

Life on Mars: Negotiating the Quality Generation Gap

Derek Johnston

Writing in 1996, Robert J. Thompson defined a period when American television was seeing an increase in “quality television”, terming it, in his book’s title, *From Hill Street Blues to E.R.: Television’s Second Golden Age*. This conceptualisation of a new golden age of television, focussing on the idea of a resurgence in “quality television”, was set in an exclusively American context, and the discourse around “quality television” has remained largely focussed around American television ever since. For example, *Quality Popular Television*, published by the British Film Institute in 2003, dealt almost exclusively with American productions and co-productions, albeit in a number of different reception contexts. Similarly, Janet McCabe and Kim Akass’ *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond* (2007) indicates this American focus in its very title.

However, the concepts that Thompson uses, together with the idea of a “Golden Age” of television, are applicable internationally, even if the exact “ages” differ from country to country, and even from genre to genre. Where Thompson defines the first Golden Age of US television as “stretching roughly from 1947 to 1960 when serious people could take TV seriously”, (Thompson, 1996: 11) Lez Cooke, writing about British television, refers to ‘the so-called “golden age” of the 1960s and 1970s’. (Cooke, 2003: 1) Writing about a specific genre, Jonathan Rigby places the Golden Age of British television horror as being “bookended, more or less, by *Mystery and Imagination* [ABC Weekend Television, then Thames Television, 1966-1970] and *Supernatural* [BBC, 1977]”. (Rigby, 2004: 309) Cooke also notes that “Golden ages” are always partly illusory, seen through the nostalgic rose-tinted spectacles of hindsight’, (Cooke, 2003: 66) thereby emphasising the importance of the connection between the perceived “Golden Age” some time in the past and the comparatively corrupted present.

This article focuses on a particular British example of the negotiation between one “Golden Age” and the next. The first “Golden Age” is that of the 1970s *Law and Order* show, a genre which includes British domestic productions such as *The Sweeney* (Euston Films, 1975-1978), *Target* (BBC, 1977-1978) and *The Professionals* (London Weekend Television / Mark 1 Productions, 1977-1983). However, the genre was also informed by American import series such as *Starsky and Hutch* (Spelling-Goldberg Productions, 1975-1979, with UK transmission from 1976) and by films, with Lez Cooke identifying Clint Eastwood’s title role in *Dirty Harry* (Warner Bros., 1971) as the epitome of the ‘rogue cop’ figure that Regan filled in *The Sweeney*. (Cooke, 2003: 116) The second “Golden Age” under consideration is that of the recent development of sophisticated dramas which share many of the attributes which Thompson identified as characteristic of “quality drama”: something “not “regular” TV”, with “a quality pedigree”, a “blue-chip” but often small audience, internal continuity, mixed genres but an aspiration towards “realism”, complex writing, self-consciousness and intertextuality, frequently controversial subject matter and a degree of acclaim. (Thompson, 1996: 13-16)

In particular, the focus is on the police series *Life on Mars* (Kudos Film and Television / Red Planet Pictures / BBC, 2006-2007). This series not only shows its awareness of its generic predecessors, while also mixing genres in the manner identified by Thompson as indicative of “quality television”, but it also engages with them in a way which encourages the audience to consider the ways that society and media have changed between the previous generation of the Law and Order show in the 1970s and the early 21st Century viewing context of *Life on Mars*. It depicts the generational conflict between 1970s and 2000s police programming through the interaction of its characters. This article examines this dramatisation of the relationship between the different approaches of different generations of television production through the relationships depicted on screen, and suggests that this is part of a conscious attempt by television producers and writers to reinvigorate apparently tired genres in order to expand their appeal in the television market.

‘Hooked to the Silver Screen’: Inspiration and Repetition

Asked to create a new television series, writers Ashley Pharoah, Matthew Graham and Tony Jordan went on a retreat where, Graham has noted:

One of us said, «Is there any way we can just do *The Sweeney* in the Seventies?» *The Sweeney* is terminally sexist, terminally racist, all the things you just can’t do, and yet we also thought there was almost an odd innocence about it. We just had a feeling it wouldn’t turn out to be a vile piece of offensive drama but might end up being quite cool and fun, and probably the only way to do that it is to take someone with our sensibilities and plonk them right in the middle of it, so that any time Gene Hunt says, «All right luv, go and make us a cup of tea and [bring] a Garibaldi biscuit,» someone can roll their eyes. Somehow that lets us off the hook. (Graham quoted in Smith, 2007)

The series that resulted from this retreat, and eight further years of development, was *Life on Mars*, which concerns a policeman from 2006, Sam Tyler, who is involved in an accident and finds himself in 1973, in what turns out to be a fantasy that he is creating within a coma. Tyler gives the creators of the series the ‘out’ that the quote from Matthew Graham acknowledged they needed. But the tensions that Graham noted between 1970s and early 21st century sensibilities are also what drives the show. This process of negotiation between the 1970s Law and Order drama like *The Sweeney* and the police drama of the early 2000s is dramatised throughout the text of *Life on Mars* as a generational connection, primarily between parents and children, but also as a link from what went before to what is happening “now”.

This return to the recent past can be understood as part of a ‘retro’ sensibility, one which “focuses on the recent past, even if it might seem to have slipped out of sight only yesterday.” (Guffey, 2006: 17) Elizabeth E. Guffey has argued that this sensibility should be considered as separate from its associated sense of nostalgia. She writes that: “Where nostalgia is linked to a romantic sensibility that resonates with ideas of exile and longing, retro tempers these associations with a heavy dose of cynicism or detachment; although retro looks back to earlier periods, perhaps its

most enduring quality is its ironic stance.” (Guffey, 2006: 20) In other words, while nostalgia is largely about the emotions associated with the past, particularly emotions of loss, retro is more about revelling in the style of the past. For the creators of *Life on Mars*, returning to the style of *The Sweeney* was attractive, something ‘cool and fun’, with the presence of a 21st Century character providing the necessary detachment to retain an ironic, retro stance. However, for the character of Sam Tyler, the appeal of the 1970s is one of nostalgia, focussing on a sense of loss and longing rather than an obsession with look.

The series is also interesting as an appropriation of material primarily from commercial television for use by a public service broadcaster. The use of ITV’s “low” culture as a loved but criticised source for a multi-layered, critically-respected BBC narrative illustrates some of the tensions between the cultures and the expectations surrounding the different broadcasters. Similarly, it is interesting to note that *Lost in Austen* (Mammoth Screen, 2008), an ITV drama involving an individual who finds themselves somehow within Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice*, was complimented as being not the sort of thing to be expected from the channel, with Nancy Banks Smith in *The Guardian* calling it “Amazingly good for ITV” (Banks Smith, 2008) while Janine Gibson wrote that the production was “the sort of thing we’ve come to expect of BBC1.” (Gibson, 2008) These comments and associations suggest that it is the implied “cleverness” of the metatextuality of both productions that marks them as more appropriate as BBC product than as commercial. Rather than taking the simple route to successful television with a straightforward Jane Austen adaptation or an action-driven police show, these productions looked for ways to reinvigorate and comment on those successful models.

Such considerations of the relationships between the past and the present can also be perceived in other police and detective programmes with a historical setting. What *Life on Mars* does differently is to dramatise that relationship through characters on screen. Where *Inspector George Gently* (BBC / Company Pictures, 2007-) or *Foyle’s War* (Greenlit Productions / Paddock Productions, 2002-) can raise issues about how society has developed from the period of the setting to the present day, the character of Sam Tyler in *Life on Mars* can point out these connections directly, making the relationship an explicit part of the narrative. Alan Clarke has noted the particular usefulness of the police series in helping people to reflect on the changes in policing, finding that the use of televisual examples in a teaching context meant that “[t]he discussion of change suddenly came alive”. (Clarke, 1992: 232) While the viewer is free to make their own conclusions about the type and degree of change from period police and detective dramas, *Life on Mars* directly engages with those changes, pointing out changes and encouraging debate around them.

The police / detective series and historical settings can be seen to be well-suited to each other, regardless of any time-slip plotlines. Part of the detective’s role is to examine, to see and to hear, which allows for an inspection of the minutiae of the setting, and the historical details of props and locations. This can serve the desire associated with heritage drama of the viewer immersing

themselves in certain kinds of details, which Andrew Higson has termed “the pictorialist museum aesthetic [...] the ideal showcase for the visual splendour and period richness of the carefully selected interiors and locations [...] crammed with period artefacts plundered from the nation’s heritage archives”. (Higson, 2003: 39-40) However, the detective series is frequently about the “wrong” sort of details from the heritage drama viewpoint. While period-correct clothing and cars and brands are frequently displayed, the detective drama is about disruption of this setting, this historical idyll, although it is also about the restoration of the idyllic, or at least of the status quo. *Life on Mars* subverts this heritage approach to drama by making all of the apparently authentic details part of a coma-fantasy, personal memories twisted by the passing of time and the influence of the nostalgia industry, all serving the demands of a nostalgia-driven television drama. While this serves as a useful production device, whereby any anachronisms, including unintentional ones, can be explained away by it all being part of Tyler’s fantasy, narratively it functions to emphasise the constructed nature of our televised images of the past.

The series uses this nostalgic appeal to underline the falsity and the desire for the past that is part of nostalgia. Unlike the cynical, slightly mocking approach of retro, nostalgia embraces the emotional resonance of the details of the past and expresses a desire to live or relive those moments. Thus, when Tyler reawakens from his coma in 2006, he finds himself distanced from the present because he cannot ‘feel anything’, he has lost his engagement with what he is doing. The nostalgic appeal of his reconstructed Seventies, based around his memories of his childhood as activated by media representations of the period, has far more emotional connection to him. What also has a connection is his ability to change things, to make a difference, and thus to deal with the frustrations that he is shown experiencing in his day job, dealing with meetings and bureaucracy and procedure rather than directly engaging in catching criminals. The coma-fantasy Seventies allows him to make a direct difference, to solve a different crime every week, to bring in useful parts of later policing, such as recorded interviews, which satisfy his desire for due process, while retaining the freedom to act of the Seventies television Tough Cop. He can still remain superior, and show them a ‘better’ way of doing things, but it is the woman and the cars and the cops he stays for. In doing so, he accepts a demotion, from the rank of Detective Chief Inspector that he held in 2006 to his 1973 rank of Detective Inspector, signalling that he had something to learn from the past, from his DCI, Gene Hunt, a construct generated from Tyler’s media experience of Seventies policing. And it is to this media experience that we turn next.

“Take a Look at the Lawman”: *Life on Mars* and Police Television

As has already been noted, one of the key texts to consider in relation to *Life on Mars* and its inspiration is *The Sweeney*. *The Sweeney* itself bore some of the markers of «quality television» as defined by Thompson. It was derived from “Regan”, a single play in the *Armchair Thriller* anthology written by Ian Kennedy Martin, who also wrote eight episodes of the *Sweeney* series. His brother, Troy Kennedy Martin, creator of *Z-Cars* (BBC, 1962-1978) and later writer of *Reilly, Ace of Spies* (Euston Films / Mobil Oil, 1983) and *Edge of Darkness* (BBC, 1985), wrote 6

episodes of *The Sweeney*. Cooke notes the series' debt both to the 'rogue cop' sub-genre and the 'buddy-movie', (Cooke, 2003: 116) indicating the multi-genre aspect of the programme. This use of multiple genres meant that the series also managed to incorporate an appearance by comedians Morecombe and Wise who derail the villains' plans in a chase sequence which includes Morecombe throwing frozen fish from a van at the pursuers.

Anthony Clark has claimed that "*The Sweeney* was more than just a hugely successful TV series - it also acted as a catalyst for change across the entire police genre. With the arrival of Regan and Carter the innocent world of Dixon was no longer believable." (Clark) The deepest change was that the police were now being portrayed as being on a par with the criminals in their brutality, with the excuse that their violence was, like that of a Wild West lawman, on behalf of civilisation and ultimately guided by morality. This particular concept is displayed explicitly in *Life on Mars*' Gene Hunt, who not only decorates his office with posters for Western films, but who also explicitly refers to himself as "the sheriff". The connection of *The Sweeney* with the notion of 'quality television' as being socially relevant is reinforced by Toby Miller's understanding of the show as combining "British social realism with US-style violence in a bitter account of working-class strife." (Miller, 2001: 17)

Clark's reference to *Dixon of Dock Green* as 'innocent', in much the same way that Matthew Graham referred to *The Sweeney* as "innocent", illustrates the shifting interpretations of these productions between generations. While the creators of *Life on Mars* can see the Seventies as an innocent time, Clark sees the Seventies as replacing an innocent time in television police shows. Compared to *Life on Mars*, *The Sweeney* may be innocent, but compared to *The Sweeney*, *Dixon of Dock Green* was innocent. This innocence is associated with concepts of 'realism', with the belief that real life is "gritty", "dirty", corrupt, and that each new series becomes more "realistic" in its portrayal of the world (with a tendency towards 'realism' also being one of Thompson's markers of "quality television"). Morality is questionable in these less innocent productions, where it is a less complex matter in the more innocent. Like Matthew Graham, John E. Lewis and Penny Stempfelfel have described *The Sweeney* as having "an innocence under its bruiser exterior" because 'episodes concerned the apprehension of professional villains ... security van robbers, lorry-hijackers and the like - all bad boys but not murdering psychopaths.' (Lewis and Stempfelfel, 1997: 112) The criminals in these series may have chosen to take on a life of crime, but the programmes stay away from the complexities of the role of psychology and particularly psychopathology in the examination of the role of law and order in society; that aspect of policing and the criminal system would emerge later, in the late-1980s and the 1990s, as psychological profiling became a more regular part of television crimefighting.

"Innocent" also means pre-lapsarian, that the characters in *The Sweeney*, and by extension characters like Gene Hunt, know no better. They have not had the full revelations of racial and sexual equality, of the second wave feminist movement, and so on, and so cannot be criticised for behaving in a way which was considered appropriate to their society in that time and place.

They have no worries about the way that they behave because they do not know that they are doing wrong. To accept and even embrace this as an explanation of the behaviour of Hunt and his colleagues is to take the retro approach to the series, while to look to it as a set of character traits and opinions to be emulated is to take the nostalgic approach, one which James Chapman has noted is taken by the readership of “men’s magazines such as *FHM* and *Maxim*, whose thirty- and forty-something readership had grown up with *The Sweeney*.” (Chapman, 2009: 15)

Leon Hunt has also discussed the issue of 1970s nostalgia in relation to this concept of ‘innocence’, suggesting that:

1970s nostalgias construct the period as both ‘golden age’ and ‘Fall’, sometimes simultaneously. In the first version, the period is more ‘Fall’ within a ‘structure of progress’ (the 1960s were more ‘hip’, the present more ‘enlightened’), recuperable only from a position of irony. In the second, 1970s gaucheness is a signifier of innocence before a Thatcherite, style-obsessed Fall. In the third, we find a pre-politically correct ‘golden age’, and embedded within this is a kind of male heterosexual *fin de siècle*. (Hunt, 1998: 5)

These nostalgias, at once both competing and complementary, resonate within *Life on Mars*. Of particular interest with regard to the television series is the comment on the way that the 1970s ‘innocence’ preceded ‘a Thatcherite, style-obsessed Fall’, considering that the sequel series *Ashes to Ashes* is set explicitly in a 1980s which places issues of big business and big crime over the individual, together with the downsides of hedonism, alongside New Romantic and yuppie style and flash cars. The colour of *Life on Mars* is bronze or beige like the colour of Hunt’s Ford Cortina, while that of *Ashes to Ashes* is the rich red that features in all of lead character Alex Drake’s costumes for the first and second season, together with the paint job of the Audi Quattro that Gene Hunt drives. *Life on Mars* is subdued and domestic, concerned with family, while *Ashes to Ashes* loses its focus on family after the first series to concentrate on the self of Alex Drake and her perception of her time-slip.

‘But her mummy is yelling «No» and her daddy has told her to go’: *Life on Mars* and Family

The parental connection of *The Sweeney* to *Life on Mars* was regularly commented on during publicity and commentary on the series by creators, production staff, cast and journalists. Other significant and regularly cited inspirations, or relatives if we continue the generational metaphor, for *Life on Mars* included *Starsky and Hutch* and *Get Carter*, programmes and films that centred on a certain macho, direct and physical approach to resolving problems. These were the productions which inspired the creators of *Life on Mars*, but in doing so they also create the coma-fantasy world of Sam Tyler within the fiction of *Life on Mars*. Tyler is using these media inspirations to comfort himself and to work through some of his own psychological and emotional issues, while the creators of *Life on Mars* use Tyler and his reactions to his created 1973 to work through some of their issues with these fictional progenitors. The importance of this media origin for the series and for Tyler’s fantasy is clearly emphasised in the text by the way that Tyler is

contacted by both psychological guides and his real world of 2006 through televisions, radios, a projected film. In the very first episode, Tyler is left hugging a television and crying 'Please don't leave me!' because the Open University lecturer who appeared on the screen had diverted from their lecture to clearly talk about Tyler's coma, providing him with a link to his real world. This clearly shows the strong emotional link to 1970s media, particularly television, that the creators of the show acknowledge.

The use of technology as a medium between Tyler's internal fantasy and his external world has a number of obvious reasons. There is the uncanny aspect of hearing a radio talking about you or to you, or seeing a character on a television programme do the same, approaching the camera as if to examine you more closely. The appearance of a character from the television, the Test Card Girl, within Tyler's fantasy, apparently leaving her place on the television screen to talk to him directly, is particularly unsettling, breaching the boundaries between the screen world and the everyday. This particular breach is one that also carries echoes of films such as *Ringu* (1998), *Videodrome* (1983) and *Poltergeist* (1982), where the television apparatus acts as a supernatural link to a frightening but greater reality, leading to an expanding of the characters' understanding of the universe. The technology also gives a focus for the voices, rather than having Tyler simply "hear voices", while the one-way nature of the media shows Tyler's entrapment within his comatose mind and his isolation from the sources of those voices. This technological mediation can also be understood as a rationalisation within Tyler's comatose mind of those things which he is aware of in the outside world, but the fact that it is television and radio through which he predominantly rationalises them, rather than through, for example, other characters, shows that the medium itself is important.

But it is in the focus on changes and relationships between generations, between predecessors and successors, that *Life on Mars* really works through its issues with its own predecessors. Of the sixteen episodes produced, only two have no obvious use of the concept of generations and how they influence each other. Episodes feature parents who commit, or admit to, crimes for the sake of their children, often violent crimes which will earn money to support a family. Other crimes are performed by parents and mentors to maintain social coherence, such as the acceptance of bribes by Hunt from a gangster which helps maintain the gangster's control over criminal activity in the city. In this respect, there is an element of what Leon Hunt has identified as a key aspect of "the 1970s "Law and Order" show in which hard men do unpopular things to protect the "national interest"." (Hunt, 2001: 129) The criminal parent or mentor is forging the way or ensuring the future for their successors, performing illegal or immoral acts so that those who follow them will not have to.

The issue of coming to terms with the "sins" of 1970s Law and Order programming is most strongly dramatised in the last episode of the first season of *Life on Mars*. Tyler's mother had already featured in the series, and his family life had been built up as one which was essentially happy, but with a largely absent, travelling salesman father. This episode depicts Tyler's father

as a gangster, looking to move into the void in Manchester left by the arrest of the ganglord by Tyler and Hunt in an earlier episode. Tyler has to come to terms with the idea of his father as a pornographer and organised criminal who is willing to kill to get what he wants. In other words, his father deals explicitly in sex and violence. This dramatises the conflict with the violent and exploitatively sexist 1970s Law and Order programmes which the creators of *Life on Mars* had to face. The way that Tyler finally lets his father go, because for him to be imprisoned would destroy his family, can be understood as another way of expressing the desire to accept the pleasures of these earlier dramas while “letting go” of their worst crimes against modern tastes. To unravel the Law and Order programmes too far would be, from this viewpoint, to reveal not only the problems with the dramas themselves, but also to unravel their television ‘family’ and the structures that connect these earlier dramas with current ones. To reveal that the use of violence in 1970s Law and Order programmes is an essentially authoritarian response to changes in the wider culture, for example, would lead to a questioning of the legacy of finding pleasure in that violence, and the way that modern police shows, including *Life on Mars*, have grown out of that tradition.

Nevertheless, this sort of questioning is exactly what occurs all the way through *Life on Mars*, negotiating the difficult boundary between nostalgia and kitsch. Tyler’s continued emphasis on the consequences of the behaviour and methods of fictional 1973 policing is intended as a counterpoint to the nostalgic pleasures of gold Cortinas ploughing through piles of cardboard boxes or sending newspaper spinning across the road, or of a van full of police engaging in a fistfight with a gang. Without this critical voice and the desire to change the fictional world to better fit with modern mores, we are left with what Andy Medhurst has termed:

the dispiriting voice of depoliticized kitsch, where giggling at a pair of flared trousers takes precedence over questioning an attempt to turn sexual brutalization into comedy, and where there is a palpable nostalgia for a pre-feminist world in which sexual liberation meant the chance for men to earn status by screwing around as much as they liked. Kitsch strategies [...] can all too easily drift from an attempt at wrong-footing the stuffier, more humourless end of ‘political correctness’ to an endorsement of those reactionary worldviews which ‘PC’ set out, quite rightly, to challenge. (Medhurst, 2001: 185)

Tyler is only able to accept his father’s criminality (which may only exist in Tyler’s coma-fantasy) because it has first been revealed to him, just as the creators of *Life on Mars* had to first unravel the strands of violence, corruption and misogyny in the 1970s Law and Order series for them to establish an enjoyable, genre-conscious modern drama complete with action and characterisation, and just the right kind of nostalgic pleasure.

‘Beating Up the Wrong Guy’: Questions of Violence and Corruption

This is clearly not an unproblematic relationship, that the harshness of 1970s society had to be met, at least in the media, with tough action, that unlawful behaviour was required to create a safer, more stable and affluent society. Hunt’s corruption and violence is frequently depicted as

a problem for Tyler, the representative of 2006 society, not just for its failure to match Tyler's morals but for the way that it caused problems for Tyler's generation. Hunt's acceptance of self-governing organised crime is seen as representative of the whole police force, and when he and Tyler arrest the gangster who had ruled the city, it is seen as affecting every police officer, with Hunt commenting that they are all 'walking a bit taller' as a result of the arrest. But there are other consequences, with the opening up of organised crime in the city to new and different organisations, and its fragmentation amongst factions unknown to the police.

Similarly, Hunt's use of implied and actual violence against suspects is shown to be of some use, gaining leads, while not being completely accepted. The use of violence by Ray Carling, Hunt's right-hand-man before Tyler 'arrived', leads to the death of a suspect; he claims that he was just doing what Hunt would do, but Hunt confides to Tyler that he is scared by his successors like Carling, because they do not understand where to draw the line the way that he, Hunt, does. Again, Hunt is clearly the media tough cop of the 1970s, whose violence is justified by its role in preserving society at large, while other violent police, like Carling, are representative of the real problems of violence in policing. Hunt is essentially a good man who does what has to be done by any means necessary, while Carling does not consider the deeper needs, he merely does. The issue of violence within *Life on Mars* is a complex one, as the series accepts fights amongst the police as part of the retro fun of the programme, acting often as a form of male bonding and with no lasting consequences. In this, the programme fits with Lucy Lippard's description of "retro" as the work of "those artists who embraced socially unacceptable attitudes as libertarian gestures [... and as] a symbol of resistance to the political and social certainties of the mainstream". (Guffey, 2006: 15) However, violence enacted by criminals or by the police against each other or their victims is shown as having consequences, often devastating, such as the shootings of June the cleaner in season one, episode two, or of Ravi in season two, episode six.

This apparent contradiction, or confusion, around the use of violence in the show makes more sense when it is considered not as it affects the characters, but as "a vehicle through which meanings are transferred: one technically suited to the television medium with visual, active face-to-face (or fist-to-face) contact that fills the optimum mid-shot / close-up range of the television camera frame." (Fiske and Hartley, 2003 :145) The fist fights between police officers are all about the maintenance of status and power within the Force, or within the group of characters, and their "ritual condensation of social conflicts" (Ídem: 147) does not ultimately do violence to the status quo of society, the programme, or to the expectations of a retro 1970s police show developed from accepted concepts of what such a show would, or should, be like. Other violence, criminal violence, is depicted as having stronger consequences because its root meaning is not one that has been translated by an understanding of the tropes and cliches of the 1970s *Law and Order* show. Instead, it retains the same meaning that it had in those programmes: the demonstration of illegal and antisocial activity and its subdual by the superior forces of dominant power and sensibilities.

PREVIOUSLY ON

This is reflective of the way that the creators of *Life on Mars* used the series to remake the 1970s Law and Order show into something more acceptable to modern sensibilities. A bit of freewheeling action is perceived as retro fun, but the realities of the historical situation are acknowledged and must be dealt with. There must be consequences. There also has to be a possibility of change and redemption, which largely happens through Tyler introducing more modern policing ideas which protect witnesses, maintain evidence, focus on detection and community, and the maintenance of legality within the police force. In effect, Tyler begins to reshape this fantasised 1973 into a more comfortable ideal of policing, combining modern techniques of deduction and profiling and gathering evidence with the appeal of immediate action and avoidance of red tape.

Tyler's reshaping of the police of his imagined 1973 carries with it echoes of what Alan Clarke has identified as the development of post-*Sweeney* British police television through series such as *Juliet Bravo* (BBC, 1980-1985), *The Gentle Touch* (London Weekend Television, 1980-1984) and *The Bill* (Thames Television, 1984-2005; Talkback Thames, 2005-2010). This development was the increased presence of female characters and the return to concerns about community and 'the routine and mundane crimes of everyday life'. (Clarke, 1992: 249) In *Life on Mars* this development is represented by the character of Annie Cartwright, who begins as a WPC primarily providing office support to Hunt's detectives, but who is immediately brought into CID's work by Tyler drawing upon her psychology degree in attempting to profile a criminal, and who ultimately becomes a detective constable. Even the character's name serves to point towards its inspirations in previous television police programmes, being reminiscent of 'Anna Cartaret', the name of the second actress to play the lead role in *Juliet Bravo*. The character of Cartwright serves as an emotional contact with Tyler, enabling him to talk about his feelings and experiences in a way that would appear artificial with the other CID characters, while also providing an opportunity for the show to directly engage with the issue of the treatment of women as professionals in the 1970s police show. Clarke also notes that these post-*Sweeney* series carry 'a greater emphasis on due process and proper procedure' a concern which is central to Tyler's interaction with his 1973 counterparts. (Clarke, 1992: 250)

The 1970s police series' treatment of crime as part of an action show, devoid of consequences, has been seen as something new to that period. As Clarke has pointed out:

An important element of the police series prior to the 1970s had been the sense of social conscience that the series had portrayed. Quite often the crime which formed the subject matter for an evening's episode would be treated in complex ways, considering the underlying causes of the action, the criminal's individual problems as well as the police response which was deemed to be most appropriate. (Clarke, 1992: 236)

Unlike the community-based officers of *Dixon of Dock Green* or even *Z-Cars*, *The Sweeney* presented a situation where "the policeman no longer enjoys any sense of belonging." (Clarke, 1992: 237) This sense of disconnection is clearly one that is emphasised by Tyler's particular predicament in *Life on Mars*, a situation that his mind has created in an attempt to understand

his feelings of detachment from everyday life and everyday policing in 2006. Yet for him, and in his created 1970s, Hunt and his officers are connected to the community, are concerned with individuals, in a way that Tyler feels has been lost. This is another example of the way that nostalgia re-interprets the past, particularly when refracted through memories of the media and childhood associations. Tyler's memories of 1970s media are associated for him with ideas of family and belonging, ideas which he then projects onto policing in his imagined 1970s.

'It's About to be Writ Again': Conclusions and Continuations

Life on Mars has now produced its own offspring. Most obviously, there is the direct sequel-cum-spinoff *Ashes to Ashes*. This series particularly complicates the issues raised in this chapter by providing a different explanation for the time-shift aspect of the show. No longer are we watching the coma fantasy of a particular individual; instead, we are privy to a kind of police afterlife, with the characters being explained as all dying before their time in different time periods and coming together in this purgatory to come to some sort of terms with this and to move on. The shift in perspective is signalled by the fact that *Ashes to Ashes* does not have the main point-of-view character, Alex Drake, in every scene, as was done with *Life on Mars*.

This is clearly a reimagining of the central concept, not entirely compatible with *Life on Mars*, but not entirely incompatible either. If we followed Tyler's perspective in *Life on Mars*, that could be seen as merely his contribution to this purgatory, and his interpretation of it, while *Ashes to Ashes* shows the perspectives of more of the other characters. It could be significant that one of the creators of *Life on Mars*, Tony Gordon, did not continue on to *Ashes to Ashes*. All of this indicates that, despite their links, the two series can be considered and interpreted separately. Indeed, the final shot of the series implies that at least one other series can be pulled into the continuity of *Life on Mars / Ashes to Ashes*, as it closes with a characteristic sign-off from *Dixon of Dock Green* (BBC, 1955-1976), a series developed around the character of PC George Dixon, who had been introduced and killed in the film *The Blue Lamp* in 1950, but whose television adventures showed him enjoying a career which extended into the mid-1970s. This extends the set of potential connections to be found in previous media as inspirations for *Life on Mars / Ashes to Ashes* as well as suggesting that these are not the first programmes to chart the experiences of a policeman in this afterlife.

Other "offspring" of *Life on Mars* can be found on other channels and in other national contexts. As discussed above, ITV has shown *Lost in Austen*, described by one reviewer as "a shameless blending of *Pride and Prejudice* with *Life on Mars*", (Walton, 2008) in which a 21st Century woman finds herself in Austen's novel, disrupting narratives and relationships. And, most interestingly, as far as this article is concerned, there are the American and Spanish versions of *Life on Mars*, and the ways that they interact with their British parent and with their own equivalent of the British 1970s Law and Order series. The American series rejected the coma-fantasy element as too restricting, (Rawson-Jones, 2008) ultimately presenting the 1970s setting as part of a virtual reality programme entertaining Sam Tyler on his voyage to Mars, as part of the first

manned mission there. Tyler's need to feel, to engage emotionally, that drives the British original, becomes more of a search for a father figure, a "gene hunt". Meanwhile the Spanish version, *La Chica de Ayer* (Ida y Vuelta P.F., 2009), was set in 1977, to avoid having to deal with Franco's regime. (Sherwin and Catan, 2008) Even in the realm of direct sequels and direct remakes, it appears that it is now essential to identify elements of the predecessor programme which need to be changed, because they do not fit the sensibilities or the times of the new production. The process of renegotiation between generations continues.

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