drawn, and the script written [sic], as well as the real-life participants.”⁶

One writer who recognized the scripts of *Jessie* as *Police Story* rip-offs was the author of one of the *Police Story* scripts, E. Arthur Kean. He had been aware that something was going on when Stan Kallis, who was now working on *Jessie*, asked Kean the name of his technical advisor on a *Police Story* episode called “Wolf.” The author of the *Jessie* episode was Sy Salkowitz, who now says, “I didn’t take that episode, I took the source material and ran it in a different direction.” The direction was not different enough on that and other episodes based on Kean’s scripts for Kean not to be “even more offended that they ripped them off so badly. The shows were embarrassing.” Kean called the guild to complain of plagiarism, and eventually Kean received credit on the *Jessie* episodes.

Gerber was upset that Kean took the matter to the guild. He later told a writer, “Art Kean murdered me. He went to the guild and says I’m ripping him off.”

The writer asked, “Well, aren’t you?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Well?”

Gerber said, “Well, he murdered me. I’ll never work again.”⁷

Gerber, as of this writing, heads the television division of MGM. Several years after *Jessie*, Gerber and Kean were at a party together. Kean, who by then had forgotten the arbitration, went up to Gerber and they exchanged hugs and, in Kean’s words, had “lots of laughs.” Ten minutes later, Gerber’s wife, the beautiful and talented actress Laraine Stephens, came over to Kean and said, “David never holds a grudge, you know.”

HILL STREET BLUES

The Eighties

Traditional kinds of series continued to be produced in the eighties, with the traditional kinds of problems associated with them. Ed Waters was approached to write for the second season of *Jake and the Fatman*, which was being relocated from Southern California to Hawaii. The show was made a little more hard-edged, but Waters says the stars made it difficult for the writers:

[Joe] Penny and [William] Conrad hate each other, to put it mildly, and Joe Penny is a nervous guy who sweats every moment in the script. Conrad is a man I don't think you can please unless you make him center stage. But with his physical liabilities he can't move around very much. And the story doesn't move if it's centered on Bill. You get much more activity if you escalate Joe Penny's part, which I think was what I was trying to do, but I rubbed Bill Conrad the wrong way. And I think that's why I left.

In the third season of *Magnum P.I.*, Joel Rogosin came on as supervising producer. He had no problems with the star, but in finding writers who could capture the tone of the show. The original pilot script by Glen Larson was a conventional detective show until Don Bellisario, in Rogosin's words, "infused it with the *Magnum* personality. It was all sort of tongue-in-cheek. It was a very difficult style to write in. Nobody but Don Bellisario could ever really write it very well. There were a couple of people who came marginally close, but not like him."

Traditionally in TV, drama writers write drama, comedy writers write comedy, and they very seldom switch over. For all the lightness Roy Huggins brought to *Maverick* and *The Rockford Files*, his one attempt at a situation comedy, the 1963 pilot for *The Ginger Rogers Show*, did not sell. Huggins

says, "That's not my field." Two writers who have made the transition are Rick Mittleman and Phil Mishkin.

Mittleman in the eighties moved into hour dramas with comedy overtones such as *Remington Steele* and *Simon and Simon*. The big difference for him is that "In comedy you have to hone every line, because every line is either a punchline or leading to a punchline. That's very hard. Sometimes you sit all day working on one line. When you don't have to go for the joke, the down-and-dirty writing is easier in drama than in a comedy. A story editor's job [on a comedy] sometimes is to take out funny lines" that do not fit the story. One story editor told Mittleman he kept a large manila envelope to save all the funny lines he had to cut out. Phil Mishkin moved to hour dramas and says, "I still have a hard time having a character in *Matlock* leave a scene without a blow-off line, that line that says, 'I'm gone,' big laugh, boom. [In] an hour [drama], a guy can actually say, 'Goodbye,' and leave a room."

As in any decade, there were writers who were trying to expand the boundaries of series television. One was Eric Bercovici. Fred Silverman, then head of NBC, asked Bercovici to "Go to Chicago and do a 90-minute show, doctors, lawyers, policemen, a wheel [of different shows that could be programmed in one time slot under a generic name]." Bercovici was not comfortable with the wheel idea and wanted to put them all into the same show. Silverman agreed and the series *Chicago Story* premiered in March 1982.

The pilot had six continuing characters but the series had more. Bercovici felt that "because of all the intertwined stories, it had a lot more juice to it than the usual one-hour episodic." The stories were structured so each episode involved all the characters, "but not equally. Some shows the lawyers would be number one, the police would be number two, the doctors would be number three. On other shows it would be the reverse of that." By organizing the stories this way, Bercovici was able to have two units shooting two separate episodes at the same time, a help when shooting in Chicago in the winter.

The story complexities made it a hard show to write for. Unlike Bercovici, E. Arthur Kean recalls that Bercovici wanted to use all of the main characters equally, but for the episode he wrote and directed, Kean reduced the number of characters he followed. He had no problem with Bercovici. After Kean took the script through the first set of revisions, he did not hear further from Bercovici. Kean finally called him to tell him he was leaving for Chicago the next day. Bercovici replied, "Yeah, I know. Good luck."

"Well, what about revisions?"

"Good luck." Bercovici says now he stopped giving notes "when you get it right. Nowhere is it written that you have to have eight drafts." On the other hand, when Kean got to Chicago and started auditioning actors with scenes from the script, he decided it did need more revisions, so he spent the week-

end in his hotel room doing a rewrite. Kean thinks Bercovici gave him “the best treatment I ever got” on a show on *Chicago Story*.

The treatment the show got from NBC was not quite as good. By the time it was ready to go on the air, Silverman had left, taking any enthusiasm for the show with him. The show was pulled after thirteen episodes, but Bercovici says that when he does press tours for other shows now, *Chicago Story* is still the one he gets asked about most.

Perhaps one reason NBC was not so interested in *Chicago Story* was that it already had another show on the air doing what *Chicago Story* did, but doing it better. The show was *Hill Street Blues*.

Hill Street Blues

Fred Silverman had another idea for an NBC series. Silverman was thinking about a cop show like *Barney Miller*, with an ethnically mixed cast, done not as a half-hour comedy but as an hour drama, set in a bad neighborhood like the upcoming feature film *Fort Apache, The Bronx* (the same area where the Raymonds’s documentary *The Police Tapes* was shot), with the absurdist humor of Chayefsky’s feature film *The Hospital*, and dealing with the private lives of the police as *Police Story* did. The thinking was, as social historian Todd Gitlin puts it, “recombinant.”¹

One of Silverman’s executives was Michael Zinberg, who had previously produced and directed at MTM, and it was Zinberg who suggested the network’s pitching the project to MTM. MTM had by this time gotten into making hour dramas, by the unprecedented device of spinning off a character from a sitcom, Lou Grant, into his own hour dramatic series. The specific writer–producers Zinberg suggested Silverman talk to were Michael Kozoll and Steven Bochco.

Kozoll had published in literary journals as a college student, then later taught English at community colleges. He then decided he could write for television, and spec scripts got him work at Universal on such shows as *Quincy*, *McCloud*, and *Delvecchio*, a cop show where he met Bochco.² Bochco had started working for Universal while still in college, and had written scenes to fill out one-hour *Chrysler Theater* episodes to feature length for European release. He later wrote for *The Name of the Game*, *Columbo*, and *McMillan and Wife*.³ According to one producer there, his plotting was often not clear.⁴ When Bochco got tired of the big-studio atmosphere at Universal, he went to work at MTM. In January 1980 Kozoll, whom Bochco had brought to MTM, was about to leave, and the company asked him to work with Bochco on the NBC project.⁵

Neither writer was happy about the idea of doing a cop show, since both had done them before. They proposed to the network a show based on Arthur Hailey’s novel *Hotel*, which would allow them to intertwine several storylines,

much as Aaron Spelling was doing on *The Love Boat*. The network was insistent on a cop show (Spelling himself later did *Hotel* as a series), and let Bochco and Kozoll use the multiple-storyline idea in the cop format with an ensemble cast. While the network was focusing on what was “recombinant,” Bochco and Kozoll were looking for something different. Bochco also insisted on a meeting with Broadcast Standards to set the limits for the show before they even wrote the pilot.⁶

More than most pilots, the one for *Hill Street Blues* demonstrates the tone and feel of the series. It also shows the distinctive narrative patterns Bochco and Kozoll intended to use. As do most of the series episodes, the pilot begins with the roll call Kozoll brought over from *The Police Tapes*, including the final “Let’s be careful out there.”⁷ The first “item” Sgt. Esterhaus reads deals with a purse snatcher who dresses in drag; the second item is about gang homicides. The juxtaposition of humor (primarily humor of character rather than gag humor) and seriousness, which is an element of both *The Police Tapes* and *Law and Order*, is made immediately.

The first act, after the credits, establishes Furillo as the captain of the division, then brings on public defender Joyce Davenport breathing fire about one of her clients being “lost” in the system. Detective LaRue continues an earlier effort to charm Davenport, and in the final scene of the act officers Hill and Renko chase two crooks who turn a liquor store into a hostage situation that will be settled by the end of the episode.

As much as the *Hill Street* pilot (and the series) borrow visually from the direct cinema films like *The Police Tapes* and *Law and Order*, it does not borrow from their narrative structure. In both the *Raymonds* and *Wiseman* films, the pattern consists of long sequences complete in themselves, such as the door-battering sequence in *Police Tapes*, rather than *Hill Street’s* interweaving storylines, which borrow more from the narrative pattern of *The Love Boat*. The difference is that while Spelling’s show would have three stories combined, the *Hill Street* pilot has at least seven, not counting different elements of the hostage situation.

Hill Street also establishes much more vivid characters more quickly than any previous show on television, yet conversely, unlike Spelling’s shows, it does not tell the audience everything as soon as possible. In the pilot we are led to believe that Hill and Renko are going to be major figures in the series (the first scene after the roll call is between them), but they are shot at the end of the third act (and in the original pilot were killed, but kept alive in the pilot as broadcast, and the series, because test audiences liked them the best). LaRue’s seduction efforts with Davenport lead us to expect a romantic relationship, but in the final scene we learn that Davenport and Furillo are lovers. The series does the same thing with Furillo, not telling us until the last episode of the first season that he is a recovering alcoholic. This withholding of information about the characters and sometimes the story action is

also perhaps borrowed from Wiseman's documentaries which, without narration, plunge us into the action and let us figure it out for ourselves.

The visual look of *Hill Street Blues* borrowed from the hand-held camera approach of the direct cinema documentaries, and some critics began to complain the series was using it less than the pilot did, and returning to a more conventional television look of an establishing shot of characters followed by exchanges of close-ups. One reason for this change was the strength of the writing of the show, which emphasized character over action. Curiously, this follows an element in direct cinema as well, which is to focus on the characters; and some of the later series episodes seem more like direct cinema in content than in style. A late first-season episode called "Fecund Hand Rose" has the fiftyish Sgt. Esterhaus preparing to marry a high school cheerleader. The pacing is slower than the pilot because there are longer character scenes, particularly between Esterhaus and Grace Gardner, the policeman's widow he has had a steamy affair with.

Gardner had been created by Bochco for actress Barbara Babcock and was intended to appear in only two episodes, but was so good a character she was written into enough other episodes that Babcock won an Emmy in 1981 for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Series. Babcock later put together a film of all her *Hill Street* scenes from the entire 146 hour episodes of the show, and the film only ran a hour and twenty minutes, which gives some idea of how quickly and vividly the writers created characters.⁸

The first half-season of *Hill Street*, from January to May 1981, did not get good ratings. NBC, which had low ratings as a network, renewed the show, but with the insistence that there be at least one storyline completed per episode, since the network felt audiences had trouble following storylines wandering through many episodes. Bochco agreed, and said at the time ("putting on a brave face," as Todd Gitlin wrote), "I see the validity of that. . . . I hate having to do it, in a sense, because I loved the freedom we had last season with our stories."⁹ A few years later he told Levinson and Link about the change, "The network had a valid complaint, and we responded with great pleasure. We were creating our form as we went along, and that [difficulty in following all the storylines] was something we hadn't anticipated."¹⁰ In the second season, the show also made some continuing stories more distinct, as in a four-episode set centered on Captain Freedom, a man dressed in tights and a cape who tries to help the cops.

Bochco and Kozoll wrote most of the first season's episodes themselves, with single episodes by other individual writers. By the second season Kozoll was not writing scripts, although he was still involved in the creation of the stories, and other writers were coming to the fore, including Anthony Yerkovich, who had written during the first season, and Jeffrey Lewis. Lewis was a Yale alumnus who graduated from Harvard Law School. He worked as an Assistant District Attorney in New York County while writing unpublished

novels. He wrote to Bochco telling him he had a lot of cop stories from his legal days—which was true—and enclosing a spec script he had written for *Lou Grant*. His first script for *Hill Street*, “Fruits of the Poisonous Tree,” deals with the legal question of the admissibility of evidence obtained in a deceptive way. He wrote other scripts and quickly became part of the staff.¹¹

Lewis subsequently brought his college roommate, David Milch, onto the show. Milch had written a novel in college, lived through a coup d'état in Greece, and got himself expelled from Yale Law School for shooting the lights of a police car with a shotgun.¹² His first script, “Trial by Fury,” opened the 1982–83 season and went on to win an Emmy and a Humanitas Award, which is given to writers for scripts that promote “values which most fully enrich the human person.” The episode was one of the occasional “stand alone” episodes the series did that focused on a single storyline complete in one episode. (This is one of the reasons it appealed to award givers: a panelist on the awards committee could make sense of the show without knowing the series.)

Based on a news story Milch read in the *New York Post*, the episode centers on the rape and murder of a nun. The two men responsible are caught but because he does not have enough evidence Furillo gets the prosecutor to indict them on lesser charges, which would let them go free on minimum bail. But it is made clear to the suspects that the public is in a lynching mood over the case. The pressure makes one suspect, Gerald, confess and agree to testify against the other, Celestine. Davenport is furious and later in Furillo's office he defends his action to her, saying he trusts his instincts. She says she trusts *his* instincts, but prefers the rule of law since there are others whose instincts she does not trust. In the last scene, we see Furillo go into a confessional and say, “Bless me father, for I have sinned.”

The episode is very much in the tradition of *The Defenders* and even *Police Story*, the former in its dealing with an “issue” in intelligent if somewhat didactic terms, the latter in showing the moral complexities of police work. While “Trial by Fury” would have been a great *Defenders* or a great *Police Story*, it is only a reasonably good *Hill Street Blues*, simply because *Hill Street* had by then upped the stakes for this kind of show. The Davenport–Furillo scene is preachy in a politically correct way (perhaps the main reason the episode won awards), and the subplots, particularly a second murder that does not get solved because it does not get the public attention the nun's murder did, are very obvious counterpoints to the main story. The lack of continuing stories keeps the show from having the loose texture of the best of the *Hill Streets* and there are, probably inevitably given the basic storyline, not the sudden comic counterpoints that keep the series surprising.

Milch and Lewis became the mainstays of the writing staff, and Bochco told Levinson and Link how the writing process worked during the years he and they were in charge:

Basically, Jeffrey Lewis, David Milch, and I collect all kinds of material, things that we know will function well as purely modular stories within an hour. Each segment has one story that has a beginning, a middle, and an end, along with other storylines that we may weave through three, four, six, or ten hours. We come up with single stories as well as the ones that will carry us through a number of episodes.

The way it generally works is that David and Jeffrey and I will sit down and structure an hour show, scene by scene. We'll talk it through, and I'm usually sitting at the desk with a pad and pencil. I'll take all of the stories within an episode and weave them into a four-act structure. Or Jeffrey will do it. We eventually come up with a four- or five-page step outline for internal purposes. Then we decide who's going to write the teleplay. Usually it's divided among three or four writers. Sometimes it's divided into acts, or even scenes. Then one of the writers has to assume primary responsibility for the sections where we bring stories from the outside into the squad room. That's where all kinds of things overlap, and someone has to take all of those elements and weave them so that things crisscross in the appropriate fashion.¹³

"Mayo, Hold the Pickle," which opened the 1984–85 season, is an example of what *Hill Street* does best. The previous season Michael Conrad, who played the avuncular Sgt. Esterhaus, died and the episode plunges right into roll call with new sergeant Stan Jablonski's first lines: "And what is Stan Jablonski, 22 years at Polk Avenue, doing at Hill Street, day one? Three or four of you may have heard rumors. Let me tell you one thing: Stan Jablonski never coldcocked no woman. O.K.? That's it." Then he gets into the items for the day, which include the news that Celestine Gray, who murdered the nun two years before in "Trial by Fury," is sentenced to die the next day.

The main storylines of the episode cover the typical *Hill Street* interconnection of emotional, legal, political, and social issues: tension between Davenport and Furillo, who have separated, at least partially as a result of the Celestine Gray case; a burglary-assault case that is intertwined with a fencing sting that LaRue and Washington are running; Belker working undercover as a clerk at the hotel where LaRue and Washington are set up as fences; what looks like a comic subplot about a man stealing bags of ice and then an ice cream truck, but which turns out to be a murder case when Bates and Coffey discover the body of the man's mother in the back of the ice cream truck; and the beginning of a storyline about a married couple from out of town whose car is stolen and who are put up at Belker's hotel by Furillo's ex-wife, now a victim's aid helper. At the end of the episode Furillo is almost seduced by new detective Patsy Mayo, but returns to Davenport. As Bochco said, "We were putting more information on, frame by frame, than any other show in prime time. If I'm proud of anything about *Hill Street*, it's that we redefined for the audience the terms of the agreement under which they turned on the set."¹⁴

In 1985 Bochco left the show fulltime to develop *L.A. Law*, and Milch and Lewis took over the daily running of it, which meant they were in the market for new writers. One was Walon Green, who had written National Geographic specials for television and theatrical films, most notably *The Hellstrom Chronicle* and *The Wild Bunch*. Green had learned that while the filmscripts he wrote became big-budget films, not a lot of the budget went to the script. He could make a lot more as a weekly staff writer, plus, unlike the development hell of motion pictures, a writer could see what he wrote on the screen within weeks of writing it.¹⁵

Another writer whom Milch and Lewis brought on the show was Robert Ward. He had graduated from the University of Arkansas in creative writing, then after being on the road (“All the good things happened to Jack Kerouac, all the bad things happened to me”), he taught at various colleges and wrote novels. He got into magazine writing and wrote two more novels, but they were not making him much money. He told his agent he had to find “a real paying gig.” The agent asked if he would consider television, but Ward had never worked in TV and *Hill Street Blues* was the only show he watched. The agent suggested she could get him a job on that, and he assumed she was just talking agent-talk. The next day she called to say Milch and Lewis had read his novel about steel workers and wanted him to come out and pitch ideas.

Ward had picked up enough police stories in his free-lancing days that he could work into material for the show, so he met with the producers. His best idea was about a cop who falls in love with a woman with a child, then feels the relationship is going too far, and when the cop and the woman fight, the child gets the cop’s gun and shoots him. They asked him whom he saw the story for, and he said Neal Washington. Ward recalls, “Jeff and David both smiled. They knew I understood the show. They said, ‘He’s right. He’s the perfect guy for it.’”

Ward describes the writing process when he was on the show:

In general we worked every way you can imagine a group of guys could work. That is, we tried every combination. Here’s one way to work, the way my first script turned out: they [Milch and Lewis] came up with one idea for one story in that, but the rest of them were mine; I went off and wrote the whole script; it came out great; we shot it. That’s one way to work. Every guy on the staff did at least one of those that way that year. Some came out better than others, but everybody had at least one episode.

The other way you can work is this: three guys sit around and kick around a story. They go, “O.K., we’re going to get Belker married [an episode Ward helped develop the story for]. Let’s see what happens. O.K., O.K., he needs this, he does this. No wait, let’s try this.” You go back and forth, all right? Eventually you work out the beats to that story. That means you’ve done the story with these other guys. However, maybe because you’re working on two different scripts, or three different scripts simultaneously, maybe I don’t end up writing those stories.

Maybe some other guy ends up writing it with somebody else. We give that to him while I work on another story that I have an interest in. So that's another way to work.

Another way to work is to assign two guys [to a script]. We assign Jacob Epstein and Bob Ward to write a script. They work out a story together and they take different acts. Jacob Epstein writes Act I, Bob Ward Act II, Jacob takes III, I take IV. We then meet, meld our stuff together until it's seamless, or tries to be seamless. That's another way to work. So there's any number of ways you can work, and we tried them all on *Hill Street* that year.

In addition there are scripts that come in from outside writers, which the staff writers have to fit into the patterns of the show.

Ward says that with the story "arcs" that cover several episodes, "The guy who's hot on the story, you might give him the story . . . all the way through. Somebody wrote a story that was an arc, but they didn't do a good job, you take them off it and get somebody else on it, or if it's just too much for them, keep two groups of guys, or two guys might work on it." The staff writers would meld together the storylines as best they could, and the material was then worked over by Lewis and Milch. Ward and the other writers found themselves exhausted by having done eleven shows by Christmas, only to realize they had to do eleven more. They were writing weekends as well. Ward says, "TV shows tend to be [a] fairly all-inclusive lifestyle. When you're writing the shows, that's pretty much all you're doing."

Ward often saw the story being changed by Milch after it had supposedly been approved, which would require wholesale rewrites. Ward found it tough at first.

But this is how one learns. I was beat up. In TV [and] movies, you have to be able to talk a story. I was used to being a novelist, sitting in a room, working on characters for years at a time. These guys would come in and go, "Beat one: Belker does this. Beat two: he does that. Beat three: no, no, we switch this around. Beat four: now this guy comes in here."

"What guy? What guy are we talking about?" They've invented him on the spot. I remember the first time I saw these guys doing this, I thought, "Either these guys are geniuses or they have some magic I don't know about," because I couldn't do that. I can now, because it's a habit of thinking about story that literary intellectuals never do, because first of all, growing up in the fifties and sixties, we were [not] taught [that] in English classes, in graduate classes. All of us [on the show then] have [college] English backgrounds.

Walon Green was a wonderful writer there. I learned a lot from him. This was great education to be taught by these guys because they were the best writers in town. When it came to dialogue, nobody could write dialogue any better than me, but I didn't know how to do stories. That was the difference. Those guys could write the dialogue and do the story. I couldn't do that. And that was the thing that was really tough to learn. But you learn it, because if you don't, you're out. They used to say to me, "Go to your room and write a five-beat story on

Furillo and Davenport.” I’d go in the room and sweat would just come down my face. I’d think, “Five scenes?” That was like asking me to move a mountain. I just didn’t know how to do it. Finally, though, [it was] like on a bicycle. You know how you try to ride a bicycle, you fall down, and one day suddenly you’re up there and you’re going, “What’s so hard about this?” That’s how it literally was, psychologically. One day I was going, “O.K., Belker does this, Belker does this, ping, ping, ping.” I suddenly realized, “Hey, I can do story.” It was like osmosis. I’d heard it so many times that finally I could do it.

It’s a question of seeing, inherently. First of all, you know certain things about story. You know that [Belker’s] a cop. You know that he’s got to go out on a case. You know that he’s probably going to go undercover, because that’s what Belker did best. Now it’s a question of what does he go undercover on. What haven’t we seen before? What would be fun for Belker? Now the big mistake that a lot of novice writers make is that they like to make up wonderful guest stars. They go, “O.K., he meets this guy, the guy’s dressed like Dracula, blah, blah, he’s really funny, the guy does this, the guy does that.” He’s always telling, “The guy does [something].” The question will always be then, what does Belker have to do with any of this shit? The story is about Belker and his relationship to the guy and everything has to go back onto Belker. The audience doesn’t care about this guy that much. They want him to be colorful, but they want to see Belker’s involvement with him. And that’s where we used to have trouble, because the writers were going, “What’s Belker doing? He’s just a cop?” But no, we had to find a way to make Belker emotionally involved with this person.

Once you started realizing that was the center of a story, not the surrealistic goings-on and shenanigans of the guest star, which was what a lot of people thought *Hill Street* was about when they saw it on the surface, then O.K., you start to see the beats then. Beat one is: he’s undercover; beat two: he meets the guy; beat three: there’s some kind of twist or turn of the plot which endangers their relationship. Maybe Belker likes the kid or something, and the kid is going to get killed because of his own foolhardiness, or tries to be too much like Belker, which makes feel him guilty for somehow involving him. In other words, the whole-out point is to try to find stories that have Belker’s involvement.

That’s true of all the other characters as well. And once you learned those secrets, then writing scripts became a whole lot easier. You started to realize, “Oh, this isn’t just some magical thing guys do.” It’s that they understand the mechanics of storytelling.

In the third season of *Hill Street*, actor Dennis Franz created a memorably corrupt cop, Sal Benedetto. Benedetto died, but Milch and Lewis wanted to bring back Franz in a similar role, which they did in the sixth season, creating the role of Detective Norman Buntz. Several writers wrote Buntz stories, establishing him in Robert Ward’s words as “a tough, no-nonsense guy who was willing to take the law in his own hands, which put him in direct conflict with Furillo.” Ward says Buntz is “such a great guy to write for,” whereas Furillo was the hardest character to write for because “It’s no fun to write for a guy with no flaw. He’s always fair. He’s always stern, true, good. It’s a drag

to write for somebody like that. It's much more fun to write for a guy that might take the law into his own hands and may go off the deep end."

Walon Green's fans among writers, and there are many of them, generally think his script for *The Wild Bunch* is the best work he ever did, but a good case could also be made for the February 13, 1986, episode of *Hill Street*, "Remembrance of Hits Past." It is in some ways atypical for the show in that it is a "stand alone," although appreciation of its richness does depend on a knowledge of the series. It also focuses more on Davenport than episodes normally do, which helps give it a different perspective on the characters and the show. The episode opens with a pre-roll call scene of Davenport and Furillo getting dressed at home, and then at roll call we learn Furillo is testifying at Viamonte's retrial today. At the courthouse Furillo is shot by a gun with a silencer.

In Act I, Chief of Police Daniels and Henry Goldblume are at the hospital, leaving a phone message for Davenport. When we see her at the hospital, she has already heard on the radio on the way over. Green (and Lewis and Milch, who worked on the story with him) avoid the obvious scene of her hearing to move the story forward.

By this point other cops on the hill have heard of the shooting, and we expect a scene in which one of them shows up at the hospital to comfort Davenport. Rather than an obvious choice, Lewis, Milch, and Green bring Buntz into the intensive care unit. Davenport says he probably should not be here, and Buntz replies, "Yeah, I had to tell the doctors I was from the Medical Examiner's office"—an oblique reference to a third-season character, a sloppy, alcoholic coroner named Nydorf. In a world in which Nydorf is a coroner, doctors would believe Buntz works for the Medical Examiner. Buntz tells Davenport that if everybody's positive, it will help Furillo, and she replies with a slight smile, "It helped me." Buntz, who is always chewing gum, offers the elegant Davenport a stick of gum, which she takes. It is a lovely scene, played beautifully by Veronica Hamel with stoic coolness and by Franz with surprising delicacy.

In Act II Davenport hears Viamonte on television insisting he did not order the shooting and that his prayers go out to Furillo and his family. Then there are the first of a continuing series of flashbacks to the first meeting of Furillo and Davenport, after Viamonte's aborted first trial, intercut with the efforts of the cops either to find out about Furillo (Belker is undercover at a meat packing plant—a nice visual juxtaposition with the operating room sequences—and has trouble getting a break to make a phone call) or to track the shooter.

In Act III the flashbacks continue, with Furillo and Davenport's first date, reluctant on her part because she wants her independence. This flashback is followed by a scene in the hospital between Davenport and Chief Daniels. Green here gives us a new slant on the normally pompous Daniels, showing us his affection, usually hidden, for Furillo.

In Act IV the cops discover that the shooter was not hired by Viamonte, but is a former mental patient who had attempted to shoot other public figures. Intercut with flashbacks of Furillo and Davenport starting their romantic relationship, the cops track the shooter to the hospital. Buntz chases him into a stairway, takes careful aim and shoots him, even though he is several floors below. Other cops express amazement at the shot. Buntz chuckles and says, "Wasn't that one hell of a shot, huh?" In Furillo's room Davenport learns his vital signs have begun to stabilize.

There were some pressures on the show to go out with a two-hour finale, in the manner of *M*A*S*H*, but according to Ward, the writers on *Hill Street* thought the finale of *M*A*S*H* was overdone and they wanted to avoid that. Ward says, "We decided basically to make it like any other episode and that'd be the end of it. So that's what we did. Understatement. The show's strength was understatement. That's the way we wanted to go out." The last episode, "It Ain't Over Till It's Over," telecast on May 12, 1987, was so understated that it did not have as much of an impact as it might have.

Todd Gitlin reports that midway through the second season of the show its co-creator, Michael Kozoll, told him that he had finally found a metaphor for series television. Doing series television, Kozoll thought, was like rearing a retarded child. There were only so many things it could do, no matter how much effort you put in.¹⁶

Kozoll left *Hill Street Blues* to write theatrical films. His first-produced script after the series was *First Blood*, the initial Rambo movie. If pressed to select whether *Hill Street Blues* or *First Blood* is most like a retarded child. . . .

THE CHILDREN OF HILL STREET

*E*ven the vicar of American television production, Grant Tinker, once referred to the project that became *St. Elsewhere* as “*Hill Street* in the Hospital.”¹ *St. Elsewhere* was the first of several post-*Hill Street* hour dramas to use the pattern the police show had established: a large ensemble cast, set in an institution, several intersecting storylines per episode, story arcs covering several episodes, and literate, witty writing.

When *St. Elsewhere* premiered the year after *Hill Street*, it seemed very much like a rip-off. The setting was the Boston hospital St. Eligius, nicknamed St. Elsewhere because, like the Hill Street area in the earlier show, it was very much in a lower-class, ethnically mixed neighborhood. *St. Elsewhere*'s Furillo was Dr. Donald Westphall, the chief of staff; the cops were the assorted doctors, nurses, and interns; and the crooks and their victims were the patients. As the first and succeeding seasons continued (the show was renewed after its first season in spite of low ratings, at least in part because its ratings pattern followed that of *Hill Street* the previous year²), the show began to develop its own tone. There was more out-and-out surrealism on *St. Elsewhere*, including dream sequences, and there were not only running jokes, but series of in-jokes complete in individual sequences. *Hill Street* would not have even attempted something like the *St. Elsewhere* episode in which the doctors go to the bar from *Cheers*. The episode did not work, simply because the rhythms of the writing of the two shows is so dissimilar the two styles could not mesh. It was also one of the few dramatic shows on television that could end with a suggestion the entire series was a figment of the imagination of an autistic child (perhaps its makers' reply to Michael Kozoll's observation).

The *St. Elsewhere* style was firmly in place when Lydia Woodward was hired as a writer and story editor on the show in its last season. Woodward had produced a film at the American Film Institute, then been both an agent (a bad one, she admits, because she could not sell scripts she did not believe in: “I could not do the old CAA attitude, ‘Don't smell it, sell it’”) and a development executive before turning to writing. A script for the sitcom *Slap*

Maxwell got her the *St. Elsewhere* position. The show was run by its creators, Joshua Brand and John Falsey. Woodward says that all the stories were generated by the producers and then handed to the writers. Woodward did two scripts on her own and was teamed on a third one with Grace McKeaney, although “teamed” is perhaps the wrong term, since they did not work directly together. They were given storylines, some as short as a line or two, and developed some others themselves.

Each storyline was written as a separate script, and then the producers integrated them into a whole script. So Grace probably had two storylines and I had two storylines, which I wrote from beginning to end, and which she wrote from beginning to end. And then, after the script was integrated, it was given back to us to do rewrites on, and that’s when I was writing on the first act and the third and she was writing on the second act and the fourth. Grace wandered into my office and said, “How are you doing on your half?”

“I don’t know. How are you doing on your half?” And we didn’t have any idea. She’d be finishing storylines that I was starting, but she didn’t know what I was doing with it.

St. Elsewhere always had these little funny insider themes in their shows. In this one, the name of it was “Fairy Tale Theatre,” so all the storylines reflected fairy tales in certain ways. What was funny was that because Grace and I really weren’t working together on it, we kept using the same fairy-tale references, because you go to your most basic ones. So there are all these Jack and the Beanstalk references in her stuff and then in my stuff, so we had to go back and clean that out. Our instincts were all the same everywhere.

So it was not exactly a collaborative process. It was great. At points it was a little crazy, but it was fun.

Woodward describes writing for *St. Elsewhere* as being “like writers’ boot camp. You shoved the pages out under the door and they would shove in the food. It was a lot of fun and a lot of writing, because you did so much rewriting on free-lancer scripts.” Woodward started her work as a story editor, “which is only another word for writer,” rewriting scripts that had been farmed out to free-lancers. Woodward or another story editor would do two drafts of the script, then turn it over to the producers, who did their drafts. Woodward says, “I think I was pretty lucky. I actually saw a lot of my stuff kind of get through. Not always in the same form or in the same place.”

The story editors on *St. Elsewhere* were often asked to come up with a scene quickly to fit a script about to shoot. Woodward remembers when

they came to Doug [Steinberg, also a story editor] and me once and said, “We don’t have an ending for the show. We need a final scene for the show, Ehrlich and his wife, about the baby.” And we did it in half an hour. We knew roughly what the show was about. We’d seen it through its various stages, so it wasn’t like they just handcuffed and blindfolded us. We just shut the door of one of

our offices and panicked and came up with a final scene for the show, which they did not rewrite. They put it in. It was shot.

As with *Hill Street*, one of the great strengths of *St. Elsewhere* was the characters, but in the final season the characters seemed less consistent than in previous seasons. Woodward replies, "Are you asking if logic played a role in any of this? In a television show? Certainly not," adding seriously, "I don't really remember being aware of that [unevenness], quite honestly." She relates:

I think the thing that I loved about the *St. Elsewhere* characters and [why] I loved writing about them, is that every character there had the ability to accidentally spit on himself. Drool, that's the word I want to use. Every character had the ability to drool on himself, which you don't often see in television characters. They're usually straighter, stronger, more confident, not as much vulnerability as I think the *St. Elsewhere* characters [had]. I think that's why the success of that show really came out of the writing of those characters. They had more dimension, and that's why they were more interesting to write and more fun to write.

Steven Bochco's second attempt at an ensemble cast show was not as successful as his first and his third. In 1983 he and Jeffrey Lewis created *Bay City Blues* about a minor league baseball team. Thad Mumford, who had been a batboy for the New York Yankees ("and it's been downhill since then"), and his partner, Dan Wilcox, were brought to MTM to write for the series, but the series was delayed by a financial dispute between MTM and NBC. The delay did not help the writing. Mumford admits, "I think there was about a month or five weeks where we couldn't do anything. We would sit down and we would talk about ideas, but it was like waiting in a hospital room to find out if somebody was going to die or not. 'Do we make plans to go shopping or do we make plans to get the crypt?'"

Mumford and Wilcox had been given the impression when they were hired that they would be running the show, but as it developed, Bochco made it clear Lewis and David Milch were in charge. Mumford says he and Wilcox "felt like hired hands or story editors." They did one episode and left the show. Only four episodes were run on primetime, and the remaining four ran on NBC-owned stations late at night later in the season. Mumford thinks the problem with the concept was that

Steven tried to compare the lives of athletes to policemen. I think he was looking for the same kind of pathos and drama [as in *Hill Street*] and it wasn't that kind . . . in minor league baseball. People who are in minor league baseball are happy, even the ones who don't get a lot of money, because they have a chance at the big leagues. Not to say there is no unhappiness, but it's not the same complexity.

The problem for viewers was simply telling the various players apart, since there were several in their early twenties on their way up, and several older and on their way down.

Bochco's third ensemble series turned out better. In 1984 he read in a newspaper column that the head of NBC, Grant Tinker, had asked him to do a series on the law. Tinker called him that day, having seen the item, to ask Bochco to refresh his memory about the conversation. Bochco could not, since they had never talked about such a series. Both agreed, however, that it was a good idea. Bochco thought about the idea and later pitched it to Brandon Tartikoff at NBC. Tartikoff bought it, and Bochco looked for an attorney to collaborate with him, since he did not feel he knew enough about the law. His co-creator was Terry Louise Fisher, a former deputy district attorney and producer-writer of *Cagney and Lacy*.

Bochco and Fisher wrote a two-hour television movie pilot for what became *L.A. Law*. It opens with the husband of an ex-client coming into a divorce lawyer's office with a gun, and then a senior partner is found dead in his office, his face in a plate of beans. When the firm's divorce attorney learns of the death, he calls dibs on the late partner's office. Bochco said,

The pilot opening is designed, very consciously, for effect, to very quickly loosen up your expectations about a show about the law. *Perry Mason*, *The Defenders*—they're earnest shows. There's nothing wrong with them. But there was precious little humor in them. The cases were all resolved, usually heroically, by the end of each episode. I don't want that kind of show . . . and I want the audience to know that right away.³

Bochco saw early on that the writing of *L.A. Law* had to be even better than the writing of *Hill Street Blues*, since the newer show had no action scenes to cut to. Fisher said, "This show is talking heads. The talk better be good. . . . We've learned already [in the first few scripts] that when the words aren't good, the show is awful, the scenes endlessly boring."⁴

It took the show from its opening in October 1986 to its episodes in January 1987 to find the right balance. Scripts that other writers did were rewritten by Fisher and/or Bochco.⁵ Several of the writers were lawyers themselves. One of them was David E. Kelley, who had decided in the mid-eighties to write a screenplay for a feature film about his legal experiences. (The script became the 1987 film *From the Hip*, which is not quite the retarded child film legend has it; Judd Nelson is just not Corbin Bernsen.) The script got to Bochco when he was looking for writers for the series. Bochco later said,

I only read about the first thirty pages of his script, and you could see in the courtroom stuff—he wrote it with such real feeling and it was very funny. And that's exactly the voice you want to locate for *L.A. Law*. You want to take the viewer into the courtroom and make it come very much alive and also find the

humor inherent in the environment. Most TV writers fall into the trap of writing courtroom stuff very ponderously; it's so overwritten. It's like bad French cooking where everything is bathed in too much cream sauce.⁶

At the beginning of the 1989–90 season Bochco left the show and Kelley took over the running of it. In March 1991, Executive Producer Rick Wallace noted the difference in the emphasis: “The first three years under Steven’s tutelage and guidance was 65 percent relationship and 35 percent legal. What’s happened since David has taken over is that it went the other way and it become [sic] more like 65 percent legal and 35 percent relationship.”⁷

In February 1991 it looked as though Kelley might be pushing the show back into relationships. New characters had been added, including an English woman lawyer, C. J. Lamb. After Lamb and Abby Perkins, another woman attorney, have dinner together to celebrate a deal they have made on a case, Lamb kisses Perkins, who is startled. The next day Perkins tells Lamb that she likes men, and Lamb says she does too, admitting to being “flexible.” After further discussion, the relationship is left up in the air for several episodes, as if the writer [Kelley wrote the episode] and the network were awaiting the public response. The Los Angeles NBC affiliate reported the next night that they had received only 85 calls about the scene, only a little more than half negative. Wallace said later that very few viewers had objected to the scene,⁸ but Kelley said later there was pressure from NBC not to continue the storyline.⁹ The more freewheeling days of the earlier Bochco shows were, perhaps, coming to a close.

On its pastel surface, *Miami Vice* would not seem to be an obvious child of *Hill Street*, but in typical network recombinant thinking, it evolved out of the earlier show. The network wanted a combination of *Hill Street Blues* and *Starsky and Hutch*, a traditional buddy cop show, and they decided to approach *Hill Street* writer Anthony Yerkovich, who had a reputation for writing the Hill and Renko characters. The network shorthand was “MIV Cops,” since they wanted to play the show against contemporary music and envisioned cutting the scenes like the music videos on MIV. Yerkovich was tired of shooting in Los Angeles and suggested making the show in Florida.¹⁰

The style of the show made an immediate impact, as the style of *Hill Street* had done, but the earlier series had also developed its characters and its content; the characters on *Miami Vice* were never particularly interesting and did not develop over the course of the series in interesting ways. *Miami Vice*’s main stories, because of the locale, inevitably had to be about drugs, and they became repetitive. The flashy visual style got tiresome very quickly without the substance to back it up. Getting the visual style was often at the expense of the story. Ed Waters, who worked on the show its second season, recalls:

In an effort to keep that visual look that they did so successfully on that show, they would go to a location that would take them three to four hours to get to,

and they would shoot a page and a half that day, so something had to give. You have a 55-page script and seven days to shoot it in, you have to shoot seven and a half pages, or whatever, and if you shoot one and half pages one day, you're in trouble. So a lot of things were sacrificed to preserve that style. Many of the stories suffered. When you're scrambling to meet the schedule, story values and plot points are going to fall by the wayside. They did.

The producer in Florida was more concerned about the look of the show, and Waters kept seeing dailies that were "oftentimes not reflective of what was in the script." (Communication and understanding between the writers and production staff is often a problem on shows shot some distance away from Los Angeles. Waters noticed similar problems on *The Equalizer*, and Joel Rogosin also saw it happen on *Magnum P.I.*)

Robert Ward came on *Miami Vice* as producer in its fifth year and tried to develop tighter stories about a greater variety of subjects, but by then the show had run its course. It was one of many shows in the history of television, like Milton Berle's first show, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, and *Mork and Mindy*, that made a strong immediate impact but burned out quickly.

Having done a show with great visual style, Anthony Yerkovich turned in 1987 to one with great verbal style, *Private Eye*, set in Los Angeles in the mid-fifties. Joseph Dougherty, a big Raymond Chandler fan, did two scripts for the show, and comments, "The problem is, you've kinda, gotta have Bogart to hang a show like that on. I don't think anybody realized how tough it is to do Chandleresque material." Not so much for Dougherty, who claims he "could write this stuff by the long yard." He got the assignment to work on the show by showing up one day when they had an episode that needed some extra narration for it to make sense. Dougherty says, "I just sat down in the office and I wrote four and a half minutes of narration. I'm sorry, but it's the best thing in the episode. It's great. It's these big, sweeping Chandleresque metaphors. It's fun to do." The series never quite worked and was pulled after twelve episodes.

For his 1986 police series *Heart of the City*, E. Arthur Kean focused on the relationship of the cop and his two teenaged kids. The relationship struck a nerve in viewers and Kean began to get what he describes as "love letters" from parents telling him how it helped them talk to their teenagers. Kean describes what he learned from the show and its audiences:

Now I know there are about 12 million people out there that are interested in that kind of thing. It's putrid [numbers] by television standards. Well, we opened in 63rd place, and I said, "I'm going to be diligent. I'm going to hang in there." And I persisted. And I managed with great force of will on my own personal behalf to keep it at 63rd place. Which was the bottom. But I managed to keep it there. It's to my credit that it never rose a single point.

The show was scheduled at nine on Saturday night on ABC against *The Golden Girls*. ABC never found another time period for it and it was canceled after thirteen episodes.

Call to Glory, a 1984–85 series, also tried to interweave the personal and professional lives of its characters. The problem was that the profession was Air Force officers in the early sixties, and unlike most previous one-hour series, the personal lives were serialized, with continuing developments each week. Joel Rogosin, a producer on the series, says,

So you not only dealt with the personal lives against the professional lives against the [production] logistics [of shooting] at Edwards [Air Force Base] with the cooperation of the Air Force, and the integration of stock footage and second-unit stuff which we shot, but you dealt with the continuity of the storylines that were going on. In 48 minutes that's a lot to juggle and have it coherent. Very difficult.

Even writers who wrote for years before *Hill Street* began to adapt to the style. Christopher Knopf, whose credits go back to the late fifties, co-wrote a pilot in 1988 called *Mad Avenue*, which would have been an ensemble show set in an advertising agency. Knopf says, “There’s no question that Steve Bochco set the tone for it, for that kind of show.” The problem with the idea for the series was similar to the problem with *Bay City Blues*, or, as Knopf puts it, “How concerned can you get about a twenty-million-dollar [advertising] account?”

Later, he was working with his partner, David Simons, on a show about the criminal justice system, and ABC put them together with Thomas Carter, one of the most successful directors of pilots in television, who was also thinking about a law show. Their collaboration became the 1990 series *Equal Justice*, which focuses primarily on the prosecutor’s office and the people working in it. Robert Ward’s description of everybody doing everything on *Hill Street* also applies to *Equal Justice*. Talking in November 1990, Christopher Knopf describes the then-current process: “We’re starting a brand-new story right now. [The staff writers] go into the office of Deborah Joy LaVine, a very good writer. She has a big white board up there you can write with ink crayons on that you can erase right off. [She] draws four lines down. Act I, Act II, Act III, Act IV, and we’ll start talking.” They will need to develop three stories. One will be a case story, but they found that case stories can only take eleven pages, which still requires two days of shooting, because of the necessity of covering all the participants in a trial. They will need a legal story outside the courtroom, and a personal story for one or more of their characters.

Not all of the five writers can spend too much time on the story, since they are busy planning their own new stories, writing their own scripts, and doing rewrites. Thomas Carter, the co-creator of the show, can help some, but he is involved with shooting and cutting. Knopf says, “When you first begin the

year, you're all sitting around, 'Isn't it wonderful? We're all here to help everybody.' But right now [November] it's you catch what you can catch. You go knocking on somebody's door and say, 'You got five minutes for me? I got a problem with this scene.' So it gets a little hectic."

Knopf has found that several older writers resent being asked to show they can adapt to the newer style, but he recommends the older writers write a spec *L.A. Law* script to show they can handle it. He knows writers who have, and have gotten work from it.

The spring of 1990 saw the beginning of several months of premieres of series following the *Hill Street* pattern. The most heavily promoted—to the point of creating a frenzied cult about it—was *Twin Peaks*. The co-creators were film director David Lynch and Mark Frost. While most of the talk about the series centered on Lynch because the series was seen as being very much in his portentous and surrealist style, the *Hill Street* connection was through Frost, who had written for that show. In one interview with Frost (as opposed to the many with Lynch), he was quoted as saying, "*Hill Street* was very good, but it was very impersonal work for me. I wrote about that place as if I was a visitor. It wasn't what my life was like. It was a great place to learn the craft of how to shape a scene, but I wanted a chance to write about more personal themes and obsessions. My point of view has always been more offbeat."

The two-hour pilot of *Twin Peaks*, written by Lynch and Frost, shows the connections with *Hill Street*, most notably in not revealing until the end of the pilot that Sheriff Truman and Josie Packard are involved in a romantic relationship. The biggest delay in revealing story details to the audience came in the structure of the series, which begins in the pilot with the investigation of the murder of Laura Palmer. The killer is not revealed in the pilot, or even the first series of episodes, run in the spring of 1990, but only in a new series of episodes in the fall of that year. The problem Lynch and Frost set for themselves with the delayed payoff of the murder story is that while the investigation is continuing, they were not creating other stories, and more importantly, not developing compelling characters to hold the audience's attention past the revelation of Laura Palmer's killing. Like *Miami Vice*, *Twin Peaks* tried to get by on style without substance. Unlike *Miami Vice*, it could not do it for more than a season.

Twin Peaks was followed in the summer by *Northern Exposure*, created by Joshua Brand and John Falsey, the creators of *St. Elsewhere*. Like Lynch and Frost's show, Brand and Falsey's is set in an odd small town in the northwest, in this case Alaska. Unlike *Twin Peaks*, *Northern Exposure* began early in its run to develop a set of offbeat and interesting characters. While it was often hard to tell the two or three young dark-haired women or the two or three young dark-haired men on *Twin Peaks* apart, each character on *Northern Exposure* is precisely defined and well rounded, often in surprising ways. Returning in the spring of 1991, *Northern Exposure* began to catch on with audiences and was renewed after *Twin Peaks* was canceled.

The fall of 1990 saw three children of *Hill Street* start the season, with all

three to be canceled before the season was over. David Milch, one of the stalwarts of the *Hill Street* writing staff, was the principal creator of *Capital News*, an ensemble show about a Washington newspaper, and John Eisen-drath and Kathryn Pratt created *WIOU*, a show about local television news. The most heavily promoted of the three was Bochco's *Cop Rock*, in which he tried to integrate musical numbers into a realistic cop show. *Cop Rock*'s characters and location were too similar to *Hill Street*, so the show produced a sense of déjà vu. The musical numbers did not fit into the show's realism and felt like commercials instead of the show.¹¹ It was not only a question of realism. Bochco's skill, as seen in his successful shows, is to create compelling characters in strong storylines. The musical numbers in *Cop Rock* were so aggravating precisely because they took audiences away from the characters and the storylines.

By the end of the 1990–91 season ABC cancelled *Equal Justice* and *Cop Rock* as well as *China Beach* and *thirtysomething*. The other networks were dropping hour dramas, particularly with ensemble casts, although *L.A. Law* and *Northern Exposure* held on, and there were continuing hour dramas with one or two stars, such as *Matlock*, *In the Heat of the Night* and even *Jake and the Fatman*. But the heyday of the children of *Hill Street* was clearly over, even as critics were willing to admit that it had been another Golden Age of television.¹² The large ensemble shows were dying out for several reasons. One may have been that audiences found it too hard to keep *that* many characters in *that* many shows in mind. The style may have worn out its welcome.

There were other considerations as well. The networks were losing viewers, which in turn caused a loss of advertising revenue. So-called “reality shows” were much cheaper to make and got as good or better ratings. (An interesting irony: the direct cinema documentary techniques first led documentary into examining character, which is an element the ensemble shows picked up from documentary. The “reality” shows tended to use the same techniques in a shallower way, avoiding character and turning the documentary into the sensationalized mind candy that the best fictional shows were more and more avoiding.) The ensemble shows were expensive to make, not only in costs of the actors, but also in terms of writers, because of the large number of staff writers, usually with salary-increasing titles like Story Consultant, Executive Story Consultant, and Producer, which were necessary to keep these shows running. Such expenses could possibly have been covered by the production companies, to be made up for when the series were sold in syndication, but the market for hour dramas—particularly serialized shows like *Hill Street Blues*, *St. Elsewhere*, and even *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, had collapsed (although several such shows did well in cable showings, cable reruns are much less lucrative than traditional syndication to local stations). Half-hour comedies did much better on the networks and in syndication. The hour ensemble dramas were simply too good, and too demanding, for the conventional audience for syndicated re-runs.

YET ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

*L*ike most American institutions, network television has been very much an old boys' club. In discussing their careers, writers talk about how they got jobs through friends and contacts made on other shows. Most of the writers for American television have been men, but from the beginning there have been women writers as well as women stars, and even women producers and directors, and they too got jobs through contacts. Network television has in some ways been less sexist than many American institutions, and the changes in women's roles in TV both on-screen and off-screen mirror the changes in women's roles in American society. Looking at the history of television writing by observing women writers and women characters provides yet another perspective on that history.

One reason Catherine Turney was able to find work in the early days of television was her previous experience writing women's pictures in Hollywood. She worked on *Mildred Pierce* as well as several Bette Davis films, but as stars like Davis left the studios for independent production, writers like Turney were let out of their contracts. Among her early television work, Turney did an adaptation for the *Lux Video Theatre* of the old Bette Davis film (not one she had written) *Jezebel*.

Madelyn Davis got into radio because the newspaper she wanted to work for "didn't want Journalism Graduate ladies on their paper." She was willing to start as a secretary in radio, but landed a job writing commercials first. In radio and then TV situation comedy, it was helpful for her to have a male partner to deal with people who might be uncomfortable with a woman writer. Being a woman writer helped her get work on shows with major women characters. Many of the women she wrote in the fifties and sixties were scatterbrained, and she says, "It would probably bother me today, but we hadn't had our consciousnesses raised yet. And that was sort of a style: Gracie Allen, Marie Wilson, Mary Livingstone, Blondie, Joan Davis." (Nat Perrin worked within that style as well, first on *My Friend Irma*, and later in the fifties when

he decided that the focus of the series version of *How to Marry a Millionaire* should be on the “funny” girl, since the show was supposed to be a comedy.) Davis looks now with what she admits is hindsight at what she wrote and says of the changes that have taken place:

There were a couple of things in that pilot that didn't get aired [the original unaired pilot of *I Love Lucy* was shown on CBS in April 1990] that I thought, “Oh, my,” [such as] Ricky saying, “I want you to stay home and cook my meals and have my children.” I would never write that today. It was a long time ago.

People say, “Has comedy changed?” Well, life has changed. So if you're going to be funny, you write about the funny problems today, which are a little different from the funny problems then. When we did *Alice* [1977–85], I noticed we got into more of today's themes, were more aware of the times . . .

Davis had more difficulties as a woman producer than as a writer:

I found I had to be rather careful, because men didn't particularly want to be working for a woman producer. It wasn't very overt, but I learned to handle it. Whereas a man would never have to do that. I just learned to say, “What do you think?” a lot. “I need some help on this.” A lot of times they'd have good ideas. It wasn't that it was a big chore or anything, but you just learned to be rather . . . careful.¹

Being a woman could be difficult in the early days of TV, for a variety of reasons. Lucille Kallen, one of Mel Tolkin's “outsiders” on *Your Show of Shows*, later remembered the problem of office space: “We were in a rather seedy part of the city, and there was very little space. So Mel [Tolkin] and I got the boys' dressing room, the dancers' dressing room. So we sat there surrounded by jockstraps, if you please.”² According to Allan Manings, when Kallen worked on *The Imogene Coca Show*, she had just had her first child and “was having difficulty being a mother because she was devoting so much time to the show. I remember she came in and she said, ‘I dropped him. Well, of course, what else would I do? I mean, I don't know what to do with a child. A sketch I'll fix, a child is different.’” Kallen eventually got out of television and into writing mystery novels.

From the beginning of filmed television, it has not been uncommon for women to move from being secretaries to being writers. Dorothy Fontana's first job after she graduated from college in 1959 was as a secretary at *Revue*. Assigned to the show *Overland Stage* as a secretary, she later pitched a story to the same producers for another of their shows, *The Tall Man*, and they bought it. She continued working as a secretary for several years because, until *Star Trek*, she was not making enough writing to support herself. Fontana wrote for several Western series using her full first name, then she

was trying to write a *Combat* or whatever, and I found I was running into, “Oh, well, a woman can't write *our* series.”

I said, "Well that's silly." But I decided to start putting the initials [D. C.] down because then if they were reading a submitted script, as a sample script, they wouldn't have any built-in prejudices as to whether it was a man or a woman.

That was how I sold the *Ben Casey* [script]. They didn't know who had written it. They didn't care. They just liked the story and bought it. I found that was lucky, so I kept on with it.

As D. C. Fontana she continued to write Westerns. On *The Big Valley* she wrote for the matriarch of the ranch, Barbara Stanwyck. Stanwyck read the first draft and told Fontana, "Look, I'm just Ruby Stevens [Stanwyck's real name] from Brooklyn. I don't talk like this. Make it simpler"—which Fontana did.

In the seventies Fontana was called in to write a *Streets of San Francisco* because the show wanted to do a woman's story. Fontana talked to police-women and relates, "Some of the things they said, which were true at that time, are in the script, about the fact that a woman has to work harder to gain rank, that mostly they wound up being desksitters at that point because then you didn't have what you have now, with the women actively in patrol cars or on the beat doing more dangerous things." Fontana was told she was the first woman writer hired by that production company, Quinn Martin Productions, and they wanted her to use her full name. She agreed to let them use "Dorothy C. Fontana" on that one script, provided they went back to "D. C." on any others. They agreed, and wanted her to do another woman's story, but to avoid being typecast she wrote an episode that was "all male." She later wrote for the show a recurring woman police-lieutenant character who had a romance with the Karl Malden character.

Another secretary who moved into writing was Juanita Bartlett. Bartlett tried to write scripts for years, but without making any sales. Once a friend working on a medical show suggested she submit a script. The producer refused to read Bartlett's material, telling the friend, "You know we've never had success from women writers." Bartlett went to work as a secretary to Meta Rosenberg, who was executive producer of the James Garner series *Nichols*. One day Bartlett asked the producer of the series, Frank Pierson, "Have you assigned any Bertha stories yet?" He asked, "Who's Bertha?"

Bartlett had noticed on the Western street standing set where the show was filmed that there was a saloon called Bertha's. Pierson said he had not thought of any character to go with it, and Bartlett asked if she could submit a story. Pierson asked Rosenberg if she had any objections, and when she did not, Pierson agreed to read the story. After several days of waiting nervously, Bartlett got a call from Pierson saying, "Congratulations, Juanita. You're no longer a secretary, you're a writer." Bartlett was afraid she would not be able to sell another script, so Rosenberg agreed to hire only a temporary replacement, and if at the end of three months Bartlett wanted her old job back, she could

have it. Bartlett plunged into writing scripts for *Nichols*, including a rewrite of another script. She says, "It was sort of a baptism of fire. Somebody was standing below the window practically, and as I would finish pages, I'd throw them out. So I really didn't have any opportunity to get too nervous, because there wasn't any time." This did not stop Bartlett from continuing for some time to come by Rosenberg's office and make coffee. The new secretary finally had to say to her, "Juanita, I know how to make coffee."

Like Davis, Bartlett found more problems as a woman producer than as a writer, but she remembers a conversation she had with Rosenberg on the subject:

When I had just started to work for Meta Rosenberg years ago, I was in her office one day and she said, "Let me ask you something, Juanita. Just out of curiosity. How do you feel about working for a woman?"

I said, "I don't think about it one way or the other. The one thing that I care about is that I have respect for the person that I'm working for. And if they're a man, fine; if they're a woman, fine. But it doesn't bother me to work for a woman."

She said, "Well, there are some women who don't want to work for another woman."

I said, "There is a disadvantage, and that is you can't throw your apron over your face, or tear up, or bat your eyes, and say, 'Oh, silly me. What a terrible mistake to have made. Can you ever forgive me?' You're on your own."

Some producers, especially writer-producers, agree with E. Jack Neuman, who says, "I don't care what they are as long as they can write. Color, sex means nothing to me. Just gimme a writer." Ironically, he makes this comment in discussing the 1975 series he created about a woman lawyer, and Neuman can no longer remember whether he had any women writers on the staff of *Kate McShane* or not. What he does remember is that in the original script the lawyer was a man, the son of a cop who raised five children alone. Neuman felt that for it to work the lawyer had to be a son, but Fred Silverman, then the head of CBS programming, insisted it be cast with a woman, Anne Meara. Neuman thinks she is "a nice lady," but simply wrong for how he had conceived the series.

One reason it may have occurred to Silverman to make the lawyer a woman was not only the women's movement in this country, but the way the sensibilities of the movement showed up in weekly series. Some of those sensibilities came from the women writing the shows, such as Treva Silverman on *Mary Tyler Moore*; Charlotte Brown on *Rhoda*, Linda Bloodworth, Mary Kay Place, and Karen Hall on *M*A*S*H*; and Irma Kalish, who co-wrote the episode of *All in the Family* in which Edith thinks she might have a breast tumor. The women (and some men) writers may have been running slightly ahead of the public on the issues. *TV Guide* noted in a 1977 article that a poll in December 1976 showed that 46 percent of all viewers, and 47 percent

of all women viewers, thought that women on TV were *more* liberated than women really are, while only 3 percent thought they were *less* liberated.³

There were male writers and writer-producers who wanted to explore a more liberated view of women. Allan Manings is married to actress Whitney Blake, who played the mother in the series *Hazel*. Blake had in real life raised three children alone, and she and Manings thought there was a show in that. Manings tried unsuccessfully for eight years to sell the idea. He started out by pitching the idea as “What happens to Nora after she leaves the doll’s house?” Manings recalls the reactions of most executives: “I would get the blankest looks you have ever seen in your life. I’d say, ‘Ibsen. Play?’ [The executives would grumble.] And finally I’d say, ‘This is the story of a woman who jumps up and down on the diving board and as she launches herself, on the way down she notices there’s no water in the pool.’ And that’s essentially it.”

In 1975 Manings pitched the idea to Norman Lear, who had always wanted to do something about the emerging woman. The show was *One Day at a Time*, and even though Whitney Blake was the co-creator she had reservations about Schneider, the building superintendent who constantly came into the apartment of the mother and two teenage girls. Manings recalls, “Whitney always used to say, ‘That man should not be allowed to walk into that apartment.’ And she’s right. She says, ‘A mother would not allow this. Don’t these people ever lock their door?’ I said, ‘No one in television locks their doors, because you always have that funny neighbor next door who’s got to walk in with the joke.’”

Lou Shaw also saw an opportunity in the 1974–75 season to help the television presence of both women and blacks. As usual, it began with a phone call from Glen Larson, who had taken over a series that had debuted that September, *Get Christie Love!* The show starred Teresa Graves, a black singer and dancer, as a police officer. Shaw says, “I was very excited about the whole idea. . . . I thought it would be a very exciting thing to have a black woman as a lead. And it could work. . . . That could have been a massive hit.” Shaw’s motives for agreeing to be a story editor on the show were not entirely altruistic. He did not know what a story editor was at the time, but thought it would help him “get his hooks” into Universal and become a producer.

Shaw wrote a script for the show and then had his first meeting with Graves, who brought along a man Shaw “guess[es] you’d best call her manager/preacher.” Graves had recently converted to a fundamentalist religion, and told Shaw the manager/preacher would discuss the script with him. Thus began what Shaw remembers as a seven-to-eight-hour meeting: The script opened with Christie Love coming into the police station dressed from having played tennis; the police raise a glass of champagne and wish her a happy birthday. The manager spent an hour and a half explaining all that would have to go: birthdays are heathen since “Only Jesus has a birthday”; drinking

is “barbaric and heathen”; making toasts is all right as long as no person is praised, since only the Lord can be praised; and in athletics a woman does not show her legs.

Shaw began to wonder if he was being put on. He reminded them that on *Laugh-In* Graves danced in a bikini, but the manager said, “That was a former life.” Now she would be fully covered at all times and would never show her body or her legs. Shaw made what he now calls a “feeble joke” about hiding one of the assets of the show, and the man replied, “That kind of joke could never happen on *Christie Love*.” As the meeting finally ended, the manager added, “By the way, it would be a good idea maybe if I was hired to be an actor on the show so that I could keep close track of what is going on every minute, you know.”

The whole thrust of the show was that *Christie Love* was anti-establishment and, in the cop show tradition, disagreed with her superior, who was a man. The manager told Shaw, “A woman does not disagree with her boss . . . a woman’s position is secondary to a man.” All the scripts had to be rewritten, with the manager constantly saying, “Oh, no, Teresa doesn’t say this. Teresa doesn’t say that.” Shaw thought the scripts “reduced” in the rewriting. He also thought the manager ruined Graves’s performances. Shaw says, “She was an absolutely charming woman, and she had charisma on the screen. Except, this guy just was with her and flattened it out.”

Get Christie Love! would never have become great drama. It was always intended as light entertainment, but within its formula it could have broken new ground if Graves had used her position wisely in dealing with the politics of the studio and the network. She did not, and while it may have been a religious victory, it was at least as much of a loss for women and blacks on American television. The same thing can be said about Lindsay Wagner’s later experience with *Jessie*. Wagner was trying to use her power as a star to shape the show to her viewpoint, but did not handle her dealings with the writers and the network well. Just as Bercovici should probably have pulled out of the show at the first meeting, so perhaps should have Wagner (*her* autobiography will undoubtedly tell us what *she* saw in *his* eyes) when it was clear she, Bercovici, and the network were not in agreement on what the show was to be. The uses of power, particularly in a collaborative medium such as television, need to be handled skillfully and often are not, particularly by actors and actresses.

Writers who are sympathetic to women and women’s stories often are confounded by actresses as Bercovici and Shaw were by Wagner and Graves. Phil Mishkin had such an experience on a 1982 television movie finally titled *Not Just Another Affair*. The original script, by Rick Podell and Michael S. Preminger, called *The Last American Virgin*, was about a woman marine biologist saving herself for marriage. Mishkin was called in to do a rewrite and the CBS executive in charge told Mishkin that Victoria Principal wanted to play the lead. Mishkin said that he thought she was a little too old to play a virgin.

The executive said she could not be a virgin. Mishkin replied, "But Norman, that's what the movie is about. It's about a virgin. You're saying, 'Let's do *Sands of Iwo Jima* but it's not going to be about a war.'" The network decided to make the character celibate, so Mishkin reconceived the character as someone who does not want to give in until she is swept away by romantic love, as in the old movies. The old movie connection was a running theme in the script, and according to Mishkin, Principal simply did not understand that and asked why she had to wear the "old-fashioned clothes" the script called for in a scene that paid homage to the old films. The movie tries to capture the spirit of the screwball comedies, but the dialogue sounds rather flat, and it is not helped by both lethargic direction and the lack of light-comedy skills of Principal and her leading man, Gil Girard.

Just as there are actors writers like, there are also actresses with whom writers have good professional relationships. In 1984 Juanita Bartlett wrote a two-hour movie pilot about a woman sheriff in the West that starred Stella Stevens, and Bartlett says, "She's a joy to work with." Rick Mittleman sold free-lance scripts to *Remington Steele* for a year, and then was executive story consultant for another year, and he admired Stephanie Zimbalist's professionalism. She and her co-star, Pierce Brosnan, did not particularly like each other, but they never let it interfere with the work. On the other hand, when it was suggested the show could continue for another year if the two characters got married, both Zimbalist and Brosnan "refused to play married," in Mittleman's phrase, and the show went off the air. Mittleman thinks Zimbalist learned her professionalism from her father Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. Mittleman says she developed the idea, "You go to work with your lunch pail."⁴

Phil Mishkin, somewhat to his surprise, enjoyed writing for Suzanne Somers on the late-eighties syndicated series, *She's the Sheriff*. Part of it was that the show itself was undemanding to write for ("No one involved in that show thought they were curing cancer, or even a headache"), but part of it was that Somers was "wonderful. I'd come to expect a person with an attitude problem [because of her publicized disputes with the management of *Three's Company*] and found just the opposite. She worked hard. She didn't have any presumptions of doing anything great. And she didn't think she was that good. She knew she had limitations."

In addition to *Kate McShane* and *Get Christie Love!*, other dramas in the late seventies focused on women leads. The series *Julie Farr M.D.* in 1978 began as a series of three movie pilots: *Having Babies*, *Having Babies II*, and *Having Babies III*. All three had scripts by women writers and dealt with the medical and emotional problems of birth and adoption. In the second film the character of Dr. Julie Farr first appears as an obstetrician/gynecologist, and after the third film, the series evolved. Joel Rogosin, who was brought on to produce the series, says, "We began to feel that that (specialty) was going to be very limited on a week-to-week basis, and we made her into an internist." The limitations of network television in terms of explicitness prob-

ably made a series about a gynecologist impossible, but might not women producers as well as women writers have found ways to tell stories that would have worked for a female audience? But would there have been enough of a male audience as well to satisfy the demands of a network?

Just as Madelyn Davis thought it was useful to have a male writing partner, having a male producer can be useful to women writers in promoting and protecting their ideas. In 1974, writers Barbara Corday and Barbara Avedon wrote a script for a theatrical film about two women police detectives. *Cagney and Lacey* was turned down by all the studios, but Corday's husband, producer Barney Rosenzweig, kept trying to sell it. It was also turned down as a proposed series by all three networks, and turned down as a television movie by two networks. In 1981, CBS agreed to do it as a television movie starring Tyne Daly as Mary Beth Lacey and Loretta Swit as Chris Cagney. The movie got high ratings and the network wanted a series.⁵ Swit was still tied up with *M*A*S*H*, so the part was recast with classy and attractive Meg Foster. The immediate ratings of the series were low, and a definitely unclassy CBS executive was quoted in *TV Guide* as saying Cagney and Lacey were seen as "too harshly women's lib," and that "We perceived them as dykes."⁶ Foster was replaced at the network's insistence by the equally classy and attractive Sharon Gless.⁷

The show was canceled twice, but brought back by complaints from the audience, encouraged by Rosenzweig, who kept a careful watch on the production of the show and the network's treatment of it. Rosenzweig kept in contact with women's groups over the status of the show,⁸ which eventually ran for six years. The series focused on both the professional and personal lives of the two detectives and provides an interesting counterpoint to its contemporary, *Hill Street Blues*.

Hill Street takes a wider and denser view of the lives and work of the police, while *Cagney and Lacey* focuses specifically on the women. A recurring criticism of *Hill Street*⁹ is that it shortchanged its women characters. Davenport is presented as an intelligent, professional woman, and the makers of the show resisted the network's pressure to hire a more conventional bombshell type for the show,¹⁰ but much is also made of her sex appeal. It is a definite step forward from both *Rocky King*, *Detective* and *Police Story* that Davenport is seen at the end of the episodes with Furillo and is both supportive and critical of him, but she is usually seen in bed or in the bath with him. The "Remembrance" episode is the only one primarily focused on Davenport, but even there most of what we see of her is her reaction to what the men are doing. In the series we see Furillo's family but never hers, and we do not get inside her in the way *Cagney and Lacey* gets inside its heroines.

The family lives of Cagney and Lacey are a source for both subplots and occasionally major plots. We learn more about how Cagney and Lacey think and feel about everything than we learn about Davenport (or any of the women) in *Hill Street*. Partly this is because Daly and Gless both have greater emo-

tional palettes as actresses to work with than Hamel does, and the writers for *Cagney and Lacey* use their actresses' resources extraordinarily well. (Walon Green, in the "Remembrance" episode of *Hill Street*, does an excellent job of using Hamel's strengths and avoiding her limitations.) By being a star vehicle for the two actresses, *Cagney and Lacey* avoids a problem that many ensemble shows like *Hill Street* fall into. The ensemble shows were generally run by male writer-producers, and while they include women characters, there is a tendency to deal with characters they feel closest to.

This was true of *St. Elsewhere*. In the pilot script, Dr. Wendy Armstrong was described as a "pert redhead," but the producers decided to cast Asian-American actress Kim Miyori. The role was never fully developed, and at the end of the second season, Miyori was called into producers Tom Fontana and John Masius's office and told that the character would be committing suicide. Miyori at first thought they were joking, then realized they were not and asked Fontana why. Miyori said, "He told me that they couldn't write as well for my character. . . . He said that my character hadn't developed like the others, wasn't as interesting. . . . How *could* it be? You never saw Wendy Armstrong out of St. Eligius Hospital, not with her family or friends. And you don't see any Asian writers involved, obviously."¹¹ Viewers, and not only Asian-American ones, never entirely forgave the show for killing off one of its most potentially interesting characters.

In a February 1990 article,¹² Lydia Woodward was quoted as saying she had been hired on the last season of *St. Elsewhere* because of network pressure on the show to hire women writers. In the interview for this book a year later, Woodward says,

I never said that in the interview. It wasn't the network. I think there was pressure on MTM at the time because they had a lousy hiring record in terms of women. To tell you the truth, I don't think that particularly mattered. They were surely not people who were going to hire you because you were a woman. They hired you because they liked your work and they liked you. At that point, it probably was like, "Oh good, she's a woman, too. You can kill off a couple of birds here."

I don't think it was by any means the deciding factor why I was hired at *St. Elsewhere*. One of the guys from *St. Elsewhere* called me after that article and said, "We didn't hire you because you're a woman."

I said, "I know that, John."

Woodward says she has "never been terribly interested in all the women's issues stuff, quite honestly," and her view of *St. Elsewhere* from that perspective is that she does not

think their show was primarily about women. I think they cared about their women characters, but I don't think they really wrote for women characters, particularly. And I don't think I was even remotely hired to write for the women

characters. I was hired to write the show. I was hired to sit in the office and turn out stuff. I don't say any of that as a criticism of them particularly. I just think it was not what the focus of their show was.

I guess the one example that I could use would be the Nurse Rosenthal character played very nicely by Christina Pickles. I think that they, without realizing it, had created a rather strong character. I think there were probably times when they would have liked to have killed her off. She was strong. She kept fighting back.

They certainly took some of the women through some very, very interesting story arcs on that show, so it's not like they ignored the women characters. I mean, Dr. Craig's wife and that divorce in that last year, Nurse Rosenthal becoming a drug addict, all sorts of stuff. They took the women characters through interesting arcs, but I just don't think that was the primary focus of the show.

Hiring a woman writer does not necessarily overcome pressures from the networks. In the mid-eighties a producer came to Reginald Rose with the idea of doing a TV film about a woman discovering her bisexuality. Rose describes the result, *My Two Loves*, as "TV gone Hollywood," and his script for it as "not much like you saw" in the film. He learned later that the producer hired novelist Rita Mae Brown, who has been open about her own bisexuality, to provide what Rose calls "*that* point of view." Rose did not like the final results, which he thought was filled with "terrible, terrible clichés." Brown was also not happy with the results. She has written that in "theme" shows such as this,

a therapist appears in the fourth act, if not before. That's right, folks. Rub a little therapy on it and that nasty rash of incest just disappears. Do I like it? No. Do the producers like it? No. (Don't underestimate network executives. They have tremendous intelligence but so few of them have any real power—or guts.) Do the sponsors like it? I expect they do. It's a little "safer." Do the censors like it? You bet. Do therapists like it? Hell, yes. It's got to be bringing them business.

Brown adds that if called upon to write "one of those shows . . . you smack that therapist in there. It's a formula and once you know when and where to look for it, an unintentionally funny one."¹³

One of the basest canards of the seventies was that the feminists had no sense of humor, which was ironic in that there were several successful professional women television comedy writers at the time (not all of whom would necessarily wish to be considered feminists, but still . . .). One was Susan Harris, who went on to create *Soap*, *The Golden Girls*, and *Empty Nest*. Another was Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, who in the mid-eighties had an idea for a series about a group of women running a decorating business. She called CBS to pitch the show and sold it within twenty minutes, and "about thirty seconds after I sold it"¹⁴ she decided to set *Designing Women* in the South. She felt the South had been maligned, and said, "What I originally

intended was to entertain, but I also wanted to influence the media about women and the region. We're definitely doing something subversive." Once the show got on and was renewed, there was no trouble with the network: "They have other holes in their ship, so they just let our dinghy set sail."

One "subversive" element of *Designing Women* is the rhythm of its dialogue, particularly in the episodes Bloodworth-Thomason wrote herself. It is not the traditional sitcom structure of repeated setup, setup, punchline. The speeches in the show tend to be longer, and the sentences within the speeches longer, than in traditional television writing. The rhythm of the speeches is not just very Southern, but very Southern *woman*, particularly in some of the "arias" Bloodworth-Thomason has written for Julia Sugarbaker (Dixie Carter). *Designing Women* has the most distinctive regional writing to appear on television since the heyday of Chayefsky and Foote (and perhaps *The Andy Griffith Show*).

In the early seasons, the scripts were written by either Bloodworth-Thomason or Pam Norris, who also writes effectively in the Southern rhythm. Bloodworth-Thomason said in 1990 that the show was never a script ahead, except "Once we got a script ahead, put it in a room and called it a stockpile." The show rehearsed and filmed Monday through Thursday, and Bloodworth-Thomason and Norris wrote the first drafts Friday through Sunday. The ideas came from anywhere. Bloodworth-Thomason, like Roy Huggins, gets ideas while driving, and sometimes the cast suggested ideas. Delta Burke went in to talk to Bloodworth-Thomason one Friday about the possibility of doing a show on people's obsession with weight, and by Monday the script for "They Shoot Fat Women, Don't They?" was done.¹⁵ The scripts then went through rewriting in rehearsal, with changes continuing up to the day of shooting, with sometimes as much as 90 percent changed.¹⁶

In 1990 Bloodworth-Thomason left writing the show to develop another Southern show, *Evening Shade*, and it took the new writers on *Designing Women* several episodes to find the distinctive tone. *Evening Shade* had some trouble in its first season finding an equally distinctive tone, but CBS was happy enough with the work of Bloodworth-Thomason and her producer-husband Harry Thomason in December 1990 to sign them to an eight-year deal to create five new series. The deal is expected to be worth between \$45 and \$50 million to the Thomasons.¹⁷

Diane English, the creator of *Murphy Brown*, also works on ideas while she drives. Her husband, producer Joel Shukovsky, said, "Diane tends to do her thinking in a car on the freeway. She puts on her music and she'll just kind of think and meander. It's not good to drive with her when she's in this state. She won't say anything to you for thirty-five miles."¹⁸ (A word here about producer-husbands like Thomason and Shukovsky. Writers have always depended on the kindness of strange producers, so it is probably better for them to have producers they know well and who know them well and who are of a gender to deal with the [declining] number of male [and female]

executives who may have difficulty dealing directly with strong, talented women.)

English also works in the office. A lot. The writing procedure on *Murphy Brown* in its first seasons was more complicated than on *Designing Women*. English recalled:

A half a dozen times each season we lock ourselves in a room for a whole hiatus week [a week when the show is not shooting], and we just pitch story ideas. We pinpoint the ones that we like, and then we spend a full day or more together [the show had several staff writers], working the story out, scene by scene, beat by beat, until we've got something we feel has a beginning, a middle, and an end, a good arc.¹⁹

The writer assigned the script will first do a detailed outline that includes not only plot, but character attitudes as well. The outline is reviewed by the entire staff, and then the writer takes notes from that review and writes a first draft script. That draft is read by English and writer Korby Siamis, the show's supervising producer. From their notes, the writer does a second draft, which is reviewed by the staff; then English and/or Siamis will do the "final" draft, which is finally provided to the cast on the weekend prior to the first reading Monday morning. As with other shows, there are rewrites until the shooting Friday night.²⁰

Like many women television writers, English does not think of herself as a feminist,

but if feminism means that my female characters or my friends or myself are respected, in all walks of life, then I'm a feminist. But I don't get involved in the politics of it very often. I don't waste my time pointing at men, blaming them for holding us back, because that has not been my personal experience. I don't like to refer to myself as *woman* writer. I think those kinds of labels are very limiting and I look forward to the day when no one refers to me as woman writer anymore, because I'm just a writer, as an artist is just an artist and a singer a singer.²¹

It is perhaps not surprising that one of the most "feminist" episodes of the series, in which Murphy tries to get into an all-male club, was written by two of the male writers on the show.²²

Because *Murphy Brown* deals with a woman successfully working in a world of men, there is less of a distinctive rhythm in the dialogue than in *Designing Women*. Where *Murphy Brown* has made a change in sitcoms is in the rhythm of scene construction and storytelling. Prior to the show, half-hour sitcoms were broken up into two acts of equal lengths, with in some cases a "teaser" (short scene) before the first commercial break and/or a "tag" (short scene) after the last commercial break. In *Murphy Brown*, the scenes are of greatly different lengths, with commercial breaks likely to arrive at any time

during the show. This gives the series a greater degree of flexibility in the kinds of scenes it can have, changing the rigid rhythm of traditional sitcom storytelling.²³

Thad Mumford has also written shows not just for women, but for black women. When it was decided in 1987 to spin off Lisa Bonet from *The Cosby Show* into her own show, Mumford was brought on *A Different World*. Unfortunately, Bonet simply could not carry her own show. As Mumford says, "Lisa Bonet has gifts . . . she's very good in an ensemble, and I think she's perfect where she is, back on *The Cosby Show* as part of an ensemble."

After three years on *A Different World*, Mumford worked on *Bagdad Café*, and saw firsthand how the networks have begun to accept black women as strong characters. In one episode, the word "ho" (meaning, as Mumford explains it for those who might think it is an abbreviation for a garden utensil, "a derogatory reference to a woman") was used because Whoopi Goldberg "didn't feel the rhythm of the line was right without some third word. The network didn't want her to use the word 'ho,' so in the second [taping] she used the word 'bitch' The network called and was so grateful, "Thank you. Thank you for saying, 'Bitch.' "

Like women writers who had male partners or producers, Mumford had a white male partner for several years, and thinks "unofficially that helped people see me differently from some of my black peers. I think people do get ghettoized and stereotyped easily." This has changed in the years he has been in the business. When he started in the seventies, he thinks there was greater concern about getting new black writers.

But it doesn't go on much any more. I think people sort of feel that it's O.K. now. We have a lot of shows with black characters. And I think there is this feeling, maybe we have it ourselves, of complacency, because we now get to look at more than just Bill Cosby. We get to look at a lot of our people.

On the other hand, I think that we are the ones probably who are better at writing about our own lives. You see, it's a real fine line, and I'm picking words carefully because I don't want to say the wrong thing. It's not to say that white people can't write about black people. Of course that's just as stupid as saying that we can't write about white people. But sometimes a black person might have a better instinct, or, because of exposure, you might just hear the language better. I am sure the same thing is true for white people too. You just don't want people to make decisions about writers based on things like that. You want people to make decisions on the basis of an instinct on whether you can write this material because of your skill, not because of your ethnicity, or your gender, or anything like that.

For women writers, Kasey Arnold-Ince sees it also as a question of attitudes. In her relatively few years in the industry she has not run into any overtly chauvinist men who would not hire women, but she sees certain problems women writers have. One is that in our society women have not been

trained to promote themselves, since society does not reward women who do. In TV self-promotion is necessary for advancement, even in what is supposed to be a solitary endeavor like writing. Television writing of course is not, but as Arnold-Ince notes, women, because of their lack of self-promotion, are more likely to focus on the work of writing, “not the [seduction] of the secretarial pool,” as men writers might.

A second problem for women is a question of time, particularly for those like her who are mothers, which inevitably means difficulty in keeping up with the time pressures of television writing. Because of the time demands of a staff position, Arnold-Ince has kept to free-lancing, which has its own element of seduction, as she observes: “I compare it to being single, not having a steady boyfriend, going to parties, being charming, flirting. Developing the story is like you get to dance with Fred Astaire in the moonlight, champagne, roses, and then you turn in the script and the next morning it’s Andrew Dice Clay who gets out of bed and goes to the window and yells, ‘I broke the bitch.’ ”

There are frequent studies of female employment in the television industry, most of them semi-encouraging at best. The opening of American television and American society has begun to include women, but neither are as yet as open as they might be. Consider the uni-sex restroom I used in a writer’s building on one of the studio lots in 1991 while I was conducting interviews for this book. Tacked up over the back of the toilet was a poster-sized picture of a beautiful girl in a bikini. The picture had an inscription from the would-be actress who had sent it to the writer-producers in the building, and additional inscriptions had been added by other writers. As I turned to leave, I noticed by the door a picture of a shirtless hunk of a man, with inscriptions. In what appeared to be women’s handwriting.

The picture was about half the size of the poster.

MATURITY

*I*n December 1978 Larry Gelbart pitched to NBC's Fred Silverman what Gelbart described as "a comedy but not a situation comedy." Gelbart wanted to "avoid writing problems and the mediocrity that a lot of television is."¹ Silverman agreed, and Gelbart intended to have a full season's worth of scripts completed before the series went into production. Gelbart said while working on the scripts, "Most people who work in television feel somewhat illegitimate, and few are writing as honestly as they'd like to. I'm lucky that I can."²

The series, *United States*, premiered in March 1980 and it focused on a young married couple, Richard and Libby Chapin. They seldom left their house. No funny neighbors came in through an unlocked door and made wisecracks. Libby did not try to break into show business. They did not talk in setup, setup, punchline. But did they talk. All the couple did was talk. A lot. About their problems. About their feelings. The show was very literate, mature, intelligent. And dull. The couple and their problems simply did not connect with an audience enough to compel people to watch. Nor was it compelling to at least one writer who worked on it. Gelbart asked Everett Greenbaum to do some episodes. Greenbaum did, but felt the show "Too conversational, too personal. . . . The trouble was, I just didn't like the people. I couldn't get attached to them." By the end of April the show was off the air, having telecast only eight of the completed thirteen episodes.

In 1983 *The Big Chill*, the upscale rip-off of John Sayles's 1980 *Return of the Secaucus Seven*, was a box-office hit in theaters, and in 1985 CBS presented its television rip-off of *The Big Chill*, a series called *Hometown* about a group of friends in their mid-thirties. There was, as in *United States*, a lot of talk about their feelings and attitudes, and the series died after nine episodes.

thirtysomething

Marshall Herskovitz and Edward Zwick were in their twenties when they met in a filmmaking class at the American Film Institute. According to Richard

Kramer, what happened then was that “recognizing each other as the *other* smartest person around, they had declared a pact of mutual disarmament.”³ They worked individually after that, writing for such quiet dramas as *Family* (Zwick) and *The White Shadow* (Herskovitz). They first teamed up to write the story for the 1983 television movie *Special Bulletin*,⁴ a masterful blend of a fictional story of nuclear protestors threatening the destruction of Charleston, South Carolina, told in the form of a simulated news special.

Later Zwick had a development deal at MGM/UA, which wanted to sell a series to ABC.⁵ Two days before they were scheduled to meet with people from ABC, they still had no ideas. According to one source, Zwick said later the breakthrough came from his wife, Liberty Godshall, who referred to a cartoon of a blocked writer in a room full of dogs whose wife tells him to write about dogs.⁶ According to another source, it was Herskovitz who suggested doing “something about our generation.”⁷ Eventually they worked up a memo on their idea:

It’s about a group of people, all of a certain age, who know enough about life to be totally confused by it. It’s about growing up—no matter how old you are.

Which means owning up to certain realities. Swallowing a pill or two. Not necessarily the compromise of principles, but rather the recognition that many of our notions of the future were idealizations and can’t be lived in the world.⁸

That generalized description could apply to people of different ages, but Herskovitz and Zwick began to work in the memo toward more specifics:

And since everyone knows this is the first generation ever to have children, or buy houses, or try to have careers, it naturally assumes that everyone else will be interested in its noble endeavors. The truth is we know there’s nothing inherently noble or even particularly interesting about people in their thirties. It just happens to be the territory we know best. And the fact that we *aren’t* the first to attempt any of the things we’re stumbling through that leads us to hope that twentysomethings and fiftysomethings will identify with it as well. It’s about people. Not ages. . . .⁹

Film and television are very specific, realistic media, and the more precise the story and characters were made, the more specifically “thirtysomething” they became. In the pilot episode, Hope’s final speech answers Michael’s question about why everything is so hard: “Because we expect too much. Because we’ve always gotten too much. I think that our parents got together in 1946 and said let’s all have lots of kids and give them everything they want so they can grow up and be totally messed up and unable to cope with real life.” What Herskovitz and Zwick beautifully articulated was the self-absorption of the specific generation they were writing about, which in turn was what made the show both more aggravating and more successful than *United States* and *Hometown*. Generally those viewers both older and younger (and even some the same age) than the characters in the series found the characters

whiny and self-indulgent. The show and its creators took the angst of a generation seriously, and those of that generation returned the favor by taking the show seriously.

What brought the viewers at least partially together finally was laughter. Near the end of the first season of the show, there was a program on it as part of the Museum of Broadcasting's Festival of Television at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. An early episode, entitled "Therapy," about Elliot and Nancy's attempt to save their marriage, was shown. It was written by Herskovitz's wife, Susan Shilliday, and she was afraid of what the audience reaction might be to such a depressing episode. She later wrote: "But a shocking thing happened. The audience got into it. They *laughed*. I had never written for the stage, never witnessed an audience responding to my writing, certainly never thought of myself as *funny*. And I had certainly never thought of 'Therapy' as funny. I became completely intoxicated."¹⁰

It became apparent to those creating *thirtysomething* that viewers, even loyal ones, sometimes found the agonies of Hope, Michael, Elliot, Nancy, Ellyn, and the others funny, and that was part of the reality of the generation as well. It opened up the show to a new texture.

The sale of the movie rights to Joseph Dougherty's play *Digby* brought him to Hollywood. In 1987 he was working on Anthony Yerkovich's series *Private Eye* and talked to Herskovitz and Zwick about doing some first-season *thirtysomething* episodes. He worked on both shows simultaneously—a form of culture shock. Dougherty would sit in the office with Yerkovich for five or six hours in two or three meetings and work out every story beat, ending up with a seven-page outline. It was different down the street:

With Ed and Marshall you come in, you knock things around for an hour, an hour and a half. You figure roughly the beats in an act, then you are totally on your own. There were mornings where I would actually spend from about nine to one with Tony Yerkovich at Universal, then have to drive down here [the series was made for MGM/UA but at the MTM studios, about a mile away from Universal] to work on *thirtysomething*, and basically, somehow I had to use Ventura Boulevard to stop thinking about hookers and cops and people driving in De Sotos, and come down here and just all of a sudden start working on an atmosphere which was much closer to my play.

Actually I'm very proud of the fact that in the same year I was writing for these two incredibly different shows, just because it eliminated the chance that I was being typecast. Although I am finding out now as I go out looking for something to do after this show, my agent's astonished that I am just perceived as a dramatic writer. I say, "Don't they watch the shows? They're funny."

Dougherty, a fan since age twelve of Preston Sturges's ability to shift between comedy and drama, uses comedy as an "ingratiating tool to elicit trust: 'It's going to be O.K. Come with me. I'm going to take care of you. You're

going to have a good time.' And once people have committed to a piece, they will stay with you."

When *Private Eye* was canceled, Dougherty joined the staff of *thirtysomething*. The show was written then primarily by Herskovitz, Zwick, their wives, and Richard Kramer, who had known them for years. Ann Lewis Hamilton was something of an outsider on the staff, and she at first assumed Dougherty was, in Dougherty's words, "another film school dweeb." She was in his office when he was unpacking. The first picture out of the box was his wife, but the second was Sturges. She told him later that she knew then it would be O.K.

Dougherty thinks he and Hamilton, as outsiders, have brought a little "vinegar" to the show, that they avoid "the more self-congratulatory aspects" of the show, those elements that make audiences complain of the "whining" of the characters. Dougherty says, "When people tell me Michael whines, I say, 'No he doesn't.'" Dougherty explains, "I take a much more sophisticated view of Michael Steadman. He's like a doctor who just understands the symptoms of his own disease too much. He's incredibly self-reflective, but I only think about him in terms of how I write him." Dougherty says that Ken Olin (Michael) once said to him after a reading of a new Dougherty script, "God! Plot!" Dougherty gave himself the title of Executive in Charge of Plot and Plot-like Substances.

Dougherty and Hamilton's professional relationship led to a December 1990 episode he wrote that she directed, in which Ellyn meets an old flame, Billy, and starts seeing him, all the while pretending with Gary that she and Gary are sleeping together. Dougherty tells how the episode came about:

It's the first one she directed, so the deal we had was that I directed one of her scripts and she would direct one of mine, so we'd see if either one of us was talking to the other at the end of the experience. It was me desperately wanting to write for Polly [Draper, who played Ellyn]. I thought Ellyn was underserved as a character and I wanted her to be happy. I wanted her to be fixed up with a guy and I wanted Ann to have a good sexy script to direct.

And, basically, it had to do with the fact that since Ann and I hang out so much together we became the subject of an office rumor. We found out that Ed and Marshall were wondering if we were sleeping together. That's kind of where it came from: "You and I will be Peter [Horton, who played Gary] and Polly, and Michael and Hope will be Ed and Marshall, and it's just these people thinking we're sleeping together." Now at every given opportunity we always allude to the fact that we have slept together.

Because both Dougherty and Hamilton have worked in low-budget action adventure films (Hamilton's husband produced Dougherty's script of *Steel and Lace*), Dougherty considers them "genetically close as writers." He also sees the two of them as "the bad kids. We can't believe they're letting us sit together this semester. We shouldn't be allowed to sit together at read-throughs."

As with the last two years of *Hill Street Blues*, the writing on *thirtysomething* was done in a variety of ways. Dougherty says this is one reason the show is “so good” and “so uneven” at the same time. Richard Kramer wrote that the show was fun to write because “Ed and Marshall had created in the pilot the chance for me and other writers to write in our own voices.”¹¹ Dougherty expands on this:

I think there are six people formally on staff right now, and no two of us work exactly the same way. My assessment of Richard [Kramer] is he's very detail oriented. I think he thinks he has to be perfect early in the process. This is a very comparative statement, [but] I think Richard is a slower writer than some. He takes it very seriously.

Right now Ann Hamilton and I write the fastest of anyone here. Ann and I, for different reasons, the lesson we learned from television is the ability to give the certain effort. Does the language do the job or not? If it doesn't, fix it. If it isn't [right], throw it out and do it again.

Ann does something that I can't do. Ann doesn't have to through-draft the first time. She can go to an outline and look at an outline and pick the place where she wants to start and just go all over the place writing scenes. I couldn't do that to save my life. I've got to get through it at least once.

I'm looked on as an incredible eccentric in that I have to write my first draft longhand. Because I can't type it the first time through. Winnie Holzman and Richard sometimes work on stuff together and might collaborate. I don't quite know how the collaboration stuff works. Winnie's pretty fast. Richard's slowed down but I hate to say that as a negative.

thirtysomething began as an ensemble show, but during the first season, the writers found it increasingly difficult to use all the characters all the time. In the second season, the writers began to focus on individual characters, or couples, in each episode, such as the series of episodes dealing with the collapse of Elliot and Michael's business and their going to work for Miles Drenfell. This focus on characters led the writers to write in certain areas. Dougherty did several of the business shows, and says, “Richard [Kramer] adopted Melissa. Winnie [Holzman] is adopting Melissa to a certain extent, too, and also Ellyn. Before Susan [Shilliday] left, Nancy and Elliot were basically her bailiwick. Liberty did Hope and Michael. Sometimes the lines would be crossed.”

Richard Kramer, from the beginning of the show, spent time with the actors discussing their characters, and discovered they often knew what he was trying to write for them before he did.¹² Joseph Dougherty's experience is

almost that turned on its side, in that I look at the actors now and I know what their voices are and I know what their characters are, so I know what I can do with them. This is a case with somebody like David Clennon, who is Miles

Drentell, which is a character I've written a lot. There are some times that you say to yourself, "There's something I want to write about. Who are the best characters I can run this story [through]? Who'd be the most interesting to put in this situation?"

You get to a point after three years when you're dealing with actors that the physical text of their speeches on the page is different than the text for the other characters. The two people who it leaps out to me about are Tim Busfield and Polly Draper, but it's also true with David Clennon. It's like having actors available to you in repertoire. You hear their voices. You know how they corner in a scene, so that with Tim Busfield, you can give him a speech that consists of nothing but incomplete sentences, with ellipses and run-ons, and Timmy can make sense of these things. Timmy can fill in the ellipses.

Polly is wonderful. Again, you can give Polly Draper non-sentences, but if you give Tim Busfield a non-sentence, you have to end it with an ellipse to indicate a trail-off. With Polly you can actually do two words and a full stop.

You can put two diametrically opposed thoughts next to each in a Miles Drentell speech and David will cut them completely clean. It's astonishing. I've seen him do it. And he's always done it. He does it in *Being There* [and] *Missing*. He's able to play somebody who in his mind can play three different chess games, and uses it and can corner like that.

My philosophy is that these people are instruments and they came in with very different things. It's like a choice of colors that would be like a palette for a writer to have access to on a regular basis. So it's kind of the flip of what Richard's talking about. So I think now each one of us approaches the characters differently.

In an episode in the last season of the show (1990–91), Dougherty wrote a monologue for Polly Draper that ran seven minutes in the first cut. The last two minutes had to be cut, since the entire episode ran thirteen minutes long. Dougherty says, "Just because we came in an act over, I don't see any reason we couldn't have aired it and just told Ted Koppel to stay home for an extra fifteen minutes," but television had changed since the days of Desi Arnaz and U.S. Steel.

One reason Dougherty wrote for Draper in the last season is that at the end of the previous season he had written several "business" shows and made it part of his deal to return for the fourth season that he have "access to the women [characters]." Dougherty feels that he and Hamilton were doing "damage control in a strange way" in their handling of the women characters. He says the two of them were

very pugnacious in terms of defending characters, particularly the women. In an overall sense Ann and I are eager for every opportunity to try and keep the women strong, and to try and keep them healthy, since there's a tendency to make them mentally neurotic and physically ill because of their neuroses. We are desperately trying to keep Melissa happy, but there's some kind of glacial feeling from the corner office, from Ed and Marshall, that Melissa is not permitted to be happy.

This happens a lot with Melissa and Ellyn. I sometimes don't know how Polly and Melanie [Mayron, who played Melissa] deal with [being] the most radically differently written characters over the course of the year. When Ann and I write either one of them, they usually tend to be pretty integrated people. But when Richard and Winnie write them, they tend to be very neurotic and lock themselves in bathrooms. And it's kind of like, "Weren't they O.K., last week?" I think it's there that we basically feel different ways. We want to do different things with these characters. I'd like people to look at these people and say, "It's O.K. to be single. It's O.K. to be sexually ambivalent." I'd love it if at the last show of the season Melissa would finally realize she's gay, or something. "Please, could we just let the woman be happy somewhere in her life?"

Polly Draper took the job of Ellyn based on the assumption, which was the same assumption I had, that it was not always going to be Ellyn who was always going to be jealous of Hope, but Hope was going to be jealous of Ellyn because Ellyn was single and fucking like a bunny. Unfortunately there is this kind of neo-conservative agenda, which I've run afoul of in very strange ways. It's my opinion that Ed and Marshall do not like strong women, as characters or as writers or as people. I think their problem is translated into the choices they make for the show.

For a while there, Ellyn was supposed to have an ectopic pregnancy resulting in a hysterectomy. And Ann and I have been saying, "Excuse me? You're going to take out the sex organs of two out of the four female characters?" That's fifty percent. That's a little statistically significant. That was nipped after much screaming.

There was, as befits a semi-democracy, even more yelling and screaming the year before when Herskovitz and Zwick decided to give Nancy ovarian cancer. The issue was discussed at what is now a legendary staff meeting,¹³ with several of the writers objecting strongly, for a variety of reasons. Ann Hamilton felt that the show's women had suffered enough, and Susan Shilliday thought that it would be impossible to get back to dealing with daily life after introducing a problem of that size.¹⁴ Dougherty says that Zwick's defense was "We can do it better than anybody else. We can be straighter about it. We can go someplace where no one's ever gone before."

The cancer "arc" was enormously compelling, if controversial, and the writers of the show were able to get at the range of emotions patients and their families go through.¹⁵ The arc of stories dealt with it not just as an issue, as other shows had done, or even just in terms of the emotions of the characters, but the fact that it was a group of episodes made it clear cancer was a war with many battles. As should have been expected, women went for checkups as a result of the show, as well as writing and calling the show. The makers of the series were aware of their responsibilities. Dougherty says,

I'm appalled at how many people in television don't accept the fact that television is the primary culturalization force in America today. They just out and out deny it. The only people I have met who have not denied that are Ed and

Marshall. They accept the fact that this particular medium actually does shape [public attitudes].

I had a theory that one of the reasons a lot of people are unhappy in this country is because they couldn't figure out why they weren't as happy as the people on television. Why couldn't they solve problems that way? Here was a show that was going to say you could be angry with somebody you love. You can go through periods where you can't stand to have them touch you. You can be dissatisfied. You can have problems that won't get solved right away.

The writers of the show were also aware that, however much a conservative agenda they might think there was on it, there are people who do not think the show was conservative enough. Because the series suggested all the complexities that Dougherty mentions above, the proponents of a narrower American society have objected to the openness of the show, especially in its positive portrayal of a brief affair between two gay men. The conservatives put pressure on the sponsors of the show and succeeded in getting ABC not to rerun one of the episodes in which the two men appear in bed together. In retaliation, Joseph Dougherty wrote into a Halloween party scene an exchange between two gay characters, one of whom identifies himself as Jesse Helms, the other as Donald Wildmon. Dougherty expected some kind of reaction, but as of the January 1991 interview for this book, there was none. Dougherty says, "We wanted them to know that we are aware that they are monitoring the show. 'We just wanted to wave to you.'" Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom of expression.

In the last season, Dougherty and Ann Hamilton's scripts were written differently from scripts in earlier seasons. He thinks they were more subtle, with more emotional subtext and less language. They decided, "Let's see what's the smallest amount of words we can use to do this." Their writing was different from that of other writers, and the show and the characters, like the last year of *St. Elsewhere*, were more uneven. Dougherty thinks the show would have been much more successful and certainly more homogeneous if it were a more conventional show with more conventional writers. He says, "We fuck up, easily, as often as we succeed. . . . We may fall flat on our face, and usually if we do it's with a rather flatulent pomposity, but you've got to give us points for trying. And sometimes we hit our goals."

Dougherty defines the mixture of attitudes necessary to write the show, and television in general:

You're doomed when you say to yourself, "I'm writing *thirtysomething*. I'm writing important television." I've always felt that Marshall should have two signs on the door to the producers' suite. On the front door going in it should say, "It's not television, it's *thirtysomething*." And on the door going out it should say, "It's a TV show." Because really, "It's a TV show" is very liberating. I feel free to try anything. It may not work, and I may have to come up with something else, but I can try it. I can sit down and I can write this heavy dramatic episode

and say to myself, "I really want to do this right here," and you believe in it and you just go with it. You have to be free to kind of [do it]. You can't be afraid of the paper.

I don't think there's any excuse for bad television. There just isn't, except for a failure to take pride in what you are doing and an assumption that "Everybody else is doing shit, I might as well do it." There's no excuse. . . . I don't care what people say. "Oh, it's what the public wants." The public wants what's there. The public would not miss bad shows. The public is not going to wake up tomorrow morning and realize *Full House* is not on the air. If *Full House* had not existed, it would not have been necessary to invent it.

As uneven as the writing process on *thirtysomething* may have been during the last season, the writing staff came up with an astonishing series of shows, particularly those shown in February and May 1991. On the February 12 episode, written by Ann Lewis Hamilton, Nancy goes into the hospital for a "second look" for her cancer after her chemotherapy treatments. Hamilton holds off the results until the end of the second act, not letting us hear the doctor tell Nancy, but letting us see the scene we want to see: Nancy telling Elliot, and their reactions. In the third act, the major characters celebrate in Nancy's room, and we begin to get suspicious because Gary is late in arriving. Michael goes out to call him and learns from a cop who has left a message on Michael's machine that Gary has been killed in an accident. Hamilton handles the balance between the happiness about Nancy and the sadness about Gary beautifully.

Joseph Dougherty's script the following week gives us the reactions of the women in Gary's life to his death, showing Susannah, his wife, handling the situation better than anybody else, including Michael. Although Dougherty generally tried to avoid the flashback/surrealist shows other series writers did, here he uses both flashbacks and the ghost of Gary very effectively, in the almost-casual way they had become part of the grammar of *thirtysomething*.

Winnie Holzman's episode the following week shows the respective bachelor parties of Ellyn and Billy, the "feminists" on the staff having triumphed with Ellyn getting a husband instead of a hysterectomy.

The final episode of the series, telecast May 28, was intended only as the season finale, but the network decided not to renew the show. Herskovitz said, "If we knew the show was gonna end, we would have tried to come up with a more comprehensive final episode."¹⁶ In some ways, the episode is more typical of the show by *not* tying up all the loose ends and leaving situations and relationships open.

thirtysomething was produced for MGM/UA, but made at the old MTM lot. While the producers undoubtedly visited the MGM administrative offices, on at least one occasion the head of MGM/UA Television visited them. He told the show's staff, "Jesus, I love coming over here. This is the way it should be in this business. This is *fun*."¹⁷

And if anybody would know about the fun of making television, it would be David Gerber.

China Beach

The young woman in the swimsuit sits on the beach. It could be any beach. It is a peaceful day.

The camera pans across the beach and we begin to hear a mechanical sound. The camera is on the back of the woman's head. She hears the sound, and there is tension in her neck as she turns her head to one side, then bows her head. The sound is clear: helicopters.

She starts walking into the underbrush up from the beach, soldiers running past her. She goes into a hut, puts on a surgical gown and opens the door to see the choppers with the wounded. The actress is Dana Delany; her face, her expression, and her presence carry a moral weight. The pilot for *China Beach* has begun.

The nurse, Colleen McMurphy, is scheduled to leave the China Beach hospital and recreation area in Vietnam. She is given a farewell party, and she is hustled by a visiting singing group into being a backup singer for them. The base is attacked, and McMurphy and a singer in the group help the wounded. The singer admires what McMurphy does, and McMurphy decides to stay at China Beach.

The question the pilot only begins to answer is: how do you do a series about a combat area hospital and make it different enough from one of the great series on television, *M*A*S*H*? The *China Beach* pilot seems to have more similarities than differences, but the hints of the differences are there. First of all, the focus is not on a man but on a woman, McMurphy. As created by John Sacret Young and William Broyles, Jr., she was originally much tougher, a character who had seen it all, but Young was impressed with Delany and shifted the character to suit her talents, which included an ability to be still. Delany told an interviewer in 1989, "Well, one thing I've learned from doing *China Beach* is the value of stillness, so that you let the audience come to you, and then they can project whatever they want onto you. There's great value in that. I mean, you see all the old movies, that's what they used to do."¹⁸ It is this stillness that gives her the moral weight, that draws the audience into not only her emotions but her choices of action.

Not only is the focus on McMurphy, but the experience is seen from her point of view. In a scene later in the pilot, she and the primary doctor in the series, Dr. Richards, come into the wards, and while Richards is making Hawkeye-type jokes, the scene's focus stays on McMurphy and her reactions to what she sees.

The pilot and the first six episodes of the series ran in the spring of 1988, and it was clear from them that the series was darker than *M*A*S*H*. The storylines followed not only McMurphy, but Cherry White, a naive young

Red Cross worker who volunteered to come to Vietnam to look for her brother, who is listed as missing in action. Her search takes her into some of the more disreputable areas of Vietnam, where she finds he has become a drug addict. Within the first few episodes of the fall season, Cherry White is killed.

William Broyles, Jr., who had written a book about Vietnam¹⁹ and wanted to do a show about war from women's point of view,²⁰ said in the fall of 1988, "We wanted to do a character show from the very beginning. We're not doing a documentary about the war any more than *M*A*S*H* or *Full Metal Jacket*. We want to bend realism here, something in the way *M*A*S*H* did. There's an absurdity to our show that I think is realistic. If you try to deal with [the war] like a camera, like a documentary, you miss the sort of absurd truth about it."²¹ Another series about Vietnam, *Tour of Duty*, got letters from Vietnam veterans who put down *China Beach* because it was about human relationships rather than combat. Broyles replied, "I think they've managed to attract the veterans. The audience of veterans is an important audience, but we want to reach people who *weren't* there as well."²² *China Beach* began with that broader view both of the war and what the series was about, a view that expanded as the show continued.

John Sacret Young, whose credits include *Police Story* and the television movies *A Rumor of War* and *Testament*,²³ wanted women on the show in several capacities, especially writers. Lydia Woodward, who went from *St. Elsewhere* to *China Beach*, says

It's worked out great. We've fulfilled Warner Brothers's entire minority hiring program. Especially this year [1990–91]. We hired three staff writers this year. Two of them were women. One of those women was a vet who served in Vietnam. And the third person we hired was a black guy, so we *really* fulfilled their minority hiring this year.

We got into making lots of what we called our gender gap jokes in the office. Stuff in story meetings, "You're a guy. Of course you don't get it." That kind of stuff, silly stuff. Obviously it was a very different experience for me from *St. Elsewhere*, but John was very insistent on having a lot of women involved, and had a lot of women involved in the show at every level: women editors, Mimi Leder was the producer-director.

Woodward got on *China Beach* in the fall of 1988 because its staff read her *St. Elsewhere* and *Slap Maxwell* scripts.

They had gotten a pickup for the full season, so they were staffing up. I went over and met with them. I talked to a few other shows, but *China Beach* was very intriguing to me. I knew of John Young from other work he had done, specifically *Testament*, and thought, "This was an interesting guy." I had seen all six [episodes], and I thought they'd done a pretty interesting job with them.

It seemed unrelentingly dark and depressing, and I think in part I was hired because there was a little more humor in my writing examples from *St. Else-*

where and from *Slap*. [They] were things that had a little more comedy relief, if you will, and I think at the time the network was pressuring them to lighten up a little.

From the beginning, the show had people interviewing veterans. Carol Flint, who later became one of the show's best writers, started as a researcher, and it was her research that Woodward read through when she went on the series. For the first weeks Woodward got "more and more depressed reading about Vietnam until you couldn't even take any more in. Emotionally it became too overwhelming, so at some point you just kind of stopped and started the process of doing the show."

While she may have been hired to lighten the show, Woodward "immediately became as dark and depressing as everybody else there. I've now ended up on the darkest, most depressing show on television and loving it." It was a show that did things like killing off Cherry White, but unlike the suicide of Wendy Armstrong on *St. Elsewhere*, Cherry White's character had grown and developed. As Woodward recalls,

We had pushed the Cherry White character as far as she could go with the show in any kind of interesting way. And women did die in Vietnam, and Red Cross women, so we decided to go ahead and do it.

It was slightly controversial and there were a lot of people who loved that character who said, "I never forgave you for killing Cherry White." We didn't think it was that big of a deal. I don't think the network was crazy about it, either. The network said, "You don't kill off your regulars. What are you doing?"

What was kind of fun and great about working with John Young is that he didn't really care. If he thought it was a good idea and we were going to be doing something interesting with it, then he was completely supportive of that kind of thing, as opposed to just, "Oh, yeah, the rules of the game are you don't kill off a regular this early." [*M*A*S*H* had obviously defined how early you can kill a regular. His attitude was] "Forget the rules. Throw the rules out and do what you think is going to be interesting for our small but loyal audience." It wasn't that small, actually. It wasn't as small as it's rumored to be.

Woodward saw the writing process on *China Beach* as "a very different experience from *St. Elsewhere*. Very, very differently run show. *China Beach* is a democracy. *St. Elsewhere* is not." She continues, talking about establishing whatever overall story arcs *China Beach* had in the first season she was on it, "It was a collective process. We would sit around and throw out all sorts of things and then we'd kind of weed through them. We'd marry certain stories to others. The show was still very new and was experimenting with its form and its characters were changing." The democratic process of story development continued over the run of the series. In March 1990, writer Carol Flint said the process that season began with all the writers sitting in a room

with a big board on the wall with open spaces for episode ideas. The writers discussed possible ideas, then each writer went off and wrote the scripts he or she wanted to do. She felt it involved the best of both kinds of writing, collaborative and solo, and described it as “Part café society, part art.”²⁴

John Young kept an eye on the writing. Woodward says Young “has an enormous respect for writing. . . . Not that he would let you off the hook and let you do anything with it. The expression we always used was ‘Dig deeper, dig deeper.’ Because that was always [Young’s] comment on all the scripts.” Broyles described his own function as executive consultant on the series as “They show me the scripts. I read them and send them notes. Sometimes they pay attention to what I say.”²⁵

It is common for television series, particularly if they get behind in production, to do a show consisting primarily of flashbacks. *China Beach* did its in 1989 the hard way. John Sacret Young said that they were suffering “mid-season fatigue” and realized one Thursday night at ten they did not have a script for the following week. Writer John Wells suggested using filmed interviews with veterans intercut with material from the show. They had interviewed over five hundred vets, and they now had between 40 and 50, some of whom had been interviewed before, some of whom had not, come in and give filmed interviews. In some cases the material in the interviews had been the basis for story material in the pilot or earlier episodes, but in others it was just coincidence that the material matched. Unlike “The Interview” episode of *M*A*S*H*, the “Vets” episode used the real interviews, rather than fictionalizing them. The network objected to “Vets” on the grounds that people would tune out, thinking it was a documentary. Young thought the *China Beach* audience knew the show well enough to appreciate it, and it was shown, getting more response from veterans and children of veterans than any other episode until then. The following season the show did a similarly structured, if not quite as powerful, episode, “Souvenirs,” without any objection from the network.²⁶

The end of the 1988–89 season saw a two-part episode, “The World,” written by John Wells, in which McMurphy returns to her home in the Midwest for the death of her father. The thinking on the staff was that they wanted to deal with two issues:²⁷ the treatment soldiers in Vietnam received when they got home and McMurphy’s relationship to her family. Wells’s script is particularly good at laying out in subtle and complex ways the tensions within the family.

The beginning of the 1989–90 season saw the introduction of new characters, particularly Holly, a Red Cross worker; Frankie Bunsen, a black woman mechanic; and Sgt. Pepper, a grizzled long-timer who runs the car pool. Unlike the traditional pattern of introduction of new characters in shows, the writers of *China Beach* wrote no great entrances for their new characters. They often hovered in the background for an episode or two, then moved into more substantial stories.

Lydia Woodward explains the purpose of the new characters and how the show itself defeated that purpose:

The war was a very dark experience. We were always trying to find ways to kind of lighten things somewhat, and it was usually through the introduction of a new character. Invariably what would happen is that we would introduce characters and they would turn dark on us, because we turned them dark. It's because it's essentially what the show was. The show was really about the emotional costs of war. Even with these characters, we brought them on and they could sing and they could dance and they could be funny, and we would immediately put them into dark storylines. It just happened. We just couldn't help ourselves.

Holly, for example, later became the subject of the abortion episode, "Holly's Choice." When Carol Flint first thought of the story, she was afraid that it would become a traditional "issue" episode in which the issue would be debated in a balanced style. What she ended up doing was telling the story in reverse order, beginning after Holly's abortion, then having each scene go another step backward in time. She felt—and rightly so—that this would focus on the characters rather than the debate.²⁸ The show did not immediately get as much trouble from the network as the writers anticipated, at least partially because the leading character, McMurphy, came out against the abortion, but there was pressure on the sponsors of the show and the network pulled the show from its scheduled rerun, just as it did with the "gay" episode of *thirtysomething*.²⁹

The same darkening came when the network asked the show to include a romance for McMurphy. The writers came up with an older French doctor who had been in Vietnam for years, which gave him a different perspective on the war and the American presence. The relationship contained echoes of Nellie Forbush's relationship with Émile de Becque in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*, and another relationship, between a Vietnamese woman and Beckett, the soldier in charge of preparing the bodies of dead soldiers for return to the States, also parallels the Liat-Lt. Cable relationship in the same musical.

One limitation of the series was that the Vietnamese characters were generally not as well conceived as the Americans, although the season opener of the 1989–90 season, in which McMurphy and K.C., the more-explicit Miss Kitty of *China Beach*, are caught in a Viet Cong cave provided a conscious opportunity to show the Vietnamese side. Lydia Woodward says, "Obviously the tunnels were a pretty extraordinary metaphor for how the Vietnamese survived and won the American war in Vietnam. It was their land and they dug in and it worked, and I think we wanted to show that. And that there was another life, a whole other kind of underground life that you would be exposed to." The most interestingly conceived Vietnamese character, Trieu Au, the woman who took care of K.C.'s baby, did not show up in the series until the final season.

In February 1990 *China Beach* brought one of its characters home for good in “Thanks of a Grateful Nation,” and the 1990–91 season expanded on that idea. It was typical that the writers did not choose to do it in a simple way. Woodward explains in her matter-of-fact way how the season’s narratively complex arc was constructed:

We wanted to bring the characters home. We wanted to move forward in time and explore their lives on through the years. And we did not want to do it in a strict chronological, linear fashion—for a number of reasons. One, that felt a little too much like we were doing straight soap opera: and then this happened, and then this happened. So we wanted the ability to jump all the way into the future. I think the most forward we ever go is 1988. The opening of the season was 1985, and then flashbacked to 1967, which is another era we never showed. The pilot took place in ‘68, and the first two years of the show took place in 1968, so we’d never shown any of the kind of pre-stuff, and we’d never shown that 1969 stuff at the base, and the war was very different in 1969. But we really wanted to be able to jump around in time.

We also had some just practical considerations in that one of our actresses, Marg Helgenberger [who played K.C.] was pregnant, so we knew there were X number of episodes that she was going to be out of. And, we also knew that if we did it in a strict linear fashion, we’d run out of *China Beach* stuff at some point and we wouldn’t be able to shoot the compound. So a lot of the decision of integrating time periods within shows was basically a financial consideration to shoot on location and also still be able to use the compound that we already were paying for. But I think that foremost we were not interested in telling linear storylines.

There was no bible for this. We never sat down and said, “This is where every character is going to go for the next 15 years.” We knew some of what we wanted to do with characters, so it’s not like it lacked any direction. It did have some direction, but we left a lot of it open to just discover as we went along.

My feeling is that it’s resulted in, I think, some of our best work, and I think that our successes were bigger and maybe some of our failures were bigger. It was a lot of fun to do. I think it was probably difficult for an audience. Your hardcore, loyal audience is with you. I mean, heaven forbid you should be a new viewer. You wouldn’t have a clue what was going on. So, politically, maybe it wasn’t a smart thing to do, but again, we didn’t play by those rules particularly.

It was more than just their best work. What turned out to be the final season of *China Beach* was an astonishing attempt, that mostly succeeded, in presenting on an American television series a serious, epic, multi-level vision of the past twenty years of American emotional history. In view of the way it was put together, it is amazing it held together as well as it did, flaws and all.

In the first episode of the season, “The Big Bang,” John Wells establishes the structure of intercutting between later, in this case 1985, and earlier at *China Beach*. Boonie, the former lifeguard at *China Beach*, his wife, and his children (or those we assume to be his children) visit Dr. Richards and his

wife in 1985. Richards has not married McMurphy, but another woman named Colleen who reminds us very much of McMurphy. The visit provokes a series of flashbacks to Dr. Richards's first day at China Beach.

The next episode, "She Sells More Than Sea Shells," written by Carol Flint from a story by four writers, lets us know that one of Boonie's daughters is in fact K.C.'s daughter. "You Babe," by two new writers to the series, Susan Rhinehart and Cathryn Michon, shows us McMurphy in Vietnam having to deliver K.C.'s baby in the streets of Saigon—a harrowing scene that is a long way from the gentility of the birth of Ricky Jr. on *I Love Lucy*, which set the television precedent this scene builds on. Woodward's "Fever" cuts between McMurphy in Vietnam in 1967 and her adjustment, or lack of it, to returning home in 1970. The episode ends with McMurphy getting on a bus and hitting the road. Woodward says of writing for Delany:

How do you write the quiet stuff? I don't know. She's sort of a stoic Western hero, that's really who she is. She's kind of Gary Cooper in some respects, with a little stronger emotional life. I really don't have an answer for that question. We seem to do it. The thing about *China Beach* is the whole thing is subtext, so it always kind of comes out. You're never really writing about what you're writing about, it's all about something underneath. And the actors certainly understood that and were very good at delivering that.

The director of this episode was Diane Keaton, and as well written as the episode is, Keaton's direction is a little off. The rhythm is perhaps too distinctively Keaton. She does not use Delany's stillness as well as the best of the series directors, John Sacret Young and especially Mimi Leder.³⁰ (Woodward, on the other hand, thinks Keaton's direction was "great" and "got it.")

Young both wrote and directed one of the best of the season's episodes, "Juice," in which we find Richards in Miami Beach in 1972 with a girl we come to realize is the Colleen he later married. They run into McMurphy, who now wears leather jackets and works at a juice plant. At the end of the episode she is leaving Miami Beach and helps a vet in a wheelchair off a curb. He tells her he is going to his first demonstration, at the Republican National Convention. She does not go with him, but rides a bit of the way on her motorcycle, stops, then looks at the demonstrators. She is lost, both emotionally and historically. The scene's imagery suggests both *Easy Rider* and *Born on the Fourth of July* without the pomposities of either. The series was looking at the past, but not as most television does in terms of nostalgia. The Cunninghams of *Happy Days* would not let this McMurphy live with them.

China Beach's time slot for the first two and a half seasons was Wednesday nights at ten P.M., where it had an average 21 percent of the audience watching television at that time. In the fall of 1990, ABC moved the show to Saturday night at nine as a lead-in to *Twin Peaks*. *Twin Peaks* died for the

reasons mentioned in Chapter 19, and took *China Beach*, which was then opposite the very popular *Golden Girls* and *Empty Nest*, with it. *China Beach's* share was reduced to 12 percent.³¹ In December 1990, as the deadline for Iraq to leave Kuwait drew closer, ABC put *China Beach* on hiatus. After the war started in January, the cast and crew of the show spoke out. For John Sacret Young, the war was

a good reason to bring the show back.

Our whole reason for doing the show has changed. We did an episode [yet to be broadcast] called "Rewind," where Karen [Christine Elise], the daughter of K.C. [Marg Helgenberger], was doing home movies and talking to our characters about the Vietnam War. When you watch what they say and suddenly think about the Middle East, there's a whole different level going on. There's a whole added sadness, a whole added complexity. It may make our show tougher to watch.³²

It was not until June 1991, after the Gulf War was over and the interminable parades had begun, that ABC brought back the series and ran the last of its episodes. Two episodes follow K.C.'s decision to give up her child, and both cover enough of the same material that they might have been condensed into one more conventionally written show. What the two episodes do, however, is articulate what had always been a subtext in the series: that the most important relationship in the series is not the conventional McMurphy–Richards semi-romance, but the thorny, difficult relationship between McMurphy and K.C.

The focus on this relationship becomes a continuing thread in the season and series finale, the two-hour "Hello and Goodbye," which begins with a reunion of the *China Beach* personnel in 1988 to which K.C.'s daughter, Karen, comes, hoping finally to meet her mother. K.C. does not appear at the reunion, and the second half of the episode has some of the group, including Karen, driving to Washington to see the Vietnam Memorial. Karen finally meets her mother, who has become an international businesswoman dealing with Japanese businessmen.

Like the final episode of *M*A*S*H*, the "Hello and Goodbye" episode of *China Beach* is probably too long, and the scenes at the memorial wall are unfocused. Those between McMurphy, K.C., and Karen do not seem strong enough to end the series, or even the season, since when they were written and shot, it was not yet clear the series was being canceled. The K.C. and Karen material is better handled in "Rewind," the episode that ran two weeks before the finale.

Written by Carol Flint and John Wells, the episode begins with videotaped interviews of people talking about Vietnam. Some know about it, some (especially the younger ones) do not. (Are the interviews real, or made up for the episode? We cannot tell by looking or listening.³³) The show is tying

together reality and fiction in an even tighter knot than it has done before. The interviews are part of a school project by K.C.'s now-teenaged daughter Karen, who is living with Boonie and his family.

Boonie sees the interviews and winces when a kid says his grandfather was in Vietnam. Boonie asks Karen if she is only going to talk to kids, and she turns the camera on him and he asks her if this is about K.C. She says it is just for a communications class, but he gives her the names of people who knew her mother. In Act II she interviews some of the main characters of the show, ending with now-General Miller. In a brilliantly written, directed, and acted scene, the general slowly realizes that Karen is his daughter, but all he can remember about K.C. is that she was good in bed.

In Act III Karen talks to K.C.'s sister, the aunt whom Karen did not know she had, and Act IV begins with the awaited scene in which Karen interviews McMurphy, who claims not to remember that much, although it is clear through Delany's performance that she remembers too much. This is followed by an interview with Trieu Au, and then Sgt. Pepper, who now says that the movies and television shows about Vietnam are becoming his memories, that they are "better than my messy old memories. Vietnam is just becoming a little war in history now, a little half-page sandwiched between Kennedy's assassination and Watergate. Pretty soon all we'll have left is the clichés."

Karen is back with Boonie, showing him the tapes, ending with a montage of people asking her to turn the camera off. Boonie tells her it's great, but Karen says, "I still feel lost." After Boonie leaves, she interviews herself, talking to the K.C. who is not there. Karen wants to call it quits, but then admits it is not finished.

The series, unfortunately, was.

CONCLUSION

*T*here is, because of the institutional structures and their pressures on it, a lot of junk on American television, just as there are bad movies shown and bad books and magazines published. American television, like American filmmaking and American publishing, is a moneymaking business, which is why the people who run the structures of American TV are willing to make and show junk: Sponsors are willing to pay for it because audiences are willing to watch it, just as viewers are willing to watch bad movies and read bad books.

But there is also as much work of quality and substance on American television, and often more, than in American films and literature. It happens when the writers (yes, and actors and directors) are given the chance to do it, and when the audiences are given the chance to appreciate it. For every nostalgic wallowing in the worst of American TV, there is at least some awareness, love, and appreciation for the best of American TV.

And the reason is because audiences know that when the best of the writers for American television are at their best, they are not playing for anything so trivial as money, power, glory, titles, or credits. They are playing for the soul of America and they are playing for keeps.

Notes

To reduce the length of these notes, material clearly from the interviews conducted for this book has not been footnoted. A complete list of those writers who were interviewed can be found in the Acknowledgments.

Introduction

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Chapter 1

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2. Burton interview, also Burton's unpublished memoirs (*Hello King*).
3. Charles Champlin, "Reunion of Uncle Miltie's Million-Member Family," *Los Angeles Times Sunday Calendar*, March 26, 1978, p. 47.
4. Milton Berle, with Haskell Frankel, *An Autobiography* (New York: Dell, 1974), pp. 296–97.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
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7. Jay Burton's complete collection of scripts for the Berle shows is in the Special Collections section of the Doheny Library of the University of Southern California. Notes on the scripts are from the scripts in this collection.
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10. *Ibid.*
11. Berle, pp. 334–35.
12. David Crook, "Uncle Miltie: Out at NBC, But in, Perhaps, on Pluto," *Los Angeles Times Sunday Calendar*, September 13, 1981, p. 2.
13. Milt Josefsberg, *The Jack Benny Show* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1977), pp. 380–83; see also Jack Benny and His Daughter Joan, *Sunday Nights at Seven: The Jack Benny Story* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), pp. 236, 279–81.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 71–2.
15. Josefsberg, p. 390.
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18. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.
21. The scripts for both the radio and television shows of Burns and Allen are in the Special Collections of the Doheny Library at the University of Southern California.
22. Blythe and Sackett, p. 169.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 93–95.
24. A history of the radio and television life of *The Lone Ranger* can be found in David Rothel, *Who Was That Masked Man?* (San Diego: A. S. Barnes, 1981).
25. Rothel, p. 54.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
27. In the summer of 1989, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum ran several of the radio and television episodes of *The Lone Ranger*, including these two.
28. SuzAnne Barabas and Gabor Barabas, *Gunsmoke: A Complete History* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 1990), p. 83.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
31. *Ibid.* The book has complete summaries of both the radio and television episodes, pp. 359–725.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
33. "'Death Valley Days' Can't Be Numbered," *TV Guide*, November 12, 1960, p. 9.
34. Perrin.
35. See Chapter 21 for the *thirtysomething* equivalent of that.
36. "Armchair Spectator," *TV Guide*, October 7, 1950, pg. 22.
37. Robert Taylor, *Fred Allen: His Life and Wit* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989), p. 290.

Chapter 2

1. "The Fifth Network," *TV Guide*, August 20, 1955, p. 16.
2. Dan Jenkins, "The Man Who Bet on Television," *TV Guide*, June 11, 1955, pp. 4–7.

3. Ibid.
4. "Fifth Network," p. 17.
5. The collection of *Racket Squad* scripts, with production notes on the scripts, is in the Special Collections section of the Doheny Library at the University of Southern California.
6. "Old Horse Operas Never Die," *TV Guide*, January 15, 1954, p. 21.
7. Ibid.
8. Rothel, p. 195.
9. Hal Erickson, *Syndicated Television: The First Forty Years, 1947–1987* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 1989), pp. 5–8.
10. "Now Hear This," *TV Guide*, March 2, 1957, pp. 14–5.
11. "'Death Valley Days' Can't Be Numbered," pp. 8–10.
12. Madelyn Davis began her life and her career as Madelyn Pugh, and her *I Love Lucy* scripts are signed that way. She was Madelyn Martin for a while thereafter, and has been Madelyn Davis personally and professionally for several years.
13. Davis interview; also Bart Andrews, *The "I Love Lucy" Book* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), pp. 36–37.
14. Andrews, p. 1. Andrews writes that Carroll and Davis did a pilot script for a television version of *My Favorite Husband*, but Davis in the interview said they did not.
15. Davis quoting Ball in *I Love Lucy: The Unaired Pilot*, broadcast April 30, 1990.
16. Andrews, p. 15, quotes Arnaz as saying there was a pilot script written in which Ball and Arnaz played married movie stars, but Davis does not recall any such script.
17. Quoted in Andrews, p. 141.
18. Andrews, pp. 92–94.
19. Ibid., pp. 192–93.

Chapter 3

1. "Six Candles," *TV Guide*, May 1, 1953, p. 13.
2. "Final Curtain for Kraft Theatre," *TV Guide*, September 13, 1958, pp. 6–7.
3. Ibid., pp. 6–7.
4. "Six Candles," p. 14.
5. The UCLA Theatre Arts Reading Room in the Graduate Research Library has a collection of *Kraft* scripts of one of the early *Kraft* directors, Richard Dunlap, and the scripts included the blueprints for the set construction, as well as Dunlap's handwritten notes.
6. "They Never Had It So Good," *TV Guide*, August 6, 1955, p. 14.
7. Brooks Atkinson review, *New York Times*, September 22, 1933, p. 15.
8. "Six Candles," p. 14.
9. "Trends in TV Drama," *TV Guide*, January 19, 1957, pp. 26–27.
10. "104 Plays a Year," *TV Guide*, November 6, 1953, p. 9.
11. Engel, p. 120.
12. Barnouw, p. 131.
13. Roscoe Karns, "Why You Never See My TV Family," *TV Guide*, December 7, 1951, p. 24.
14. Background on Tolkin: Tolkin interview; background on Liebman: Ted Sennett, *Your Show of Shows* (New York: MacMillan, 1977), pp. 7–9.

15. Sennett, pp. 9–10.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 18–20.
19. Quoted in “Great Caesar’s Ghost,” *Esquire*, May 1972, p. 142.
20. *FrameWork*, p. 28.
21. Sennett, p. 26.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
24. See *FrameWork*, Chapter 9, for a discussion of this phenomenon. Also see *Ibid.*, p. 211 for the cure.
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26. Sennett, pp. 171–73.
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34. *Ibid.*
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36. Wilk, p. 82.
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39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. Michael Wilmington, “Special Screenings,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1989, p. VI5.

Chapter 4

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2. Wilk, p. 127. The beginnings of *Philco* are from Wilk, pp. 125–27.
3. “Produced by Fred Coe,” pg. 11.
4. Gore Vidal, ed., *Best Television Plays* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1956), p. 139.
5. Gore Vidal, *Visit to a Small Planet* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1957) p. xvii. This

is the published edition of the stage play. The television version appears in *Best Television Plays*, for which Vidal was the editor.

6. "They Never Had It So Good," *TV Guide*, August 6, 1955, p. 15.
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13. Swift, UCLA screenings.
14. The creation of "Marty" is from Delbert Mann on two occasions. One is Cecil Smith, "Paddy Made TV's 'Small Moment' An Art Form," *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1981, pp. VI4–5. The other is Mann at the Museum of Broadcasting's 8th Annual Television Festival in Los Angeles, March 8, 1991.
15. Chayefsky, p. 173.
16. "Playwright Turns Self Critic," *TV Guide*, October 22, 1955, p. 15.
17. Chayefsky, pp. 259–68.
18. Brady, p. 52.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 38 and 66.
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23. Rex Polier, "Reflections On TV's Golden Age," *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1982, Part VI, p. 9.
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36. Bob Stahl, "'Studio One' Goes West," *TV Guide*, December 28, 1957, pp. 5–6.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
38. "Strictly for Adults," *TV Guide*, October 12, 1957, p. 19.

39. Engel, p. 86.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 136–38; also see comments by the director Ralph Nelson on the video release, Wood Knapp Video.
42. Brooks and Marsh, pp. 628–29.
43. Wilk, pp. 260–61.

Chapter 5

1. The Subcommittee of the House of Representatives on Un-American Activities. For a brief history of the Subcommittee's investigations on Hollywood and its connections with writers, see *FrameWork*, pp. 136–152, 164–175.
2. Barnouw, p. 125.
3. I have for space reasons had to leave out some of Polonsky's stories about his adventures on the black market, but he assures me that Walter Bernstein, who wrote the script for the film about their activities *The Front*, is writing a memoir of the period that will include all his great tales.
4. In Powell's case it was Martin Berkeley's article, "The Reds in Your Living Room," *The American Mercury*, August, 1953. Berkeley was one of the most voluble witnesses before the committee. He named 161 names. He was also one of the least accurate, with at least a dozen misidentifications: Victory Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), pp. 75 and 85.
5. "Now He's a TV Hero Who Fights Communism," *TV Guide*, December 4, 1953, pp. 6–7.
6. Dick Holeson, "TV's Disastrous Brain Drain," *TV Guide*, June 15, 1968, p. 8.
7. The original owners included Joel McCrea and Rosalind Russell, but they were replaced early by Lupino and Niven.
8. Christopher Knopf, "If My Aunt in Little Rock Doesn't Like It," *Daily Variety 43rd Anniversary Issue*, October 26, 1976, p. 182. Previous background on Knopf from Knopf interview.
9. "Ceiling Unlimited," *TV Guide*, February 23, 1957, pp. 12–13.
10. Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version* (New York: Avon, 1968), p. 11.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 266–67; also Leonard Goldenson with Marvin J. Wolf, *Beating the Odds* (New York: Scribners, 1991), pp. 121–24.
12. Ward Kimball, talking to a class at Los Angeles City College, November 9, 1973.
13. Dan Jenkins, "Hollywood Stubs Its Toe," *TV Guide*, December 17, 1955, p. 6.
14. Quoted in Goldenson, p. 124.
15. Background on Huggins: Huggins interview, and Navasky, p. 258.
16. Goldenson, p. 129; McNeil, pp. 791, 901.
17. Lynn Woolley, Robert W. Malsbary, and Robert G. Strange, Jr., *Warner Brothers Television* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 1985), p. 143. The book also lists the Warners series by episodes, indicating which ones are rewrites of other shows.
18. Knowledge can be disillusioning: When Leith Adams was growing up in the fifties, he loved the Warner Brothers Western series such as *Cheyenne*. He has since become the archivist for the collection of Warner Brothers papers at the University of

Southern California and learned from looking at the papers that all the scenes he remembered from the shows were in fact stock material taken from theatrical films.

Chapter 6

1. Interviews with writers; biographies from Vidal, ed., *Best Television Plays*, pp. 249–50.
2. “Dragnet Catches 38 Million Viewers,” *TV Guide*, April 10, 1953, p. 7.
3. “Strong Medicine,” *TV Guide*, October 9, 1954, p. 17.
4. “The Sponsor Sits in the Audience,” *TV Guide*, March 19, 1960, p. 19.
5. Barnouw, p. 187.
6. Stockton Helffrich, “Nobody Loves Me! (or, the Lament of a Censor),” *TV Guide*, March 3, 1956, p. 5.
7. Sorry to disappoint you, but this one was way off the record.
8. Holeson, p. 8.
9. “The Time of Our Lives,” *TV Guide*, November 30, 1957, pp. 20–23.
10. Robert Drew, “An Independent with the Networks,” reprinted in Alan Rosenthal, ed., *New Challenges for Documentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 391. The entire article is on pp. 389–401.
11. I’ve shown *Primary* in my History of Documentary Film class at Los Angeles City College for many years, and it varies from semester to semester whether the class thinks the film favors Kennedy or Humphrey.
12. Erik Barnouw makes the distinction between the two filmmaking styles in his *Documentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 235–55.
13. For an excellent account of making the film and the subsequent controversy, see Mary Ann Watson, *The Expanding Vista* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 144–51. See also Stephen Mamber, *Cinema Verite in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974), pp. 105–14.
14. Watson, p. 150.
15. The most detailed look at Wiseman’s work is Thomas W. Benson and Carolyn Anderson’s appropriately titled *Reality Fictions: The Films of Frederick Wiseman* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989).
16. The Raymonds returned to Antony Bouza for their 1990 film *Police Chiefs*. Bouza was by then chief of police of Minneapolis.

Chapter 7

1. “He Sticks With Cattle,” *TV Guide*, September 10, 1960, p. 23.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
3. Sally Bedell Smith, *In All His Glory* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), pp. 435–36.
4. Knopf interview, although he admits, “That’s the story I heard. I don’t know if it’s true or not, but the fact of it was, we were all fired.”
5. McNeil, pp. 901 and 905.
6. Lou Shaw says it happened to him as well.
7. Kean.
8. *Ibid.*

9. See Goldenson, pp. 238–42, for a more detailed account from Huggins of exactly how much everybody else disliked it.
10. Edith Efron, “The Eternal Conflict Between Good and Evil,” *TV Guide*, March 17, 1962, p. 8.
11. Both Stone and Vlahos quoted in *Ibid.*
12. Efron, p. 8.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
14. Rose.
15. A similar idea was tried in 1990 with the series *Law and Order*, but in that series the attorneys are prosecutors, so they were working with the police.
16. Watson, p. 43.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.
18. Edith Efron, “Can TV Drama Survive,” *TV Guide*, September 25, 1965, p. 10.

Chapter 8

1. Richard Kelly, *The Andy Griffith Show* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John Blair, Rev. Ed., 1989), pp. 25, 108–9; Greenbaum interview. Kelly’s book is a model of how to write about a series. It is also very encouraging to note that in the 1989 revision of the 1981 original, Kelly added sections on two of the series writers, Harvey Bullock and Everett Greenbaum.
2. Kelly, p. 8.
3. There is an excellent discussion of the differences between one-camera and three-camera shooting in Kelly, pp. 28–35. This has been augmented here by material from the Greenbaum, Tolkin, and Mumford interviews.
4. Kelly, p. 115.
5. Ginny Weissman and Coyne Steven Sanders, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983) p. 1.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–6. David Marc, in *Comic Visions* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp. 97–99), raises an issue that Weissman and Sanders avoid: that one reason Reiner was replaced with Dick Van Dyke is that Reiner would have seemed too Jewish for Middle America whereas Van Dyke was from there.
8. Weissman and Sanders, p. 31.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
11. Fred Graver and Terri Minsky, “Garry Marshall Is Asking For It,” *Esquire*, March 1990, p. 167.
12. Jerry Belson Studio Biography 1981.
13. Graver and Minsky, p. 167.
14. Weissman and Sanders, p. 67.
15. See Watson, pp. 44, 59–60; also Marc, pp. 84–76.
16. Weissman and Sanders, pp. 63–65; also John Rich, the director of the episode, at “The Expanding Vista” forum at UCLA.
17. Van Dyke: Weissman and Sanders, p. 65; cutting 45 seconds: Rich at UCLA.
18. Weissman and Sanders, p. 65.
19. Rich at UCLA.

20. Perrin.
21. For a more detailed history of the development of *The Twilight Zone*, see Marc Scott Zicree, *The Twilight Zone Companion* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), pp. 17–29; see also Engel, pp. 151–83.
22. Engel, p. 169.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
24. Zicree, p. 36.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 296.
28. Engel, p. 173.
29. For more detail about the creation and writing of the series, see John Heitland, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E. Book* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).
30. Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty*, pp. 366–68.
31. Weissman and Sanders, p. 65.
32. Salkowitz.
33. Mittleman.
34. Roddenberry had actually been tinkering with the idea since as early as 1960: Stephen E. Whitfield and Gene Roddenberry, *The Making of Star Trek* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), p. 21.
35. Fontana remembers the budgets as \$190,000 per episode the first season of shows, then dropped to \$180,000 for the second. Whitfield and Roddenberry quote memos indicating the second set were to be budgeted at \$185,000.
36. Daniel Cerone, "Roddenberry's Trek Record," *The Los Angeles Times TV Times*, October 28, 1990, p. 3.
37. Sheldon Teitelbaum, "Trekking to the Top," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, May 5, 1991, p. 18.

Chapter 9

1. "Buttons at Bat Again," *TV Guide*, October 16, 1954, pp. 13–15.
2. The interview with Greenbaum was conducted before Gobel's death.
3. A *TV Guide* article (Cindy Adams, "Life Among the Gag Writers," *TV Guide*, December 3, 1960, p. 13) says the writers were on the job from 10:30 to 4:30, but Burton remembers them quitting for lunch and not coming back.
4. "What's Wrong with Television," *TV Guide*, December 7, 1957, p. 6.
5. Burton's scripts for *The Perry Como Show* are also at the Special Collections of the Doheny Library at the University of Southern California.
6. The description of the creation of the Hope sketches is from the Tolkin and Rhine interviews, but the critical judgments are mine.
7. "Reviews," *TV Guide*, August 20, 1955, p. 19.
8. For a look at the process of writing for Carson on *The Tonight Show*, see Lawrence Leamer, *King of the Night* (New York: Morrow, 1989), especially pp. 155–57, 195, and 263–67.
9. Background on Kovacs: Diana Rico's excellent *Kovacsland* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990).
10. Rico, p. 83.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 85–78. The Kovacs papers are in the UCLA Special Collections, but only beginning with material from 1951.
12. Rico, pp. 194–95.
13. Specials 4, 5, 6, and 7 were run as part of the program *Kovacs and Kaufman* at the Long Beach Museum of Art, November 1989–January 1990.
14. Rico, p. x.
15. Doug Hill and Jeff Weingrad, *Saturday Night* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1986), p. 37.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 348.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 347.
20. Donna McCrohan, *The Second City* (New York: Perigee Books, 1987), pp. 213–14.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
22. Susan King, “Exploring Comedian Martin Short’s Inner space,” *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, June 28, 1987, p. E11.
23. McCrohan, pp. 222–3.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 228. See also Lawrence Christon, “SCTV: Let’s Create a Show,” *Los Angeles Times Sunday Calendar Magazine*, December 11, 1983, pp. 1, 5–7, for a more or less transcript of a writing session on the show, and his follow-up, “How SCTV Finally Got Act Together,” *Los Angeles Times Sunday Calendar Magazine*, December 18, 1983, p. 56.
25. While the performers on *Saturday Night Live* have gone on to star in films and television, the SCTV people have done primarily supporting work in films, and even those who have had starring roles, such as John Candy, have generally been better in supporting parts.
26. McCrohan, pp. 216–17.

Chapter 10

1. Steve Weinstein, “A Quarter-Century of Television Movies . . .” *Los Angeles Times Sunday Calendar Magazine*, April 23, 1989, p. 24.
2. Richard Levinson and William Link, *Stay Tuned* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981) pp. 29–30. While this memoir does deal with some of their series work, particularly *Columbo*, it is more detailed about their television movie work.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.
5. I have used the opening pitch scene in *The Storyteller* in my screenwriting class to show students how it happens in the real world.
6. Symposium on *Brian’s Song*, the Museum of Broadcasting’s 8th Annual Television Festival in Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, March 22, 1991.
7. See Goldenson, p. 330, for the development of the 90-minute movie.
8. *Ibid.*
9. The background on the film is from Mishkin: the observations on the completed film are mine.
10. Goldenson, p. 345.

11. William Froug, *The Screenwriter Looks at the Screenwriter* (New York: MacMillan, 1972), p. 279.
12. Edward Anhalt, "America at the Movies: The Screenwriters in the American Film Seminar," American Film Institute, October 20, 1988.
13. For a brief look at Anhalt's film career, see *FrameWork*, pp. 179–80.
14. Anhalt, AFI.
15. Froug, pp. 281–82.
16. Kathryn C. Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 154–55.
17. Montgomery indicates the scene was cut completely, but it remained in drastically reduced form.
18. The mini-history of *Roots*, including the quote from Stoddard, is from Goldenson, pp. 363–64.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 365.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Howard Rosenberg, "Protests Erupt Over *Beulah Land*," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1980, quoted in Montgomery, p. 125. Montgomery's chapter on the controversy over the film, pp. 123–53, is a sharp-eyed look at the conflicting forces, their stands, and their excesses.
22. Arthur Unger, "A Bargain Basement *Gone With the Wind*," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 6, 1980, quoted in Montgomery, pp. 151–52.
23. The script is in the Louis B. Mayer Library of the AFI.
24. Montgomery, pp. 130–31.
25. In spite of the protests, *Beulah Land* did run on NBC in October 1980 and again in 1983, and is available on videocassette.

Chapter 11

1. For the distinction between Cohn and Wald, see *FrameWork*, pp. 100–1 on Cohn, p. 127 on Wald.
2. Dwight Whitney, "Cop vs Showman," *TV Guide*, August 17, 1974, p. 21.
3. Neuman recalls that it was his idea to do it as an anthology. Wambaugh recalls that it was either himself or Gerber who had the idea.
4. This idea was picked up the late-eighties documentary series *Cops*, which had groups of episodes taped in different cities, including a one-hour *Cops in Moscow*.
5. Whitney, p. 22.
6. Don Freeman, "'We Saw It Happen. Who Could Make That Up?'" *TV Guide*, April 10, 1976, p. 33.
7. Wambaugh memo to Kallis, October 11, 1975, pp. 2 and 3. The Wambaugh memos are in the possession of Liam O'Brien.
8. Wambaugh memo to Kallis, May 29, 1975.
9. Wambaugh memo to Kallis, September 25, 1975.
10. Wambaugh memo to O'Brien, July 28, 1976.
11. Wambaugh memo to O'Brien, July 23, 1976.
12. Wambaugh memo to Kallis, June 19, 1975.
13. Wambaugh notes, November 10, 1975.
14. Wambaugh memo to O'Brien and Waters, September 1976. Wambaugh

threatened a lawsuit if the script went on as written, but later decided he liked the show and asked for a cassette of it.

15. Wambaugh memo to O'Brien and Waters, September 10, 1976.
16. Wambaugh memo to O'Brien and Waters, August 16, 1976.
17. Wambaugh memo to O'Brien and Waters, December 19, 1976.
18. Wambaugh memo to O'Brien, December 24, 1976.
19. Wambaugh memo to O'Brien and Waters, September 3, 1976.
20. Wambaugh memo to Kallis, June 2, 1975.
21. Whitney, p. 26.
22. Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 242–46, has a good section on *Today's FBI* as an attempt to do a “conservative” show.
23. Wambaugh memo to O'Brien, June 22, 1976.

Chapter 12

1. Literally, *schpilkes* means “something in the pants,” so “*schpilkes* in the pants” is redundant, but why kvetch?

2. Donna McCrohan, *Archie & Edith, Mike & Gloria* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1987), pp. 9–11.

3. Horace Newcomb and Robert S. Alley, *The Producer's Medium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 176.

4. The writing process on the later *All in the Family* is from the Tolkin and Rhine interviews. There is also a less detailed description of it in McCrohan, *Archie*, pp. 114–18.

5. Montgomery, pp. 27–50, has a good section on the controversy over the abortion episodes.

6. Manings.

7. Brooks and Marsh, p. 306.

8. Edward Gross, *The 25th Anniversary Odd Couple Companion* (Las Vegas: Pioneer, 1989), p. 22.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 69.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

15. Joel Zwick, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 101.

16. Brooks and Marsh, p. 324.

17. David Wallace, “Blue-Collar Knight,” *Los Angeles Times Sunday Calendar Magazine*, June 16, 1991, p. 38.

18. Goldenson, p. 348.

19. Wallace, p. 39.

20. Graver and Minsky, p. 171.

Chapter 13

1. The beginnings of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and MTM are from two major sources: Robert S. Alley and Irby B. Brown, *Love Is All Around: The Making of the*

Mary Tyler Moore Show (New York: Delta, 1989), pp. 1–2; and Paul Kerr, “The Making of (The) MTM (Show),” in Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr, and Tise Vahimagi, eds., *MTM: ‘Quality Television,’* (London: British Film Institute, 1984), pp. 61–69. Kerr’s article is from public sources and places the show in the cultural, business, and political trends of the period, while Alley and Brown were able to interview most of the participants in the show and have more firsthand accounts of working on the show.

2. Jane Feuer, “MTM Enterprises: An Overview,” in Feuer, et al., p. 5.
3. Background on Brooks and Burns: Horace Newcomb and Robert S. Alley, *The Producer’s Medium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 196–97.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
5. Quoted in Kerr, p. 74, from an article in *TV Guide*, February 8, 1975, p. 32.
6. Alley and Brown, p. 4.
7. Kerr, p. 71, from Don Freeman, “Mary Tyler Moore: ‘I’m Not a Comedienne; I React Funny,’” *Show*, October 1972.
8. Alley and Brown, pp. 39–40, 47, 51.
9. Newcomb and Alley, p. 211.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
12. Alley and Brown, p. 48.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
15. Newcomb and Alley, pp. 221–22.
16. David S. Reiss, *M*A*S*H: The Exclusive, Inside Story of T.V.’s Most Popular Show* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980, rev. ed. 1983), p. 12.
17. *Variety*, July 12, 1968.
18. “Richard Hooker,” *M*A*S*H* (New York: Pocket Books, 1969).
19. Ring Lardner, Jr., *M*A*S*H*, Final Draft, February 26, 1970. The script is in the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.
20. See, for example, *Thelma and Louise*, *The Color Purple*, and, just to show you it’s not entirely an American phenomenon, *Chariots of Fire*.
21. Wayne Warga, “‘M*A*S*H’ Mangles Film-making Axiom,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1970, Calendar, p. 1.
22. “All-Time Film Rental Champs,” weekly *Variety*, October 15, 1990, p. M170.
23. Marshall Berges, “Home Q & A: Pat and Larry Gelbart,” *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine*, July 16, 1978, p. 27.
24. Jack Searles, “‘A Once-in-a-Lifetime experience,’” *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, February 28, 1983, p. C1.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Berges, p. 28.
27. Burt Metcalfe, quoted in Searles, p. C-4.
28. Searles, p. C1.
29. *Ibid.*, p. C4.
30. Reiss, pp. 112 and 51.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
32. Metcalfe, in Searles, p. C1.
33. Greenbaum. In *Memories of M*A*S*H* (Producer: Michael Hirsh, broadcast

on CBS, November 25, 1991), Gelbart indicates he gave copies of the last page to the actors before the scene was shot and that they gasped when they read it.

34. Salkowitz.

35. Reiss, p. 112.

36. Berges, p. 28.

37. Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, in *Memories of M*A*S*H*.

38. *Making M*A*S*H* (Producer: Michael Hirsh, broadcast on PBS, 1983).

39. Reiss, p. 98.

40. *Making M*A*S*H*.

41. Greenbaum.

42. See the weekly *Variety* special section on the show, February 23, 1983, pp. 82–92, which shows how much some local stations paid for and received in advertising rates from the syndicated reruns of *M*A*S*H*.

43. “How *M*A*S*H* Reached Its Final High-Water Mark,” *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, March 15, 1983, p. A6.

Chapter 14

1. Monica Collins, “The Collins Report,” *TV Guide* (Los Angeles Metropolitan Edition), January 26, 1991, p. 36.

2. *The Fall Guy* was actually produced by Fox and not Universal, but with a lot of the Universal “regulars” connected with it—which is why it is squeezed in here.

3. Jean Valley, “The James Garner Files,” *Esquire*, July 13–19, 1979, pp. 70–80. The section on the development of the show is on pages 70 and 73, and appears to have come primarily from Stephen J. Cannell, although Valley does not list her sources. The quotes from Cannell are from this article.

Chapter 15

1. Polier, p. 8.

Chapter 16

1. “Guilds Clash on 4 Fronts in Jostle for TV Jurisdiction,” *Daily Variety*, February 16, 1949; Notes from Erik Barnouw, Former Chairman, WGA. For a brief history of the Screen Writers Guild, see *FrameWork*, pp. 136–43.

2. “Six Writers Guilds Mapping One Big Television Council,” *Daily Variety*, June 16, 1949.

3. *Ibid.*

4. “WGA Resids Pass \$700 Mil Mark,” weekly *Variety*, July 22, 1991, p. 12.

5. Louis Chunovic, “Conciliatory Words Flow in Aftermath of Bitter Strike,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1988, p. V1.

6. “Cy Howard Curls a Scornful Lip at ‘Country Club’ Writers,” *Daily Variety*, March 31, 1954.

7. See *FrameWork*, pp. 123–28, for a discussion of this trend in movies.

8. Background on Spelling: Richard Levinson and William Link, *Off Camera* (New York: New American Library, 1986), pp. 229–35; also “He Scored a Bingo with ‘Ringo,’” *TV Guide*, March 26, 1960, pp. 20–22.

Chapter 17

1. J. Max Robbins, "War Webs Dine on Humble Pie During Prudent Pilot Roll-outs," weekly *Variety*, March 25, 1991, p. 50.
2. There is no record of it in Lee Goldberg's book, *Unsold Television Pilots* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1990). Goldberg's book is a mine of information and it would not have been possible to do this section of this book without his book, since it gave me basic information to ask the writers about. Citadel Press published an abridged paperback edition entitled *Unsold TV Pilots* in 1991.
3. Goldberg, p. 1.
4. Morgan Gendel, "Lindsay Wagner and the Series of Doom," *Los Angeles Times Sunday Calendar*, November 18, 1984, p. 3.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
6. *Los Angeles Times Sunday Calendar*, Letters, November 25, 1984.
7. Kean tells this story but cannot remember precisely who the writer was.

Chapter 18

1. Gitlin, p. 279. Gitlin's chapter on the creation of *Hill Street*, pp. 273–324, is an excellent example of writing intelligently about a television show.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 277–78.
3. Levinson and Link, *Off Camera*, pp. 18–19.
4. Gitlin, p. 276.
5. Levinson and Link, *Off Camera*, p. 21.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
7. Kozoll, quoted in Elvis Mitchell, "It Was the Old Pros Who Put 'Hill Street Blues' on Map," *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, February 28, 1985, p. B8.
8. Barbara Babcock, talking to a combination of Television and Theatre classes, Los Angeles City College, December 12, 1988.
9. Gitlin, p. 306.
10. Levinson and Link, *Off Camera*, p. 32.
11. Michael Austin Taylor, "Alumni: A Little Bit of Art," *Yale Alumni Magazine*, April 1985, pp. 34–36.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Levinson and Link, *Off Camera*, p. 31.
14. Mark Christensen and Cameron Stauth, *The Sweeps: Behind the Scenes in Network TV* (New York: William Morrow, 1984), p. 118.
15. Walon Green, at the seminar "America and the Movies: The Screenwriter in the American Film," American Film Institute, Los Angeles, November 3, 1988.
16. Gitlin, p. 324.

Chapter 19

1. Gitlin, p. 76.
2. Michael Leahy *TV Guide* article, November 12, 1983, quoted in Feuer et al, pp. 268–69.
3. Beginnings of *L.A. Law* and quote from Bochco: David Shaw, "The Partner

Lay There Dead . . . Face Down in a Dish of Beans," *TV Guide*, October 11, 1986, pp. 34–38.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

6. Steve Weinstein, "He's the Final Authority on *L.A. Law*," *Los Angeles Times Sunday Calendar Magazine*, August 12, 1990, pp. 7 and 94.

7. Susan King, "The Wheels of Justice," *Los Angeles Times TV Times*, March 24, 1991, p. 3.

8. *Ibid.*

9. On *Entertainment Daily Journal*, broadcast July 19, 1991.

10. Beginnings of *Miami Vice*: Brandon Tartikoff, quoted in Levinson and Link, *Off Camera*, pp. 251–52.

11. One person I was watching an episode with got up when one number started and said, "As long as the commercial's on, I'm going to the bathroom." I think she realized she was making a joke.

12. See, for example, Rick Du Brow, "Humanity Loses to Reality," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1991, pp. F1 and F12.

Chapter 20

1. All the writers I interviewed who had worked with Madelyn Davis highly praised her and her professionalism.

2. Sennett, p. 24.

3. Ellen Torgerson, "Even Edith Bunker Has a Paying Job," *TV Guide*, September 17, 1977, pp. 16–17.

4. In her father's case this was literally true: When he was at Warners in the late fifties, he brought his lunch to work with him in a workman's lunch pail: Grace Lee Whitney, quoted in Woolley et al., p. 189.

5. Beginnings of *Cagney and Lacey*: Barbara Corday, in Levinson and Link, *Off Camera*, pp. 225–26.

6. Quoted in Brooks and Marsh, p. 123, along with some comments made by other organizations and people on the controversy that followed. Gitlin, p. 9, identifies the CBS executive as its head of research, a man named Arnold Becker. Terry Louise Fisher, who wrote for *Cagney and Lacey*, co-created *L.A. Law*, whose sleazy divorce lawyer is named Arnie Becker. Do you think that is just a coincidence?

7. An indication of the class of both women: When Gless started her own series, *The Trials of Rosie O'Neill*, in 1990, Foster was hired for a recurring role as an assistant district attorney.

8. See Montgomery, pp. 201–15, for Rosenzweig's working with women's groups on an episode on abortion.

9. See Steve Jenkins, "*Hill Street Blues*," in Feuer et al., pp. 183–99.

10. Gitlin, p. 289.

11. Michael Leahy and Wallis Annenberg, "Discrimination in Hollywood: How Bad Is It?" *TV Guide*, October 13, 1984, pp. 10–11.

12. Sharon Bernstein, "The Women of TV's Vietnam," *Los Angeles Times Sunday Calendar*, February 18, 1990, pp. 9, 90, 94.

13. Rita Mae Brown, *Starting from Scratch* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), pp. 183–84.

14. Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, Museum of Broadcasting's Festival of Television, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, March 10, 1990. Unless otherwise noted, quotes from Bloodworth-Thomason are from this source.
15. Delta Burke, Museum of Broadcasting Festival, March 10, 1990.
16. Arnold-Ince; she was a coordinator on the show for a season.
17. Rick Du Brow, "CBS Shows Faith in Its Future with 'Designing Women' Deal," *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1990, p. F1.
18. Robert S. Alley and Irby B. Brown, *Murphy Brown: Anatomy of a Sitcom* (New York: Delta, 1990), p. 21. This is interesting to read in juxtaposition to the same authors' *Love Is All Around*, about *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–62.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
23. I am surprised that in their book Alley and Brown make no mention of this at all, since it is a step in the liberation of the sitcom format.

Chapter 21

1. Wayne Warga, "Gelbart, Slade: Through the Ranks to the Theatre," *Los Angeles Times Sunday Calendar*, June 10, 1979, p. 60.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Richard Kramer, "The *thirtysomething* Journal," *Playboy*, December 1989, p. 156.
4. Terri Minsky. "The Unbearable Heaviness of Being," *Esquire*, November 1990, p. 163.
5. The beginnings of *thirtysomething*: Kramer, pg. 156; Minsky, pp. 163–64.
6. Kramer, p. 156.
7. Minsky, p. 164.
8. Reprinted in *thirtysomething Stories* (New York: Pocket Books, 1991), p. 3.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
10. In *thirtysomething Stories*, p. 60.
11. Kramer, p. 203.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
13. See Minsky, pp. 219–20, for an account of it.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
15. I speak from experience; my wife had breast cancer two years before Nancy's cancer, and while I would like to think we handled it all better than Elliot and Nancy, the show covered familiar ground.
16. Howard Rosenberg, "Are the Nights of Yuppie Angst Really Over?" *Los Angeles Times*, May 28, 1991, p. F5.
17. Kramer, p. 154.
18. Tom Shales, "Critics Corner," *Los Angeles Times TV Times*, August 20, 1989, p. 6.
19. William Broyles, Jr., *Brothers In Arms: A Journey from War to Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1986).
20. William Broyles, Jr., at the Museum of Broadcasting's Festival of Television, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, March 24, 1990.

21. Diane Haithman, "TV's 60's: War and Remembrance," *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 1988, p. VI7.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Yes, *Testament* was released first theatrically, but it was originally made for PBS's *American Playhouse*.

24. Carol Flint, Festival of Television.

25. Broyles, Festival of Television.

26. John Sacret Young, Festival of Television.

27. Woodward.

28. Flint, Festival of Television.

29. Woodward.

30. I have to admit a little bias here. Mimi Leder was a student of mine in the film program at Los Angeles City College in the early seventies, and I have followed her career with great interest. At LACC she was my student projectionist, and I can say without fear of contradiction she is a much better director than she ever was a projectionist.

31. Steven Herbert, "China Beach Winds Up Production," *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1991, p. F28.

32. *Ibid.*

33. The giveaway that they are mostly real is a credit at the end of the episode for "interview coordinator." Mimi Leder says the interviews were shot *before* the script was written. The questions were based on the treatment for the script: Phone conversation with Mimi Leder, March 5, 1992.

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