

**THE LITTLE MAN COMEDIES OF CHARLIE DRAKE  
AND THEIR RELATION TO THE UNCONSCIOUS**

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**Portrait of Charlie Drake by the artist Gerard de Rose (c.1960s)**

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A seemingly unlikely source was the 'user' comments' facility on *YouTube*, which brought me into contact with Simon Trewin who had an unhappy time working as a stage manager with Drake in the panto 'Jack and the Beanstalk' at the Beck Theatre, Hayes. I am deeply indebted to Trewin and Ventham for not allowing my assessment of Drake's personality to become erroneously one-sided.

By way of contrast my correspondence with the nephew of Kenneth Connor on *YouTube* and the reactions of many users who rushed to defend Connor after I posted a provocative comment about the 'little man' character[s] he plays in the *Carry On* films confirmed my suspicions that the way the public relate psychologically to the characters they play is

coloured as much by an intensely cosseted private life as by any sleaze that a star becomes identified with under the intense spotlight (cosseted or not) of the media gaze, and it is the public who cannot or do not want to separate persona from personality.

I am grateful to Nicholas Parsons for the telephone interview he gave me in 2009 where he discussed working with Connor in *Carry On Regardless*. Parsons helped me to understand that there is a fundamental difference between an actor who plays the 'little man' type written for him by a scriptwriter and a comic like Drake who creates the 'little man' character he plays. Thanks go to Louisa Clifton at Diamond Management, London, for contacting Parsons on my behalf.

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As important as these personal accounts are other archives have been extremely useful too. I am indebted to Catherine Gerbrands, Archivist of the performing art industries newspaper 'The Stage' who helped my trawl through over 900 'hits' on the database to uncover now forgotten interviews and publicity photographs of Drake throughout his career.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis has two purposes: to examine the film and television ‘little man’ comedies of the British comic Charlie Drake in order to rescue him from the neglect that has masked his work, and to recover psycho-analysis as a viable critical methodological tool for understanding comedy. This thesis tests the applicability of psycho-analytic cultural theory to British Television and film comedy by using Drake’s work as a case history; given the scope of the thesis I also draw upon his work on dreams, the Oedipus complex, and castration anxiety as Freud’s work on jokes, humour and the comic was part of a triad of books that explores the trivial in the *psychopathology of everyday life*.

The thesis adopts a psycho-analytic position because the ‘little man’ character(s) played by Drake render them amenable to a Freudian analysis. Much of the research material included in the thesis pertaining to Drake’s private life supports the argument that Drake’s ‘little man’ comedies and the ‘little man’ character he created are psycho-biographical. Similarly, audience research reports provide evidence that men’s appreciation of Drake’s comedies was different to women’s which explains why the psycho-sociological reception of his ‘little man’ character(s) popular appeal was predetermined.

## Introduction

This thesis has two purposes: to examine the film and television ‘little man’ comedies of the British comic Charlie Drake in order to rescue him from the neglect that has masked his work, and to recover psycho-analysis as a viable critical methodological tool for understanding comedy. Using archival research and traditional textual analysis, I examine Drake’s contribution to British film and television comedy set in a context of a reappraisal of his extensive career. The archival research compiled in the Appendix provides the first comprehensive record of his achievements, and an application of cultural theory drawn from psycho-analysis, specifically Freud’s work on jokes and the unconscious, will uncover the nature of his success, especially of his ‘little man’ character and the social function of his humour. Some evidence of that success is provided by the BBC Audience Research Reports (a systematic tool devised by the BBC to measure its own audiences’ reactions) where comments at live television broadcasts of Drake’s shows were recorded.

The rationale for the archival research was to construct a comprehensive history of Drake’s film & television career. Drake is an important figure in British broadcasting history and won every accolade in his day, yet none of his work (with the exception of *The Worker* television series) is generally available today so the retrieval of any additional audio-visual material (for example in the BFI’s archive, or clips on YouTube) is vital to a study reliant on textual analysis. The Appendix contains a complete list of Drake’s film and television work which has been compiled into one reference catalogue from a number of sources. The exhaustive work of two authors, in particular, has been of vital importance and has laid the foundation for the Appendix: Denis Gifford and Mark Lewisohn.

In his first edition of *The British Film Catalogue* (1973), Gifford does not include Drake’s final film, *Professor Popper’s Problem* (1974). He amended the list in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *The British Film Catalogue* (2001), and now all of Drake’s films are included. In Gifford’s *The Illustrated Who’s Who in British Films* (1978) only scanty biographical detail on Drake is given: ‘Actor. London. TV(1950). Small slapstick star’ (1978: 88), and there is none at all where you might expect it in his book *Entertainers In British Films* (1998). Lewisohn’s *Radio Times Guide to TV Comedy* (2003) offers more biographical information and useful commentaries, but it does not list all of Drake’s television work. *Halliwel’s Film Guide*, the *Radio Times Guide to Films* 2007, *The Encyclopedia of British Film* (McFarlane & Slide

2003) and the BFI's *screenonline* database billed as a 'definitive guide to Britain's film and TV history' all fail to provide any details of Drake's films.

The Appendix brings together Drake's film and television work into one reference source and provides comprehensive descriptive detail. Supporting historical documentation also forms an important part of the Appendix, including descriptions of Drake's 'little man' character appearances, BBC Audience Research Reports, message board comments posted on the IMDb online database, and user comments on YouTube. Overall, the Appendix is compiled mainly from Gifford and Lewisohn, but more details have been included from the London edition of the *TV Times* (1955-1985), recently made accessible by the British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFVC) in its digitalised TVTiP Project [www.tvtip.buafc.ac.uk](http://www.tvtip.buafc.ac.uk), and with findings from archival research at the BFI. Ultimately, this more complete catalogue of Drake's film and television work serves as a reference document for the main body of the thesis, and fills in important gaps about his film and television work.

Descriptions of Drake's screen characters reveal the persona that he developed for the small and big screen, and the chronological arrangement of the Appendix helps to chart Drake's rise (and fall) in popularity as a television star. It also shows that the 'little man' character he created, first as a children's entertainer while a Butlin's Redcoat; and then in the very successful television show *Mick and Montmorency*, was the comic invention responsible for his meteoric rise to fame as a mainstream entertainer. Drake's face was featured on the front covers of the *Radio Times* and the *TVTimes* more times than any other comic and he was so famous in the 1960s that his public appearances were considered newsworthy; as can be seen in newsreels accessed through the BUFVC database and the British Pathe News Archive [www.britishpathe.com](http://www.britishpathe.com). (see Appendix p.234-235). His arrival in town as the king of comedy in *The Man In The Moon* pantomime actually stopped the traffic in London in 1965 (photographs of the event can be accessed through [www.gettyimages.co.uk](http://www.gettyimages.co.uk). (see Appendix p.242). Drake's television shows were consistently among the top ten twenty television shows watched in the 1960s, as the Television Audience Measurement (TAM) ratings, published in *The Stage* newspaper, show; they are collected from the archive database [www.thestage.co.uk](http://www.thestage.co.uk) and Teletronic: The Television History Site [www.teletronic.co.uk](http://www.teletronic.co.uk).

Why did Drake's 'little man' character become so popular with audiences that the 'real' Charlie Drake became such a big star with the public? The rationale of a psycho-analytically

inflected analysis of Drake's work in the thesis is to go beyond historical survey to propose why Drake had such popular appeal for television audiences. The importance of historical sources becomes obvious in a psycho-analytic study if we consult them with this question in mind; what do they reveal about the audiences watching Drake? Clearly their reaction is irrefutably bound to a historical *present* that reflects their social attitudes and demographics, but it also reveals a desire to construct the comedian in a way which is complicated by a reluctance to separate the fictional character from the 'real' persona of the performer.

Steve Seidman's work is useful because he examines how comedian comedies tried to trade on the popular appeal of a star performer's persona by developing extrafictional techniques that enabled the comedian to perform as himself. Devices such as the look to camera, and direct verbal address, says Seidman, offered 'a mode of self-presentation that emphasised the individual's presence and personality' (2003:33). These techniques allowed a comedian to 'draw on [...] aspects of his extrafictional self-ness' (36) as Drake does throughout a series like *The Worker* (1965-1970).

Historical sources help to build a psycho-biographical portrait of the extra-fictional Drake. They further show that the entertainment media, the producers and promoters of Drake's comedies, deliberately fused the fictional character and the 'real' Drake. So, an interview in the *TVTimes* that promises to uncover the 'real' Charlie Drake's life story in six parts (September-October, 1963, see Appendix p.237), doesn't, and the *Picture Show* article 'Charlie Drake: How He Really Is When He's Off TV' (24 September, 1960), simply represents him as a film star à la mode 'little man'. Even later interviews with Drake in the *TVTimes* by Anthony Davis (February 25, 1965), Max Caulfield (October 2, 1965), or Kenneth Passingham (March 20, 1971, see Appendix p.238) that discuss the break up of his marriage and his bachelor life are soon directed (by Drake) to discussions about the loneliness of writing comedy. They also provide evidence that help to form an analysis of his success because they suggest the psychology behind the humour of the audiences watching his comedies. The complicated relationship between the 'real' Charlie Drake and the fictional 'little man' character he created can be assessed with more confidence because the BBC Audience Reports provide some hard data about how audiences responded to his comedies. At the same time they help to justify what Freud says about the psycho-sociological purpose that jokes, the comic and humour provide for the individual in the social context of everyday life.

Given the level of psychological investment Drake has in his character, sources such as Drake's autobiography,<sup>1</sup> interviews in film magazines, such as the *TV Mirror and Disc News* (12 July, 1958), *PictureGoer with Disc Parade* (25 October, 1958), or *Picture Show and TV Mirror* (30 July, 1960), or newspaper Sunday supplements such as the Mail on Sunday *You* magazine (June 1991), and even newspaper obituaries (see Appendix p.242), become useful to a psycho-analytically inflected analysis of Drake's life and work. Even something as seemingly innocuous as the *ABC Film Review* (June 1963) magazine, or an exhibition pamphlet of Drake's paintings ('Top of the Pops' 20 November, 1962) can provide an important psychological insight into Drake's life as a celebrity comic because it allows us think about his work in a psycho-analytic way. My interviews with Drake's manager and some of his fellow comedians, whose opinions are glowing, are counter-balanced by interviews with a stage manager and actors who worked with Drake that are less than complimentary. They help to explain that an attitude other than humour is shared between an audience and a comic like Drake, something again that is revealed in the BBC Audience Research Reports.

The rich sources in the Appendix provide an armature for the argument proposed in the thesis, and they contribute significantly to the formation of the psycho-analytic perspectives adopted in this study, and, since I had adopted Freud's theories on joke-work and implied audience in an earlier research study to explore the 'little man' characters played by Kenneth Connor in the *Carry On* films<sup>2</sup> (around whom the comedy of castration coalesces). Freud was a tested source to return to. This thesis tests the further applicability of psycho-analytic cultural theory to British television and film comedy; given the scope of the thesis I also draw upon his work on dreams,<sup>3</sup> the Oedipus complex,<sup>4</sup> and castration anxiety<sup>5</sup> as Freud's work on jokes,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Drake, C. *Drake's Progress*, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Bannister, J. 'Carry On Joking: Freud, Laughter and the Hysterical Male in the *Carry On* Films', M.A. (by Research), University of Central Lancashire, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Freud, S. *The Interpretation of Dreams (Part I)* (1900): *Part II* (1900-1901) and *On Dreams* (1900-1901): *The Standard Edition (SE) of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vols. IV and V, London, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. SE Vol. IV. See also Freud, S. *Two Case Histories: ('Little Hans' and the 'Rat Man')* 1909, SE Vol. X 1955.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. SE Vol. IV. See also *The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex* (1924) SE Vol. XIX, 1961 and *Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes* (1925), SE Vol. XIX, 1961, pp. 257-258.

<sup>6</sup> Freud, S. *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), SE Vol. VIII, 1975.

humour and the comic was part of a triad of books that explores the trivial in the *psychopathology of everyday life*.<sup>7</sup>

The adoption of psycho-analysis, in particular Freud's work on the study of humour, as the main academic analytic framework in the thesis, comes from a desire to re-centre psycho-analysis within film and media studies. Freud's work on humour was pioneering because his

intention was to explain the phenomena of jokes and humor in the same terms he used to explain other psychological phenomena, and thereby to fit this account into his overall picture of mental processes. It is entirely consistent with his general psychoanalytic theory, and in fact works to illuminate other aspects of it' (Marmysz 2005:38).

Freud attempted to make psycho-analysis a comprehensive psychology, so he did not limit himself to abstract theories alone. He was concerned with everyday life and the detrimental effect on the mental well-being of the individual trying to function socially under the laws prescribed by a patriarchal society that determines their individual subjective experience by censoring their instinctive primitive urges and denying them expression. Storr (2001:82-85) reminds us that 'One of Freud's early excursions from the consulting room into everyday life was concerned with humour. Had he confined himself to the study of the various forms of mental illness, psychoanalysis would hardly have exerted so wide an influence'. What makes Freud's work so enduring, so adaptable, and so often utilised by academics (often without acknowledgement) is that 'it yields particularly definitions about subjectivity and social life which may be definitive and capable of generalised application' as Cook and Berninck (2002:343) suggest.

The point here is that Freud averred his theory applied not just to the neurotic patient who failed to function in society, but to the normal person who had found a psychic pathway to 'draw pleasure from a source which [an] obstacle has made inaccessible' (Freud 1975:100-1)<sup>8</sup> in order to circumvent the satisfaction of an instinct.

In the 1950s that 'obstacle', the prohibitions on unacceptable social behaviour imposed by censorship, produced complex child-like 'little man' character types in television and film comedy who were sexually inhibited, neurotic and the butt of society's jokes, but at the same

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<sup>7</sup> Freud, S. *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), SE Vol. VI, 1960.

<sup>8</sup> Freud, S. *A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works* (1901-1905), SE Vol. VII, 1975.

time were rebellious, raucous, and anti-authoritarian; the 'little man' who made figures of authority into figures of fun for audiences' to laugh at. However, the 'little man' character was only allowed to be rebellious because he was ridiculous and his rebellion was rendered harmless because it was safely hidden behind a comic mask of infancy.

We can make sense of this if we connect what Freud has to teach us about infantile sexual development and the male child that fails to negotiate the Oedipus Complex and becomes the neurotic adult, and the child-like 'little man' character whose behaviour is infantile, who is sexually fixated at the anal stage, whose mannerisms and looks, (especially in Drake's case) are babyish and bisexually perverse, with what he has to tell us about the appeal of the 'comic' in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905).

If infantile sexual development is the core around which Freud's psychoanalytic theory coalesces, and the notional cause of neurosis is arrested sexual development, then the 'little man' character in comedy is clearly a manifestation of this, and slapstick (which goes hand-in-hand with 'little man' comedies) serves the same function of circumventing the hostile and aggressive desires to punish (and protect) the 'little man' for behaving like a child. It does not require a leap of faith to realise why Drake's 'little man' character(s) are self-destructive, or why they are repeatedly made to face up to their pre-Oedipal sexually regressed baby-selves in nightmare dream sequences. Freud's work on dreams is particularly illuminating because it becomes relevant when we analyse Drake's 'little man' character whose dreams serve the same psychological purpose as jokes do when joking fails for him. Thus, slapstick humour, played as a dream sequence in Drake's comedies, performs two functions; they are either nightmare manifestations of the 'little man-child's' tantrums and castration anxieties, where the pursuit of personal pleasure (the satisfaction of infantile urges) is prevented by patriarchal law, or they are 'star' performances; mechanisms that Drake developed to satisfy the 'infantile' wish-fulfilment to be loved and adored by audience.

This thesis adopts a psycho-analytic approach because the 'little man' characters<sup>9</sup> played by Drake render themselves amenable to a Freudian analysis. Drake's television comedies (like the *Carry On* films) exhibit a recurrent theoretical preoccupation with psycho-analysis in

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<sup>9</sup> At this point it should be understood that the author contends that Drake nearly always played the same 'little man' character, unlike say the diminutive actor Kenneth Connor who played different 'little man' character parts that were allegedly not written specifically for him. For this reason I have adopted to use the [s] symbol in parenthesis to signify the singular nature of Drake's 'little man' character.



terms popularised by public discourses about Freud and his theories; themes such as castration, self-castration, hysteria, neurosis, repression, regression, aggression, psycho-analysis, self-analysis and dreams, are used as devices to create tragi-comic situations that his 'little man' character has to confront as he tries to face up to his father-fixation complex with the only means of defence left available to him, his giant sense of humour.

Freud's work on humour in *Jokes* is particularly instructive in relation to Drake's success because he not only explains the psychological purpose of jokes (as a defence weapon against figures of authority), he explains the social function of jokes, which reveal a great deal about the intimate relationship between an audience and a comic like Drake. But, Freud's work on jokes goes even further; it reveals the psycho-genesis of the 'little man' character Drake created, and how his performance persona was a mask that helped him to fulfil a wish to fight back against authority figures through comedy that he felt could not do in his real life (again his autobiography provides evidence of this); something that was nurtured through personal experience and formed his particular sense of humour. Drake's 'little man' character was successful because audiences shared the same sense of humour as he did. And even if they did not always empathise with his 'little man' character who had lost his "nich in der society",<sup>10</sup> they understood how he felt. Sharing a sense of humour was a survival mechanism that offered some relief to the individual who wanted to 'Walk tall'[er]<sup>11</sup> than the 'little man' being laughed at.

Freud's 'general psychology' provides a critical discourse that can be used to explore why Drake's working class 'little man' comedies were so popular with television audiences, which is why this thesis adopts psycho-analysis as its main academic framework.

The comic who performed for the film and television mainstream audience created a persona that was of but not one of them. Drake represented them as underdogs in society, he reflected their everyday lives as working folk, but he represented them fulfilling a wish they could not, by fighting back against authority. Comedy was the communal mental mechanism that made the 'little man' character believable as a giant killer and acceptable because he was working class just like them.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Worker*, 'Out of the Mouths of Casual Labourers' series 1, episode 2, ITV (ATV), Saturday 6 March, 1965.

<sup>11</sup> *The Worker*, 'A Host of Golden Casual Labourers' series 2, episode 1, ITV (ATV), Saturday 2 October, 1965.

Drake deliberately cultivated the image of the working man when he played unemployed worker Charles Drake from Weybridge in *The Worker*. It was a eureka moment for him, 'I'd got it!' he exclaims in his autobiography (1986:119). He was under pressure to come up with a workable idea after he left the BBC and had signed a new contract with ITV, 'I had to find a hook to hang thirty-six pictures on, one for each of the shows I was contracted to make' (1986:118) he recalls. However, he did not create a 'new' 'little man' character but a variation on the type of 'man the public would associate with, one who had a characteristic that would appeal to everyone' (1986:118). The working class character type *was* the type he played; and one reason his 'little man' comedies were so popular with audiences.

Ever since World War Two the working class had been the focus of attention in films that promoted the idea of community spirit and the working class hero. The war enfranchised the working class entertainer, too, because their services to the nation had been an important part of the war effort. Comics in particular played an essential role in keeping up morale because they made people laugh when they needed to the most, and the people who knew how best to make the working class laugh were those who came from within their own ranks. After the war many of these comedians found work in radio but once television had started broadcasting again there was an increasing demand for audiences to see the faces of clowns who had made them laugh but who were invisible when they had tuned into their favourite radio shows. Once the 'other' channel, dedicated to entertaining popular audiences, began broadcasting in 1955, finding performers who could appeal to this demographic was a key battleground. Drake's working man character was part of that tradition and his success capitalised on it, though it is perhaps best glorified in the slightly later television series *The Worker*. With an opening title sequence that seems to follow a blueprint of the popular 'work shy' working class type, Charlie comes out of his boarding house bedsit dressed in overalls, puts on his jacket and cloth cap, walks across the road to the labour exchange (conveniently located close by), turns to camera, smiles, makes a 'job' of taking off his jacket and doffing his cap while the theme song 'I'm only a working man' is played over the entire sequence. The singing voice the audience hears as the show opens is Drake's, but it is meant to be Charlie's, just as his anti-anthem to work is meant to be theirs as they sing along with him.

But there is a disharmony because the singer is not the fictional character (Charlie), it is Drake, the creator of the song (and of *The Worker* series). The audience's investment in the star involves some understanding about how the fictional character and the star persona are

separate entities, and we need to recognise that the audience's investment in them is quite separate from the (cynical) investment of the producers for whom the consumption of the star is not pleasure, but business, and that Drake was an entertainer trying to sell a product (himself) to earn a serious living. Here, as Seidman points out in his discussion of comedian comedy, the comedian (here Drake) 'may be seen in the *actual* role of enunciator, a usurper (*not* a stand-in for) the inscribed enunciative privilege of those 'producers' who suppress signs of their presence' (2003:29)<sup>12</sup> because Drake had complete creative control of both his fictional character and his extra-diegetic star persona.

Seidman's conclusions are useful when he points out that extrafictional 'techniques [...] cohered into conventions [and] many of these conventions – such as performing to the spectator, references to the comedian's star persona, [...] and the revealing of narrative as a contrivance – are geared towards the production of aware spectators' (40). Although Drake made his fame on television, in that sense his 'extrafictional personality' (33) was 'pre-filmic' (21); it existed before the film text. Drake had learnt most of these techniques as a Butlin's Redcoat and in pantomime performing in front of a live audience. These techniques are clearly visible in a series like *The Worker* and they would have to have been established previously or the lack of rapport between Drake and his audience would have made the comedy unsuccessful. For example, in the title sequence of *The Worker* just before Charlie goes into the labour exchange he turns to camera and through this direct address to camera the audience identifies him as Drake. Similarly, as Charlie takes off his coat and cap, and turns to camera to shrug his shoulders Drake is acknowledging his audience. It is not Charlie anymore but Drake the 'knowing' clown (and Drake the star) who is shedding his working class performance persona as he doffs his 'jingly hat' and takes a bow. At such times, he is, as Seidman states, 'presenting the 'I', exhibiting the self in such a way as to induce an immediate response (laughter, applause, and sing along) from the audience' (22). It is in such moments that Drake reveals Charlie is a common fool and Drake is the star; the famous television clown. It is here that a 'literal' reading of the 'little man' character(s) Drake created and the 'real' psychology of Charlie Drake becomes an interesting dialogue throughout the thesis. The construction of that fictional comedic character and the 'self-presentation' (33) of

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<sup>12</sup> My italics.

the 'real' Charlie Drake impacts on this study, and argues that his working class character was merely a vehicle that he created to satisfy his egocentricity; a wish-fulfilment from the days when he was an unknown and would put on a dinner-jacket 'to prance and preen in front of the mirror, preparing himself for stardom' (1986:49). Nowhere is this intention expressed more clearly than when he says, 'I had Charlie Drake, but no one strong enough for him to play' (1986:118). Extratextual self-referential inclusion of episodes from Drake's private life in a series like *The Worker* avoids the literal equation of the performer with the fictional character he plays.

Just as Charlie Drake's 'little man' character can be traced back through a long tradition of working class types, so too can the performance style he favoured and adopted. Slapstick and a surreal sense of humour became the signature traits of his comedies, and its comic roots lay in a long tradition of music hall clowns whose fame seemed to inspire him more than their acts. 'I always knew that one day I'd be topping the bill with them' (1986:50) he says, inspired by his own self-confidence, 'I slept with a smile on my face. It was lovely up there and I was going to get up there - it was only a matter of time' (1986:51). Again this self-assurance about his own destiny is characteristic of his egocentricity; he did not want not to be like them, but to be remembered as one of them, to stand on the shoulder of giants! And crow!<sup>13</sup>

Despite Drake's self-assurance that he possessed a unique talent for comedy, we do get some indication from his autobiography that other comedians influenced the development of his performance style, and that these pre-television performing traditions came from the Music Hall. Seidman explains how the 'success of these [vaudevillian] performers was dependent on [...] establishing a direct rapport with the audience' (2003:22). Drake fondly remembers stand up comedians such as Max Miller ('The first joke I ever told in public [...] was one I had heard Max Miller tell' (1986:13)), who seemed larger-than-life on the theatre stage and, probably because his anxiety about his own diminutiveness dictated it, Drake felt the need to create a fictional persona 'that the public would associate with [...] one that would appeal to everyone' (1986:118). Another comedian was the less flamboyant cheeky chappie persona

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<sup>13</sup> Although Drake is speaking nearly thirty years later, I believe his attitudes towards the public had not changed at all, and his motivation for writing his autobiography was to remind the ungrateful public what a big star he had been.

created by Tommy Trinder (who was always dressed in his best Sunday suit and personified the working class man in the audience). Trinder's stage persona showed him that being just plain 'ordinary' had popular mass appeal too. As solo artists, as confident stand-up performers star comedians like Max Miller and Tommy Trinder represented something else to Drake though which is reincarnated in the coruscating rebellious and double nature of the fictional 'little man' character at odds with the world who stands up for the working man and the 'real' Charlie Drake. Drake absorbed rather than copied these ideals and quirks of comic characterization and created a fictional persona in his own image. But, it is argued, Drake's re-created comic self had a serious purpose; to show by direct comparison that Drake was king of the clowns.

Drake's favourite comics were the Crazy Gang (1986:50), but it was the mayhem of their madcap humour that influenced his love of surreal slapstick humour and not their camaraderie as a comic group; Drake would never have contemplated sharing centre stage. Norman Wisdom is mentioned as another big name, but that is all, and although his 'little Gump' persona must have been an influence on the 'little man' character Drake created; they are very different creations, as we shall see later. Laurel and Hardy are undoubtedly the inspiration for the characters Big Jack and Little Mack in the double act that became *Mick and Montmorency*, but the act was less sophisticated and created only to entertain children. What is more interesting is the emergence of the double act in the evolution of the performance style that influenced the creation of the fictional Charlie Drake; that is more easily traceable, because the pairing had become a standard model that [pre]determined the performance roles of the comics that played them long before film and television. This evolution is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three 'The Descent of the 'little man' in British Comedy.

What is important to stress here is that Drake was able to try on these roles to see if they fitted him. He was able to do this because, before he was a star, he had learned his trade; he wrote radio scripts and played the feed to comics like Dick Emery (1986:64-65) and later to Arthur Askey (1986:58). But he is undoubtedly most indebted to Jimmy Wheeler, 'the best front-cloth comic I've ever seen' (1986:79) he says, who he worked with at the BBC after he decided to move out of children's entertainment into mainstream comedy. There is more than a hint that Drake saw Wheeler as a father figure in the gratitude he shows towards him in his

autobiography, 'After a few shows<sup>14</sup> together [...] he let me win a laugh or two [...] when he saw that I was improving [...] It was directly through Jimmy's kindness that [...] the BBC offered me the first series of my own' (1986:79-80). But he took nothing from Wheeler in terms of his performance style; that was clearly something Drake was keen to have us believe it was a persona he had constructed himself.

The working class 'little man' character was nothing new to British audiences; Drake's variation on the theme belonged to a long tradition of 'little man' comic characters who rebelled against male authority figures like a naughty child challenging the rule of the omnipotent father. Neither was it new for audiences to believe that the 'little man' character was a manifestation of the diminutive comic that played him. What was new was that Drake deliberately created his 'little man' character from his own life experiences and he was not afraid to explore the complexes, hidden phobias, fears and desires that might expose his own unconscious mind through the mask of his little clown character; that kind of self-analysis in 'little man' comedy was indeed new.

This thesis explores the personal history of the 'star' to determine how the identity of the performance persona (his 'little man' character) is an extension of his own personality and how his performances in television shows like *The Worker* (1965-1970) are autopsychobiographical. It was no accident that Drake used his own name and home address for the 'little working man' character in the series; 'Pretty well everything that had happened to me in my life went into that show' reveals Drake in his autobiography (1986:121). A lot of the episodes in the show take their inspiration from actual life events; from his working life ('The Machinery of Organisation')<sup>15</sup> to his career in the forces ('Through a Glass Darkly'),<sup>16</sup> his career as an entertainer at the London Palladium ('A Democratic Democratism'),<sup>17</sup> his hobbies ('The Siege of Kidney Street'<sup>18</sup> / 'I Babble, Babble As I Flow To Join The Brimming River')<sup>19</sup> and his addiction to gambling ('A Punting We Will Go').<sup>20</sup> Even the titles of the shows are interesting and deserve attention because they reveal a synergy between his surreal sense of humour and his own combative nature. Whereas once, his pugnacious nature had got

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<sup>14</sup> *The Jimmy Wheeler Show*, BBC, 1956 and the same year *Tess and Jim* with Tessie O'Shea, see Appendix.

<sup>15</sup> *The Worker*, series 1, episode 1, ITV (ATV), Saturday 27 February, 1965.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. series 2, episode 5, ITV (ATV), Saturday 30 October, 1965.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. series 1, episode 5, ITV (ATV), Saturday 27 March, 1965.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. series 3, episode 3, ITV (ATV), Monday 12 January, 1970.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. series 4, episode 6, ITV (ATV), Thursday 10 September, 1970.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. series 2, episode 4, ITV (ATV), Saturday 23 October, 1965.

him into trouble with authority figures in the armed forces, now through the mask of comedy he found an outlet to release his pent up aggression. A series like *The Worker*, which includes so many comic references to psycho-analysis, shows how much Drake was aware of the impact that Freud's psycho-analytic theories had had on popular culture. In the episode revealingly titled 'Through a Glass Darkly' for example Charlie is looking for a father-figure and he tells Mr. Pugh (Henry McGee) that "Frood started it you know. Frood. He was sitting on his couch one day analysing himself just for the fun of it...". The statement contains a confession in the form of a disguised joke. The phrase 'analysing himself' followed by the punchline 'just for the fun of it' reveals exactly what Drake was doing by clowning about and making fun of himself. This thesis will show that Drake made these comic confessions throughout his entire career, and many examples from his films and television shows are provided to illustrate this.

An explanation of the methodology used in the thesis is followed by a critical review of psycho-analytic and comedy theory. Chapter One is concerned with 'Building up a psycho-biographical profile of Charlie Drake', Chapter Two introduces Freud's theories and explains why they are particularly useful tools for examining Drake in relation to his 'little man' comedies, and Chapter Three explores 'The Descent of the 'Little Man' in British Comedy' and *his* relation to the stereotype(s) found in Hollywood horror and gangster films because, it is argued, they have a common ancestry and therefore a similar psychological profile. Chapter Four, the 'Psycho-analysis of the film *Petticoat Pirates*' provides a case study to show how Freud's theories contribute to our understanding of Drake's 'little man' comedies. A short conclusion draws these strands together.

## **Methodology**

As the thesis deals with broadcast and film history, and specifically with a comic who has been overlooked in research to date, archival research has been central to the project. To this end, materials used include: BBC Audience Research Reports, BBC internal memos, trade papers and popular cinema magazines, as well as interviews from the recently digitalised *TVTimes* archive TVTip and the performing arts newspaper *The Stage* archive. The *British Pathe News* archive contains news reels which not only provide a testimony to Drake's enormous popular appeal but reveal an audience demographic that is often neglected in [psycho-analytic] studies of film and television comedy, the female viewer. Personal

interviews with the scriptwriter Norman Hudis (who worked with Drake) and correspondences with television and film performers and standup comics like Jim Davidson and Danny Blue help to build a psycho-biographical profile of Drake and to bolster a strong case for utilizing a psycho-analytical approach to his work.

The Appendix was compiled with information from these sources and includes a *catalog addendum* – a comprehensive list of Drake’s films and television series that, with the exception of *The Worker*, are not commercially available. Using archival material as a source and the Appendix as a cross reference hub, I suggest that there is much more value in this kind of childlike humour than there is often given credit for.

A classic Freudian psycho-analytical methodological approach is used to explain the psycho-social dynamics behind the popular slapstick humour found in Drake’s work. Drake reveals self-awareness in his film and television comedies about the social function of humour as well as an awareness of Freud and psycho-analysis. Only Freud offers an explanation of the crucial relationship between the comic and the audience in the social function of humour (1928:215) and his work on jokes clearly demonstrates how jokes are invested with moral meaning and how they function to pacify the psychological demands society imposes on the collective individual’s repressed social and aggressive instincts.

‘Humour is not resigned, it is rebellious’ (1928:217) states Freud, and the rebellious ‘little man’ character(s) played by Drake is both a clear example of how Freud says humour functions as a way of rebelling against the demands of the social order through ridiculing jokes where aggression plays a central part in its reception against social superiors and authority figures who are the obvious target for such jokes, but also how the essence of humour originates in the humorist himself and is copied and/or shared by the hearer (1928:216). Many of Drake’s television comedies display this dynamic in practice when Drake looks to camera to share a joke with the ‘live’ studio audience. By travelling backwards and forwards between film and television texts and Freud’s work on the comic, jokes and humour, the psycho-sociological function of Drake’s childlike ‘little man’ character’s behaviour is explained; ‘the one is adopting towards the other the attitude of an adult towards a child’ states Freud (1928:218) which provides a clue to answering our question: what is the psychological intention which humour fulfils?



The thesis argues that academics have often taken an oversimplified approach to humour and whilst some have looked at the formal properties of jokes they have ignored the psychological dynamics behind them. Jokes express sexual and aggressive desires and the Freudian methodological approach adopted in this thesis demonstrates the psychological impulses behind jokes depend on the shared moral and political dimensions of the audience in the joke-work. Michael Billig (2002) for example, suggests that 'Humour, far from being principally rebellious, also fulfils a deeply conservative function' (454). This too is demonstrated in Drake's television comedies in the dual nature of his performance persona. If Drake's 'little man' character's innocent joking stories in *The Worker* are a kind of self-deceit; 'the kind of self-deceit that lies at the root of all humour argues Freud' (Billig 453), it is exposed each time Drake looks to camera to share an aggressive joke, or to perform one of his signature slapstick sketches from the surreal world he entered outside the 'real' world of the sitcom. Drake's sense of humour exposes but 'does not diminish the essential morality of the joke. Nor does it detract from the greatness of its creator' (455) as Billig states, because the joke is 'harbouring murderous intentions' (454) towards the 'little man' character. The uniqueness of the archival material presented in the thesis shows that even this kind of infantile humour had a moral purpose which helped to strengthen existing social bonds. Despite the fact that there existed a patriarchal phallocentric agenda to the production of film and television comedy at the time, women loved to laugh at Drake's television comedies as much as men did, (the BBC Audience Research Reports clearly show this to be true). I argue that for the most part though women in the audience are laughing at the 'little man' character. They are not invited to laugh with Drake when he steps out of character to share a smutty joke with the men in the audience. The implication is that women's appreciation of his humour is exclusively bound to the matriarchal role of mother that Drake's childlike 'little man' engendered in his female audiences, and the unashamed exhibition of dancing dolly-bird types, who were clearly visual smutty jokes for the male voyeur in the audience, kept the prefeminist heterosexual ideology intact. Pertinent to this is Drake's giant ego which adds a psycho-biographical element to all of his comedies. By adopting Freud's psycho-analytical methodology the thesis explains why a comic like Drake is an essential producer of joke-works, and why the duality of his performance persona and 'little man' character is both childlike ('the humorist arrogates to himself this role' states Freud (1928:218), and patriarchal, ('the humorist acquires his superiority by assuming the role of the grown-up, identifying himself to some extent with the father, while he reduces the other people to the position of children' (218), and crucially why

Drake's role as comic is akin 'to the role the superego plays in its efforts to comfort the ego by humour to protect it from suffering' (221) is as much psycho-biographical, as symptomatic of the 'little man' in every man struggling against social strictures that seek to control his natural sexual impulses by calling them deviant and causing his psycho-neurosis. The methodology of the thesis traces the logical progression of this duality by examining Drake's giant ego and tracing its evolution in the tragi-comic personalities of the 'little man' character in drama and comedy; all the time moving back and forth between texts and Freud's psycho-analytic theory.

### **A critical review of psycho-analytic and comedy theory**

In a manner reminiscent of Freud's academic approach to the existing philosophical theories of humour in *Jokes*, I found the most recent theories of comedy lacking because they tended to provoke more questions than they provided answers to one simple question: Why was Drake's 'little man' funny? So, the main elements of debate in recent film theories of comedy (its narrative context) is explored expanded on and eventually supplemented with Freud's psycho-analytic theory and his work on the comic, humour and jokes. Much of the debate about the nature of film comedy, as Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink (2002) point out, centres on the 'narrative and the non-narrative context in which [jokes and gags] occur' (223). Gerald Mast (1979)<sup>21</sup> first discussed the comic structures of narrative in film comedy, but, commentators on comedy theory such as Andrew Horton (1991) find Mast's emphasis on narrative and comic plots 'incomplete and restrictive in the light of theoretical perspectives that have proved useful since 1976' (1991:1), and he cites Jerry Palmer's *The Logic of the Absurd: On Film and Television Comedy* (1987) as an important work in this debate. Informed by this, Horton concludes that, '[no] plot is inherently funny. Any plot is potentially comic, melodramatic, or tragic, or perhaps all three at once' (1). The main concern though, suggests Cook and Bernink, has been that Mast's typology 'avoids the issue of funniness by focussing on the 'maximum' units of comedy (like plots) rather than the 'minimum' units of comedy (like jokes and gags) which they say: 'for many commentators are fundamental to all

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<sup>21</sup> In his first edition of *The Comic Mind and the Movies* (1973) Mast concentrates on plot, theme and character development. In the second edition (1979) Mast incorporates the comic developments of the 1970s -This is the text that Horton (1991) uses. When Palmer discusses Mast's theory he is referring to *Film Theory and Criticism*, Mast & Cohen (1974).

forms of comedy' (2002: 223).<sup>22</sup> This has inevitably led to serious debates about how comedy is defined. Horton suggests that 'comedies are inter-locking sequences of jokes and gags that place narrative in the foreground, in which case the comedy leans in varying degrees towards some dimension of the noncomic, or use narratives as only a loose excuse for holding together moments of comic business' (1991:7). A film like *Petticoat Pirates*, for example, suffers because a performance space had to be found in the dramatic (noncomic) narrative for Drake's surreal slapstick sketches (where his Dream-work equates quite literally to his Joke-work).<sup>23</sup> Of course this inevitably results in them existing as stand-alone sketches outside any narrative context. The implications that this disruption had on Drake's comedy is discussed in our analysis of the film in Chapter Four.

In terms of the research on television comedy, Palmer's work on the absurd is significant, not least, because his theory encompasses both film and television. His focus is primarily with the 'absurd' logic of the silent 'gag'. By recognising that gags and funny moments have a structural quality Palmer's theory comes closer than any other to Freud's work on the 'techniques of verbal jokes. Clearly, it is an idea borrowed from Freud even if it is not acknowledged by Palmer. Stephen Neale and Frank Krutnik (1995) rightly point out that Palmer's theory of the 'logic of the absurd' is merely a 'global term for the ludicrous and the ridiculous' (1995:68) which he has borrowed from Aristotle. However, Jeffrey Goldstein and Paul McGhee (1972) notice that Freud also borrowed from Aristotle's definition of characters in comedy as being 'an imitation of characters of a lower type' (trans. Butcher 2000:9).<sup>24</sup> Unlike Palmer though, Freud's definition was closer to Aristotle's when he says the 'comic is found [...] first and foremost in people' (*Jokes* 1905:181). Just how the comic is found (in Drake's comedies) is described by utilizing Freud's definitions in Chapter Two, and numerous examples are given throughout the thesis.

Palmer's affirmation that four types of 'comic' character (1987:167-168) exists in comedy is once again merely a reworking (a reversal even) of what Aristotle says are the 'four things to

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<sup>22</sup> See the section 'Maximum or Minimum Unit Analysis of Comic Narrative?' in Palmer (1987:25-38).

<sup>23</sup> Freud's terminology but literally meaning the joking content of Drake's scripts and performances that is explored throughout.

<sup>24</sup> Even Greek scholars offer different translations of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Heath (1996), for example, translates: 'Comedy is an imitation of inferior people' (9). Both translations offer some psychological insights into the characters in Drake's comedies, but the 'inferior' definition is far more plastic than the 'lower type, not in the full sense of the word bad', which seems better suited to Drake's comedies still preoccupied with 'class'.

aim at'<sup>25</sup> when an actor plays a character in tragedy. None of Palmer's comic types accurately fit Drake's 'little man' character(s) though and it is better to trust Aristotle's psychological insights more than Palmer's and Freud's more than Aristotle's when we consider how accurately Freud's work on the 'comic' and his description of psychoneurotic types in his paper 'On Narcissism' (1914)<sup>26</sup> fits the 'little man' character type(s).

Similarly, whilst many academics such as Horton have pointed out that 'no totalising theory of comedy has proved successful' (1991:2),<sup>27</sup> and researchers such as Goldstein and McGhee, in their survey of the *Psychology of Humour* (1972), simply list psychoanalytic theory amongst the other 'varieties of humour theory' (4-12), it does appear that Freud's theory is being neglected. Yet, Goldstein and McGhee's observation that, 'numerous followers have restated, reworked, and modified Freud's theory'<sup>28</sup> (1972:13) is telling because many theorists and academics who study film comedy *follow, restate, rework, and modify Freud's theory* too. Neale and Krutnik, for instance, acknowledge that they 'draw extensively [...] upon psychoanalytic theory', specifically on 'Freud's categories of 'wit', 'humour', and the 'comic' (1995:3). But, they have a narrow agenda which focuses on the comic forms that generate laughter in film and television comedy, so they draw on other sources instead of relying on Freud to guide them.

Ultimately a way of challenging these theories is to make the point that they concentrate on visual comedy at the expense of verbal jokes. Freud's work in *Jokes* is unique because it incorporates the comic (visual) element with verbal jokes as well as considering the essential function that humour plays in the appreciation of jokes. It is a more comprehensive theory. It is important to state that the thesis is an essentialist one. It *is* 'primarily concerned with summarizing original notions' (Goldstein and McGhee 1972:13), namely, Freud's. Nevertheless, it is equally important to point out that Freud's work on jokes was an attempt to prove that psycho-analysis was a 'comprehensive psychology'<sup>29</sup> (Storr 2001:82), as Marmysz reminds us when he states that even in his work on *Jokes* Freud 'combined elements of the

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<sup>25</sup> *Poetics*, 'Other Aspects of Tragedy – Character', (Heath 1996:24)

<sup>26</sup> Freud, S. 'On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)' in *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement: SE*, Vol. XIV, 1975.

<sup>27</sup> Cook and Bernink also state that 'no single theory has dominated the study of comedy' (2002: 223).

<sup>28</sup> It has been pointed out that Freud never wrote or claimed to have written a theory of humour. His work on jokes was a part of a comprehensive theory; 'it is entirely consistent with his general psychoanalytic theory, and in fact works to illuminate other aspects of the more general theory' states Marmysz (2005: 38).

<sup>29</sup> Storr says 'Freud was convinced that his discoveries about human motivation and the unconscious applied not only to neurotics but also to every human endeavour' (2001:82).

superiority, incongruity and relief theories' (2005:39). Crucially though, Freud found flaws in Aristotle's superiority theory,<sup>30</sup> the incongruity theories of the philosophers Kant, Fischer and Schopenhauer, and the release / relief theories of Spencer and Lipps. He acknowledged these philosophical theories but he did not merely rework them; he recognised why they did not fit in with his own purpose, which was, 'to prove that there is an intimate connection between all mental happenings' (*Jokes* 1905:15). Traditional philosophical theories he said were a '*disjecta membra*, which we should like to see combined into an organic whole' (*Jokes* 1905:14).

This thesis can not (and in fact it does not) make any claims to be a *totalising theory of comedy*, but it can make a claim that Freud's work on jokes, humour and the comic, coupled with the psycho-sociological insights Freud provides us with to explain the psychopathology of everyday life is particularly well suited when we come to analysing Drake's comedies, and it helps us to understand why the 'little man' character(s) he created and played was a recurring feature of British comedy from the mid 1950s to the late 1970s<sup>31</sup> and why he was so popular with the public.

But why analyse comedy at all? Producers of comedy often argue against analysing their work. Drake, I will argue, was an exception to this, even if he was unconsciously unaware of the fact. I found the same to be true of Norman Hudis, the scriptwriter for the early *Carry On* films, who chose to express his opinion in the form of a joke about why he would never analyse why his scripts were funny. An acquaintance of the author who had put the question to Hudis on his behalf received this response: 'Please congratulate the author [me] on his intuition and, speaking feebly for myself, I'm a Freud I'm still as Jung as I feel and propose to continue writing comedy without any hope other than that it is plain funny'.<sup>32</sup>

'A similar prejudice against academic analysis' exists even amongst academics', as Geoff King (2002:4) (who peppers his assertions with sarcastic clauses because they allow him some comic relief) points out: 'To analyse comedy, the cliché goes, is to destroy it. To seek to understand comedy through weighty theoretical speculation is to fail to grasp the nature of the

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<sup>30</sup> Noël Carroll (2001: n 434) quotes Morreall (1977:14) who 'maintains that the rudiments of an incongruity theory are suggested by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (3.2)'.

<sup>31</sup> Drake played the 'little man' character for the last time in ten mini-episodes of *The Worker* as part of *Bruce Forsyth's Big Night* in 1978. (Three remain in the archive).

<sup>32</sup> email from Norman Hudis to Wes Butters forwarded to the author, 13 February, 2009, 22:45.

beast, it is claimed' (King 2002:4). 'Why risk destroying pleasure?' says Horton 'when a closer examination may well reveal a much darker subtext/context' (1991:2). 'This is a risk that has to be taken' states King (2002:4). But, it 'can lead to increased pleasure and, yes, to even further laughter' as Horton suggests (1991:2) because by understanding why we laugh, we learn to understand ourselves.

The comic/producer does not need to analyse why his work is funny. It is only necessary that the audience analyse it consciously, or more likely, unconsciously to be able to enjoy it. The audience would not laugh at Drake's jokes or laugh at him when he makes himself an object of ridicule for their amusement if they did not find him funny. Drake, like every other comic before him, knew there was a formula for creating laughs. Peter Rogers, the producer of the *Carry On* films knew this too. He would not have been able to reproduce so many films with the same basic formula; where the same actors played the same parts in every film, if he did not know the demographic of the audiences who were going to the cinemas to watch them. Charlie might have told Mr. Pugh that 'It is the singer not the song' ('A Democratic Democratism'), but Drake, the comic / producer, knew if the song remains the same you have a hit.

Rogers had this to say about his target audience: "I am convinced that audiences do not like change [...] audiences like to see the laughs coming and to recognise them".<sup>33</sup> Freud recognised that the 'close connection between recognizing and remembering [...] is in itself accompanied by a feeling of pleasure' (*Jokes* 1905:122). This is probably why audiences laughed at the same piece of slapstick week after week and enjoyed a sense of familiarity with Drake's character(s). This is how all successful comedy works. If the audience is being positioned to share a joke they need little encouragement if they share the same sense of humour. Freud explains how the listener is essential to the joke-work, and 'calls for three people: In addition to the one who makes the joke, there must be the second who is taken as the object of the hostile aggressiveness, and a third in whom the joke's aim of producing pleasure is fulfilled' (108).

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Rogers quoted in Sally and Nina Hibbin, (1988: 9-11). Gerald Thomas, the director of the films comes to the same conclusion, "I've made 31 films from one joke! But I love that Joke and the people who have made it funny." Quoted in *The Classic Carry On Film Collection*, magazine, Issue 11, DeAgostini Carlton, London, 2004, p. 15.

In a television show like *The Worker* these tripartite roles are clearly visible: Drake (who wrote the jokes) plays Charlie (who makes Mr. Pugh the object of his jokes) that television audiences were encouraged (and expected) to laugh at. It is important to mention here that the series was filmed *with*<sup>34</sup> a live studio audience (except for the more complicated comic slapstick sketches which were video taped). The live audience was essential to Drake's television comedy and he understood that (1986:98) as we shall see in Chapter One. Drake had worked in television since the mid-50s when the medium itself was still in its infancy and he knew that his comic performance persona relied on 'his' audience relating to him personally. The camera was simply an eye<sup>35</sup> through which the television audience watched him perform his act, but the sound of a live studio audience's laughter accompanied by the occasional glimpse of the audience sharing a joke with him (as can be seen in the episode of *The Worker* called 'The Man Who Moved His Head')<sup>36</sup> demonstrates how humour is a shared experience between a comic clown like Drake and his television audience. If the reception of comedy by the audience is read as a metaphor for a transference relationship for the participating viewer, and 'humour' in television comedies is a reflection of how humour functions in everyday life, then the psychiatrist Joseph Newirth's (2006:557) observations in psychotherapy are useful. He states that 'humour allows us to entertain a view of the unconscious as a transformational system that addresses issues of male powerlessness and the limits imposed by biological and social realities' (557). So, humour in the 'little man' comedies (as in psychotherapy) 'presents a means of interpreting [...] and generating unconscious meanings, and developing intrasubjective experience' (557) for the television audience, as it does in the analyst-analysand relationship.

Fans who tuned-in to Drake's television shows each week were replaying this psychoanalytic scenario; they were accessing humour to fulfil a desire to laugh at someone either *ludicrous* or *ridiculous*. Why did audiences laugh at the same old jokes told by Drake in the same situations week after week? They were in collusion with him. They knew he would be there each week and they trusted him to offer them the same treatment. Just who was playing the analyst and who was playing the analysand is less important than understanding that watching

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<sup>34</sup> I prefer to use the preposition *with* instead of the prepositional phrase 'in front of' because it indicates the audience's accompaniment *with* the comic performer in the fulfilment of the joke-work.

<sup>35</sup> Television/film audiences did not simply catch Drake's performance through the eye of the camera, but through Drake's point-of-view as director-performer. They saw him as he wanted them to see him and themselves as he saw them.

<sup>36</sup> *The Worker*, series 2, episode 6, ITV (ATV), Saturday, 6 November, 1965.

Drake's 'little man' character(s) [mis]behave on the screen in comedies was a kind of self-help session where 'every man, as in a mirror sees himself'<sup>37</sup> albeit through the distortions of a comic mirror.

Nowhere is this more evident than when Drake steps out of his 'Charlie' character (and out of diapers) in a series like *The Worker* to communicate with the audience. A 'little man' in diapers is as much a demonstration of *male powerlessness* and a male audience's *intrasubjective experience* as Drake's nod to camera is a subjective revelation that his 'little man' character is a mask; a 'comic façade' (*Jokes* 1905:07) that disguises 'something forbidden to say' (106). By lifting the clown's mask Drake reveals that Charlie's anecdotes and 'funny stories [...] betrays something serious' (107) and he 'really means what he is saying'. His 'little man' character is therefore 'intentionally faulty' (107). Drake steps out of character in just one of his films, *Petticoat Pirates*, which happened to be his most successful film at the box office. Perhaps *one* of the reasons that his other films failed to make him into a film star (despite the fact that they were vehicles designed to showcase the talents that had made him such a huge television star) was that Drake was unable to communicate (to share his sense humour) with film audiences without this comic device; so he remained hidden behind the mask of the 'little man' character. *Mister Ten Per Cent* (1967) premiered but never even went on general release. The distributors knew by then that the films were just not attracting audiences and the Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC) probably did not even know what they were doing wrong.

Sadly, like Morecambe and Wise, Dick Emery, or Ronnie Corbett, who made unsuccessful ventures into films themselves, Drake failed to replicate the success of his television career. Drake's 'little man' character, who was so popular on the small screen, did not translate to cinema audiences watching him on the big screen. Andrew Spicer (2001) has made some valuable insights into why Drake's films were not successful, but in comparing them with Wisdom's films, the question of why Drake could not replicate the success he had on television remains unexplored. This thesis offers some insight into why Drake could not translate his television slapstick routines to the cinema format and why this was one of the

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<sup>37</sup> Ishmael's philosophical musings are inspired by his journey down to the sea in the film *Moby Dick* (1956). In the novel, *Moby Dick; or The White Whale* (1951), Herman Melville gives a poetic voice to his psychoanalytical insights: through his narrator-character Ishmael, through the rhetorical sermons preached by Father Mapple, and through the soliloquies of Ishmael's ship-mates and the megalomania of Ahab. The sea functions as a metaphor for the unconscious.



reasons his film's failed to make him into a film star like Wisdom. In this respect it seems unhelpful to compare Drake's films in the same way considering that it was the medium of television that made him a star.

Drake is the focus of the thesis because he was one of the most popular stars of British television comedy from the mid 1950s to the early 1970s until he retired as a comic and returned as a very successful dramatic actor in theatre and television plays.<sup>38</sup> Throughout his whole career he continued to play in pantomime (in fact he started and ended his career that way). But, Drake has largely been forgotten today. None of the four films Drake made for ABPC: *Sands of the Desert* (1960), *Petticoat Pirates* (1961), *The Cracksmen* (1963) and *Mister Ten Per Cent* (1967) are shown on television today and consequently his career has not attracted any sustained academic treatment. The reasons for this are twofold: Drake's own infamous reputation as a seducer of young women, a gambler, a drinker, and someone who was notoriously difficult to work with, and the critical and academic snobbery that propagates the myth that the medium of film is a higher art form than television.

The low status of comedy has been addressed by academics like Mast (1976), Horton (1991), Neale and Krutnik (1995), Palmer (1987, 1995), and King (2002). Only Spicer (2001) mentions Drake who comes off rather badly in the comparison with Wisdom (who is actually the real focus of the study). This is unfair because both of these clowns were stars of two very different mediums. The favouritism that Spicer shows towards Wisdom is typical amongst film historians who consider film more worthy of their attention, and it probably accounts for why Drake's fame in television has been overshadowed by the brighter stars of British film comedy.

If Drake is remembered at all today it is by those who remember watching television shows like *The Worker*, or recall reading something in the newspaper about his rags-to-riches-to-rags life as he gambled away the millions he earned; or his sexual attraction to young women -

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<sup>38</sup> Drake made his debut as a dramatic actor as early as 1966 in a television play written for him by Wolf Mankowitz called 'The Battersea Miracle'. He plays a tragi-comic character called Joey, a high-wire star who had to become a clown after a fall from high wire in a trapeze act. It was several years before he finally made the switch from comedy to drama. In 1980 he played Ubu in Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*. In 1981 he played the wise fool Touchstone in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* at the Ludlow Castle Open Air Theatre Festival and in 1983 he played the little tramp Davies in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester, for which he won an award for the best dramatic performance of the year. In his autobiography Drake quotes the journalist who hailed his triumphant role as Davies: 'He has erased the memory of that desperately lovable and to many utterly resistible little funny man' (1986:242).

“that trouble with a young dancing girl at Bradford” which resulted in a two year ban by Equity – or his second marriage to an eighteen year old dancing girl when he was fifty-two that made front page news. These circumstances are the ones most journalists tended to focus on in the obituaries after Drake’s death in 2006.<sup>39</sup> It seems that in one respect neither the public nor the journalists were able to separate the tragedies of the private life of Drake from Charlie, the slapstick clown, even if history has. But, that is precisely what made his ‘little man’ character(s) so popular. If the public who gathered outside the church on his wedding day in 1976 to sing ‘Nice one Charlie, Nice one son, Nice one Charlie, Give her another one!’ (Drake 1986:181) tells us something about prevalent male attitudes at the time; it probably tells us something about why Drake is unpopular today.

Drake’s sexuality always inhabits his ‘little man’ character(s) in a way that was very different to the innocent childlike ‘little man’ characters Wisdom played, or the neurotic types Connor played in the *Carry On* films. It is his sexuality, disguised in the joke-work that cannot be hidden behind the clown’s face paint. It was his rampant and publicly exposed sexuality that threatened traditional British taboos of the day that found its orgasmic comic relief in the violent slapstick sketches in his comedies. Drake’s ‘little man’ character may have got a custard pie in the face, but (it is argued in this thesis) that the men watching at home were often left with egg on their faces too, despite the fact that there existed a patriarchal phallocentric agenda to the production of film and television comedy at the time.

Women loved Drake too though, as the BBC Audience Research Reports clearly show. This obviously raises some doubts about the expected sexual demographic that constituted Drake’s target audiences where slapstick was thought to appeal only to young male audiences. The reader is encouraged to consult the Appendix of the thesis at various times because it contains a wealth of information about Drake’s life and work. To illustrate its efficacy and to demonstrate that women constituted a large part of Drake’s fan base, the reader is encouraged to view two short films in the British Pathe Archive where Drake is seen performing in front of captive female audiences; one is filmed in a factory, the other in a kitchen, and their appreciation of his humour seems exclusively bound to the matriarchal role of mother expected of women at the time.

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<sup>39</sup> This headline is typical example of what journalists focussed on: ‘Why Charlie Drake left just £5000 of the £5m he blew on women, horses and fast cars’ *Mail Online* 5 July 2008. See Appendix.

Similarly, if the reader consults the British University Film & Video Council (BUFVC) database section and follows the links, more examples of the public's fondness towards Drake can be viewed. All the information the reader requires to access a copy of a particular newsreel is provided. These primary documents have left a record of Drake's popularity. Hundreds of people are seen outside film premiers and charity events attended by Drake. One enthusiastic reporter for *British Movietone News* on the 31 March 1960 says: 'Outside the theatre the crowds ignored the rain. They were much too excited about the star[s] arriving'.

The Images section in the Appendix provides an access link to photograph archives. One set, for example, captures the enormous public excitement generated by the arrival of Drake in pantomime in the town. Other examples of his fame are illustrated by the sheer number of times Drake appeared on the front cover of the *TVTimes* and *RadioTimes* – more than any other comic then or now – access to these magazines is made by referring to the appropriate heading. Drake's own ideas on visual comedy are recorded in a number of interviews in the *TVTimes* in the 1960s. They are particularly useful with regard to explaining the psycho-sexual socio-cultural nature of the meaning of Drake's comedies and the psycho-genesis of the 'little man' character's personality in the 1960s. The popularity of some of Drake's television shows was actually measured by the BBC with what they called the Television Audience Measurement (TAM ratings). A number of TAM ratings published in *The Stage Archive* are reproduced in the Appendix. They document television shows from the early 1960s when Drake was an established star of television. A number of newspaper obituaries are included and the reader just has to click on the relevant link to access them.

All of these documents testify to Drake's fame, but it has not endured. If there is no better way for the public to show its affection for one of its clowns than to erect a statue to their memory in his home town, then the seaside towns of Morecambe and Lytham St. Anne's in the north west of England should be congratulated because there statues of Eric Morecambe and Les Dawson have been raised in fond memory of the town's favourite 'funny' sons.<sup>40</sup> When I suggested to Chris Drake that it would be nice if a statue of Charlie Drake was erected to celebrate his father's achievements, he replied; 'A statue of CD would be great but it make

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<sup>40</sup> The reaction of the public to the statue of Eric Morecambe on the promenade at Morecambe is particularly interesting in this respect. The statue shows Eric in his famous skipping pose (one hand on his hip, the other in the air). Visitors to the town can be seen copying (interacting) with the statue almost every day of the year. For their own amusement, the locals at *The Crown* Hotel across the road, award the tourists an imaginary 'Eric' (their version of an 'Oscar') for the best struck pose while they enjoy a pint.

take a bit of doing'.<sup>41</sup> There is a campaign, but still no statue to honour the achievements of the first clown of television, Benny Hill. There is, of course, a common denominator that excludes them both from this kind of permanent recognition: sex and reputation. Hill's routines were branded as smutty, sexist and politically incorrect in the late 1990s, he was treated as a pariah and portrayed as a sexist monster said friend and TV critic Gary Bushell<sup>42</sup> in a 2012 BBC News article. There is some evidence that he is right in saying that Hill has been treated unfairly. In the Channel Four programme *Is Benny Hill Still Funny?*<sup>43</sup> a group of students was shown some of Hill's best loved sketches and asked if they were offended by them. None were. They thought his comedy immature and adolescent, but not sexist or politically incorrect. Benny Hill's television shows can be watched online now, but not Charlie Drake's. It would seem that Hill's reclusive home life (untarnished by public scandals) has cleansed the smutty reputation of his television persona, while Drake's private lifestyle and scurrilous reputation with young women has been a little harder to wash clean. Like Hill he has been treated unfairly, but unlike Hill, Drake's private life is intimately linked with his film and television 'little man' character(s).

Freud's work on *Jokes*, as we are now beginning to appreciate, made an important contribution to his general theory of the mind. The comic was just part of a three-part structure (along with jokes and humour) that the mind utilised to generate pleasure. It would even lead him to discover the tripartite construct of the psychic apparatus (the id, ego and super-ego) that he discusses much later in his essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in 1920. That connection between what constitutes pleasure and what constitutes personality was first made in a remarkable statement Freud made about the ego's relationship with the id and the super-ego in 1914 when he says the ego has to 'play the part of the clown in a circus'.<sup>44</sup> As we learn more about Drake's personality in Chapter One we begin to understand the psychogenesis behind the giant ego that was formed in his mental apparatus and how it inhabits the 'little man' character(s) he plays in his film and television work. The best example would be the film *Mister Ten Per Cent* (1967)<sup>45</sup> in which Drake plays Percy Pointer, a scaffolder who

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<sup>41</sup> email from Chris Drake to the author, 04/09/2012.

<sup>42</sup> 'Benny Hill remembered 20 years after death' BBC News, Hampshire & Isle of Wight, 20/04/2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-17753021>

<sup>43</sup> *Is Benny Hill Still Funny?* Channel 4, 28/12/2006, 21:00pm.

<sup>44</sup> Freud, S. *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement* (1914d) SE, Vol. XIV, 1975:53.

<sup>45</sup> The same thing can be seen in *The Cracksmen* (1963) when Drake, who plays Ernest Wright, is given money by a gangster and told to fulfil all of his wishes about girls and gambling at the casino he owns. Again, as we shall see, it's as though Drake is holding up a comic mirror to reflect aspects of his own 'tragic' private life.

imagines himself to be the next Oscar Wilde. He writes a terrible tragic play that becomes a huge comedy hit. The story of the film (written and starring Drake) reflects what happens to an ego when it is over-indulged and uncensored. As a result the film seems to reflect some aspects of Drake's debauched lifestyle and his own self-image as a lothario.

If, as Freud argues, 'the ego develops like a skin over the id'<sup>46</sup> then the clown's face paint is the skin that allows the id (the performer) uncensored (but licensed) freedoms. Drake had worked as a clown in the circus;<sup>47</sup> indeed he made a career out of clowning. But he also used clowning as a two-way mirror in his television shows, so the working man (the 'lower types') watching the screen would see themselves in the distorted dream-like reflection of his surreal slapstick comedy.

The strength and originality of the thesis relies on the way it combines historical research with psycho-analytic theory and the way it rehabilitates psycho-analysis with the study of comedy which in general has been resistant to such approaches. There is more of a focus on Freud's psycho-analytic theories than on a broader review of comedy theories because the aim is to advance the existing scholarship on comedy not to challenge it. The purpose is to link more closely with what is lacking in this aspect of film and television history and the value that Freud's theories can contribute to it; as Marmysz states 'Freud's theory represents one of the most detailed comprehensive and sophisticated theories available' (2005:37).

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<sup>46</sup>eNotes "Ego (Ego Psychology)" <http://www.enotes.com/ego-ego-psychology-reference/ego-ego-psychology>

<sup>47</sup> In an interview with Molly Douglas (c.1960) Drake erroneously claimed that show business was in his veins and that he was descended from a circus family when he told her that 'his father was a comedian and high-wire acrobat' (74). In an interview with Brian Finch for the *TV Times* he was a little less liberal with the facts when he said that his father was merely a newspaper seller. 'The Charlie Drake Life Story' *TV Times* September 13, 1963, p. 4. See Appendix.



**Charlie Drake self-portrait (c.1961)**  
Source: reproduced by kind permission of Chris Drake

## CHAPTER ONE

### Building-up a psycho-biographical profile of Charlie Drake

Charlie Drake is all but forgotten today. None of his television shows are shown on UK television (not even on the classic comedy channel UK Gold), and the four films he made for ABPC have not been screened since the 1980s.<sup>48</sup> This lack of exposure has probably contributed to the lack of interest in his work by academics in film and media studies. Inevitably, this has resulted in a lack of any real appreciation of Drake, a comic who rose to the very top of his profession alongside those other famous names of the 1960s who have not been forgotten by them. Drake's career in television comedy spanned nearly two decades from the mid-50s to the late 1970s. In that regard alone his work in television comedy is interesting because his shows reflect changes in the genre from the mid-50s, as standup and sketch formats of variety gave way to character driven realist sitcom and satire in the 60s. One of the reasons for Drake's success and enduring popularity in the mid-60s was due entirely to the fact that he managed to incorporate the old performance variety formats with sitcom, a new form that had become more popular with shows such as *Steptoe and Son* in the early 60s. *The Worker* series, for example, is a mix of standup, variety, and sitcom styles. And it was typical of Drake that he would switch back to the old variety format with a show called *Slapstick and Old Lace* in 1971 when standup and variety shows like *The Comedians*, *Morecambe and Wise*, *The Two Ronnies* and *The Good Old Days* were becoming very popular with audiences. Of course the reasons why comedy formats changed so quickly so early was entirely due to the burgeoning new medium itself, which was making immense technological advances throughout the mid-late 50s.

A visual comic like Drake soon saw the potential of the medium and quickly learned how to use the technology to showcase his solo performance slapstick sketches that soon became his signature trademark. As television became available to more of the population – the BBC for example was broadcasting to 99.4 per cent of the population by 1962<sup>49</sup> - Drake became one

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<sup>48</sup> *Sands of the Desert*, ITV 'The Tuesday Film', 29 September, 1970, 18:55, *Petticoat Pirates*, 'Friday Morning Cinema', Friday, 5 Jan, 1973, 10:00am. The film most regularly screened was *Sands of the Desert* on ITV 'Saturday Cinema', Saturday, 14 January, 1978, 11:00am, ITV 'Monday Matinee', 14 January, 1980, 14:30. Source: *TVTimes* index project (TVTiP) – database of *TVTimes* listings 1955-1985, <http://tvtip.bufvc.ac.uk> alt. [www.rhul.ac.uk/media-arts/courses/libraries.shtml](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/media-arts/courses/libraries.shtml) See Appendix.

<sup>49</sup> Statistics quoted in Graham (1974:75).



the biggest stars in light entertainment television. Transmission was predominantly 'live', which suited Drake, who had the kind of variety skills that early television comedy relied on.

The 1960s proved to be a golden time for many comics who had learned to work and work 'with' a live audience by treading the boards in army camp concerts during their national service. Drake (1986:64-70) had shown early promise as a writer working with Dick Emery as they toured army bases and variety halls during the early 50s. Many would-be comics simply changed their uniforms from combat jackets to Redcoats when they decamped to Butlin's Holiday Camps to entertain a 'captive' audience that really was only different because they were dressed in civvies. Armed with this kind of variety training Drake found the progression from Redcoat to Rediffusion an easy one.<sup>50</sup> In his autobiography *Drake's Progress* Drake talks about the importance of having acquired the experience of working with a live audience and the pitfalls of telerecording shows: 'In a live television show the actors have to keep going whatever happens, just as they do in a live stage show [...] Personally, I think telerecording mars the performance of many actors. They don't perform with the edge and fear that to my mind are essential to all of the performing arts' (98).<sup>51</sup>

As television reached larger audiences and was being broadcast for longer hours there was an increasing demand for programmes and for new faces. Once the invisible faces of comedy stars from radio (which as Burton Graham states had been the 'foremost medium of communication for more than forty years' (1974:57) began to appear on television, it was arguably the ones with funny faces that helped to make them more famous in the new medium. Television was (and still is) primarily a visual medium. Comics with funny faces were popular, and attracted huge audiences. Audiences could now see these comic characters whereas previously they had to imagine what they looked like as they listened to them telling

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<sup>50</sup> It was while he was working as a Redcoat that the seed of an act that was to make Drake famous was sown. He formed a double-act with the six foot four and a half giant Jack Edwardes a partnership that not only gave him his first television series *Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes*, but the format that Drake revisited ten years later in *The Worker*. Their second series *Mick and Montmorency* (1955-1958) prophetically re-titled *Jobstoppers* saw the useless pair (who really were two Laurel and Hardy types) foul-up every job they tried. See Appendix.

<sup>51</sup> Howard R. Pollio, Rodney Mers, and William Lucchesi conducted an empirical study for the Department of Psychology at the University of Tennessee to see 'if there were any differences in the properties of canned laughter compared to more naturally occurring spontaneous laughter'. The study concluded that 'naturally occurring laughter is quite different in a great many specifiable ways from canned laughter' (224) which does give some indication why Drake did not like telerecording his television shows. The study also noted that the duration of the canned laughter continued over a longer duration and at a higher amplitude than the recorded live laughter which tailed off in intensity which might suggest that television audiences are being encouraged to laugh longer. See 'Section II. Naturalistic Observations of Audience Laughter, 'Humor, Laughter, and Smiling: Some Preliminary Observations of Funny Behaviours' in Goldstein & McGhee (1972).



jokes on the radio. Now there was an added pleasure; the comic was something that audiences ‘found in their movements, forms, actions and traits of character’ (*Jokes* 189, see *façade* 181) as Freud suggested, and whereas previously the physical characteristics of comic characters had ‘altogether escape[d] the hearer’s attention’ (193), now that they could see them, they could relate to ‘their mental ones as well’ (189).

Even a cursory glance at the face of the toothy Terry Thomas or the hangdog features of a droll like Tony Hancock bear testimony to those clowns who did not need to put on the face paint to look comic. Drake, who was too young to have become a radio star<sup>52</sup> had ‘the most wonderful face’<sup>53</sup> for television comedy noted Phyllis Rounce when she first saw Drake at International Artistes. Drake says, ‘Phyllis Rounce saw me with a look of amazement as my little cherubic face peeped nervously round the door, followed by fifty-one inches<sup>54</sup> of shy but eager comedian’ (1986:62). If we were to ask Drake to provide us with a definition of his ‘little man’ character this would suffice. It was his memorable face that attracted the attentions of an agent and made him one of the most recognised stars in television comedy for over two decades; yet it is a face that has been forgotten today. Film comedy had always been a canvas for displaying famous fool’s faces, and comics who knew the importance of pulling a funny face to get laughs, whether it was the guppy-mouthed gormless George Formby,<sup>55</sup> the toothless Frank Randle (who famously had his own teeth taken out), the single-toothed Moore Marriott, or a gurning Wisdom, Drake had one of those faces that audiences found funny and could not forget.

The aim of this thesis is to bring back into the light one of the most famous faces from television light entertainment that has been forgotten for almost forty years now. Drake was as

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<sup>52</sup> Drake did make his radio debut as a comedian in 1951 two years before he appeared on television in the children’s television shows *Jigsaw* and *Showcase*. See Appendix.

<sup>53</sup> Drake suspects that Phyllis Rounce must have said this to her partner Colonel Bill Alexander who subsequently became Drake’s agents. (1986:62).

<sup>54</sup> Is Drake’s slip of the tongue an example of a Freudian slip? As a shy nervous unknown comic he sees himself even smaller than he actually is. He meant to say he was sixty-one inches tall.

<sup>55</sup> George Formby’s comments in the article, *The Boy’s Cinema Annual 1941* are interesting considering Freud’s observation that, the ‘comic’ is ‘found in people’. The interviewer asks: ‘What’s the secret of being funny George?’ ‘Secret?’ he exclaims. ‘Why, there isn’t any secret. You see, people always laugh at anybody goofy. There are people in the world who are always serious about everything, and nobody laughs at them. Then there are other people who are naturally funny. They can’t help it. It’s a sort of disease. Whatever they do, people just laugh at them. I don’t mean on the stage or in films. I mean in ordinary life. If they have anything to say or do, they always pick the goofy way of doing it. They were born that way, I suppose. And I’m one of them [...] I must have a funny mouth or something’. The interviewer ends, ‘He makes millions of people hold their sides with laughter, and that’s no small thing in this very serious world’, p.82.

big a television comedy star as any in his day. If he is remembered at all today though, it is for his rather rakish public life, and his inflated sexual ego. Peter Hepple's review of Drake's autobiography tells us a lot about Drake. Titled 'Tainted talent' he says,

If ever a man was the opposite of his best-known show business persona, that of the incorruptible simpleton with a babyish streak, it is Charlie Drake. [...] the man is an undoubted survivor, in private as much as in his profession [...]. With due respect for his honesty, he does not come across as a particularly nice man, especially at the height of his television and stage career. He was awkward and stubborn, unfaithful to his first wife and given to high living which encompassed everything from gambling to champagne for breakfast [...] He fell from grace in 1972 when he insisted a raw beginner should have a role in his Bradford pantomime, and gained further notoriety when he married someone 30 years his junior. Neither of these things were major crimes in themselves but, in the way of such things, he somehow became tainted.<sup>56</sup>

This unsavoury image is repeated in an email sent to the author by Simon Trewin who once worked with Drake in pantomime. 'When I was a stage manager I spent a weird Xmas working with Charlie Drake at the Beck Theatre Hayes doing 'Jack and The Beanstalk'. Very much at the end of his active career it was a slightly sad affair and he was obviously suffering from that real sense of his fame slipping away'.<sup>57</sup> 'Drake was one of the most unpopular men in show business and he managed to be completely oblivious of the fact that most people hated him!'<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately, his own comments about young women in his autobiography, which he dedicates typically to "Prettybody", do little to alter this public perception about the way he thought about the very young women he was sexually attracted to. "Prettybody" was actually his pet-name for Elaine Cameron his second wife, but it sounds more like a catch-all name for all the young women he pursued in his sexual conquests. 'I wrote her into the show, so I would have something to do between houses' (1986:89) he boasts of the woman he later married, and who, half-driven mad by living in 'Charlie Drake Land'<sup>59</sup> tried to commit

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<sup>56</sup> April 2, 1987, p. 10. Source: The Stage Archive.

<sup>57</sup> email. 16/06/2008, 16:46.

<sup>58</sup> email. 16/06/2008, 17:32.

<sup>59</sup> Drake is referring to his private life which he calls 'Charlie Drake Land' in his autobiography. The fact that he describes it in this way gives some indication of the tragic nature underlying comedy. His working class character had brought him fame and fortune, but only at the expense of reliving painful experiences. However, one feels that Drake enjoyed his life as a big star in Charlie Drake Land and found it objectionable to be classed as ordinary. The irony is that while his worker character lives an ordinary life, audiences were more than happy

suicide before running away and divorcing him. It is this sexual predator that appears from behind the clown's mask that made his 'little man-boy' character(s) so appealing (but to many others so appalling). Drake seemed unable or unwilling to hide the double nature of his 'little man' character(s), but he was aware of the libidinous beast baying behind the innocent baby face. In his autobiography he says, 'It's said [he does not say who said it, so the assumption is that Drake is saying it] that in order to reach its full power [and presumably Drake is talking about his own potential to become a famous clown here] intelligence seems to require both the presence of well-developed sexual glands and the temporary repression of sexual appetite. Despite meeting these criteria, I found that, on the contrary [...] Emotion was beginning to rout my reason and I was getting out of control. I think I would have gone mad' (236). Then there was the drinking ('I'll have another drink first' he told Hancock, who reputedly asked Drake if he wanted to commit suicide with him),<sup>60</sup> the drugs (he used cocaine as an aphrodisiac - he even called one of his girlfriends "Coke" (126), the gambling (he lost millions betting on the horses and left very little in his will) and the inevitable ageing, which meant that the Botticelli cherub-faced<sup>61</sup> screen persona with the falsetto voice of an angel, gradually mutated into a gargoyle with a foul-mouth and became Baron Hard-On in Jim Davidson's bawdy adult pantomime *SINderella* (1995) who hands his daughter Cinders a huge black dildo and tells her that if she rubs it three times the 'Genie O' the Prick' will appear. 'It's a cock!' he shouts petulantly when Cinders innocently asks her daddy, the Baron Hard-On, what the gift he has given her is. Yet, there are some who remember Drake fondly as well. The author received a message from an ebay member who had worked as a booking agent at the Apollo Theatre in Oxford. She remembers that 'Charlie was pleasant, friendly and generous, both with his time and the occasional thank you gift in the form of flowers'.<sup>62</sup>

Yet, it seems likely (human nature being what it is) that Drake's 'tainted' reputation *has* discouraged the entertainment industry from recognising the contribution he undoubtedly

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to enter the surreal world of Charlie Drake Land to be entertained by the clown who was king there just to escape from the mundanity of ordinary life for a while. However, when Drake describes his private life as Charlie Drake Land, his joking comment betrays an underlying sadness which reveals that he felt his ordinary life seemed surreal to him now that he was famous, and that for other people (in particular his two wives) it was not a happy place to be if they were there just to entertain king Charlie.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Fisher (2008: 479).

<sup>61</sup> Drake (1986: 5). Drake quotes from memory a comment made about him in the press. Spicer (2001:107) uses the same quote which he traces to a review of *Petticoat Pirates* in *The Times*, 1 December 1961. The description is reused again in an obituary by Stephen Dixon in 'The Guardian', Obituary, Thursday December 28, 2006. <http://www.guardian.co.uk>. [Accessed 22 September 2008].

<sup>62</sup> ebay member: ultraviolet0123, message received 13 September 2012, 18:17.

made to British television comedy<sup>63</sup> and why his work has been forgotten. The result of this is probably why there has never been a sustained and considered academic study of Drake's work.

Even though Drake was still seen regularly on television in the 1970s his reputation as a comic genius was dissolving away. He did not get his own show again after mini-episodes of *The Worker* were slotted into *Bruce Forsyth's Big Night* variety extravaganza, a show which in itself was a failure. The episodes were a sad echo of the series former glories for a number of reasons: The situation format that began every show was the part they decided to retain because Drake was too old to do any slapstick (the very thing that had made the original show a success) and even though Drake had decided to concentrate on verbal comedy, the *duelques*<sup>64</sup> between Mr. Pugh and Charlie were muted by comparison. The old combatants seemed to have called a truce; they behaved more like old friends gossiping over a garden wall about current events instead of defending their own side of it. The counter at the labour exchange was always the thin red line drawn in the sand between Mr. Pugh and Charlie in *The Worker*. The ongoing joke was that Mr. Pugh would try to drag Charlie over it into adulthood and make him behave responsibly, but the joke was always on him because the audience knew he would never be able to do that.

After that Drake was only seen on panel game shows like *Quick on the Draw*<sup>65</sup> and *Celebrity Squares*.<sup>66</sup> No doubt Laurie Mansfield, his manager, was (like Mr. Pugh), doing his best to keep his client (who was not being offered contracts to do his own shows anymore) in work. Drake was redundant in comedy after 1978. Today many comics make their living from panel

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<sup>63</sup> One only has to think of the furore surrounding the recently deceased Jimmy Savile who is accused of sexually abusing young girls throughout his long career at the Beeb and the moral watchdog at the BBC barking loudly now to prevent the programme that was meant to celebrate his life and work in television from being aired. Alarming many other male celebrities including Jim Davidson and Freddie Starr have recently been accused of similar heinous crimes against young girls since the Saville exposé.

<sup>64</sup> I have adopted to use the term 'duelque' instead of the more usual 'dialogue' because it is a more psycho-analytically inflected description of the confrontational or violent verbal exchanges between Charlie and his fellow combatant Mr. Pugh/Whittaker (the "great big twit"), his opponent behind the counter of the labour exchange.

<sup>65</sup> Drake appeared on 20 March, 1974, (ITV Thames Television). See Appendix. On the show 'two celebrities and a professional cartoonist (usually Bill Tidy) would sit before easels and be given a topic on which to make a lightning-fast sketch. The funniest received the most points [...] Charlie Drake put the following caption to a picture of a man in bed, his foot in plaster: "That's the last time I try kung fu!" AdamFontaine (Ambrosia), User review, IMDb, 27 July, 2010.

<sup>66</sup> Drake appeared on 11 January, 1 February, 3 October, 27 November, 1976, and 8 January 1977, (ITV). See Appendix.

shows; which is probably a sad reflection on the absence of any real comic talent now as much as it is a reflection on the kind of shows that are popular with television audiences today.

Drake also began appearing as a guest on family light entertainment shows like the *David Nixon Show*, and *The Rolf Harris Show*. Arguably, his presence in the guest spot was to boost the rather limited appeal of some of these entertainers. Some confirmation of this is indicated in the *Meet Peters and Lee*<sup>67</sup> show where Drake was given a weekly comedy spot. The couple, as popular as they were, just could not go on singing one slow ballad song after another without exhausting their repertoire, or risking boring their audience, which is why television shows like these were still based on the variety format. Drake probably provided a very much needed comic relief, but his spot served as an interval between acts. Even his role in the show was backward looking. He was like the traditional music hall comic who came on and did a few gags to warm up the audience while the scenery was being changed. He was no longer top of the bill. Mark Lewisohn in the *RadioTimes Guide to TV Comedy* (2003:241) hails Drake's 'return to television with this weekly comedy spot' on *Meet Peters and Lee*, (but he had never really been off the screen; he just did not have his own show anymore). He had been a big enough star to still have some nostalgic appeal, but a user's comments on the Internet Movie Database website (IMDb) perhaps indicates why Drake was not popular any more. 'Interspersed with their songs were sketches featuring Charlie Drake, his first regular television series since 'Slapstick and Old Lace' in 1971. It has to be said that these sketches were far from his best work. In one, he played a World War 2 pilot who lets loose his cargo of bombs even though his plane has yet to take off. The show was a big comedown for the diminutive comic...bad for fans of 'The Worker'.'<sup>68</sup>

Slapstick comedy was still popular at the time though, and it was still centred on the 'little man' character fighting patriarchal authority figures, as the highly successful (long running) series *On The Buses* which ran from 1969 to 1973 clearly demonstrates. The series made a star out of Reg Varney. But Stan was an altogether different animal to Charlie. Despite being

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<sup>67</sup> Drake appeared on ATV, 3 April-8 May, 1976. See Appendix.

<sup>68</sup> AdamFontaine (Ambrosia), User review, IMDb, 20 January, 2008.

in his thirties (Varney was actually fifty-seven when he left the series in 1973)<sup>69</sup> Stan still lived at home with his mum, whereas Charlie lived alone in lodgings in *The Worker* (even the customary harridan landlady/substitute mum never made an appearance). *On The Buses* was a fully formed sitcom, with slapstick (easily the funniest parts of the show) neatly sutured into variations on the same story each week (Stan trying to get off with one of the “clippies”). *The Worker* was a sitcom only in the sense that it was a springboard to let Drake perform his unique slapstick routines (which could only ever be a variation on the same theme). Each show started with the same situation - Charlie walking into the labour exchange – but before the commercial break Charlie left the labour exchange to come back as Drake who performed one of the surreal slapstick sketches he was famous for. At the end of each show Charlie went back to the labour exchange, so the whole charade could begin again the following week, but not before Drake became Charlie became Drake the star of television comedy again, who looked straight at the camera to acknowledge his audience and take a well deserved bow.

Drake’s slapstick sketches are always a kind of comic self-flagellation, or to appropriate Freudian terminology, a kind of self-castration - an operation Drake pretends he is performing on himself in the first episode of *The Worker* ‘The Machinery of Organisation’ (1965). By making himself the object of his own jokes Drake encouraged the audience to ridicule him. It was perhaps this self-deprecating, self-inflicted violence that made him ultimately unlovable.

Self-harm is a rejection of human relations, and self-castration, a perverted kind of self-love, a symbolic gesture of the distance between the conceited star and his audience. Stan in *On The Buses* was loved because he was the unwitting victim of castration. Audiences loved him because they felt sorry for him. His sexual frustration has share value. Crucially, he was not unattractive. The clippies at the depot are attracted to him, whereas in Drake’s case women *en masse* are not, even when his character has a girlfriend she is never seen in *The Worker*. In *Petticoat Pirates*, Charlie is quite literally lifted up by the seat of his pants by the Wrens who catch him spying on them while they exercise in the gymnasium. The camera dwells on the women’s legs and bottoms as they wrestle and touch their toes, but the voyeurism is meant for the male viewer, not Charlie, who is taken to the naval courts and charged with “Peeping Tom

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<sup>69</sup> When Stan finally decides to leave home, his mother bemoans the loss of her ‘little baby boy’ (although she is in fact more worried about how she is going to manage without his financial support) he retaliates, shouting, ‘Cor blimey I’ve been here for 40 years’. *On the Buses* ‘Goodbye Stan’, series 7, episode 7, London Weekend Television (LWT), April 8, 1973. Varney’s youthful appearance gives some credence to his ‘little man’ character’s age.

activities”. Only attractive men (obviously those watching from their cinema seats) are allowed to gaze at half-naked women. A picture of Elvis is seen hanging in the Wrens dormitory. Elvis, not Drake, represents the kind of man women were supposed to find attractive. Elvis, the dreamboat, is the popular icon of male sexuality; he represents every man’s ego-ideal here, not Drake the foolish little man-child who dreams he is hung (castrated) by a jury of Drakes in the court-martial dream sequence in the film. In a letter to the author, Wanda Ventham, who played Kathy in the film *Mister Ten Per Cent*, explains that, ‘It was a mistake to cast him in a semi Romantic Role – he was not at all attractive and should NEVER have been surrounded by a group of pretty girls none of whom found him remotely attractive on or off the screen’.<sup>70</sup> Ventham’s comments illustrate perfectly how much Drake’s personality inhabits his screen character(s) and how difficult it is to see anything other than Drake indulging his fantasies. That this was not an uncommon conception is illustrated by Norman Hudis in a letter to the author when he says, ‘There is one possibly psycho-sexually-socially revealing line in the annual “Stage” newspaper ad inviting applicants to appear with him: Tall Girls Wanted For Charlie Drake Summer Show. A case of ducks and Drakes?’<sup>71</sup> Does this not explain why the ‘little man’ characters Drake plays are not attractive to women as they are to the characters say Norman Wisdom plays? Even the shy and sexually retarded characters played by Kenneth Connor in the *Carry On* films are attractive to women. The difference is the personality of the actor did not inhabit the characters he played in films; they are as Palmer (1987:168) states, ‘comic characters in the fullest sense’.<sup>72</sup>

The audience never believes (or is expected to believe) that Charlie is attractive to women in *The Worker* because the audience’s representative (the manly clerk behind the counter at the labour exchange played by Percy Herbert) does not believe he can possibly be. “ow do you know I ‘aven’t got a litul woman?” Charlie asks Mr. Whittaker / Percy Herbert in the episode, ‘The Machinery of Organisation’. “You are rudderless, and damn well useless!” (Freud/castration metaphor) he screams at him, whereupon Charlie tells him “he has an

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<sup>70</sup> The letter from Wanda Ventham, dated 19 August, 2008 is in the author’s possession.

<sup>71</sup> The letter from Norman Hudis, dated August 24, 2008 is in the author’s possession.

<sup>72</sup> As we mentioned earlier Palmer’s classification of the different types of comic character that exist in comedy is not convincing when we try to see which category Drake’s ‘little man’ character(s) fits into, for example, he suggests that the ‘comic character in sitcom is nearer the sketch where character is concerned’, the comic characters in silent farce is ‘the stereotypical characters positioned according to needs of the punch line’ and the comic character of standup comedy and the television show is a ‘relatively consistent comic persona’ (1987:167-168). In the case of Drake, who wrote and played the comic character(s) he created for film and television and pantomime, this categorisation is inadequate because Drake was never completely in or out of character. Even in the three films he made for ABPC where he stays in character the ghost of Drake still inhabits them.

arrangement” with a girl called Muriel. In ‘A Democratic Democratism’ Charlie may glance at the legs of the dancing girls waiting for their audition, but he is embarrassed and looks the other way. This look though is a signal for a change of character. Immediately, a transformation takes place. With a lecherous wink to camera Charlie (Jekyll) has turned into Drake (Hyde). Through the eye of the camera the audience sees the monstrous<sup>73</sup> man masquerading as a child. Compare this to the warmth the audience feels towards Stan still living at home with his mum, or between Harold and his father in *Steptoe and Son*. In comedic terms it is crucial that the audience feel that warmth in order for them to be able to laugh at the tensions that erupt between the characters. Family, however dysfunctional, is an indication of inclusion in society, of belonging. It is an affirmation of love. Stan never gets the girl. He is trapped in a pre-Oedipal world of wish-fulfilment and dreaming about women. He is sexually frustrated and fixated at the phallic stage of his development, but he is loved by his mum and his sister Olive, and the “clippies” do find him sexually attractive. Drake’s ‘little man’ character(s) are outsiders, and misfits. In *Petticoat Pirates* Charlie is billeted with the Wrens, but he lives a subterranean existence in the boiler room (an apt metaphor for frustrated heated sexual desires buried in the unconscious). In *The Cracksman* Ernie Wright lives on his own above his locksmith’s shop, and in *Mister Ten Per Cent* Percy Pointer lives alone in digs and tries to relieve his sexual frustrations by imagining himself as the sexual predator in the plays he writes. In *The Worker*, on the rare occasion that Charlie is seen as part of a family he is rejected by both parents. “I never ‘ad no mother. I never ‘ad no father either” he tells a family who fool him into believing he is their long lost ‘Little Tom’,<sup>74</sup> before they try to murder him.

The audience is always in on the joke (that Charlie has a protector though) because Drake always steps out of character to show himself to them. He lifts his clown’s mask as if to say to the audience “Look. I am Charlie Drake; the King of Fools isn’t this masquerade a joke?” But how is Drake’s humour being communicated here and what is being communicated? We will look at how Freud explains this later. Drake even makes a grand royal entrance at the end of the episode ‘I Babble, Babble as I Flow to Join the Brimming River’ wearing a crown and draped in an ermine gown. With a self-satisfied smile, the self-appointed King of television

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<sup>73</sup> The concept of the monstrous and how it relates to the ‘little man’s’ character is discussed in the chapter ‘The Descent of the ‘Little Man’.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Little Tom’ is also the title of the episode, series 2, episode 3, ITV (ATV), Saturday, 16 October, 1965.



comedy walks towards the camera (and walks off the set) to take the applause from his adoring fans. The childlike ‘little man’ character Charlie who likes to dress up like “daddy” may be silly and gullible, but he is protected by a higher power, the super-ego of Drake, the monarch of mirth.

Drake’s personality completely inhabited the character(s) he played on television, and he was so well known by the time he made his films that the ghost of his personality even haunts the characters in them. As we have already noted, the films were merely vehicles to showcase Drake’s performances. Unfortunately, things only got worse in later films like *Mister Ten Per Cent* as the star began to dominate the director and the crew on set. In a letter to the author, Norman Hudis, who wrote (rather than co-wrote) part of the screenplay for the film, said, ‘I was not present when the film was shot and it was there that the fertile Charlie ad libbed and was not controlled’.<sup>75</sup> The telling phrase here is, *I was not present*, and if proof were needed to qualify the statement, “art reflects life”, that too is provided in the film because the character Drake created and plays (Percy Pointer) tries to control the production of the play he has written by telling the director how the leading man (who, as we have learnt earlier in the dream sequence, is whom Percy imagines himself to be) should play his part, and the leading ladies (who he imagines find him sexually irresistible) should fight over him (as they do in the dream sequence) whilst he shows no concern at all for their feelings even when one kills the other.

Drake had a giant ego. He had a lot of confidence in his own capabilities as a comic. This was apparent even from his earliest days in television when the BBC let him take over the writing of his first television series *Drake’s Progress*,<sup>76</sup> the show that was supposed to ‘hail the arrival of a second new Chaplin’ (Drake 1986:80), after it was panned by the press. Drake knew what the problem was; the writers Dick Hills and Sid Green, who the BBC had commissioned to write for him. They may have been according to Ronnie Waldman, Head of Light Entertainment, ‘the best writers in the business’ (82), but Drake felt they were too heavily committed, ‘they were writing five shows’ at the time he recalls (82) so, half way through the series Drake refused to work with them anymore. He took over the writing for the

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<sup>75</sup> Letter from Hudis to the author, Op. cit.

<sup>76</sup> An article in *The Stage* titled, ‘Drake’s Progress Introduces New Personality’ reads, ‘On May 6, BBC-TV introduces a new personality, Charlie Drake, who is being given his first series, “Drake’s Progress”. Charlie Drake is working on the scripts with [...] radio’s leading scriptwriters’, April 25, 1957, p. 5. Source: *The Stage* Archive. See Appendix

remaining three shows of the series (which really does show how confident he was) and the effect was immediate. Drake realised his wish-fulfilment to be a big star on television. Recalling Peter Black's headline in the *Daily Express* the morning after the fourth show had gone out which read, 'I salute the breakthrough of a great comedian!' (83) Drake in his autobiography<sup>77</sup> proclaimed himself, 'Numero – Uno I'd made it!' (89), 'I'd cracked it. I was away' (83). His remark reveals a lot about his over-inflated ego; it was he says, 'the first chapter in the legend of Charlie Drake, the selfish, single-minded and bullying trouble-maker' (83).

More compelling evidence of Drake's overbearing nature and tenacity to keep artistic control over the scriptwriting (and his co-writers) is his highly publicized split with Dave Freeman in the national newspapers in 1959 which resulted in Freeman quitting the very successful television series *Charlie Drake In...*<sup>78</sup> after the second series. Quoting the headline "PRIDE" – 'Charles Drake and his £250 a-show script writer Dave Freeman are parting. PROFESSIONAL PRIDE IS INVOLVED – ON BOTH SIDES!' Drake's agent Hugh Alexander wrote to Eric Maschwitz at the BBC (29 June 1959) to tell them what Charlie thought they should do about it, 'he is quite definite that he does not want any writer to work for or with him on sufferance. Further, he feels that [...] we should look elsewhere for a new writer [...] I must on our client's behalf refute the suggestion that there is any differences between the writer and artiste'.<sup>79</sup> *The Stage* newspaper summed up this imbalance between star and co-scriptwriter well: 'The Freeman ideas fitted in – because the first essential, in Freeman's plan for scriptwriting, is to express the personality of the star [...] In that sense Dave Freeman is a "ghost" writer welding himself to the personality of the star'.<sup>80</sup> And Drake exorcised that ghost.

The *Charlie Drake In...* series 'presented a number of unrelated comedy playlets that attracted seriously big audiences' states Lewisohn (2003:239), but the reaction indexes of the BBC Audience Research Reports do tell a different story because they show that the standard of the

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<sup>77</sup> The title of the autobiography is taken from the title of the show that launched his career, *Drake's Progress*.

<sup>78</sup> *Charlie Drake In...* (1958-1959), Two short specials were written for the television extravaganza, *Christmas Night With The Stars* 1958 and 1959. Dave Freeman was replaced after the second series by David Cummings and Derek Collyer were replaced by Richard Waring who was replaced by Lew Schwarz in the next two shows. To be fair to Drake, the most successful parts of the *Charlie Drake In...* shows were the Christmas Specials written solely by him.

<sup>79</sup> BBC Written Archive Centre (WAC) Charlie Drake, TVART File 1, 1952-1959. See Appendix

<sup>80</sup> *The Stage*, April 2 1959, pp. 12-13. Source: The Stage Archive. See Appendix.

shows started to slip very soon, and that poor scripts, not Drake's performance, were the reasons given by many viewers for them not being funny. The report for 'The Siberian Sandwiper', for example, concludes that, 'Quite a number were inclined to place the responsibility more on the script than the comedian',<sup>81</sup> because 'the situations were not really well thought out' ('Charlie and the King of Siam').<sup>82</sup> And even though 'The Lust for Gold' 'was one of the funniest and most amusing Drake shows yet',<sup>83</sup> it was, remarks one viewer, because 'the script was rather better this week and there were some really hilarious comedy situations [which] Charlie himself took full advantage of'.<sup>84</sup> Freeman left after the second series and David Cummings and Derek Collyer were taken on to help co-write the scripts for the third and fourth series. Again, though, those monitoring the shows said that viewers reported a "scrappiness" about the script [and] too many absurd situations, that in the estimation of something like half the sample audience, merely hampered Charlie Drake's enormous capacity for pure action comedy of his own devising'.<sup>85</sup> The Audience Research Report for 'Treble' is particularly interesting, because viewers single out Drake's visual performances as being the most memorable show of the series: 'When he broke into the Apache scene he was a riot' (a Housewife said)'. The conclusion drawn was that:

According to many viewers, this hilariously funny episode had been the highlight in the best slapstick tradition – and certainly the best thing Charlie Drake, that king of slapstick comedians, had ever done on television. Further it had proved beyond doubt that Drake was at his very best in pure action comedy – that a script (practically non-existent in this case) merely hampered his capacity for fooling around for himself and being enormously funny.<sup>86</sup>

It is important to note here that, 'The Little Picture-Hanger', 'The Moon and Fourpence' and the 'War and Peace' slapstick sequences in 'Treble' were all written by Drake.

The BBC Audience Research Reports do give a clear indication about what audiences liked, and what they had come to expect from Drake, who was now a big television star: 'He

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<sup>81</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *Charlie Drake in 'The Siberian Sandwiper'*, Tuesday, 9 December, 1958, 7.30-8.00pm. (A.R.D.) 29 December, 1958.

<sup>82</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *Charlie Drake in... 'Charlie and the King of Siam'*, Tuesday, 7 April, 1959, (A.R.D.) 24 April, 1959.

<sup>83</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *Charlie Drake in... 'Lust for Gold'*, Tuesday, 21 April, 1959, (A.R.D.) 6 May, 1959.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *Charlie Drake in... 'Igig'*, Wednesday, 18 November, 1959. (A.R.D.) 8 December, 1959.

<sup>86</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *Charlie Drake in... 'Treble'*, Tuesday, 5 May, 1959. (A.R.D.) 27 May, 1959.

emerged as a natural TV comedian ('an absolute scream', said a Civil Servant) of marked individuality ('his clowning being modern yet full of the tradition of classical clowning'), and a certain Chaplin-like charm'.<sup>87</sup> Working instinctively on his own, Drake knew what his audiences liked. Proof is found in the Audience Research Report for 'Recital' which documents the audience's 'highly favourable reaction' to the *1812 Overture* sketch. The report shows an overwhelming praise for Drake's solo effort. 'Charlie promised to entertain us and by Jove he did!' said an Insurance Inspector. 'Here was Charlie at his 'brilliant best' - He is 'a great little comedian' - 'This was the most amusing programme to date, proving that his talents and personality were well able to sustain a one-man show' - 'The real hit of the show proved to be the last item, the orchestra sequence' - It was, 'A marvellous achievement' - 'I have nothing but praise for him' (said a Building Inspector's Wife)' - 'This was brilliant. Charlie Drake has never been funnier. His orchestra item was absolutely first class, (Bank Manager's Wife)'. - It was, 'The best thing in the series [...] Charlie Drake must now certainly be regarded as a star of the first magnitude [...]'.<sup>88</sup>

'Recital' featured an unbelievable solo performance from Drake, a slapstick sketch in which Drake conducted an orchestra of Charlie Drake musicians. Guy Taylor writing in *The Stage* called it, 'The FUNNIEST EVER TV Programme'. He wrote:

On the last day of 1959 I saw a thirty-minute programme in which the only artist to appear was a Mr. Charlie Drake. I have no hesitation in saying that this show was the funniest thing EVER seen on television. It's a wonderful thing to be able to make people laugh. And if you can make them laugh so much that their sides ache it's really a BIG achievement. This programme proved once and for all that, as a TV clown, Drake stands miles ahead of any other artist. He works like a Trojan, his timing is impeccable, and he doesn't lay on too much pathos. He's the little man to whom everything happens, yet you don't feel sorry for him because you know he enjoys it. His entire programme on December 31 was pure slapstick. Beautifully done, [and] perfectly executed.<sup>89</sup>

It was so successful that a stand-alone repeat was shown, and in 1968 (almost tens years later!) the sketch won him the Golden Rose of Comedy Award at the Montreux Festival. The success of the last two series of the *Charlie Drake In...* show made him into a television star

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid

<sup>88</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *Charlie Drake in...* 'Recital', Wednesday, 30 December, 1959, (A.R.D.) 22 January 1960.

<sup>89</sup> Guy Taylor, *The Stage*, January 7, 1960, p. 20. Source: *The Stage* Archive.

overnight and it attracted attention from ABPC and America. In an interdepartmental memo Cecil Madden (television programme planner at the BBC) writes:

Jim Wallis, who is now head of the studios at ABPC, rang up to say That, they are most anxious to look at and study Charlie Drake's telerecording of "Treble", no. 5 in the new series (*Charlie Drake In...*). They want to show it to a number of people at Elstree. He also asks if they could buy a print to send to New York. I gather the matter is urgent to them and would be grateful if action could be taken.<sup>90</sup>

Reaction Indexes included in the Audience Research Reports at the BBC clearly show how much more audiences were enjoying the shows written by Drake. The first show in the new series 'The Patriotic Singer' was given 'a Reaction Index'<sup>91</sup> of 78, well above the average (63) [...] The average for six editions of 'Drake's Progress', televised earlier this year, was 62,<sup>92</sup> and 'The Little Picture-Hanger' a slapstick sequence from the show titled 'Treble' got a reaction index of 81.<sup>93</sup>

Drake proved triumphantly that he was better at *exploiting the comic traits and quirks* of his own persona better than any of his co-scriptwriters had been.<sup>94</sup> From now on Drake would create the character(s), write the dialogues, design the sets, choreograph the slapstick stunts, and then perform his 'clown' act in front of the camera. All that a director had to do was to make sure the camera was pointed at him, as that other 'little man' clown Melvyn Hayes, pointed out when he remembered working on *Carry On England* (1976): 'My lasting memory about making *Carry On England* was the way the film was shot! No clever key-hole shots – the director just pointed the camera at the actors and let the "clowns" do the funnies'.<sup>95</sup> Drake, now had as much power as an auteur film director, and the effect this had on his ego is reflected in the comparison he makes with himself and Fred Zinnemann in his autobiography. He quotes Zinnemann's now infamous comment about himself. 'Whenever I get round to thinking I'm not a great director I run *Nun's Story* and I know I'm a great director'. Drake acquiesces, 'I feel the same about the *1812* [...] No one will ever top my conducting and

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<sup>90</sup> BBC WAC Charlie Drake, TVART File 1, 1952-1959.

<sup>91</sup> The Reaction Index is based on questionnaires completed by a sample of the audience.

<sup>92</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *Charlie Drake In...* 'The Patriotic Singer', Tuesday, 11 November, 1958, (A.R.D.) 25 November, 1958.

<sup>93</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *Charlie Drake In...* 'Treble', Tuesday, 5 May, 1959, (A.R.D.) 27 May, 1959.

<sup>94</sup> Freeman says that this is what he had to do when he wrote with / for a star like Drake. *The Stage*, April 2 1959, pp. 12-13. Source: The Stage Archive. See Appendix.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Ross (2003:121).

playing of the *1812 Overture*. That is the best nine minutes of television comedy that has ever been made or ever will be made. I won five awards with it including the Golden Rose of Montreux.’(1986:99).<sup>96</sup> Drake did top it, with a sitcom, *The Worker*, but it was a synergy of visual and verbal slapstick that was not all of his own making even if he thought it was.<sup>97</sup>

As if to prove he was right Drake astounded the press and public alike with his clowning glory, the *1812 Overture* and then followed it, quite literally, with another ‘Jack fell down and broke his crown’ type of crowning glory in ‘Bingo Madness’ (an episode from his new series, *The Charlie Drake Show* (1960-1961)<sup>98</sup> after a stunt went wrong when he was pulled through a bookcase and was knocked unconscious because the shelves had been nailed in place instead of just resting loosely; he was then picked up by fellow actors, who were always instructed to carry on whatever happened, and thrown through a window. He hit his head on a stage weight and rushed to hospital when he could not be revived. After that, even set builders and prop men who ignored Drake’s directions<sup>99</sup> risked their jobs if they did not do as they were told. In *Paul Merton’s Palladium Story*<sup>100</sup> Drake tells the story about a prop man who forgot Drake’s Moon boots on the opening night of the ‘Man in the Moon’ pantomime. After Drake’s admonishments he went backstage to get the boots and was never seen again.

After the accident Drake announced his retirement and for the first time he suffered from a severe attack of self-doubt and ‘the biggest, darkest depression I’d ever known, with all its attendant fears’ (1986:102) he confesses. Drake then took up painting; primarily self-portraits, (see p.28) after his psychiatrist recommended it as a form of self-analysis. He produced quite

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<sup>96</sup> A clip of the *1812 Overture* has been posted on YouTube.

<sup>97</sup> To be fair to Drake, he does acknowledge the producer, Ernest Maxin, and director Sid Lotterby in his autobiography but only because he thinks he is (quite rightly)\_amongst equals. ‘The three of us spent over nine months getting that nine minutes right, and I know the three of us will always be proud of it, and I bet even that when I die that will be the bit the BBC run in my fond memory’ (1986:99). Thankfully, the BBC did honour Drake’s contribution to television comedy before he passed away, as part of its documentary series, *Arena presents The Entertainers: Drake’s Progress*, the ‘Recital’ sketch was featured in a standalone repeat after the programme was broadcast on BBC2, 25 December, 2001.

<sup>98</sup> The third series, which was scheduled for six episodes, was cut short because of the accident. Drake’s skull was fractured and he was unconscious for three weeks. He was not seen on television for over two years. An interview with Drake who describes what went wrong during the live recording has been uploaded by WhirligigTV on YouTube ‘Charlie Drake’s 1961 accident’. See Appendix p.256.

<sup>99</sup> In the *Arena* documentary Drake describes how he asked for a book case to be glued together so it would fall apart when he was thrown through it. Unfortunately, the information was not passed on and the bookcase was nailed together instead. When the scene was shot, Drake was thrown through the bookcase and he was knocked out. He was then picked up (as directed in the script) and thrown through a window where he hit his head on a stage weight.

<sup>100</sup> Drake appeared in ‘Episode 1.2- Act Two: The Television Years’, Sunday, 25 September, 1994, 8.00pm-9.00pm. The two-part documentary was screened again on BBC4, 10 and 11 March, 2011, to celebrate the London Palladium’s diamond jubilee.

a number of canvases during his convalescence and he proved to have a natural talent for painting in the abstract style. Now before any comparisons are made with Tony Hancock's character's in *The Rebel* (1961) who thought he could just pick up a brush and paint, Drake actually sold all his paintings in an exhibition called 'Top of the Pops' in 1962 and he was described as a 'veritable virtuoso in paint' by the art critic Denis Bowen whose analysis of Drake's paintings in the exhibition catalogue are interesting because he is virtually describing the 'little man' character and what motivates his behaviour and, of course, the ego of the creator who gives life to that character.

The paintings of Charles Drake are spontaneous and direct communications [...] They are images that depict the struggle of the individual to maintain dignity in face of the energy-devouring monster of bureaucratic control [...] They are images which in emerging from the storm of the subconscious attain their measure of visual reality within the same motivating concept of survival.<sup>101</sup>

Gerard de Rose, the famous painter of the stars in the 1960s went so far as to say that he had the 'happiest augury for Drake's future success as a painter'.<sup>102</sup> But, as far as Drake was concerned painting had fulfilled its self-analytic purpose. 'I kept none of them; I didn't love them. I saw no sense in emptying my mind then gazing at the contents for the rest of my life' (1986:108) he says in his autobiography before revealing what actually did get him back to work. 'It was love that brought this period of morbid creativity to an end' (109) he recalls, the love of his audience who begged him not to retire in hundreds of letters, which, his rather canny agent delivered to the depressed comic to read.

One does get the impression then, that for Drake, adulation and fame (often misconceived as love) was priceless, and not being famous was 'as the unsteady wind, Worthless'.<sup>103</sup> With his lavish lifestyle and his contractual commitments to ABPC he had to come out of his self-imposed retirement to make another film and television show to satisfy both. In his autobiography he says that he co-wrote the screenplay for *The Cracksmen* with Lew Schwarz, but the opening screen credits state only that he contributed 'additional material' for the film.

Clearly, the slapstick 'balloon' dance sequence at the nightclub is Drake's own work. The film certainly has a clearer narrative in terms of telling a story, and Drake, for the most part,

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<sup>101</sup> Comments by Denis Bowen in 'Top of the Pops' exhibition catalogue, 1962. See Appendix.

<sup>102</sup> Forward by Gerard de Rose in 'Top of the Pops' exhibition catalogue, 1962. See Appendix.

<sup>103</sup> Southey, R. *Joan of Arc* (1796), London, Routledge & Sons, undated, p.11.

plays the character straight. For this reason *The Cracksman* is perhaps the most watchable of all the films he made. But, the film fails for precisely the opposite reasons that Drake's previous films for ABPC failed. It is strong on narrative and weak on slapstick. It does not showcase enough of Drake's slapstick solo performances, which is what audiences would have paid to see. If *Petticoat Pirates* is marginally better because Drake steps out of character and into the familiar slapstick routine television audiences were familiar with, *The Cracksman* suffers because it does not. The clown's makeup has been removed and he is just like one of the other characters who inhabit the film world; even his combative nature is quite literally 'locked up' in a prison cell in the film. The best scene (which is slapstick in style if not content) comes when Ernest/Drake (a locksmith by profession) picks the lock of his cell door to pinch some bird seed for his cell mate's budgerigars and his fellow convicts follow him, Pied Piper fashion, to the stores and back to their cells again, because they think he is actually masterminding their escape out of prison.

This kind of 'variety star' performance is one of the reasons why Drake's television show, *The Worker* triumphs. The 'Little Trier's' pugnacious character is as visible on a television screen as a robin's red breast is in a snow scene, (a robin outwitting a cat in Drake's garden was the inspiration for his character in *The Worker* who keeps trying to get a job (1986:119). Conversely, it is the cat's (Mr. Pugh's) curiosity (to hear Charlie tell his tall stories each week) that kills him (not Charlie) each week, and Drake (who only pretends to put Charlie in danger) who gets the cat's cream (the adulation). This device is an example of what Freud calls the 'comic story', the purpose of which is the 'unmasking' of an 'exalted' figure of authority for the purpose of 'degradation' (*Jokes* 1905:201-202). It is something discussed later with reference to *The Worker* in the chapter on Freud. The other reason that *The Worker* series was a success has to do with something which we have up until now seen as two irreconcilable forces – performance and narrative cohesion – in the sitcom/sketch format of the series. Clearly the partnership between Drake and his co-writer Lew Schwarz worked in *The Worker*, even if one does sense from Schwarz that he was 'star struck' and consequently, under the tutelage of the King of television comedy at that time, 'Charlie, in my view, was at the height of his talents, one of the greatest clowns this country has ever seen' (1988:61), he says.



Inevitably, though, the kind of comedy that Drake made became unfashionable. Tom Sloan, Head of light entertainment at the BBC foresaw this. Expressing his appreciation of *Comedy Playhouse* in the *Radio Times* in 1961 he said,

In the last six years one of the most distinctive contributions has been in the field of situation comedy. Tony Hancock, Eric Sykes, Jimmy Edwards, Charlie Drake, Sidney James, Harry Worth and now *The Rag Trade*<sup>104</sup> have all raised this type of humour to a level which is unsurpassed in this country. It is a record of which we in the BBC are very proud. In all these scripts the same stars have played the same roles or variety of roles in scripts written by craftsmen who have allied their particular talents to these stars.<sup>105</sup>

Sloan, who is careful to be respectful, goes on to suggest that a new kind of situation comedy, written not for stars, but for actors, may be about to replace the old variety style of performance comedy overnight. 'For writers this can generally be a wholly satisfying experience but I have often wondered how certain of them would react if they were invited to write exactly what they wanted to write – with no particular star in mind. To this end I have asked Alan Simpson and Ray Galton to launch a new series called *Comedy Playhouse*. I am glad to say they have jumped at the assignment and the first of their original comedy plays will be shown tonight'.

*Steptoe and Son* was an overnight success because character actors, not the variety star (like Drake who could only exist and perform outside it) was central to the situation comedy. The new humour was darker. It came from the tragi-comic nature of 'real' human relationships in the claustrophobic atmosphere of the family home, not the one-eyed Polyphemic world of Charlie Drake Land. The subject matter was new too. It revolved around the psycho-sociological traumas of family relationships and dealt with ennui, frustration, and repressed fury. But domestic comedy was cruel and kind. It was certainly a more verbally violent medium. Physical (slapstick) violence was repressed and replaced with cruel jokes. Violence was only threatened. Relief for the fly-on-the-wall audience at No.10 Oil Drum Lane came from being able to laugh at the things they recognised and probably felt like saying at home

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<sup>104</sup> This television sitcom brought the diminutive comic Reg Varney to the public's attention, but it was *On The Buses* that made him a television star where, once again, the double-act team and the confrontational *duologues* contributed significantly to its success.

<sup>105</sup> Sloan quoted in Galton and Simpson (2002:15-16).

themselves, but had to suppress. It had warmth too though. It had to have. There are many moments of tenderness and pathos between Harold and Albert which are very sad. Their domestic situation is both tragic and comic. Crucially, for the comedy, there is usually a kind of truce declared by the end of each episode and father and son are reconciled. No matter how dysfunctional their relationship is (and all domestic comedies since then have replayed this theme) conflicts are always resolved; at least until next week.

For the audience, if relief comes from being able to laugh at the “slanging” match that borders on the edge of (slapstick) domestic violence, that laughter reveals an awareness, that, as real as the situation seems, Harold and Albert’s relationship is far from normal. As Neale and Krutnik state, ‘In *Steptoe* there is a marked non-correspondence between its *situational* ‘normality’ – the stable situation to which each episode returns – and the bourgeois-familial ‘normality’ which is the ideological touchstone of the traditional domestic sitcom. *Steptoe and Son* is the *inverse* of such shows: the show’s situational ‘inside’ is the conventional ‘outside’ and vice versa’.<sup>106</sup>

In the wake of this new kind of comedy centred on family feuds, Drake’s surreal comedy became unfashionable because it was centred on him beating himself silly outside and away from the home. The family sitcom format delivered a knock-out blow to the slapstick that defined Drake’s comedy because it seemed to be self-indulgent and non-inclusive. His shows must have seemed old hat, and the style (his style) was consigned to the dustbin by the new writers. A not-so subtle hint that this was so can be seen, ironically enough, in Eric Sykes’ television comedy short, *The Plank* (1979) (which itself is a celebration of slapstick comedy) in the scene where Drake is thrown into a dustcart and reappears covered in a stinking pile of rubbish. Deliberate or not, it is hard not to associate Drake’s reputation with this kind of skit.

Drake then made the mistake of looking back to the nostalgic past with his next show, *Slapstick and Old Lace* where he tried ‘single-handedly to revive variety’ (Lewisohn 2003:240). He didn’t. He couldn’t. The time wasn’t right. It was almost ten years before a comic would make variety slapstick popular again, and that was Freddie Starr in the aptly named, *Freddie Starr’s Variety Madhouse* (1979).

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<sup>106</sup> Neale & Krutnik ‘Broadcast Comedy and Sitcom’ in Buscombe (2001: 281).

Perhaps no one knew better than Drake just how far he had fallen from the highest branch of the tree of television comedy, because only he would have cocked a comic snook and swan dived as he fell out of fashion. In what was to be his final hour in his own television show in 1972, *The Charlie Drake Comedy Hour* subtitled ironically enough, ‘A Day In The Life Of Charles Drake’,<sup>107</sup> Drake took a nostalgic look back at his past achievements (no doubt spitting feathers all the way). Lewisohn’s description in the *RadioTimes Guide to Television Comedy* is apposite; ‘This single programme had Drake falling from a very high building in order to test out the old saying that, when you’re falling to your death your whole life flashes before your eyes’ (2003:240), and with that Drake disappeared from our screens.<sup>108</sup>

That Drake was so quickly forgotten is indicated in one of those table-top browsing books with titles like, *A Do You Remember Book: Television* published in 1974, only two years after Drake’s last television show (and that’s not taking into account that the book may have taken some months to come to press). With the caption ‘re-live your favourite programmes’ on the cover, Drake literally was consigned to the past. Even sadder perhaps, is the inclusion of statement that Drake won the ‘Charles Chaplin Award for Best Comedy’ at the 1968 Montreux Television Festival for a compilation of sketches from *The Charlie Drake Show*,<sup>109</sup> to remind them (in case they had forgotten) just how good he once was.

In 1978 his name appeared in Gifford’s, *The Illustrated Who’s Who in British Films* and in 1980 he was appearing on the unfortunately titled panel chat show, “*Looks Familiar*”.<sup>110</sup> Then it was not until the 1990s that some acknowledgement of his career was made. He is included in *Quinlan’s Illustrated Directory of Film Comedy Stars* (1992),<sup>111</sup> which, ironically enough, is perhaps where you would not expect to find him listed, since the films failed to

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<sup>107</sup> Note the substitution of his “familiar” screen name Charlie for the more private Charles. Perhaps he was saying (unconsciously) that he wanted to be taken seriously. In fact his next career move took him into serious drama and away from slapstick comedy forever.

<sup>108</sup> One final attempt was made to revive Drake’s career on *Bruce’s Big Night Out* in 1978 by reviving (or more correctly revisiting), *The Worker*. A mini episode was presented each week. Sadly, it was weak because Drake looked very old and tired. Three episodes that survive can be seen on ‘The Complete Series: Charlie Drake is *The Worker*’, 2007. See Appendix

<sup>109</sup> *The Charlie Drake Show* (1967- 1968). Drake was such an important draw that his show was chosen by the BBC to bring colour television to its audiences. See Appendix

<sup>110</sup> “*Looks Familiar*” (1970-1987). Drake appeared on ITV (Thames Television), Thursday, 10 April, 1980, 3.45pm. See Appendix. On the show three guests chat about their ‘early’ theatrical careers. Its daytime slot, suggests one IMDb reviewer, was set because the show was only ‘deemed fit for viewing by the retired’, simon acors (London), User review, IMDb, 9 June, 2009.

<sup>111</sup> Short biographical details are included. See Appendix.

make him a comedy film star.<sup>112</sup> Other British television stars suffered the same fate too. The films Morecambe and Wise made in the mid-late 60s<sup>113</sup> failed, but they failed in a subtly different way to the films Drake made at ABPC - the films did not (and could not) showcase their particular kind of television act. David Parkinson in his review of the films in the *RadioTimes Guide to Films 2007* (Fane-Saunders 2006:1221) says, 'The problem that blighted all three of their movies; the pair's relaxed, intimate style might have been perfect for the sketch format of their TV show, but it was totally wrong for sustaining narratives'. In one way Parkinson's last statement does lend some weight to the arguments made by Mast (1976) or Horton (1991) that we have already noted (p.16), but his initial observation is more helpful because it goes some way to explain why the Morecambe and Wise double-act<sup>114</sup> was not a transferable comic element that would guarantee success in films in the same way the teaming of Hope and Crosby<sup>115</sup> did in America. The intimacy between Morecambe and Wise is missing. Television audiences felt it and it was reciprocated by them. It was essential to their comedy because the television audience were always positioned to share the jokes with them. Of course what was missing was the *liveness* (real and contrived) of the television medium. And that *liveness* has its roots in their early careers as music hall performers.<sup>116</sup> Drake, as we have already seen, thought working in front of a studio audience in a live television was essential to a performing comic like him because it made him perform with the an edge and fear that television actors have not experienced. In his autobiography he reveals what his own personal fear is, and consequently he does not come across as a human being who feels any warmth towards his fellow man. He says:

You have to accept that you're working in a mechanical medium [...] and still try to maintain the fear and the knowledge that you first

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<sup>112</sup> The entry on Drake in *The Encyclopedia of Film* (2003) is interesting because it does suggest that Drake himself was the reason the films failed at the cinema. It reads: 'Short of stature, outrageous in demeanour and bizarre of accent, he is clearly an acquired taste, cinema audiences never acquired it in great numbers as they watched mind-numbing pieces like *Petticoat Pirates*' (206). This is a somewhat confusing statement to make for two very obvious reasons, (i) most audiences who went to the cinema to see the films would have been fans of Drake's television shows already so they would have acquired a taste for his particular kind of comedy, and (ii), those who did not go could never acquire it.

<sup>113</sup> *The Intelligence Men* (1965), *That Riviera Touch* (1966), *The Magnificent Two* (1967).

<sup>114</sup> 'The inspiration for a double act with an overgrown, hyperactive, surreal, adult-child (Eric) and a long-suffering, rather pompous parent-substitute (Ernie) is American, where Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello and Martin and Lewis had perfected the model', Richards, J. (1994:39).

<sup>115</sup> I am thinking of the six *Road* movies that Bob Hope and Bing Crosby made at the Paramount Studios from 1940-1952. Their seventh and film *The Road to Hong Kong* was made at the Shepperton Studios in 1962.

<sup>116</sup> Bob Hope had learned his craft in vaudeville too and this obviously contributed to the intimacy that he had with Crosby in the 'best' of the *Road* movies. That tradition is acknowledged in the *Road to Bali* (1952) when the cinema audience is given a front row eye-view of the duo performing a song-and-dance act on a vaudeville stage at the beginning of the movie.

climbed on to a stage to escape from being one of the audience. If you get it wrong, you'll go back down there with them. And you know that's the last thing you want (98).<sup>117</sup>

Coming from a variety background, Eric and Ernie always knew the importance of maintaining direct contact (or at least the illusion of it) with their television audience because they included a sketch at the beginning and end of their shows where they trade jokes and invite the “audience at home” to share their joking duels by talking directly to them through the camera lens. The *Two Ronnies* use the same device when they tell jokes at the end of the show in the news reader sketch just before they actually acknowledge the audience at home when they say, “It’s Goodbye from me, and it’s Goodbye from him”. The popular ‘Ronnie in the chair’ spot is filmed in front of a live studio audience for the same reason. Drake often acknowledges his audience in *The Worker* with a look to camera or with his famous pantomime catchphrase “Hello my darlings” entrance. But the phrase seems condescending; it is as though it did not require a response from the audience for Drake. His relationship with Mr. Pugh has the same effect. It is antagonistic; there is seldom any reconciliation or warmth between them (like there is say between Jerry Desmond’s character Mr. Freeman or Edward Chapman’s Mr. Grimsdale and the little “Gump” character Wisdom plays, or like there is between Albert and Harold in *Steptoe and Son*). Drake’s character(s) are just irritating little men with nothing to love about them. Their mischief is self-serving. In the chapter ‘The Descent of the ‘Little man’ we shall explore the idea that this trait is not just common to the ‘little man’ character’s psyche in film and television and comedy but has its roots in tragedy and horror. We shall begin to learn that this trait is prevalent and that humour performs an essential function in relation to it.

It was a long time before anyone remembered Drake at all. ITV’s half hour documentary in 1992, *The Entertainers: Charlie Drake* seems to have created some new interest because some of his sketches were included on two videos released the following year, *The Golden Years of British Comedy ’50’s*<sup>118</sup> and *Comedy Classics of the 60’s* which includes the *1812*

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<sup>117</sup> Anyone who watches Reality TV shows like *Big Brother* or *X Factor* will soon realise that this is not something particular to Drake but seems to be, sadly, a common trait in the human psyche.

<sup>118</sup> The phrase “The Golden Years” signifying simultaneously the past and the best of does included Drake, which at least is some acknowledgement of his importance as a television comic.

*Overture* sketch that Drake said, 'he would bet evens the BBC would run in his fond memory' after his death (1986: 99).<sup>119</sup>

Unfortunately, *Paul Merton's Palladium Story* in 1994, which was made to celebrate the stars who had appeared at the London Palladium, did more to harm than good to stimulate any interest in Drake's career. Merton is more interested in Drake's bad boy reputation than what had made him top of the bill. This is conspicuous because in all the other interviews with stars who had appeared at the Palladium Merton talks about their performances. Only Drake is singled out and made more infamous for his personal misconduct than famous for making Palladium audiences laugh by dressing up in the over-sized Moon boots, strapping himself to a rocket seat, and sending himself up (as a shooting star). If there was any doubt in the audiences' minds back then that he wasn't a star, by the time he had shot over their heads into the roof of the Palladium to twinkle with the stars above the Royal Box, he soon reminded them that he was.

The BBC retrospective, *Arena: Night of Entertainers: Drake's Progress* in 2001 was a more balanced and appreciative documentary because it celebrated one of its own stars. Not unsurprisingly though, the '1812 Overture' sketch that was screened after the documentary did not appear on Channel 4's *Britain's 50 Greatest Comedy Sketches* in 2005, and Drake was not included amongst *Britain's Greatest Comedy Heroes* in a celebration released on video in 2009.

So why has Drake been forgotten? He was photographed everywhere he went. He was photographed socialising with British film stars. He was so famous on television that he was offered a major film deal himself. He was invited to appear on the Ed Sullivan Show in America after they had seen tapes of 'Charlie Drake In...'Treble'.<sup>120</sup> He appeared on *This Is Your Life*<sup>121</sup> in 1961. He received the *Daily Mirror National Television Award* on the day he announced his retirement (Sunday, 29 July 1962). He headlined at the London Palladium many times, and he appeared in fifteen Royal Command Variety Shows. Perhaps it is something to do with Drake's giant ego. Why for instance does he have to tell us, 'I've won every comedy award there is to be won on television [...] I made the best nine minutes of

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<sup>119</sup> A clip of the '1812 Overture' has been uploaded on YouTube.

<sup>120</sup> Original BBC Transmission Tuesday 5 May 1959, 7.30-8.00pm.

<sup>121</sup> "This Is Your Life" series 7, episode 11, BBC One, 11 December 1961.

television comedy that has ever been made or ever will be made [the *1812 Overture*'], I won five awards with it including the Golden Rose of Montreux' (1986:99). Perhaps it is because *he* tells us, that we do not want to listen. Perhaps it was the 'little boy' in his unconscious begging to be noticed.

Some of his more generous contemporaries have not forgotten the debt they owe him though. Bob McCabe in *The authorized biography of Ronnie Barker* says, '[l]ooking back, Ronnie realizes that the seeds of his performance as Fletcher were sown in *The Cracksman*' (2004: 64), and John Fisher in *The Definitive Biography of a Comedy Legend Tommy Cooper: Always Leave Them Laughing* places Drake alongside other famous stars of British comedy; 'from the mid-fifties there had been no question over the sole drawing power of many of his [Tommy Cooper's] contemporaries, names like Norman Wisdom, Tony Hancock...and a little later...Charlie Drake' (McCabe 2006:208).

The debt that later comedians owe him is questionable, but would Mel Brooks have made *The Producers* (1968),<sup>122</sup> or Michael Crawford made *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em* (a vehicle originally intended for Wisdom) without *Mister Ten Per Cent* and *The Worker*? Even in Hollywood does the old-aged, cigar-smoking, lecherous off set childlike on it, adult Baby Herman toon in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988) not bear an uncanny resemblance to Baron Hard-On in *SINderella*? If Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes are indebted to Laurel and Hardy for their *Mick and Montmorency* characters, the Chuckle Brothers<sup>123</sup> are equally indebted to *Mick and Montmorency*. The Chuckle Brothers are mere imitators though. They have neither the desire nor the talent to prove their uniqueness. Drake's comedy evolved into something that owed a lot to the tradition of the 'little man' in comedy but it was unique for a number of reasons. Drake's comedy was fuelled by an enormous psychopathological ego; it is what drove him to express himself in comedy. But, one suspects that he would have found another medium to satisfy this urge as he did after he announced his retirement from television when he took up painting as a means of expressing his pent up feelings of self-loathing. We have already noted that he could have become a successful artist and how he

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<sup>122</sup> *Mister Ten Per Cent* was based on an original idea by the Jewish writer Myra Avrech. It is likely that Brooks had read the book and possibly seen the film before he wrote the screenplay for his film. In his letter to the author (Op.cit) Hudis makes the laconic comment, 'Final word on Mr 10%: not long afterwards, out came Mel Brooks' "The Producers", on the same theme. No comparison'.

<sup>123</sup> The television children's entertainers do acknowledge that *Mick and Montmorency* did influence the creation of their double-act in the article, 'The family business', in *The Stage*, December 14, 2006, p.33. Source: The Stage Archive.

succeeded as a dramatic actor later on in his career. It was his big ego that fuelled a desire in him to leave his mark on British television comedy and to prove to everyone (if not himself more) that he could produce work that would be loved and never forgotten. By any other definition he would surely be called a genius.

Most academics, as we noted earlier, have never considered Drake at all. Spicer (2001) however, whilst offering a valuable insight into why Wisdom's 'Gump' character was so popular in films, is only able to point out by comparison why Drake's character was not. Spicer even comes close to making the close connection between the character(s) Drake plays and Drake's own personality (which I argue, inhabits them all) when he uses the psychologically charged adjective 'disturbing' (108) to describe the mood his characters create in the films. Spicer's observations (if not insights) are useful because he emphasises the importance of the medium of film and the part it played in constructing the different types of 'little man' characters played by Wisdom and Drake. His focus on film does help us to pick out the reasons why one type of 'little man' character worked better for film than it did for television, but of course the opposite is true as well. Spicer's work which is considered in more detail in the chapter, 'The Descent of the Little Man', is a starting point for placing Drake's 'little man' character(s) amongst his contemporaries, but it is also a point of departure for tracing their evolution.

What is an inescapable fact though, is that Drake's own personality is the entity that haunts his 'little man' character(s) and that his life story is the haunted house where his psycho-comedy is exorcised by him for an audience who congregate in front of their television screen to worship him. Drake did little to dispel the idea that there was any distinction between his performance persona and himself, when for instance, he played the part of Lionel in *Filipina Dreamgirls* in 1991, a character which is drawn (or traced) from his bad boy reputation with young women. Lionel is typically, a misfit. He does not interact with the other middle-aged British men who go to the Philippines looking for a dream girl to marry and take back home to Britain. The ever smirking, trench coat wearing Lionel (the association with the dirty Mack type is probably deliberate) who is accompanied everywhere by his minder (a nod to his 'protected' star status) is seen going in and out of hotels. It is clear that he has not gone looking for love and marriage, but to have sex with the Filipina girls, a wish *he* does not have to dream about to fulfil because it is something his 'star' status guarantees.



In a Granada retrospective of the Stockport artist David Hughes Drake plays various comic characters. Principally, though Drake represents Hughes' judgemental father. Consequently, the retrospective, which is meant to help us understand the mind of the artist, is also a detailed study of Drake portrayed through the 'little man' character(s) he played throughout his career. Importantly, the film reveals that Hughes' deep seated psychological anxieties (which he tries to work out through his art) are the result of his difficult relationship with his overbearing father. Consequently, Hughes thinks of himself as a 'little man' in comparison, and his only defence is to make fun of father-figures by making them small, so Drake seems to be an inspired choice to play out this Oedipal comic psychodrama. As Judge Drake (taken from his 'trial by a jury of Drakes' dream sequence in *Petticoat Pirates*) he represents the omnipotent law of the patriarchal father, but this manifestation is more condemnatory than comic, and Hughes' repressions seem more tragic for being exposed in this way. The short film slowly and unsurprisingly meanders its way to the inevitable castration joke. Judge Drake puts on his black cap to pronounce the sentence of a life of repression on Hughes for not obeying the law of his father before a young naked girl castraterix symbolically chops off Hughes' head as the film (dream sequence) ends.

What is less interesting about Hughes' film is not that it shows another victim of the father complex using the medium of film as a form of self-analysis to expose himself and disguise his pain with more jokes about castration anxiety. What is more interesting is Drake's paternalistic comic performance, which is a kind of remembrance; a self-promoting retrospective of the ultimate triumph of the will of the 'little man' over the father by becoming the comic father. By parodying his "contraphallic"<sup>124</sup> 'little man' type character(s) Drake reminds us why he was once famous, and that we are in danger of classifying his comic creation as just another subspecies of the 'little man' type played by more celebrated clowns. Consequently, we are in danger of not giving Drake any credit for his uniqueness as a clown, and allowing his fame to fade unfairly. It is important therefore to be reminded by contemporary reviewers like Molly Douglas, that Drake was once 'called a genius of the

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<sup>124</sup> *The Worker*, 'A Host of Golden Casual Labourers', ITV (ATV), series 2, episode 1, Saturday, 2 October, 1965. This is one of many malapropisms Drake's 'little man' uses in the series. Freud would define the word 'contraphallic' as a sound pun, a composite word made up from the words 'contra' and 'phallic'. When combined the joke relies on the *double entendre* meaning created in the audience's mind between the split personality of Drake's highly publicised sexuality and his 'little man' character's sexual immaturity.

television screen' (c.1961:74).<sup>125</sup> Drake's 'little man' character *was* a new species. This thesis hopes to show that his egotistical personality coupled with his diminutiveness and [un]natural 'comic' features probably meant that Drake would have been 'Swimming against the tide'<sup>126</sup> of public ridicule had he not found a successful career in television as a clown which enabled him to cope with his own 'little man' complex.

Perhaps Drake does reveal something about the way he felt about his diminutiveness in the way he says he used to promote himself before he was famous. 'When I used to dance on table tops in pubs' he tells Douglas, 'My billing was "Five Feet One Inch of Loveliness"' (1986:74). This need to be loved is part of the little man-child's character and appeal; 'littleness' equates with 'loveliness'. But it raises a question that the 'little man' character(s) Drake played was a mask that hid his own sadness about feeling unloved, and he unconsciously substituted it with a wish to become famous by exploiting the very thing that made him feel unloved by turning it into something that everyone loved, little Charlie. In *Charlie Drake In...* 'Treble' Drake plays 'The Little Picture-Hanger' and later as we have seen he re-imagined himself as the 'Little Trier' in *The Worker*, a show where this psychological anxiety about 'littleness' was furiously debated in the *duologues* between a very tall antagonist at the labour exchange, Mr. Whittaker / Mr.Pugh and little Charlie.

We will now take the psychoanalyst Harvey Greenberg's advice in 'Celluloid and Psyche' (1990) and turn to Freud to analyse how Drake's 'little man' comedies 'can be evaluated for character's symptoms and diagnoses; for their depiction of normal or pathological mental mechanisms; for their portrayal of life-stage specific psychological conflicts [...] leavened by [Drake's] ego-psychology' (3) to show how 'psychoanalysis can illuminate the text, the

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<sup>125</sup> The author has been unable to trace the title of the magazine that this article comes from or the date that it was published. It may have been sometime in the early part of 1961 since the article includes stills from the film, *Sands of the Desert* which was released in 1960 and no mention at all is made about Drake filming *Petticoat Pirates* which was released in November 1961. Gifford's (1973) entry (Catalogue Number: 13025) is useful because it confirms the actual date of the film's release. Douglas' interview is enlightening because it offers some insights into Drake's personality, but it essential to be cautious since some of the biographical details supplied by Drake are incorrect. The same cautious approach must be taken about Drake's obvious intentions to paint himself in a good light. Nevertheless, Drake is not sentimental at all when it comes to discussing comedy and a lot of what he does say in the interview provides some considerable insight into the comic mind of a clown at the height of his powers.

<sup>126</sup> *Swimming against the tie* (1991) was a short psycho-bio made by the artist David Hughes. The title is a pun on the well-known saying, "swimming against the tide". In it Hughes' remembers his father reprimanding him for forgetting his tie, which of course, is a symbol of castration and obedience to patriarchal authority. In the short Drake plays a number of roles, including a music hall comedian. See Appendix

characters and the subtext of [Drake's comedies] as well as the way in which an audience experiences it' (Gabbard and Gabbard: 1987:197)<sup>127</sup> by analysing Drake's [sense of] humour.

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<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Greenberg (1990:4).

## CHAPTER TWO

**“Frood started it you know. Frood. He was sitting on his couch one day analysing himself, just for the fun of it”.**

Freud had a great sense of humour. He often used jokes to elaborate his ideas; indeed he told his friend Wilhelm Fliess that his ‘subjective reason for taking up the problem of jokes’ was in response to a complaint he had made that *The Interpretation of Dreams* was too full of jokes.<sup>128</sup> On one famous occasion when Freud’s life was in danger, his sense of humour demonstrated what he had always professed was its purpose; that it functioned as a survival mechanism to cope with the threat of everyday life. On the day he escaped from the nazis in 1938 he told a Gestapo officer, who was delaying the train from leaving the railway station in Vienna because he wanted Freud to absolve the Party of any blame, ‘I can heartily recommend the Gestapo to anyone’.<sup>129</sup> The Gestapo officer did not get the joke. He did not share his sense of humour. Freud’s joke functioned as a way of rebelling against the demands of a dictatorial social order, ‘a joke is not resigned, it is rebellious’ (1927/1990:429) he says. It clearly demonstrates the moral and political implications of such jokes. Because Freud had to repress any aggressive thoughts he had about the Gestapo, his only means of finding a release for his impulses was by expressing his desires behind the façade of a joke. It might be argued that he could have just kept his mouth shut, and that he might have actually been endangering his own life, but in that moment he demonstrated the kind of courage that is found in all ‘little man’ comedies and why the ‘little man’ characters who always stand up to authority figures and bullies became so popular with film and television audiences during and after the great wars. In a series like *The Worker* for example, Mr. Pugh/McGee only rarely makes jokes. He cannot control his aggressive desire to hurt Charlie and he often threatens him with physical violence. He clearly does not share Charlie’s sense of humour because *he* is the object of his aggressive jokes in the joke-work of the comedy. Jokes serve the same function for Charlie as the joke Freud told to the Gestapo officer did, they avert the threat of physical harm. The violent slapstick (the self-harm slapstick sketch) is a manifestation of the punishment he feels he deserves for being a naughty little boy. Mr. Pugh is in a position of

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<sup>128</sup> Editor’s Introduction *Jokes* (1905:3-5 and 173n).

<sup>129</sup> See ‘The Nazi Who Saved Sigmund Freud’, David M. Cohen, writer, filmmaker, psychologist, *The Huffington Post*, 03/30/2012, 4:40 pm.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-m-cohen/freud-nazi-germany\\_b\\_1392377.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-m-cohen/freud-nazi-germany_b_1392377.html)

authority and control over Charlie's life (he will get him a job or he won't). He represents the punishing (castrating/Oedipal) father-figure.

Clearly then, a joke is much more than a joke. They serve a psycho-sociological purpose; they disguise aggressive impulses which have to be communicated to someone other than the object of the joke. The success of any joke says Freud relies on a 'Third Party' (*Jokes*: 1905:151) who shares the same sense of humour and aggression they feel towards the object as the joke-teller. As we have already noted the device Drake uses to communicate with his audience is the nod to camera to signal he is about to tell a joke, or to acknowledge that he has just told one. The collaborative nature of how this system functions bears careful re-examination, especially since we are reprising Freud's theories and his work on humour (which concentrates on verbal jokes) and applying them to the predominantly visual media of film and television comedies<sup>130</sup> 'as tools [...] of psycho-analysis that offer a means of understanding the mental machinery activated by the passage of images on the screen' (Cook & Bernink 2002:335).<sup>131</sup>

'Freud wrote as if the cinema were a cultural form directly antithetical to psycho-analysis' state Cook and Bernink (341), and Heath (1999) in *Cinema and Psychoanalysis: Parallel Histories*, reminds us that 'when Freud was approached by his colleagues Sacks and Abraham to become involved in a film about psychoanalysis entitled *Secrets of the Soul* (1926), he refused to entertain the notion that cinema could figure the unconscious or any concepts that pertained to it' (29).<sup>132</sup> To demonstrate its applicability it is prudent to see why other writers and academics in film and media studies think Freud's psycho-analytic theories provides useful tools for examining film and television texts before we analyse the 'little man' comedies of Drake in more detail.

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<sup>130</sup> The relationship between the visually (comic) and verbal jokes in comedy is complex, especially since film and television is primarily a visual medium. However, it is important to remember that the visual content of comedy is synergistic, and that sound (even in silent comedies) in the form of musical accompaniments, such as, whistles, whoops and bangs, was provided to provoke the audience's laughter. Verbal jokes, funny dialogue, and comic asides were often written down and displayed on screen cards for audiences to read and share collectively. The sound of communal laughter contributed to the idea that they shared a common sense of humour.

<sup>131</sup> The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge made an interesting comment to Lamb when they were discussing a print of Hogarth's, 'The Rake's Marriage'. He suggested, "Everything in Hogarth is to be translated into Language – words - & to act as words, not as Images" to which Lamb replied the image had "the teeming, fruitful, suggestive meaning of words", in Holmes (1998:225).

<sup>132</sup> Heath quoted in Trahair (2005:175).

‘Nobody in psychiatry has had a bigger impact than Freud’ said a psychiatrist on the recent BBC television series *Great Thinkers*.<sup>133</sup> Goldstein and McGhee (1972) in *The Psychology of Humour: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues* echo this sentiment when they state that Freud’s work on jokes is a ‘highly influential work’ (12) and the author would agree with Cook and Bernink (2002) when they say ‘that of all the theoretical frameworks academics have utilized for investigating how film and television comedies tell their stories, how characters interact and behave, and how they are watched and understood’ (319), nobody makes a bigger impact than Freud. Annette Kuhn (2004) ‘finds psychoanalytic theory enormously helpful in thinking about film’ (1223) and notes that ‘Cinepsychoanalysis’ has concerned itself with the psychical organisation of looking and seeing, [and] drawing on the psychoanalytic account of human development’ (1224).

Barbara Creed reminds us that, ‘not only did Freud draw on cinematic terms to describe his theories, as in ‘screen memories’, but a number of his key ideas were developed in visual terms’ (Creed in Hill & Gibson 1998:77). Lisa Trahair (2005) states that

while film theory has used psycho-analysis to give meaning to films in terms of Freudian scenarios as the Oedipus complex, and the concept of wish-fulfilment (176), Freud’s book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* also represents a substantial contribution in the theory of the comic. Indeed, Freud’s commitment [...] to a discussion and theorization of the *Witz* makes it one of the most extensive treatments of the aesthetics of the comic (181).

Horton (1991) points out that ‘Freud found a much greater significance in jokes than most of his contemporaries did’ (58) and many, if not most, recent theorists and commentators on film and television comedy draw on Freud’s work on *Jokes*. Cook and Bernink for instance observe how ‘Mast draws on Freud, Neale (1981) and Neale and Krutnik draw on – and to some extent modify – Freud’s ideas’ (2002: 223) whilst Palmer (1995), they point out, argues that most theories of humour such as Freud’s are ‘partial’ (224); which is simply not the case, as Marmysz (2005:13) explains. ‘Freud’s theory is the most sophisticated and comprehensive’ because ‘he combines elements from each of the three traditional types of theory’. Palmer is perhaps trying to dismiss any suggestion that his earlier work on film and television comedy

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<sup>133</sup> *Great Thinkers: In Their Own Words*, episode 1, ‘Human, All Too Human’, BBC Four, 1 August, 2011. The only film footage that exists of Freud is a family film shot just before he died is shown on *Great Thinkers*. Freud would have recognised the psychological importance of leaving a memory of himself for his immediate family, but it is unlikely that he was driven by any anxiety about being forgotten since he had been internationally recognised in his lifetime as one of the world’s great thinkers.

was also a ‘partial’ theory because he draws exclusively on Freud’s ‘theory of jokes’<sup>134</sup> too (1987:30-38). Horton observes how Koestler (1949) built his concept of comic “biosociation” and comedy on Freud’s analysis of jokes and the unconscious (5), but he points out that ‘although Palmer makes no reference to Koestler, his semiological reading of comedy is almost identical’ (6). Similarly, his attention to the ‘structure’<sup>135</sup> or the shape and the logic of jokes, the ‘function’ or the psychological purposes of humour and laughter, and the ‘limits’ or the points, psychic and social, at which humour or laughter disappears’ (Cook and Bernink 2002:224) is a modification of Freud’s deconstructive model in *Jokes*. Palmer, in fact, comes as close as any writer on film comedy to Freud’s observations that jokes employ techniques, that they have a psychic and social purpose, and that the technique of a joke can be discovered by applying a process Freud calls ‘reduction’ (*Jokes* 1905:23).<sup>136</sup>

We come to the same kind of [mis]appropriation of another writer’s work when we discuss character in comedy. In our introduction we stated that Freud’s definition of the ‘comic’ comes closer to Aristotle’s definition of the ludicrous than Palmer’s theory in *The Logic of the*

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<sup>134</sup> Palmer (1987) makes the common mistake of calling Freud’s *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* a ‘theory of jokes’ (31). Marmysz (2005) mistakenly calls it a ‘theory of humour’ (13, 25). Even those in the field of psychology like, Goldstein & McGhee (1972:12), who perhaps should know better, commit the same error. Freud did not write a theory of jokes. The study was part of an “all encompassing work” (*Great Thinkers*). Freud’s theories are ‘essentialist’ but his work on jokes must certainly not be regarded as either *partial* or as a ‘totalizing theory’ of comedy (Horton 2), as Palmer, Mast, or Morreall (1983) claim their own theories to be. Neale & Krutnik inevitably make the same claim whilst simultaneously denying they are trying to come up with ‘yet another theory of comedy’ (2) by doing essentially exactly what Morreall and Palmer do; they ‘collapse these elements together in pursuit of a single thesis’ (2) and by admitting that they ‘draw extensively on psychoanalytic theory’ (3) they do ‘privilege some over others’ (2) namely Freud, as Cook & Bernink (2) point out (above).

<sup>135</sup> It is important to point out that the author is not dismissing any of these theories and commentaries because they either draw directly from Freud’s work on jokes and the comic (Neale & Krutnik, King) and his psychoanalytic theories (Horton, Paul, Lehman in Horton 1991) or they modify it to invent a new one (Mast, Palmer); every author must do this. Freud graciously expresses his thanks to Lipps’ *Komik und Humor* (1898) in his introduction to *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* when he says, ‘It is this book that has given me the courage to undertake this attempt as well as the possibility of doing so’ (footnote 1), and he acknowledges contemporaries such as Spencer (‘The Physiology of Laughter’ (1860), Fischer (*Über den Witz* (1889) and Bergson (*Laughter, an Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900) for the contribution their work made to his psycho-analytic theory.

<sup>136</sup> This process was tested by a Chicago-based stage company called the Neo-Futurists who performed a comedy lecture called *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious – a theatrical exploration of comedy theory*. The aim was to find out why ‘visual’ jokes are funny by dissecting them. The company demonstrate this by suggesting that the ‘process of reduction’ that Freud (1905: 23) applied to discover the technique of ‘verbal’ jokes (i.e. by getting rid of the joke) can also be applied to the visual media of pantomime, theatre and film, which lends some justification to the study being undertaken here. The Neo-Futurist’s answer to the charge of ‘attempting to render comedy unfunny...by explaining why it’s funny...of course only makes it funnier’, *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious: A comedy to end all comedy*, created by Greg Allen, featuring the Neo-Futurists, directed by Jeff Meyers, shot before a live audience on location at The Neo-Futuranum, Chicago, first light publishing, Venice, California, 2002.

*Absurd*. A reason for this, as Neale and Krutnik (1995:68) point out, is that Palmer's theory echoes another work which 'sought to theorize a distinction between the ludicrous and ridiculous' (66), Elder Olsen's *Theory of Comedy* (1968). Palmer fails to acknowledge Olsen, but clearly, Neale and Krutnik recognize the continuity. Interestingly though, the very fact that Aristotle's term is still being used to define 'comic' character types in comedy today suggests that there may be a link to a common ancestor, an archetypal 'lower' character type that existed in ancient Greek comedy, which is useful, because it provides an indication as to why certain 'comic' characters in film comedy remain popular, even if, the moral and social implications of comedy has changed, as Coleridge (1817) [1975] who is obviously reflecting on the comedy of his own time points out; 'The ancients neither sought in comedy to make us laugh merely; much less to make us laugh by wry faces, accidents of jargon, slang phrases for the day or the clothing of common-place morals in metaphors drawn from the shops or mechanical operations of their characters', (192 n.1). It appears that the purpose of comedy had done a complete *volte-face* by Coleridge's day, yet the clown's face has remained the same since, as we shall see in the next chapter when we discuss the descent of the 'little man'. In the twentieth century the appearance of the Janus-faced 'little man' character reflected the neurosis of the modern age that Freud's psycho-analytic theories had unintentionally ushered in (comedy); the repressed and rebellious nature of modern man hiding behind the 'comic' mask of regression of the plucky 'little man' character. The tragic hero type that had existed for hundreds of years was lost in a brief revelation of self-doubt. In his place stood the little clown who had swapped his sword for a slap-stick, his helmet for a jingly hat, and tales of mighty deeds for a comic story and a joke that mocked his boasts about being a giant among men. But 'That's what comics do; they make light of tragedy' said Michael Parkinson when he interviewed his guest, the comic Max Wall, who told him how his comedy was born out of personal tragedy.<sup>137</sup> When Drake was a little boy he saw his brother get knocked over and killed when he was hit by a motor car as they were playing 'chicken' to cross the road. His mother saw the accident and it deeply affected Drake (1986:4). The psychological scars that these kinds of personal tragedies left behind shaped the sense of humour of 'little man' comics like Chaplin, Askey and Wisdom too. The very tough lives that these comic had to face up to when they were very young undoubtedly made them put on a brave 'comic' face to help them cope with whatever 'custard pies' life was going to throw at them. The 'little man'

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<sup>137</sup> *Parkinson: Michael Parkinson Meets Max Wall*, BBC 1, 14 February, 1981, 21:50-22:50.



character(s) that each of these comics developed are variations on a theme of tragedy. It is a concept explored in more detail in the next chapter.

We should not dismiss Palmer's theory because he has borrowed without license; his is one of the most important recent theories. But it should be clear that our opinions are sceptical. So, when we observe what Palmer has to say about character types in comedy, we should be wary. Earlier (p.17) we noted Palmer's claim that four types of 'comic' character (see p.37 n.72) exist in comedy. It is now worth comparing these comic types with the psychoneurotic types Freud describes in his paper 'On Narcissism (1914)' to see if he can offer some psychological insight into Drake's 'little man' character(s) as we have suggested. The types Freud 'found' include the narcissistic type, a person who is concerned only with: '(a) what he himself is (i.e. himself), (b) what he himself was, (c) what he himself would like to be, (d) someone who was once a part of himself' (90). This definition sums up the character types pre-occupied with self-love played by Kenneth Williams in the *Carry On* films. The 'anaclitic'<sup>138</sup> (or attachment type) is a person concerned: (a) with the woman that feeds him, (b) the man who protects him and the succession of others who take their place'<sup>139</sup> fits the hysterical character types played by Connor in the *Carry On* films. It is worth mentioning others here because it indicates the prevalence of these types found in the film and television 'little man' comedies as well as providing some psychological insight into the type of comic actors who played them. Wisdom's 'mothered' 'little man' character(s) in *Just My Luck* and *Trouble in Store*, and Ronnie Corbett's grown-up-son living at home with a domineering mum in *Now Look Here...* and *Sorry!* (who eventually gets the girl-next-door) are anaclitic types. There are 'little man' characters who at first do not seem to fit Freud's categories, such as Granville played by David Jason's in *Open All Hours* (who never gets the girl-next-door), but he does fit the anaclitic type because he fosters an emotional attachment to his "H, H, Hungarian" mum (by fantasizing that she did not really abandon him) and an attachment to a

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<sup>138</sup> 'anaclitic: from the Greek *anaklitos* for leaning upon', *Collins English Dictionary* (1979). Rycroft (1972) states: 'anaclitic object-choice occurs when the choice is based on the pattern of childhood dependence on someone unlike himself. Homosexuality is narcissistic, while heterosexuality is anaclitic' (6). The two kinds of object-choice describe the narcissistic type that Williams played in the *Carry On* films who are constantly gazing at themselves in the mirror (*Carry On Sergeant*, *Carry On Emmannuelle*), and the anaclitic type played by Connor in *Sergeant* (that is, until he is repatriated back into the dominant male heterosexual ideology once he is cured of his neurotic fear of women and is finally able to grow-up emotionally into manhood). Wood (1979) explains, 'the happy ending typically signifies the restoration of repression' of the dominant male heterosexual ideology.

<sup>139</sup> Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)', S.E. Vol. X11, p. 90. Also quoted in Storr (2001) p. 72.

real mother type, the big bosomed nurse Gladys Emmanuel/Lynda Baron who treats him like a little boy. However, Drake's 'little man' character(s) seems perversely narcissistic and anaclitic. But, since we have accepted the double presence of Drake the star performer and his 'little man' persona in television shows such as *The Worker* where Charlie 'leans on' Mr. Pugh each week to get him a job and the fact that Drake steps out of character to play the clown before an adoring 'live' audience whose gaze functions like a one-way mirror reflecting back his self-adoration, once again, we have a photo-fit with the psychoneurotic types Freud describes.

Furthermore, if, as Marmysz (2005:36) suggests, we accept that 'Humour as a form of neurosis' helps or determines how a comic like Drake (Askey, Wisdom) creates his 'little man' character, then humour is exactly what Palmer concludes, 'a logic of the absurd'. It is an entirely human concept. It would be inhuman to consider it as something illogical, as Saavik/Kirstie Alley (an alien from the planet Vulcan) demonstrates when she fails to appreciate why Admiral James T. Kirk/William Shatner finds something humorous about a character with no sense of humour. "Humour? It is a difficult concept. It is not logical" she tells the Captain who, out of courtesy, lowers his head and smiles at her inability to share a joke. 'Freud was convinced that his discoveries about human motivation and the unconscious applied not only to neurotics but also to every human endeavour' states Storr (2001:82). If that is the case, a sense of humour is what consciously motivates the need to tell jokes (and to share them), and the 'joking envelope' (*Jokes* 1905:132) (the slapstick routine or the clown himself) is a disguise that contains unconscious wishes whose discovery is revealed through laughter. And if laughter is a measure of a joke's effectiveness it is not difficult to understand why people flocked to music halls and picture palaces, or settled down in front of their television screens to laugh at their favourite comic who made themselves into an 'object of reticule'.<sup>140</sup> It is just difficult to understand why they laugh and the pleasure they get from laughing all together unless we accept the psychological purpose behind the adage *there is safety in numbers*.

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<sup>140</sup> *The Worker*, 'A Democratic Democratism', ITV (ATV), series 1 episode 5, Saturday, 27 March, 1965, 20:25-21:00. Again another example of a sound pun, a composite word made up from the words 'retina' and 'ridicule'; in itself not funny until the association is made with the 'little man' as somebody who is seen as an object of ridicule.

Although Freud never applied any part of his psychoanalytic theory to the analysis of film (largely because it pre-dates it) aspects of his theories soon appealed to film makers, indeed the rapid speed with which those themes entered into the public consciousness (to such an extent that words like the ‘unconscious’ and ‘ego’ have become everyday words now) is to a large degree attributable to popular entertainment mediums like cinema. The pervasiveness of Freud’s influence can be measured alone by the fact that his theories, in one form or another, became (and remain) popular subjects in almost every genre of film and television production. Psycho-analysis was plundered by film makers long before it ‘emerged in Anglophone debates about film in the early 1970s’ as Cook and Bernink (2002:341) tell us, and in television comedy long before Dragunoiu (2001-2) noted that the ‘comic appropriation of some of the most popular theoretical models of psycho-analysis’ suggested that psycho-analysis was ‘the instrument of comedy and vice versa’ (17).

It would be impracticable to try to list every film or television show that utilizes the subject of psycho-analysis, in part or as a whole theme, because there are so many, but it is important to provide some examples just to give some idea of the pervasiveness of Freud (as a serious or comic subject) and his theories (of psycho-analysis and dreams) because they can be found in almost every genre of film.<sup>141</sup> Psycho-analysis began to filter down into American culture from the 1930s, and throughout the 1940s and 1950s it became a popular theme in melodrama, film noir, and horror films. One of the most popular scenarios depicted is, of course, the psychoanalyst/patient scene. In American cinema in the 1940s hysterical women were put on the couch (or in the dock metaphorically) in melodramas like *Now Voyager* (1942), and *Possessed* (1947), or portrayed as *femme fatales* (the classic castraterix) in *film noir* crime melodramas like *Whirlpool* (1949). The psychological drama *The Snake Pit* (1948) based on Jane Ward’s semi-autobiographical novel about life in a mental institution was ‘perceived to be so disturbing that it suffered from over-zealous censor cuts and still retains its power to shock’ today says Parkinson in his review of the film in the *RadioTimes Guide to Films* (2006: 1128).

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<sup>141</sup> ‘The silver screen seems to have a certain fascination with psychiatry: its illnesses, treatments, institutions and doctors. Indeed psychiatrists appear in only slightly fewer films than cowboys (404 vs. 491 films), according to one recent survey. Even in animated Disney films 85% contained some references to mental illness with characters being described as “crazy” or “nuts”, Dr Chris Pell *Psychiatry at the Movies*, RC Psych Royal College of Psychiatrists, [Page last updated 26 January, 2009] <http://www.repsych.ac.uk/discoverpsychiatry/studentassociates/psychiatryinthedia/mediaresources/psychiatryatthemovies.aspx>

In the horror genre of 1940s American cinema the ‘catty’ personality of the neurotic woman is depicted quite literally in the psychological horror *Cat People* (1942). In *The Wolf Man* (1941), a Doctor Lloyd (note the name rhymes with Freud) diagnoses “Larry” Talbot’s (Lon Chaney) lycanthropy<sup>142</sup> as a psychosomatic form of schizophrenia. Various references to hypnotism and psychic disturbances of the mind are made in the film. This is perhaps the earliest evidence of actual references to psycho-analysis when it was still a relatively unknown entity to the public and it is used to increase the audience’s sense of the ‘uncanny’. In what is probably the first reference to the psychology behind humour in a horror film, psychiatrist Doctor Maxwell/James Bell in *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) explains to a nurse that ‘Sometimes it’s better to laugh than pull a long face when things are hopeless’ when he discusses the strange case of ‘Zombie’ wife, Jessica Holland/Christine Gordon.

If Freud’s psycho-analytical themes were becoming more recognisable from the 1940s, by the 1950s so was the psychiatrist character. Benshoff (1997) says that that this was not the case in earlier horror films: ‘Psychiatry in the horror genre can be traced back at least to Doctor Seward in Bram Stoker’s short story *Dracula’s Guest* (1914). It is significant, however, that in Universal’s 1931 adaptation, his role is a relatively minor one. In *Dracula’s Daughter* (1936) and many of the horror films of the World War II years, the psychiatrist replaces either or both of the roles filled by Jonathan Harker and Professor Van Helsing - i.e. the normal male of the heterosexualized couple and/or the voice of patriarchal authority. In other films, especially those made at Universal Studios, the psychiatrist becomes a new version of the mad doctor’ (114).<sup>143</sup> The psychiatrist character was starting to look like Freud too. In the science fiction adventure *Forbidden Planet* (1956) Dr. Morbius/Walter Pidgeon is a bearded Beatnik Freud look alike. By 1962 the face of the father of psycho-analysis is revealed in the biographical drama *Freud* (1962). As far as I am aware Freud is the only psychoanalyst who was well-known enough to warrant any interest in his life. Montgomery Clift plays the young Freud ‘formulating his theory that the sexual instinct was the basis of human personality,

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<sup>142</sup> lycanthropy. ‘a rare psychiatric syndrome that involves a delusion that the effected person can transform into, has transformed into, or is a non-human animal’. Garlipp P, Gödecke-Koch, T, Dietrich, D.E, Haltenhof, H (January 2004). ‘Lycanthropy-psychopathological and psychodynamical aspects’ *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 109:1 pp.19–22.

<sup>143</sup> For a psycho-analytically informed account in relation to horror films see Creed (1993), or Hutchings (1993). Wood (1979:10) drawing on Freud provides a psycho-social explanation of the death of the monster in horror films to suggest how patriarchal ideology represses ‘unnatural’ sexuality. He says ‘the happy ending (when it exists) typically signifies the restoration of repression’ (of dominant patriarchal heterosexual ideology). Quoted in Cook & Bernink (2002:197).

leading to the revelation that came to be known as the Oedipus complex' says Hutchinson in his review of the film in the *RadioTimes Guide to Films* (2006:453). The British film *Zina* (1985) is a 'Biopic/drama: the traumas of 20<sup>th</sup> Century history distilled through the psychic disturbances of Trotsky's daughter, Zina, under analysis with Sigmund Freud in 1930s Berlin' state Monk and Sergeant (2002:265). Here we meet a much older Freud, a representation of the man that became the classic symbolic image of what every psychiatrist type should look like – a look-alike Freud – in cinema. In the Hitchcock-style thriller *Dead Again* (1991) Robin Williams plays a psychiatrist who is sarcastically referred to as "Mr. Freud" by detective Mike Church/Kenneth Branagh, and in *High Anxiety* (1977) Professor Lilloman/Howard Morris (note the pun on words "little old man") is a bearded, bespectacled, tweed suit wearing comic impersonation of Freud. Esar (1954) touches on why the 'comic' caricature of the mad psychiatrist has only recently appeared in comedy. 'The time lag between his discoveries and their effect on popular humor covered several decades, for the psychiatric authority [figure] had to percolate down to familiar acceptance before it could become a ready source of laughter. A study of jokebooks prior to the 1940s reveals only rare specimens of such humor in story and cartoon. Within one quick decade, however, Freudian humour developed a conspicuous stock caricature, the *mad psychiatrist*, a figure that may be defined as a psychiatrist who needs a psychiatrist' (196).

By far one of the most popular genres where Freud and his psycho-analytic themes feature is comedy, especially in pre-Oedipal comedy where it can be traced as far back as films like *Brats* (1930) where King (2002) points out, 'Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy are in full regressive mode' (79). Harpo in the Marx Brother's films of the 1930s, and the Three Stooges in the 1940s continue this infatuation until it becomes an American tradition. In the screwball comedy *Monkey Business* (1952) Professor Barnaby Fulton/Cary Grant accidentally drinks Darwin's brew and regresses to a primate state of pre-Oedipal playful rebelliousness. The later films of Jerry Lewis<sup>144</sup> and more recent American comedies are preoccupied with anal humour, and comic manifestations of the regressed and repressed male return in films like *Dumb and Dumber* (1994), and *Flubber* (1997).

In many ways these films seemed to reflect the deep stasis of the sexually repressed attitudes of white middle-American conservatism that was being addressed in British comedies like the

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<sup>144</sup> See Seidman (1981), Bukatman in Horton (1991), Krutnik (1994), and King (2002) for a discussion of Jerry Lewis' near hysterical pre-Oedipal character(s).

*Carry Ons* thirty years earlier. Interestingly, the popular myth of psycho-analysis as a recurring theme can be seen most often in the *Carry On* series from the first film in 1958 to the last in 1978. Bannister (2007) points out that

the *Carry On* films make a useful choice for investigating the relevance of Freud's theory of humour since the films exhibit a recurrent theoretical preoccupation with psycho-analysis in terms popularised by public discourses about Freud and his theories (1).

The theme of psycho-analysis was such a popular one in the *Carry On* films that it was continually returned to when a film had not done well at the box office. The scriptwriter Norman Hudis reused the psychoanalyst-patient scenario in *Carry On Cruising* (1962) after *Carry On Regardless* (1961) had flopped, as did Talbot Rothwell in *Carry On Matron* (1971) after *Carry On At Your Convenience* (1971) had proved unpopular with audiences.

British film makers had not been slow in adopting Freudian themes from America, especially in comedies. The film *Car of Dreams* (1935) is a musical romantic comedy replete with Freudian phallic symbols (from big cars, to the cinephallic pre-occupation on men blowing trumpets in the musical numbers) that are used to make direct associations with sexuality of the young man Robert Miller in the film played by diminutive actor John Mills. Drake himself was famous for driving and crashing big sports cars.<sup>145</sup> His escapades are even the subject of biographical jokes in the adult pantomime *SINderella*.<sup>146</sup> A comedy fantasy like *Blithe Spirit* (1945) clearly includes dialogue that is rich in Freudian textbook 'speak'; referring to terms such as the "subconscious", "psychic allusions", "hypnotism", "autosuggestion", and "delusions" in pseudo-psycho-analytic conversations between the sexually castrated Charles Condomine/Rex Harrison (who has to rid himself of the ghosts of his two warring dead wives who vie for his affections) and the 'quack' clairvoyant Madame Arcati played by Margaret Rutherford. The psychotherapist/patient scenario is featured in the Victorian-styled melodrama *The Seventh Veil* (1945), and the 1950s comedy, *The Magnet* (1950) contains scenes of psycho-analysis with the boy's father and mother co-operating in parodies of child psychology; 'Jokes about psychiatry and the Labour government gives it a middle-class

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<sup>145</sup> He drove a Jensen Interceptor and a Facel Vega at the height of his fame in the 1960s.

<sup>146</sup> That these are most popular parts of the show is given some credence because the only clips of the panto uploaded on YouTube are those featuring Drake's performances; subscribers describe their uploads as the 'favourite part of the adult panto'. One is titled 'Pissed' and is a clip from the panto where Drake jokes about crashing his car; another is titled 'Genie O' the Prick' (see above p. 33).

attitude unusual for Ealing, but frequently associated with the British cinema of the time' states the reviewer.<sup>147</sup>

Another genre where the theme of psycho-analysis features regularly is British horror. The Hammer cycle is a particularly fertile source and Peter Hutchings (1993) interprets many of the films using Freud's theoretical model of psycho-analysis. A film like *The Innocents* (1961) is probably the most 'Freudian' of all British horror films whereas *I, Monster* (1971) is 'a vapid attempt to give a Freudian psychological interpretation to the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde tale' says Alan Jones in the *RadioTimes Guide to Films* (2006:589). In *Frightmare* (1974) the psychologist Graham/Paul Greenwood apologises for not having a sense of humour when he does not laugh at a joke his friends share at the dinner table. 'He's probably analysing the psychology of humour' jokes his girlfriend thereby making him the butt of their humour.

In the main though films like *The Baby* (1973) are more typical in the way they use Freudian themes. The film is an American psychological horror about a social worker, Ann Gentry/Anjanette Comer, whose fascination with the case of Mrs Wadsworth/Ruth Roman, a man-hating mother who has kept her fully grown son in nappies into adulthood turns into an obsessional neurosis. These films revisit the theme of the monstrous overprotective Ma of the 1930s gangster films, but there has been a sea-change; now the films seems to be suggesting that their obsession is a psycho-sexual revenge mechanism against the withdrawal of love from women by men, and more disturbingly that these women have a Hyde complex commingling with their mother natures. 'All human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil' Doctor Jekyll discovers.<sup>148</sup>

Rycroft's definition of the Oedipus complex is particularly relevant here especially since there is evidence in cinema's back catalogue of films to confirm what he says. The 'little man' character is a particularly useful barometer to read off these sea-changes because psycho-analysis is used to shift the emphasis of blame for male hysteria onto the mother. Rycroft begins with the usual Freudian phallogentric interpretation of the myth and how

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<sup>147</sup> sleeve notes, Ealing Studios Presents, *The Magnet*, VHS, (Warner Home Video, 1993).

<sup>148</sup> Stevenson, R. L. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886 text), Reader's Digest edition, 1991, p.61.

psychoanalysts originally suggested the way it applied to the male child's psycho-sexual development in relation to father, but he notes that the relationship with the mother was considered a more important casual factor of nascent psychoneurosis in the male child from the 1930s. He explains: 'Resolution of the Oedipus complex is achieved typically by identification with the parent of the same sex and (partial) temporary renunciation of the parent of the opposite sex, who is 'rediscovered' in his adult sexual object. Persons who are fixated at the Oedipal level are mother-fixated or father-fixated. Oedipal rivalry is a cause of castration anxiety [...] but since the [1930s] psycho-analysis has become increasingly mother-orientated, and concerned with the pre-Oedipal relationship to the mother' (1972:105).

Rycroft's observations are easy to prove if we compare Chaplin's early comedies to the 1930s gangster genre. It is interesting to note that Chaplin was an orphan and his 'little man' character was born from tragic personal circumstances. Consequently, his 'little tramp' character was more like a hero from the ancient Greek tragedy than an anti-hero of the 30s depression era of gun-totin' momma's boys. He is the kicker not the kicked. He takes control of the 'real' world through subversion, and by surreal invention re-creates it in his own image. His 'little Tramp' character is God-like. He is not neurotic; he is pre-Freudian. On the other hand the 'little man' gangster characters that Cagney plays aspire to be Gods to please their God-Mothers. They are anti-heroes ('anti' here *deifies* them as 'tragi-comic'). They are mother-fixated; 'Mother of Mercy, is this the end of Rico?' gasps a perplexed Little Caesar as he is gunned down by law enforcement officers when he thought he was indestructible; they are post-Freudian.<sup>149</sup> This type helped to shaped all 'little man' characters in American and British comedy from then on. We will take a role call of their names in the next chapter, but they include Arthur Askey, Norman Wisdom, Kenneth Connor, Reg Varney (whose character Stan lived with his mum), George Formby (whose catchphrase "Mother!" requires no further explanation at this point) and Jimmy Clitheroe, the 'Clitheroe Kid' (the schoolboy who never grew up).<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Edward G. Robinson's 'little man' gangster Cesare Enrico Bandello is interesting. "*Little Caesar* becomes at Robinson's hands a figure out of a Greek tragedy, a cold, ignorant, merciless killer, driven on and on by an insatiable lust for power, the plaything of a force that is greater than himself." (*Rico's End* <http://moderntimes.com/egr/>) but he is defined as comic by his diminutiveness; the audience is aware that he feels like a 'big shot' because he carries a gun; take it away from him and he is just a 'little man' nursing a giant ego.

<sup>150</sup> Lewisohn (2003) is right when he says: 'He's all but forgotten now, but little Jimmy Clitheroe was once a massively successful comic. At its height his marathon BBC radio show, spanning 16 series from 1958-1972,



The hysterical male characters played by Connor in the early *Carry On* films prove the point we are trying to make, that his nervous ‘little man’ characters are defined by their mother-fixation and psycho-sexual underdevelopment, they are the anaclitic type. In the film *What a Carve Up!* (1961), for example, Ernie/Connor turns to his best mate Syd/James and whimpers “I’m highly strung” / “You’re too sensitive” Syd tells him. The reason for his sensitive nature soon becomes apparent when his aunt Emily/Esma Cannon turns to her ‘little man’ nephew and burbles “Ooh the baby of the family. I haven’t seen you since you were in your pram. You haven’t changed a bit”. Drake’s ‘little man’ character Charlie in *The Worker* is mother-fixated in the episode ‘Through a Glass Darkly’ where Charlie volunteers to ride a torpedo to prove to his mother that he can be ‘her’ little hero. The dream sequence is a comic re-enactment of the ‘little man’s’ failure to negotiate the Oedipus Complex (Figure 1). Compare this with the “contraphallic” Drake in his phallocentric pram (Figures 2-8, p.87).



**The ‘little man’ rides the giant father-phallus back through the amniotic sea in the Oedipus Stakes**

Figure 1. ‘Through a Glass Darkly’, *The Worker*.

Source: Courtesy of ITV.

Now that we have established that Freud and psycho-analysis was / is a popular theme in film, it is worth noting that Chaplin was the first, and probably remains the only comic, to tackle the tragic theme of suicide in his comedy/melodrama *Limelight* (1952), and to utilize psycho-analysis as a means of salvation. In the film Chaplin plays Charlie Calvero, a has-been vaudeville entertainer who has turned to the bottle to drown his self-pity (note Chaplin’s ‘little man’ type would never contemplate suicide himself; he faces the constant threat of annihilation, he is a survivor). Charlie saves a young dancer, Terry/Claire Bloom from trying

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attracted as many as ten million listeners [...] Clitheroe was 4ft 3in ‘tall’. He also had a high flutey voice, and these elements, combined with short trousers enabled him to play the perpetual schoolboy, a role he carried through until his death in 1973. The children’s television sitcom *Just Jimmy* (1964 –1968) was based on the same domestic situation as the radio version, with Clitheroe cast as the naughty laddie from Lancashire, Mollie Sugden appeared as his mother’ (433).

to commit suicide and nurses her back to health. Throughout the film Charlie uses psycho-analytic techniques to help the girl understand herself. An interesting observation about Chaplin's choice of leading ladies is worth noting here: he often chose teenage girls to play his 'little clown' character(s) love interest in his films, two of whom he subsequently married. This obviously reveals a lot about Chaplin's psychosexual nature, but it is interesting to compare Chaplin to Drake because the psychosexual traits which manifest themselves in their relationships with young women seem so similar; Chaplin's marriage to the eighteen year old actress Oona O'Neal in 1946 at the age of fifty-seven - Drake's marriage to Elaine Cameron at fifty-two and the public scandals that resulted from their entanglement with young women and nearly brought their careers to an end; Chaplin's Federal trial where he was indicted for violating the Mann Act with the teenager Joan Barry who claimed that she was pregnant with his child - Drake's Equity ban at Bradford's Alhambra after he refused to sack the twenty-two year old Sue Moody in 1974 which was, and still is, shrouded in the public's misconceptions about Drake being punished for sexual wrongdoings with the young girl. Although the circumstances are very different, what is common to both of them is the fact that both these diminutive comics had what is considered by most people instructed in the moral codes of normal social behaviour to be a sexually deviant attraction for young women. This psychosexual aberration is a symptomatic trait found in both these diminutive comics, ironically enough it may help us to understand why the 'little man' was so popular in comedy.

From the examples provided above it is safe to assume that Charlie's comment that 'Frood started it' is apposite; and when he says 'Frood was sitting on his couch one day analysing himself, just for the fun of it' it is not just a joke, it is a comic's observation on the act of looking inward in order to see outward, and vice versa. It is not just a parody of Freud and psycho-analysis, but of the viewer sitting on his couch in front of the television screen analysing himself, just for the fun of it. The observation illuminates the psychic purpose that 'little man' comedy is meant to mask; to hide unpleasant neurotic feelings by joking about them, just as the audience's attention is diverted from the clown's sad face when he makes us laugh at his knockabout gags. The most unpleasant fear we face is the idea of death. Yes, the clown cheats death because he is indestructible, but he teaches us how to face up to that fear with his formidable sense of humour. "Comedy is the vanguard of life. It's the opposite of death - a protest and scream against death. I scream to the heavens 'I'm alive! I'm alive!'"

declares Mel Brooks.<sup>151</sup> According to Bakhtin (whose theory of the carnivalesque and its relation to the 'little man' character is explored in Chapter Three) 'Even themes of death lead to "the world's revival and renewal" (in Horton (1991:13). But Brooks' comments reflect post-Freudian man's most neurotic fear, as Kerr (1968) points out: 'Perversely [...] the most striking legacy we have taken from Freud is fear of ourselves' (293). Together, of course, these observations describe the violent carnivalesque world of the slapstick clown and the popular appeal of the 'little man' fitfully fighting his way through real life (ordinary contemporary settings) and extraordinary situations.

Kings of 'little man' comedies like Chaplin, Askey, Wisdom and Drake armed their armies of fans with a significant defence weapon against the troubles of life - laughter. "Laughter is God's hand on the troubles of life" says Big Momma/Malcolm Turner (Martin Lawrence) in *Big Momma's House 2* (2006). But if post-Freudian man spent all his mental energy on anxiety, as Steve Harley points out in the song *The Best Years of Our Lives* 'there's no room for laughter, there's no room for me'.<sup>152</sup> Displaying the typical neurosis of twentieth century man Harley has a solution though, 'Try laughing at you rather than me' he says, which is just what audiences do when they laugh at the manic 'little man' struggling through everything life has to throw at him; by doing just that; the 'little man' character functions like a release valve for the audience's pent up anxiety. Freud explains this psychic mechanism: 'Laughter arises if a quota of psychic energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychic paths has become unusable, so that it can find free discharge' (*Jokes* 1905:147). Clearly then *the troubles of life* are lifted for a moment with laughter and 'since laughter at a joke is an indicator of pleasure, we can relate this pleasure to the lifting of the cathexis which has previously been present' says Freud (148). That can either be the pleasure of the memory of childhood play that the 'little man' character brings back, or the opposite (which of course

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<sup>151</sup> The quote is taken from the jacket cover of the DVD (MGM/UA) to promote the film *Spaceballs* (1987). Note Brooks' choice of words here, which is surely the whole point; he uses the same phrase Doctor Frankenstein uses when his monstrous son wakes up to bring one more fear into the world. "It's alive! It's alive!" he screams hysterically except of course Brooks is referring to himself as the monster by saying "I'm alive" I'm alive!" which reveals the neurosis of twentieth century man who has to survive in a monstrous world. Nowhere, is post-Freudian man's neurotic fear of the world better depicted than in the film *High Anxiety* (1977) when Doctor Dick Thorndyke/Brooks arrives at the mental institution called the 'Psychoneurotic asylum for the very very nervous'. As he passes underneath the sign over the gate of the haunted castle-like asylum a clap of thunder nearly scares the life out of him. Of course the man responsible for this neurosis, Freud, is parodied by Professor Lilloman, a little old man (pun) look alike who happens to be crazier than the patients in the institution.

<sup>152</sup> *The Best Years of Our Lives*, Steve Harley & Cockney Rebel, LP, 1975, EMI.

is the source of the 'little man' type of comedy), slapstick. In other words it is his pain audiences laugh at because it is not their pain. 'Pleasure is nothing else but the intermission of pain' says the sixteenth century English historian John Seldon (quoted in Hunt 1979:129). It is the 'release of emotional tension in the viewer's mind' that brings pleasure says Koestler (in Horton 1991:5). If we carry the idea one step further though, it is a damning indictment about the psychological weakness of post-Freudian anaclitic man, and it says more about self-hatred than self-love, for he loves to beat the 'little man' with his own psychic slap-stick.

Minimally, audiences need some form of reassurance that the suffering they are witnessing in 'little man' slapstick sitcoms is not real despite the real life setting. In comedy a mechanism for this is provided by something that Palmer calls 'comic insulation' (1987:45, 55-6). As we have shown above Palmer is merely re-working the point that Freud had already made; that it is the psychical forge that enables us to fashion a fun hammer to defend ourselves against the troubles of life and laugh them off. 'Defensive processes are the psychical correlative of the flight reflex and perform the task of preventing the generation of un-pleasure from internal sources' (*Jokes* 1905:233) states Freud. But laughter is the discharge of a cathexis, it is not the psychical mechanism that maintains it and provides protection against painful memories; that is humour. Freud says,

Humour can be regarded as one of the highest defensive processes. It scorns to withdraw the ideational content bearing the distressing affect from conscious attention as repression does, and thus surmounts the automatism of defence (233).

Earlier we identified two important points that are worth revisiting now: One is the significance of Drake's sense of humour (p.15, 20-22) and the other is the part the audience has to play if they are going to share his jokes. The audience equates to what Freud calls the 'third person as hearer of the joke' (*Jokes* 151), the 'outside person' (144) in the joke-work who must share the same sense of humour as the (first) person who makes the joke. 'Thus every joke calls for a public of its own and laughing at the same joke is evidence of far reaching psychical conformity' (151) states Freud. The second important point to make is that Drake was probably the neurotic type<sup>153</sup> of person Freud describes as having 'a special

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<sup>153</sup> There is some evidence to support this. Drake spent some time in a mental hospital while he was in the Air Force (1986:32). He seems to have had a depressive nature like many comics which may account for his dependency and addiction to drugs, alcohol and sex. Hancock too, suffered from bouts of depression which ultimately led to his suicide. He was so neurotic that he fired everyone who ever worked with him if he thought

aptitude for the production of jokes' (178), someone, we argue in this thesis, who [un]consciously parodied his audience's psychoneuroses.

Initially Freud describes humour as being something that 'completes its course within a single person; another person's participation adds nothing new to it' he says (229). This assertion makes it seem completely inapplicable to communicative mediums like the cinema and television, until he says,

It is not easy to say what happens in a person when humorous pleasure is generated; but we can obtain some insight if we examine the cases in which humour is communicated or sympathized with, cases in which, by an understanding of the humorous person, we arrive at the same pleasure as his; the crudest case of humour – what is known as *Galgenhumor*<sup>154</sup> may be instructive in this connection (229).

Freud then illustrates his point with an old joke about the unfortunate wretch who was led to the gallows to be executed on a Monday morning who remarked: "Well, this week's beginning nicely" (229). The timelessness of such humour can be illustrated by a more recent example taken from the film *The Wicked Lady* (1945). As the notorious highwayman 'Lucky' Jerry Jackson/James Mason is led out to his execution he notices two men still fixing the halter to the gallows. He turns to the crowd who have come to see the jovial Robin Hood off, and says, "Mind you boys don't fall down and hurt your selves". "We're safer than what you are" comes back the reply. The crowd (who, of course, stand in for the audience) erupt with laughter because they / 'we are, as it were, infected by the rogue's indifference' says Freud (230) when we should really feel pity for him. 'The psychic expenditure on the pity, which we have already prepared, becomes unutilizable, and we laugh it off' explains Freud (230). The audience's fear of death is disavowed by 'Lucky' Jerry Jackson's joke because it momentarily helps to distract the thought that the scene is tragic. It has saved them an economy of the

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they were becoming more popular with audiences who were suppose to be tuning in to *his* television show. Kenneth Williams, whose psycho-sexual neurosis is well documented, and cruelly caricatured in many of the *Carry On* films, died from a suspected overdose of barbiturates and brandy. Frankie Howerd admitted suffering from terrible bouts of depression. A survey conducted by The British Association for the Advancement of Science in 2002 'revealed that 85% of male comedians have sought some sort of psychotherapy at some point in their lives. And some of the world's most famous comedians, such as Tony Hancock, Lenny Bruce and John Belushi, are believed to have committed suicide. Perhaps [most] comedians have a tendency to suffer from low self-esteem' (88) conclude the writers. See The British Association for the Advancement of Science, "laugh"Lab: *The Scientific Quest for the World's Funniest Joke* (2002).

<sup>154</sup> trans. Gallows Humour.

psychic response. The humour provides an instantaneous rescue, which of course, it exactly what 'Lucky' Jerry Jackson gets.

When the audience sits down to watch a comedy they are already primed to pretend and not to 'penetrate so far', they 'are left with the *comic story*' or comic 'façade'; as Freud states, 'the whole thing is an admirably staged joke' (*Jokes* 202-203). In *Carry On Don't Lose Your Head* (1966) when the French "aristo" the Duc de Pommfrit/ Hawtrey is lying on his back looking up at the blade of "Madame la Guillotine" he quips, "Short back and sides, not too much off the top" the crowd erupts with laughter and applaud the Duc who has been performing for their *grand plaisir*.<sup>155</sup> Freud explains: 'There is something like magnanimity in this *blague*,<sup>156</sup> in the man's tenacious hold upon his customary self and his disregard of what might overthrow that self and drive it to despair' (229). Their anger towards him is inhibited, as Freud says, because they 'are infected by the rogue's indifference' (230) and they have to find another channel to release the cathexis (psychic) energy they have built up so they 'laugh it off' (230). The crowd who the Duc has been *playing up to* do not want to be reminded of their own mortality or their wretched existence compared to the extravagant life the aristocrats live; they want to be entertained with 'gallows humour', something that Nuttall and Carmichael (1977) call 'survival humour' (37) and Freud calls 'the crudest case of humour' (*Jokes* 229). By crudest he means the humour is undisguised, natural and narcissistic, retaliatory and resigned. The real purpose of the joke is to make the crowd watching from their cinema seats laugh. So, when the Duc looks to camera (at the precise moment he delivers the punchline) he involves and positions the spectator/audience in the same space as the crowd enjoying the bloodthirsty spectacle. But his "look" serves another purpose: it reveals the actor playing a part who makes the audience aware that he is playing a part, so they should not take anything seriously. His "look" has two purposes; it makes the audience aware that they are watching a film 'comedy' and it reveals the comic actor's (Hawtrey's) own sense of humour. With a single glance he makes the audience do a *double take*. He steps out of the film, not to escape the thought of his execution as Williams does in *Carry On Cleo* when he looks at the camera and screams, but to see if they are laughing at his joke.

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<sup>155</sup> An example of gallows humour contemporary with the period of the French Revolution is given by Robert Southey in his poem 'The Pilgrim To Compostella', the description of which reveals the poet's sense of humour. 'When to the gallows he was led / "'Twas a short way to Heaven," he said, / "Though not the pleasantest." *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey* (1860:253).

<sup>156</sup> *blague*: *blag*, pretentious but empty talk; nonsense, *Collins English Dictionary* (1979). The word is defined in *The Concise Oxford French-English Dictionary* (1974), as 'a joke, falsehood, and a hoax'.

What a good man the clown is, to endure so much, to survive so relentlessly, to keep us company in all weathers, to provide us with a way of looking at the worst that enables us to take a temporary joy in the worst! For that is what he does: he stands horror on its head to keep us tolerably happy (Kerr 1968:540).

Hawtrey reminds the audience how close the film comes to pantomime when he directly acknowledges the audience. And we saw earlier how Drake (p.30) recognised the important role a 'live' audience plays when he acknowledged their active participation as 'listeners' in the joke-work. His experience as a pantomime clown taught him how violent slapstick safely contained within circus ring comedy secured a laugh. Clowns like Drake knew that their sense of humour provided a comic shield against the pain of slapstick comedy; it provided the audience with *comic insulation* against all pain and death in the real world because, as listeners, as laughers, they actively shared the joke with the clown who laughed in the face of pretend pain. It is why the audience were able to sympathise with the Duc de Pomfritt and not with Caesar, or the 'little man' and not the figure of authority. Freud explains:

The principle thing is the intention which humour fulfils, whether it concerns the subject's self or other people. Its meaning is: Look here! This is all that this seemingly dangerous world amounts to. Child's play – the very thing to jest about!<sup>157</sup>

Two other examples, one from drama and the other from a television sitcom, will illustrate how this psychological defence mechanism manifests itself as 'humorous displacement' (*Jokes* 234). In the episode 'Strained Relations' from the BBC sitcom *Only Fools and Horses*<sup>158</sup> Rodney/Nicholas Lyndhurst explains to his older brother 'Del Boy'/David Jason just why Uncle Albert/Buster Merryfield is making jokes about his own brother at his funeral. "Laughter is his safety valve. He's just releasing the pressure" he explains with the kind of sympathy that is typical of his character's personality.<sup>159</sup> Conversely, in the 1948 adaptation of Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* (1947) Princess Betsy Tversky/Martita Hunt chastises

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<sup>157</sup> Freud, S. 'Humour' (1928), Collected Papers, Vol. V, *Miscellaneous Papers, 1888-1938*, London, Hogarth Press Ltd and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957, p.220.

<sup>158</sup> *Only Fools and Horses*, 'Strained Relations', ITV (ATV), series 4, episode 2, February 28, 1985.

<sup>159</sup> I confess to my shame that I laughed hysterically with my sisters at our paternal grandfather's funeral. Undoubtedly there were two psychological reasons why we reacted in this way. We had become estranged from that side of the family when our parents divorced, and we knew (without having to say it) that our grandfather had been a violent man (just like our own father). Our spontaneous laughter was a hysterical release from a sense of fear of the real physical harm that we had always felt as children and for a moment we remembered it and laughed because we knew as adults we were now safe. Our grandfather's death was an act of remembering made risible by a psychological act of transference. Our laughter was a substitution for crying because our father was no longer a physical threat in our lives, so we were able to joke about it.

Anna/Vivien Leigh for not having a sense of humour when she tells her: “One can take a thing too seriously and make a kind of tragedy out of it, or one can treat it quite simply and light-heartedly. Do you know my dear; I believe you’re rather inclined to the tragic side”, in other words she is telling Anna that her life will be tragic (and it turns out to be just that) if one does not have a sense of humour.

What is interesting to note here is the ‘comic’ displacement of tragedy and the placement of tragedy in comedy. The two art forms are often intertwined in the entertainment mediums of cinema and television (as we have already noted). We are inclined to agree with Kerr (1968) when he concludes that tragedy comes first, because ‘Man’s primary concern is with tragedy. Comedy, it seems, is never the gaiety of things; it is the groan made gay. Comedy always comes second’ (19). In Chapter Three we will discuss the relationship between tragedy and comedy and how both forms are essentially part of the ‘little man’s character’s personality and the psycho-genesis of ‘little man’ comedies. Kerr for example, might easily be describing Drake’s ‘little man’ character(s) in *The Worker* who screams “Ah, ha!” each time he anticipates pain, usually just before he throws himself through another window. It is important to remember that no-one ever *lays a glove* on him. But, what caused this echo of the new-born baby’s scream? And where audiences positioned to smile and not laugh at the latent cry because it reminded them of the painful experiences of life and the womb they were always trying to return to? Kerr suggests that when man chose to misread the messages of Darwin he made an ape out of himself (Wisdom’s gurning Gump epitomises this); when he chose to misinterpret the message of Freud whose ‘boldest hope was that he would relieve man of fear’ (293) he remembered he really was just like a frightened child too. Kerr says, ‘The most striking legacy we have taken from Freud is fear of ourselves [...] Post-Freudian man has learned to distrust himself. He turns in on himself and calls himself guilty’ (294). Philip Rieff, he says, ‘explains that Freud did not hold a genuinely tragic view of life. “Ordinary men compromise with their instinctual longings and become neurotic; the tragic hero, because he suffers and dies, must be presumed to have carried out his wishes in a way forbidden to most men”’ (293). The supernatural anti-hero characters played by Clint Eastwood in *High Plains Drifter* (1973) and *Pale Rider* (1985) represent the return of the [super] ego not the return of the repressed. The ‘Stranger’ in the likeness of an omnipotent unforgiving God, (‘good is evil masked’ (296) is an avenger who enjoys the ‘unsocial excesses of the id’ (291) as he sadistically rapes, and murders, apparently with our blessing.



Although these examples are extreme; the aggression the spectator audience ‘enjoys’ watching in slapstick comedy and the obvious pleasure audiences derive because they tune-in each week to watch the ‘little man’ take another beating come from the same impulses that demand satisfaction of a wish-fulfilment, the desire to kill.

This probably explains why some of the viewer’s comments in the BBC Audience Research Reports that we quoted in Chapter One express quite the opposite opinion of Drake. ‘They had little liking for Charlie Drake at any time’,<sup>160</sup> ‘many viewers clearly disliked the man intensely, (‘I cannot stand Drake’),’<sup>161</sup> said one viewer, and the reason all of these viewers gave was that his ‘little man’ character was ‘deplorably childish’, and the humour was ‘infantile’ and ‘moronic’. Conversely, the audience who tuned-in to watch the episode of *Stephoe and Son* called ‘Loathe Story’<sup>162</sup> probably laughed hysterically as they watched Harold nearly murder his dad with a meat cleaver while he is sleep walking. As fans who tuned-in to the show each week they would be expected to empathize with Harold because they understood the loathsome story of his stressful relationship with his father. It had real poignancy. The fact that the ‘murder scene’ is set in a dream made it unreal and something not to be taken seriously. It was really meant to be something comic and as such it would have softened any animosity that viewers might have felt towards Harold. Significantly, the ‘little’ Charlie character in television sitcoms like *The Worker* and in a film like *Petticoat Pirates* co-existed with audiences in real-life situations, and it is there that they are disliked. It is only (as we have already stated) when Drake steps out of character into a dream-world that audiences liked him.

The dream sequence is a device that Drake used in his television show *The Worker* and in the film *Petticoat Pirates* which makes it a useful window for looking into the ‘goings-on inside Drake’s mind’.<sup>163</sup> Chapter Four concentrates solely on the film and analyses the dream

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<sup>160</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *The Charlie Drake Show*, ‘The World of Charlie Frazer’, Thursday, 23 March, 1961, (A.R.D.), 12 April, 1961.

<sup>161</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *The Charlie Drake Show*, ‘A Thousand and One Frights’, Thursday, 27 April, 1961, (A.R.D.), 16 May, 1961.

<sup>162</sup> *Stephoe and Son*, ‘Loathe Story’, BBC 1, series 7, episode 5, March 20, 1972.

<sup>163</sup> It is easy to see how Drake’s dream sketches and surreal sense of humour fit with Freud’s ideas about art fulfilling an escapist function for the artist who escapes falling into neurosis through phantasy and play. He explains: ‘An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction, which it at first demands, and who allows his erotic and ambitious wishes full play in the life of phantasy. He finds his way back to reality, however, from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind, which are valued by men as

sequence which I call the ‘trial by a jury of Drakes’. It is important at this point to remind ourselves that these dream narratives are disconnected with the actual film and television narratives and they become instead spaces to showcase Drake’s slapstick performances.

The surreal dream sequences in films like *Petticoat Pirates* and *Mr Ten Per Cent* are probably the best thing in these films. Arguably, the films failed because they did not show enough of Drake doing what he did every week on television. *The Worker* is undoubtedly Drake’s best remembered television series and it is interesting to look at the formula that Drake and his co-writer Schwarz created because it is probably what made the show such a success. The most significant innovation they made was to create a logical break in the narrative each week so Drake could showcase his surreal sense of humour and perform his trademark slapstick sketches. The imposition of having to work round a commercial break half way through the show no doubt suggested the idea to them. The obvious mismatch between Drake’s performance space and the film’s narratives that had contributed to the failure of the films co-existed as separate entities on television and contributed to their success. The relatively new format of situation comedy that had proved to be a winning formula in television comedies like *The Rag Trade* and *Steptoe and Son* in the early 1960s was adopted in *The Worker* and used at the beginning of the shows as a springboard to set the stage for a virtuoso performance of comic clowning inside the circus tent (*inside the goings-on*) of Drake’s surreal world of slapstick humour; in Schwarz’s words the situation element was a ‘starting point [...] in order to let Charlie’s capabilities have full rein’ (1988:62).<sup>164</sup> In ‘Hallo Cobbler’ (1969), the term situation ‘comedy’ seems like a misnomer because it is almost non-existent, yet its function (more prop-like than situational) at the beginning and end of the show brings perfect balance to it.

The situation element functions in another way which is perhaps more important though; it is a place the audience revisits each week because they want to laugh at the same thing all over

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precious reflections of reality’ (S.E. XII: 224 quoted in Storr 2001:102-103). As we saw earlier, Drake used abstract painting as psychotherapy – as a means of escapism, but his special gift as a comic confirms the mediums of cinema and television comedy as an art form because they fulfilled the same escapist function for the contemporary viewing audience who ‘got’ the jokes and shared the same sense of humour and psycho-social conditioning which gave rise to a psychological defence mechanism as a means of coping with and avoiding falling completely into neurosis.

<sup>164</sup> Schwarz makes a crucial point when he says, ‘The term “situation comedy” does gain a certain validity when it is applied to established comedians or comedy actors. Here the public persona of an already popular performer is built upon, so situations must be created in which the traits and quirks of that figure can be exploited to the full’ (1998:61).

again. “I am convinced that audiences do not like change [...] audiences like to see the laughs coming and to recognise them”<sup>165</sup> says Peter Rogers the creator/producer of the *Carry On* series. This is borne out by Gerald Thomas, the director of the films, who said the films were ‘one joke films.’<sup>166</sup> The popular appeal of shows like *The Worker* is undoubtedly due to the fact that ‘the basic humour of the ‘little man’ remained the same - a tragic-comic combination exposing the futility of so many human endeavours’ (Douglas 1961:74). That qualifying clause *the futility of human endeavours* is key because it implies an unconscious complicity in the joke-work between the audience and the comic ‘little man’ whose pain makes them laugh. Freud states that ‘a special aptitude for the production of jokes is fulfilled in neurotic people’ (1905:178) and Neale and Krutnik (1995) discussing laughter and the ‘narcissistic ego of the viewer’ (79) tell us that ‘laughter in comedy stems ultimately from a pleasurable losing and regaining of a position for the ego during the process of signification’ (3). ‘It is in this context’ they say ‘that laughter and the comic emerges as a form of defence’ (80). Defence against what is the question we should be asking? The violent instinct! The answer can not be hard to find if the joke-teller can so easily ‘bribe the hearer into taking sides with him’ (*Jokes* 1905:103) if we follow Freud’s tripartite theory of how the joke-work functions; Drake represents ‘the first party who makes the joke’ and the audience [the third party] ‘in whom the joke’s aim of producing pleasure is fulfilled’ (100). The pleasure of watching violent slapstick *is* the audience’s defence against a neurotic fear of being alike, of remembering what it is to be like (of replacing what Freud calls the ‘impulsion to repeat’ with the ‘compulsion to repeat’<sup>167</sup> *viewings*), of imitation and being imitated (where Freud says, ‘the untamed instincts assert themselves’ (1914:153-154) which can be witnessed in the repetitive act of viewing) because the audience share the same sense of humour as Drake. The psycho-social mechanism of sharing a joke remains the same, only the object of the joke is diverted, because Drake steps out of character to make his audience (alongside the ‘little man’ character he plays) the second party ‘in the joke-work who is taken as the object of the hostile or sexual aggressiveness’ (1905:100), which explains why some people loved Drake and some hated him, as we noted in the BBC Audience Reports (see above pp.40-43, 79).

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<sup>165</sup> Rogers quoted in Hibbin, S., & N. (1988:9-11).

<sup>166</sup> “I’ve made 31 films from one joke! But I love that joke and the people who have made it funny.” Gerald Thomas quoted in *The Classic Carry On Film Collection*, Magazine, Issue 11, DeAgostini Carlton, London, 2004, p. 15.

<sup>167</sup> (1914:151), ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (1914)’, SE, XII, pp. 145-156.

Those who enjoyed gazing into Drake's dream world had to be able to do so without fear of falling down the rabbit hole and coming face-to-face with the monster behind the grease paint mask that they half-recognised as themselves looking back at them through their *screen memories*. Those who enjoyed Drake's television shows did so because they enjoyed watching the 'little man' getting slapped about; there was an obvious 'transference' of narcissism hidden behind the clown's face-paint that was associative (rather than cathartic);<sup>168</sup> the 'little man' character then, becomes what Freud calls, 'the main instrument [. . .] for curbing the [patient's] compulsion to repeat and for turning it into a motive for remembering the handling of the transference. We render the compulsion harmless and indeed useful, by giving it the right to assert itself in a definite field. We admit it into the transference as a playground in which it is allowed to expand in almost complete freedom' (154) explains Freud.<sup>169</sup> That *definite field*, that *playground of complete freedom* equates to Drake's film and television comedies.

But it's a double image in a comic mirror. A clown like Drake eschews this horrible vision of the violent self, visually, through a continued act of feigned self-annihilation in order to deny the audience any power that they might have over him. He does this by denying the face in the mirror is his by disguising it as theirs. The audience are thus led to believe they have some authority over the comic 'little man' character they have found to punish for their repressed desires because they recognize the monstrous little gargoyle Drake as of themselves.

Nevertheless, Drake's actual physical comic appearance and his conscious attempts to provoke unconscious laughter by adding clown make-up, an oversized suit and playing knockabout comedy needs to be analysed more closely because it reveals an important psycho-sociological function about how his 'little man' character(s) was only half-consciously constructed. Drake's physical appearance (and it would not be wrong to call it a comic attribute) was something Drake recognised/found in himself. It made *his* 'little man' character(s) uniquely different from every other 'little man' character. His diminutiveness, his shock of hair, his baby-faced features and podgy arms and legs certainly made him look childlike, and he exploited his pre-Oedipal appearance like comic props ('the essence of the

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<sup>168</sup> By 1914 Freud was moving away from the cathartic method to the associative method of treatment of neurosis in psycho-analysis.

<sup>169</sup> Op.cit. Transference states Freud is simply 'a piece of repetition' and repetition is only the 'transference of a forgotten [repressed] past' (1914:151). But it also represents an act of displacement of feelings/ideas derived from Drake's past life onto his audience and vice-versa.

comic is its link with the infantile' states Freud (*Jokes* 1905:225)), but his 'little man' character(s) were not naïve and innocent in the same way Wisdom's 'Gump' character was. His characters were more worldly wise and sexually aware because they were inhabited by Drake's rakish personality that often appeared from behind the comic mask of his 'little man' clown like the mischievous devil-like incubus sat atop the sleeping virgin in Fuseli's painting *The Nightmare* (1781). The sexual little beast from Drake's libido skulking behind the comic mask of his 'little man' character(s) is made manifest each time he lifts the veil of his hysterical dreamland to expose himself. Audiences were positioned to accept the little horror was only a joke because he looked and behaved like a child. But because Drake appeared to play peek-a-boo he revealed the 'little man' behind the childlike character was someone much more adult, much more sexually aware and much more a look alike to the men in the audience watching him misbehave. And because males in the audience were conscious (and co-operative) in the act of play-acting themselves they shared the same smutty jokes with the same immunity too. Drake's acknowledgement of the audience's presence in the pretence proves the point Freud makes; that the sharing of humour is a psychologically intrasubjective experience.

The term 'ideational mimetics' that Freud uses is not just useful because it can explain how an audience was positioned to take sides in the joke-work with Drake's man-child through the unconscious act of comparison and imitation (*Jokes* 1905:236, 290) and by joining-in with the name-calling jokes which are rewarded and sanctioned through laughter, but by the act of looking-on, which explains the guilty pleasure audiences got from repeated viewings of beating baby Charlie, because they too are disguised behind the clown's mask that Drake encouraged them to put on, which rendered any self-ridicule as risible.<sup>170</sup>

Nowhere is this better seen than in the slapstick performance sketches that Drake became famous for. His comedy was of a particularly self-flagellating, custard pie in his own face type of slapstick set in a surreal world (a pre-Oedipal world of wish-fulfilments and dreams) outside the 'real' worlds his character(s) inhabited in their television sitcom / cinema spaces; it was a world of pantomime and preadolescence. His Munchkin-like 'little man' character(s) seemed eager to get back to Oz because the real world was a more frightening and dangerous

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<sup>170</sup> Op.cit. 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (1914)' Through the ideation mnemonic content or acting out, 'it is bound to happen that the untamed instincts assert themselves' states Freud (153-154).

place, which was why this bouncing baby ‘little man-boy’ character was never really hurt by anyone except himself, and why his weapon against authority was not wit but slapstick.<sup>171</sup> Drake stepped out of ‘Charlie’s’ character and out of the narrative space to perform ‘on’ himself. This, I argue, made his ‘little man’ character(s) an outsider and a misfit in society (as Drake himself was by virtue of his star status) but it also meant he was quite different to the ‘little man’ character type(s) played by diminutive comics like Wisdom and Connor who were always striving for acceptance and social integration in their films (as the male audience were positioned to do); a thematic that was played out through the successful negotiation of the Oedipal Complex and a desire to be loved by all.

Freud’s definitions of the ‘comic’ are of considerable usefulness now considering what we know about Drake. He says the ‘comic is capable of being detached from people’ (*Jokes* 1905:189), and it is possible to ‘make *oneself* comic’ (189) through the ‘comic of situation [comedy]’ (189). But Freud’s explanation is crucial to understanding why and how the ‘comic yields [...] pleasure’ (189) for the spectator. ‘The comic is found in people’ (189) he says. People found Drake’s appearance funny, as we noted earlier (p.31) when Phyllis Rounce first saw Drake, and he was astute enough to recognise this and exploit it to create his ‘little man’ character(s) who may have been as much a self-caricature as a parody of the ‘little man’ in every man. Drake ‘little man’ character reflected the repressed spectator gazing back at his childlike self-obsessed self when he was the centre of attention in his pre-Oedipal play world, and encouraged in them a longing for pleasurable regression. The comic ‘can be content with two persons: a first who finds what is comic, and a second in whom it is found. The third person, to whom the comic thing is told, intensifies the comic process, but adds nothing new to it’ (181); in other words the two-way way mirror of the television/cinema screen is a intrasubjective lens that requires a third party to share what is comic, but only if they play (along with) the party of the first part.

Drake’s clown then might be seen through this Freudian lens, not simply as a manifestation of every man’s ‘little man’s’ unconscious fears, desires and wish-fulfilments, but as a conduit to

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<sup>171</sup> Clearly a comparison can be made with the physically agile Harlequin clown from the Italian *commedia dell’arte* traditions introduced to England in the early eighteenth century by John Weaver. The English tradition embraced music, mime and slapstick comedy, and a series of visual jokes revolving around Harlequin’s ability to transform himself, but the thesis concerns itself with the twentieth century celluloid clowns who Drake is descended from. This is discussed in detail in a Chapter Three.

the lost laughter of childhood, which explains how the infantile humour in his 'little man' comedies is communicated and understood at a psycho-sexual level.

However, it was not just Drake's visible appearance that made his 'little man' character(s) funny, they are always defined by their childlike [non]utterances (slips of the tongue, innocent jokes) and puns (which Freud calls the 'lowest form of verbal jokes, because [...] they can be made with the least trouble' (45). Puns are perhaps the most typical form of verbal jokes found in Drake's 'little man' comedies. An ongoing pun (or 'sound-joke' (45) in *The Worker* was Charlie's mispronunciation of Mr. Pugh's name, which always came out as Mister Peloo, or Mr. Pooh. These puns 'characterized' him as childlike and gave license to the infantile humour and slapstick comedy that was expected in Drake's 'little man' comedies.

Seemingly innocent jokes like these, coupled as they are with Drake's exaggerated childlike body language (which Freud calls 'the comic of movement' (1905:190) reminds us of 'pantomime and the exaggerated movements of clowns' (190) and since audiences would have been aware of Drake's work in panto they would have been reminded of it too. But, verbal puns serve another function; they suggest childlike innocence whenever Charlie mispronounces his words. It is only when Drake emerges from behind the diapered 'little man-child' that he makes the audience aware of the pretend play and his 'play with words proper' takes on the characteristics of jokes. Jokes like these are what Freud calls 'characterizing' (55) jokes because they reflect certain character traits of the joke-teller. Charlie's mispronunciations are never merely innocent jokes precisely because Drake makes the same joke over and over again to Mr. Pugh/Pooh (who does not get the joke) and to the audience (who does); so they have a hostile purpose, they are intended to wound Mr. Pugh (and the audience joins in the name-calling). These jokes are what Freud calls 'tendentious' (90) jokes, they are jokes that have 'a play with purpose' and they fit in perfectly with Charlie's love of story-telling, which creates a playful mood familiar to what Freud calls 'the old game of getting pleasure' (129) that we experienced as children. Jokes, he says, are merely devices adults use to 'find a substitute for [recapturing] the mood' (129) of a lost childhood. In order to be able to enjoy this kind of childlike humour, to suddenly regain 'the lost laughter of childhood' (289), to 'rediscover the child in him [them]' (289) Drake's 'little man' character(s) are perfectly drawn when dressed-up as baby in episodes of *The Worker* such as 'Through a Glass Darkly', but even when the diapers he wears *characterizes* the "contraphallic" 'little man-child' character, they fail to conceal the manifest content of Charlie

Drake Land, because he deliberately threatens to exposes his *private parts* (his private life) each time he throws his phallic dummy out of his phallocentric pram (Figures 2-8).





**The 'contraphallic' Drake in his phallocentric pram**  
 Figures 2-8. 'Through the Glass Darkly', *The Worker*  
 Source: Courtesy of ITV

There is something in the human psyche that finds grotesqueness in the plasticity of a baby's face both comforting and comically repellent. Drake looked either like a Botticelli cherub or a grimacing gargoyle. In a paper that Freud wrote called 'Screen Memories' Steven Wilson (1997:13) says, 'Freud argues that early memories may be preserved not because they are themselves particularly significant, but because they are linked by chance associations to *later* events which carry a strong emotional charge'.<sup>172</sup> Obviously no-one remembers the trauma of birth, but many have either witnessed childbirth, or have heard about it, so they retain a mental picture of it. The memory of the baby's head being forced out of the vagina and the proximity of it to the anus, may account for the tortured faces that comics make to signify pain or near-death experiences, and humour is the mechanism he uses to blows a raspberry at the life/death debacle. Or, perhaps Otto Rank (cited in Wilson 1997:95) was nearer to the truth when he states; 'the aim of life was to 'undo the trauma of birth', and childlike 'little man' comics such as Drake re-enact this traumatic moment by kicking and screaming against it with slapstick comedy. If gallows humour is the dark mirror that depicts life in death then the trauma of birth depicted in Drake's slapstick comedies reflects death in life.'<sup>173</sup>

Are comics like Drake inviting the audience to mimic this prepubescent screen memory because it negates the moment when a baby is slapped to make it cry by replacing it with a moment of hysterical laughter? Or is the audience invited to slap the adult for behaving like a baby because it satisfies a perverse pleasure? Slapstick comedy would seem to bear this out time and time again. It may even be, a frustrated kick against the inevitability of approaching death, as Freud (1900:560) says, 'the envy which is felt for the young by those who have grown old, but which they believe they have completely stifled'<sup>174</sup> causes the re-emergence of a repressed jealous hostile impulse to punish our children for behaving like children. This kind of humour preponderates on the pain registered on the face of the 'little man' and it is clearly meant to mirror the audiences who stare at the screen. It is humour that always travels one way, back to the viewer. This aesthetic union not only informs the submissive and rebellious natures of the childlike characters Drake plays, it echoes humanity's desire to be like a child again, ironically enough to a time when humour was unnecessary at all.

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<sup>172</sup> Wilson, S. (1997) *Sigmund Freud*, Sutton Publishing, Gloucester, 1997

<sup>173</sup> The phrase 'life-in-death' is borrowed from Coleridge's, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798).

<sup>174</sup> Freud, S. (1900) *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. V, translated by A Brill

If Drake was reliving his own psychological ‘phantasies’ (see *n.163*) in the regressive ‘little man’ character(s) roles he played, was the audience’s emotional attachment more immediate because the situation comedy format implied a ‘reality’ that the dream world of escapist cinema could not? To a large extent all motion picture comedy is situation comedy because it relies for its laughs on the very serious situations characters find themselves trapped in that are far from funny; situations that audiences would be only too happy to escape from if they encountered them in real-life. The difference of course is that the ‘little man’ character cannot escape, ever; he is forced to relive (the ‘impulsion to repeat’) over and over again. The fictional world of television sitcoms are inescapable emotional torture chambers for the characters who are cruelly imprisoned in them week after week. They provide audiences with an emotional pathway to release the pent-up hostility and anger they feel towards the real life situations in their own life by making them laugh at someone else’s pain and being just happy for a moment that it is not theirs. Hostility towards other people lies at the heart of all ‘little man’ comedy because it lies at the centre of the human psyche and it is the reason we love to hate. This explains why the audience shakes a psychic slap-stick at the ‘little man’ with the giant ego<sup>175</sup> in comedy. Psychologically, they are his look alike and they often display exactly the same ‘little man’ behavioural traits. When Bill Turnbull interviewing the diminutive dancer Wayne Sleep on BBC One Breakfast commented that he thought he was well-suited to play the Emcee in a new stage production of *Cabaret*, Sleep, who was obviously offended, replied, “Because of my size the character can be naughty and likeable, and he can turn and be nasty.”<sup>176</sup> He managed to turn his statement into a tendentious joke with a mere raise of his eyes and the hint of a sardonic smile. But the example also demonstrates how we use jokes in everyday life in the same way Sleep does when we are made to feel small.

The author is in accord with Annette Kuhn (2004:1226) who believes that ‘as a system of ideas which can illuminate film, and in particular add to our understanding of what is at stake in the encounter between films and spectators, psychoanalysis has much to offer’. With that affirmation clearly in mind and the fact that Drake’s life and work in film and television comedy is the subject/object of this thesis, the purpose of this chapter has been achieved

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<sup>175</sup> Leslie Phillips said Wisdom was a ‘little man with a giant ego’ in *Norman Wisdom: His Story*, BBC Four, Thursday 4 October, 21:00-22:00. In the same programme Tim Rice said whenever he was out with Norman, ‘He went into his act. But, it wasn’t an act. It was Norman being Norman’. Wisdom behaved in a way we could not but often wish we could.

<sup>176</sup> *BBC One Breakfast*, BBC 1, Tuesday 14 October 2008, 08:50-08:57.

because as Kuhn states, the ‘task of the [psycho-analytic] theory is to illuminate its object, and vice versa’ (2004:1222).

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The Descent of the 'Little' Man' in British Comedy**

This chapter traces the descent of the 'little man' character(s) played by Drake from his nearest contemporary, Norman Wisdom, to one of the earliest cinematic slapstick clowns, Charlie Chaplin. The chapter considers the root of the 'little man' in the English clowns of the seventeenth century, but, it also acknowledges ancient Greek Theatre to explain how the tragicomic nature of the 'little man' character reveals a common ancestry and served a similar psycho-socio-political function for popular audiences in the twentieth century as the low characters did in ancient Greek comedy.

The chapter also considers how the 'big' personality and the sense of humour of the diminutive comic inhabits (and determines the personality of) the 'little man' character(s) he played, and how it was essential to their comic appeal. By comparing Drake with Arthur Askey, for example, we are able to see, not just how the personality of their 'little man' character(s) is different, but why their humour is different too. The 'little man' character(s) they play are as different as the clowns that play them because their individual sense of humour satisfies a different psychological purpose for them - and that, of course, determines the type of comedy they present and the kind of audiences they attract who share their sense of humour.

The chapter also explores how that the 'naughty but nice' nature of the 'little man' comic character is revealed to be a reflection of the good and evil nature in every man's archetypal psychopathology. By looking at the precedent in Hollywood of evil characters in horror and gangster movies played by diminutive actors, the appeal of the 'little man' clown character is seen to be more complicated, but more comprehensive, because the comedy is more psychologically invested with the dual nature of the human mind as it was constructed in portrayals of the type(s) in cinema. Similarly, the fighting spirit of these little gangsters, ghouls and slapstick clowns mirrors the psychological defence mechanism of every man in his struggle for survival in a world that often threatens to crush his individuality and sense of self-worth.

The 'little man's' fighting spirit somehow looks larger than the giants he is fighting in the double-sided mirror of comedy and horror because it reflects the wish-fulfilment of every man

who wants to believe he is a David who can defeat his Goliath. The great appeal of the 'little man' clown character is his knockabout comedy. He is constantly knocked down, but he is never knocked out, on the contrary, he keeps getting up to face his problems, and the more gigantic those problems are, that is, to say the bigger the opponent is, the bigger the laughs are by comparison. The biggest laughs the silent slapstick 'little man' clown gets is when he jumps up and kicks the big man up the arse after being beaten senseless by him, but it can be done in a verbal battle too (as the *duellogues* between Mr. Pugh and Charlie in *The Worker* show). The fighting spirit of the 'little man' in comedy is compared with his dramatic counterpart, the trigger-happy wisecracking gangster type, such as those played by the diminutive actor Cagney,<sup>177</sup> but it is also visibly magnified in the muscle-bound meathead character of Rocky Balboa played by Stallone in the *Rocky* films in the 1980s; as the film reviewer, John Marriott (2006:1035) reminds us, *Rocky* is a 'classic Hollywood story of the 'little man' winning big'.

Other manifestations of the comic 'little man' type are visible today in American cartoons such as *Futurama* and *The Simpsons* in the shows 'star' characters Fry<sup>178</sup> and Homer. Here, as we might expect, the type is represented as a fool not a hero. But, his self-deprecating humour makes him a harmless comic anti-hero; a kind of unarmed in-law to his outlaw gangster brother who arms himself with the kind of warped sense of humour that matches his own wicked desire for gunning down his own kind, which perversely turns him into an anti-hero. Is it not precisely because these 'little man' gangsters have a hysterical sense of humour at all, that they seem more human and therefore more monstrous?

Hysterical laughter is a symptom of twentieth century man's most neurotic fear - madness. The audience are expected to laugh at the callous jokes the gangster makes as he guns down his victims because they are wearing the bullet proof vest of sanity, but their laughter is an echo of the murderous impulse they are trying to conceal behind it.

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<sup>177</sup> There are many others, from Edward G. Robinson as Cesare Enrico Bandello in *Little Caesar* (1931), to the weedy little bespectacled gangster in the British Telecom (BT) *118118.com* television advertisement who is thrown over a balcony by his bodyguards for not remembering which number to dial in an emergency.

<sup>178</sup> The name chosen for the character Fry is a verbal joke, a pun. Freud would have classified the joke as a 'double entendre with an allusion' (115) because it plays on the derogatory common phrase "small fry" (where 'smallness is related to what has to be represented, and can be seen to proceed from it' (121). It defines the character socially as a 'little man' who is sexually immature because 'fry' are newly hatched fish, and it is also an example of what Freud calls a 'characterizing' joke. This joking technique is used by the scriptwriter Talbot Rothwell in many of the *Carry On* films especially when a name is used to define a character's (rampant or repressed) sexuality.

The descent of the neurotic ‘little man’ character into adult cartoon comedy is proof of the character’s popular appeal today; their frustrations even make them victims of slapstick gags like Drake’s ‘little man’ characters were. They take a beating for the spectator. It is debatable whether the cartoon ‘little man’ fool fulfils a different psychological purpose than Drake’s comic clown did from the mid-50s to the early 1970s, but tracing that descent is interesting because it allows us to question whether the type has changed very much at all, and whether the type still represents the satisfaction of the audience’s wish-fulfilment; where *each man kills the thing he loves* with a well-aimed joke. Lee Evans (who is probably the most popular standup comic of his generation) has this to say: ‘I started doing physical comedy, because I was like a moving target. You know what British audience’s are like – “He’s shit, kill him! My upbringing taught me to keep moving.”’<sup>179</sup> He has often been compared to Wisdom but he does not regard him as an influence.<sup>180</sup>

Tracing the descent of a ‘little man’ comic like Drake is not difficult. Immediately, a line from Wisdom, his ‘main rival’ says Spicer (2001:107) (though not really) straight back to Chaplin, can be drawn. Obviously, the common trait they all share is that they are descended from that branch of comics called clowns. ‘The English people have always adored their clowns’ says Priestley (1934:22); ‘As soon as the stage was set up in this country, there was fooling’ (22). Priestley traces the lineage of the clown from as far back as the *mediaeval* histories where he says ‘humour is forever breaking in’ (22) - a phrase that perfectly describes the disruptive affect and rebellious nature of the clown breaking down the doors of life we often take too seriously – to the most famous clown of cinema in *his* day, Chaplin; ‘the little man whose face and figure and characteristic gestures and grimaces would be instantly recognised in Europe and America...wherever, in fact, the moving pictures have gone’ (42) he says.

Bakhtin’s study of *mediaeval* comedy and the carnival is particularly useful here. Horton (1991) says ‘Bakhtin’s perspective enables us to see the carnivalesque backgrounds of comics’ (13). One of those perspectives, as Clark and Holquist (1984) explain, is that Bakhtin’s ‘notion of carnival is connected with the grotesque’ body (303). The body is, according to Bakhtin ‘a measuring device’ (303). But it does not measure the effects of those

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<sup>179</sup> IMDb Personal quote <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0262968/bio#quotes>

<sup>180</sup> ‘I saw his films as a kid. It surprises me because if you watch my act it’s nothing like his really’. See article ‘All I’ve ever felt on stage is pain’ *Daily Telegraph*, 25 October 2004.

beatings or the amount of battering the body can cope with because no marks are left on it, (even the pain registered on Charlie's face is in anticipation of it). What it measures is the immortality of the human spirit, 'the body's need of a type of clock if it is to be aware of its timelessness' (303). The comic wears his grotesque body but he never wears it out. It gives him immortality because it is as unchanging as the human spirit that wills it to survive.

Another perspective relates to the performance space and audience participation. Horton says, 'there is much in common between pre-Oedipal and carnivalesque comedy' (13) – its all inclusiveness – and 'the sanctioned freedom where almost any behaviour is permitted' (13). Similarly, Clark and Holquist explain that '[T]hose attending a carnival do not merely constitute a crowd; rather the people are seen as a whole, organized in a way that defies socio-economic and political organisation' (302). They point out that according to Bakhtin, "[A]ll were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, [in the cinema or tuning in at home] a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age" (10).

A televised 'live' comedy show like Drake's does indeed share something with *mediaeval* pantomime and Renaissance carnivals. If we accept Clark and Holquist's summary that:

At carnival time, the unique sense of time and space causes individuals to feel they are a part of the collectivity, at which point they cease to be themselves. It is at this point that, through costume and mask, the individual exchanges bodies and is renewed. At the same time there arises a heightened awareness of one's sensual, material, bodily unity and community (302).

And, if we accept that Priestley's family tree proves that Chaplin and 'Comedians of this kind [are] true descendants [of those medieval clowns] and have always been the idols of the English people' (1934:38), then we must celebrate Drake's rightful place in the pantheon of fools, as Douglas did, when she said: 'The man who shares the virtues of those great clowns of former days, and the man who most deserves to be crowned 'Clown of the Twentieth Century' is Charlie Drake' (c.1961:74).

Douglas recognises that Drake is a modern variation of the medieval clown and that these 'New Look' clowns 'coincided with the development of the little screen' (Douglas 74). Priestley said: 'However new the art that presents it may be' (45) they serve the same purpose as the medieval clowns did in carnivals. They have always entertained ordinary people, with



‘low comedy’ and ‘horseplay’ (45) - ‘the quality of the one tells us of the quality of the other’ - he says (45). By *horseplay* Priestley means rough boisterous play, which is a synonym for knockabout or slapstick comedy. By *low comedy* he means coarse or infantile comedy that is meant to entertain the lower classes, which corresponds with the light entertainment programmes that are meant to entertain television’s mass audiences (whose violent impulses have to be satiated somehow). The period in time is irrelevant; in every age the clown has to be beaten senseless by a patriarchal representative of society (the father-figure of authority) who is the nation’s public defender against unacceptable morals and bestial behaviour. But even if the ‘little’ fool is a counterfeit foil for freedoms, it is essential that he is portrayed as a champion of chaos, causing apparent mayhem and laughing in the face of his executioner as he is led to the gallows to be taught his place in society. As Priestley says, the ‘man undone in law the day before (the saddest case that can be) might for his two pence have burst himself with laughing, and ended all miseries’ (24). Here lies the psychological determinants for laughter; the law that censors it and death that ends it. The focus of all carnival (slapstick) humour is the body, its functions, its frailty, and its fight against the threat of death by miraculous renewal.<sup>181</sup> The clown always cheats death, cheerfully, inexplicably, but expectantly, because however much he is beaten again, and again, and again, he bounces back with a grin not a grimace on his face. The slapstick clown is seldom if ever able to talk his way out of trouble like the wise fool. Chaplin, working in silent films, mimed his way in and out of trouble. ‘Clowns had a habit of “gagging” (23) says Priestley. Even Charlie, who often mesmerises Mr. Pugh with his tall stories, always manages to put his foot in his own mouth, which, of course, precipitates some act of self-flagellation disguised in the typical kick-up-the-arse gag expected of the slapstick tradition. In an episode of *The Worker* ‘I Just Don’t Want To Get Involved’<sup>182</sup> he tries desperately not to get involved in discussions where he has to explain his behaviour to others, preferring instead to stay silent (which of course only increases the threat of physical violence to him).

Drake’s facial features (like all clowns) are not really silent though; ‘Drake has been described as ‘looking like a Botticelli angel with a stomach ache’ as Douglas (c.1961:77) reminds us. This *New Look* face of the twentieth century clown, as we have already noted, is a tool of the trade that has a long tradition. Priestley (1934) picks out Doggett and John Rich

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<sup>181</sup> For an Orwellian/Bakhtinian interpretation of this see Chapter 3, ‘From carnival to crumpet: Low comedy in the 1970s’ in Hunt (1998: 34-44).

<sup>182</sup> *The Worker*, series 2, episode 7, ITV (ATV), Saturday, 13 November, 1965.

(“the father of English pantomime” whose stage name was Lun) from seventeenth century reviews. He quotes one contemporary reviewer of Doggett who says, “On the stage, he’s very Aspectabund, wearing farce on his face, his Thoughts deliberately framing his Utterance Congruous to his looks”, and he repeats Garrick’s versicle to describe Lun: ‘When Lun appeared, with matchless art and whim, / He gave the power of speech to every limb: / Tho’ masked and mute, conveyed his quick intent, / And told in frolic what he meant’ (29).

The *very Aspectabund* faces of clowns like Rich, like Doggett, like Drake, like Wisdom (who practised the art of pulling faces)<sup>183</sup> reveals a peculiarity of the ‘English’ character; repression. Priestley explains why: ‘They live in such deep intimacy with their feelings that they find it difficult and distasteful to reveal them’ (19) verbally. But, is this psychological characteristic not more universal? Is the ‘little man’ clown not a substitute for the ‘little man’ symptom in all men? Is this not why the clown is popular all over the western world? Drake was invited to appear on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in America in 1968 because at that time Drake says, ‘America had no comic to love. All their comedians were stand-up people. The public could laugh at them, and so they should – the bulk of them were brilliant and their material superb – but there was no love. Bud Abbott and Lou Costello were the last men of warmth in the comedy field that they could love and they’d gone some time ago. I was up for grabs’ (1986:129). American might have found Drake funny because, as Douglas (c.1961) says, ‘Little Charlie has a battered, hopeless look about him’ (74) (and it was the home of slapstick after all) but does this reflect Priestley’s assertion that English audiences ‘prefer[ed] a droll chunk of personality’ (38) from their clowns, and why they ‘did not like a comedian to be different, but to be forever himself, or, if you will, to be more himself each time they see him’ (38)? Or does it reveal that their love of English clowns comes from the fact that little Charlie

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<sup>183</sup> ‘I discovered the enjoyable art of pulling faces [...] the more you practise, the more you can manipulate your skin into all sorts of monstrous looking masks. In the army I became a positive India Rubber Man, mainly to “take the Mickey” out of snooty officers and sadistic sergeants. I could pull the most horrendous faces – and lapse into child-like innocence when they whirled round to find out why everyone was laughing’ (Wisdom 2003:125). Wisdom reveals everything that defines the ‘little man’ clown here, as well as the psychological reasons behind what Nuttall & Carmichael call the ‘survival’ humour, (1977:37) that the ‘little man’ aka the ‘common man’ uses as a weapon to make war against authority figures: ‘By making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve...the enjoyment of overcoming him-to which the third person [audience]...bears witness by his laughter’ states Freud (*Jokes* 103). Drake’s own particular sense of humour is revealed in his autobiography when he recalls his time in the RAF. His humour is less good natured than Wisdom’s, (which was really observational - the purpose of which was to make his mates laugh, and to satisfy his own need to perform to an audience). Drake’s is more ‘hostile’ (Freud) and self-defensive. He did not need to share his humour; driven by an over-inflated ego that made him believe he was better than anyone else, it merely satisfied his natural inclination to ridicule those in authority to satisfy the idiosyncrasies of his own incomparable inferiority complex.

Chaplin was English and one of the biggest stars America has ever had? Wisdom was hugely popular in Albania. ‘Why Albania? *Because they kept asking me back!*’ explains Wisdom (2003:274) unable to comprehend why they loved him because his narcissistic ego is concerned only with the fact that they did, and Charlie Cairoli was hugely popular in England. Why England? Because he was Italian, and his broken English made him seem more buffoonish and child-like, and the lilting musical quality of his native tongue made audiences warm to him.

While the physical uniqueness of these clowns undoubtedly set them apart as individuals from every man, it was the simple everyday [extra]ordinariness of their ‘little man’ characters that made them an Everyman to popular audiences. A cursory glance at Aristotle’s *Poetics* would seem to confirm that clowns occupied the same social position in Ancient Greek theatre that Chaplin, Wisdom and Drake did in their films and television shows, even when we take into account the warning given by Heath (1996) that ‘the loss of the extended analysis of comedy which the original *Poetics* probably contained makes it difficult to be sure what Aristotle’s views on comedy would have been’ (lxii). ‘Comedy’ states Aristotle, ‘is...an imitation<sup>184</sup> of inferior people’ (49a 32f)<sup>185</sup> - ‘inferior’ having both moral and social implications’ explains Heath (lxii) and ‘[T]he central figures of comedy will include the lowly persons (such as peasants and slaves)’ (lxii) which we might as easily equate with the middle and working-class audiences watching Drake in *The Worker*, as with the mass audiences who went to the Penny Picture Palaces to watch Chaplin, or the ‘nearly unemployable’ Laurel and Hardy in the 1920s. Aristotle seems to have recognised the psychological function that ‘low’ characters in comedy fulfilled for public audiences too, as Heath points out; ‘They evoke pity, emotions which Aristotle defines as responses to painful and destructive harm’ (n.21:51). Aristotle provides a template for characters in comedy that combines their physical and psychological traits with their socio-political function. If we recall that Freud said the comic is found in people and the psycho-sociological function of jokes and humour is ultimately to maintain the

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<sup>184</sup> Freud’s concept of ‘ideational mimetics’ is clearly indebted to Aristotle’s use of the word *mimêsis*. Heath translates the word as ‘imitation’ to explain that the usual translation of the word meaning ‘representation’ is misleading. He says ‘likeness’ or ‘similarity’ (of something) is a more useful translation. Hence, Aristotle says, ‘human beings engage in the creation of likeness for the sake of pleasure’ (xii-xiii). Therefore, the ‘little man’ comic character in comedy brings humorous pleasure to the viewer because he is childlike, but the conscious act of pretending to be like a child produces pleasure for the viewer through the unconscious process of ‘ideational mimetics’ where he imagines himself to be like Drake’s childlike ‘little man’ character and then recognises it as comic by comparison.

<sup>185</sup> This page number is the reference system Heath applies to quote from Aristotle’s original text.

status quo of a civilised state by censoring the disgraceful and dangerous aggressive urges of the individual who threatens it, without harming them, Aristotle's descriptions do not seem time bound either, on the contrary they define modern clowns like Chaplin, Wisdom and Drake. What had changed was that the stoic mask the ancients wore now had the tears of the clown running down it; the *New Look* (Douglas c.1960:74) clown anticipated pain and the commingling of anger and fear on his face reflected his childlike hysteria without any thought that he might be behaving disgracefully if he laughed or cried out loud. Aristotle states that '[T]he laughable is an error or disgrace that does not involve pain or destruction; for example, a comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not involve pain' (9).

But clowns like Wisdom and Drake are very *Aspectabund* (like the popular clowns of the seventeenth century) not at all like the clowns of the *ancients* that Coleridge recognised (above p.62); they anticipate pain and contort their faces into grotesque masks. They make every effort to be ugly, but their ugliness is also a form of protest and rebellion. Wisdom and Drake pull funny faces to pull the rug of respectability from under the snobbish noses of their superiors to make the audience laugh at their pretensions, they are never deadpan when they take a beating or when they are trying to evoke sympathy; they caricature childish mannerisms and scowl before they scream.

Aristotle saw comedy as antithetical to tragedy. It was an imitation of baser animal natures while tragedy was an art form. Walter Kerr (1968) in *Tragedy and Comedy*, like Aristotle, puts 'tragedy *first*' (17), nevertheless, he does emphasise that comedy is 'connected to the root of tragedy' (17). The comic figure of the clown, he says, 'walks directly into the tragic landscape from which comedy came' (262) but he tells us nothing about the comic character. It is worth examining what Aristotle has to say about the construction of characters in tragedy and to offer it as a comparable model to comedy because much of what Aristotle wrote about comedy is lost but it is safe to assume that this was his intention. There are 'four things to aim at' (24) he states. (i) Their 'deliberate *goodness*' - The 'little man' comic character is mischievous but never wicked. (ii) Their *appropriateness*. - So it is appropriate that the 'little man' in comedy is a coward, as the character in tragedy is courageous. (iii) Their *likeness*. - If 'tragedy is an imitation of people better than we are' (Kerr 1968: 25) comedy is an imitation of people worse than we are, therefore, comedy is an imitation of *the* people, and (iv). The imitation should be *consistent*. - The performance personas created by 'little men' comics like

Chaplin, Askey, Wisdom, Drake, and later Reg Varney seem to suggest that Aristotle's descriptions are still useful.

Whilst many academics acknowledge Aristotle's *Poetics*, it is only Palmer (1987) who attempts to provide a definition for all the character types found in comedy. As we have already noted Drake is hard to place in Palmer's typology, but so is another other diminutive comic, Arthur Askey (and for apparently the same reason: He often turns to the camera to make a joking aside to the audience in his films and television shows). There is an explanation for this. Askey, like Drake, was a seasoned pantomime performer who stood up and told jokes to a live audience. This device helped them to create the illusion of intimacy between themselves and the audience in their film and television performances. I would agree that Wisdom and Drake's comic characters *are positioned according to the needs of the slapstick punch*, but it is only Wisdom's characters that are *fully drawn comic characters*. Connor's 'little man' characters in the *Carry On* films fit Palmer's category too, but that does not explain why he did not become a star like Drake or Askey. Peter Rogers, the producer of the series always claimed that the *Carry On* title was the star, not any particular individuals, nevertheless the likes of Williams, Hawtrey, and James are acknowledged stars of the series.<sup>186</sup> Connor's personality does not manifest itself in the same way theirs does though. This is either a credit to his acting ability or an acknowledgement that he is not a natural clown.<sup>187</sup> Drake actually played the parts he wrote (or co-wrote) himself. As we have seen, he was right to take control of the writing. But, that is only part of the reason that he became a star.

The diminutiveness of the 'little man' character, whether he appears in comedy, drama, or horror, is his greatest asset. Drake's physical appearance is absolute key to his success as a

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<sup>186</sup> "I hadn't really noticed Connor", Leon Hunt my external MA examiner told me.

<sup>187</sup> Connor was an actor who often craved to do drama when he was doing comedy and comedy when he was doing drama. There is a lot of evidence to support this in the BBC Written Archives which houses many of the 'begging' letters he wrote to the BBC in the early part of his career. Whether the fear of not working at all, because he had been rejected so many times early on his career, created a determination to work at anything that might be offered, or whether he felt that his talents as an actor were not satisfied when he played in one genre for too long, he was always keen to list his acting credentials, (after all he did win a gold medal at the Central School of Music and Drama), but inter-departmental memos in the archive state that he had only average talents as an actor and no special inclination to comedy or drama. See BBC WAC 'Kenneth Connor Artist File 1, R. Cont 1 - Artist File - 1936-1951'. It is interesting to compare the files on Drake because they show that the BBC knew immediately that they potentially had a great comic 'of the Norman Wisdom type' (Memo from Head of Television Programme Planning dated 7 October 1957) in their stable. Their only concern they had was to find the right vehicle to showcase him. But from the beginning the BBC realised that Drake knew best and they paid unusual deference to him. See BBC WAC 'Charlie Drake Artist File Charlie Drake, TVART File 1, 1952-1959'.

slapstick clown. He even seems to acknowledge this in an episode of *The Worker* when Charlie (his performance persona) says he is being “exhibited as an object of reticule”.<sup>188</sup> Drake’s use of pseudo medical terminology in the joke-work is very clever here (and one wonders whether everyone got the joke). Once again though Drake is demonstrating his interest in the function of the mind by creating a verbal pun on the word ‘reticule’ / ridicule which exposes the anxieties of the audience’s own ‘little man’ syndrome<sup>189</sup> through his knowledge of the reticular formation system. The remark, ‘I enjoy watching Charlie when he is up against it’<sup>190</sup> recorded by one viewer is damning evidence (of at least one member) of the audience’s self-awareness about their ‘little man’ syndrome and the self-deprecating humour that is used as a defence mechanism to make them feel better about it. Douglas’s assessment of Drake above is, of course, an assertion, if not a recognition, of this comic mentality. She says, ‘In his act, of course, he believes that the more out of depth the comic is, the funnier he is. ‘And my size helps to get the idea across’’ added Drake (c.1961:76).

Drake’s diminutiveness defines his comic character, but it is never used to define Drake, the big television star. Lewisohn (2003) for example, calls Drake ‘[t]he proverbial pint-sized comedy powerhouse’ (238) and in a more recent article featured in the *Mail Online*, a journalist said, ‘Charles Drake specialized in playing the put-upon and downtrodden ‘little man’. At the height of his fame, the 5ft 1½ in Drake was watched by millions of people on the BBC and ITV’.<sup>191</sup> Lewisohn’s description of Drake is quite different to the description of the ‘little man’ character(s) he plays. But, this is the point. It is Drake’s *powerhouse* personality that inhabits the ‘little man’ character(s) he plays.

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<sup>188</sup> *The Worker*, ‘A Host of Golden Casual Labourers’, series two, episode one, ATV, 2 October 1965.

<sup>189</sup> This was as true when Priestley wrote about the English character in 1934 as it was in 2010 when disappointed English football fans at the World Cup tapped their foreheads when they noticed they were on camera. They were acknowledging a mental weakness in the national character. One fan spoke for all when he said: “Our players have the skill, but they don’t have the mental strength to beat foreign teams”, *News at Ten*, 27 June, 2010. A post-match analysis on Channel Four News about England’s disappointing early exit from the finals was revealing because it was so self-aware. With a mixture of sarcasm and grudging acceptance the disappointed newsreader said, “The disallowed goal sapped the delicate spirits of the England team, and that is why England are losers”. His comments reveal the self-deprecating English sense of humour that lies at the core of the nation’s ‘little man’ syndrome and the inspiration behind the ‘little man’ character’s sense of humour whose goal is to change that national neurosis. *Channel Four News* Monday, 28 June, 2010, 19:00-20:00.

<sup>190</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *Charlie Drake In... ‘Recital’*, Wednesday, 30 December, 1959, 7.30-8.00pm. (A.R.D.) 22 January, 1960.

<sup>191</sup> Quoted from, ‘Why Charlie Drake left just £5,000 of the £5m he blew on women, horses and fast cars’, *Mail Online\_files\WHYCHA~1.HTM*, [Accessed 5 July 2008].

Angela Levin understood this when she interviewed Drake for *You* magazine in 1991 (who at that point in his career had turned to dramatic roles as a salve to soothe his slapstick wounds). She says, ‘Charlie has a Peter Pan attitude to life that encompasses more than just his size’ (49). Her phrase *more than just his size* is more than just a play on words about Drake’s physical diminutiveness, because it questions his sexuality (and therefore by association the Englishman’s well-known preoccupation about the size of his ‘small’ penis and his [in]ability to satisfy women). Levin’s cock-a-hoot is a castration joke. She is suggesting that Drake’s marriages (Prettybody had divorced him by then), his bragging in the interview about his over-developed sexual libido and his attraction to young women) ultimately failed because he could not satisfy them sexually. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that he could not satisfy them sexually, but the play on words about his size implies that it does. If Drake portrayed himself as the Pied Piper of promiscuity off screen, on it he remained something of a Peter Pan, “The Boy Who Would Never Grow Up” stuck in a pre-Oedipal Never land (or ‘Charlie Drake Land’ as he called it); where as he said “My size helps to get the idea across’ (c. Douglas 1961:76).

However, if the sexual roguishness of Drake’s persona can inhabit his ‘little man’ character(s), can we assume those darker dualities inhabiting them inhabit us? Often the contradictoriness of the words used to describe diminutive comics seem to reveal something of this duality, for example, Spicer (2003:21) describes Askey as a ‘wickedly innocent schoolboy or man-child’ and Mr. Whittaker/Percy Herbert in an episode of *The Worker* calls Charlie ‘an evil little creature’<sup>192</sup> when he compares him, of course, to a snake (a phallus).

So, what makes the *wickedly innocent man-child* of comedy different from the evil dwarfs in horror, or an evil gangster like “Little Caesar”/Edward G. Robinson? In horror the homunculus’ body is a grotesque odd body<sup>193</sup> because it houses a huge bestial brain. To corrupt George Orwell’s phrase, he is ‘the unofficial [ghoul], the voice of the belly protesting against the soul. His tastes lie towards safety, soft beds, pots of beer and women with ‘voluptuous’ figures’ (1942/1971:192). In comedy there is little to distinguish the two except

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<sup>192</sup> *The Worker*, ‘Out of the Mouths of Casual Labourers,’ series one, episode two, ATV, 6 March, 1965.

<sup>193</sup> Oddbod is a monster in *Carry On Screaming!* (1966) whose sexual urges are controlled by Dr Watt. When you realise Dr. Watt is played by Kenneth Williams, who found his own sexual urges monstrous, you will appreciate the gallows humour behind the joke that Williams was the real Oddbod being referred to in the jokes. Similarly, perhaps, ‘Prettybody’ is the monstrous feminine that Drake is compelled to possess through the act of fornication. In a sense, his self-parodying hostile jokes about his ‘little man’ character’s odd body are an act of regression, and love for mummy, “Perhaps, it’s mummy”, almost becomes a catchphrase in *The Worker*.

there is no need to harm him because he harms himself. The evil dwarf like the little gangster is always murdered. Making the body small in comedy makes it helpless, harmless and hilarious. Making it large in horror makes it frightening so it must be destroyed. Making it small makes it despicably evil;<sup>194</sup> it leaves no room for goodness or love to grow [up] in it. In *The Corpse Vanishes* (1942) the evil dwarf Toby/Angelo Rossitto helps the mad Dr. Lorenz/Bella Lugosi murder and steal the corpses of virgin brides so he can draw cerebral fluid from their spinal cord (their brain) to keep his wife/ Elizabeth Russell eternally beautiful. It is only after her beauty is restored that she finds the evil dwarf repellent. “Get out you gargoyle” she shouts at him angrily. It is as though his ugliness is written in stone on his dwarfism. Toby’s perverted sexuality is written large too in the horror house mirror where it is manifested in the giant body of the beastlike dumb brute Angel/Frank Moran who is constantly beaten like a dog by Dr. Lorenz (while Toby laughs and claps his hands with delight) each time he catches him stroking the hair of a dead virgin bride. The dumb brute has developed a fetish to satisfy his retarded sexual development. That retardation is symbolised by his idiocy. Yet, Toby seems more terrifying than the dumb brute because he is cunning. He follows Dr. Lorenz around like a little dog obeying every command because he wants to get his reward – Lorenz has promised to make him beautiful too. A new body will be the fulfilment of a wish for Toby - he will then be able to release his own pent-up sexual urges on a (corpse) bride of his own. But, because Toby’s sexual desires are squeezed into his deformed dwarf body his sexuality seems magnified and more monstrous. It is his devilish and deceitful smile that betrays the monstrous libidinous beast trying to escape from the cage of its dwarf body. “Cheerful little fellow isn’t he” jokes Patricia Hunter/Luana Walters the reporter investigating the mystery of the vanished bride corpses trying to disguise her repulsion with some gallows humour.

Evil ‘little man’ characters like these may be the personification of *the wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness* as Orwell observes because they ‘express only one

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<sup>194</sup> In horror the ‘little man’ is nefarious. In *Frankenstein* (1931) Dwight Frye plays Fritz, an evil dwarf, whose deformed body symbolises a more monstrous personality than ‘The Monster’ because he chooses to be evil. Peter Lorre plays the child murderer Franz Becker in Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931), and in his later comic roles, ‘He was content to parody the sinister snivelling that made him compelling to watch’ says David Parkinson in the *RadioTimes Guide to Films* (2006:751). Chaplin plays mass murderer Henri in *Monsieur Verdoux* (1951), and Mickey Rooney, that ‘pint-sized, snub-nosed American entertainer [went from] Jack-in-the-box clowning [note Quinlan’s choice of adjectives that focus on Rooney’s diminutiveness] to play ‘a bald grinning demon in the Broadway show *Sugar Babies*, before winning an Emmy for the TV movie *Bill* (1981) where he played a middle-aged retarded man’ (1992:242).



tendency in the human mind', to be bad. Gangster films may reflect Orwellian fears about mob mentality and the breakdown of society because the public loved to watch them. *The Public Enemy* (1931), as Patrick McGilligan (1975) states, certainly 'glamorised the gangster' and 'a post script narration to the film explicitly warns audiences that Cagney's Tom Powers is an average person' (McGilligan 1975:30) like them.

In the gangster movie the body of the self-abusing gangster is a manifestation of a mind corrupted by immoral sexual desires and a self-destructive drive to kill the libidinous beast trying to escape from the cage in the mind that represses it. The headaches Cody Jarrett / Cagney suffers in *White Heat* (1949) is one example. Coke-snorting Tony Montana played by Al Pacino in *Scarface* (1983) (a movie so spectacularly violent that it would be disturbing to watch were it not for the black comedy that brings the viewer some relief) is another. A contract is taken out on Montana who is murdered by a rival mob, but the death scene is Shakespearian in its scope and intensity. He dies in an orgasmic blood-bath as he falls into a water fountain in a shoot-out at his home. The death (wish) scene comes immediately after he has shot his own sister in a jealous rage. His unnatural sexual attraction to his sister is his most revolting crime and by the end of the film the audience probably feel some satisfaction that the price of a cinema ticket has paid for justifying their collusion in the contract killing.

The 'little man' gangster character represented the worst forms of humanity that the average person could descend to, and if an audience's pleasure was ultimately to enjoy the spectacle of their death, they did this by identifying with the aggressive and sexual desires of these social outcasts and indulging in a kind of mental rebellion. Some parallels can be drawn between the audience's experience of going to the movies and the popular appeal of Donald McGill's picture postcards that Orwell discusses in his essay. The paper postcard scenes, like the moving pictures, prod the same funny bone of the same popular audiences that went to the picture houses to watch the comedies and laughed because they saw something of themselves in the grotesque caricatures. Orwell does suggest that the postcards have a practical social purpose too; they helped to pacify the natural vulgar impulses of the masses. They offered 'a sort of mental rebellion' against a '[S]ociety that demands a little more from human beings than it will get in practice [...] faultless discipline and self-sacrifice' (193). Deprived of these outlets for 'harmless rebellion' Orwell says, 'the corner of the human heart [...] might manifest itself in worse forms' (1942:195). It could be argued that film and television comedy served the same purpose; the medium was a form of state repression. This brings us back to

Bakhtin's observations about state sanctioned medieval carnivals like the Festival of Fools<sup>195</sup> (the title was probably given to the festival by some witty state official) where the ugliest man that could be found (Freud – *the comic is something found*) was crowned King. In the 1939 film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* pretenders to the throne try to make themselves ugly by comically pulling their faces and gurning. Others have more naturally funny-looking faces which make the crowds laugh. But the crowd turns away in silent horror when they see the deformed features and hunchbacked body of Quasimodo/Laughton. Then they do something strange, they laugh hysterically, crown him King of Fools and carry him through the street of Paris joyfully celebrating their happiness. Why? Because "[T]he ugly is very appealing to man; it's instinct. One shrinks from the ugly, yet one wants to look at it. There's a devilish fascination in it. We extract pleasure from horror' explains the wise King Louis/Davenport. The connection between the comic and the tragic is conjoined in the grotesque body of the man the crowds crown the King of Fools. A comic rendering is given by Drake in a scene from the episode of *The Worker*, 'I Babble, Babble as I Flow to Join the Brimming River'<sup>196</sup> when Drake steps out of character to crown himself King of Fools before a cheering live television audience.

The maniacal gangster suffers from king mania too, and the 'little man' character often made the diminutive actor playing him a king of the cinema. Besides their ruthless tenacity something else made the character compelling, their unshakable (albeit deranged) sense of humour. It was after all Cagney's wisecracking as well as his ruthless little tough-guy persona that connected with audiences. Drake is perceptive when he says, 'Everything we do, whether good or bad in the accepted sense has to be answered for one way or another. The definition of good and evil is so similar that it tells us there is no definitive answer to either. With this in mind I wrote a piece [an episode for *The Worker*] entitled 'No Good Deed Goes Unpunished' (1986:121). That king-sized sense of humour housed in a diminutive body became the template for what a gangster should look and act like on screen. McGilligan's descriptions (12) of Cagney are useful because they shed some light on the attractiveness of this avatar of murder and mirth and the artist who creates it. McGilligan describes the character(s) Cagney played, not the man, but it is not hard to see that McGilligan is guilty of confusing Cagney's

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<sup>195</sup> The Festival of Fools – 'The one day of the year when the people, crushed by tyranny, gave themselves to unrestrained pleasure' reads the title card in the 1923 version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

<sup>196</sup> *The Worker*, series 4, episode 6, ATV, September 10, 1970.

personality with his performance persona. Once again, we see how the personality of Cagney, the actor, inhabits the 'little man' characters he plays. The same is true of the 'little man' characters played by knockabout clowns like Chaplin, Drake and Wisdom. The image in the mirror is fuzzy because it is a close match. McGilligan describes Cagney's 'little man' character: 'He was physically tough - that was his identifying trademark - "All India-rubber muscle" [a physical requirement essential to perform slapstick]. His arms dangled monkey-like [Wisdom's gurning Gump]. He was short but, though his height was an implicit factor of his popularity his size was never mentioned throughout his whole career except in the film *One, Two, Three* (1961) where his character C. R. MacNamara is encouraged to wear elevator shoes'<sup>197</sup>(12). The film is a comedy.<sup>198</sup> If C. R. MacNamara felt he would lose his dignity in his stocking feet, the loss of dignity was the *stocking-trade* to the 'little man' clown. It is worth mentioning that dignity came with age for 'little man' clowns like Wisdom and Drake when they switched to more serious dramatic roles. Both tried on the gangster role; Drake in the ITV television series *99-1* (1995), Wisdom in the film *Double-X* (1992),<sup>199</sup> and both certainly suffered a loss of dignity when these middle aged clowns thought that the public would accept them chasing young women around. It makes very uncomfortable viewing watching Wisdom's 'little bank clerk frolicking naked in the surf with a very young girl' in *What's Good for the Goose* (1969). 'It's a film full of cringeworthy moments. Norman the sexy banker?' says Parkinson in his review of the film in the *RadioTimes Guide to Films 2007* (2006:1347). Typically though, Drake seems to have grown old disgracefully because he

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<sup>197</sup> More recently in the film *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005) Steve Coogan cleverly parodies the anxieties of being cast as the 'little man' when he plays himself as an actor playing Tristram Shandy. During a break in filming, Coogan notices his fellow actor, the shorter Rob Brydon, in costume off set walking around in elevator shoes. Coogan reacts hysterically to this, and after he has persuaded Brydon not to wear the high heels he reveals his motive for his hysteria when he explains to one of the camera crew that "It's important to the audience to see the height difference; in terms of the seniority of the characters", by which he means, in terms of the seniority of the actors. Of course, Brydon, who plays the sexually frustrated Toby, only decides to wear the high heels because his love interest questions his 'fitness for marriage' depends on "the size of his equipment". The high heels therefore represent a fetish object and a wish-fulfilment to cure the neurotic fear of impotency which in British comedy has traditionally always been the curse of the 'little man' character.

<sup>198</sup> In an episode of *On the Buses* called 'The Poster', Jack tries to help Stan win the competition to be the face of the best bus driver on the bus company's posters when he gives him some elevators to put in his shoes to make him taller and sexier like a film actor; 'You're always saying it's the sexy blokes what get the birds. You slip 'em on and you'll see how sexy you look' he tells Stan who wins the competition (when he takes off the makeup and the elevators and goes into the interview covered in oil) because he represent the typical Everyman that the bus company are looking for. Interestingly, the poster pasted on the front of the buses that 'magnifies his face a hundred times' (says Jack) represents the face of the star of the series who left the show half way through this series, and which, consequently, turned out to be the last. *On the Buses*, series 7, episode 4, March 18, 1973.

<sup>199</sup> Interestingly, when Piers Morgan asked Ronnie Corbett if he had any regrets in his career, he admitted that he'd wanted to play more serious dramatic roles – like a "gangster". See *Piers Morgan's Life Stories, Ronnie Corbett*, ITV3, series two, 7 November, 2009.

looks every inch the dirty old man when he plays Baron Hard-on in the adult pantomime *SINderella*. There is at last some acknowledgement that the ‘little man’ character is a manifestation of the clown who plays him when Wisdom points out in his memoirs that ‘with panto you can even be yourself’ (2003:215).

With regards to the sexuality of the ‘little man’ character, McGilligan’s descriptions of Cagney come in useful again. He says, Cagney’s ‘unique physicality translated readily into a sensuality and even sexuality about his person [...] By the entire manner in which he walked and talked, one knew – foremost – that Cagney was “a man” – that is, by the classic American cinematic definition: he abused women, he talked big, he lived by his wits and also his fists’ (1975:12). This could be describing Drake; the adult persona that inhabited his ‘little man’ character(s) that was never completely hidden by the innocence of his childlike masquerade because it was never meant to be. Similarly, if Cagney’s *height is an implicit factor* that defines the ‘little man’ gangster character he plays (as it is with Al Pacino and Edward G. Robinson’s characters) because it signifies castration anxiety and manifests itself in the monstrous character’s desires to be a big man, Drake’s diminutiveness not only helps to define his ‘little man’ character(s) as childlike but his childlikeness defines him as castrated too.

Castration is an important theme for the ‘little man’ in the comedy/drama/horror genres because it ‘characterizes’ him. Castration is a ‘characterization’ of his pre-Oedipal state of sexual immaturity. The castrator is always a parental figure. Actual fathers are almost always absent, so a more perfect father-figure of authority replaces him (the army sergeant, the manager of a department store, the clerk behind the desk at the labour exchange). The mother is often present, but in her absence, the overbearing landlady or doting girl next door is present. Crucially, the God-mother castraterix creates a violent self-destructive child. In *White Heat* for example, Arthur Cody Jarrett’s unhealthy attachment to his manipulating mother (Ma of the mob)<sup>200</sup> makes his character more evil. Adrian Turner in his review of *White Heat* in the *RadioTimes Guide to Films 2007* says the film is ‘a nightmarish excursion into the maladjusted mind of Arthur Cody Jarrett, a thug who sits on his mother’s knee, steals and kills for pure pleasure, and probably sucks his thumb in private’ (2006:1355). “Made it Ma! Top of the world Ma!” he screams maniacally as he dies in the masturbatory blaze of a self-

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<sup>200</sup> In the American animated science fiction sitcom, *Futurama*, Mom and her ‘trio of sycophantic, petrified, childish sons’ run MomCorp. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mom\\_\(Futurama\)#Sons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mom_(Futurama)#Sons)

consuming fire at the end of the film. By contrast the presence of the good mother, the weak and ironically named Ma Powers in *The Public Enemy*, evokes sympathy for the ‘little man’ character and McGilligan is correct when he says Cagney’s characters ‘invite the mother instinct’ (13). In *Carry On Sergeant* (1958) the audience’s ridicule soon turns to sympathy when Horace/Connor runs to Captain Clark/Hattie Jacques for help because he is ill. Is Wisdom’s ‘little man’ character not more lovable because he has a caring loving mum in *Just My Luck* (1957), and because the plump laundry maid Miss Gibson/Megs Jenkins ‘mothers’ him like little child in *Trouble in Store* (1953)? In ‘Little Tom’,<sup>201</sup> an episode from *The Worker*, little Charlie evokes the audience’s sympathy even more because he is an orphan and therefore the most vulnerable of all. “I never ‘ad no mother” he moons pathetically. Pathos is prevented from becoming too sentimental by turning sadness into comedy by adding even more pathos. “I never ‘ad no father either” he chokes. Conversely, Charlie does not evoke any sympathy when he wants Mr. Pugh to be a father-figure to him in ‘Through A Glass Darkly’, he provokes anger which manifests itself as slapstick humour.

A consequence of too much motherly love is that most of the ‘little man’ clowns are shy around women. It’s the same in Cagney’s gangster films except that his character’s shyness is manifested in an act of transference - violence towards women – note the implied sexual pleasure on Tom Power’s face when he shoves half a grapefruit into his girlfriend Kitty/Mae Clarke’s face in *The Public Enemy* (like a pre-mature ejaculation). Connor’s characters in the early *Carry On* films are terrified of women. Wisdom’s ‘little man’ character is always shy around women, which is why he is always paired off with the virginal girl-next-door type, but they are lovable. Lewisohn (2003) points out that Askey’s ‘little man’ character(s), the ‘mischievous hyperactive adolescent schoolboy in an adult’s body’,<sup>202</sup> (53) are not lovable because they are adolescents (permanently more like boys than men) pre-occupied with sex and smut. However, the moment he turns to camera to share a smutty joke (*Jokes* 1905:99)<sup>203</sup> with the male audience about the busty Sabrina<sup>204</sup> he becomes one of the big boys. When he

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<sup>201</sup> *The Worker*, series 2, episode 3, ATV, October 16, 1965.

<sup>202</sup> ‘He maintained this alter ego throughout his professional life’ says Lewisohn (2003:53).

<sup>203</sup> Freud uses the smutty joke to explain the tripartite nature of social humour.

<sup>204</sup> Similarly, as Spicer (2001) in *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, points out, in *Bees in Paradise* (1944) ‘Arthur spends his time in flight from the blonde virago, Rouana (Anne Shelton) who looks about to fulfil all his worst castration anxieties in the film [...] ‘Arthur’, offered as Everyman, is no longer a figure of fun and confidence, but a man in flight. These later films did not recapture the popularity of *I Thank You* (1941). Clearly, cinema-goers preferred Askey in his role as cheerful zany; he was not a figure who could acceptably embody masculine fears about the future’ (21-22). It is hard to imagine how even

is in character the audience are positioned to laugh *at* his ‘schoolboy’ character because he is sexually defined (castrated) by his own adolescence. The joke, of course, is that audiences have been conditioned by cinematic stereotypes so they know that a balding, bespectacled, dwarf could not possibly hope to woo a woman like Sabrina, whereas a tall, dark, handsome man could, so it’s no surprise that his smutty joke, as Freud explains, fails to make her ‘yield at once to a sexual action’ (*Jokes* 1905:99). On another level though the smutty joke does work because it is Askey (not the adolescent schoolboy character type he plays) who shares the joke with the male audience with a lecherous look to camera, and it is the male voyeurs who enjoy Sabrina’s ‘passive exhibitionism’ (*Jokes* 1905:99) as it is paraded in front of them on the cinema screen.

McGilligan’s summary of Cagney is also useful because it helps to shed some light on the personalities of other diminutive actors by revealing something about them that is common to many of them who had honed their craft on the music hall stage, their musicality.<sup>205</sup> Cagney was a dancer. Chaplin composed music for his films. Wisdom was a naturally gifted musician and seemed to be able to play any instrument he chose; he wrote and sang songs in many of his films. “Don’t Laugh at Me” from the film *Trouble in Store* (1953) even reached Number One in the record charts and ‘remained in the Top Ten for a record breaking nine months’ boasts Wisdom (2003:193). Reg Varney began his career as a singer-cum-pianist and after he left the television series *On The Buses* in 1973 he returned to his musical roots with his own series *Reg Varney* where he sang and played the piano between comedy sketches with Henry McGee. Drake had a number of novelty hits like “Splish Splash” (1958) and “Mr. Custer” (1961) in the Hit Parade. “My Boomerang Won’t Come Back” reached Number 1 in Australia and was a hit in America in 1961. Even today it is a novelty hit on YouTube and provokes many *users* to upload their own comic videos to the song. As many people remember Drake for this song as they remember Wisdom for “Don’t Laugh at Me” or Askey for his “Busy

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Askey’s ‘cheerful zany’ persona could ever help male audiences ‘laugh off’ their fears and anxieties about masculinity as Spicer suggests.

<sup>205</sup> The diminutive actor Mickey Rooney should be included here too. He was descended from a vaudeville family. He was deserted by his alcoholic father when he was three years old and consequently his mother was a strong influence in his life and career. His musical talents were quickly recognised and with Judy Garland he co-starred in a number of popular films as a successful song and dance team. His gift for comedy was always associated with his diminutiveness and his ‘natural’ tenacious character. He also starred as a boxer in *Killer McCoy* (1947) and a gangster in *Baby Face Nelson* (1957).

Bee” ballad. This musicality probably explains why these men had a natural timing for visual comedy?<sup>206</sup>

Cagney played clowns too of course in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942) and *A Man of a Thousand Faces* (1957) but he has something else in common with Wisdom, Drake and Varney, boxing. Cagney plays a boxer in *Winner Take All* (1932) and *The Irish in Us* (1935). He was, as McGilligan (15) points out, ‘an amateur boxer who was runner-up for the New York State lightweight title’. Wisdom was an Army flyweight champion and he plays a shadow boxer in his first film *A Date with a Dream* (1948). In the film he recreates the slapstick routine he discovered quite by accident when he was in the army. He was shadow boxing in the barrack room when the shadow hit him back. ‘The room filled with laughter when I went at it like a lunatic’ he says in his memoirs. ‘Thus was born part of a routine I would later use at the London Palladium, and all round the country in my variety shows’ (2003:65-66). Drake was a boxing champion at school and captain of the school boxing team (Drake 1986:5). In *On the Buses* a photograph of a boxer (presumably Stan) posing in the ring is hung on his bedroom wall.<sup>207</sup> Boxing undoubtedly taught these diminutive men how to defend themselves and it probably helped to strengthen their character because they all became extremely self-disciplined men, but it may also have been useful training for a career in knockabout comedy.

Wisdom admits he took up boxing to defend himself he says, ‘The reason is simple. Being so small, I was constantly a target for bullying. You can talk your way out or laugh your way out of ugly situations-but sometimes the chips are down, and you know you can defend yourself’ (2003:72).<sup>208</sup> Interestingly though, this shaped the psyche of his ‘little man’ character(s) who

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<sup>206</sup> Rolf Harris is another interesting television personality whose inherent musicality seems to have endowed him with a sense of comic timing. Like Drake he had a number of hit records in the Australian and British *Hit Parade*, and his sense of humour that is reflected in his television shows undoubtedly helped to make him a popular entertainer. In a television interview with Mark Lawson Rolf Harris also revealed that he suffered from depression because of his personal appearance. Since Rolf reminds the audience that he was a champion swimmer they are left to assume that it was his facial appearance that caused his anxiety and the reason he grew a beard. The beard as ‘comic mask’ became his way of repressing memories of verbally abusive bullying. See *Mark Lawson Talks to Rolf Harris*, BBC Four, 23 November, 2008, 22:00-23:00

<sup>207</sup> See ‘Stan’s Worst Day’, series 6, episode 4, 12 March 1972.

<sup>208</sup> A comic who has been compared to Wisdom is Lee Evans. His gurning mannerisms and ape like body movements, manic energy and slapstick humour are remarkably like Wisdom’s. He had a spell as a boxer too and he took the sport up for the same reasons as Wisdom, to defend himself. He is worth considering as a direct descendent of the British ‘little man’ comics. He does possess the same skills that the other ‘little man’ comics who came before him had. He is a talented musician and actor (though his films have never displayed his comic

never ran away or pulled their punches against bigger bullying figures of authority. His performance persona, the 'Gump', was never a coward. Contrariwise, Drake seems to have been a bully at school. He says he used to copy from other children's work in school. 'Most of the children were happy to let me look at their work, and those who weren't were given the promise of a going-over in the playground' (5). As we saw earlier in the comments made by people who worked with Drake there is a lot of evidence to suggest that this unsavoury trait continued into his adult working life.<sup>209</sup> Ironically his performance persona, 'little' Charlie, the unemployed worker from Weymouth in *The Worker*, is a coward who flinches every time someone bigger than him raised his hand. In the episode 'Through a Glass Darkly' Charlie's cowardice is linked specifically with his father-fixation. The essence of his slapstick was founded on the fact that his 'little man' character always tried to run out of harms way (Connor always plays these cowardly types in the *Carry On* films too). The confessions of these two men in their autobiographies reflects how each developed psychological mechanisms to cope with their diminutiveness in different ways, and how the different characters of the 'little man' characters they played was defined by that too.

In terms of character and relationships, a boxing analogy is useful for comparing the almost coming-to-blows relationship between the 'little man' and the 'big man' combatants which is such a common feature in 'little man' comedies (Chaplin and Big Jim McKay, Wisdom and Desmonde, Drake and McGee, Varney and Lewis are just some examples), and the setting of the labour exchange (complete with a bell on the counter to start each bout) in *The Worker* is worth comparing to a boxing ring. This 'small' space is where the spectator audience watched Charlie (the underdog) face his challenger (and odds on favourite) Mr Pugh[alist] in a comic rematch week after week. They trade verbal punches with their *duologue* routine until Charlie,

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talents at all), and he has undoubtedly reached 'Pop star status in the UK performing in front of thousands in huge concert arenas with his One-Man show.

<sup>209</sup> It is interesting to compare Drake to the 'little man' character called Curly played by diminutive actor Bob Steele in the film *Of Mice and Men* (1939). When migrant workers Lennie Small, a mentally retarded giant played by Lon Chaney Jr. and his friend George/Burgess Meredith are given jobs as buckers on a ranch, the son of the sadistic ranch owner tries to assert his authority by picking on Lennie. When George (who is barely taller than him) faces up to Curley who backs off because George has showed him that he is the bigger man by his show of courage Candy/Roman Bohnen, the broken down old bunk house man, explains why he is so hot-headed. 'Curley's like a lot o' little guys. He hates big guys!. It's kinda like he's mad at 'em 'cos he ain't a big guy. You seen lots of little guys ain't ya? Always scappin''. Curley's problem turns out to be his flirtatious wife Mae/Betty Field who he does not trust. 'Seems to me he's worse since he got married; like he's sittin on an ant hill' says Candy. It is worth noting that the close friendship between George and Lennie is illustrated by utilising the big man/little man double act team format with a careful choice of the physical size of the actors who play them. Similarly, George's intelligence is seen as a far superior asset for surviving in life than Lennie's giant body, which he cannot control and ultimately is the cause of his own destruction.



who is winning every round, is stopped in the 918th round<sup>210</sup> when Mr Pugh[alist] drags him over the counter by the scruff of the neck, and like Eurytheus sends the little Hercules off on his slapstick labours until the title music (the bell) ends the bout, cues the adverts, and we watch the king of slapstick swagger down the street singing his own anthem. The antagonistic relationship and the *duelogue* is a crucial ‘subjective determinant’<sup>211</sup> of all ‘little man’ comedies, but there are others too.

McGilligan’s physical description of the child-like Cagney is interesting because it might equally be applied to Drake. He was ‘simultaneously babyish and mannish. With his deep, inset eyes and puffed, etched face, he could resemble a child and he was given to tantrums, wild rages and disconsolate sulks’ (1975:13).<sup>212</sup> What is revealing is that two apparently incompatible ideas of imitation occur simultaneously and they are equally shocking and humorous. In drama, in horror, the audience’s pleasure is filtered out through their shock response to it, in comedy it is released by laughing it off. By recognising that ‘Chaplin was also a tragedian’ (13) McGilligan stumbles upon the missing link that we have been searching for – that both types of ‘little man’ are flawed tragic-comic figures – like the rest of us. The only difference is the ‘little man’ character’s psychological predilections to murder or to be mirthful are magnified while the audience’s are repressed. This of course makes the ‘little man’, a little-big man, an extra-ordinary Everyman. McGilligan says, Chaplin ‘was the symbolic representation of the working-class man...he wasn’t so school-smart, he wasn’t worldly-wise, he made mistakes, he was ultimately sympathetic, and sometimes he was even a coward’ (13). These human flaws are magnified not diminished by the diminutiveness of the ‘little man’ clown.

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<sup>210</sup> Charlie had 918 jobs in 20 years. See *The Worker*, ‘Hallo Cobbler’, series 3, episode 1, 29 December 1969.

<sup>211</sup> See Freud (1905) *Jokes* pp.111-112, 140-4, 178.

<sup>212</sup> It should be obvious by now that what exists between something ugly and something comic in the ‘little man’ / diminutive tragic anti-hero is archetypal. Some proof of this has already been offered to support this observation; from Aristotle’s descriptions of the ‘comic mask as something ugly and distorted’, to Victor Hugo’s Quasimodo, the hunchback whose huge deformity crushes his stature and whose ugliness makes the Parisians crown him King of Fools, to Bakhtin’s description of the ‘grotesque’ in carnival, to Doggett’s description of the ‘Aspectabund’ Rich ‘wearing farce on his face’, to Quinlan’s description of Mickey Rooney as the ‘pint-sized snub-nosed, evil grinning demon, to the way Wisdom’s describes himself ‘twisting [his] face into all sorts of gorgon-like expressions [and] prancing around as the Hunchback of Notre Dame in front of the wardrobe mirror’ (Wisdom 2003:125), to Douglas’s description of Drake resembling a ‘Botticelli angel with a stomach ache’, to Mr. Whittaker’s description of Charlie as an “evil creature” (‘Out of the Mouths of Casual Labourers’), or Mr. Pugh calling Charlie a “nasty little ginger-headed android” (‘I Just Don’t Want To Get Involved’) or a “horrible little freak” (‘A Host of Golden Casual Labourers’), and Freud’s observation that the ‘comic’ is something found in people, or someone whom is made comic, or someone who can make themselves comic (*Jokes* 1905:189).

John Gough in his weekly column, 'Looking Around with John Gough'<sup>213</sup> in the TV Times in 1961 talks with Billy Dainty, another diminutive comedian, who was appearing on the television series *Startime* that week. He draws the reader's attention to a question (the very same question we are discussing here) that Dainty was puzzling over himself: 'Why are so many comedians, like Norman Wisdom, Arthur Askey and Charlie Drake, short men?' (5). Gough, in his chatty style, does suggest an all too short but teasing answer to Dainty's dilemma by analysing why Dainty became a comedian. 'Billy Dainty had to have a taste of tragedy before he could make up his mind to choose show business as a career' (5) he states. By what appears to be a matter of sheer chance rather than anything connected with this question, the TV Times issue also featured an interview by Vic Edwards with Arthur Askey called, 'Hallo Playmates! The Arthur Askey Story'.<sup>214</sup> In it, Askey hints about the tragedy in his own life. He recalls how 'rough' it was at the beginning of his career. "Rough" here is an adjective Askey uses to disguise a tragic memory, which Edwards says he 'had a hard time persuading Arthur to talk about' (1961:6). Can we assume that Askey's reluctance to talk about those *rough* times reveals his desire to keep such tragic memories repressed, and that they cannot have failed to have shaped his character by armouring him with a sense of humour bigger than the sum of his little body parts? And can we also not offer a proposition that the 'little man's' jokes are an unconscious defence mechanism to keep such memories repressed?

Edwards' interview provides a revealing insight into the persona behind the performance persona of the 'little man' character(s) Askey played and this helps us to understand Drake because Askey's personality is what (we think) we see on screen too. Edwards' attention, like Douglas' in her interview with Drake is first drawn to Askey's diminutiveness. He introduces Askey in nearly the same way when he refers to him as 'This 5ft 3 1/2in. bundle of bouncing enthusiasm' (6). But his use of the word 'enthusiasm' to define Askey's character compared to Douglas' use of the word 'powerhouse' tells us how different their personalities and hence their screen personas are. Like Drake (and unlike Wisdom) Askey draws attention to his own diminutiveness, but unlike Drake he does it in a cheerful, good-natured way. Drake, as we mentioned earlier, used humour as a means of attack, as a means of gaining power over

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<sup>213</sup> 'Looking Around with John Gough' 'A Dainty step into show business,' TV Times, March 12-18 March 1961, pp.4-5.

<sup>214</sup> 'The Arthur Askey Story. Hallo Playmates! Vic Edwards with asides by Arthur Askey', TV Times, March 12-18 March, 1961, pp.6-7.

people, but Askey disarms people (the public) with self-deprecating humour. Recalling his concert party days at Shanklin and the luxury of having a lot of leisure time to swim in the pool in the afternoons between shows, he quips: “I was the only one who could dive in the shallow end”. Edwards then draws his reader’s attention to the other distinguishing features that mark him out as a clown - Askey’s face. The fans already knew what Askey looked like but Edwards seems to know unconsciously that they would enjoy being reminded; as Freud says, ‘the close connection between recognising and remembering [...] is a fertile source of pleasure in jokes’ (*Jokes* 1905:122). Edwards reminds us that Askey’s natural features (his sandy hair and his freckles) are in a “funny face” way [un]natural (like a clown’s). The freckles seem to have been stuck onto the clown’s face, and the sandy hair, along with the big glasses are props from the clown’s wardrobe. Wisdom had quite ordinary features but he was wise enough to put on the Gump suit and gurn gormlessly underneath the turned around peaked cap. Connor whose face was also not unattractive puffs, pouts, and scrunches his face up. Drake, as we have already noted, needed no props to exaggerate his clown like appearance.<sup>215</sup>

By the time Askey appeared on the screen he knew the importance of the ‘face’ in comedy. To substitute the traditional clown’s big red nose he went out and ‘bought himself a pair of generous-sized horn-rimmed glasses’ to replace the pince-nez pair that he wore. “They may not have remembered the guy in the pince-nez, [...] but they remembered the little man in the horn-rimmed specs” he told Edwards (1961:6-7). They drew attention to his face by seemingly magnifying his expressions. They are a comic prop (like Drake’s wild red hair). They draw the spectator-audience’s attention to the face and magnify it. But what is being magnified is the ‘big’ personality (the ego) of the star through the mirror of the ‘little man’ character he plays. What the cinema and television screen did, was to increase the magnification even more, which is why Askey, Wisdom and Drake became big stars in those mediums. Askey’s shrewdness (or perhaps it was just plain luck) paid off, and at last Askey was able to draw attention to himself. Arguably, this raises some psychological questions. Was his craving for attention a way of making people look up (instead of down) at him? Was he turning the tables on the audience who were laughing at him? Was he laughing at them

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<sup>215</sup> Many ‘little man’ comics make their face up like a clown’s. Again the emphasis is on magnifying the features of the face, even pulling faces and gurning as Wisdom often does can be viewed as a grotesque sort of magnification of his features. Drake’s shock of unkempt red hair (which he uses as a kind of prop) is a feature he exaggerated by leaving it wildly stood on end after every pratfall.

laughing at him? It is hard to say with certainty especially since Askey seems to have been such a confident 'little man': "I have ego, he says, "You have to like yourself before you can like other people. This is not a conceit. It is people who are not sure of themselves who are conceited. I just have all the self-confidence in the world' (6).

Perhaps Askey's character(s) over-sized spectacles are a compensatory psychological mechanism for having short legs. Glasses certainly makes his character(s) look like a wise fool,<sup>216</sup> and his humour is more farcical than slapstick. Askey's 'little man' character(s) is less the butt of violent slapstick jokes than Wisdom and Drake's character(s) too. Askey's 'generous horn-rimmed' specs blinded his character(s) to the obvious; they symbolised that he was physically imperfect and psychological retarded to the other characters, as well as to 'Mr. Average in the audience,' (7).<sup>217</sup>

Although Askey's farcical humour is fundamentally different from the slapstick knockabout comedy of Wisdom and Drake (in the sense that, it is more dependent on his / character's ready repartee) it is equally dependent on him communicating with his audience, which is not fundamentally different to Drake's humour. Lewisohn (2003) says, 'Askey's style was to acknowledge the audience through the 'fourth wall' whenever possible, often keeping up the running commentary with the audience' (53) (as Drake often does in *The Worker*). This ready repartee matched perfectly the hyperactive body that contained it. Askey dances around the

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<sup>216</sup> Ronnie Corbett 'fought tenaciously to avoid being typecast by his glasses and lack of height' states Lewisohn (2003:6), but if we recall the 41-year-old Timothy Lumsden still living at home with a mother who continually 'undermines his self-confidence' (191) in the BBC television sitcom *Sorry!* and the trade-mark television-screen spectacles Corbett fidgets with and lifts up as though he is doffing a cap to the audience each time he finishes telling them a joke in his 'Ronnie in the chair' spot on *The Two Ronnies* he does not altogether convince us that his air of self-confident isn't still hiding behind those huge glasses. Apart from the familiarity that 'Ronnie's in a chair in your front room' is designed to engender with television audiences at home, the chair, as a prop, has a dual function. Ronnie is performing in front of a live studio audience, but he is not telling jokes in the traditional stand-up way, he is seated, so this takes away the audience's attention from his diminutiveness, momentarily, as does the camera angle of the shot of Ronnie which emulates the position of the viewers at home, sat in front of the television in their front rooms. Both audiences are distracted enough to disarm their prejudices, so they do not feel uncomfortable in their chairs when Ronnie makes self-deprecating jokes about his diminutiveness, (which all his jokes tend to focus on). But, after each punch line there is another subtle visual joke made about Ronnie's diminutiveness. He squirms, in what seems now to be a high-chair, kicking his legs, shrugging his shoulders, and hiding his cute smile embarrassingly behind those television-screen glasses. 'I suppose', he says, 'I've always capitalised on being small, but I never liked dressing in silly clothes or getting bashed about. That never appealed to me because it's undignified. I think what makes people laugh is that little thing called Ronnie Corbett is pretending to be dignified and normally built. The only outsized thing I wear is my glasses' (Quinlan 1992:72). To the television audience, the 'little man' Ronnie Corbett is as plain as the glasses on his face.

<sup>217</sup> Dudley Moore 'was self-conscious about his height – 5ft 2 in. – and 'felt unworthy of anything, a little runt with a twisted foot'. Quoted in Quinlan (1992:209).

screen like a fire-fly<sup>218</sup> “Before your very eyes”<sup>219</sup> and many fans felt deeply saddened when Askey had to have his legs amputated. The real success story of a clown like Askey concerns the triumph of the will and Askey’s self-effacing good natured humour to carry on laughing. This is what manifests itself in the performance persona of his hyperactive ‘little man’ character(s). This is what made him a star.

So, perhaps we are starting to understand that the appeal of ‘little man’ character really is connected to the ‘big’ personality of the diminutive men who play them. The audience understands them because they have the courage to love themselves and to love life when it kicks them / us up the arse. His larger-than-life personality was the antithesis of twentieth century man’s new fear; he was an emotional weakling which made every man feel like a ‘little man’. Contrariwise, Askey’s ‘little man’ character(s) fought like a “diddy” David against a Goliath<sup>220</sup> every week and survived. A Goliath is a physical manifestation of the giant decisions we all have to face in life that make us feel small and as helpless as a child, and the battle between the ‘little man’ and the figure of authority in ‘little man’ comedies may represent that, in a simply light-hearted way, because the ‘little man’ who gets up and takes it on the chin with a welcoming smile is a tragi-comic hero. Drake’s ‘little man’ character is typical of that tradition, but as we are now beginning to understand because he created and

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<sup>218</sup> In this respect he is very much of his time, the actors who featured in farces of the 1930s and 40s were never still on screen.

<sup>219</sup> “Before your very eyes” was one of Askey’s several catchphrases, and he delivered many a knock-out piece of comic business with a nonchalant but jovial, “Ay-theng-yew”. An ITV sketch show which ran for three series from 1952-55, and again from 1956-58 for three series (the fourth was reduced to one programme when Askey became ill) and was the show that used his catchphrase for the title. Drake’s famous catchphrase “Hello My Darlings!” identified him as the child echoing his parents love, but it also reveals his super ego, his parental authority over his audiences with a “I like a you, and you like-a me, and we like-a both the same” refrain. The song is featured in *The Man with Two Brains* (1983). Dr. Michael Hfuhruhurr / Steve Martin, a brilliant brain surgeon sings this nursery like lullaby with a disembodied brain / voiced by Sissy Spacek. The words of the song reflect their love for themselves (narcissism) as well as (the reason why) they fall in love with each other. It is a reflection of Drake’s monstrous ego, and his relationship with his audience.

<sup>220</sup> Drake’s ‘diddy’ David character’s ‘manlinessness’ is not linked with their male sexuality at all in the television shows, as Connor’s are in the *Carry On* films and television series, or any of his other films like, *Gonks Go Beat* (1965) where he plays an alien ‘cupid’ who is sent to earth to bring the warring musical youth of Ballad Isle and Beat Land together in a Romeo and Juliet duet, or for example in *What a Carve Up!* (1961) when Syd / James finds the idea that Ernie / Connor is capable of romancing the lovely Miss Dixon / Shirley Eaton about as funny as being asked to believe that Ernie is brave enough to protect her from a serial killer who is running loose in the house they are locked up in for the weekend, because he knows how much of a self-confessed coward Ernie is both sexually and physically. “Oh, you’ve been playing Romeo as well as Goliath” he jokes sarcastically / “Some of us have got it. Some of us haven’t” replies Ernie trying to blag it. “Well if you’ve got it mate, I don’t know where you’re hiding it!” says Syd exposing his best buddy to the kind of “below the belt” *double entendre* joke that plays cruelly on his diminutiveness as well as helping to ‘characterize’ (*Jokes*: 55) the *manlinessness* of the ‘little man’ character type as sexuality underdeveloped. Much of the humour in Formby’s films works to make him appear small (minded) and sexually naïve too.

performed and slapped himself with his own slap-stick, he was also punishing his audience for their lack of courage, and reinforcing those neurotic fears about their own lack of self-confidence. We know from his confessions that *the last thing he wanted was to go back down there with them* (1986:98) so does this explain why his 'little man' character was less easy to love?<sup>221</sup>

Drake's super-ego / father-producer / performance persona / slaps his 'little man' character(s) silly. It is as though he was slapping the child in himself and if he is an Everyman he is slapping the child in every man but *his meaning is: Look here! This is all that this seemingly dangerous world amounts to. Child's play – the very thing to jest about!* (p.68) so don't be afraid, get up and fight. If someone as little as I am can do it, so can you. It does not seem quite enough to simply say that the 'little man' character(s) he plays is afraid to challenge authority figures, because he does, he just doesn't do it "perfizzically".<sup>222</sup> "I'm too litul," he says. He challenges Mr. Pugh in the only way he can, verbally, and because his tall stories are ridiculous he has to be punished (for making up excuses) not by Mr. Pugh, but by unforeseen forces - the father-creator himself. His body *is* the punch line to every slapstick joke that begins with Drake screaming "Ah haa!" anticipating the pain of yet another body blow from Mr Pugh[alist] who never lays a glove on him. It is the child-likeness of the 'little man' that ultimately saves him from being beaten to death, but even in that way, Drake, the father-creator, is showing some parental restraint which relieves the audience of the moral charge of countenancing child-beating. Seeing that he is not really hurt is a relief for the audience, hearing Drake laugh (coupled with his acknowledging look to camera) is their cue to laugh too. The slapstick joke is harmless; the 'little man' character is a victim of harm that is in itself harmless because it is just a joke (which of course it isn't). The more often a 'little man' clown is knocked about (and lives up to the well-known phrase slapstick comedy), the more he is the butt of visual gags (the purpose of which is to gag him – to shut him up), the more popular he is. The 'little man' character does not have to take his punishment in good humour (in fact he seldom does – how could he?). He does not have a share in the audience's sense of

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<sup>221</sup> Conversely, as Wisdom (2003) says, 'I treat them all as chums' like Morecambe and Wise did' (128) which is probably why audience's loved them; as the comic Vic Reeves says, 'an audience has to be matey with a character', see the documentary, *The Story of Slapstick*, BBC 2, 26 December 2009.

<sup>222</sup> *The Worker* ITV, 'A Change is as Good as a Rest', series four, episode one, 6 August 1970. Again a typical sound pun, that relies on the association made between the word's 'perfect' and 'physical[ly]' and the double meaning that suggests the opposite is true – that the 'little man' character's imperfection is associated with his diminutiveness. Jokes of this type are 'characterizing' jokes. They illustrate 'precisely...the verbal structure that the joke's character as a joke and its power to cause a laugh depend' says Freud (1905:18).

humour – how could he? This does not mean that the diminutive comic who creates the ‘little man’ character does not share the audience’s sense of humour, in fact it is essential for a comic like Drake that the audience share his sense of humour, that is the essence of his comedy.

Drake’s ‘big’ personality may not appear to be something the audience saw in his ‘little man’ character(s) on screen because, after all, it is was a psychological entity, but, as Lewisohn (2003) says, ‘Drake was pugnacious and determined; traits that gave his comedy the genuine edge that so captivated viewers’ (238).<sup>223</sup> His ‘little man’ character(s) body was a manifestation of this aspect[abund] of his personality. It was essentially not the reaction shots to physical pain on his character(s) face that audiences enjoyed (because he hides his face from them). It was the reaction of his indestructible ‘little’ body. Clowns even find a way of making this physical assault less traumatic though through the disguise of silly costumes. In ‘A Host of Golden Casual Labourers’<sup>224</sup> Charlie gets a job advertising cheese and *Up John* garden fertiliser but it is Drake (wearing variations of the traditional clown’s costume) who performs for his audience dressed as ‘Merry Mouse the Cheese man’ and the ‘Daffodil Man’ in what turns out to be less of a disguise than his Charlie character in his working overalls.

Only then, does Drake look to camera to make sure the audience know that they are watching a clown perform harmless hilarity. Significantly his look to camera is expressionless, or comically mimed. When he says, “Ooh!” he mouths it softly, and sarcastically, like a parent who is mimicking the ‘exaggerated’ pain he is supposed to have inflicted on his child. On screen the ‘body’, is quite obviously Drake’s. The audience knew that because (as comments from viewers in the BBC Audience Research Reports document) they were very concerned when he hurt himself.<sup>225</sup> His ‘little body’ becomes a big canvas for Drake to paint his giant ego on. Aristotle’s observation that men enjoy creating a likeness of themselves is pertinent here. As Heath (xlv) explains. ‘Aristotle says that fear is felt for someone ‘like us’, people ‘of

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<sup>223</sup> Comments posted on the internet site *Britmovie British Film Forum* are interesting in this respect. Discussing whether they found Drake’s character(s) appealing or not, one member says that an ‘interesting topic for discussion might be something Peter Cushing said in an interview where he gave his opinion that the character of an actor was bound to come through whatever part he played’. Ascoyne D’Ascoyne, Post: 40205. 05.10.2006, 01:39 PM. [Accessed 12 May, 2007].

<sup>224</sup> *The Worker*, series 2, episode 1, ATV, 2 October, 1965.

<sup>225</sup> ‘Viewers’ main reaction was one of concern at Charlie Drake’s unfortunate accident [...] those reporting said how sorry they were that Charlie had obviously hurt himself and wished him a speedy recovery’/ ‘Poor old Charlie – I do hope he will be better soon’, BBC WAC An Audience Research Report, *The Charlie Drake Show* ‘Bingo Madness’, Tuesday, 24 October, 1961. (A.R.D.) 14 November, 1961.

the same sort as ourselves, as distinct from those better or worse than we are' and that 'tragedy's distinctive emotional response is concerned with people *like* ourselves' (xlv). We can assume then that Aristotle thought that comedy's 'distinctive emotional response is concerned with people' *unlike* ourselves, as Drake's personality was unlike his 'little man' character's, as Drake's clown's body was unlike his 'little man' characters, as the 'little man' character was unlike the audience's. For this reason Drake's body remains in the foreground while the whimpering bruised psyche of the traditional 'little man' type cowers in a dark corner (as a reminder to the audience that what they do not see is themselves dissolving in the vanishing point of their laughter). The 'little man' character becomes impossible to see beneath the barrage of body blows, but it is at that point that the 'little man' is most visible in the audience's mind's eye as an object of fun.

It seems then, that this duality between the body of the 'little man' / clown and the big personality of the star is clearly visible, and the 'little man' character is as much a disguise for the audience as it is for the clown. It is he as them and he as himself and not them who is seen forever struggling to keep himself together in body and mind and laughing or crying while he does it. Consequently, Drake or his 'little man' character is either adored or abhorred by audiences; he is either funny or not. He can be often irritating and funny, but never funny because he is irritating.<sup>226</sup> The 'little man' characters Connor plays often fail to be funny themselves because they are always the object of hostile jokes (*stereotype characters positioned according to the needs of the punch-line* – (Palmer 1987:168) by the other

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<sup>226</sup> Jerry Lewis' characters suffer from this malady. Mast (1979) approaches 'The Problem of Jerry Lewis' in his chapter, 'The Clown Tradition' (303-306) by questioning 'the opinions of Bernard Davidson and J. P. Coursodon who state that, 'Jerry Lewis...is the incarnation of all the average man's repressions (eroticism, sadism, masochism, hysteria, homosexuality, destructive violence)...This monster named Jerry Lewis is a pathological case...[L]et us say no more than that Lewis seems to us to represent the lowest degree of physical, moral, and intellectual abasement to which a comic actor can descend'. Mast claims that, '[s]uch interesting psychoanalytic observations may be true but are not demonstrable, and are therefore refutable' (303). Mast's counter-argument, that '[T]he Jerry Lewis films prove conclusively that great film comedy is not a matter of sight gags, pratfalls, funny faces, [or] easy sentimentality [that] The soul of comedy is the brain' (306) hardly refutes Davidson and Coursodon's claims, especially when Mast declares that Woody Allen is 'the best American filmmaker of his age period' (319) in his article 'Psychocomedy of Woody Allen'. This thesis argues that the appeal of 'little man' clowns such as Drake and Wisdom in British film and television comedy *is* a matter of sight gags, pratfalls, funny faces, and that *the soul of comedy is the brain!* Quinlan (1992:297) states that 'The films [Wisdom] made between 1953 and 1966 were in some ways British equivalents of the solo work of Jerry Lewis in America. Wisdom played the willing, gormless trier in whose hands everything, but everything fell apart. But there was a greater sentimental side to Wisdom than his Hollywood contemporary'. This [un]easy sentimentality often undermined Wisdom's comedies though. Arguably had Lewis' characters been played by a diminutive actor they would have been more loveable and more palatable to British audiences. I would disagree with Mast's assertion that a psychoanalytic argument *is* demonstrable, but I would agree with him when he says that such a theory is refutable, since no theory is irrefutable.



characters, who, as Ross (2003:71) states, act as the 'audience's representatives' in the *Carry On* films. Audiences would not have been expected to share the same sense of humour as these *fully drawn characters* and *expected* to join in the name-calling; even to wield a psychological slap-stick at these celluloid clowns to punish them for being so irritating. Proof of an audiences' collusion would, of course, be provided by their collective laughter. And if what comes to mind is a mob stoning an innocent, then we are approaching the true nature of human beings and their relationships to one another based on them being like one another in order to be liked by one another. In other words, as Freud points out, even innocent jokes are tendentious (*Jokes* 1905:132).

Perhaps we are coming closer to understanding why *Mr. Average* in the audience did not wish to be *like* the 'little man' character. He recognised himself. He saw himself as in a mirror but he did not want to be reminded that he was like him. He did not want to look like a fool. He would rather be a hero, even a tragic one (and they usually are), than tragic and comic. He might laugh at the pre-Oedipal 'little man' character because he remembered what it felt like to be sexually shy when he was an adolescent but he did not want to be laughed at like him; people do not like to be laughed at. An example of this can be made by comparing the sexually shy characters Connor plays in the *Carry On* films (whose innocent jokes wounded him not the *average* male viewer) and the sense of humour that the audience shares with Drake in *The Worker* (whose nods to camera confirm that the 'little man' is the butt of their jokes because of his sexual innocence). In *Carry On Sergeant* (1958) Horace Strong, played by Connor, is meant to be as irritating to the audience as he is to the other characters in the story. The source of that irritation is his hypochondria, which is a manifestation of his regression. In 1958 that equated to a diseased mind, and in the film Horace is blamed for the poor performance of the new recruits because he has infected them with it. It is only after the army psychiatrist cures Horace by diagnosing that his hypochondria is a transference mechanism for his neurotic fear of women by using Freud's technique of 'Word Association' that Horace Strong is able to develop a 'strong', that is, 'normal' heterosexual attraction to Nora (the girl in the NAAFI who finds him irresistible), and it is only once he starts acting like a man that the men of Able platoon are able to join forces with a little male-bonding and celebrate their passing-out parade like real soldiers. The audience's irritation with Horace, the 'little man' character around which the comedy of castration coalesces in the film, works because they are positioned to laugh at him. Irritation with the 'little man' character is implicit in this kind of comedy because it providing a scapegoat to relieve male sexual anxieties. The

presence of Connor's 'little man' characters underlines all of the early *Carry On* films scripted by Norman Hudis as we have already noted. *Carry On Sergeant* was the most successful film at the box-office in 1958, which does suggest that the target male audience shared the same sense of humour as the producers. The sexually shy 'little man' character was so well established in the public's psyche that the type was utilised in the next four films where much of the comedy coalesced around him. The type was partly responsible for creating the *Carry On* series and when the television series was written in the 1970s to 'save the flagging *Carry On* film ship - which by 1977 was sunk bar its mast'<sup>227</sup> - most of the comedy sketches were written around the sexually repressed 'little man' characters played by Connor who, Hudis confesses, was a comic manifestation of his own traumatised adolescence.<sup>228</sup> Perhaps by *recognising* his sexually shy teenage self, and *remembering* that he often wished he was not like the 'little man' character, Hudis was able to make adolescent males in the audience laugh by magnifying his sexual shyness so much that he just became a big joke and an object of ridicule. By sharing his sense of humour with them he helped them to *work through* the trauma of adolescence (n.151). By creating a character they would remember because they could [dis]associate with him they would *carry on* going to the cinema to *repeat* the experience. Joking about it made it a pleasurable experience instead of bringing back painful memories of sexual inadequacy.

The director Fritz Lang said, 'The success of a picture depends on whether or not the audience can identify themselves, or their dreams, with the people on the screen. To me it seems to be

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<sup>227</sup> Quoted in Ross (2003:147).

<sup>228</sup> If we accept this, then the *Carry On* films (indeed all the films Hudis wrote scripts for) may be said to work in the same way that Freud suggests 'Dreams' do. And Hudis's scriptwriting functions as that part of the film-[Dream]-work that equates with the manifestation of his latent desires, which may have been recalled consciously at the time. However, the book does seem to indicate that these unconscious desires were probably only 'real[ised]' in hindsight by Hudis when he recalled his memories in his Autopsychography. 'Not until searching my memories for this book, did I realise - thunderbolt! that...The Real Root...of this film's spirit was' (2008:15) he states, before becoming more informative, by informing the reader that: 'Unconsciously (of course), I now see that I sought, in steady succession, steady, secure substitute families to replace my unstable one [...] Sigmund Freud may not have expressed it thus, though it seems likely he addressed the issue' (105). The motivations for the characters' behaviour then, function as a wish-fulfilling mechanism for Hudis to 'relieve' or, more correctly, to 'imagine' his life lived differently by a phantasmagoria of fictional 'others', but perhaps more importantly, the characters' 'idio[t]syncratic' personality traits shed some light on the meaning, function and purpose of the 'joke-work', both within the diegesis (between the characters) and outside the diegesis (between the scriptwriter/director/actor and the target audience who enjoyed and came back to hear the same old jokes, told by the same character types with the same old familiar faces of the comic actors who played them in *Carry On* film after *Carry On* film). The jokes are 'characterizing jokes' (Freud *Jokes* 1905:55), that is, '[t]he relationship between the visual and verbal humour contributes to the characters identity' (See Bannister 2007: 6), and the audiences' part in the 'joke-work' is either to laugh at, or with the character which meant audiences were prepped for 'every authentic joke coming, to begin to laugh and [carry on] laughing through its screening' (2008:24).

imperative that anyone directing a picture must understand people, because people are the audience'.<sup>229</sup> Audience's attitudes to the 'little man' character were determined by the genre he appeared in, which, of course, signified him as silly or serious. The male spectator watching a 'little man' character in a dramatic film is often positioned to want to be like him, and to emulate their moral code. If he is brave he is attractive to women and loved by his father. In turn the actor is loved and hero-worshipped by his fellow countrymen (arguably the films of the diminutive American actor Audie Murphy were more popular because he was a decorated war hero). Men in the audience are conditioned to be just like them; the 'little man' war hero is an Everyman ideal. The 'little man' heroes played by the diminutive actor John Mills<sup>230</sup> for example, exemplify the larger-than-life heroes whose magnificence was magnified up there on the cinema screen. The 'little man' could be either a hero (like the "plucky John Mills", the "courageous John Mills", the "valiant John Mills", the "fearless John Mills",<sup>231</sup> in all those World War 2 'against the odds missions' films of the mid-50s) or a clown.

If we look at a British film like *Reach for the Sky* (1956), the story of Douglas Bader's incredible fight to walk again after losing both his legs, there is little doubt that we have a hero before us. But is it not Kenneth More's infectious good nature and unfailing sense of humour that inhabits the character that makes him seem more heroic than tragic? And is Bader's 'My head was bloodied, but unbowed'<sup>232</sup> kind of courage not illuminated by the comic lamp of More's glad to be alive, always look on the bright side of life sense of humour that made his on-screen characters so popular?

The onscreen presence that some actors have is something that is hard to describe because it is something that seems intangible. As we have suggested the 'big' egos of the 'little man' clowns like Askey and Drake often seems to be larger than the sum of the tiny body parts that holds it. Undoubtedly it was Askey's sense of humour that made him unconquerable and it is

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<sup>229</sup> Featured article 'Famed director Fritz Lang poses the question Ambitious to direct?' in *The Film Annual*, undated c. 1955 pp. 39-42.

<sup>230</sup> Conversely, Alfred Polly in *The History of Mr Polly* (1948), and Willie Mossop in *Hobson's Choice* (1953) are likeable if not lovable 'little man' characters. Again the 'little man' challenging an authority figure is present in the large presence of Charles Laughton as the shop keeper Mr. Hobson, and we pity Colonel Basil Barrow (Mills) who is bullied into suicide by the towering Scot acting Major "Jock" Sinclair (Alec Guinness), in *Tunes of Glory* (1960).

<sup>231</sup> Robert Llewellyn's enthusiastic description of John Mills in the BBC Four television programme, "Dive, Dive, Dive!" Part of the *Sea Fever* season, broadcast on Monday, 3 May, 2010, 21.00 – 22.00.

<sup>232</sup> Henley, W. E. *Invictus* (1888), line 8.

hard to refute the claim that it was born out of tragedy (because it saved him from it). Yet, as we have seen, Drake's self-centred sense of humour was quite different to Askey's (which was warmer and more charitable). Askey's big personality gave life to his 'little man' character(s) (like Drake and Wisdom's did) and they were often as irritating to the audience (which of course is essential) as they are to the authority figures in the films. What is essential to the comedy of the 'little man' is that the audiences liked and loved these personalities enough to outweigh what was irritating about their characters. In comedy that is something harder to achieve than in a film that portrays a 'little man' as a hero of the nation.

The double standard nature of these conflicting attitudes is typical and easily accounted for. Freud recognised these conflicts in his study of personality. The duality that exists between the 'big' personality of the clown and the 'little man' character(s) he plays which coalesces in his performance persona is unconsciously recognised as a characteristically human folly – the kiss and curse of man's evolution from the lower animals. The human mind *is* cursed by contradictions and combating animal impulses. This, essentially, is the point of contact between the 'little man' character and the audience, and it explains why he is, by turns, seen as lovable and irritating, or both, as these comments from viewers recorded in the BBC Audience Research Report files show: 'This quite dreadful man is insufferable – and utterly unfunny',<sup>233</sup> said one viewer, 'Charlie Drake is a horrible little man,'<sup>234</sup> said another, but, the report concludes that, 'the majority hailed him as a lovable, endearing little man whose antics never failed to raise a laugh'.<sup>235</sup>

If we are to explore for a moment whether that is a universal characteristic in the 'little man' comic then we must look at Drake's closest counterpart in American comedy, Lou Costello. They both share similar physical traits: they are both short, have a round shaped face that resembles a baby's and their stocky baby-like bodies define them as underdeveloped and childlike. Their vulnerability is defined in a less obvious (if more expected way) which makes them quite different to other 'little man' comics, they both cry out like children. No other 'little man' comics scream like babies in this way (except perhaps George Formby). This

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<sup>233</sup> BBC WAC *Charlie Drake in...* 'March of the Movies', Tuesday, 4 August 1960, 8.30-9.00pm. (A.R.D.) 24 August, 1960.

<sup>234</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Research Report. *Charlie Drake in...* 'Recital', Wednesday, 30 December, 1959, 7.30-8.00pm. (A.R.D.) 22 January, 1960.

<sup>235</sup> BBC WAC *The Charlie Drake Show*, 'The Take-over Bid', Friday, 25 November, 1960, 7.55-8.25pm. (A.R.D.) 20 December, 1960.

makes them lovable because it evokes feeling of sadness and brings an element of pathos to their comedy, but as we have seen with some of Wisdom's films they can be irritating when they indulge in too much sentimentality at times. Spicer (2001:108) says Drake's 'little man' was therefore a much more sombre creation than Wisdom's and one whose pathos is quite disturbing'. It is not possible to feel sad for Wisdom's Gump character in quite the same way; he has not got a baby-face so he cannot show the kind of child-like emotion that would elicit feelings of sadness. So, instead, he rather self-indulgently chose to make audiences feel sad for the plight of others, the orphan Jimmy in *One Good Turn* (1954), the lonely little boy locked away in the tower of his rich home in *Up in the World* (1956) and the wheel-chair bound girlfriend Judy/June Laverick in *Follow a Star* (1959). Sentimentality became a staple of Wisdom and Chaplin's 'little man' comedies and for many critics that often undermined the comedy when it was overdone; as these reviews in *RadioTimes Guide to Films 2007* remind us: Parkinson reviewing Wisdom's first star vehicle, *Trouble in Store* (1953) says, 'it was all downhill from here. It's certainly one of his best outings, largely because the sentimentality that became almost unbearable in his later films is rigorously kept in check here by director John Paddy Carstairs' (1278). In *Man of the Moment* (1955) he says, 'slapstick and sentiment jostle for centre stage' (772), and the reviewer (whose initials TS are given but I cannot find a name for them) of *One Good Turn* (1954) says, this is 'arguably the best of his vehicles. [...] Of course, the film is overly sentimental, but sentiment was part of Wisdom's stock-in-trade' (903). So, by the time we get to the 1957 film *Just My Luck* the same reviewer points out that 'It's only a brave viewer (or a devout fan of Wisdom who'll watch it for the star's mawkish side is virtually given free rein' (652)'. For the same reason Wisdom's films are often compared to Chaplin's, and Wisdom to Chaplin. Wisdom says, 'to be compared to him, as I was later on in my career, was the most incredible compliment. But there was only one Chaplin. Although our pathos touched similar chords and our knockabout comedy touched similar funny-bones, his genius was his own' (2003:168-169).

In *RadioTimes Guide to Films 2007* Tom Hutchinson, in his review of *City Lights* (1931), a sad story of romance where the Tramp falls in love with a blind flower-seller, says, 'Charles Chaplin could reduce his audience to fits of laughter and, without warning, plunge them to the depths of despair' (240). A review of *The Kid* (1921) spells out why this became a problem in his films. 'Chaplin [tries] a touch too hard for tears in places with the 'moppet' kid [played by Jackie Coogan]. After this slapstick would slowly be replaced by [...] pathos' (Parkinson,

660), as a film like *The Idle Class* (1921), a melodramatic rags-to-riches story of a girl he marries to save her from a miserable life of destitution, clearly shows.

Conversely, Edward's states that Askey was criticized as 'a clown without pathos; that if he had it, he would be the world's greatest' (1961:7). Askey explains away 'the tears of a clown' like him when he says:

"The sadness behind the clowns doesn't interest me. I'm out to make them laugh. [...] I don't feel sad when I'm on stage, [he didn't on set in front of camera either], I feel happy, and that's the way I have to be. Myself" (7).

Once again, here is proof that the personality of the diminutive clown inhabits the 'little man' character(s) he plays. Lewisohn (2003) points out that 'Askey maintained this alter ego throughout his professional life' (238), and he is perceptive enough to know that Drake's 'little man' character(s) were a part of his personality too when he says Drake created 'mostly irritating characters at odds with authority or authority figures [...] and then adds, 'he was like that in real-life too' (238). This probably explains why some viewers found Drake's 'little man' character(s) more irritating than funny, as some of the BBC Audience Research Reports show. 'Reaction to Charlie Drake himself was quite, but certainly not outstandingly favourable' [...] A small group went further and would not grant him neither the virtue of a likeable personality with not any talent for comedy whatsoever'.<sup>236</sup> The success of all 'little man' comedies though, relies on the 'little man' character being unlikable (which does not mean he is unlovable). This is for a number of reasons, some are cowards (Costello in all those horror spoofs,<sup>237</sup> Connor in *What a Carve Up!* (1961) and the *Carry On* films where male audience are positioned by the verbal and visual hostile jokes to ridicule and despise the 'little man' characters he plays for being cowards). Clearly, some audiences disliked the 'little man' character(s) played by Drake, his contemporary Wisdom, and their comic ancestor Chaplin, but a great many liked them too because they always stood-up to the 'big' man who tried to bully them. That resonated with popular audiences who often felt disempowered by

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<sup>236</sup>BBC WAC An Audience Research Report. *Drake's Progress*, Monday, 6 May, 1957, 8.00-8.30pm. (A.R.D.) 28 May, 1957. These kind of comments were common 'There are some viewers (but relatively few in number) who declared that they had never found Charlie Drake in the least bit amusing, nor particularly likeable' (BBC WAC *Charlie Drake*, 'It's Up To You', Thursday, 7 July, 1960, 8.30-9.00pm. (A.R.D) 24 August, 1960), 'This quite dreadful little man is insufferable – and utterly unfunny' (BBC WAC *Charlie Drake in...* 'March of the Movies', Thursday, 4 August, 1960, 8.30-9.00pm. (A.R.D) 24 August, 1960). 'I can't take to him. There's something about him I just don't like' (BBC WAC *The Charlie Drake Show* 'The Take-over Bid', Friday, 25 November, 1960, 7.55-8.25pm. (A.R.D) 20 December, 1960).

<sup>237</sup> See Film Index.

what Drake called ‘The Machinery of Organisation’<sup>238</sup> of the patriarchal state<sup>239</sup> that enforced its laws about the social codes of behaviour through the armed forces, the factory work place and state run schools like a bullying foster parent. Of course, human nature being what it is, it was not long before the bullying sergeant and teacher<sup>240</sup> became hated symbols of patriarchal law enforcement, which is why a comic like Drake (Wisdom, Chaplin)<sup>241</sup> ‘appeals because many in the audience can identify with situations his ‘little man’ character struggles valiantly to overcome’.<sup>242</sup>

As we have already noted, the ‘big man’ / ‘little man’ pairing is crucial because the big bully type reminds the audience that they are often being bullied *for their own good* by these government shopkeepers;<sup>243</sup> from the clerk at the Labour exchange (Mr. Pugh “Pooh!” in *The Worker*) to the grocer shop owner (Mr. Arkwright/Ronnie Barker in *Open All Hours*, Mr. Augustus Freeman/Jerry Desmonde, the manager of Burridges in *Trouble in Store*). They do not have to empathise with the ‘little man’ character being bullied to enjoy the bouts between them. There is therefore an argument to be made that another reason why Drake’s films were not as successful, or as popular with audiences, as a television series like *The Worker* was because the double act device was not used. Proof of this is provided by the innumerable examples of pairings in so many film and television comedies: the encounters between the

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<sup>238</sup> *The Worker*, series 1, episode 1, ATV, February 27, 1965.

<sup>239</sup> ‘America likes its presidents tall. In the modern era, since the end of the second world war, the taller of the two main presidential candidates has had an overwhelming advantage in elections. In fact, only 25% of presidential elections since then have gone to the shorter of the two candidates, with Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush (twice) being the only presidents to have overcome taller rivals. And post-1900, nobody 5ft 9in or under has ever been elected president (5ft 7in William McKinley, elected in 1900, was the last reasonably small chap to make it to the White House.)’

<http://news.uk.msn.com/top-10-weird-facts-about-us-presidents-69#image=2>

<sup>240</sup> “Teacher? Leave those kids alone!” *Another Brick in the Wall*, Pink Floyd, 1979.

<sup>241</sup> And Cagney in his gangster roles in the 1930s films.

<sup>242</sup> Parkinson’s comments in his review of Wisdom’s *The Square Peg* (1152).

<sup>243</sup> Proof that from the earliest days of cinema audiences understood that diminutiveness symbolised a *lack*, and the ‘little man’ symbolised Everyman is seen in a film like *The General* (1927). In one scene Johnnie Gray/Buster Keaton (who is trying to prove his manliness to his sweetheart by being one of the first men in the town to enlist) is rejected by the Confederate Army because he is too small. Of course the locomotive is a phallic symbol for his manliness. In the Laurel and Hardy short *Berth Marks* (1929) Stan jumps out of a seat on the overnight train to Pottsville because he has sat on a ‘little man’ he did not see. The ‘little man’ stands up to remonstrate with Stan for the indignity he has suffered. The joke (an old one even then, but still funny) is the inference that because he is a ‘little man’ he is constantly being ‘sat on’ in life. His social standing is even lower than the idiot who sat on him. Over thirty years later in *On the Beat* (1962) Norman Pitkin/ Wisdom is ‘reduced to being a Scotland Yard car park attendant because he is not tall enough to be a bobby’ (Lewisohn 2003:899). In *The Worker*, Charlie, with haughty defiance and mocking deference, jokes “I’m too litul” to Mr. Pugh, who does not see the funny side of Charlie’s self-effacing humour because he knows Charlie is using his diminutiveness as the reason to tell him another “tall story” about why he has lost another job. But it is the audience not Mr. Pugh who are meant to share Drake’s humour. This is made clear when he turns to the camera and chuckles, which, of course, is a signal for them have a laugh with him. (see the episode ‘I Just Don’t Want To Get Involved’)

gigantic Scot, Eric Campbell and Chaplin in the Essanay silent two-reel slapstick comedies, *Easy Street* (1917), *The Cure* (1917), *The Immigrant* (1917), and *The Idle Class* (1921), and then with Big Jim McKay/ Mack Swain in the feature *The Gold Rush* (1925), Jerry Desmond and Wisdom at Rank in the 1950s, Sid James and Kenneth Connor in *What a Carve Up!* (1961)<sup>244</sup>, Reg Varney and Stephen Lewis in *On the Buses* (1969-1973),<sup>245</sup> David Jason and Ronnie Barker in *Open All Hours* (1973-1985), Robin Askwith and Anthony Booth in the *Confessions* films in the mid-1970s, Little and Large in the late 1970s, Cannon and Ball throughout the 1980s,<sup>246</sup> Rowan Atkinson and Tony Robinson in the *Blackadder* television series throughout the late 1980s, which proved so popular it was revisited in the late 1990s and again in 2002. A comic variation on the theme would be a film like *Twins* (1988) starring Arnold Schwarzenegger; body-builder turned action hero turned gentle giant, alongside the diminutive comic actor Danny DeVito, the loud-mouthed 'little man' bully-boy, as twin brothers Julius and Vincent. They are comic manifestations of what is missing in these two stereotypes; Julius' giant physique houses a tiny ego and Vincent's giant ego is squashed in his tiny body. The two of them make a complete perfect man, unlike Dr. Evil/Mike Myers and Mini-Me/Verne Troyer in *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (1999) who make a complete monster.

The most recent 'little man' type to evolve, as we have already noted, can be seen in American cartoon television shows like *The Simpsons* and *Futurama* (1999-2012), and animated feature films, such as, *Shrek* (2001), *Shrek 2* (2004). Here once, again, there is hint about why the 'little man' type on television is different to the 'little man' type in films. This is largely due to one determining factor, the age of the target audience. The 'little man'

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<sup>244</sup> The double act that should have been Connor and James is only glimpsed in *Carry On Cabby* and *Carry On Cleo*. Some of the blame for that may lie with Peter Rogers, the producer of the *Carry On* films, who signed both of them to the *Carry On* team and put any end to any future pairing.

<sup>245</sup> This immensely popular of the sitcom was undoubtedly due to the diminutive actor who became the star of the series, Reg Varney. If any further proof were needed to show how comedy coalesces around the 'little man', it is worth comparing the last six episodes of the last series which tried to refocus the fun on the Blakey character after Reg Varney left the series. It also highlights just how reliant the humour was on the antagonistic relationship between these two characters. The love / hate father figure / naughty son relationship that is missing is reflected in the mother / son relationship that is substituted for a land lady / lodger relationship with Inspector Blake who has moved into the Butler's household after Stan has left home. The series spawned three feature length films, *On the Buses* (1971), *Mutiny On the Buses* (1972), and *Holiday On the Buses* (1973).

<sup>246</sup> They first appeared on *Bruce Forsyth's Big Night Out* in 1978 as Drake disappeared forever as a 'little man' comic. The pair proved so popular they were given their own series which ran every year from 1978-1990. Interestingly, Bobby Ball's 'little man' character / performance persona is more stupid than Drake's and much younger too. Drake was too old to play the baby by this time. It is also worth noting that the pair famously split up (as did Abbott and Costello) because the over-inflated ego of the diminutive comic in the team thought he could be as famous without his / their 'big man' partners.



characters in the films are always approaching adolescence; the 'little man' characters on television never leave it. Children and their parents are the target audience for the films; young adults are the target audience for the television series. The films repeat the eternal Oedipal drama between father and son and their inevitable reconciliation which is always celebrated with a happy ending. The television 'sitcom' format adopted by shows like *Futurama* leaves everything unresolved; the 'little man' character Fry (*cryogenically* frozen back in his own time) is permanently unhappy (because he is fixated at the anal stage) and desperately looking out for any kind of love interest that comes within range of his regressed sexual radar (which is ultimately always out of reach in both time and space), so he has to compensate for that unfulfilled sexual desire by cracking the usual anal jokes.

What is constantly comically re-enacted and restated in the 'little man' film and television comedies of Wisdom, or Drake is the traumatic father-son relationship. They are all entwined with notions of family, in particular, the father's role as head of the family. What is clearly foregrounded in these comic discourses is an anxiety about the role of the father as patriarch (the stories in the early *Carry On* films centred on national institutions such as the army and the police force are good examples). The absence of the 'real' father in these comedies, and his substitution by a father-figure, means it is safer to attack the state and still defer to it. Similarly, the 'little man' is not taken seriously because he is childlike, and in any event, he is taught to obey the slap-stick wielding father. These 'comic' tensions lay at the heart of all Drake's 'little man' comedies: "What the hell do you want?" Mr. Whittaker screams at Charlie each time Charlie walks into the Labour Exchange in *The Worker*. "What do I want?" "What do I want?" he replies incredulously with a hint of sly sarcasm. "Get out of my sight you horrible hairy...gallimaufry" Mr Pugh screams at him before throwing him out of the window in the episode 'Through a Glass Darkly'. Never has the war between the father-figure of authority and a 'little man' character been better visualised than in that moment when words fail and violence results. Even the authority figure played by Jerry Desmonde never laid a hand on little Norman; if he had, that would have been the moment that the comedy crossed over into tragedy, because tragedy comes from obedience to the father, as the fate of Oedipus and Hamlet prove. The role of the 'little man' in comedy is to disobey the father who wants to send him to his death unless he is trying to prove to someone (his mum or a girl) that he can be a hero and cheat death. In 'Through the Glass Darkly' Drake tackles this popularised Freudian concept head on. Charlie is looking for a father-figure. He tells Mr. Pugh a story about the time he rode a torpedo (an obvious Freudian phallic symbol) when he was serving

on a submarine to prove to his Captain-father that he was not a coward. Little Charlie fails to hit the target, an enemy “shipt” (an obvious symbol of the vagina dentate/castration and penetration) but he does make his escape from the navy and the absolute rule of his Captain-father by missing the target and riding the phallus up the high-street (back into the womb) and onto dry land (mother earth-rebirth). In the film “*King Arthur Was a Gentleman* (1942) Arthur King/Askey joins the army to prove himself to his girlfriend Susan/Evelyn Dall. On the first day the Sergeant tells the boys if they want him to be a father to them they must do what he tells them and little Arthur replies ‘Yes Dad’.

The real traumatic early lives of these diminutive comics seems to have provided them with the subject[ive] matter for their performance persona as well as the psychological motivation to play the ‘slapstick’ clown in (the playground of) film and television ‘little man’ comedy. Perhaps their careers as clowns helped them to become popular were once they were lonely and loved were once they were not. Wisdom, talking about the songs he wrote, admits that, in them all, ‘there is one recurring theme, love and loneliness – perhaps a reflection of the character I created. And I suppose there must be a little bit of me in there, too’ (2003:266). Drake makes a similar admission in his autobiography when he discusses the ‘Little Trier’ character he created for *The Worker*, ‘Pretty well everything that had happened to me in my life went into that show’ (1986:121) he says, adding a parenthesis, which itself, seems to be a pause for thought for a little self-analysis - ‘In fact *The Worker* owed a lot to the early jobs the man at the Labour Exchange found for me, all as someone’s mate. I wore the same clothes whether I was a plumber’s mate, butcher’s mate, baker’s mate or candlestick-maker’s mate – and I was sacked from all of them on the grounds of incompatibility with the person I had been mated with’(15). Similarly, when he recalls his basic training in the Air Force, he admits, ‘I was in trouble almost from the first day. I was frustrated by the machinery of organisation all through my service career [...] even when I eventually got out’ (26-27) he adds as though he was making a joke that fails. This introspection displays quite a degree of self-awareness.

Undoubtedly the life of men like Wisdom and Drake shaped their performance persona and penchant for knockabout humour. The trauma of Chaplin’s life as an orphan child is well documented. His psychological response to it is probably best reflected in the over-sentimentality of many of his films. Wisdom’s mother walked out when he was nine and his alcoholic father left him and his brother Fred to fend for themselves. They ‘became street

urchins, and the streets became not only our playground but our battleground for survival [...] it was either steal or starve' (2003:5) he says shedding some light on how it affected him emotionally and how that was reflected in the over-sentimentalisation of many of his films. Wisdom seems to be re-writing his own traumatic relationship as the child of an abusive father in films like *One Good Turn* (1954) where he desperately tries (and succeeds of course) to save an orphanage from closing. In the film *Trouble in Store* (1953) Norman dresses up in a cowboy outfit to play with children in the toy department. In *Up in the World* (1956) Norman makes a lonely little boy happy by befriending him (like a big brother not a father). His love for them seems so natural because the children seem so at ease with Norman that we feel we are seeing the 'real' personality shining through the character he is playing. In his autobiography Wisdom remembers one frightening occasion when his alcoholic father came home drunk and threw his new bicycle against the wall. When he cut his hand trying to mend it his father screamed furiously at him. 'How did you do that?' he shouted. 'I'm trying to repair my bike,' I told him – and *wallop!* His hand exploded against my jaw. Dad believed in rough, instant justice...The sad thing is, looking back; I can honestly say that I never got any love from my father, ever' (2003:8). At school Wisdom suffered more abuse from a sadistic teacher. 'There was one master at school who took an intense dislike to me, and took a sadistic delight in making me squirm. He was a big man [...] with a nasty expression that seemed to blend into his face, [here perhaps lies the genesis of Wisdom's love for pulling faces]. He used a heavy old-fashioned ruler to keep us in check [...]. One morning I was silly enough to answer him back [...]. 'Hold out your hand,' he commanded [...]. The pain was unbearable [...]. He'd broken my finger' (11) he says. When Wisdom tells the story in the documentary *Comedy Heroes* the memory of the event still made him cry. The event was so traumatising that he was moved to tears again when he told the story fourteen years later in the BBC2 curiously titled documentary, *Wonderland: The Secret Life of Norman Wisdom* in 2008.

Drake's father was not abusive he was absent. 'Alongside Violet, my Dad was a shadowy figure. There's no doubting that he was a kindly man, but Violet had the strength of character for both of them – which meant that he featured little in our lives' (1986:3). Drake's father left home just as he left school and signed on at the labour exchange. Father's are also

conspicuously absent from ‘little man’ comedies.<sup>247</sup> They are replaced by father-figures who are portrayed unsympathetically. They are autocratic, self-serving fools, quite a contrast to the sympathetic way mothers are portrayed, which seems to be exactly the way Drake remembers his mother who he was very close to.<sup>248</sup> She was, according to him, a strong attentive disciplinarian, but affectionate too. This demanded respect and engendered the love of her doting son, which, of course, is reflected in many ‘little man’ comedies wherever the over-protective but loving mother is present - Norman’s mother in *Just My Luck* (1957), George’s mum in *No Limit* (1935). Just look what becomes of the ‘little man’ when his mother is weak and weepy - Ma Powers in *The Public Enemy* (1931), the despotic and unloving “Ma” Jarrett in *White Heat* (1949), or the malevolent Mom in *Futurama*.

Drake’s mantra for surviving in life might easily be the same tough advice his mother had always given him. When she died and his ‘despair was bordering on madness’ (170) he asked himself, ‘What advice would she have given me? I knew – yes, I knew. She’d say, ‘Stop snivelling and get on with it’ (1986:170). Throughout his whole professional career Drake did not let his emotions stop him from working. Discussing Dick Emery he says, ‘Dick was a sensitive man who could be hurt easily and that won’t do in this game. If you want to keep alive in the jungle, you must obey the lore of the jungle; there’s no green belt for the preservation of sensitivity. You’ve got to have the psychological capacity to accept rejection as a compliment. If there was a problem Dick’s approach was to go home and rethink the situation. I would go home and rewrite it’ (64). Drake worked hard, very hard. While working with Drake on *The Cracksmen* Peter Graham Scott, the director said, ‘Nothing is too much

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<sup>247</sup> There are exceptions. In the film *Just My Luck* Norman’s gambling father returns home to get his hands on some of his son’s race winnings. From a psychoanalytical point of view, it is not surprising that Wisdom plays Norman’s father as well as his son. Arguably Wisdom is fulfilling a wish for his father to be exactly like him by becoming his father.

<sup>248</sup> This is a familiar story. Cagney’s father died in his forties. His mother was ‘The dominant force of Cagney’s childhood became the guiding spirit of the Cagney family’ (McGilligan 16). In Cagney’s own words (which seem to reflect Wisdom’s or Drake’s experiences) “she was mother twenty-four hours of the day. That was her job, and she did it full time, over time. She pitted herself firmly against the forces of our environment – the streets, the schools, the boys we met, the things we were bound to hear, the influences we couldn’t wholly escape...She taught us that what you do is done again to you. She showed us clearly that ugliness and crime and vulgarity pay their own dividends in ugliness, crime and vulgarity”, (16). It sounds like Cagney’s mother’s guidance became his creed in life. It is also the moral lesson behind the story of every gangster he ever played. In *The Cracksmen* Drake accepted the part of the locksmith Ernest Wright because he says the locksmith’s ‘creed seemed so descriptive of my own character’ (Drake 1986:110): ‘As a public guardian he places trust and honour above temptation. His honesty is incorruptible. He is an artist at his trade and a symbol of skill and integrity to the world’.

trouble; no routine is too small for him to work at it right down to the last detail'.<sup>249</sup> It really is no surprise that the theme of work features heavily in his comedy, and that his performance persona, the unemployed worker in *The Worker*, is his alter ego, after all, the character's name is Charles Drake. It even seems as though the character's indomitable spirit *is* his sense of humour, both aspects defines who he is. It defines Drake too. He uses his sense of humour to duck and dive Mr Pugh[alist]'s verbal abuses and the inevitable physical threats, but it is his unconquerable spirit "an' dat", that helps him bounce back every week when he gets the sack. Both character and persona are not inseparable; one is the hand inside the boxing glove. So, it is easier to understand that when Drake conceived 'The Little Trier' character, it was a eureka moment and he realised, "that was it! I'd got it" (119) the character was a part of his own character. So, when he says (to himself) '[t]he public love a trier; effort, to whatever end, always wins their respect' (119) - he is not only talking about his relationship with his audience, he is talking about himself. His audience fulfils a psychological need for him. It is the psychopathology that defines Celebrity. In a sense he is like a little child looking to please his surrogate cinema parents. Even the words of the theme song that he wrote betray this sentiment, "I do the best I can" he sings. There is, even in those few words, which are as apologetic as they are adamant, a conscious manifestation of an unconscious fear. It is not a joke; it is a song here that reveals Drake's sense of humour - a psychopathological armour-plated defence weapon in his war against the world. The first joke life ever played on him was at school. He was not as bright as the other boys so he became the class clown. 'The first joke I ever told in public was addressed to the class' he says (13).

We have already established the 'little man' did not just exist in the vacuum flask of history; he was part of the Englishman's character. He probably still is. In the next chapter we analyse the film *Petticoat Pirates*. Drake plays the typically neurotic little trier character, and all the right ingredients that we would expect in a 'little man' comedy are there, but the film fails for a number of reasons that we shall discuss.

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<sup>249</sup> Quoted from the article 'Charlie's Fight Back' ABC Film Review, Michael Russell, June, 1963. The magazine could only be purchased from ABC cinema chain. [The article is in the author's possession].

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Psycho-analysis of the film *Petticoat Pirates*



**Admiral Charlie Drake whose comic sketches scuttled his own ship in the ABPC film *Petticoat Pirates***

Figure 9. Photograph taken during the lunch break on the set of *Petticoat Pirates* (1961).

Source: Private Collection: Courtesy of Chris Drake 2009

*Petticoat Pirates* released in 1961 was the second film (in a three-movie deal) that Charlie Drake made for the Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC). It turned out to be as much a failure at the box office as *Sands of the Desert* had been the year before. Drake was one of the most popular stars in television when ABPC approached the BBC requesting a telerecording copy of an episode from his recent television series *Charlie Drake In....* ABPC obviously regarded Drake as a bankable product and an opportunity to sell their films to the America market. Guy Taylor's review of the show in the 'The Stage' was as bold as the headline that proclaimed the show as 'The Funniest Ever TV Programme', and he went on with his praise for, 'Mr. Charles Drake' - 'This programme proved once and for all that, as a TV clown, Drake stands miles ahead of any other artist' (1960:20).

Indeed, as an all round entertainer Drake was what he claimed to be - 'Numero Uno' (1986:89). For the first time, part of the pantomime (his part) in 'Sleeping Beauty' was televised and included in ATV's 'Sunday Night at the London Palladium'.<sup>250</sup> By 1961 Charlie

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<sup>250</sup> The BBC accedes to Drake's demands, which shows just how important he was to them.

Drake was not only ‘King of Tyrolia’, he was ceremoniously crowned the new king of light entertainment comedy by Eamonn Andrews on “*This Is Your Life*”.

Drake’s success in two mediums of popular entertainment probably accounts for why ABPC believed he was destined to be the new star of British comedy film, so despite the failure of his first film *Sands in the Desert* (and their contractual agreement), they went straight into production with *Petticoat Pirates*. All ABPC had to do (it seems) was to follow the BBC blueprint to guarantee Drake’s success in their films. They tried, and failed. It is interesting to explore how the BBC managed to make Drake a television star yet ABPC could not make him a film star. A number of interdepartmental memos between Drake’s management and the BBC make interesting reading because they help to shed some light on the success/failure discourse of comedy in film and television, and they provide a useful tool for analysing the tension that is created when a star’s comic performance (here Drake’s) is (somewhat torturously) integrated within the narrative context of a film. In the case of *Petticoat Pirates*, for example, that would be the quasi-feminist agenda of the film’s narrative, which is ruptured by the sexism of the star’s comic performances within (and without) its contextual framework.

Interestingly, just as Drake’s ‘solo’ performances can be viewed as symptoms of a ‘guilty pleasure’ playing on the entrenched theme of the threatened male reacting with bravado to the threat to his sexuality in a battle of the sexes, it can also be seen as a ‘guiltless’ pleasure that belongs to the star solely. In the context of the narrative of *Petticoat Pirates* this either simply helps to illuminate the sexist attitudes of the men to the WRNS, or it functions as the idiosyncratic behaviour of the star’s performance, which in itself is symptomatic of the sexist attitudes of ‘little’ men towards the women who threaten them with their own ‘big guns’. The WRNS or the “petticoat pirates” as they are called by the crew, mutiny and take over the battleship. The nickname they are given not only reveals the sexist attitude of the crew and

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Memo: Our ref 01/PC/WLS 25 Feb 1959

From: H.P.Contracts

To: Leslie Grade

‘Dear Mr. Grade

Charlie Drake

I write to confirm officially that the BBC is prepared to give Charlie Drake special permission, notwithstanding the exclusive nature of his long-term contract with the BBC, to take part in a televised excerpt from the current Palladium pantomime to be included in ATV’s ‘Sunday Night at the London Palladium’ 22 March, if you can undertake, on behalf of ATV, that on this occasion there shall be a prominent screen credit as follows: “Charlie Drake appears permission of the BBC”[...] there would be no question of the transmission being billed as a Charlie Drake Show.’ BBC WAC Charlie Drake, TVART File 1, 1952-1959

producers of the film, but flags up to the men in the audience that the battle of the sexes they are about to witness is one-sided and they are sure to win. Drake's one man performance[s] in the film is interesting when we compare them to the 'little man' character he plays. As the film credits are shown it is clearly Drake, not Charlie, the 'little man' character he plays, poking his head through a porthole to proclaim that: "Every Charlie must do his duty". It is Drake who looks directly to camera and calls the men in the audience to arms, not Charlie, who is later ridiculed and ignored when he tries to rally the men to action stations and take back the ship. This single battle cry defines and concludes in a single utterance what is at stake in the film; the defence of the bastion (or battleship) of masculinity. Charlie is a manifestation of the Numero Uno male anxiety; he cannot hope to live up to the role of phallic man and carry out the duty society expects of him. If the 'little man' character is a Container ship carrying a cargo of castration anxieties and neuroses, Drake is a Destroyer flying the flag of sexual bravado as he goes into another battle of the sexes.

Drake, the clown, performs his solo act in two moments in the film. These exist outside it; the first before the film actually starts, in a slapstick routine below deck, the second, in a dream/nightmare sketch from which Charlie wakes up and then behaves 'out of character' as he helps the WRNS 'man the guns' against the Man o' War that threatens to take back the ship he vowed to take back from them, "For the honour of the service". It is interesting to note that both these sketches are private spaces. The first has some logic to it because Charlie is a stoker. The point, though, is that a space has to be created for Drake to perform outside the narrative of the film. So, the sketch is placed before the story begins. The second point is that Drake's persona has to inhabit his 'little man' character, Charlie, and that has to be done away from the ship's company, below deck in the engine room. The dream sequence is simply a glimpse into Drake's unconscious. Drake's personality is the engine room where his surreal comedy is born in the fire of his unconscious. The sketches are separately filmed entities. They are simply add-ons to the film, (or most likely, vice versa).

By such a tenuous suturing of story and comic performance sketches, both the comedy and the (pseudo) serious message of compromise between the sexes that the film purports to achieve, is blasted out of the water by its blatant male sexism. This message is reasserted by



the phallic symbolism<sup>251</sup> of heavy guns and exploding shells in the latter part of the film when the “gaggle of giggling” women give in to male authority. The visual display of big guns and awesome firepower seems to serve a dual purpose at this point in the film, both of which reassert the roles that the sexes are expected to play in a patriarchal society, in particular, the dominant role of the male opposite the submissive role of the female. It is a visual representation of the Commander-in-Chief’s angry assertion made at the beginning of the film to the Superintendent of the WRNS when he says: “I intend to put a stop, once and for all, to this ridiculous, feministic nonsense”. The display of fire power is phallogentric. It is a display of libidinous sexual aggression intended to inspire a fighting spirit in the males in the audience to defend their position of authority over the weaker sex. The underlying fear that fuels the need to make such a display is that Ordinary seamen will give in to their instincts if they fail to obey orders and if they are encouraged to mutiny there will be only one result; the battleship of patriarchal authority will be taken as a prize by the weaker sex. This echoes Charlie’s own thoughts about why the men of the service<sup>252</sup> have become weaker, women have been allowed into it. “We could do wiv more like you. Here right now, we could!” he tells himself (and the men in the audience) while looking at a portrait of his hero Captain Bligh and remembering the real reason behind the infamous mutiny, the crew did not want to leave the native women and go back to the ship. The aim then (the fulfilment of a wish) is to get the women off the ship and out of the service.

Interestingly, in *Girls at Sea* (1958) the story (and much of the comedy) revolves around the crew of a battleship who smuggle some pretty girls on board and try to keep them hidden from the Admiral. But in both cases, it reflects the anxiety about the ability to discipline men if women are given permission to bed and board on British ships by those in authority. In *Petticoat Pirates* the Superintendent of the WRNS makes a request to the C-in-C that her girls

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<sup>251</sup> ‘Freudian symbols’ are popularly supposed to be objects occurring in dreams or phantasies [film] that represent genitalia. Thus, hollow containers like [ships] may symbolise the female genitals; while [guns] may be taken as indicating the penis’ (Storr 2001:48). Freud concluded that ‘The very great majority of symbols in dreams are sexual symbols’ (1916:153). *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis*, SE Vol. XV Part II Dreams (1916[1915-1916]) ‘Symbolism in Dreams’, pp.149-170.

<sup>252</sup> A classic example of what men might mutate into if they mutiny against their own sex is symbolised in films of the period by the homosexual or effeminate character. The camp characters played by Kenneth Williams in the *Carry On* films is one example, but it has some foundation in fact (in his case at least). In *An Audience with Kenneth Williams* in 1983 Williams recalls an incident when he was serving in Singapore in Combined Services Entertainment and the Officer Commanding said to them: “I want you to go about behaving like soldiers. I will not have a lot of this effeminacy and mincing about”. He was infuriated when he watched them rehearsing the opening number for the show, a song called, “We’re boys of the service”. “No! It’s dreadful! Let’s make it Men, men of the service” he said and told them to try it again. So, they came on singing “We’re men of the service” in the same effeminate and mincing fashion and he said “Yes! That’s better show them you’re all fellow men”.

should be given a chance to run a battleship, which he denies with the usual sexist comments about women's intellectual unsuitability for such roles in the navy. Frustrated by this she tells him: "They have got it up here you know" tapping her temple with two fingers. Her gesture becomes a variation of the V for victory sign; it is a display of her anger and determination to fight back. The sexual connotation of the sign would have been understood by British audiences so it functions as a tendentious visual joke about the stubborn temperament of the Admiralty staff and their archaic attitudes to women. In one of the very few verbal jokes in the film, the C-in-C's attitude is betrayed by his reaction to the attractive Superintendent, which is smug and typically dismissive. He tells her, "I don't care where they've got it. My men will try to find it!" The emphasis of male anxiety has shifted from sailors behaving like adolescent schoolboys, trying to smuggle girls onboard their ship in *Girls at Sea*, to a real fear that the Admiralty staff have about their ability to be able to discipline the men onboard their fighting ships if they allow trained women onto them. So, the visual phallic display of male totemism is not one of sexual penetration, it is masturbatory. The WRNS are then seen manning the big guns. They are taught to handle them like men. In effect they become men instead of the men becoming effeminate males. The narrative purpose of the film is to relieve this male anxiety. But it tries to achieve this by bravado and bluster, not by compromise and acceptance, which it only patronisingly gives ground to, "Don't you play around with me my girl" remonstrates the blustering C-in-C, his face displaying the comic behind the kind of flapping anxiety that a loose topsail in a storm means to a steering a ship straight; his face becomes a sign, a visual joke that betrays his anxieties about women being just petticoat pirates.

At the midpoint of the film Mother Nature comes to the aid of the men to re-establish the natural order of the roles of the sexes. The women's weaker natures are defeated by the weather, that is, they are defeated by their own mother-nature. They suffer from seasickness (which here seems more than a convenient allegory for the sickness that accompanies pregnancy), and they are patronised for being unnatural *seamen* and having naturally weaker natures than the men. The final humiliation is that the WRNS 'victory' is reliant on a 'little man' in skirts, Charlie. But, even Charlie dressing up as a Wren can be explained in this context, because this too, is an act of war, occupation, and ownership. He defeats the enemy by absorbing their [fe]male sexuality and making it male. This act must be a solo one because it is one of sacrifice to the ultimate danger - the threat of castration. In that way it becomes

heroic and the 'little man' becomes a comic hero through clowning (dressing up as a woman to ridicule them).

In order to offset this fear, the anxiety must be repressed with comedy. Charlie/Drake, the 'little man' character/star, is the only possibly character in the film who can convincingly don 'battledress'. It is akin to the act of drawing the short straw to save your fellow brothers that we see in so many films.<sup>253</sup> Because this is a comedy and it would be a tragic act to end the film by dividing the sexes; a happy compromise has to be found. So, the end of the film adheres to the adage that 'All comedies are ended by a marriage'.<sup>254</sup> It does this by focusing on the romantic relationship between Chief Officer Anne Stevens and Lieutenant Michael Pattinson by bringing them back together at the end of the film,<sup>255</sup> which of course is symbolic of the truce reached in this battle of the sexes aboard a British battleship in the 1960s sex wars. The couple represent the 'normal' roles allotted to the two sexes in society in the film. This is a significant observation because it is usually the star/performer's 'little man' character that is married off to the girl, as can be seen in many of the Formby/Wisdom films, even if the audience does not really believe that the 'little man' is sexually capable. Drake (or ABPC) decided against this kind of silly ending in *Petticoat Pirates* and his 'little man' character, Charlie, ends his relationship with Sue/Dilys Laye because he is threatened by the castrating father. This seems a more logical end to a 'little man' comedy because we always see him back where he started in the next film, regressed and sexually repressed. At the end of the film then it is Drake that we see (looking to camera) chasing the WRNS ashore as they leave the ship. It is Drake the sexual pirate who chases the WRNS to Charlie Drake Land.

If a ship at sea is often perceived mythically as an island of lawlessness and immorality, it is exactly the place to reinforce the law of the father, because there always exists the fear that when the ship returns to port/home it will carry corruption and chaos ashore and threaten its children. Mutiny in films is seen then as challenging the authority of the father, but the challenge is often not a serious threat because those making the challenge are afraid (and respectful) of the father. In *Moby Dick* (1956) when Starbuck asks Stubb and Flask to join

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<sup>253</sup> *Carry On Cabby* (1963), is a classic example of a battle of the sexes film between two rival taxi cab companies, one traditionally male, the other modern and female. Ted /Connor is chosen to dress up as a Glam Cab girl to infiltrate the enemy camp and sabotage their cabs to try to save his fellow cabbies jobs.

<sup>254</sup> Lord Byron, George Noel Gordon. *Don Juan*, III, 1821.

<sup>255</sup> In *Carry On Cabby*, the owners of the two taxi companies, estranged husband (Charlie /Sid James) and wife (Peggy/Hattie Jacques) decide on a merger to save their marriage (and their companies) when they learn that they are going to have a baby.

him in a mutiny against Captain Ahab because he is “answerable to a charge of usurpation” their combined reaction is one of dutiful respectability for the law of the Captain. Stubb with mocking disbelief asks: “You ain’t proposin’ we do any such thing?” while Flask dismisses the whole idea as unlawful and immediately returns to duty, which of course is a suggestion to Starbuck that he do exactly the same: “Pardon me sir, this is my watch” [he tells Starbuck dutifully before turning round to respectfully remind him that] “Captains can’t break the law. They is the law; as far as I’m concerned”. The scene ends when Starbuck turns away from Stubb and says “Go and write thy last will and testament” / Aye! and do it laughin’ Sir. A laugh’s the best answer to the strains in life, ha, ha, ha” he replies, laughing-off a fear worse than death with a comic comment that only momentarily masks his fear before it precipitates an outburst of hysterical laughter. Stubb’s joking bravado demonstrates the usefulness of developing a sense of humour (as Freud did when confronted by the Gestapo) when faced with the prospect of facing a fate worse than death; disobeying the absolute law of the castrating peg-legged father, Captain Ahab, who is himself a visible sign of the castrated male disobeying God-the father.

A mutiny by women as in *Petticoat Pirates* can only be prevented by laughing-it off as a ‘silly’ idea. This is done by making the women appear weak in a man’s job, and proving to them that they are reliant on the men whose duty is to protect them because their natural function is to bear them sons. So, when Chief Officer Anne Stevens (“Deep Sea Stevens” to the men) and Lieutenant Michael Pattinson embrace in the penultimate scene, it symbolises a return to that natural order. Their embrace is expected to bring a feeling of relief to audiences because the roles of the sexes is ship-shape again than show any real concern for the couple whose relationship has been disrupted by domestic problems on the home front. As they cling to each other tightly, we are less concerned with the waves that the mutiny caused which threatened to drown their personal love life (or the sailors whose promiscuous behaviour endorsed it) than we are with the naval authorities re-establishing order and discipline and the psychological message of the film’s producers to ensure the flagship of male supremacy remains afloat in the mind of the male audience.

In retrospect of course, one of the reasons that the film ultimately fails as a comedy, is because the C-in-C (still fighting against what he has been conditioned to believe) is ordered by his superiors to accept women in the service as a marriage of [in]convenience, so he is made to look a bit of a fool and the navy service two hundred years behind the times because

it is run by men like him. The film (more like an Ealing comedy) is backward-looking and out of step with the changing attitudes of the times. This is startlingly illuminated by Drake's performances outside the diegesis of the film's narrative and why Charlie's anachronistic attitudes: "We could do wiv more like you. Here and now!" are at odds with the more modern ideas his crew mates have about women working alongside them on the ship. It is important not to forget that a space in the narrative had to be found for Drake to perform his slapstick routines but this meant that Charlie was isolated in the boiler room from the crew's other "activities" (a charge that is later made against him). The untypical ending tagged on to the closing narrative makes for a confused ending for a number of reasons: Charlie is not integrated back into society like Wisdom's 'little man' characters are, he does not get the girl like Wisdom does, the WRNS are not accepted on equal terms with men in the navy because they leave the ship, and the hug (not a kiss) between the romantic couple, Chief Office Anne Stevens and Lieutenant Michael Pattinson at the end of the love story is not a celebration of marriage, it is a celebration that is politically motivated by patronising hierarchical concerns for patriarchal power over the ratings who must be kept apart from the WRNS in order to fulfil their designated roles in the service (in society). The couple are discovered cavorting below decks, and separated. At the end of the film, as we watch the WRNS marching out of the dock, the suggestion being made is that they have been tried and condemned (castrated) for encouraging promiscuous behaviour among the male crew by the Admiralty Staff, who clearly are not the audience's representatives but the lieutenants of society's law makers, its patriarchal fathers. The other disruptive element is Drake, who the audience sees running after the WRNS. The implication is that males in the audience are invited to celebrate his escape from the corporal punishment of the Sea Lords of the navy (ensigns signalling castration) as he turns to camera (to them) and chuckles. This disrupts the narrative because it is not concise, or as Palmer would say even absurdly logical. In one sense, Charlie's 'Jolly Jack Tar' antics might raise a laugh because he is the cinematic equivalent of the *sailor who has a girl in every port*, but this jars with the knowledge that Charlie is not like the other sailors. He is as much separated by the nature of his job as chief stoker, as Charlie is by Drake who performs his 'comic' antics above and below deck for his audience outside the diegesis of the film.

This double identity of character/performer was a problem throughout the film, but especially at the end of the narrative. And the fact that it was a very real problem is evident in the film's editing. After HMS Huntress has returned to port accompanied by a flotilla of ships sounding

their horns to celebrate a great victory, the scene cuts momentarily to Charlie in a long shot walking up to the door of the Admiralty. As he enters there is a dissolve and cut to the interior where the C-in-C is seen congratulating the combined efforts of the crew. The cut made here becomes more interesting because the script clearly indicates that Charlie (not the joint crew of the HMS Huntress) is in conversation with the C-in-C at this point in the film<sup>256</sup> and Charlie who having being reprimanded for his behaviour (which links this to the ‘trial by a jury of Drakes’ sketch that we will discuss shortly) makes up his mind to leave the navy, “That is the last straw [...] I’m going and nothing you can do will stop me” he tells the C-in-C. The script’s directions are as follows:

ACTION: He goes closing door.

DIALOGUE MUSIC STARTS

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WRENERY

WRNS marching

R - L - Charlie follows

PAN with him – he stops and looks at camera – smiles – moves out

CUT AT WRNS moving in c.r. and away – Charlie runs in and follows them down slope –  
TITLE SUPERIMPOSED OVER<sup>257</sup>

At this point (as the script clearly indicates) the film is disrupted. Perhaps it was because the producers felt that the narrative had not been resolved clearly enough. The audience might be left wondering if any charges would be made against the WRNS for piracy despite their triumphant return to port. Again, the music dialogue at this point in the film indicates the intended ending of the film. It replays the main theme as the WRNS march out of port with Charlie following them as the film actually ends. The producers had to end the narrative of the film, as we discussed, ‘with a marriage’ of convenience, with an affirmation that there was a truce between the sexes and that the old male order had not been seriously challenged. But, they were left with the unresolved problem that Charlie, the stoker had to face court martial charges and leave the service in disgrace, Charlie, the hero who had saved the ship and the WRNS from a charge of mutiny and to create a space for Drake, their star performer, to take his bow.

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<sup>256</sup> In fact the shot is a repeat from the beginning of the film which cuts to an interior where Charlie finding the Chief -of- Staff out ‘practices’ his remonstrates about leaving the navy if he does not getting a posting on a ship soon. Reel time: 14:25.

<sup>257</sup> ‘Petticoat Pirates’ script. Numbered page 10. Reproduce by kind permission of Chris Drake.

Inevitably, they made a disastrous decision, instead of choosing the lesser of the two evils, they chose to have a double ending which just reaffirmed the problems they were faced with given the narrative they had decided on was a good vehicle to showcase their star's performance. From bow to stern, the film was shot full of holes and bound to sink. In the end, a combination of a patronising philanthropy clumsily masquerading under blatant sexism scuttled the film in more ways than the petticoat pirates ever could because ABPC made a Jonah out of their star performer. In many ways the producers were responsible for the wreck because they failed to emulate what the BBC had done to steer Drake to his star ship. The BBC had found the right vehicle and the right formula for Drake to set his compass by. ABPC went to sea in a sieve. It is an education to read the memos and letters in the BBC archive that chart Drake's career to success in television comedy. The BBC blueprint served him well right up until the 1970s. In contrast all of Drake's films for ABPC failed at the box-office, and the last film they made, *Mr. Ten Per Cent* (1967) was never even released onto the film circuit.

So what did the BBC do right that ABPC did wrong? Whilst remaining mindful of the differences inherent between the two mediums, it is possible to pinpoint the reasons for the failure of a comedy like *Petticoat Pirates* other than to simply admit that it is difficult to sustain comedy for 80 minutes, or ignoring the fact that that what is often funny on television is often not at the cinema. From first to last the BBC saw star potential in Drake. A memo from the Head of Programming dated 7 Oct 1957 reads: 'H. L. E. Tel. – believes that BBC Television has a chance to develop Charlie Drake as an artist of the Norman Wisdom type.'<sup>258</sup> Indeed, *Petticoat Pirates* would seem to have been a better vehicle for Wisdom's more innocent child-like, ranting, Gump character. At first glance the formula that had made Wisdom famous in films seems to have been replicated at the BBC who realised early on that Drake was a solo performer. He even has the same familiars serving the same function in his comedy routines as they did for Wisdom in his films: the straight-man/father-figure types such as Percy Herbert and Henry McGee in *The Worker* equate with Edward Chapman and Jerry Desmonde in Wisdom's films, the girl next door types that fall *literally* head-over-heals in love with him (though we never actually see Muriel in *The Worker*), and children<sup>259</sup> to make audiences love the 'little man' character because he loved children (after all Drake did

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<sup>258</sup> BBC WAC Charlie Drake, TVART File 1, 1952-1959.

<sup>259</sup> In Drake's films Rebecca Dignam plays Nerima in *Sands of the Desert* and Terry Brooks is Willie in *The Cracksman*.

begin his television career as a children's entertainer). We have already discussed how the plight of underprivileged children is at the core of some of Wisdom's over-sentimentalised films. In two of the films Drake made at ABPC, *Sands of the Desert* and *The Cracksman*, children serve two important functions; they help reflect the loving nature of Drake's 'little man' character and their presence is a perfect springboard for initiating a particular kind of infantile slapstick sketch. The only character type we do not find in Drake's films or television work, that is a staple in many of the 'little man' films is the mother-figure types (Megs Jenkins<sup>260</sup> in *Trouble in Store* for example). But that is where the similarity ends. With one stroke the BBC broke up the double-act 'Mick and Montmorency' and moved Drake out of children's entertainment.<sup>261</sup> They saw him essentially as a 'little man' comic, not a little child in a man's body (like Wisdom) whose regressed behaviour was tragic-comic (unlike Wisdom). They saw that Drake's slapstick comedy was funny to adult audiences because it was a child-like response (when all common sense had failed) by a grown up man frustrated by everyday life; which is what made it tragic-comic. Crucially though (and this is where ABPC might have paid more attention) the BBC realised the importance of Drake writing all his own material. G.W. Turnell (A.H. Programme Contracts) at the BBC writes:

We have to take into account that in his own particular line of comedy it is essential that the greater part of the writing must be done by himself, at least for the present. With the greatest respect we submit that in his last series [Drake's Progress] although he was well served in this connection, he had to readjust a considerable amount of the material to suit his own style and this we feel will not only continue but basically he must be responsible for a larger amount of the material to be included in the programmes.<sup>262</sup>

If we take into account these observations, we see what might have caused some of the problems. Drake was used to having full control in every aspect of his television work. Earlier (p.39) we saw how during the pre-production of *Mister Ten Per Cent* Hudis thought Drake had been 'uncontrolled' and he was very difficult to work with because he was a perfectionist. We have already discussed how difficult it was to suture Drake's performances into the film's

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<sup>260</sup> Megs Jenkins also played the motherly innkeeper who employed Alfred Polly/John Mills in *The History of Mr. Polly* (1949).

<sup>261</sup> See Memo: A. H. Children's Programmes Television, Ursula Eason discusses a telephone conversation with Tom Sloan [Marked 'Confidential'] undated but probably late 1975.

To: H. C. P. Tel. BBC WAC Charlie Drake, TVART File 1, 1952-1959.

<sup>262</sup> Memo: Our ref 01/PC/GMT 29 Apr 1958

From: A.H. Programme Contracts, G.W. Turnell

To: Miss Phyl Rounce. BBC WAC Charlie Drake, TVART File 1, 1952-1959.



narrative. Drake's slapstick act was essentially a solo one; it disrupted the narrative. In the same sense Charlie is as much an adult as the rest of the characters in the film, he is not 'child-like' so there is no logic that allows for his slapstick to be funny in a narrative context, or for his character to actually be involved in the story with the rest of the characters, which of course he isn't. He remains as much an outsider in the narrative context as Drake, the performer, does outside the diegesis.

The opening credits show that Drake contributed only 'additional material' to the scriptwriting. An educated guess here would probably lead to the conclusion that the additional material Drake wrote was the performance[s] he gives as Drake/Charlie before the film starts, and the three minute 'dream trial by a jury of Drakes' nearly an hour into the film (Reel-time: 00:52). If this screen time is added to the twenty second solo slapstick sequence before the film starts, then it might be reasonable to suggest that the star was not given enough screen time and to conclude that that is why the film is not a successful comedy. The script hardly brims with verbal jokes, one-liners, or comic situations. The latter though seems to be hindered more by the dearth of comedy/comic moments as it tries to navigate through the plot, than it does by the setting 'aboard ship'. After all, a great deal of the best television comedy is reliant on the restrictions imposed by a situation on those trapped in it. In film though, this tends to lend itself more to tragedy. Films which set sail in similar cinematic seas, *Doctor at Sea* (1955) and *Carry On Cruising* (1962) fared slightly better at the box office because they were both fairly plotless, and because the comedy was shared by a repertory of familiar comic actors. As one recent comment on the *Internet Movie Database* (IMDb) points out (whilst totally blaming Drake for the film's failure) '[T]here is a definite good spirit present in the film'.<sup>263</sup> This is true; the characters are strong enough stereotypes and the actors sufficiently type-cast in the roles they play to be able to interact effortlessly and with good humour. The problem is the Charlie/Drake character, which, like Charles Hawtrey's character Charlie Muggins in *Carry On Camping* (1969) seems to be *acting in his own little movie*. Again, it is interesting to refer to a letter in the BBC archive because it might easily apply to the problems inherent in *Petticoat Pirates* as far as Drake is concerned. It refers to a television script written for Drake:

The synopsis outline might give the impression that it is rather more

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<sup>263</sup> The Internet Movie Database (IMDb), *Petticoat Pirates* (1961), User Comments Don't Lose Faith in the British Film Industry! 11 July 2002. Author: intercostalclavicle from Edinburgh, Scotland, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0055293/> [Accessed 21/12/2010].

story-line than we intend, although we definitely do want that to a limited extent. But we visualize that in at least two spots during the programme we drop into that broad comedy situation that Charlie can handle so well.<sup>264</sup>

Furthermore, the BBC 'Audience Research Report' on 'Charlie Drake In...Treble' (the very telerecording ABPC requested a copy of) positively declares the type of vehicle that was suitable for Drake:

It proved beyond doubt that Drake was at his very best in pure action comedy – that a script (practically non-existent in this case) merely hampered his capacity for fooling around for himself and being enormously funny.<sup>265</sup>

So it could be argued that the tedious storyline in *Petticoat Pirates* hampered his capacity for fooling around because he was only given two spots during the programme [film] to drop into that broad comedy that Charlie handle[d] so well. Arguably, the two spots, but especially, the 'dream trial by a jury of Drakes' sketch (the forerunner to the '1812 Overture' sketch broadcast later that year in 'Charlie Drake In...Recital' in which Charlie played all the parts in the orchestra and was halloed as 'The Funniest Ever TV Programme' by Guy Taylor in his bold headline) is arguably the funniest moment in the film. As Taylor remarked

It's a wonderful thing to be able to make people laugh. And if you can make them laugh so much that their sides ache it's really a BIG achievement. Charlie Drake did just that. Credit must also go to Ernest Maxim, his producer, whose clever cutting (of the film) of the 1812 Overture in which Drake played all the parts, was masterly.<sup>266</sup>

There were other tantalising footsteps in the sand for ABPC to follow. A jubilant memo to Eric Maschwitz, Head of Light Entertainment Television, muses, 'Happily it looks at the moment as if we have struck the right formula and writer for the comedian and I am happy that we should not need to change for some time.'<sup>267</sup> The writer for the first and second series

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<sup>264</sup> Letter: International Artists Representation, 1 February 1957

From: Phyllis

To: Ronald Waldman Esq. BBC WAC Charlie Drake, TVART File 1, 1952-1959.

<sup>265</sup> BBC WAC An Audience Report, Charlie Drake In...Treble, Week 19, Tuesday, 5th May, 1959. 7.30 -8.00 pm, Television Service, LE VR/59/243.

<sup>266</sup> Taylor, Guy. 'The Stage', Jan 7 1960, p. 20.

<sup>267</sup> Memo: To: S.S. Tel; H. L. E. Tel [Eric Maschwitz], 28 Nov 1958. BBC WAC Charlie Drake, TVART File 1, 1952-1959.

was Dave Freeman. The writer of 'Recital' was Charlie Drake. The producer of the first and second series (who is credited above by Guy Taylor) was Ernest Maxin.

Tantalisingly, this winning team had fallen apart when ABPC came knocking. The 'Reaction Index' in the BBC's 'Audience Research Reports' record the result. Indices fell from a high of 81 (for 'Treble') and 76 (for 'Recital') in the first and second series, to 60 (for 'It's Up to You') in the fourth series with a team of new writers and producer. And, the indices continued to fall to an average of 58 for the 'Charlie Drake Show' (1959-1961) until Charlie fell through a window in 'Bingo Madness' (Oct 24, 1961) and was not seen on television for nearly two years.

ABPC might have questioned that Drake's star was paling and cancelled his contract; more tellingly though, they decided to go ahead. ABPC must have been aware that their team of writers was not working as much as they must have been aware of the team that was. Equally, they knew the type of comedy that Drake was good at - *the pure action comedy and his capacity for fooling around and being enormously funny* - and that he *would be hampered by a script* – that is precisely what they were trying to cash in on. But, ABPC tried to play it safe. T. J. Morrison who had adapted a play for their 1958 film *Girls at Sea* had written a story, but ABPC perhaps sensing that he had written another 'fluffy, sweet comedy'<sup>268</sup> set firmly in the fifties hype of re-fashioning the War, thought it might be quite unsuitable for audiences used to Drake's television persona. So, ABPC decided to use the television scriptwriter Lew Schwarz to write the screenplay to bring some silliness to the decade becalmed story. In all events this was not a success. Schwarz had never written for film before, and he failed to modernize the story. Maybe because it was his first film, he too was playing it safe. Similarly the choice of director was not suitable for Drake's style of comedy. David MacDonald had made comedy films – most of which were made in the late 30s – none of which had “‘em rollin’ in the aisles”, and his last film for Argo Films, *The Golden Rabbit* (1961) is probably an even worse comedy than *Petticoat Pirates*. From the mid-50s (probably due to the lack of success in films) he was primarily a television director of adventure/crime/horror genres - not comedy. His work in television throughout the fifties was not consistent; he directed only occasional episodes (often only 1 in a series), so this perhaps throws some doubt on his

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<sup>268</sup> The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) *Girls at Sea* (1958) User Comments “Girls at Sea”: Fun Shipboard Romance 1 June 2007. Author: tracyterrymalibu from United States. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0055293/> [Accessed 21 August 2012].

capabilities to be successful in films. He returned to television after *Petticoat Pirates* to direct two episodes of the long running popular BBC crime series *The Third Man*<sup>269</sup> in 1963 before retiring into obscurity as a lacklustre director.

So, we have a story that could easily have been a vehicle for a film made in the mid-50s. We have a scriptwriter working on his first film script, who either could not do anything with the story (having been a teenager during the war years one might have expected him to be a good choice for this), because like R. F. Delderfield's novel *The Bull Boys* it needed to be completely rewritten to make a comedy out of it, or he is *caught between a rock and a hard place*, that is Drake (who wants to write material himself) and Morrison (who wants him to stay faithful to the story he has written). It is worth noting how dissimilar the film is with *Carry On Sergeant* 1958 because John Antrobus could not adapt Delderfield's story and make it funny either. It had to be completely rewritten by Norman Hudis, handed over to a very competent director and handled by an accomplished team of comic actors. The latter is worthy of further comment regarding *Petticoat Pirates*. Established comedy character actors were cast to play the three stereotype roles that this kind of armed service story demanded: comic figures of authority played by Cecil Parker, their subordinates (Thorley Walters, Victor Maddern) and servicemen and women (Michael Ripper, Dilys Laye, Angus Lennie, Norman Chappell). Casting comic actors to play the same kind of characters in comedies often increases the chances of a film's success. There are countless examples to prove this. And, it is a recognised rule in British comedy that actors play their roles straight – after all, it is the serious side of life which necessitates the need for comedy – but in *Petticoat Pirates* we have actors playing straight roles in situations that excludes the comic, so the comedy has to be found elsewhere (as comic relief); that's where Drake the star performer comes in...and that's where the comedy goes out.<sup>270</sup> The problem is that the slapstick performance exists outside the narrative diegetic time-space<sup>271</sup> and the star persona is 'necessarily' becomes out of touch

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<sup>269</sup> The series ran from 1959-1965.

<sup>270</sup> "And that's where Brother Belcher goes out!" – Brother Belcher, *Carry On Up the Khyber* (1968). Captain Keene is looking for a guide to take him up the Khyber Pass. He explains to Sergeant Major MacNutt, "That's where Brother Belcher comes in!" to which Brother Belcher makes the reply above. If only Charlie Drake had been as afraid to lead the way.

<sup>271</sup> 'One of the most important apparatus for regulating and storing time [is] cinema' explains Doane (2002). The interruption of time by Drake through dream sequences and slapstick sketches in his film and television series 'operate as a symptom whose effects are intensified by the excessive trauma of modernity, so that modernity becomes, in part, a pathology of temporality' (34). Quoting Freud Doane explains that for him "Time is not "out there," to be measured, but is instead the effect of a protective configuration of the psyche' (34). For a full

with the other actors (by virtue of the fact that Drake is a solo performer), so the ‘good spirit’ of camaraderie created by a team of characters is absent (it excludes the comic), which, as far as the comedy is concerned, means that it has to come from outside the film; from Drake, who is like a Jonah, an alien invader aboard, hidden away from the rest of the crew below deck in his own ‘star’ ship, a ship he is about to sabotage. His slapstick performances therefore invade narrative space and time because they either come before the story even starts, or they take place in an ‘other’ outer space – in the dream world of Drake’s surreal mind space;<sup>272</sup> he even has a ‘walk out’ part at the end of the film.

For my part, the scenes where Drake performs are the best and most pure comic moments in the film. Unfortunately, they are also the scenes that make the rest of the film seem catastrophically unfunny. And, because these scenes are not a part of the film (take them out and the narrative is unaffected), neither is Drake, and as a result his comedy seems self-indulgent and completely at odds with the message of the film, which is to get the two sexes to work together as a team, as a heterosexual community, as husband and wife (symbolised by Michael and Anne’s reunion at the end of the film). If cinema audiences persevered with this film only to see Charlie/Drake walk out at the end it would not be difficult to understand why they did not see the joke.

But they had gone to see the star. The sole purpose of the twenty second comedy vignette at the beginning of the film is to introduce the television ‘star’ Charlie Drake to the film audience who had gone to see him doing what he was famous for on television – slapstick comedy. If we think about the sketch and its relationship to the ethos of the film and the ‘little man’ character Charlie, a stoker from Weybridge, who ends up with oil instead of a custard pie in his face after blowing down a voice pipe - in terms of respect for, and punishment by, the patriarchal power, viz. the middle-class as producers of a national cinema whose mission statement might well be (like the BBC’s) to inform (to instruct the middle and working classes about their relative places in relationship to each other in society), to educate (to teach them as a group) and do this in a benign way, that is, to use the medium to entertain the audience and to pacify them - then the sketch as a lesson on the rule of the father is a *tour de*

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exploration, see Doane (2002) chapter 2, ‘Temporality, Storage, Legibility: Freud, Marey, and the Cinema’ pp. 33-46.

<sup>272</sup> The ‘dream trial by a jury of Drakes’ sketch is reworked in an ITV episode of ‘The Worker’ called ‘Hallo Cobbler’ series 3, episode 1, ATV, 29 December, 1965.

*force* in this film. The nation's men must be rallied round (entertained), their roles defined (educated) and then (informed) about how to combat the threat of women who go to sea in ships and challenge the law of the patriarchal father. This ethos pervades *Petticoat Pirates* just as it does in so many 1950s war films. The patriarchy needed the obeisance of its sons, and needed to show that it could punish them if they did not "*do their duty*". *Carry On Sergeant* is another good example of this even though Sergeant Grimshawe decides to 'curb his temper and treat [the recruits] with kid gloves'.<sup>273</sup> The film does this by singling out the sexually immature male (Connor) and displaying him in front of 'the lads' (in the audience) until they have all learnt to obey the law of the father as a single combined unit. There is only ever one of these 'little man' types in a film or television comedy. In *Carry On Sergeant* it is Horace Strong/Connor who is paraded in his Long Johns (Baby Grow)<sup>274</sup> before the army psychiatrist. In *Petticoat Pirates* it is Charlie who dreams that a navy psychiatrist at his court-martial can explain why he is a degenerate rating.

The dream/theme of psycho-analysis is the tool used by the patriarchal psychiatrist to cure the neurotic 'little man' characters (the male audience) in both these films and if we take into consideration the fact that Drake created, wrote and performed the 'little man' role of Charlie in *Petticoat Pirates* himself and his sketches exist outside the diegesis of the film/narrative, they are in fact still sketches within it, because they proclaim its extra-diegetic ethic. In this guise the producer/patriarch of the film/dream - Drake - is presenting the film to the audience as though it was a (on the couch) single/mass hallucination while simultaneously playing the part of psychoanalyst himself. So, just as in the classic narrative tradition in cinema, where equilibrium is restored at the end of a film, the analysand/audience leaves the auditorium/analyst's couch brain-washed, cleansed by the producer/psycho-analyst/patriarchal father *en masse*, just as Horace/Connor is cured of his neurotic fear of women by the army psychiatrist and is then able to join the other men of Able platoon on the parade ground in the passing out parade, or chase Nora, the NAAFI girl out of the kitchen with the same thing on his mind as Charlie/Drake who chases the WRNS around the port like any other full-blooded

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<sup>273</sup> Webber (2005: 221)

<sup>274</sup> In the film "*King Arthur Was a Gentleman*" (1942) Arthur King/Askey who is trying to impress his girlfriend Susan/Evelyn Dall in his new uniform tells him how well he looks he replies "Oh my austerity rompers"; a quip that typically undermines his efforts to prove to her that he is the big brave man he thinks she thinks he should be. In the episode of *The Worker* 'Through a Glass Darkly' Charlie/Drake regresses through various stages of his life; we see him in infancy dressed in a Baby Grow, then in uniform as a submariner, but his Navy jumper is much too large because of his retarded growth so he still looks like he's wearing a Baby Grow and pretending to be grown up by dressing up like a soldier.

serviceman would. I was going to say like every other normal ‘heterosexual’ but that would imply that these ‘little men’ are ‘homosexual’ in these films – that is not the case at all. They are psycho-heterosexually immature which accounts for their ‘bisexuality’ and numerous disguises in drag. Horace is sexually repressed and behaves like a frightened child. Charlie’s repressed sexuality is frustrated by a patriarchal authority that will not allow him to grow up sexually (“Three years<sup>275</sup> I’ve been in the navy and I ‘aven’t even got me feet wet yet” he complains) until he has learned to obey the father/navy discipline.

Any doubts that this may not be the case are erased by the way the film is edited at the end. Charlie could not be seen to leave the navy voluntarily because that would be a ‘mutinous’ act against the navy/patriarchy, so those chosen representatives who are charged with administering navy law at the court-martial hearing unanimously find the “mutinous swine” / “Guilty!” “Guilty!” “Guilty!” “Guilty!” His act of mutiny is punishable by death<sup>276</sup> by hanging. Charlie wakes up from his nightmare with a rope around his neck. He has fallen asleep on some coiled ropes on the deck. What better way is there for a producer, a representative of patriarchy, to display their ultimate power over the ordinary man than with a comic execution of an Ordinary seaman? That patriarchal voice is not silent in the diegesis; it is displayed in a cinematic parody of the pennants that were flown on Nelson’s flagship ‘Victory’<sup>277</sup> along with the message of the film: “England!...Expects!...Every!...Charlie!...To do!...His...Duty!”

Each word of the message is accompanied by a shot of Charlie/Drake popping his head out of a porthole and ducking back inside before he gets caught fooling about. This is a comic metaphor of a man playing chicken with Madam la Guillotine. Like a Jack-in-the-Box Charlie challenges the law of the father by popping his head out of the porthole and screaming to the world outside (the unconscious) at the top of his voice the mantra he has to been told he must live by within the confines of the ship (the conscious), but he knows that he is never going to be able to prevent the father from snapping the lid shut again (castration), or having the courage to not duck back in again (repression). Alternatively, the “porthole” an oft too much repeated crude joke referring to the vagina in *Carry On Follow That Camel* (1967) might be

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<sup>275</sup> This corresponds with the anal/oral stages of psychosexual development that Freud claims exist up to the age of three; the pre pubescent / pre phallic / pre-Oedipal phases.

<sup>276</sup> The abolition of the death penalty for the offence of mutiny was not abolished until 1998.

<sup>277</sup> ‘But ‘twas a famous victory’ are also lines repeated in Robert Southey’s comic poem, *The Battle of Blenheim* 1796.

seen to represent the womb-mother, and the reluctance of the sexually immature male (whether that is fuelled by feelings of fear or love) to leave (or be prevented from leaving) the possessive/over-protective mother (the child's first love object). We have an inkling of the Oedipus triangle here if we consider a ship (traditionally referred to as "She") as a pronoun for "mother", (as a vessel that protects the unborn child, the all male crew) that is commanded by an omnipotent "As far as I'm concerned, they is the law!" father/captain who the crew must learn to love and obey if they are to survive (and negotiate the Oedipus complex). By attacking other ships with torpedoes (penetration=intercourse) the crew (prove their courage and resolve the complex) and learn to love (by the act of transference) a mother-object (the ship). For Freud love and aggression were two sides of the same emotion. The triad of protective mother/authoritative father/[dis]obedient child that makes up the 'complex' is echoed later on when Charlie sings (and is prevented from finishing): "Rule Britannia...Britons never, ever, never, shall be..." by an officer/father representative.

The still/shots of Charlie/Drake in the opening sketch chime simultaneously with a synchronicity of comic rhymes and rhythms that together form an impression of the morality of the 'singer' (Charlie) as it is shaped by the 'song' ("England expects every man to do his duty"); a song it is easy to imagine, that he might have learned in the nursery when he was sat on his mother's knee listening to stories about the great British hero Nelson and being encouraged to be just like him. Charlie's childhood heroes represent a boy's ego-ideal of what the perfect sailor should be like; cleaning is what mummy does, not what a great hero should be doing. Each time he repeats Nelson's inspiring message to his crew he is reminding the male audience of their duty because he is only addressing them. Even the act of ducking back inside the porthole is an act of remembering (an *impulse to repeat*, complicated by a compulsion to repeat - the discharge of action - by 'acting out' a traumatic event, including re-enacting the event and putting oneself in situations where the event is likely to happen again by [dis]obeying orders).<sup>278</sup> It is a childish act that demonstrates the moment when obedience to the father (captain) is momentarily forgotten during pretend play only to be suddenly recalled, which initiates a cowardly response from him; to run to his mother to hide. Charlie's act of ducking in and out of the porthole represents the early learning stage when the child's

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<sup>278</sup> Freud, S. 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis' II) (1914), S.E. Vol. XII (1911-1913), pp.145-147.



mind wonders between reality and fantasy. It coincides with the moment when the child must try to negotiate the Oedipus complex. He has to choose either to obey his father (do his duty to the captain) or stay with his mother (ship). Cleaning the porthole (sharpening the edge) is simultaneously a reminder of birth and castration. The physical act of ringing the ship's bell is a manifestation of the moment when the child has to make this decision. Charlie shakes violently and his face reflects his shivered-to-the-timbers Oedipal fear.

Charlie tries to escape the trauma of negotiating the Oedipus complex (castration by the father) by putting the clock forward. The pre-emptive act of ringing the bell represents Charlie's pre-conscious engagement with his unconscious anxieties. It precipitates action - it awakens the conflict between the flight or fight response - of making a conscious decision to obey father or run back to mummy - of wanting to be like mummy or daddy - of dressing up in Battle Dress uniform or wearing a dress and becoming mummy to please daddy (manifest in the act of cleaning the porthole). Charlie emerges dressed as the ship's cook (again there is the associated cultural memory that this is a woman's job). Similarly, Charlie's job of stoking the fire in the engine room is associated with hearth and home. Here both jobs and their female associations are absorbed and re-emerge as masculine professions, but Charlie's immaturity makes him mentally retarded. He struggles to keep the fire burning in the engine room (cue slapstick sequence where Charlie tries to feed the fire he calls mom) and then he throws potato peelings over a WRNS/mummy's feet. Immediately there is a cut to explain this. Waving his arms frantically he signals: "This...is...what...every man...has...to do". Charlie now represents Everyman, and it is his/their "Duty" to obey; like a child (like mummy). If he/they do not, they will be punished. Charlie covers his face and looks down at his feet like a naughty child who knows he has disobeyed. When he looks back up a shot of oil from the voice-tube (Freudian symbols of phallus and umbilicus) is squirted all over his face. Charlie has been reminded by the father/captain that he is a product of his semen, his will[y].<sup>279</sup>

There is a constant reminder about whose will[y] must be obeyed throughout the film – indeed it constitutes the message of the film within and without the diegesis/narrative. The patriarchy of the navy is represented by the portraits of Captain Bligh, Nelson and Sir Francis

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<sup>279</sup> Willy. nickname derived from a male given name derived from Germanic words meaning "will" and "helmet" which are easily associated with the will of the Oedipal father and the phallic symbolism of Freud.

Drake hung in Charlie's workplace, the furnace room. The portraits are significant, not least because Bligh and Nelson are famous for putting down mutinies, but because they are animated and communicate directly with the audience an attitude about Charlie/Everyman who holds them up as heroes while they/patriarchy look down on him/them despite disguising it under the thin veneer of the British 'little man' comedy tradition that challenges authority figures. Morton Hunt (1993) reminds us that Freud wrote: 'It is our fate to direct our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father' (187)

Again, and again in British 'little man' comedy films of the 50s the tradition of challenging authority figures is done superficially (comically) in order not to undermine them too seriously; to maintain a respect for them. This return to obeisance (reflected in every encounter between the 'little man' and a figure of authority) is a point made right at the beginning of the film as Charlie/Drake/Everyman repeats that dogma when he "talks" to the portraits of his heroes who show nothing but contempt for the 'little man' as they look down on him with animated eyes. But, the comedy of 'reaction' is reversed through the look. The joke is on Charlie here, or rather, Drake's look to camera - one that invites the collusion of the audience to ridicule someone in authority - is because it becomes a look that ridicules Charlie. The look invites the audience to agree with the figures of authority who condemn the irritating 'little man' before them, but this not only threatens to undermine the performance comedy of Drake, it gives us an indication why some people did not like his 'little man' character or share his belittling sense of humour. Charlie/Drake speaking as Drake/Bligh condemns himself/Everyman to ridicule by his own ridiculous impression of Charles Laughton/Bligh: "I'll have no mutiny on this boat. Any more of this and I'll give you all a jolly good hiding (Daddy will smack! Some of the audience will no doubt have despised this kind of self-deprecating humour). Charlie/Drake's attitude (and his reflections on the poor discipline of the men in the service) is reflected in the stern resolve of Bligh's judgemental and permanently fixed gaze. This is swimming against the tide of the anti-authoritarian attitude that informs all of Drake's television comedy. In *Petticoat Pirates* Charlie contradicts the audience's expectations about how the 'little man' character is supposed to behave towards figures of authority, he's on the wrong side, and that undermines the comedy.

When Nelson raises his eye patch as though he needs to check how useless the 'little man' in front of him is, it contradicts the preconceptions audiences have always had; even with one eye covered they can see how incompetent Charlie will be in the navy (after all he is tried for

deserting his post). That is where the funny business is and that is what a comedy like this should have concentrated on. That is where it is found in Wisdom's film *The Bulldog Breed* (1960). There are moments when Drake's 'little man' character conforms to type; when he is one of those characters that Will Hay 'gloried in...an inefficient man doggedly trying to do a job of which he is utterly incapable' says Quinlan (1992:131). Charlie is *utterly incapable* of doing his own job as a stoker (he nearly sets the boiler on fire). So, just as the audience expects an eye has to be kept on this incompetent, the highest echelon of Charlie's Holy trinity of naval heroes, represented by Sir Francis Drake, the father-God, looks down despairingly on the tiny tar sailing as close to the family name as he is ever likely to become an Able seaman. Before he raises his eyes to heaven with disbelieving apathy he looks to camera to condemn Charlie/Drake's delusion of grandeur that will one day he will be "recognised" as a great hero (of film comedy) too. Alas, as Charlie fortuitously says himself: "I've not been recognised yet" – nor was Drake likely to be in this shipwreck of a comedy. Drake was more a *skipper scuppered on a ship without a sea*<sup>280</sup> in *Petticoat Pirates*. In a landlocked world of narrative and character his slapstick sea of comedy was bound to leave his ship high and dry.

This ego-centricity is revealed in the psycho-automata that are Charlie/Drake, in the 'dream trial by a jury of Drakes' sketch that comes an hour into the film. The sketch serves no narrative purpose in advancing the storyline, but it does capture in its four minutes of screen time, the patriarchal anxieties about the undisciplined sexuality of the common seaman/common man in society who is threatened by so-called feminism. This challenge to the rule of the patriarchal father, as we have established, is thought to be the fault of the sexually weak male in 'little man' comedies set in the army services whose repatriation by cuss or cure<sup>281</sup> to heterosexual parity is essential to maintaining the law of the father. In Darwinian terms, the 'little man' is the cinematic runt of the litter. The impotent male

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<sup>280</sup> Oliver August. Skipper is scuppered on the ship without a sea. 7 July, 2001 The Times, [http://www.oliveraugust.com/journalism\\_skipper-is-scuppered.htm](http://www.oliveraugust.com/journalism_skipper-is-scuppered.htm) [Accessed 17 March, 2009].

<sup>281</sup> The cuss is dropped for the cure by Sergeant Grimshawe/Hartnell who decides that humouring his new recruits instead of hollering at them in *Carry On Sergeant* (1958) may help him to win the Star Squad prize. The comically named Able platoon cannot pass out until Horace Strong/Connor is cured of his castration complex by the 'male' army psychiatrist, not, it is worth noting, by the 'female' M.O. Captain Clark/Hattie Jacques. In *Tunes of Glory* the cussing Major Jock Sinclair/Alec Guinness (literally) enforces the rule of the gun over the neurotic 'little man' Lieutenant Colonel Barrow/John Mills who shoots himself, and the little Orderly Room Clerk/Angus Lennie (who plays George, a very similar type of character in *Petticoat Pirates*) runs away from the verbal broadsides of Regimental Sergeant Major Riddick/ Percy Herbert (Mr. Whittaker in *The Worker*) who calls him "a horrible little man!"

represents a threat to society, so the omnipotent father-God demands a cure before he welcomes him back into society.<sup>282</sup>

In the British Cinema of the 50s the mythical father's power was wielded through his representatives who occupied the higher stations of the armed and civil service and ruled over the ordinary seaman, the bobby on the beat, and the common soldier, by disciplining his baser instincts. The result was often achieved by deception. The 'little man' is a classic scapegoat for this deception. He is allowed to challenge authority, to play the Fool, to ridicule, to be insubordinate and unruly, and to be sexually ambiguous because his behaviour is childlike, preadolescent, and therefore harmless. His challenge to the father's authority is never taken seriously. Instead, the 'little man' must be made to "grow up".

The 'little man' character's childlike personality is associated with the immature stasis of his sexual development, but it is kept from maturing by his continued harassment by the father-figures who threaten to castrate him and ostracise him from society unless he learns to obey. The key word here is learning because the expectation is that the audience associate learning their first lessons at school with the childlike 'little man'. Evidence of this is provided by Charlie who continually repeats the lines (like a child reciting a nursery rhyme) "I must strike a blow for the Honour and freedom of the navy. England expects every Charlie to do his duty" to CPO Nixon/Victor Maddern as though he was trying to prove to his father-figure that he has remembered his lessons and is a dutiful son. Remembering that he overheard the WRNS plotting to steal the battleship and was prevented from warning his superiors, he becomes anxious, and like a child he falls asleep to try and hide away from his worries, but his anxiety manifests itself as guilt in a 'dream trial by a jury of Drakes'. His guilt stems from his fear of reprisals by the naval authorities/his father's for his dereliction of duty (again the echo of "England Expects Every Charlie To Do" is almost a subliminal message now it has been repeated so often). Admiral Sir Charles Drake who is also dreaming about how to punish 'little boys' who have not learned to obey the law of the father wakes up and shouts, "Hang 'im! Hang 'im!" Charlie is thus condemned by Charlie/Drake even before the trial begins. The charges are read out to Charlie (before the league of Laius') by Lieutenant Commander Drake (Figure 10).

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<sup>282</sup> As do all the 'little man' character's that Connor plays in the *Carry On* films from 1958-1964.



**Dream trial before a jury of Drakes/a league of Laius'**

Figure 10. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

As a visual manifestation of his guilty self 'he' is very interesting. Significantly, all of the manifestations 'of self' focus on the face. Here, Lieutenant Commander Drake/Charlie is brilliantly bald (Figure 11). This, character trait signifies his baby bisexual<sup>283</sup> self, his androgyny which is certainly confirmed by the Lieutenant's high voice and camp vocalization, but his huge ears are *ear marks* of paternal ridicule and punishment – reminiscent of the "Listen! Do you know why your ears are so big?" story/lesson told by Father Adam to the stupid little boy who forgets his name is "donkey".<sup>284</sup>



**Lieutenant Commander Drake/Charlie reading out the charges**

Figure 11. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

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<sup>283</sup> 'The conception which we gather from this long known anatomical fact is the original predisposition to bisexuality which in the course of development has changed to monosexuality, leaving slight remnants of the stunted sex.' Freud, S. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), S.E. (1975) VII.

<sup>284</sup> Forgotten Books. Myth, Ritual, and Religion, Lang, Andrew, 1887, republished 2008, p. 111.

<http://www.forgottenbooks.org/> [Accessed 19 March 2009]. For full description see

<http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/alang/bl-alang-myth-5.htm>

The punishment of Pinocchio, a marionette (a boy made of wood, a boy permanently fixated at the Oedipal phase) who must prove himself worthy of becoming a real boy and is turned into a donkey (a stupid ass) instead because he disobeys his father Geppetto, is another apt analogy here.<sup>285</sup> Pinocchio runs away from home – he disobeys the law of his father, Charlie deserts his post – he disobeys the law of the father and fails to protect the fatherland. The seriousness of this is confirmed and explained in the second charge – that “on discovering a plot to steal a naval vessel you failed to desert your post in the boiler room” – the hearth/heart of the ship/home, the Home Front of masculinity, the Motherland. This is reinforced by the frogwomen who carry Charlie into court kicking his legs between them, and the female clerk of the court Drake who sticks her tongue out at him. Again this is an example of the ‘little man’ in comedy being used as a scapegoat (or donkey) to pin male anxieties of cowardly and unmanly behaviour on.

The third charge, “resisting arrest when properly apprehended for Peeping Tom activities” re-establishes the idea of the abnormal, of the fetishized look that is the result of the child/Charlie’s inability to negotiate the Oedipus complex. The males in the audience are positioned to enjoy the fetishized<sup>286</sup> bodies of the WRNS undressing in the gym because it is a collective (therefore socially acceptable) act. Charlie was discovered gazing at them through a telescope in his room, which of course is perverted act.

Thus, with male perversion presented before the jury, the fourth and most damning charge of “masquerading as a wren” is made against Charlie. A shot is heard, the big-eared baby Charlie with an effeminate voice falls dead. “Mutinous swine!” shouts Admiral Nelson Drake. The hair of the female clerk of the court stands stiffly on end at the sight of Admiral Nelson Drake wielding his weapon (even she has been made to appear male in the courtroom). “How do you

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<sup>285</sup> *Pinocchio* (1940). The character Geppetto, a ‘wanna-be’ father is a castrated male fixated at the Oedipal phase. His only psychological sexual relief is to make a little wooden boy (a manifestation of the phallus -a lack) in order to feel like an adult male. In order for his ‘wish’ to be fulfilled – to become a real father – Pinocchio must learn to obey the law of the father, just as Charlie must.

<sup>286</sup> The conventional understanding of the fetish object can be explained by Freud; ‘Fetish objects are those in which the normal sexual object is replaced by another which bears some relation to it, but is entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim [...] it only becomes pathological when the longing for the fetish passes beyond the point of being merely a necessary condition attached to the sexual object and actually takes the place of normal aim, and further, when the fetish becomes detached from a particular individual and becomes the sole sexual object [...] the choice of a fetish is an after-effect of some sexual impression, received as a rule in early childhood,’ Freud, S. *The Essentials of Psychoanalysis* (1986: 298-9). Marc Vernet upsets this definition, offering an alternative reading of the fetish object and its relation to the cinema and the cinephile. See, his article, ‘The Fetish in the History and Theory of Cinema’, in Bergstrom, J. *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories*, 1998.

plead?” he demands pointing his pistol at him. Of course, Charlie has already been condemned, so he is not allowed to speak. He is silenced by a bearded anima/Drake, a bestial representation of patriarchal power who threatens to devour him like Saturn devoured his sons.<sup>287</sup> He roars like a lion (King of the jungle – bestial emblem of male sexuality and sovereignty). Charlie is so frightened he silences himself by putting his hand to his mouth like a child. The trial is now gathering a momentum reminiscent of the trial of the knave of hearts in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.<sup>288</sup> The pugnacious Charlie/Drake is the pantomime version of the two characters: the frightened little knave and the argumentative Alice<sup>289</sup> who likes to show off too. Both Alice (and Charlie) are prevented from speaking by the bestial “All ways are my ways!” monarchs like the Queen of Hearts, who screams, “Silence! Off with her head!” throughout the entire court proceedings because she has already made up her mind. “Sentence first, verdict after!” she says eagerly trying rush the proceedings so she can “Get to the part where I lose my temper”,<sup>290</sup> as does Admiral Sir Charles Drake who continually shouts “Silence in court! ‘ang ‘im! ‘ang ‘im!” (Figure 12).



**Admiral Sir Charles Drake/Charlie “‘ang ‘im! ‘ang ‘im!”**

Figure 12. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

As is the case at Alice’s trial, a semblance of court etiquette must be seen to be observed at Charlie’s ‘trial by a jury of Drakes’, albeit reluctantly, with impatience, and without the least

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<sup>287</sup> The Roman God Saturn (equivalent to the Titan Cronus in Greek mythology) fearing he would be overthrown by his sons devoured each one at birth.

<sup>288</sup> See also *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), an animated feature that is loosely based on Lewis Carroll’s novels, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865 and *Through the Looking Glass – and What Alice Found There*, 1871. Of course all the characters at court (and in *Wonderland*) are manifestations of Alice’s unconscious fears and desires, which is reveals when she sings “A World of My Own”.

<sup>289</sup> Novelguide.com Alice, in the novel, is a girl struggling with adolescence and her transformation from an idle child to a conscientious adult. <http://www.novelguide.com/aliceinwonderland/characterprofiles.html> [Accessed 19 March 2009].

<sup>290</sup> This quote is taken from the Walt Disney film, *Alice in Wonderland* (1951).

concern that it will alter the verdict. Justice must be seen to be done however madcap the proceedings appear to be So, at the beginning of the trial Admiral Nelson Drake wearing patches over both eyes makes sure he is blind to justice (Figure 13) because he has seen enough and has already passed sentence, but he keeps up the pretence for the fun of it (Freud – *tendentious* joke).



**Admiral Nelson Drake/Charlie Blind to justice. “Has a defending council been appointed?”**

Figure 13. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

“Has the defending council been appointed?” he asks the court. A nervous American navy psychiatrist/Drake (Figure 14) presents his findings to the court. Stuttering along, trying to find a way to express himself, his words parody the childlike nature of his ‘little man’ client and the courts laughable attitude to him: “He, he, he, he, he, is sick (sounds like tragic-laughter this). “He, he, needs, a doc, a doctor.”



**American psychiatrist/Charlie “He, he , he...”**

Figure 14. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

“He, he, had a...(cut to the blind Admiral Nelson Drake whose lip is beginning to tremble) “...very difficult child...(cut to Admiral Sir Charles Drake presiding who has fallen asleep – bored, deaf and impenitent) “...child, adoles...(cut to stern-faced bestial anima/Drake)



“...due, due...(cut to thee dewy eyed female clerk of the court) “He had a tough time as a ki...kid (cut back to psychiatrist/Drake trying to explain) “His ma and his pa used to stand him on the porch and hit him on the head...(cut to Charlie in the dock crying). “All day long, they stand there...on the head, head...(psychiatrist crying now). “Can’t you see him standin’ there, hit on the head, on the porch...(psychiatrist breaks down). Provoked by the psychiatrist’s empathy with his client’s plight the proceeding reach a crescendo of emotional outpouring now; “Pardon me” he says apologising to the court (cut to judge crying, but only because he has hurt his fingers trying to bring down the gavel on the proceedings) / (cut to bestial/Drake where we see another side of his libidinous instinct, his Id, seeking discharge through the act of crying – ‘contrary impulses exist side by side, without cancelling each other out’ we are reminded by Freud (*New Introductory Lectures* 1933:106) - He is crying because he sees other people crying - ‘The Id knows no judgements of value: no good or evil, no morality’ says Freud (107) / (cut to Lieutenant Commander Drake who has risen from the dead; tears squirting out unnaturally from both his ears) / (cut to female clerk of the court pouting and making “ooh, ooh, ooh” sounds (accompanied by the sound of a sad but by no means sombre ship’s horn which turns to a blaring howl) / (cut to Admiral Nelson Drake his sight restored). “How does your client plead?” he asks the psychiatrist whose head is now bandaged. In a comic reversal of what Freud calls ‘transference’, the psychiatrist shows psychosomatic symptoms of the physical blows Charlie received to the head as a child which caused his inability to know which parent to obey (the blows being doled out equally by his ma and pa). But his bandaged head has simply become a symbol of parental discipline, of justifiable corporal punishment, so any psycho-analytic explanation becomes unnecessary. Hilariously, it is the ‘bloodied but [...] bowed’<sup>291</sup> psychiatrist who is forced to lead the chorus of the courts final verdict of “Guilty!” “Guilty!” “Guilty!” “Guilty!” (Figures 15-18).

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<sup>291</sup> Henley, William, Ernest. *Invictus*, 1875.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.



**Jury of Drakes/Charlie “Guilty!” “Guilty!” “Guilty!” “Guilty!”**

Figures 15-18. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

The combined forces of the assembled judges announce their verdict like a twenty-one gun salute and it echoes “like two seashells multitudinously murmuring”<sup>292</sup> in the big ears of *Every Charlie* [who fails] *to do his duty*. The verdict is repeated to Charlie by every Drake on the jury at the trial as though they were teaching him how to commit the lesson to memory by learning it by rote – that infallible means of learning a lesson and not understanding a word of it.

So, when the charges are read out again to Charlie, he admits to being guilty to all of them, (even to one he has not been charged with, of *liking strawberries*).<sup>293</sup> “Yes’t” he replies mispronouncing his affirmation, an affirmation which is interesting for two reasons; (i) it

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<sup>292</sup> Father Maple/Orson Wells, *Moby Dick*, dir. John Huston, 1956.

<sup>293</sup> The Victorian Web literature, history, & culture in the age of Victoria Authors Christina Rossetti, “Goblin Market,” Macmillan, London edition 1893. <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/crossetti/gobmarket.html>

We must not buy their fruits:  
Who knows upon what soil they fed  
Their hungry thirsty roots?"

reflects the necessary requirement that *Briton's slaves never, ever, never* need to understand why they obey their masters, they simply need to be disciplined until they do and (ii) the addition of the 'T' consonant, the "tut" which means "No" (as an exclamation of reproof usually directed at a child by an adult) is mimicked by the 'little man' who has accepted that the law of the father is intractable, so his "tut" means "Yes alright" (and is an exclamation of reluctant resignation by a child to an adult). Inevitably, little Charlie has condemned himself by a jury of Drakes to be hung/castrated and hoisted by his own lanyard, as an example to the crew/the men in the audience.

But this is a dream, so Charlie, like Alice, like the fatherless Dorothy in OZ, still has time to return home if he does what is expected of him, run away like a little child would, do what the audience expects the 'little man' character to do, *desert his post*. So as Charlie struggles with his 'death-wish' he is awoken from his nightmare by Sue/Laye, a wren who has taken a fancy to Charlie. But, here's the point, has he learnt his navy *fathers'* lesson? He never had to learn it. He lives by their dogma of strict moral discipline and preaches it to the men. It's just that nobody takes any notice of him. He runs away from Sue shouting: "Don't try to stop me" because he knows that the presence of the WRNS undermines the discipline of the men. So, for the third time in the film, Charlie delivers his message to the men. The lesson he learnt to recite by rote has become a proclamation – a war cry. "I must take over the boat, and strike a blow for the honour and freedom of the navy. England expects every Charlie to do his duty" he tells the men. I quote this last line again because it is worth noting that Charlie speaks it without separating out each word now. It is a positive declaration of his obeisance to the concept of patriarchal discipline. But, his ranting comes across as hysteria. This has nothing to do with him being sexually repressed like Connor's character in *Carry On Sergeant* because he clearly is not. Neither do the crew chastise him for being sexually withdrawn. At one point in the film, when most of the crew are cavorting with the WRNS openly on deck, Charlie tries to find his *range-finder* with Sue (he tries to kiss her), but he and the crew are prevented from satisfy their sexual desires by the navy father's second-in-command, CPO Nixon who tells the "nasty seafaring Casanovas" that they are only allowed to chase the "Popsies" when they go ashore, and although he is a little bit more familiar with them (he is known as "Chiefy" to the boys) he still says "Try and behave yourselves" shaking his head, and "tutting" at them as he allows them to go ashore with the WRNS. It is enough of a reminder for Charlie to make him stay on board.

The idea that it is only the Ordinary seaman, who will give in to his baser instincts if he is left undisciplined, is proven by the fact that any rank above him can have sexual liaisons while on board. It is his rank that proves his obedience. It is his rank that allows him certain privileges. So when CPO Nixon turns to Chief Wren Mabel Rawlins as they watch the combined crew leave the ship and says “Come on then” they both sneak below deck for a *bit of how’s your father*.

This is confirmed again in the next scene when Lieutenant Michael Pattinson and Chief Officer Anne Stevens are alone in the captain’s cabin. Anne lies provocatively on her bunk in a classic ‘nude’<sup>294</sup> pose. They surreptitiously chat about the weather before canoodling but the love making stops when Anne suspects Michael’s motives; that he is only making love to her to distract her in as he attempts to re-claim the captain’s cabin and recapture the ship. This mercenary act is responded to with a comic visual skit when the WRNS who command HMS Huntress send a sarcastic pennant message to HMS Taverner (the ship sent to recapture her). The message needs no interpretation; they just hang up some lingerie to make the point. A witty young midshipman on another ship who is asked to interpret the message says “I think they’re trying to give them the slip Sir”.

But, why does Charlie help the WRNS fight off the ship that has been sent by the Admiralty to recapture it? Surely it will fulfil his wish and renew his faith in the men of the service. The answer is simple; it gives Charlie the opportunity to be a hero like his portrait-fathers. He not only has a chance to say to his inner self ‘I am master of my fate: I am captain of my soul’<sup>295</sup> he is able to lead the WRNS by example and strike a blow for masculine supremacy.

But it is important to remember that the film is a ‘little man’ comedy, and as such, the film adheres to conventions in the genre which challenge the traditional social order and authority figures associated with it. Charlie in this respect is a typical ‘little man’ who challenges the authority of the father/naval authorities. Similarly, the ‘little man’s’ relation to women is typically sexist, even though the ‘little man’ himself is often sexually impotent. In most cases the mother is perceived by the ‘little man’ to be a threat to him fulfilling his own sexual desires, but in all cases the threat from the father-figure is the real cause of his castration

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<sup>294</sup> See, Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes’ double portraits ‘La maja desnuda’ (The Nude Maja) c.1800 and ‘La maja vestida’ (The Clothed Maja) ca. 1803 which depict the same woman fully clothed and nude.

<sup>295</sup> Henley, S. *Invictus*, 1888, line.16.

complex. If it is taken as written that female characters are defined by the relationships to/with the males around them, then the same can be said of the castrated 'little man' in comedy films. He must learn from the father. He therefore has to copy the behaviour of the father. He must learn to be sexist. Charlie's sexual neurosis at the beginning of the film is associated with his childlike little *manliness* and his search for a father-figure to worship and look up to. As we have seen, Charlie compensates for this by hero-worshipping images of dead heroes like Nelson who became fathers to the nation's males in popular imagination. But, these dead heroes are symbols of castration too; they symbolize Charlie's fixation at the Oedipal phase.

If Charlie is a typical neurotic in the 'little man' mould Drake is positively a pervert when he reveals himself; 'Neurotics are, the negative of perversions' states Freud (Storr 2001:31). His apparent sexist behaviour is really a manifestation of a disorder of his psychosexual development. His voyeuristic "Peeping Tom activities" of gazing through his periscope at the WRNS in the gym, of hiding in a shower cubicle behind a Charlie/red-haired wren while she showers, of masquerading as a wren and reading a 'dirty book' while they undress in front of/for him, is what some viewers have pointed out is an expression of the actor's own sexism.

We have already established that *Petticoat Pirates* is undoubtedly sexist, but the viewer's last comment brings us back to the debate we were having at the beginning of the chapter about how Drake's solo performances intrude on the narrative. If we return to an observation we made, that Drake inhabits the 'little man' character(s) he plays, it is safe to argue that the audience is looking through Drake's eyes, not Charlie's. It might be labouring a point to remind ourselves that Drake said *Pretty well everything that had happened to me in my life went into* (1986:121) the 'little man' character(s) he created, and he did have a lot of control at the BBC and at ABPC over his film and television productions. So, if Drake *is* the producer of the look, we should ask ourselves some questions. (i) How were males in the audience invited to look? and (ii) given the blatant sexism exhibited in the film and the psycho-biographical profile we have built up on Drake, were males in the audiences positioned to look at women the way Drake saw them or were they looking *through a glass darkly* at themselves? Or (iii) was Drake just reflecting the general attitudes men had towards women at the time?

In one scene the WRNS are seen exercising in the gym. This could be construed as being an argument which supports a feminist reading because the WRNS are shown to be physically 'fit for the job', but it is immediately undermined because of the unusual way they are looked at. The camera has often been used as the male's eye view of fetishising women's bodies in classic Hollywood cinema. In British films the way of looking at women is usually less revealing because it reflects more repressed attitudes. *Petticoat Pirates* is typical in this respect. The WRNS are seen less glamorously because they are covered up more, but they are also seen collectively going about their everyday ablutions, which is less romantic; the camera rarely focuses on individuals in the film, even the glamorous Anne Stevens is a Deep Sea *vestida*. But, the males in the audience are invited to look through Drake's eyes. There is only one other British film where this psycho-biography is implied so explicitly and that is *Peeping Tom*<sup>296</sup> released the year before. It clearly influenced the scenes where Drake looks at the WRNS through a periscope (camera). And it is Drake not Charlie who is *properly apprehended for Peeping Tom activities* because, as we have established, it is Drake's performance outside the narrative that the audience is watching. The WRNS are not seen as romantic and glamorous, their bodies are fetishized as Drake peers at body parts through an impossibly located periscope. The male audience are invited to look through Drake's phallic periscope by Drake. A close-up shot of his eyes not only implies the look is his, it suggests, rather unsettlingly, that he is looking into the mind of the male spectator and he knows what he is thinking (Figures 19-22) as he looks at the girls in his cinematic version of his dirty book. In a similar way the male audience are invited to share Drake's voyeurism in a later scene as he raises his eyes to camera and leers at the saucy pictures of half-naked women in a magazine. This extra-diegetic act of knowing is quite deliberately separated from the innocent naivety that defines his character's behaviour.

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<sup>296</sup> *Peeping Tom* (1960). Carl Boehm/Mark Lewis uses a camera to film the dying expressions [self-administered shock-therapy] of the young women he murders. 'As a boy, Mark Lewis was subjected to bizarre experiments by his scientist-father, who wanted to study and record the effects of fear on the nervous system.' Internet Movie Database Plot: summary. <http://www.imdb.com> [Accessed 27 March 2009].



**The look-to-camera invites the male audience to look through Drake's phallic periscope to see if they measure up.**

Figures 19-22. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

Note the difference between Drake's look and Sue's 'glamorised' look to camera, (Figure 23).



**"Smile for the camera/men ladies"**

Figures 23. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

The look[ing]/lusting is defined as lecherously male, the look[ed] at, passively female. The look[ed] at is fixated on the young and attractive. Look[ing] at the old and unattractive is punishable; as in psychiatric aversion therapy treatments where electric shocks are given to



modify social behaviour in children.<sup>297</sup> Significantly, at that moment the camera cuts away to reveal Charlie/Everyman, not Drake screaming, as he recoils from the periscope; shocked by/for looking, (Figures 24 & 25).



**Charlie recoils from the periscope shocked by/for looking**

Figures 24 & 25. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

Older women are “seen” as a threat, because they are unattractive and barren, even to a little ‘Botticelli cherub’ like Charlie who might see such types as “mother”. The immorality of the look is temporarily lost behind the mask of the clown and the laughable antics of the childlike ‘little man’ “looking”. Charlie’s look is only a “peep”, an innocent child’s look, ‘normal’ because the ‘child is polymorphously perverse’ (Freud *Three Essay on Sexuality* (1905)).<sup>298</sup> As Adam Phillips says, the ‘crucial irony of Freud’s account in the *Three Essays* was that perversion in childhood *was* the norm’ (1994:101) unlike the look of the “Peeping Tom” which is a sexual perversion of the adult male acting alone. So, the sexism *is* blatant, but blunted by the *enfant terrible* who is punished for being a naughty little boy. When Charlie looks, at the same bobbling bottoms the male audience is looking at, the female audience is invited to chastise him because they understand that his look is not sexual, it is prepubescent. He is punished for looking by the female audience’s representative mother-figures the WRNS, to prevent him (the child) developing deviant behaviour when he grows up. In scene after scene his punishment is meted out by a maternal slap. When the WRNS lock him in the laundry room he tries to break the door down but he falls into a linen basket when he bounces off the ‘rubber’ door (the womb wall which protects and prevents him from leaving and

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<sup>297</sup> See, Rogers, Sarah., & Paul Foster, ‘Ethical Review of “Building Social Behaviour in Autistic Children by Use of Electric Shock”’, December 6 2000, Virginia Polytechnic University and State University, <http://www.filebox.vt.edu/s/sarogers/My%20Documents/autism.doc> [Accessed 27 March 2009].

<sup>298</sup> See also *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916[1915-1916]209) Part II. Dreams, ‘The Archaic Features and Infantilism of Dreams’, pp.199-213, S.E. Vol. XV, (1915-1916)



inevitably from growing up to quickly). But, when he emerges fully clothed and soaking wet from a shower cubicle he has been hiding in, it becomes a moment that represents the violence and trauma of birth. It is his first rejection, his punishment for watching a naked woman take a shower, his first step towards mature sexual development. The 'little man' character is conceived this way, he is not born a baby but an infant who has overstayed his time in the womb, he is still-born, fixated at the oral phase, and the slap-stick is a Caesarean infanticide.

Therefore, the voyeurism and blatant sexism in *Petticoat Pirates* is a celebration of the *adult* male's privilege of look[ing] at the fully fledged female form emerging like a Botticelli Venus.<sup>299</sup> Whenever the eye of the camera is not inviting the male audience to look from Drake's point of view the women undressing are not fetishized. Proof of this is provided in the scene where the WRNS are getting undressed to take a shower. Their bodies are shown *in toto* walking into shot, undressing and walking out of shot, into the showers. Once there, only their heads are visible above the shower doors. Similarly, in the scene where the WRNS are getting ready for bed, the camera remains still; it does not invite a fetish's viewpoint by following or focussing on them. The act of undressing is not presented as a striptease, it is simply a function. It is precisely at this point that the camera cuts to Charlie who is disguised (dressed up) as a wren (who is *polymorphously perverse*) pretending to hide his eyes behind the pages of a magazine which has half-naked women in a harem on the front cover – the foreign woman's body is a permitted sexualised object in British films of this period. The 'dirty' magazine is a reminder to the male voyeur in the audience that they see the women's bodies as sexual objects and Charlie does not. At that moment Charlie disappears and Drake appears and looks directly to camera. It is a "Nudge, nudge, wink, wink, say no more"<sup>300</sup> moment by the star. The camera then returns the audience to Charlie's point of view. A half-naked wren is shown standing at the side of Charlie. Her head has been truncated, so the focal point is her legs and her tummy. The camera's eye wanders back and forth from Charlie, who is pretending not to look, (after all he is playing a game of hide-and-seek) and the fetishized images that his 'little man' character desexualizes. When one of the WRNS starts to undress in front of Charlie she obscures him/his look completely. The sexual look, like the sexualised

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<sup>299</sup> Venus emerges (is born) from the sea as a fully grown, naked young woman. See 'The Birth of Venus', Sandro Botticelli, c. 1485, tempera on canvas.

<sup>300</sup> Sketch called 'Candid Photography' from episode 3 of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* called 'How to Recognise Different Types of Trees From Quite a Long Way Away', BBC 1, 19 October 1969.

body, belongs to the male voyeur again. So, by the time the “full-frontal” shots of the women lounging on deck in their bathing costumes comes, Charlie is conspicuous by his absence from the scene, and the women, long since stripped of their identity as WRNS, are paraded like young girls in a beauty pageant in front of the voyeurs sat judging in their cinema seats.

The sexually mature male gaze or the maleonization of the look is reinforced in the film when Charlie dresses up as a wren. The emphasis is on “dressing up” not being “in drag” because we do not see Drake under the skirts so much as Charlie. Charlie, for instance, is simply not like the characters played by Sid James who “drag up” in *Carry On Don’t Lose Your Head* (Figure 26) whose rampant masculinity cannot be disguised.



**The “Black finger nail” unflanked – all men together.**

Figure 26. *Carry On Don’t Lose Your Head*, 1966

Source: Courtesy of ITV plc (Granada International).

But even the ‘little man’ character, Ted Watson played by Connor in *Carry On Cabby* (1963) (although he is punished with the same slapstick) is believable in drag. The diminutiveness of both Drake and Connor certainly lends itself to the ‘little man’ characters they play, but in very different ways. Ted/Connor, like Charlie/James in *Carry On Cabby*, is a real full-bloodied, mature, heterosexual male who has a sexual partner. So, when he is forced to dress as a woman cabby to “knobble” Glamcabs taxis, he does it to protect a bastion of maleness that has always been a male dominated occupation – cab driving. There is not only a logical reason in the plot for Ted to dress up as a female taxi cab driver, there is absolutely no chance whatsoever of him fooling the women or the audience (even though he looks more like a woman than Charlie does). “Oh, Cor Blimey, it’s ‘orrible” laughs Charlie/James. It is perceived to be highly comical. Contrariwise, Ted’s repulsion to dressing up like a woman draws attention to the fact that it is perceived as being a perversion and not an act at all. When Charlie dresses up as a woman he stops to contemplate the act. He does not seem to just smile because his cunning act will deceive the WRNS and allow him to escape; he seems to smile

inwardly because he will enjoy dressing up so he can become *like* one of them. His comic smile gives him away; it is a *nudge nudge wink wink* into his unconscious. This undermines the ‘little man’ comedy that relies on Charlie being a childlike man because it sexualises him as *her*. The 1960s may be hallowed as a decade of sexual liberation, but this liberation was depicted in British cinema as strictly heterosexual. The 1990s may have accepted that a man like Eddy Izzard could enjoy dressing up in women’s clothes and tout himself as a ‘male lesbian’ or a ‘male tomboy’, but in the 1960s this was taboo, and associated with sexual deviancy. Even in British comedy of this time, comic actors like Sid James who “dragged up”, did it reluctantly (as did the characters they played). Those who did not, those who seemed to enjoy it, like Charles Hawtrey/P.C. Timothy Gorse as Agatha and Kenneth Williams/P.C. Stanley Benson as Ethel in *Carry On Constable* became associated with the actor’s own effeminate nature and homosexuality. These actors were deemed to be donning a double-disguise especially as their identities became inseparable from the camp characters they played so often. Audiences were thus conditioned to ridicule them through the dominant heterosexual comic lens of castration humour - even if these characters wore underpants underneath their skirts “A dirty great Burpa [would] wave his sword thing” and castrate him, as Private Widdle/Hawtrey in *Carry On Up The Khyber* explains to his superior Sir Sid, “I looked down and they were off” (his “privates”).

On three occasions in *Petticoat Pirates* the WRNS capture men, pick them up, and carry them off kicking their legs between them. It is a recurring motif in the film, literally a running joke. It is useful to examine each occasion in turn because it will provide more evidence to prove the argument above. On the first occasion (Figure 27) Charlie is caught by the WRNS who have discovered him watching them in the gymnasium. Two of them pick him up, carry him off and confine him in the laundry. His feet, quite literally, do not touch the ground. If it is safe to assume that this is an act of castigation by the women who treat him like a naughty little boy because they do not want him to grow up to be dirty old man, then the laundry symbolises a washing away of his *dirty* thoughts. They are not actually concerned by his “Peeping Tom activities” because he does not pose a sexual threat to them. “I think it’s a man?” says one of the wrens when she discovers him; they are more concerned that little Charlie boy will run and tell daddy/his superior officers that he has overheard them plotting to take the ship. But the scene has a playground feel to it. This is partly because Charlie’s diminutiveness makes him look like a little boy and partly the women look like schoolgirls dressed in gym slips. So, it looks like they are taking him off to detention.



**Dragging Charlie to the dressing-up room to drag up?**

Figure 27. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

Compare this with the scene where the WRNS in uniform arrest Lieutenant Pattinson. He is obviously too tall to carry, but there is much more to it than that; his stature defines his status just as his status defines his stature. The WRNS defer to both. They laugh, he laughs; it's just a game, a navy lark. After all these are only women. He plays the little boy "Ooh steady" he tells the WRNS when he thinks they're playing a bit too rough with him (Figure 28).



**Lieutenant. Pattinson "Ooh, steady!"**

Figure 28. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

He only begins to take the WRNS seriously when they try to restrain his rakish arms which rather like Charlie's runaway legs, the WRNS are at pains to restrain. Their attention is focused on an arm that has broke free, the phallic arm, as strong and as straight as his erect body. Notice how the wren who is wrestling with the arm/phallus keeps her eyes on the lieutenant's lower body, the site of the phallus restrained, (Figure 29).



**Restraining Lieutenant Pattinson/phallus/arm/phallus**

Figure 29. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

As the WRNS manage to restrain him, he weakens, but his weakness is revealed by the orgasmic expression on his face, (Figure 30) not in his frantic attempts to run away. The game is blatantly sexual here, in the sense that the power of the phallus/man must be weakened<sup>301</sup> before the WRNS can take the ship, in the sense that the Lieutenant is a willing participant.



**Castration or “master”bation.**

Figure 30. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

In the scene when Charlie who is disguised as a wren tries to run away they think she/he is just afraid because they have been given orders to take the ship. So they chase after her, pick her up and carry her, kicking her legs to a waiting truck, (Figure 31). A long camera shot

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<sup>301</sup> In the same sense when Delilah/Hedy Lamarr cuts the long hair of Samson/Victor Mature it is an act of castration (but it is also an act of fore play) in the sense that she has to seduce him to satisfy/weaken the pent up passion trapped in his straining muscle-bound body/phallus. Castration is not simply an act of jealous revenge that becomes a political act of punishment for Samson's unrestrained lust for a Philistine princess he does not love; it becomes an act of sexual release connected with the passion of Christ. *Samson and Delilah* (1949).

captures a look of guilt and resignation on his face. The WRNS accept that he is a wren; that he is a woman. But the audience know he is masquerading as a woman. He is chased and caught out in this game of hide-and-seek by the viewer who watches Charlie trying to hide his *little man* beneath his mother's skirts. Charlie is once again exposed as a 'little' boy/[wo]man.



**Castrated Charlie in skirts masquerading as a wren.**

Figure 31. *Petticoat Pirates* (1961)

Source: Courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

Similarly, more evidence of Charlie's preadolescent [bi]sexuality is provided in a very strange scene that takes place in the wren's dormitory between Charlie and a young, 'gawky' ginger-headed, girl-next-door look-alike, who asks Charlie if he has got a boyfriend, "Yes" he replies. "What's his name?" she says. "Mary" he says. "What?" she asks looking at her/Charlie oddly. Then Charlie, anxious that he might give himself away, gives Charlie (the confused little boy trying to *lie his way out of trouble*) away, not with a malapropism or a slip of the tongue, but with a childish lie (a disguised lie that tells the truth about the trauma of negotiating the Oedipus Complex when the infant's bisexuality is developing into monosexuality): "Fred, Fred, Mary" he stammers. "Ooh, that's a funny name for a man isn't it?" she asks. "He's a funny fella, ha, ha," replies Charlie. Now up to that point, there is some humour created by the confusion that Charlie's real identity might be discovered. It should have been, but sadly it is not, instead their conversation (and presumably the fun) concentrates on Charlie relishing his role as a woman. The realism behind the statement that he "finished with his boyfriend" because "He sent me a [Dear John] letter" is not funny, because it is unsettling. There is an explanation for this, and it is hinted at in the simple observation that the 'gawky' red-headed girl is yet another projection (not a manifestation) of Drake's manifestly heterosexual male ego.

There is something worrying about an ego that is overindulged by stardom. It causes a separation from the world and an over identification with the self. It is easy to accept that

Drake's ego was sufficiently large enough to inhabit the characters he plays, but it is more difficult to accept that he thought he could occupy another actor's skin with it, even if one accepts it as a form of self-caricature. But, no attempt is made to extract comedy from the comparison in the film. Similarly, the 'little man' character that Drake created – which he identifies as himself (Charlie) – is the conduit through which the comic shares his sense of humour with an audience. So, when that sense of humour becomes contaminated with any real suggestion that their funny characters are a vehicle through which the actor shares his sexual fantasies (which are deemed unhealthy perversions by social mores at the time) then the comic's humour is not lost, it is just not shared with an audience (the essential 'Third Party' that Freud claims is necessary for a smutty joke to work). More crushingly though is the idea that if the performer does not care to share his sense of humour – that he is making a joke purely for his own amusement – then his 'little man' character (as a manifestation of himself) will do the same and he will fail in the joke-work because as Freud (*Jokes* 1905:100) points out: 'It is not the first person who makes the joke who laughs at it, but the inactive listener' (the audience). This is reflected in a User's comment about the film posted on the IMDb, "It's a painful experience – the verbal jokes fall flat and the physical comedy is awful. What makes matters considerably worse is that he is evidently enjoying what he's doing more than any person who might be watching."<sup>302</sup>

Inevitably, rightly or wrongly, the public often, cannot or do not want to separate the actor from the popular characters they play. It was "Charlie" Drake playing Charlie they expected to see, it was Charlie they enjoyed having a laugh with; 'little' Charlie was their mate, their friend and ally. The audiences' presence is not accidental; it is essential to the success of this kind of comedy. This is acknowledged whenever Drake looks to camera and raises his eyes sarcastically, because he is literally, trying to raise a smile. As Mark Vernet (1989:52) points out, 'there is a reference to the spectator as a sort of "Third Party," the role of which Freud analysed in the case of the pun or play on words.'<sup>303</sup> So, when Drake looks to camera, he is sharing a tendentious joke with 'us' (the audience) because he is not one of 'them' (authority figures). This implied relationship between a 'them' and 'us' creates empathy and is essential if a sense of humour is to be shared. A rapport, a friendship, an empathy must exist between

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<sup>302</sup> intercostalclavicle op.cit.

<sup>303</sup> Vernet, Mark. 'The Look at the Camera', *Cinema Journal*, 28, No. 2, Winter 1989, p. 52.

‘us’ in order to be able to laugh at ‘them’ (52).<sup>304</sup> The audience, therefore, plays an important part in the joke-work as the character’s friend and ally. ‘A joke’, says Freud, ‘calls upon the third person as his ally [...] in whom the joke’s aim of producing pleasure is fulfilled’ (*Jokes* 1905:100).

So, Drake disappoints when he steps out of character to share a smutty joke with *his* fans in *Petticoat Pirates* because he steps out of the character of Charlie, their mate, to become Drake, the solo performer, whose deviant behaviour is believed to be too self-satisfying, too real. The cinema is a fantasy form which allows an audience to recall their repressed sexual fantasies from their dream memories. Those sexual fantasies are safely ensconced in the continual recall of these screen memories as long as the characters who live them out for them stay in them; if they don’t they become monsters that invade and terrorise the psyche just like the monsters in horror films who invade the ‘real’ world the characters inhabit. In television comedy, whenever actor/performer ‘comes out’ of the world that scares him, it is to share his joke with the audience; that it is all meant to be just a jest, a pantomime, and that he is play[ing] the fool; after all it is just harmless frivolous fun.

But, it is important that this safety curtain of fun remains down to protect the audience by sustaining their [dis]belief. If it is lifted by even an inch, by the hem of a skirt, the joke will fall flat and the real world will flood in from memory and the audience will fly the cinema, more afraid of the folly than they ever were of Frankenstein’s monster, because *he isn’t half a scary* as Drake. He goes from friend to foe, and risks being cast out because he reminds the audience of the seriously unfunny world they want to escape from; it is a death-wish incarnate. Because Charlie does not share the smutty jokes with other characters in the way Drake does with the audience, their aim is diverted from their narrative context to the neurotic spectator, so the smutty jokes serve the same purpose as the “kick up the arse” does in slapstick comedy except it is the audience giving Charlie a good kicking for exposing his/their sexual fantasies/perversions not the comic Drake. The social purpose of such tendentious jokes is thus diverted onto the ‘little man’ Charlie who becomes their ‘comic’ object of contempt; seen as too childlike to lust after lithe young girls in gymslips, and the manifest monster-narrator of their secret sexual desires, the ‘dream trial by a jury of Drakes’ sketch

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<sup>304</sup> The significance of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ in low comedies like the *Carry Ons* is discussed by Jeff Nuttall & Rodick Carmichael in *Common Factors/Vulgar Factions* (2000), and in television sitcoms such as *On the Buses* by Leon Hunt in *British Low Culture: from safari suits to sexploitation* (1998).



compounds Drake's confession in their/the audience's condemnation of Charlie for "Peeping Tom activities."

Compare this to how very differently the 'little man' is treated in other films like *Carry On Cleo*. Hengist Pod/Connor is married to Senna but he is sexually shy to the point of developing a psycho-somatic symptom of his fear about his manhood which manifests itself as cowardice. He is afraid of all men and consequently all women. Physically strong and powerful war-mongering men like the invading Romans and Soseges (Cleopatra's eunuch bodyguard) represent the punishing phallic father to the tiny Briton from Coccium. Yet he is able through an Oedipal journey of tragic-comic circumstances to overcome his castration complex with the help of his adopted father, Julius "Julie" Caesar/Williams, who is so weedy and so much more of a sexual coward than he is, that he makes Hengist, Champion Protector of Rome, (his phallus). Only a man suffering from such a deep-seated inferiority sexual complex like "Julie" could be so easily convinced that the terrified wretch brought kicking and screaming before him (Figure. 32) could protect him from assassination by the castrating fathers in the forum.



**Hengist: "I plead for my life, I plead for forgiveness, I plead for mercy!"**

**Mark Antony: "You miserable little pleader."**

Figure 32. *Carry On Cleo* (1964)

Source: Courtesy of ITV plc (Granada International)

But Hengist, feeling courageous for the first time in his life, develops a protective love for his foster father. He learns the value of defending the motherland/Britain/Senna by playing out both parental roles (like a child does; Freud defines the infant child as bisexually perverse), he mothers 'Julie' (in one scene he cuts his hair, in another he protects the sexually impotent Caesar from the amorous attentions of his wife Calpurnia by sleeping God the Father like over his 'son's' bed). In Rome he learns to do what the Romans do. He must take the place of the father by becoming the father. But first he must kill the father. But since "Julie" Caesar is

effeminate he must kill a re-presentation of the father who he manages to dispatch in a way typical of the 'little man' with a disguised thrust of his gladius into the back of the Goliath Sosages. He returns to Briton a courageous hero, but he can still only face the sexual demands of his wife Henna with a little Dutch courage. At the end of the film *Hengist*, with a quick swig of the aphrodisiac to help him keep his 'happy muscle'<sup>305</sup> / "sword thing" from bending, becomes the father of many children. Conversely, at the end of *Petticoat Pirates* the character Charlie is still chasing the girls around like a headless chicken condemned to be permanently pre-Oedipal. He is the little boy/Jonah thrown overboard<sup>306</sup> for not growing up, for not negotiating the Oedipus Complex.

Drake's 'Charlies' always remained 'little boys' on the TV and in films; the character was castrated by his diminutiveness, his baby-faced looks, and his preadolescent pugnaciousness. This apparent contradiction with Drake's public image as the "odd little man" who chased young actresses around on set, is reflected by a him in his autobiography when he remembers that when he was a man he wanted to go to sea, 'I chose the Navy because I liked the uniform and I'd read somewhere that a sailor had a girl in every port. Love of the sea had nothing to do with my choice.'<sup>307</sup> Just like *Petticoat Pirates* has nothing to do with comedy, Drake's sketches could not rescue the film because he was the Jonah aboard.

The audience ends up being spectators at a double hanging of Charlie[s] in the film; one at the end of the 'dream trial by a jury of Drakes', the other when Charlie Drake walks out of the navy; could conceivably be Drake the 'poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/ And then is heard no more: it is a comic tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/ Signifying nothing'<sup>308</sup> because Drake walks out of the film at the end charged with crimes

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<sup>305</sup> Drake (1986: 21), 'But, as soon as my happy muscle got sight of the sheath [castration] it decided it didn't want to join in.' It is a clucking chicken (cock/phallus) that puts the young Charlie off his love making in a farmyard.

<sup>306</sup> In *The Bulldog Breed* (1960) Norman Puckle/Wisdom throws the crew overboard to defy the rule of Admiral Sir Bryanston Blyth. In *Captains Courageous* (1937) the adolescent Harvey Cheyne/Bartholomew falls overboard from his father's ship. He is taught how to become a man/obey his 'fathers' by Manuel/Tracy who fishes the 'Jonah' out of the sea (semen). At the end of the film Manuel is cut in half (castrated) by a fishing line and Harvey, wiser, obedient, and now loving towards his real father is reunited with him. In *Moby Dick* (1956) Ishmael/Basehart is the 'Jonah' who does not openly defy or question Ahab's rule as Captain. He obeys God the Father's law (that "All, all, save one shall perish") and heeds Elijah's warning. At the end of the film he is the only one left 'alive to tell thee [us]' about the terrible vengeance of the father/Laius. At the end of *Petticoat Pirates* Charlie leaves the ship because metaphorically, he is a codling (a juvenile Cod) that his fisherman fathers throw overboard and back into the sea to mature.

<sup>307</sup> Drake, *ibid.* p. 26.

<sup>308</sup> Shakespeare, W. *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, Act 5, scene 5.

against comedy. Of course it was not really Drake's fault; as we have observed he was literally kicking his heels at the end of a narrative because the fire in the engine room had not been stoked enough to power the ship that was *Petticoat Pirates*.

## Conclusion

Comedy deserves recuperation through any lens but, I have argued that ‘psycho-analysis can play a crucial role in the study of film and television comedy’ as Cook and Berninck suggest (2002:352). Throughout the thesis I have demonstrated the validity of studying film and television comedy using a Freudian frame of reference. I have undertaken a detailed examination of the film and television work of the British comic Charlie Drake, and whilst I would agree with Gabbard and Gabbard (in Greenberg 1990:4) ‘that no single theory will unpack a film’ (or television show), I have demonstrated by travelling backwards and forwards between film and television texts and psycho-analytic theory (Cook & Bernink 2002:352) that ‘psycho-analysis can help to illuminate the text, the characters, the subtext of a film [and television shows], as well as the way audiences experience them’ (1990:4) in the way Greenberg suggests. But I have also shown how the success of a television show like *The Worker* (as well as the failure of a film like *Petticoat Pirates*) is dependent both on the ego-psychology of a performer/creator like Drake and the audience colluding in the joke-work when they are targeted (depending on whether they are male or female) either by the comic himself or the ‘little man’ character in his comedies. In that sense Freud’s work on jokes, the comic and humour in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* does ‘describe in general and all-embracing terms the psychological processes provoked and exploited in the experience of film-going’ (Cook & Bernink 2002:342).

The thesis does not make any claims that Freud’s work on *Jokes* provides a *totalising theory of comedy*, but it does argue that it is comprehensive theory *not* a partial theory either, as Palmer suggests. Freud’s work on jokes, humour and the comic, coupled with the psycho-sociological insights Freud provides us with to explain the psychopathology of every day life is particularly useful when we come to analysing Drake’s comedies and understanding why the ‘little man’ character he created and played was so popular with the public. To that end I have drawn upon Freud’s work on dreams, the Oedipus complex, and castration anxiety because they were all part of his attempt to provide a general psychology of everyday life. But I have also demonstrated the validity of drawing upon a number of biographical sources, from Drake’s autobiography and his self-portraits, to personal testimonies from scriptwriters, agents, stage managers, comics and actors who knew and worked with Drake, as well as archival sources, because they make an important contribution to the psycho-analysis of his ‘little man’ comedies, which, I have argued, served a psycho-biographical function for Drake

and his 'little man' character. This renders them amenable to Freudian analysis that concentrates on infantile sexual development, the role of the comic and the social function of humour.

This thesis combines historical archival research with psycho-analytic theory and attempts to rehabilitate psycho-analysis within the study of comedy. Freud's work on humour was pioneering. Today we have the more up to date works of Palmer (1978, 1991), Seidman (1981), Horton (1991), Neale and Krutnik (1995), and King (2002), but the purpose here has been to link more closely with what was lacking in this aspect of film and television study and to demonstrate how Freud's theories can contribute to analysis.

Testing the applicability of psycho-analytic cultural theory to British film and television comedy by using Drake's work as a case history has addressed the two main purposes of this thesis: to re-examine the film and television 'little man' comedies of Charlie Drake in order to rescue him from neglect and to recover psycho-analysis as a viable critical methodological tool for understanding comedy. I have argued, particularly with regard to Drake's comedies, that adopting a Freudian analysis contributes considerably to our understanding of how humour functions in them in ways that cannot be achieved by applying theories of comedy which neglect the psycho-biographical nature of performance. In that sense, I would suggest that Freudian psycho-analysis has a much wider application to other comedy texts (and drama too) and hope that the thesis will encourage an awareness of the benefits of its use there.

The 'little man' comedies of Drake and the 'little man' character(s) he created illustrate how Freud's work on jokes fits in with his general theory of psychology that encompassed everyday life. Drake uses many examples from popularised Freudian theories to tell the comic story of the [extra]ordinary working man trying to cope with everyday life and the serious impact it made on his (audiences') psycho-pathology. The 'little man' as Everyman reflected through a tragi-comic mirror represents the adult male who often feels degraded by a society that makes him feel as helpless as a child and whose only means of defence is to develop a sense of humour. The character(s) he created represented the 'little man' rebelling against figures of authority who made him feel small and "damn well useless".<sup>309</sup> Paradoxically, the psychology behind the self-destructive urge and the survival instinct is dependent on a

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<sup>309</sup> *The Worker*, 'The Machinery of Organisation' series 1, episode 1, ITV (ATV), Saturday 27 February 1965.

mechanism, 'humour', which allows a momentary detachment from the threat of the present and the desire for the adult to return to a state of grace when such a defence mechanism was unnecessary at all, childhood. Drake's slapstick comedies, however, are not simply a return to a state of childhood play untrammelled by adulthood, his 'little man-child' is a comic manifestation of the state of narcissistic nirvana when the adult remembers himself being the sole centre of attention. As we have seen, this mirrors the psycho-genesis of Drake's humour, and his overwhelming desire to become a star.

The 'little man' character is a manifestation of Drake's psycho-pathology, and slapstick comedies like *The Worker* reveal Drake's sense of humour as a complicated defence mechanism that empowered him, and enabled him to cope with his own feelings of inadequacy and a dread fear of becoming unloved, which is why 'everything in his life went into that show' and why it was important to create a character that was loveable, ordinary, and working class. The middle class audience, particularly women, as we saw from the BBC Audience Research Reports, assumed a parental role over his 'little man' character. They assumed, individually, the role of mother; the role he considered most important in his life. Males represented adulthood, a lack, a withdrawal of love. As we have seen, these comedies have an underlying Oedipal trajectory that appealed to this historical demographic.

Primary research material was crucially significant to a psycho-analytically inflected analysis such as this, and the comprehensive psycho-biography of Charlie Drake built in the first chapter, contributed considerably to our understanding of his comedies. The close connection between Drake's diminutiveness and the giant personality that developed as a consequence explains why this 'cocksure and confident',<sup>310</sup> personality was never far from the 'little man' character he created in his comedies. It helped to explain why 'fifty-one inches of shy comedian with a little cherubic face' (Drake 1986:62) who was beloved by millions, turns into a daemonic gargoyle with an eye for young women when his giant ego is indulged and unchecked. His unsavoury reputation as a seducer of young women and someone who was difficult to work with, also help explain why Drake has been forgotten by the industry today.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> *The Guardian*, 'Charlie Drake' obituary, Stephen Dixon, Thursday 28 December 2006. See Appendix.

<sup>311</sup> The same can be said of Frank Randle and Benny Hill.

I assert that Drake's 'little man' comedies were different from other 'little man' comedies because he deliberately incorporated his own life experiences into them as a subject of humour. That kind of self-analysis in 'little man' comedy was new, and his preoccupation with Freudian themes also suggested a degree of self-awareness about psycho-analysis gained because he suffered from recurrent bouts of depression for which he was either referred to or sought the help of a psycho-analyst himself.

Chapter Two introduced Freud's psycho-analytic theories and demonstrated why they are useful methodological tools for examining Drake in relation to his 'little man' comedies. The social purpose of jokes was explained as an psychological defence mechanism against the threat of violence which, of course, is the subjective determinant of all 'little man' comedies where the 'little man' character is left with no alternative but to make a joke because he is prevented by patriarchal social laws from facing violence with violence against father-figures who are the agents responsible for enforcing its laws. We saw how the infantile 'little man' character is fixated at the oral phase, perpetually unable to negotiate the Oedipus complex, and condemned to unsuccessfully challenge the sovereignty of the father, and why, as a consequence, the slapstick in these 'little man' comedies is an act of self-harm by the 'little man' character. To this end Freud's explanation of how humour is shared in a tripartite relationship between the comic and the audience was demonstrated with an explanation of how the double-act and the verbal *duelques* between Mr. Pugh (the authority figure) and Charlie (the 'little man' Everyman) was an essential part of the formula in all these comedies. Similarly, Freudian castration anxiety is visualized in the slapstick humour (indeed it is the ultimate manifestation of it) quite literally in the mock self-castration scene in the first episode of *The Worker*, 'The Machinery of Organisation' where Charlie has to go for a medical to prove that he is man enough to get a job with the other men on the factory floor. Of course he gets the job but his inadequacies are soon revealed because he cannot pull the little handle on the machine that makes plastic aeroplanes. Comic sketches like these in *The Worker* (and a film like *Petticoat Pirates*) are replete with phallic symbolism and associations that type Drake's 'little man' as sexual immature and deny him socially integration.

Clearly then, when we analyse Drake's comedies (especially when we consider them as psycho-biographical) using Freud's psycho-analytic theories, a joke is much more than a joke. The clown's self-flagellation was a slapstick act that guaranteed audiences loved him, but the inclusion of aspects of his private life that informs so much of his comedy, and the intrusion

of Drake's 'real' personality into the narrative space (which he achieves with a look to camera) functioned on two levels. He risked separating his audience in the joke-work because he shared a smutty joke with the male audience who he acknowledged with a lewd look and a wink, while he relied on his 'little man' character's loveableness and childish rebelliousness against the father-figure to make him more loveable by just allowing the women in the audience to look at him being child-like and comical. The BBC Audience Research Reports clearly show this schism and the risk Drake was taking. Some men in the audience hated Drake's 'little man' character because he was *deplorably childish* and *infantile* while many women often adored the baby-faced man-child who dressed up in a baby-grow and naughtily mispronounced his words to make them sound like he was swearing. The implication is that women's appreciation of his humour was exclusively bound to the role of mother which Drake's little man-child engendered in his female audiences, while the mature males adopted a father-figure role (which their disapproving comments about his infantile behaviour testify to).

Drake's 'little man' comedies are interesting because of the apparent contradictions that co-exist in his comic character(s). Freud is most useful in helping us to understand the significance of this dual nature, and we can conclude that the 'little man' character(s) played by Drake is both mother-fixated, anacletic, and a comic manifestation of post-Freudian man, or the 'Ordinary man [in the audience] who compromises his instinctual longings and becomes neurotic' as Rieff states (in Kerr 1968:293) and holds a genuinely tragic view of life. As a character he represents ego. Running parallel to this is Drake's performance persona. He represents id. He 'enjoys [acts out] the unsocial excesses of the id' each time he breaks out of the narrative world to perform, which means that either the comedy fails, as it does in all of his films because a performance space has to be sutured into the narrative, or is a success, when the comedy is 'situated' within *his* performance space, as a television sitcom like *The Worker* proved. He 'carries out wishes in a way forbidden to most men' (Rieff in Kerr 1968:293). He is father-fixated and narcissistic. In that sense Drake's performance persona is Oedipal.

At times, some very literal connections have been made between the 'real life' and fictional character(s) Drake created. Seidman has pointed out that the fictional character and the 'extrafictional personality' of the comedian is a common effect of comedian comedy (2003:33). These encourage the very literal connections that audiences make (as the BBC



Audience Research Reports testify) and which are part of the comic dialogue between the comedian and his audience, who play the third party in the joke-work in Freud's scheme.

As we have seen, Drake created the comic Charlie from his own poor self-image. He clearly separates the 'little man' character from the 'real life' Charlie Drake, and indeed finds a performance space for outside the diegesis of his comedies to communicate directly with a 'live' audience. He reveals himself as clown, but significantly, he puts the make-up on again when he becomes the working class character he plays. Drake, as clown, needed no make-up to look comic because his diminutiveness, his baby-like body, and 'funny' face made him into 'an object of reticule'. This unmasking is clearly seen in the episode of *The Worker* called 'A Host of Golden Casual Labourers' when Drake takes off the Daffodil Man suit that his 'little man' character is made to wear to advertise flower seeds because he thinks it robs him of his dignity. I cannot help associate what I have learned about the psychology of Drake's 'real' persona when he turns to camera, strips off the clown's costume, pulls on the working class clothes that define his performance identity and speaks to camera.

During the minute long soliloquy that follows he confesses how he felt as a working man when he was made to look like a 'right Charlie' in public and became the butt of working class humour to earn a living. Ridicule was the catalyst that gave Drake the power to re-create himself in the tragi-comic mould of the comic self-deprecating little worker who wins out (even if only extra-diegetically) because his alter-ego emerges as star. *The Worker* series presented a flashback to a time when Drake suffered the indignity of being a working man and was treated like a fool because he was never able to hold down a job. It is Drake then, not Charlie, who turns to camera and tells the audience to

Be quiet! There's no need for you to laugh anymore; you've done it, I'm finished, I've tried, but I can't go on any longer. All I've ever wanted was for a chance to do my best. All I've ever needed was for a man to pat me on the shoulder and say, "Well done!" But it never goes that way. All people ever do is laugh at me. And it's nice to see people laugh. It's great to see people happy. It makes me feel good when they say "Here's old Charlie, he's good for a laugh" but you don't feel so good when you realise that's all you're good for; that's all you're ever goin' to be good for, and you're gonna spend you're life as an object of ridicule. See, you have stopped laughing. People are funny like that. You see, you see they do bad things, and, and, they say sorry, and er, they imagine that this makes them better, but it doesn't. It's too, it's

too late. But you need feel no remorse you see, 'cos you have put  
and end to my suffering, and I've finished.<sup>312</sup>

And that is the cue for the slapstick punchline of the joke that is not a joke. Charlie is doused with a bucket of water (presumably to make the Daffodil Man 'grow up) and the audience, who until that moment have become quiet, begin to laugh hysterically again. But, if we remember that Drake had retired from show business in the 1960s because he had reached that self-critical moment of anxiety and self-doubt when he thought he was really only a star because he was a clown, then his comedies become as clear as the message in his self-portraits that he used to psycho-analyse himself; he needed the love of his adoring audience to make him feel good about who he was. Being just another star in the universe of stars was not good enough for Drake; he wanted to be the brightest; that was intrinsically linked to his anxiety about his diminutiveness. The stage was the launching pad where he said, 'my size helps'. The 'little man' comedies guaranteed that fame was gigantic.

However, because of this duality between ego and alter-ego, the fictional 'little man' character was not as rebellious as he seemed to be. This is countenanced by the simple fact that Drake the producer/creator saw himself in a patriarchal role; as he reveals in his autobiography when he says, 'the last thing I wanted was to go back down there with them' (1986:98). His jealously guarded star status set him above the social class of his popular audience because he lived apart from the real world as much as he did in the surreal world he created on screen.

His comedies are carnivalesque, morally conservative, and celebrate patriarchal rule. At the time of their production there existed a 'patriarchal phallocentric agenda to the production of film and television comedy which left the male, heterosexual prefeminist ideology intact' as Anderson states when she discusses the *Carry On* films (1998:44). So, if Drake often seems to be mocking his male audience; it was his way of rehabilitating them back into the patriarchal social order. It was his part in the joke-work, as the joke producer, to provoke laughter for his audience, but joking was also his psychological reward for coping with his own frustrations with the machinery of social organisation and authority figures. Thus, as

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<sup>312</sup> This moment of pathos has been uploaded on YouTube (see Shedachannel 'Charlie Drake The Worker Series 2 episode 1 pt 4/5.

Freud states the joke-work fulfils the same purpose for the comic and his audience where ‘recognizing and remembering is [...] accompanied by a feeling of pleasure’ (*Jokes* 1905:122) because it displaces ‘feelings of unpleasure’.<sup>313</sup> Joking was Drake’s way of turning round and kicking the representatives of the patriarchy up the arse, albeit disguised by self-mockery. This goes some way to explaining why so many comics suffer from depression as we saw in Chapter Three. It is not enough for them to be in the audience laughing at the comic, they have to be the centre of attention (narcissistic, patriarchal, psychopathological and extra-ordinary). This often makes them appear to be tragic figures in ‘real’ life (as we have seen many of them had tragic childhoods) and it explains why their performance personas are often anacletic, mother-fixated, neurotic, infantile, sexually shy and loveable ‘little men’. In most cases the ‘little man’ character’s personality is a simple combination of tragic-comic traits.

In Chapter Three we discussed the relationship between tragedy and comedy and showed how both art forms are an essential part of the ‘little man’ comedies and together constitute the ‘little man’ character’s core personality. We noted that the tragic [anti] hero is the progenitor of the rebellious ‘little man’ in comedy (indeed tragedy is the psycho-genesis of ‘little man’ comedy) and we shared Kerr’s view (1968:19) that tragedy came first because psychologically, *Man’s primary concern is with tragedy* (with survival) and *comedy always comes second* (as a comic relief to surviving). Following this idea we traced the descent of the ‘little man’ in British Comedy and saw how the ‘little man’ character in comedy shares the same traits as the ‘little man’ character in drama (in the gangster and horror genres of film), and that these psychological traits are magnified in the physical diminutiveness of the performer who plays these types.

Of course there is artistry to admire in the diminutive stars of comedy which, as we noted in Chapter Three, was something honed in front of ‘live’ audiences in Music Halls and Holiday Camps; comic skills which were easily transferable to the new medium of film and later

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<sup>313</sup> Freud states that ‘The psychical apparatus is intolerant of unpleasure; it has to fend it off at all costs, and if the perception of reality entails unpleasure, that perception—that is, the truth—must be sacrificed’ (p. 237), see ‘Analysis terminable and interminable’ (1937c) SE, Vol. XX111: 209-253. ‘Unpleasure is thus not only an affective state, it is set up as a principle that regulates psychic functioning’, Michèle Pollak Cornillot *Gale Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, <http://www.answers.com/topic/unpleasure>

television. Multi-talented artists such as Chaplin, Rooney, Wisdom, Drake and Varney possessed artistic and comedic skills that the ordinary man sat in the audience did not.

These diminutive multi-talented men became big stars because audiences were over-awed by their apparently 'God-given' talents which seemed even more remarkable when they were magnified on the big and little screen, as were the huge personalities that the diminutive frames of the 'little man' character seemed unable to contain. I have suggested that the giant egos of these diminutive comics developed as a result of early life traumas and the 'little man' characters they created were not just a glass the audience looked through darkly and saw themselves struggling to cope with life; such characters offered audiences a hall of mirrors that comically distorted the self-image and made the viewer laugh at him or her self.

Chapter Four furthered arguments made in the thesis in a psycho-analytic case study of the ABPC film *Petticoat Pirates*. The film was not a success, and if Drake's fame had to rest on it as a showcase of his comic genius he would not be remembered at all today. Ultimately, the film illustrates why his fame rests on his television work because the standalone performance spaces that are unsuccessfully sutured into the film's narrative are the audiences' only glimpses of the comic clown performing the signature slapstick sketches that had made him a big star on television, exactly what they had gone to the cinema to see repeated.

'I bet even that when I die [...] the BBC will run 'Recital' in my fond memory' said Drake in his autobiography (1986:99). Sadly, Drake's talent is not recognised at all today. None of his films or television shows are repeated, even on our multi-channel digital television networks. Hopefully, this thesis has helped to reconsider a comic genius whose television shows won him two Golden Rose of Montreux Comedy Awards, who appeared in fifteen Royal Command Variety Shows and topped the bill regularly at the London Palladium, and who was the undisputed King of Pantomime for over twenty years.

Despite the fact that a statue of Drake will never be erected, some acknowledgement of his success was made recently in Blackpool where his name (and famous catchphrase "Hello My Darlings") was included on the Comedy Carpet opposite the Tower where Drake had often entertained holiday makers during the panto season. Curiously enough Freud spent a happy

holiday in Blackpool in 1908.<sup>314</sup> Perhaps if he had ever been able to see Drake in panto (or in one of his television shows) he too would have laughed at the “contraphallic” ‘little man’ who made himself an ‘object of reticule’ without trying to explain to them why they were laughing.

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<sup>314</sup> ‘Dreaming of the seaside: Freud’s travel letters tell of happy days in Blackpool’, article by psychologist, Oliver James, *The Guardian*, Wednesday, March 21, 2007, p. 11.

## Appendix

The Appendix includes a more complete list of Drake's films and television shows collected into one reference catalogue here. Gifford's *The British Film Catalogue 1895-1970* (1973) did not include the film serial *Professor Popper's Problems* (1974) but has been added to the 2001, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, *The British Film Catalogue: Fiction Film 1891-1994* volume two. Gifford's catalogue is invaluable to the researcher because it contains a wealth of information about each film: the date and month of release, the censor's certificate, the Production Company, Distribution Company, producer, director, story source, screenplay, cast and characters, subject, summary, and additional features.

However, the film *To See Such Fun* (1977), a compilation of 'some of the funniest and most memorable sequences from over a score of British comedies' is listed in Gifford (1973, 2001) but not on the entry on Drake in the index. The film is included in *The Encyclopedia of British Film* (McFarlane & Slide 2003) but the two films listed by Gifford above are not included in their entry on Drake. Furthermore, Drake's first film appearance as Joe in the crime thriller, *The Golden Link* (1954), and the children's serial *Professor Popper's Problems* (1974) is recorded by Gifford, but they are not listed in *Halliwel's Film Guide* or the *Radio Times Guide to Films* (2007). Both films are also listed in Gifford's, *A Guide to Entertainment Films* (1973), and *The Illustrated Who's Who in British Films* (1978).

A further listing is provided on the IMDb website, and the two films, *The Golden Link* (1954), and the *Professor Popper's Problems* (1974) have recently been added to Drake's filmography. *To See Such Fun* (1977), however, has not.

In my catalogue that follows, all of the films are listed together here with details from Gifford and commentaries added by myself. I also add his television appearances, as similarly, the list of Drake's television programmes is incomplete. So, I update Lewisohn's *RadioTimes Guide to TV Comedy* (2003), under the section on Drake (pp.238-241), using the BUFVC *TVTimes* digitalised TVTip Project database. A more complete list of the children's series *Mick and Montmorency*, together with the description of the theme of the comedy of that week's show is included because they are often written as comic dialogues and include jokes that could only have been shared with the adults reading the magazines, which betrays the appeal of such infantile humour. Detailed listings of the *Charlie Drake In...* series from the *Radio Times* include programmes that were shown before and after the show to give an idea of

where Drake's comedy fit into the flow of the evenings entertainment viewing. I have included the commentaries because they contain brief interviews with Drake about his show, but they also reveal attitudes towards the slapstick star that producers were keen to promote to win audiences. Together these sources provide a chronological date-line of Drake's work that charts his entire career in film and television.

The BFI Film & Television Database has been consulted to help compile Drake's filmography and whilst it is comprehensive, there are still some programmes missing from the list: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/individual/11250?view=credit>.

Some material recorded on video and DVD was kindly made available by Christopher Drake. In the same spirit the author intends to donate the material to the Salford University Film and Television Archive for the benefit of researchers who may want to access the material in the future. It includes a public video recording of the pantomime "*Wizard of Oz*" where Drake plays a not-so cowardly Lion and a copy of the 1991 Granada television short *Swimming Against the tie*. Both are now very rare and unavailable even in the British University Film & Video Council (BUFVC) holdings. *Swimming Against the tie* is not listed on the BFI database and it is even missing from director David Richardson's filmography on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) website.

Permission to reproduce previously unpublished publicity photographs and a photographic reproduction of a self-portrait by Drake is given by kind permission of his son Christopher Drake. Quotations by the portrait painter Gerard de Rose and the art critic Denis Bowen are taken from the catalogue for Drake's 1962 art exhibition, 'Top of the Pops' at the New Vision Centre Gallery, London, Saturday 20 November-8 December, 10am-8pm.

A comprehensive discography of Drake's 45 single playing records from the late 1950s to the mid-70s is included.

The **TVTip** symbol is used to show a television programme has been sourced in that digital database.

The **BFI** symbol is used to indicate where television programmes are listed on the database.

The **YouTube** symbol indicates what can be viewed, in part, or whole, on the website.

Lewisohn (2003) is acknowledged wherever details of Drake's television programmes are provided in the *Radio Times Guide to TV Comedy*.

### **Filmography (chronologically arranged)**

*The Golden Link* (August, 1954).

'A' certificate.

Production Company: Parkside (Archway).

Produced by Guido Coen.

Directed by Charles Saunders.

Story by Allan Mackinnon.

Crime thriller

\* This is Drake's first film. He plays little Joe.

Source: Gifford (1973 (2001), 1978, 1998).

The four ABPC (WPD) films are:

*Sands of the Desert* (July, 1960).

'U' certificate.

Produced by Gordon T. Scott.

Directed by John Paddy Carstairs.

Story by Robert Hall, Anne Burnaby, Stafford Byrne.

Screenplay by John Paddy Carstairs and Charlie Drake.

Comedy.

Source: Gifford (1973 (2001), 1978, 1998).

*Petticoat Pirates* (November, 1961).

'U' certificate.

Produced by Gordon L. T. Scott.

Directed by David MacDonald.

Story by T. J. Morrison.

Screenplay by Lew Schwarz and Charlie Drake.

Comedy.

Source: Gifford (1973 (2001), 1978, 1998).

*The Cracksmen* (June, 1963).

'U' certificate.

Produced by W. A. Whittaker.

Directed by Peter Graham Scott.

Story by Lew Schwarz.

Screenplay by Lew Schwarz, Mike Watts and Charlie Drake.

Comedy

Source: Gifford (1973 (2001), 1978, 1998).

Clip **YouTube**

*Mister Ten Per Cent* (May, 1967).

'U' certificate.

Produced by W. A. Whittaker.

Directed by Peter Graham Scott.



Story by Mira Avrech.  
Screenplay Norman Hudis and Charlie Drake.  
Comedy  
Source: Gifford (1973 (2001), 1978, 1998

*Professor Popper's Problem*[s]† (January, 1974).

'U' certificate.

Production Company: Mersey (CFF).

Produced by Roy Simpson.

Directed by Gerry O'Hara.

Story by Richard Loncraine.

Screenplay by Leo Maguire.

Children's television.

Source: Gifford (1973 (2001), 1978, 1998).

Serial: A film in 6 episodes: 1. 'Into the Unknown'. 2. 'Descent To Danger'. 3. 'The Monster'. 4. 'Pursued'. 5. 'Follow That Skate'. 6. 'The Magic Powder'.

\* 'Drake plays Professor P. Popper who invents reducing tablets which he 'accidentally' puts into his tea, shrinking himself and his kid assistants' Gifford (1978:88). The Professor tries to discover an antidote whilst trying to stop two crooks from stealing his formula.

† extra [s] added for American release.

Clip **YouTube**

*To See Such Fun* (1977).

Directed by Jon Scofield.

\* A documentary celebrating 80 years of British Comedians. Archive footage of Arthur Askey, Norman Wisdom, Charlie Drake and Kenneth Connor are included.

### **Television Index (chronologically arranged)**

*The Centre Show*, BBC 1, 7 July, 1953.

\* Drake television screen debut. He was an aspiring stand-up comic at the time.

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*Showcase*, BBC 2, new-talent show hosted by Benny Hill.

\* Drake appeared with Jack Edwardes on 24 May, 1954.

† Lewisohn (2002) notes, 'Charlie Drake, Terry Scott, Warren Mitchell, Norman Vaughan and Rolf Harris were among those given their TV 'break' in the Benny Hill-hosted editions of *Showcase*' (p. 446n).

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The following list of television programmes are taken directly from the TVTiP TV Times database.

\* Some names are spelt incorrectly on the index, but every effort has been made to correct them wherever possible. Source: TVTiP - *TVTimes* Project (September 1955-March 1985), <http://tvtip.bufvc.ac.uk>

Title: *Jigsaw*.

**TVTip**

Writers: Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes

Director: Robert Tronson

Producer: Michael Westmore

Writers: Charlie Drake

Jack Edwardes

Directors: Jonathan Alwyn, Daphne Shadwell

Broadcast Info: missing (see Lewisohn 2003:238).

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Title: *Mick and Montmorency*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: *Jobstoppers*

Broadcast Info: Friday, 30 September, 1955, 17:30 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Mick and Montmorency are looking for work. They are a willing pair, but they never seem able to keep a job for more than ten minutes. However, if they do not cover themselves in glory they are certainly always covered in soot, flour, whitewash or tomato soup.

Performers: Charlie Drake

Jack Edwardes

Year: 1955

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Title: *Mick and Montmorency*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: *Jobstoppers*

Broadcast Info: Friday, 7 October, 1955, 17:30 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Do you need your chimneys swept? Why not send for the grate pair Mick and Montmorency (Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes) and let them prove their sootability?

Sweep your chimneys? They'll sweep them right away...!

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1955

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Title: *Jobstoppers*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Friday, 14 October, 1955, 17:30 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Starring Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes, the television slapstick comedians as Mick and Montmorency.

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1955

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Title: *Jobstoppers*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Friday, 21 October, 1955, 17:50 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: With Charlie Drake and Jack Edwards as Mick and Montmorency. If you want your windows cleaned this week, send for Mick and Montmorency. They will make a really smashing job of it, although they find the work rather "painful".

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1955

Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Friday, 28 October, 1955, 17:30 (15 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: Starring Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency. Mick and Montmorency simply fall over themselves when they get a chance to become bakers.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1955

---

Title: *Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes* **TVTiP**  
Subtitle: *as Mick and Montmorency in Jobstoppers*  
Broadcast Info: Friday, 4 November, 1955, 17:30 (15 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: Unable to hold any job they take, Mick and Montmorency are setting themselves up as Grocers. Monty is very pleased about this - when it's "time for tea", he'll be able to sell it to himself.  
Year: 1955

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Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Friday, 18 November, 1955, 17:30 (15 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: If your pipes are leaking and you need a plumber they may not be able to stop the leak, but they'll have great fun trying.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1955

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Title: *Mick and Montmorency* **TVTiP**  
Subtitle: *Jobstoppers*  
Broadcast Info: Friday, 16 December, 1955, 17:20 (10 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: Watch Mick and Montmorency pack the Christmas parcels. If the label says "Unbreakable", don't worry - they'll break it!  
Performers: Charlie Drake  
Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1955

---

Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Friday 23 December, 1955, 17:20 (20 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency. Would Good King Wenceslas have ever looked out if he had known that Mick and Montmorency were going to sing about him? It's very doubtful.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1955

Title: *Mick and Montmorency*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: *Jobstoppers*

Broadcast Info: Tuesday 27 December, 1955, 17:30 (10 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: They have found jobs in a laundry. Let's hope they don't get into hot water.

Performer: Charlie Drake

Jack Edwardes

Year: 1955

---

Title: *Jobstoppers*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 3 January, 1956, 17:25 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: They try their hand at repairing Big Ben, and almost succeed in making Time stand still.

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

---

Title: *Jobstoppers*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 10 January, 1956, 17:15 (10 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: This week they have obtained jobs as carpenters and they show how easy the job is, if only you will hit the nail on the head.

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

---

Title: *Jobstoppers*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 17 January, 1956, 17:30 (10 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: This week they are zoologists in darkest Africa. Let's hope that Mick manages to bring Monty back alive!

Director: Jonathan Alwyn

Settings: Frank Gillman

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

---

Title: *Jobstoppers*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Tuesday 24 January, 1956, 17:30 (10 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency. The Captain made his biggest mis-stoke when he signed on these two as stokers!

Performer: Charlie Drake

Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 31 January, 1956, 17:35 (10 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: As garage hands, they show this week how to fix a car so that it never takes the road again.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956

---

Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday 7, February, 1956, 17:33 (9 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: This week they are Policemen, and the Long Arm of the Law tries to keep the Short Arm of the Law out of trouble.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956

---

Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 14 February, 1956, 17:31 (10 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: This week they are potholers - and, as usual, they find themselves in a hole, but this time it is deep underground.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956

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Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 21 February, 1956, 17:08 (22 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency take viewers to the British Industries Fair at Earls Court, to see a few of the exciting things on view.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956

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Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday 10 April, 1956, 17:15 (15 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency are all at sea in the Navy.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956

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Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday 17 April, 1956, 17:15 (15 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: This week they are TV aerial fitters, and as usual, they are totally unfitted to be aerialists.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956

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Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 24 April, 1956, 17:15 (15 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: This week they join the Foreign Legion, and, as usual, their troubles are legion, too.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956  
Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion Network

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Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 1 May, 1956, 17:15 (15 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: This week they are removal men - and they certainly push things around a lot.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956  
Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion Network

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Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 8 May, 1956, 17:45 (10 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: This week they are Royal Canadian Mounted police. Mounties always "get their man" but Mick and Montmorency run into endless trouble living up to this maxim.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956  
Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion Network

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Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 15 May, 1956, 17:45 (10 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: They get into more trouble this week in their search for the ideal job.  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956  
Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion Network

Title: *Jobstoppers*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 22 May, 1956, 17:45 (10 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: This week, as detectives, they are as clueless as ever.

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

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Title: *Jobstoppers*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 29 May, 1956, 17:40 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: This week they are balloonists but, unfortunately, they fail to realise that the sky's the limit.

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

---

Title: *Jobstoppers*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 5 June, 1956, 17:55 (approx.)

Channel: ITV

Description: This week they go to work in a chocolate factory. The ideal job? Yes - but of course they come to a sticky end.

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

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Title: *Jobstoppers*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 12 June, 1956, 17:30 (approx.)

Channel: ITV

Description: Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency - the Two Musketeers. There used to be Three Musketeers, but our heroes have always believed in the old saying. "Two's Company, Three's a Crowd." However, even two's a crowd where these two are concerned.

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion Network

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Title: *Jobstoppers*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 19 June, 1956, 17:30 (approx.)

Channel: ITV

Description: Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency. This week they are doing the job you wanted them to do. You've asked for it - and you've got it.

Director: Jonathan Alwyn

Settings: John Emery

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956

---

Title: *Jobstoppers* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 26 June, 1956, 17:30 (approx.)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency. This week they are the key men of the locksmiths. Love laughs at locksmiths, and so does everybody else.  
Director: Jonathan Alwyn  
Settings: John Emery  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956

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Title: *Mick & Montmorency* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 3 July, 1956, 17:30 (approx.)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: The tent is up, the tent pegs are in, and the guys - well, of course, they're Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes, because this week Mick and Montmorency are going camping.  
Director: Jonathan Alwyn  
Settings: John Emery  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956

---

Title: *Mick and Montmorency* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 10 July, 1956, 17:30 (approx.)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency are trying their hand at being Secret Agents, and they're all at sixes and sevens in MI5.  
Director: Jonathan Alwyn  
Settings: John Emery  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1956

---

Title: *Mick and Montmorency* **TVTiP**  
Subtitle: Ice Cream Vendors  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 17 July, 1956, 17:30 (approx.)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: With Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency. When they scream "Ice Cream", you'll scream.  
Director: Jonathan Alwyn  
Settings: Frank Nerini  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes



Year: 1956

---

Title: *Mick and Montmorency*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 31 July, 1956, 17:28 (approx.)

Channel: ITV

Description: With Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency, set off on their summer holidays.

Director: Jonathan Alwyn

Settings: Frank Nerini

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

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Title: *Mick and Montmorency*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: It's Teatime

Broadcast Info: Friday, 21 September, 1956, 17:45 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes, as Mick and Montmorency, return to the studio and invite Jimmy Hanley to tea.

Settings: John Emery

Director: Jonathan Alwyn

Performer: Jimmy Hanley

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

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*Tess and Jim*, BBC, standup, 3x60mins, b/w, 29 September-24 November 1956, monthly, mostly Saturdays, 9pm.

Main cast: Tessie O'Shea, Jimmy Wheeler, Charlie Drake.

Writers: Sid Colin/Talbot Rothwell.

Producer: George Inns.

'A short series screened under the 'Saturday Comedy Hour' banner', Lewisohn (2003:754).

---

Title: *Mick and Montmorency*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Friday, 5 October, 1956, 17:15 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: If you wanted a plumber, would you plumb for Mick and Montmorency?

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

---

Title: *Mick and Montmorency*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Friday, 19 October, 1956, 17:15 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Today they take up tennis, and teach you how to improve your service with a smile.

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

---

Title: *Jolly Good Time*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: Jim Whittington and His Sea lion [television film]

Broadcast Info: Wednesday, 26 December, 1956, 17:00 (55 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: A super-colossal extravaganza in ten many magnificent scenes. Written by mistake by Peter Ling. With music by accident by Eric Spear and a cast of thousands as town folk, country folk, hostile kippers, etc. Unmusical accompaniment by Eric Spear. Upsettings by Stancliff Langtry. Misdirected by Roger Jenkins.

Music: Eric Spear

Writer: Peter Ling

Director: Roger Jenkins

Settings: Stancliff Langtry

Cast: The Demon King: Rolf Harris

Idle Montmorency: Charlie Drake

Michaela, the Cook: Jack Edwardes

The Fairy Queen: Dorothy Smith

Snoozy [the sea lion] (by arrangement): Woolf Goldberg

Alice Fitzwarren: Muriel Young

Jim Whittington: Jimmy Hanley

Year: 1956

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Title: *Mick and Montmorency*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Friday, 28 December, 1956, 17:15 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency. Today they are parcel packers, but perhaps it might have been better if they had been sent packing.

Director: Jonathan Alwyn

Designer: John Emery

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1956

Production Company: An Associated-Rediffusion Network Production

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Title: *Jolly Good Time*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: The Truth Game

Broadcast Info: Thursday, 3 January, 1957, 17:00 (60 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Tell the truth or take the consequences. Barry Baker asks a celebrity some searching questions.

Charlie Drake and Jack Edwardes as Mick and Montmorency in 'The Painters'. Once again they try their hand at house painting, and once again the job proves too much for them.

Director: Jonathan Alwyn  
Settings: John Emery  
Performer: Barry Baker  
Presenter: Jimmy Hanley  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwards  
Year: 1957

---

*Laughter in Store*, BBC, sitcom, 1 x 30 mins, b/w, 3 January, 1957, Thursday 7:45pm.

Writers: George Wadmore, Charlie Drake.

Producer: George Inns.

\*'After serving his apprenticeship in Children's Television, Charlie Drake was asked by the BBC's Head of Light Entertainment, Ronnie Waldman, to come up with a half-hour comedy idea for a later slot. This single-episode production, with fellow funny folk Charlie Hawtrey and Irene Handl, was the result', Lewisohn (2003:239).

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Title: *Jolly Good Time*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: Mick The Magician

Broadcast Info: Friday, 11 January, 1957, 17:00 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Mick tries his hand at magic with disastrous results.

Director: Jonathan Alwyn

Designer: John Emery

Presenter: Jimmy Hanley

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwards

Year: 1957

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Title: *Mick and Montmorency*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: Window-Cleaners

Broadcast Info: Friday, 18 January, 1957, 17:15 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: As window cleaners they are at great "panes" to have a smashing time.

Director: Jonathan Alwyn

Performers: Charlie Drake

Jack Edwards

Year: 1957

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Title: *Mick and Montmorency*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: Gardeners

Broadcast Info: Friday, 25 January, 1957, 17:15 (15 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: This week as gardeners they get well dug in to their new job.

Director: Jonathan Alwyn

Designer: John Emery

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1957  
Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion Network

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Title: *Mick and Montmorency* **TVTiP**  
Subtitle: Chimney Sweeps  
Broadcast Info: Friday, 1 February, 1957, 17:00  
Channel: ITV  
Description: As chimney sweeps they certainly get some black looks.  
Director: Jonathan Alwyn  
Settings: John Emery  
Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake  
Montmorency: Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1957  
Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion Network

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Title: *Mick and Montmorency* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Friday, 8 February, 1957, 17:15 (15 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: They are nearly burglar catchers, but a burglar nearly catches them.  
Director: Jonathan Alwyn  
Designer: John Emery  
Performers: Charlie Drake  
Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1957  
Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion Network

---

Title: *Mick and Montmorency* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Friday, 15 February, 1957, 17:15 (15 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: This week they are wall painters, and get themselves into a mess as usual.  
Director: Jonathan Alwyn  
Settings: John Emery  
Performer: Charlie Drake  
Jack Edwardes  
Year: 1957  
Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion Network

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*Pantomamia: The Babes in the Wood*, BBC, 1957  
\* Drake appears as one of the performers

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*Drake's Progress*, (1957-1958), sketch, BBC, 2 series, 12 episodes. See Lewisohn (2003:239)

---

Title: *Let's Get Together*

TVTiP

Broadcast Info: Friday, 25 April, 1958, 17:00 (25 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Artists and Redvers Kyle with another Quick-fire Quiz.

Designer: Jim Nicolson

Director: Prudence Nesbitt

Performer: Redvers Kyle

Cast: Mick: Charlie Drake

Montmorency: Jack Edwardes

Year: 1958

Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion Network

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Title: *Let's Get Together*

TVTiP

Broadcast Info: Friday, 23 May, 1958, 17:00 (25 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: With Jack Edwardes and Charlie Drake as Mick and Montmorency in hot water as usual.

Designer: Jim Nicolson

Director: Prudence Nesbitt

Performer: Charlie Drake

Jack Edwardes

Redvers Kyle

Year: 1958

Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion Network

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*Laughter in Store*, 3 January 1957.

\*'Ronnie Waldman, head of light entertainment at the BBC, offered Drake a one-off try-out in grown-up time and the half hour show was such a slap-bang success that a full-blown series of six was started on 6 May [...] Sadly the tall stalwart Jack Edwardes was nowhere to be seen. That particular partnership had been suddenly dissolved', Gifford, D. 'Charlie Drake' obituary, *The Independent*, Tuesday, 26 December 2006.

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*Drake's Progress*, BBC, sketch, 1957-1958.

'A sign of TV success in the 1950s was to have a show title that incorporated your surname, usually in some awful pun: Ted Ray had *Ray's A Laugh*, Norman Wisdom had *Wit And Wisdom*...the diminutive comic had finally established himself' (Lewisohn 2003:239).

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*The Charlie Drake Show*, ITV (ATV), sketch/standup, 1 x 60 mins, b/w, 31 Aug, 1958, Sun 8.30pm. See (Lewisohn 2003:239).

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*Charlie Drake In...* BBC 1, sitcom, 1958-1960. 4 series, 21 episodes, 2 Christmas Specials part of *Christmas Night With The Stars*, 25 December, 1958 **BFI**<sup>315</sup>

\* **Radio Times** Nov 7, 1958 issue

Tonight 'Charlie Drake In...The Patriotic Singer.' The First Of A new Series†.

Television listings: Nov 11

7.25 News Summary

7.30 Charlie Drake In...The Patriotic Singer. C: Geoffrey Summer, Peter Haigh, Gerard Heinz, Harry Towb, Ewan MacDuff, Jack Cunningham, Colin Croft, Pete Sugden, Ian Parsons, David Butler, The George Mitchell Singers. D; Richard Henry.

8.0 Hermione Baddeley with Doreen Aris in 'Air Mail From Cyprus' by Willis Hall. P: Peter Dews.

† IMDb does not list 'The Patriotic Singer' as an episode at all. It lists 'The Siberian Sandwiper' as episode 1, and episode 5 is untitled. Neither have they a list of cast and crew.

**Radio Times** Nov 14, 1958 issue

Television listings: 18 Nov, Tuesday

7.25 News Summary

7.30 Charlie Drake In...The Clapper Boy

C: Mark Singleton, Joanne Dainton, Otto Diamant, Peter Haigh, Ralph Tovey, Mark Baker, Robert Mackenzie, Herbert Nelson, Murray Kash, Stuart Nichol, Diane MacMillan, Barry Shawzin, S: Dave Freeman and Charlie Drake, p. 15

8.0 Dora Bryan in scenes from 'Living Pleasure', a new revue. Lyrics and sketches by Arthur Macrae [cast includes Lynda Baron]. Televised direct from the Garrick Theatre, London. [pic] Dora Bryan in 'jollijaunts,' a number from the new revue at the Garrick Theatre, London. p15.

**Radio Times** Nov 21, 1958 issue

Television listings: Nov 25, Tue

7.25 News Summary

7.30 Charlie Drake In...Granddad was a Wrestler. The Third in a new series of weekly adventures written by Dave Freeman and Charlie Drake. P: Ernest Maxin

8.0 Donald Pleasance and Siân Phillips in 'Granite' by Clemence Dane. [costume drama set on the island of Lundy], p.15.

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*Six-Five Special*, BBC, season 1, episode 94, 1958, 6.5pm.

\***Radio Times** Nov 28, 1958 issue

'Off The Record. Listening to Housewives Choice the other day with only half an ear, we were surprised to hear the compère suddenly addressing his vast unseen audience, with a strictly informal "Hullo my darlings." It turned out to be, however, only Charlie Drake on the latest of his records which brings us to the little man's appearance this week on the Six-Five

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<sup>315</sup> The BFI archive holdings contain the following episodes from *Charlie Drake In...* (a series of comedy plays): Series 1: 11/11/1958, 09/12/1958, 5 x 30min (Tues). Series 2: 07/04/1959, 05/05/1959, 5 x 30min (Tues). Series 3: 18/11/1959, 30/12/1959, 7 x 30min (Wed). Series 4: 07/07/1960, 04/08/1960, 5 x 30min (Thurs), and the short special part of *Christmas Night With The Stars*, 25 Dec, 1959.

Special. Although, as many viewers know, Charlie is at present engaged on Tuesday nights in a series of hilarious adventures, he is taking time off on Saturday to hop aboard the old Six-Five and show something of his other side, that of an up-and-coming recording artist. Also in the programme will be Andy and the Bay Sisters, making their first television appearance in Europe during their London season of cabaret, and before they go to LA. Although they were born in New York, the two sisters, with brother Andy at the piano, can sing in Hebrew, Italian, Spanish, French and Arabic, as well as Irish and welsh accents.' (p.4).

Dec 6, Sat

6.5 Six-Five Special with Jim Dale, p 23.

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**Radio Times** Nov 28, 1958 issue [pic p.15]

Dec 2, 1958, Charlie Drake In...The Man Who Went for the Milk. Tonight's stirring human drama.

Television listings: Dec 2

7.25 News Summary

7.30 Charlie Drake In...The Man Who Went for the Milk

C: Harry Towb, Sam Kydd, Thomas Gallagher, Ewan MacDuff, Pamela Beckman, Jacques Cey, S: Dave Freeman, Charlie Drake, P: Ernest Maxin, [pic p.4]

8.00 Television Playwright presents Jacques Gillies, 'A Bouquet for the President'. Set in the capital of South American republic, tonight's play brings Will Faraday, an engineering salesman into the midst of a violent political conflict, in fact, when the immediate future of the republic rests in his hands, and the question is - can he rise to the occasion?

**Radio Times** Dec 5, 1958 issue [pic p.13]

Television listings: Dec 9

7.25 News Summary

7.30 Charlie Drake In...Siberian Sandwiper

C: Ronny Brody, Czeslaw Grocholski, Gisela Birke, Paul Bogdan S: Dave Freeman, Charlie Drake, D: Richard Henry, P: Ernest Maxin]

8.00 'Incident At Echo Six' [drama] 'A story of National Servicemen in Cyprus...written by Troy Kennedy Martin, P: Gilchrist Calder].

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*Christmas Night With The Stars*, 25 December, Thursday, 1958, 6.25pm

\*'David Nixon hosts seasonal variety programme with stars Vera Lynn, Tony Hancock...Nixon (intro), Charlie Chester (patter and Xmas jokes) joined by Eric Grier, the George Mitchell singers & TV Toppers (for seasonal song melody involving throwing "snowballs" at audience c/w audience throwing them back), Nixon (hair restorer joke), introduces Beverley Sisters (who sing "Left Right"), Nixon (Christmas card jokes), intro Charlie Drake (performs carol singer sketch, slapstick involves being thrown through windows), Nixon intro Perry Como with Ray Charles singers (sings "Home for the Holidays"), Ted Ray and Kenneth Connor (patient and doctor in casualty ward at Christmas sketch)'. Source: BBC Information & Archives. Research gateway tv & radio. Programme number: LLV5184S. Category: LONPROG. Catalogue number: 238936 MMVI <http://www.bbc.co.uk/informationandarchives/faqs.html> [Accessed 10/12/2008]

Title: *Val Parnell's Sunday Night at The London Palladium*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: *Sleeping Beauty*

Broadcast Info: Sunday, 22 March, 1959, 20:00 (60 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: From the stage of The London Palladium Highlights from the magnificent pantomime 'The Sleeping Beauty' (currently at the London Palladium). The terrific cast includes: Charlie Drake, Edmund Hockridge, Bernard Bresslaw, Patricia Lambert and Bruce Forsyth.

Book by Phil Park and David Croft

Songs by Phil Park, David Croft and Cyril Ornadel

Choreography by George Carden

Decor by Edward Delany and Tod Kingman

Costumes designed and executed by R. St John Roper

Presented by Val Parnell

Devised and produced by Robert Nesbitt

Produced for television by Albert Locke

(Charlie Drake appears by permission of the BBC)

An ATV Network Production

Producer: (For television) Albert Locke

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*Christmas Night With The Stars*, BBC, 25 December 1959, Friday, 6.20pm.

\*Charlie Drake, The Black & White Minstrels, Jimmy Edwards, David Hughes, Jimmy Logan, Joan Regan.

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Title: *Make A Date*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Saturday, 26 March, 1960, 18:30 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: With your host Ernest Maxin and his Orchestra. This week's guests are Jill Day, Cedric Monarch<sup>316</sup> and also an interview with Charlie Drake.

Dancers: Jean Deeks, Pauline Innes, Hazel Johns, Merle Lee, Louis Conrad, Geraldine Jordan [aka Jeraldine Jordan]

Charlie Drake appears by courtesy of BBC Television

Orchestral Leader: Alec Firman

Director: Janice Willett

Designer: Bob Fuerst

Producer: Ernest Maxin

Performers: Anna Neagle

Maria Pavlou

Pauline Innes

Toni Dalli

Ernest Maxin and his Orchestra

Cedric Monarch

Jean Deeks

Hazel Johns

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<sup>316</sup> Cedric Monarch alias Les Henry



Merle Lee

Year: 1960

Production Company: ABC Television Network

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Title: *The Royal Variety Performance*

**TVTIP**

Broadcast Info: Sunday, 22 May, 1960, 20:00 (150 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: In the presence of Her Majesty the Queen and HRH. The Duke of Edinburgh at the Victoria Palace, London, on May 16.

Presented by Jack Hylton

(In aid of Variety Artistes Benevolent Fund and Institution: Organising Secretary, Arthur Scott).

The Victoria Palace Orchestra under the direction of Billy Ternent and Jack Ansell.

The show directed by Charles Henry under the personal supervision of Jack Hylton

Director: Bill Ward

Orchestra under the direction of Jack Ansell, Billy Ternent

Show directed by: Charles Henry

Performers: Hughie Green

Liberace

Charlie Drake

Robert Horton

Alma Cogan

Billy Cotton and his Band

Norman Wisdom

The Tiller Girls

Teddy Johnson

Pearl Carr

Marion Ryan

Max Bygraves

Joan Regan

Dickie Valentine

Bruce Forsyth

Anne Shelton

Hattie Jacques

Ronnie Hilton

Alfred Marks

Russ Conway

Dennis Lotis

Vera Lynn

Bob Monkhouse

Frankie Howerd

Harry Worth

Ronnie Carroll

Glen Mason

Benny Hill

Diana Dors

Sheila Buxton

Shirley Eaton

Lonnie Donegan

The Crazy Gang  
Yana<sup>317</sup>  
Janette Scott  
Ivor Emmanuel  
Gary Miller  
The Ken-Tones  
Bryan Johnson  
The John Barry Seven  
The Vernons Girls  
Jackie Rae  
Cliff Richard  
Millicent Martin  
Sonia Rees  
Dickie Dawson  
Al Burnett  
The Lynton Boys  
Adam Faith  
The Croft Twins  
Nat 'King' Cole  
Sammy Davis Jr.  
Jimmy Edwards  
The Fol-de-Rols  
Sheila Holt  
Tom Gilles  
Kazbek and Zari  
The Silhouettes  
Welsh Children's Choir  
The Victoria Palace Orchestra

Presenter: Jack Hylton

Year: 1960

Production Company: ATV Network

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*Charlie Drake's Christmas Show*, BBC, 1960.

'A 45-minute compilation of the best moments from the *Charlie Drake In...* series' Lewisohn (2003:239).

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*The Charlie Drake Show*, (1960-1961), sitcom, BBC, 3 series, 12 episodes. See Lewisohn (2003:239).

\* **Radio Times** Nov 12 1960 issue [pics Drake in Top hat & Tails pp. 54 & 55]

Charlie Drake Show

New Series

How d'you do, my dears...Charlie Drake's new series...It is called – topically enough – The Take Over Bid, and in it the loveable little man will be venturing into the world of the financial giants – it includes one of Charlie's brilliant slapstick sequences. Charlie was in fine

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<sup>317</sup> Yana (Pamella Guard).

fettle when we talked to him about his new series the other day back in London after his appearance in a summer show at Great Yarmouth. "This time," he tells us, "we are going to present our view of some of the problems and frustrations of life in 1960, contending with hire purchase and insurance policies, for instance; trying to win the Premium Bonds, or a few pounds at the races." Charlie has a lot of sympathy with the small punter. He loves racing and spent a lot of time at Newmarket during the summer – "losing most of the money I was earning at Yarmouth!" There will be six weekly programmes in the new series, and at Christmas time a selection from the best shows Charlie has done over the past seven years. Then in January he goes to the United States to appear on television, p. 55

Television listings: Nov 25

7.30 R.C.M.P. Stories of the Mounties [cowboys & Indians]

A film series starring Gilles Pelletier as Cpl. Jacques Gagnier

Dir: Paul Almond

7.55 The Charlie Drake Show – 'The Take-Over Bid'

8.25 Barnaby Rudge

Charles Dickens by Michael Voysey

Dir: Morris Barry

Cast: Esmond Knight (Dennis), Barbara Hicks (Miss Miggs), John Wood (Barnaby)

### **Radio Times** Nov 24 1960 issue

Television listings:

Dec 2

7.30 R.C.M.P.

Film series

7.55 The Charlie Drake Show – 'The Man Who Could Dream Winners'

Cast: Michael Balfour, Howard Lang

Design: Fred Knapman

Prod: Ronald Marsh

8.25 The Friday Show

Starring: Eve Boswell

With: Paddy Roberts, Lionel Blair, The George Mitchell Singers

Dir: Yvonne Littlewood

Prod: Dennis Main Wilson

9.0 Barnaby Rudge, p. 57

### **Radio Times** Dec 1 1960 issue

Television listings: Dec 9

7.30 R.C.M.P.

7.55 The Charlie Drake Show – 'The Siege of Cyril Street'

Cast: Michael Ward, Michael Balfour, Charlotte Mitchell

Design: Frederick Knapman

Prod: Ronald Marsh

8.25 Barnaby Rudge, p. 57

### **Radio Times** Dec 8 1960 issue [pic p. 57]

Television listings:

Dec 16

7.55 The Charlie Drake Show – 'Love Locked Out'

Cast: Cameron Hall, Noel Hood, Victor Platt, Edna Morris, Audrey Nicholson, John Fitzgerald

Design: Frederick Knapman  
Prod: Ronald Marsh  
8.25 The Friday Show  
Presenting George Formby, p. 57

**Radio Times** Dec 15 1960 issue [pic p. 53]

A Christmas Carol

Charlie Drake

Charlie Drake's version of A Christmas Carol...Charlie of course, falls naturally into the role of the meek, long-suffering Bob Cratchit

Television listings: Dec 23

7.29 Headline news

7.30 The Charlie Drake Show

Cast: Philip Locke (Scrooge)

Fred Stone (First gentleman)

Kenneth Thornett (Second Gentleman)

Jennifer Browne (Nancy)

Howard Lang (Bill Sykes)

Kenneth Gouge (David Copperfield)

Edwin Richfield (Mr. Murdstone)

Lloyd Pearson (Mr. Pickwick)

Marjory Hawtrey (Miss Havisham)

Frazer Hines (Nicolas Nickleby)

Austin Trevor (Mr. Micawber)

Martin Benson (Fagin)

Peter Delmar (The Artful Dodger)

Hennie Scott (Oliver Twist)

William Lyon Brown (Ghost of Jacob Marley)

Script: Waring

Design: Fred Knapman

Prod: Ronald Marsh

**Radio Times** Mar 16 1961 issue

7.30 Out of the fast car tripped a cherub in a zip-fastened wind-cheater and a squelchy khaki cotton hat floating on a froth of golden curls. "It's Charlie Drake!" Two girls passing by had spotted him even in those five swift seconds before we smuggled him into the building for photographing. 'Phew' said Mr Charles Edward Drake. He's rocketed straight from his Thames side house at Weybridge to try on the uniform for The World of Charlie Frazer –first episode in new series – Charles is a uniformed member of a security force of an unspecified secret establishment...

"This time I'm out for adventure; I'm through with cosy domestic stuff."

Uniformed and whistled, Charlie snaked warily along the side of a brick wall as the camera clicked. Office windows opposite were packed with waving typists. He waved back. "Hullo, my darlings," he said.

Report: Ernest Thomson, p. 47

Television listing: Mar 23

7.29 Headline News

7.30 The Charlie Drake Show – 'The World of Charlie Frazer'

Cast: Carl Bernard, Victor Platt, Hugh Lloyd, Robert Percival, Charlotte Mitchell, Stuart Saunders, Michael Peake, Tutte Lemkow, Jay Denyer, Michael Greenwood, Michael Ward.

Prod: Ronald Marsh  
Incidental music: Rabinowitz  
8.0 Yacht On The High Seas  
Film drama  
Dir: Ted Post  
Starring: Gary Merrill, Nina Foch, p. 49

**Radio Times** Mar 23 1961 issue  
Television listings: Mar 30  
7.29 Headline News  
7.30 The Charlie Drake Show – ‘Charlie The Kid’  
Cast: Eileen Way, Audrey Nicholson, Robert Mackenzie, Murray Kash, Cal McCord, Michael Henry, Frank Finlay, Michael Balfour  
Design: Knapman  
Prod: Marsh  
Incidental music: Rabinowitz  
8.0 Town Vet  
A dramatised documentary by Allen Prior  
Prod: David E. Rose, p. 49

**Radio Times** Mar 30 1961 issue  
Television listings: Apr 6  
7.29 Headline News  
7.30 The Charlie Drake – ‘The Man Who Blew Himself Up’  
Cast: Pat Coombs, Sam Kydd, Richard Caldicot, Howard Lang, Robert Percival, Jay Denyer  
Design: Knapman  
Prod: Marsh  
Incidental music: Rabinowitz  
8.0 The Little Key  
A play by Marian Hemar set in war-time London. Starring: Paul Daneman. With: Mary Webster. Prod: Michael Hayes, p. 49

**Radio Times** April 6 1961 issue [pic Charlie in jester garb, p. 45]  
How does Charlie Drake find himself in the court of King Canute – and, having found himself there, how does he succeed in staying? p. 45  
Television listings: Apr 13  
7.29 Headline News  
7.30 The Charlie Drake Show – ‘Jester Minute’  
8.0 After The Crash  
A dramatised documentary by Wilfred Greatorex  
Prod: Alan Sheath

**Radio Times** Apr 13 1961 issue [pic p.49]  
Television listings: Apr 20  
7.29 Headline News  
7.30 The Charlie Drake Show – ‘Nine Little White Men’  
Cast: Michael Peake, Michael Balfour, Arthur Goulet, Mark Singleton, Tessa Davies, William Lyon Brown  
Design: Knapman  
Prod: Marsh

Incidental music: Rabinowitz

Charlie Drake sets out on a bird-watching expedition at 7.30 – a quiet beginning to another spine-chilling adventure, p. 49

8.0 Big Time by J. Macready

Prod: Dan Taylor

Jimmy, Terry and Ricky are not exactly juvenile delinquents; it's just that they would rather be...

**Radio Times** Apr 20 1961 issue [pic p. 49]

Television listings: Apr 27

7.29 Headline News

7.30 The Charlie Drake Show – 'A Thousand And One Frights'

A modern version of a famous classic.

8.0 The Kantanga Tribal Dancers

A programme of authentic dances from Bahemba, Makushi & Baluba tribes.

**Radio Times** Oct 19, 1961 issue [pic p.31]

Television listings – [pic p.33]

Tonight in Bingo Madness\*

In the next six weeks Charlie will be bouncing across the screen in such guises as a rodent operative, a visitor to a stately home, and a little man with an eye on the bank at Monte Carlo. 'The last show in the series will be a solo mime piece in which I shan't say a word for the entire half-hour. It's going to be a tough one,' he adds with relish: 'Some very tricky slapstick indeed – Been working on it for months.'

Television listings: Oct 24

7.30 PLAY YOUR HUNCH

The Show to keep you guessing.

Introduced by Jack Jackson

With Barry Craine, Julie Alexander, The XYZ Band

Prod: Stewart Morris & Bill Cotton, JNR

8.0 The Charlie Drake Show – Bingo Madness

The meticulous master of slapstick comes bouncing back tonight – television's indestructible little man Charlie Drake....Tonight in Bingo Madness [Charlie] once again plays the unlucky little man (I was raised on condensed milk) who tries so hard and always gets lumbered in the end. \*This was a prophetic announcement. The show (and the series) ended after the first transmission when Drake had a bad accident after a stunt went wrong (A clip of 'Charlie Drake's accident 1961' has been uploaded by WhirligigTV on **YouTube**)

8.30 A FOR ANDROMEDA

A science-fiction thriller in seven episodes. By Fred Hoyle & John Elliot. Starring Esmond Knight (Prof. Reinhart), Mary Morris (Prof. Dawnay). With Peter Halliday (John Fleming), Patricia Kneale (Judy Adamson). Introducing: Julie Christie (Christine). Prod: Michael Hayes & Norman James.

Episode 4. The Monster

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"This Is Your Life" tx. 11 December, 1961 (Season 7, Episode 11).

\* stills from the show are included in *Drake's Progress* (1986, between pp. 118-119).

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*Comedy Playhouse*, 'A Clerical Error', BBC 1, Friday 5 April, 1963.

\*Drake appears postscript as 'The Weeks Good Cause on TV' as Rear Admiral Sir Brian Granville Drake making an appeal on behalf of the National Fund For The Resettlement of Distressed Lighthouse Keepers.

See The British Comedy Guide: [http://www.comedy.co.uk/guide/group/comedy\\_playhouse/](http://www.comedy.co.uk/guide/group/comedy_playhouse/)

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Title: *The Charlie Drake Show*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Saturday 28 Sep 1963, 20:25 (35 mins)

Channel: ITV

Producer: Colin Clews

Presenter: Charlie Drake

Year: 1963

Production Company: ATV Network Production

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Title: *The Charlie Drake Show*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Saturday, 5 October, 1963, 20:25 (35 mins)

Channel: ITV

Devised: Charlie Drake

Producer: Colin Clews

Designer: Eric Shedden

Choreography: Roy Gunson

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Script: Lewis Schwarz

Cast: Albert and Les Ward, Jack Parnell and his Orchestra, Hugh Morton, Mark Singleton, Ronnie Brody, Kaplan Kaye, The Eight Charlies, The Square Pegs, Chris Rayburn, The Skylons, Gwen and Tony Raine, Olivia Hussey, Michael Wennink.

Year: 1963

Production Company: ATV Network

---

Title: *The Charlie Drake Show*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Saturday, 12 October, 1963, 20:25 (35 mins)

Channel: ITV

Producer: Colin Clews

Year: 1963

Production Company: ATV Network

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Title: *The Charlie Drake Show*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Saturday, 19 October, 1963, 20:25 (35 mins)

Channel: ITV

Producer: Colin Clews

Presenter: Charlie Drake

Year: 1963

Production Company: ATV Network

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Title: *The Charlie Drake Show*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Saturday, 26 October, 1963, 20:25 (35 mins)

Channel: ITV  
Producer: Colin Clews  
Presenter: Charlie Drake  
Year: 1963  
Production Company: ATV Network

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Title: *The Charlie Drake Show*  
Broadcast Info: Saturday, 2 November, 1963, 20:25 (35 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Producer: Colin Clews  
Presenter: Charlie Drake  
Year: 1963  
Production Company: ATV Network

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**TVTiP**

*Juke Box Jury*, panel show, BC 1, 6 June 1964.

\*Drake is a panel guest. Only Dianna Dors is listed on IMDb. Panellists Bunny Lewis and Jessie Mathews are also missing from the cast list. See BBC Photo Library images below.

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*The Worker*, sitcom, ITV (ATV), 1965-1970, 4 series, 26 episodes. See Lewisohn (2003:240). The British Comedy Guide includes a synopsis of each episode.

[http://www.comedy.co.uk/guide/tv/the\\_worker/](http://www.comedy.co.uk/guide/tv/the_worker/)

---

*The New Palladium Show*†, ATV/ITV, variety show, 21 November, 1965.

\*Drake appears [information missing on IMDb, UCLA Film and Television Archive and the Classic TV Archive website [http://ctva.biz/UK/ATV/Palladium\\_11\\_\(1965-66\).htm](http://ctva.biz/UK/ATV/Palladium_11_(1965-66).htm)]

† The show took over from *Val Parnell's Sunday Night at the London Palladium*. It was compèred by the fresh, likeable young standup comedian Jimmy Tarbuck and new comic sensations Peter Cook and Dudley Moore who were breaking through with *Not Only...But Also* series on the BBC.

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*The Battersea Miracle*, ABC Armchair Theatre, ITV (ATV), drama, Saturday 26 March, 1966, 10:30-11.00pm. Based on a play written for television by Wolf Mankowitz. Produced and directed by Shaun O'Riordan.

\* Billed as 'A Season of comedy' this was Drake's first foray into drama. He plays Joey a clown who discovers that one of his pet fleas Pete can not just talk but is a philosopher who wants to preach love and peace to mankind, so he puts him in a loud speaker to tell the whole world.

---

Title: *The London Palladium Show*†  
\*Drake appears with Henry McGee  
† Often billed as *The New London Palladium Show*  
Subtitle: Direct from the World's Most Famous Variety Theatre  
Broadcast Info: Sunday, 9 January, 1966, 20:25 (60 mins)  
Channel: ITV

**TVTiP**



Executive Producer: Val Parnell  
Script writer: Charlie Drake  
Producer: Colin Clews  
Dance Direction: Pamela Devis  
Designer: Bill McPherson  
Presenter: Jimmy Tarbuck  
Cast: Henry McGee, The Square Pegs  
Full Supporting Company the London Palladium Dancers:  
Jack Parnell and his Orchestra  
Year: 1966  
Production Company: ATV Presentation

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*Who Is Sylvia?* Tagline: 'A Love Story In Seven Parts', sitcom, ITV (ATV), 1 series, 7 episodes, 30 mins, Saturday 11 February – Saturday 25 March 1967, 8.55pm.

\* Drake is Charles Rameses Drake, a man searching for his perfect partner with the help of Mrs. Proudpiece (Kathleen Byron) at the marriage guidance bureau. Scripts by Drake and Donald Churchill. Producer / Director: Shaun O'Riordan.

[http://www.comedy.co.uk/guide/tv/who\\_is\\_sylvia/](http://www.comedy.co.uk/guide/tv/who_is_sylvia/)

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*The Charlie Drake Show*, sketch, BBC, 11 editions, 10 Dec 1967-28 April 1968. See Lewisohn (2003:240)

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*The World Of Charlie Drake*, BBC, sketch / variety, 35 mins, 14 April, 1968. Part of *The Charlie Drake Show*.

Producer: Ernest Maxin.

Writer: Charlie Drake.

Production Designer: John Burrowes.

Music Director: Arthur Wilkinson.

Performers: Henry McGee

Celestine Burden

Robert Fountain

The Ronettes

\**The Worker* renewed Charlie Drake's huge popularity, bringing about a return to the BBC, this time for colour programmes. One edition, shortened to 35 minutes and screened on 14 April 1968 as *The World Of Charlie Drake*, was the BBC's entry in that year's Montreux †Festival', (Lewisohn 2003: 240).

The '1812 Overture in E flat' sketch featuring Drake conducting and playing all the instruments in the orchestra won the Golden Rose of Montreux.

**YouTube**

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Title: *The Worker*

**TVTIP**

Subtitle: You Have Enjoyed the Sweets, Now You Must Suffer the Sours.

Broadcast Info: Monday, 5 January, 1970, 21:30 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Twenty thousand units of Bovidex 2C are missing and so is The Worker. Was it industrial sabotage...or the hand of the Kremlin?

Writers: Charlie Drake

Lew Schwarz  
Designer: Michael Bailey  
Producer: Shaun O'Riordan  
Musical Director: Derek Scott  
Director: Paul Annett  
Cast: Brownlow: Frederick Hall  
Mr. Pugh: Henry McGee  
Nurse Collins: Jennifer Browne  
Cropper: John Ringham  
Matron: Margaret Denyer  
Pringle: Windsor Davies  
Miss Gates: Geraldine Newman  
The Pacer: Malcolm Rogers  
Watt: Ellis Dale  
Doctor: Roger Brierley  
Tom: Robin Humphreys  
Jack: Bill Lyons  
Year: 1970  
Production Company: ATV Network

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Title: *The Worker*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: The Siege of Kidney Street

Broadcast Info: Monday, 12 January, 1970, 21:30 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: On Monday, police were called to a house in Kidney Street, East Walsham, where a workman engaged in demolition was reported to have gone berserk with a loaded blunderbuss.

Producer: Shaun O'Riordan

Writers: Charles Drake

Lew Schwarz

Musical Director: Derek Scott

Director: Paul Annett

Cast: The Worker: Charlie Drake

Paddy: Barry Keegan

Belltower: James Hayter<sup>318</sup>

Mr. Pugh: Henry McGee

Roger Pundit: Christopher Sandford<sup>319</sup>

Grayson: James Grout

Sandy: Roger Rowland

Aged man: Mick Dillon

Year: 1970

Production Company: ATV Network

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<sup>318</sup> James Hayter (sometimes mistakenly spelt Hoyter)

<sup>319</sup> Chris Sandford plays Dr. Schur in the TV mini-series *Freud* (1984).

Title: *The Worker*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: Now is the Time for All Left Legs

Broadcast Info: Monday, 19 January, 1970, 21:30 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: "Go now to the Ministry of technology. Enter by the rear door in Scully Lane, and ask for Department S," said Mr. Pugh, smiling sardonically. And The Worker did as he was bidden...

Designer: Michael Bailey

Writers: Charles Drake

Lew Schwarz

Director: Paul Annett

Producer: Shaun O'Riordan

Cast: The Worker: Charlie Drake

Copthorne: David Hutcheson

Mr. Pugh: Henry McGee

Colonel Playfair: Philip Stone

Receptionist: Jennie Paul

Mason: David Hargreaves

Blenkinsop: Robin Scott

Humphries: Sylvester Morand<sup>320</sup>

Professor Robinson: Geoffrey Palmer

Jenkins: Peter French

Crawford: Barry Meteyard

Hoskins: Patricia Maynard

Johnson: Roger Ferry

Brown: George Baizley

Toastmaster: Fred Berman

Welshman: Bill Burridge

Irishman: Pierce McAvoy

Scotsman: David Joyce

Year: 1970

Production Company: ATV Network

---

Title: *The Worker*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: When Adam Delved and Eve Span...

Broadcast Info: Monday, 26 January, 1970, 21:30 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: He was interrupted by a rude Oxford accent. "Right ho, chaps," it said, "We will put the cameras here." The Worker opened his eyes and there stood this Evening's ace reporter dressed in a pork pie hat and half a kangaroo skin.

Designer: Michael Bailey

Producer: Shaun O'Riordan

Writers: Charles Drake

Lew Schwarz

Musical Director: Derek Scott

Announcer: Christopher Coll

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<sup>320</sup> Sylvester Morand plays Jim in 'Hello Cobbler' (1969).

Director: Paul Annett  
Cast: The Worker: Charlie Drake  
Mr. Pugh: Henry McGee  
Robin: Noel Davis  
Studio manager: Peter Baldwin  
Year: 1970  
Production Company: ATV Network

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*"Looks Familiar"*, (1970-1987) ITV (Thames Television), Thursday, 10 April, 1980, 3.45pm.

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Title: *The Worker* (Series Two) **TVTiP**  
Subtitle: A Change is as Good as a Rest  
Broadcast Info: Thursday, 6 August, 1970, 21:00 (30 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: Mr. Pugh: "You have surpassed yourself, haven't you? Twenty-five years of my life I have dedicated to you. "I wanted to turn you into a pillar of the community." "I wanted to turn you into a respectable member of society." "I wanted most of all to turn you into a decent British working man. "And now you want to turn yourself into a lady!"  
Producer: Shaun O'Riordan  
Screenplay: Charles Drake  
Lew Schwarz  
Designer: Henry Graveney  
Musical Director: Derek Scott  
Film Editor: Colin Slade  
Cast: The Worker: Charlie Drake  
Paddy: Barry Keegan  
Mr. Pugh: Henry McGee  
Alphonse: Eugene Deckers  
Bus conductor: John Scott Martin  
Ethel: Fiona Kendall  
Beryl: Louise Sullivan  
Year: 1970  
Production Company: ATV Network

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Title: *The Worker* **TVTiP**  
Subtitle: Breed in for Speed, Breed Out for Stamina  
Broadcast Info: Thursday, 13 August, 1970, 21:00 (30 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Description: "I am not a tradesman, I am a common chimney sweep come about the mixing of the blood. Kindly inform her ladyship that I am available."  
Producer: Shaun O'Riordan  
Screenplay: Charles Drake  
Lew Schwarz  
Designer: Henry Graveney  
Film Editors: Michael Nunn  
Colin Slade  
Director: John Scholz-Conway

Cast: The Worker: Charlie Drake  
Butler: Willoughby Goddard  
Mr. Pugh: Henry McGee  
Her Ladyship: Kathleen Byron  
James: William Lyon Brown  
His Lordship: Nicholas Phipps  
Scrivens: Blake Butler  
Jacqueline: Jackie Afrique  
Bridget: Celestine Burden  
Gwendoline: Clare Lang

Year: 1970

Production Company: ATV Network

**BFI**

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Title: *The Worker*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: Cough

Broadcast Info: Thursday, 20 August, 1970, 21:00 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Mr. Pugh: "That works out at about one golden voucher for every 50 million packets of cigarettes, and you are going to stroll out of here and buy one of the five packets that contains a golden voucher?"

Producer: Shaun O'Riordan

Screenplay: Charles Drake

Lew Schwarz

Designer: Henry Graveney

Director: John Scholz-Conway

Film Editors: Michael Nunn

Cast: The Worker: Charlie Drake

Mr. Pugh: Henry McGee

Totter: Leslie Noyes

Year: 1970

Production Company: ATV Network

---

Title: *The Worker*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: The Saucerer's Apprentice

Broadcast Info: Thursday, 27 August, 1970, 21:00 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Charlie: "I went into the garden this morning to get a sprig of mint for me boiled egg, an' there it was eating me garden hose. They live on plastic you know!"

Producer: Shaun O'Riordan

Screenplay by: Charles Drake

Lew Schwarz

Designer: Henry Graveney

Film Editor: Colin Slade

Cast: The Worker: Charlie Drake

Mr. Pugh: Henry McGee

Man in queue: Edwin Brown

Shop manager: Fred Hugh

Policeman: Cyril Cross

Man in crowd: Matthew Robertson  
Young woman in queue: Marcia Warren  
Snooty girl: Celestine Burden  
Extra Terrestrial Being: Kay Frazer  
Woman in queue: Jen Challis

Year: 1970

Production Company: ATV Network

---

Title: *The Worker*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: Ma Chandelle est Mort

Broadcast Info: Thursday, 3 September, 1970, 21:00 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: It's hardly a trifling matter when a wasp lands on your nose in a cake factory. When it happens to The Worker on his latest job his reaction is typical, and the outcome inevitable. The manager ends up iced and decorated, and Charlie lands up at the Labour Exchange. But that just about takes the biscuit as Mr. Pugh is concerned, and he issues the ultimate sanction - perpetual banishment from the halls of the honest jobless.

Producer: Shaun O'Riordan

Script by: Charles Drake

Lew Schwarz

Designer: Henry Graveney

Director: John Scholz-Conway

Cast: The Worker: Charlie Drake

Mr. Pugh: Henry McGee

Miss Giles: Kathleen Byron

Enoch Ramsbottom: Windsor Davies

Ninian McSanderson: Gerald Turner

Big Jack Hardcastle: Willie Shearer

Year: 1970

Production Company: ATV Network

---

Title: *The Worker*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: I Babble, Babble As I Flow To Join The Brimming River

Broadcast Info: Thursday, 10 September, 1970, 21:00 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Has the Worker finally found a job? That's what it looks like when he arrives at the Labour Exchange dressed and equipped for a fishing trip. But Mr. Pugh is not hooked on the idea, and his reaction is typical: "I shall go round to Gerry's and ask him for a penknife with three blades, a combined corkscrew, a disgorging, and a thing for getting little ginger headed idiots out of Labour Exchanges. Now gather up all that gear, hang it variously about your person, go down to the river and jump in."

Producer: Shaun O'Riordan

Script by: Charles Drake

Lew Schwarz

Designer: Henry Graveney

Director: John Scholz-Conway

Cast: The Worker: Charlie Drake

Mr. Pugh: Henry McGee

Vicar: Frank Williams  
Policeman: Edwin Brown  
Year: 1970  
Production Company: ATV Network

---

Title: *The Worker*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: No Room at the Inn for the Odd Couple up the Staircase

Broadcast Info: Thursday, 17 September, 1970, 21:00 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: In the last of the present series, Charlie hears Mr. Pugh make an apologetic phone call to his wife - and that's where the fun begins.

Producer: Shaun O'Riordan

Script by: Charles Drake

Lew Schwarz

Designer: Henry Graveney

Director: John Scholz-Conway

Cast: The Worker: Charlie Drake

Mr. Pugh: Henry McGee

Taxi driver: Roy Simpson

Year: 1970

Production Company: ATV Network

---

Title: The Tuesday Film

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: *Sands of the Desert*

Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 29 September 1970, 18:55 (95 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Charles Sands, a meek little travel agency clerk, is constantly indulging in day-dreams in which he is a hero. When his boss tells him he is to be sent to the desert to supervise the opening of the firm's new holiday camp, Charles finds he cannot measure up to his dream.

Producer: Gordon L. T. Scott

Screenplay: John Paddy Carstairs

Cast: Charles Sands: Charlie Drake

Mamud: Derek Sydney

Advisor to Sheik: Marne Maitland

Mustafa: Alan Tilvern

Sheik Ibrahim: Peter Illing

Bossom: Raymond Huntley

Sheik El Jabez: Peter Arne

Pilot: Paul Stassino

Hassan: Neil McCarthy

Janet Brown: Sarah Branch

Abdulla: Harold Kasket

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*All-Star Comedy Carnival*, 25 December, 1970, Friday, 6pm. Short special [*The Worker*], See Lewisohn (2003: 240).

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*Slapstick and Old Lace*, sketch, ITV (ATV), 7 editions, Thursdays, 4 March-15 April, 1971, 6.55pm. See Lewisohn (2003:240).

\* Filmed in front of a live theatre audience at the new Imperial Vaudeville Theatre House, Elstree, Herts. Written by Drake. Songs composed by Drake. Produced and directed by Shaun O'Riordan.

---

Title: *Lift Off with Ayshea*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Wednesday, 8 December, 1971, 16:55 (25 mins)

Channel: ITV

Producer: Muriel Young

Director: Dave Warwick

Performers: Charlie Drake

Wally Whyton

New World

Ayshea Brough

Tony Christie

Ollie Beak,

The Feet

Year: 1971

Production Company: Granada Television Production

---

*The Basil Brush Show*, BBC, children's show, 16 January 1972.

Director: Douglas Argent

Writer: George Martin

\* Drake as a child-like man is back entertaining children.

---

Title: *Saturday Variety*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Saturday, 29 January, 1972, 20:30 (60 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Charlie Drake has made his name as a daring comic without necessarily having to crack a blue joke. It's the way he throws himself into his work - and he's got the bruises to prove it. Tonight, he comes back for more, with a hand in any downfall he might have - he writes some of the sketches. But while Charlie takes on anything, the Grumbleweeds are more at home taking off anyone. They are three guitarists, a drummer and a lead singer who impersonate without fear or favour - hilariously. More comedy comes from Larry Grayson, returning for his second Saturday Variety - and a reunion. One of Larry's first big breaks was at the Palladium alongside Mr. Jingle-Jangle Russ Conway who joins this week's bill. Music is provided by Jack Parnell and his Orchestra and adding dance to the song are Second Generation.

Producer: Colin Clews

Writer: Bryan Blackburn

Music Associate: Derek Scott

Designer: Paul Dean Fortune

Choreography: Dougie Squires

Performers: Charlie Drake

Russ Conway

Jack Parnell and his Orchestra



Larry Grayson  
Grumbleweeds  
Second Generation

Year: 1972

Production Company: ATV Network

**BFI**

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Title: *The Charlie Drake Comedy Hour*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: A day in the life of Charlie Drake

Broadcast Info: Wednesday, 20 September, 1972, 20:00 (60 mins)

Channel: ITV

Writers: Charlie Drake/Lew Schwartz

Producer: Terry Henebery

Year: 1972

Production Company: Thames Television.

**BFI**

---

Title: Friday Morning Cinema

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: *Petticoat Pirates*

Broadcast Info: Friday, 5 January, 1973, 10:00 (95 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Ann Stephens and the 150 girls under her command, piqued at having their application to serve at sea in warships turned down, plan to raid the frigate H.M.S. Huntress, and take command.

\* Charlie gets up to some rare old antics in this comedy film - including a sequence when he's disguised as a Wren. He's caught spying on the rebellious service girls in the plot and made to join in their activities. The biggest laugh is when the girls - and Charlie - take part in a naval exercise at sea.

Director: David MacDonald

Cast: Charlie: Charlie Drake

Admiral (U.S.N.): Lionel Murton

Mabel: Eleanor Summerfield

P.T. instructress: Barbara Hicks

C.P.C. Nixon: Victor Maddern

Paul Turner: Kenneth Fortescue

Sue: Dilys Laye

C-in-C: Cecil Parker

Superintendent: Maxine Audley

Jerome: Thorley Walters

Michael: John Turner

Ann: Anne Heywood

Year: 1973

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*David Nixon Show*, ITV (Thames Television),

\*Drake appeared in season 2, episode 2, 4 June, 1973.

**BFI**

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Title: *The Rolf Harris Show*†

**TVTiP**

† this is a lost programme.

Subtitle: The Tribe

Broadcast Info: Saturday, 12 January, 1974, 17:45 (45 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: When the little man with the big comic talent, Charlie Drake, decides to tell Rolf about the virtues of life Down Under, he nearly causes a severe rift in Anglo-Australian relations. While Charlie looks after the comedy, Stuart Gillies and little Millie Small, who's a big girl now, take care of the music. Stuart proves that It's a Musical World and Millie sings An Island in the Sun and brings her first hit My Boy Lollipop up to date. The all-coloured dance group The Tribe perform a lively African routine and take part in the high-spirited finale.

Music Director: Harry Rabinowitz

Designer: Bryce Walmsley

Director: Bruce Gowers

Writer: David McKellar

Associate Producer: Mike Smith

Choreography: Dougie Squires

Performers: Rolf Harris

Charlie Drake

Stuart Gillies

Little Millie

The Tribe

Year: 1974

Production Company: London Weekend Television Production

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*Quick on the Draw* (1974-1979), ITV (Thames Television), comedy/ panel game show.

Director: Daphne Shadwell

Writer: Dennis Gifford

\* Drake appeared on 9, 20 March and 1 May 1974.

**BFI**

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Title: *Celebrity Squares*

**TVTIP**

Broadcast Info: Sunday, 11 January, 1976, 16:05 (45 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: It's television's most spectacular game of noughts and crosses as nine more stars take their "squares" to answer questions on behalf of two viewer contestants. Packing an extra punch on the panel is World Light Heavyweight Boxing Champion John Conteh. Bob Monkhouse puts the questions, with the prizes described by Kenny Everett.

Designer: Ray White

Additional Material: Peter Vincent

Producer: Paul Stewart Laing

Writer: Dennis Berson

Performers: Charlie Drake

Barbara Kelly

Bob Monkhouse

Kenneth Connor

William Rushton

Michele Dotrice

Roy Hudd

John Inman

Madeline Smith  
John Conteh

Year: 1976

Production Company: ATV

---

Title: *Celebrity Squares*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Sunday, 1 February, 1976, 16:05 (45 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Fanny and Johnnie Cradock join the celebrity guests with fellow newcomer Diane Keen of the Cuckoo Waltz series. As usual, Bob Monkhouse fires the questions, with zany Kenny Everett describing the prizes in the secret squares.

Designer: Ray White

Additional Material: Peter Vincent

Producer: Paul Stewart Laing

Writer: Dennis Berson

Performer: Charlie Drake

Bob Monkhouse

Ted Ray

Gordon Jackson

Pat Coombs

Arthur Mullard

Barbara Mitchell

Fanny and Johnnie Cradock

Diane Keen

Patrick Mower

Year: 1976

Production Company: ATV

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*Meet Peters And Lee*, ATV, music / comedy / variety show, 3 April-8 May, 1976.

\*Drake returned to television after the Equity ban with a weekly comedy spot.

---

Title: *Celebrity Squares*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: Bob Monkhouse with Pat Coombs, Jack Douglas, Ken Jones, Barbara Mitchell, Arthur Mullard, David Nixon, Willy Rushton, Sally Thomsett, Charlie Drake

Broadcast Info: Sunday, 3 October, 1976, 16:50 (45 mins)

Channel: ITV

Producer: Paul Stewart Laing

Director: Anthony J Bacon

Presenter: Bob Monkhouse

Year: 1976

Production Company: ATV Network Production

---

Title: *Celebrity Squares*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: Bob Monkhouse with Ami Macdonald, Willy Rushton, Charlie Drake, John Inman, Rula Lenska, Lionel Bart, Ray Alan and Lord Charles, Liz Fraser, Arthur Mullard, introduced by the voice of Kenny Everett.

Broadcast Info: Saturday, 27 November, 1976, 17:15 (45 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Producer: Paul Stewart Laing  
Presenter: Bob Monkhouse  
Year: 1976  
Production Company: ATV Network Production

---

Title: *Celebrity Squares*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Saturday, 8 January, 1977, 18:15 (45 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: Join Bob Monkhouse as he introduces another edition of the noughts and crosses game for big prizes. The writer is Dennis Berson, with additional material by Peter Vincent.

Designer: Ray White

Additional Material: Peter Vincent

Producer: Paul Stewart Laing

Writer: Dennis Berson

Performers: Charlie Drake

Arthur English

Bob Monkhouse

Diana Dors

Arthur Mullard

John Inman

Paul Melba

Anne Ashton

Willy Rushton

The voice of Kenny Everett

Clodagh Rodgers

Year: 1977

Production Company: ATV Network Production

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*Night of 100 Stars*, LWT, 5 June, 1977.

Gala performance to celebrate the Queen's silver jubilee performed live at the Olivier Theatre.

Director: Jon Scoffield

\* Drake was one of the performers

**BFI**

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*To See Such Fun*, documentary, 25 December, 1977, 90 mins.

Director: Jon Scoffield

\* excerpts from 80 years of British comedy. Includes archive footage of Drake and Kenneth Connor.

**BFI**

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Title: Saturday Cinema

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: *Sands of the Desert*

Broadcast Info: Saturday, 14 January, 1978, 11:00 (90 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: That tiny bundle of energy Charlie Drake capers across the desert wastes in a quick-fire series of comic escapades. Charles Sands, a meek little travel agency clerk, is constantly indulging in daydreams in which he is a hero. When his boss tells him he is to be sent to the desert to supervise the opening of the firm's new holiday camp, Charles finds he cannot measure up to his dreams.

Screenplay: Charles Drake  
John Paddy Carstairs  
Producer: Gordon L. T. Scott  
Cast: Charles: Charlie Drake  
Abdulla: Harold Kasket  
Mamud: Derek Sydney  
Adviser to Sheik: Marne Maitland  
Mustafa: Alan Tilvern  
Sheik Ibrahim: Peter Illing  
Bossom: Raymond Huntley  
El Jabez: Peter Arne  
Pilot: Paul Stassino  
Hassan: Neil McCarthy  
Janet: Sarah Branch  
Fahid: Inia Te Wiata

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*Bruce Forsyth's Big Night*, ITV (LWT), 1978.

*The Worker*, ITV (LWT), sitcom, 10 x 15 mins,  
Colour

Series One (8) part of *Bruce Forsyth's Big Night*, 7 Oct-18  
Nov; 16 Dec 1978, Sat mostly 7.25pm

Special 17 Dec 1978, Sun 5pm

Short special part of *Bruce Forsyth's Christmas Eve*, 24  
Dec 1978, Sun 7.15pm

Cast: Henry McGee  
Writer: Charlie Drake  
Director: Stuart Allen

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*The Worker*: Happy Birthday 2/12/78 [8 mins production footage].

**BFI**

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*Bruce Forsyth's Christmas Eve*, 24 Dec 1978, Sun 7.15pm. *The Worker* short special, part of the show. See Lewisohn (2003: 241).

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*The Plank*, ITV (Thames Television), 1 x 30 mins, silent comedy film, 17 December 1979, Monday 8pm, Colour.

Cast: Eric Sykes, Arthur Lowe, Harry H. Corbett, Bernard  
Cribbins, Diana Dors, Charlie Drake, Charles Hawtrey, Frankie Howerd, Wilfred Hyde-  
White, Kate O'Mara, Reg Varney.

Writer/director: Eric Sykes

Producer: Dennis Kirkland

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3-2-1: *School Days*, Yorkshire Television, 21 December, 1979.

\* Guest

**BFI**

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Title: Monday Matinee

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: *Sands of the Desert*

Broadcast Info: Monday, 14 January, 1980, 14:30 (105 mins)

Channel: ITV

Description: That tiny bundle of energy, Charlie Drake, capers across the desert wastes in a quick-fire series of mad comic escapades. Charles Sands, a meek little travel agency clerk, is constantly indulging in daydreams in which he is a hero. When his boss tells him he is to be sent to the desert to supervise the opening of the firm's new holiday camp, Charles finds he cannot measure up to his dreams. See film guide page 38.

Director: John Paddy Carstairs,

Producer: Gordon L. T. Scott

Screenplay: John Paddy Carstairs, Charles Drake

Cast: Scrobin: Eric Pohlmann

Charles: Charlie Drake

Abdulla: Harold Kasket

Mamud: Derek Sydney

Adviser to Sheik: Marne Maitland

Mustafa: Alan Tilvern

Sheik Ibrahim: Peter Illing

Bossom: Raymond Huntley

El Jabez: Peter Arne

Fahid: Inia Te Wiata

Pilot: Paul Stassino

Hassan: Neil McCarthy

Air Hostess: Beth Rogan

Janet: Sarah Branch

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Title: *Looks Familiar*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: Denis Norden, Charlie Drake, Kathie Kay, David Kaye

Broadcast Info: Thursday, 10 April, 1980, 15:45 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Director: Anthony Parker

Producer: David Clark

Presenter: Denis Norden

Year: 1980

Production Company: Thames Television Production

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Title: *Tell Me Another*

**TVTiP**

Subtitle: Dick Hills with Roy Kinnear, Charlie Drake, Fred Emney, Cardew Robinson, Norman Wisdom.

Broadcast Info: Tuesday 17 June, 1980, 15:45 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Director: John Coxall Paul Bryers

Presenter: Dick Hills

Year: 1980  
Production Company: Southern Television Production

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Title: *Tell Me Another* **TVTiP**  
Subtitle: Dick Hills with Derek Batey, Cliff Michelmore, Charlie Drake, Cardew Robinson,  
Percy Edwards, Fred Emney, Dave Lee Travis  
Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 24 June, 1980, 15:45 (30 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Director: John Coxall Paul Bryers  
Year: 1980  
Production Company: Southern Television Production

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*The Royal Variety Performance*, variety show, BBC 1, 23 November, 1980. **BFI**

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*Rhubarb Rhubarb*, comedy film, ITV (Thames), 1 x 30 mins, Colour, 15 December, 1980.  
Cast: Eric Sykes, Jimmy Edwards, Hattie Jacques, Charlie Drake  
Writer/director: Eric Sykes  
Producer: David Clark. **BFI**

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Title: *3-2-1* **TVTiP**  
Subtitle: *Super Heroes*  
Broadcast Info: ITV, Saturday, 28 March, 1981, 18:35 (60 mins)  
Channel: Yorkshire Television  
Producer: Mike Goddard  
Director: Don Clayton  
Performers: Charlie Drake  
Johnny Vyvyan  
Bernard Bresslaw  
Mike Newman  
Kenny Whymark  
Chris Emmett  
Maxton G. Beesley  
Chris North  
Presenter: Ted Rogers  
Year: 1981  
Production Company: Yorkshire Television **BFI**

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Title: *Starburst* **TVTiP**  
Broadcast Info: Wednesday, 11 November, 1981, 20:00 (60 mins)  
Channel: ITV  
Producer: Colin Clews  
Performers: Charlie Drake  
Jack Parnell and his Orchestra  
Freddie Davies  
Anna Dawson

The Brian Rogers Dancers  
Joey Loren  
Pearly Gates  
Lance and Miriam  
Julian Stringle's Dixielanders

Year: 1981

Production Company: ATV Network Production.

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Title: *Whose Baby?* Game-show

**TVTiP**

Guests: Leslie Crowther with Lynsey de Paul, June Whitfield, Charlie Drake, Nikki Critcher

Broadcast Info: Thursday, 15 September, 1983, 19:00 (30 mins)

Channel: ITV

Producer: Robert Reed

Presenter: Leslie Crowther

Year: 1983

Production Company: Thames Television Production

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*The Bob Monkhouse Show*, BBC, stand-up, season 1, episode 6, 28 November, 1983.

---

Title: *It Was 20 Years Ago Today*

**TVTiP**

Broadcast Info: Tuesday, 1 January, 1985, 20:30 (140 mins)

Channel: Channel 4

Description: Enjoy a chance to travel back to the black and white days of the swinging Sixties Mersey beat boomed across the nation with Gerry and the Pacemakers and popular comedian Charlie Drake provided the laughs.

8.30: The Worker - A Punting We Will Go

Year: 1985.

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*Bleak House*, drama, TV mini-series, BBC, 1985.

Directed by Ross Devenish.

\*Drake plays Smallweed. See episodes: 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.7.

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*Hello Campers! Butlin's 50 YEARS 1936, 1986*, documentary, TVS, 30 April, 1986.

\* Keiran Prendiville presents a networked ITV documentary celebrating 50 years of Butlins.

Interviews: Charlie Drake (Redcoat 1958), Roy Hudd, Ted Rogers, George Melly, Jimmy Perry, Arthur English, Mike Reid and The Beverley Sisters.

**YouTube / BFI**

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*The Modern World: Ten Great Writers*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's '*Crime and Punishment*', Channel Four (TV mini-series/documentary), 24 January, 1988.

Cast: Drake plays Marmelodov.

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*Mr H Is Late*, ITV (Thames), comedy film, 1 x 30 mins, Colour, Monday, 15 February, 1988, 8pm.

Cast: Eric Sykes, Jimmy Edwards, Bobby Ball, Tommy Cannon, Charlie Drake, Henry McGee, Richard O'Sullivan, Terry Scott, Freddie Starr.

Writer/director: Eric Sykes

Producer: Dennis Kirkland

**BFI**

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*Comedy Christmas Box*, 25 December, 1989.

\* Jim Davidson on Christmas Day presents a compilation of his favourite shows and performers. Drake contributes.

---

*Endgame*, BBC, TV movie based on Samuel Beckett's play, 1989.

Director: Tony Coe

\* Charlie Drake plays Nagg.

Lee Evans played Clov (the part Drake surely should have played) in 2008 at the Albery Theatre (Noël Coward Theatre) in the West End.

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*Wogan*, talk-show, 24 July, 1991.

Wogan is joined by a variety of television stars to commemorate the end of BBC's Television Theatre. **BFI**

\*includes footage from 'Bingo Madness' the first (and last) programme in the new series of *The Charlie Drake Show* broadcast on the 24 October, 1961 where a slapstick stunt goes disastrously wrong.

---

"Screen One". (TV series) *Filipina Dreamgirls*, season three, episode three, directed by Les Blair, broadcast 15 September, 1991.

\* Drake plays Lionel, a business man seeking a child-bride (talk about type casting!) The transformation from the Botticelli cherub-faced comic into a the dirty Mack type who appears later as Baron Hard-On in the adult pantomime *Sinderella* is well underway here, though Drake, as usual, would not countenance any degradation of his star image so he wore a pristine white Mack, a Fedora to covered his lecherous gurning grin and was driven to and from hotels by his chauffeur cum minder. He seems to be a separate entity in the movie – the seedy star making grand entrances. **BFI**

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*Swimming Against the tide*, directed by David Richardson, Granada in the North West, 1991.

\* Drake plays a number of characters including: The Butler, The Surgeon, The Barber, The Judge, The Umpire, a Red Star Clerk and a Music Hall Comedian,

*The Entertainers: Drake's Progress*, ITV (Yorkshire Television). Presented by Angela Rippon, broadcast, 9 September, 1992, 12:30-1pm. **BFI**

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*Burning Ash*, short, shown at Sydney Film Festival (1993) and the Candas Asturias España Festival of Rural Cinema (1993)

Director: Jonathan Ripley

\* Drake plays Ethan Hawker

*Paul Merton's Palladium Story*, documentary, BBC 1, 18 September, 1994 + 25 September, 1994.

\* Drake chats to Merton about his experiences at the London Palladium, 'Episode 1.2- Act Two: The Television Years', Sunday, 25 September, 1994, 8.00pm-9.00pm. **BFI**

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*Fry and Laurie Host a Christmas Night with the Stars*, BBC, 27 December, 1994.

Director: Geoff Posner

(archive footage of Drake's performance on *Christmas Night With the Stars*)

**BFI**

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*99-1*, ITV (1994-95), drama.

'Dice', season 2, episode 2, broadcast, 12 January, 1995.

Writer: Terry Johnson

Director: Anthony Simmons.

Cast: Drake plays vicious casino boss, Freddie Windsor

Leslie Grantham ("Dirty Den" *East Enders*) is cop Mick Raynor

Zenith Productions. Drama Production for Carlton Television.

**BFI**

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*Right Royal Song and Dance*, LWT, 21 September, 1996.

Director: Ian Hamilton

\* (archive footage of Drake's performance at the Royal Variety Show)

**BFI**

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*Arena: Night of Entertainers: Drake's Progress*, documentary, BBC 2, 25 December, 2001.

\* The programme was followed by a repeat of the 1968 sketch, 'The 1812 Overture in E Flat Major Opus 49 – Performed And Conducted By Charlie Drake'.

**BFI**

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## Television Commercial

*Heineken: Aladdin's Lamp*, 1977

\* Commercial filmed on a panto stage. Drake plays Aladdin. When he rubs his lamp nothing appears. He is handed a can of Heineken which he pours into the lamp. A cartoon genie (voiced by Kenneth Williams) appears and grants him his wish. He wishes for his Heineken back and they share a glass together.

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## Archive – Television

The Stage Archive: [www.thestage.co.uk](http://www.thestage.co.uk)

\*TAM Top Twenty Ratings Region-by-Region Charts†

† 'A TAM rating is the percentage of sets capable of receiving both independent television and BBC transmissions actually tuned, in a point in time, to any particular programme. The position of a programme in TAM's "Top Twenty" networked programmes is determined by the total number of homes viewing the programme'.

Week-ended December 18, 1960: London Area No 9 Charlie Drake BBC 56%

Northern Area Top BBC programme 48%

	Scottish Area Top BBC programme 55%
	Southern Area Top BBC programme 41%
	North Eastern Area Top BBC programme 57%
	East Anglian Area Top BBC programme 51%
	( <i>The Stage Archive</i> , Dec 29, 1960, p.12)
Week-ended January 1, 1961:	London Area No 5 BBC 54%
	Midland Area Top BBC programme 50%
	Northern Area Top BBC programme 46%
	South Wales & West Area No 9 52%
	Southern Area Top BBC programme 53%
	North East Area Top BBC programme 47%
	East Anglian Area Top BBC programme 53%
	Ulster Area No 3 72%
	( <i>The Stage Archive</i> , Jan 12, 1961, p.12)
Week-ended October 29, 1961	London No 1 Charlie Drake 60%
	Midland No 2 62%
	Central Scotland No 8 57%
	South Wales & West No 6 57%
	Southern Top BBC show 53%
	East Anglia No 10 60%
	South West No 1 62%
	Network No 5 Home Viewing 6352 (000's)
	( <i>The Stage Archive</i> , Nov 9, 1961, p.14)
Week-ended November 5, 1961	Midland Top BBC programme 49%
	Southern Top BBC programme 42%
	Network No 17 Home Viewing 4907 (000's)
	( <i>The Stage Archive</i> , Nov 16, 1961, p.12)
Week-ended November 12, 1961	Network No 10 Home Viewing 5802 (000's)
	London No 8 52%
	South Wales & West No 8 53%
	Southern Top BBC show 46%
	North East Top BBC show 57%
	( <i>The Stage Archive</i> , November 23, 1961, p.12)
Week-ended November 7, 1963	Network No 16 Home Viewing 5924 (000's)
	London The Charlie Drake Show ATV No 11 50%
	( <i>The Stage Archive</i> , Nov 7, 1963, p.14)
Week-ended November 14, 1963	Network The Charlie Drake Show ATV No 18
	Home Viewing 5799 (000's)
	East Anglian No 11 56% (p.12)
	( <i>The Stage Archive</i> , Nov 14, 1963, p.12)
Week-ended 5 May, 1968	South No 5 The World of Charlie Drake BBC1
	41%
	East of England No 10 35%
	( <i>The Stage Archive</i> , May 16, 1968, p.13)

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*The Classic TV Archive:* <http://ctva.biz/>

UKTV Christmas listings: 1967: Christmas Eve, BBC2, Sunday 24 December, 8:55pm *The Charlie Drake Show*. 1968: Christmas Day, BBC1, Wednesday 25 December, 12:145pm, *The Charlie Drake Show*. 1969: Christmas Day, ITV Thames Television (London), Thursday 25

December, 3pm *Petticoat Pirates*. 1978: Christmas Eve, ITV-London Weekend Television (LWT), Sunday 24 December, 7:15pm – part of *Bruce Forsyth's Christmas Eve*.

<http://www.google.com/cse?cx=partner-pub-4955165530873922%3A1r73xgh2846&ie=ISO-8859-1&q=charlie+drake&sa=Search#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=charlie%2>

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### British Pathe News Archive:

‘THIS ISN’T CRICKET!’ Charlie Drake and Dickie Henderson captain the ‘cricket elevens of the century’ in a charity match at Fleetwood in 1959. Film ID. 1591.14

‘HEINZ COOKERY SERVICE PRESENTS - WHAT’S COOKING - WITH CHARLIE DRAKE - AND MARGARET ALDEN’.

\* A female audience of the ‘Young Wives Club’ are entertained by Charlie Drake and an actor who perform a typical slapstick sketch in the little man / tall man double-act formula which turns out to be a recipe for laughter in the Heinz kitchen. This is high quality television film directed by Frederic Goode (ABPC), written by Douglas Warth, photographed by William Jordan and edited by Ronald Glenister and Sidney Stone of Associated British-Pathé. Film ID. 2275.05/06

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/whats-cooking-with-charlie-drake-and-margaret-al-1>

‘CHARLIE DRAKE STIRS IT UP’. Charlie Drake and Cliff Richards at Cadby Hall stirring the largest Christmas pudding mix in the world. Women workers watching are in hysterics. 1960. Film ID.1698.22

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/charlie-drake-stirs-it-up/query/RICHARD>

‘CHARLIE’S FIRST’. Drake’s first film *Sands of the Desert* is launched at a star-studded premier in Blackpool in 1960. Alma Cogan, Adam Faith, Peter Arne, and Harry Secombe attend. Film ID. 1686.09

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/charlies-first/query/charlie+drake>

‘TEN PIN INTERNATIONAL’. England versus Italy at the Princess Bowl, Dagenham, London in 1963. Charlie Drake is the celebrity star who gets the ten pin bowling competition rolling. The event is also used to advertise his new film *The Cracksman* then in production at Elstree studios. Film ID. 1750.12

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/tenpin-international>

*Sir William Butlin Receives the Variety Club International Humanitarian Award*, filmed at the Annual Variety Club Convention, Dublin, 1972.

Eamonn Andrews presents the award in *This Is Your Life*, style.

\*Drake attends as a special guest.

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### Websites

The British University Film & Video Council (BUFVC) database: [www.bufvc.ac.uk](http://www.bufvc.ac.uk)

\* includes details of *British Movietone News* broadcasts featuring Drake.

*Pathe News*: ‘This Isn’t Cricket’, 20 August 1959. Issue no 59/67. NoS ID 108771. *British Movietone News*: ‘Charity Golf’, 24 March 1960. Issue no 1607A. NoS ID 023528. *British*

*Movietone News*: 'Royal Film Show', 31 March 1960. Issue no 1608A. NoS ID 0235539. 'A special performance of the film *The Last Angry Man*, in aid of the Cinematograph Trade Benevolent Fund took place at the Odeon Theatre. Outside the theatre the crowds ignored the rain. They were much too excited about the stars arriving. Charlie Drake...' *Pathe News*: 'Charlie's First', 21 July 1960. Issue no 60/59. NoS ID 109276. *Pathe News*: 'Charlie Drake Stirs It Up', 28 November 1960. Issue no 60/96. NoS ID 109466. *Pathe News*, 'TenPin International', 18 February 1963. Issue no 63/15. NoS ID 110560. *British Movietone News*: 'King of the Cinders', 19 September 1963. Issue no 1789A. NoS ID 025256. 'Wembley, and the preparations for the 1963 World Speedway Championship is in full swing...MCU Charlie Drake presents wreath to Fundin'. *British Movietone News*: 'Christmas with a Variety', 19 December 1966. Issue no 1959. NoS ID 026701. 'The British branch of the Variety Club, the international Show-Biz Charity organisation, collects toys for orphans and under-privileged children and for those who will spend Christmas in hospital. MS Charlie Drake with girls in Christmas outfits'. *British Movietone News*: 'Duke Opens Boys Club', 26 July 1971. Issue no 2199. NoS ID 028947. 'Another Royal visit. This time when the Duke of Edinburgh officially opens the London Federation of Boy's Clubs Hindleap Warren Camp in Sussex – Duke shakes hands with [...] Nat Cohen & Charlie Drake'. *British Movietone News*: 'Sir John Davies' 15 November 1971. Issue no 2215. NoS ID 029130. 'A dinner given in honour of Sir John Davis, of the Rank Organisation was attended by many show business personalities [...] MS Charlie Drake'. *British Movietone News*: 'Children's Film Foundation Premier', 2 May 1976. Issue no 2448. NoS ID 030810. 'The Foundation celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a special Film Show at the Odeon, Leicester Square, attended by personalities of Show Business and the Film Industry. MS Charlie Drake and girl arriving'. *British Movietone News*: 'Medieval Jousting', 4 September 1977. Issue no 2518. NoS ID 031027. 'At Chilham castle in Kent a revival of the Middle Ages in the form of a Jousting Tournament...MS man dressed as King Henry with Charlie Drake'. *Nightline* (radio show) 3 June 1986. 'Pete Murray's *Nightline* on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Butlin's holiday camps opening. Comedian Charlie Drake, an ex-Red Coat, talks to Sue Reed, author of the book *Hello Campers*, relaying anecdotes from the camps and describing the history of Butlins, the owner of the camps, Billy Butlin, and the changes that have occurred during the 50 years'. *Endgame*, By Samuel Beckett (1991), video.

<http://bufvc.ac.uk/allbufvc/search.php?q=charlie+drake&page=1>

<http://bufvc.ac.uk/allbufvc/search.php?q=charlie+drake&sort=relevance&page=2>

The British Comedy Guide:

<http://www.comedy.co.uk/>

<http://www.comedy.co.uk/search/?cx=014616590127644354972%3Artby0f2vfkc&cof=FORID%3A9&ie=UTF-8&q=charlie+drake&sa=Find>

British Television: <http://www.britmovie.co.uk/forums/british-television/>

\* The site contains some interesting discussions about Drake's personality inhabiting the 'little man' character(s) he plays on television and how that seems to have determined whether *users* liked his comedy or not.

<http://www.britmovie.co.uk/forums/british-television/5262-charlie-drake.html>

Memorable TV: <http://www.memorabletv.com/uk-tv/charlie-drake/>

Screenonline: <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/index.html>

\*Charlie Drake biography: <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/1039164/index.html>

\*Review of *The Worker* series including video clips:  
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/793512/index.html>

The Stage Archive: [www.thestage.co.uk](http://www.thestage.co.uk)

\* Contains interviews, reviews of television shows, Television Audience Measurement (TAM) ratings, and pantomime listings.

Stage Direct: [www.stagedirect.com](http://www.stagedirect.com)

Teletronic: The Television History Site: <http://www.teletronic.co.uk/>

\* Top Ten TV Shows Month by Month – 1955-1969 [Source: Television Audience Measurement (TAM) 1955-1968].

\* TVRatings of the 50s: [http://www.teletronic.co.uk/tvratings\\_50s.htm](http://www.teletronic.co.uk/tvratings_50s.htm)

\* TVRatings of the 60s: [http://www.teletronic.co.uk/tvratings\\_60s.htm](http://www.teletronic.co.uk/tvratings_60s.htm)

No. 10 November 1961 'Charlie Drake' ITV 5.8 million viewers

### ***Video/DVD***

*Bleak House*, BBC television mini series, 1985, episodes 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.7.

\* Drake was well on the way to successfully reinventing himself as a dramatic actor when he played Smallweed, an evil money-lender consumed by greed, in this adaptation of Charles Dickens novel.

DVD available from BUFV & Amazon.

*Endgame*, BBC, 1991, TV movie drama, directed by Tony Coe.

\* In this adaptation of Samuel Beckett's play Drake plays Nagg a character whose sexuality cannot be contained even by the dustbin he lives in.

Videocassette recording available from BUFVC.

*The Golden Years of British Comedy from the 50's*, Classic Pictures, Vision Video, 1993.

*The Golden Years of British Comedy 40's/50's/60's*, Universal Pictures, Vision Video, 2005.

*Comedy Classics of the 60's*, Castle Communications, Pegasus Video, 1993.

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### **Discography**

"Splish Splash" / "Hello My Darlings" (1958) UK #7 **YouTube**

"Volare" / "Itchy Twitchy Feeling" (1958) UK #28 **YouTube**

"Tom Thumb's Tune" **YouTube**

/ "Goggle Eye Ghee" (1958)

"Sea Cruise" **YouTube**

/ "Starkle Starkle Little Twink" (1959)

"Naughty" / "Old Mr. Shadow" (1960) **YouTube**

"Please, Mr. Custer" / "Glow Worm" (1960) UK #12 **YouTube**

"My Boomerang Won't Come Back" **YouTube**

/ "She's My Girl" (1961) UK #14; US #21, Australia #1

"Tanglefoot" **YouTube** / "Drake's Progress" (1962)

"I Bent My Assegai" **YouTube** / "Sweet Freddy Green" (1962)

"I've Lost The End Of My Yodel" **YouTube**  
 / "I Can Cry, Can't I" (1963) **YouTube**  
 "I'm Too Heavy for the Light Brigade" / "The Reluctant Tight-Rope Walker" (1964)  
 "Charles Drake 007" / "Bumpanology" (Bump Head Blues) (1964) **YouTube**  
 "Only A Working Man" / "I'm A Boy" (1965)  
 "Don't Trim My Wick" / "Birds" (1966)  
 "Who Is Sylvia" **YouTube**  
 / "I Wanna Be a Group" (1967)  
 "Puckwudgie" / "Toffee and Tears" (1972) UK #47 **YouTube**  
 "You Never Know" (1976) (produced by Peter Gabriel) **YouTube**  
 "Super Punk" (1976) (spoof record)

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### **Radio Times covers**

Drake appears on the front cover several times: April 19-25 1959. November 19-25 1960, March 18-24 1961. October 21-27 1961.

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### **TV Times front covers**

Drake appears on the front cover of the TV Times more than any other comic from 1955 until today. From 1961-1971 he appears five times. Other comics like Tommy Trinder appear only once in 1955 (and even then he is trading on his comic past as he embarks on a new career as a game-show host), Ken Dodd appears twice in 1965 and 1972, Arthur Askey appears in 1970 (though this is just a nostalgic tribute to his past fame) and Reg Varney appears once in 1970. The formidable double-act Morecambe and Wise appear twice in 1978, (but one of these is the Christmas issue), and after that the only time a stand-alone comic appears on the cover is as a cartoon in television toon town (Les Dawson and Frankie Howerd caricatures are included on the cover of the December 20-January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1975 Christmas variety issue). After that, tellingly, 'star' names only appear on the bottom of the front cover in tear-off type lists underneath a picture of the new 'stars' of entertainment television - the compère and game-show hosts (in the 1984, 22 December-January 4<sup>th</sup> issue - even Eric and Ernie are hidden inside).

The 1963 September 13th issue announces 'Charlie Drake starts his life story inside'. Interviewed by Brian Finch his life story is told in six parts. Part One: 'Charles The Drake', No. 411 September 13, 1963, pp. 4-5. Part Two: 'Poor little blighter!' No. 412 September 20, 1963, pp. 14-15. Part Three: 'Capers in the cookhouse!' No. 413 September 27, 1963, pp. 14-15. Part Four: 'MICK meets MONTMORENCY', No. 414 October 4, 1963, pp.20-21. Part Five: 'Flip Flop Third Time Lucky' No.415 October 11, 1963, pp.26-27. Part Six: 'Why I dropped my bombshell', No. 416 October 16, 1963, pp. 24-25.

There is an interview with Drake by Anthony Davis 'CHARLIE DRAKE LAUGHS AT THE BAD OLD DAYS' No. 487 February 25, 1965, pp.8-9, and a caption title 'Charlie Drake comedian extraordinary talks with Max Caulfield' on the cover the Oct 2- Oct 8 1965 issue directs the readers to the popular 'Caulfield Interviews - in which the stars talk about what makes them tick', (pp.2-3).



Drake appears on cover of the March 26-April 1, 1966 issue made up as a clown. The caption reads, 'Charlie Drake in his first TV play *The Battersea Miracle* Saturday, 10.10 pm. This was Drake's first venture into drama.

In an interview with Kenneth Passingham, March 20-26, 1971 titled, 'Charlie Drake the sad clown who lost a dream' Drake talks about the break-up of his marriage, depression, and the loneliness of writing comedy. The photographs of Drake at work in his bachelor apartment, ('a place as lonely as a prison cell' he says), are revealing psycho-biographically. They show the creative processes of the comic mind. In one photograph Drake is seen making drawings of his ideas which, he says, he does before writing the scripts. The interior details of his study is of course psycho-biographical; they include 'some pictures on the walls – a couple of grey-fleshed nudes, and one of Charlie Drake himself in equally sombre hues, his head and shoulders framed by a television screen' (pp.2-5).

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### **Magazine / Annual articles / Film Journals**

*TV Mirror and Disc News*, 12 July, 1958.

\*Interview with Charlie Drake.

*Picturegoer with Disc Parade*, 'Now rock – with laughter', 25 October, 1958.

*Picture Show and TV mirror*, 30 July 1960,

\*Stills with captions from Drake's recent film *Sands of the Desert*

\*NPM Vintage Magazines [http://stores.ebay.co.uk/NPM-Vintage-Magazines?\\_trksid=p4340.12563](http://stores.ebay.co.uk/NPM-Vintage-Magazines?_trksid=p4340.12563)

*Picture Show*, 'How He Really Is When He's Off TV', 24 September, 1960.

\*Source: magazine scene [http://stores.ebay.co.uk/magazinescene?\\_trksid=p4340.12563](http://stores.ebay.co.uk/magazinescene?_trksid=p4340.12563)

Douglas, M. 'Charlie Drake 20<sup>th</sup> Century Clown', magazine title unknown, c.1961, pp.73-77.

*Sight and Sound* (Winter 1961/62) 31.1. 'Petticoat Pirates', p. 52.

*Sight and Sound* (Summer 1967) 36. 3. 'Mr Ten Per Cent', p.160.

Levin, A. Mail on Sunday *You* magazine 'The Angela Levin Interview - Charlie Drake' June 1991, pp.47-50.

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### **Film production company magazines**

*ABC Film Review*† 'Charlie's Fight Back', Michael Russell, June 1963.

\* In the article Drake talks about painting as psycho-therapy – as 'an outlet for my emotions, my feelings'.

† The magazine could only be purchased from the ABC cinema chain.

Warner-Pathé PressBook (1967) *Mr. Ten Per Cent*.

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## Pantomime

### Pantomimes at the London Palladium†

1958 'Sleeping Beauty'

\*Drake shares top billing with fellow television star Bernard Bresslaw. Their names combined with their humorous television catchphrases are used on the front of the pantomime programme.

1961/62 'Little Old King Cole'

\*Drake as little Old King Cole is the star attraction. Cast includes, Janette Scott (Miranda, a shepherdess), Herbert Hare (the court chamberlain), Jackie Rae (Benedict, a fisherman), Roger Delgado (the Duke Rollo), Gary Miller (Valentine, a prince).

1963. The revue 'Man in the Moon' replaced the pantomime this year.

\* Drake is the star sent to the Moon.

Cast: Anna Dawson, Eric Flynn, Barbara Evans, The Baker Twins, David Davenport, James Ottaway.

† Source: The Palladium Pantomimes: <http://www.its-behind-you.com/palladium.html>

A year on year list from 1957-1987/88.

N.B. Christopher Woodward, the archivist for The London Palladium Theatre Collection, points out that Norman Wisdom broke the tradition of a man playing the role of principle boy (previously it had been a young woman) in panto. Drake, it might be said, continued this tradition, except that he played the king and the man, never the boy. That part is reserved for a handsome young man such as Gary Miller in *Little Old King Cole*.

## Websites

### *The Stage*

\*Newspaper for the performing arts industry records Drake's pantomime appearances at the palladium.

*The Stage* online archive <https://archive.thestage.co.uk/>

London Palladium Pantomime online Record:

[www.it's-behind-you.com/palladium.html](http://www.it's-behind-you.com/palladium.html)

\* Contains a record of Drake's pantomime appearances in late 50s-mid 60s.

## Pantomime in the Provinces

Drake appeared every year in pantomime for over forty years. He started before his television career began, as a Redcoat at Butlins, and finished as Baron Hard-On in 1995, over twenty years after his career as a television clown had ended. This is not intended as an exhaustive list; it could not be, that is for another research project (see *The Stage Archive* for a more comprehensive list). Below one or two examples are included for reasons that are explained.

'Jack and the Beanstalk' (1974-75)

Venue: Alhambra Theatre, Bradford.

\* This was the venue where Drake was banned by Equity. It is important to dispel the common notion that Drake had been mis[s]behaving with the young girl in the cast. In actual fact he had not. He simply thought it would be a good publicity stunt if he wrote a part for a local girl to play. Sue Moody won the audition but she was not a member of Equity, so they

refused to let her appear in the pantomime. Drake was fined and he refused to pay, so Equity banned him. He did not work in the provinces over two years.

‘The Wizard of Oz’ (1982)

Cast: Chris Quentin, Meg Johnson, Anthea Askey, John Conroy, Jayne Leigh-Collins, Ian Francis

Venue: Birmingham Alexandra Theatre

Opened 5<sup>th</sup> April 1982

‘Wizard of Oz’ (1988)

Cast: Drake as the not-so cowardly Lion.

Michaela Strachan as Dorothy (how she escaped Drake’s sexual attentions is a mystery).

Venue: Horsham Arts Centre.

\* Private video recording 23 June, 1988

Source: Chris Drake family archive collection.

### **Pantomime on Television / direct to video**

*Pantomamia: The Babes in the Wood*, BBC, 1957

\* Drake appears as one of the performers.

*Val Parnell’s Saturday Night at the London Palladium*

Subtitle: Sleeping Beauty

Televised Broadcast: Sunday, 22 March, 1959, 20:00 (60 mins)

*SINderella* (1995)

Cast: Drake plays Baron Hard-On

\* With his cherub face weathered with age and an adult audience to play to there was no longer any need to play down the salacious reputation of his private persona, in fact, Drake seems to revel in the opportunity to unmask his clown image and be himself. He gives full vent to indecent puns and shouting verbal obscenities.

Venue: Filmed live at the Cambridge Theatre, London.

Writer: Jim Davidson. The part of Baron Hard-On was written specifically for Drake.

\* Drake provided some of his own material – the sing-a-long sketch “What a wonderful fish are soles” which is a pun - play on words – on the vulgar colloquialism “arse holes”).

Throughout the routine Drake’s banter with his audience is full of sexual innuendo and profanity. Another sketch that Drake reused was the nursery rhyme style skit “I’m a Ganoo with shit on my shoe”. See letter to the author from Jim Davidson to author dated 3 July, 2008 who confirms this.

\* Autobiographical reminiscences where Drake jokes about his infamous drunk-driving accidents are worked into the script as though ad-libbed. This device always helps comics share their humour with the audience.

\* User Comments on YouTube universally agree that Drake is the funniest ‘thing’ in the panto.

**YouTube**

### **Pantomime performers talking about pantomime performers**

‘Tommy Cannon & Bobby Ball interviewed by Sue Barber’ at The Alban Arena, St. Albans, 19 December, 2008’

Source: British Library Theatre Archive Project: sound recording, [transcript available], shelf mark: C1142/246,  
<http://sounds.bl.uk/Arts-literature-and-performance/Theatre-Archive-Project/024M-C1142X000246-0100V0>

\* Cannon and Ball discuss working with Drake in their first pantomime at Bradford. They are both very complimentary towards Drake.

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## Plays

*Ubu Roi* (1978)

Writer: Alfred Jarry

Director: Charles Marowitz

Cast: Drake plays Ubu

Venue: Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre, London.

\* The play was an absolute failure – it was not Drake's fault – it just was not funny. See Drake (1986: 197-199)

*As You Like It* (1981)

Writer: William Shakespeare

Director: David Kelsey

Cast: Drake plays Touchstone (a part Kenneth Connor also played)

Nyree Dawn Porter (Muriel in *The Cracksmen*), Brian Deacon, Robin Hunter, Roger Milner, Felicity Jane Goodson

Venue: Ludlow Castle Open Air Theatre, Ludlow Festival, Shropshire.

*The Caretaker* (1983)†

Writer: Harold Pinter

Director: Richard Negri

Cast: Drake plays the old tramp, Davies.

Jonathan Hackett - Aston

Tim McInnery – Mick

Michael Angelis (*Boys from the Black Stuff*)

Design: Nadya Cohen

Lighting: Geoffrey Joyce

Sound: Chris Coxhead

Venue: Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester.

\* Drake won an award for best actor. 'He has erased the memory of the desperately lovable and to many utterly resistible little funny man' (Drake quoting press eulogies in his autobiography, (1986:242).

†Stills of Drake's performance can be viewed on

<http://www.richardnegri.co.uk/GalleryCaretaker/>

*Funny Money* (1995)

Writer: Ray Cooney

Venue: The Playhouse, London

Cast: Sylvia Syms, Henry McGee, Trevor Bannister, Peter Ellis, Ray Cooney and Lynda Baron (who declined to talk to me about Drake).

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## Obituary Notices

BBC News - Live 'Slapstick comic Drake dies at 81' Sunday, 24 December 2006, 11:24 GMT <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/6207585.stm>

BBC News - Entertainment - Obituary - Charlie Drake, Sunday, 24 December 2006, 11:30 GMT <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/4634199.stm>

*The Independent* News Obituary 'Charlie Drake Diminutive Slapstick Comedian', Dennis Gifford, Tuesday, 26 December 2006.

\* Overview of Drake's life that offers an insight into his egocentric personality and its effect on his career.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/charlie-drake-429830.html>

*The Telegraph* News Obituaries 'Charlie Drake', 26 December 2006, 12:01AM GMT

\*Article highlights that Drake suffered from depression, contemplated suicide and consulted a psychiatrist.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1537814/Charlie-Drake.html#>

*the guardian* News - Media - Obituary 'Charlie Drake: A brilliant physical comedian, he revelled in mayhem with outraged innocence' Stephen Dixon, Thursday, 28 December 2006, 10:15 GMT. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/dec/28/broadcasting.guardianobituaries>

*Mail Online* - TV&ShowbizHome - 'Slapstick star Charlie Drake dies' 24 December 2006, 15:23 GMT <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-424651/Slapstick-star-Charlie-Drake-dies.html>

*Mail Online* - Femail - 'Why Charlie Drake left just £5000 of the £5m he blew on women, horses, and fast cars' Daily Mail Reporter, 5 July, 2008, 11:58PM

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1032365/Why-Charlie-Drake-left-just-5-000-5m-blew-women-horses-fast-cars.html>

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## Images

BBC Photo Library

\*Stills of Drake and Dianna Dors on *Juke Box Jury*, 6 June 1964. (The date is incorrectly given as May). Drake appeared in the peak year of the shows popularity.

[www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/4634199.stm](http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/4634199.stm)

Getty Images

\*'Martians in London', 9 January 1965. Tag – 'Members of Lester's Midgets who play Martians in *The Man In The Moon* with Charlie Drake at the London Palladium take shoppers by surprise'.

[www.ChrisWare/KeystoneFeatures/GettyImages](http://www.ChrisWare/KeystoneFeatures/GettyImages)

Rex Features: <http://www.rexfeatures.com/>

[http://www.rexfeatures.com/search/?kw=charlie+drake+&search\\_newest](http://www.rexfeatures.com/search/?kw=charlie+drake+&search_newest)

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### **Web site resources**

BBC Archive: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/index.shtml>

BBC Motion Gallery: <http://www.bbcmotiongallery.com/gallery/home/archives.do>

BBC Programmes: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes>

BBC Written Archive: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/written.shtml>

The British Comedy Guide: <http://www.comedy.co.uk/>

The British Comedy Society: <http://www.britishcomedysociety.com/>

The British Comedy Website: <http://www.britishcomedy.org.uk/comedy/index.html>

British Film Catalogue: [www.britfilms.com/index.html](http://www.britfilms.com/index.html)

British Film Institute Archive: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo/>

\* Film and television database and archive holdings.

British Library Sounds: <http://sounds.bl.uk/>

Britmovie – British Film Forum: <http://www.britmovie.co.uk/forums/>

\*Site does not list any of Drake's films or include him in its list of actors.

British University Film & Video Council (BUFVC) database: [www.bufvc.ac.uk](http://www.bufvc.ac.uk)

\* 'moving image and sound, knowledge and access'.



BUFVC TRILT: Television and Radio Index for Learning and Teaching:  
[https://auth.athensams.net/?ath\\_returl=httpwww.trilt.ac.uk&ath\\_dspid=BUFVC.TRILT](https://auth.athensams.net/?ath_returl=httpwww.trilt.ac.uk&ath_dspid=BUFVC.TRILT)

Cinema-Theatre Association (CTA): [www.cinema-theatre.org.uk](http://www.cinema-theatre.org.uk)

Danny Blue: [www.dannyblue.co.uk](http://www.dannyblue.co.uk)

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The Heritage Foundation: <http://www.theheritagefoundation.info/index.html>

The Internet Movie database: <http://imdb.com>

ITN Source: [www.itnsource.com](http://www.itnsource.com)

ITV Studios: <http://www.itvstudios.com/>

Kaleidoscope-The Classic Television Organisation: <http://www.petford.net/kaleidoscope/tv>  
\* Contains a list of television company addresses for copyright permission.

The Kettering: the magazine of elderly British Comedy: <http://www.thekettering.co.uk/>  
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Movie Market: [http://www.moviemarket.com/Charlie\\_Drake\\_P203231](http://www.moviemarket.com/Charlie_Drake_P203231)

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\* Charlie Drake is not included on the 'British TV Greats' list  
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Whirligig '1950s British TV Nostalgia': [www.whirligig-tv.co.uk](http://www.whirligig-tv.co.uk)

\* WhirligigTV has uploaded an interview with Drake on YouTube called 'Charlie Drake's 1961 accident'. Drake describes what went wrong with the slapstick stunt during the recording of the live television episode of *The Charlie Drake Show* 'Bingo Madness'.

## Archives

The National Archives  
BBC Written Archives Centre  
Peppard Road  
Caversham Park  
Reading  
RG4 8TZ  
Telephone: +44 (0)118 948 6152  
Web: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/>

British Film Institute  
21 Steven Street  
London  
W1T 1LN  
Telephone: 020 7957 4726  
Web: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/nftva>

International Artistes  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Holborn Hall  
193-197 High Holborn  
London  
WC1V 7BD  
Telephone: +44 (0) 20 7025 0600  
Web: <http://www.internationalartistes.com>  
National Archives  
Kew  
Richmond  
Surrey  
TW9 4DU  
Telephone: 020 8867 3444  
Web: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

The Stage Newspaper Ltd,  
Stage House  
47 Bermondsey Street  
London

SE1 3XT  
Telephone: 020 7403 1818 x 8481  
Web: <http://www.thestage.co.uk>

King's College London  
Centre for e-Research  
Gareth Knight  
Digital Curation Specialist  
email: [gareth.knight@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:gareth.knight@kcl.ac.uk)  
Telephone: 0207 848 1979  
Web: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/groups/cerch/index.aspx>

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## Television Index (General and in chronological order)

*Six-Five Special* (1957-1958), family music show, BBC, 1 season, 97 episodes, black & white.

*The Third Man* (1959-1965), crime series, BBC 1, 5 seasons, 77 episodes.

*Juke Box Jury* (1959-1990), pop panel show, BBC 1, 12 series, 149 episodes (est.).

*Comedy Playhouse* (1961-1975), comedy, BBC 1, 15 series.

\* Showcase for potential new series. The series is best remembered for launching *Steptoe and Son* written by scriptwriters Galton & Simpson who Hancock had fired.

*Steptoe and Son* (1962-1974), sitcom. BBC 1, 8 series, 54 episodes, 4 Christmas Specials, pilot.

*Just Jimmy* (1964-1968) children's television, ITV (ABC), 5 series, 49 episodes.

*Not Only...But Also* (1965-1970), absurd humour / social satire, BBC 1, 3 seasons, 22 episodes.

*The Rolf Harris Show* (1967-1974†), music / comedy/ variety show, BBC 1, 7 seasons.  
† 1973 and 1974 seasons are lost.

*On The Buses* (1969-1973), sitcom, ITV (LWT), 7 series, 73 episodes, 2 Christmas Specials.  
\* Reg Varney plays Stan Butler.

*The Goodies* (1970-1981), sitcom, BBC 8 series, LWT final series, 76 episodes.

*Now Look Here* (1971-1973), sitcom, BBC 1, 2 series, 14 episodes.  
\* Ronnie Corbett plays Ronnie.

*The David Nixon Show* (1972-77), comedy / magic / variety show, 6 seasons, 72 episodes.

*Reg Varney*, (1973-1974), comedy sketch, ATV, 2 series, 14 episodes.

*Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em* (1973-1978), sitcom, BBC 1, 3 series, 19 episodes, 3 Christmas Specials. \* Michael Crawford plays Frank Spencer.

*Open All Hours* (1973-1985), sitcom, BBC 1, 4 series, 26 episodes, 1 Christmas Special, pilot. \* David Jason plays Granville.

*Quick on the Draw* (1974-1979), game-show, Thames Television. See Appendices.

"It Ain't Half Hot Mum" (1974-1981), sitcom, BBC 1, 8 seasons, 56 episodes.

\* Once again the comic double-act team of 'little man' and the bullying authority figure is a runaway success with television audiences. Diminutive actor Don Estelle / Gunny "Lofty" Sugden is often teamed with his nemesis Windsor Davis / Battery Sergeant Major "Shut Up!" Williams. The pair also had a number 1 hit record in 1975 with "Whispering Grass". See 'My Lovely Boy', 10 January 1974, season 1, episode 2.

*Carry On Laughing* (1975), sitcom, LWT (Thames Television), 2 series, 13 episodes.

\*Kenneth Connor was the 'star' of the series: Dave Freeman wrote the screenplays for 'The Prisoner of Spenda', Connor plays Nickoff, and 'The Baron Outlook', Connor plays Sir William. Barry Cryer and Dick Vosburgh wrote the screenplay for 'Orgy and Bess', Connor plays King Phillip. Lew Schwarz wrote the screenplay for 'One in the Eye For Harold'. He uses the double-act formula with Connor who plays Athelstan and Jack Douglas who plays Ethelred. The three episodes written by Dave Freeman, 'The Nine Old Cobblers', 'The Case of the Screaming Winkles' and 'The Case of the Coughing Parrot' are arguably the best of the worst in the series. Once again the 'little and large' double-act team proves its efficacy in comedy. Connor plays Punter, Jack Douglas plays Lord Peter Flimsey in a deconstruction of the 1920s world of Lord Peter Wimsey detective mysteries. Schwarz wrote the remainder of the episodes, but the first: 'Under the Round Table', 'Short Knight, Long Daze' are noticeably worse than the last three because unsurprisingly for him he does not use the double-act formula. Connor plays King Arthur. In 'And in My Lady's Chamber', and 'Who Needs Kitchener', Schwarz reverts to the double-act formula he had had a major success with in *The Worker*. Connor plays Sir Harry Bulger-Plunger, Douglas plays Clodson. But once again in 'Lamp-Posts of the Empire', Schwarz writes the comedy around one central character, this time Jack Douglas who plays Elephant Dick Darcy, and it fails, (the series ended after this). Connor's character Stanley, a randy old man whose sexual urges are finally castrated by his old age, is almost a solo performance here, his old age is used rather cruelly, if typically, to create the usual stereotype of the dithering elderly man living on the edge of a society that treats him as an outsider anyway. The character type reappeared in 'Allo 'Allo! Monsieur Alphonse was Connor's swansong.

*Celebrity Squares* (1975-1979), celebrity / comedy / game show.

*Meet Peters And Lee* (1976), ATV, music / comedy / variety show, tx. from 2 April, 1976.

*Freddie Starr's Variety Madhouse* (1979), stand-up / comedy sketch show, ITV (LWT), 6 shows.

*Sorry!* (1981-1988) sitcom, BBC 1, 7 series, 42 episodes, 1 Christmas Special.

\* Ronnie Corbett plays Timothy Lumsden.

*Only Fools and Horses* (1981-1996), sitcom, BBC 1, 8 series, 48 episodes, 15 Christmas Specials, 1 special part of Comic Relief. \* David Jason plays Derek "Del Boy" Trotter.

*Parkinson* (1971-1982), chat show, BBC 1, *Michael Parkinson Meets Max Wall*, 14/02/1981, 21:50 **YouTube**

*An Audience with Kenneth Williams*, one man show, LWT, 23 December 1983 **YouTube**

*Blackadder* (1983-1989), sitcom, BBC 1, 4 series, 24 episodes, 1 Christmas Special, 1 special part of Comic Relief. \* Tony Robinson plays Baldrick.

'*Allo 'Allo!* (1984-1992), sitcom, BBC 1, 9 series, 81 episodes, 2 Christmas Specials, pilot.

\* Kenneth Conner plays Monsieur Alfonse.

*Freud* (1984), BBC 1, TV mini-series.

\* David Suchet plays Freud.

*The Simpsons* (1989-present), animated sitcom, Twentieth Century-Fox Corporation, 17 seasons, 399 episodes.

*Vic Reeves Big Night Out* (1990-1991), stage show, sketch, double act, Channel 4, 2 series, 15 episodes.

*Bottom* (1991-1995), sitcom, BBC 2, 3 series, 18 episodes.

*Absolutely Fabulous* (1992-2012), sitcom, 6 series, 40 episodes.

*The Smell of Reeves and Mortimer* (1993-1995), BBC 2, 2 series, 12 episodes.

*Heroes of Comedy: Norman Wisdom* (1994), documentary, Channel 4, Saturday, 25 September, 21:00.

*The World of Lee Evans* (1995), sitcom, Channel 4, 1 series, 4 episodes.

*Harry Hill* (1997-2000), standup / sketch, Channel 4, 3 series, 26 episodes.

*Bang, Bang, It's Reeves and Mortimer* (1999), sketch show / double act, BBC 2, 1 series, 6 episodes.

*Family Guy* (1999-2002), animated sitcom, Twentieth Century-Fox Corporation, 3 seasons, 42 episodes.

*Futurama*, (1999-2012), animated sitcom, Twentieth Century-Fox Corporation, 7 seasons, 111 episodes.

*You've Been Framed* (2004-Present), comedy / reality TV, ITV, Harry Hill presenter series 25.

*Britain's 50 Greatest Comedy Sketches*, Channel 4, North One Television, 2005.

*Wonderland: The Secret Life of Norman Wisdom*, (2008), documentary, BBC2, Wednesday 16 January, 21:50, series 1, episode 1.

*Mark Lawson Talks to...Rolf Harris*, BBC Four, Friday, 28 November 2008.

\*Interesting because it is an insight into the relationship between comic timing and music as being something that seems to be an inherent quality in many comic's and television entertainers like Rolf Harris who performed comic musical sketches such as the 'Jake the Peg' on *The Rolf Harris Show*, BBC 1, Saturday, 22 March, 1969. Another example would be a very camp Chuck Berry performing a "sexy little number" called 'My Ding-a-Ling' in front of a British Audience on 29 March, 1972 at the Shepherds Bush Empire. It is interesting to see how quickly the teenage audience's sexually repressed embarrassments manifests itself in hysterical laughter when it is released by the shared humour of the sing-a-long filled with smutty innuendo, especially when he dedicates a verse "to those who will not sing". And of course, there is Rolf Harris' comic book interpretation on *Top of the Pops* (November 9, 1972) where he draws a caricature of baby Rolf in a pram playing with his own Ding-a-Ling while an edited performance of Chuck's performance of the song in concert is played.

\* Both performances can be viewed on

**YouTube**

*Total Wipeout UK* (2009-2011), game show / reality TV, BBC 1, 5 series, 47 episodes.

*Britain's Greatest TV Comedy Heroes*, Pegasus Entertainment, 2009.

*The Story of Slapstick*, BBC 2, 26 December 2009.

*Piers Morgan's Life Stories* (2009-2012), talk show, ITV 3, 7 seasons, 44 episodes,

\* *Ronnie Corbett* appears, season 2, episode 5, 7 November, 2009.

*"Dive, Dive, Dive!"* (2010), Part of the *Sea Fever* season, BBC Four, Monday 3 May, 2010, 21.00 – 22.00.

*Norman Wisdom: His Story*, BBC 2, Friday, 15 October, 2010, 21:00

**YouTube**

*Great Thinkers: In Their Own Words*, 'Human, All Too Human', BBC Four.

\* Rare footage of important thinkers of the Twentieth Century. Episode 1 includes a broadcast by Freud, Monday, 1 August, 2011, 21:00-22:00.

*The Story of Slapstick*, BBC 2, Monday, 9 April 2012, 11pm.

### **Television Commercial**

*Actimel: The little bottle with a lot inside*, first broadcast, 25 January 2012.

\*Diminutive comic *Ronnie Corbett* provides the voice over for this TV advert for a yoghurt drink with healthy bacteria in it. "It might look small (the bottle), but what's inside is really huge!" says Corbett.

## Film Index (General and in chronological order)

*Easy Street* (1917), directed by Charles Chaplin (uncredited).

*The Cure* (1917), directed by Charles Chaplin (uncredited).

*The Immigrant* (1917), directed by Charles Chaplin (uncredited).

*The Kid* (1921), directed by Charles Chaplin.

*The Idle Class* (1921), directed by Charles Chaplin.

*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), directed by Wallace Worsley.

*The Gold Rush* (1925), directed by Charles Chaplin.

*The General* (1926), directed by Buster Keaton / Clyde Bruckman.

\* Buster Keaton plays Johnny Gray.

*Berth Marks* (1929), directed by Lewis R. Foster.

*Brats* (1930), directed by James Parrott.

\* Stan Sr. plays Stanley Jr. and Ollie Sr. plays Oliver Jr.

*City Lights* (1931), directed by Charles Chaplin.

*Little Caesar* (1931), directed by Mervyn LeRoy.

\* Edward G. Robinson plays Cesare Enrico "Rico" Bandello / "Little Caesar".

*M* (1931), directed by Fritz Lang.

\* Peter Lorre plays [little] Hans Beckert.

*Frankenstein* (1931), directed by James Whale.

\* Dwight Frye plays Fritz.

*The Public Enemy* (1931), directed by William A. Wellman.

*Winner Take All* (1932), directed by Roy Del Ruth.

\* James Cagney plays boxer Jim "Jimmy" Kane.

*The Spectacle Maker* (1934), directed by John Farrow.

\* midget actor Angelo Rossitto plays a Court Jester.

*Babes in Toyland* (1934), directed by Gus Meins, Charles Rogers.

\* Stan plays Stanley Dum and Ollie play Ollie Dee.

*No Limit* (1935), directed by Monty Banks.



*The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), directed by James Whale.

\* Dwight Frye plays Karl.

*Car of Dreams* (1935), directed by Graham Cutts, Austin Melford.

\*John Mills plays father fixated Robert Miller.

*The Irish in Us* (1935), directed by Lloyd Bacon.

\* James Cagney plays boxing promoter Danny O'Hara.

*Dracula's Daughter* (1936), directed by Lambert Hillyer.

*Captains Courageous* (1937), directed by Victor Fleming.

*Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), directed by Michael Curtiz.

\* James Cagney plays Rocky Sullivan.

*The Terror of Tiny Town* (1938), directed by Sam Newfield.

\* midget actor "little Billy" Rhodes plays "little Billy, the Tiny Terror".

*Of Mice and Men* (1939), directed by Lewis Milestone.

*The Wizard of Oz* (1939), directed by Victor Fleming, King Vidor (uncredited).

*Pinocchio* (1940), directed by Hamilton Luske & Ben Sharpsteen.

*I Thank You* (1941), directed by Marcel Varnel.

*The Wolf Man* (1941), directed by George Waggner.

"*King Arthur Was a Gentleman*" (1942), directed by Marcel Varnel'

\* Arthur Askey plays Arthur King.

*Don't Lie* (1942), directed by Edward L. Cahn.

\*midget actor Billy Curtis plays Melinda, the Chimp.

*Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942), directed by Michael Curtiz.

*The Corpse Vanishes* (1942), directed by Wallace Fox.

\* midget actor Angelo Rossitto plays malicious dwarf Toby.

*Cat People* (1942), directed by Jacques Tourneur.

*Now Voyager* (1942), directed by Irving Rapper.

*I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), directed by Jacques Tourneur.

\* Melvin Williams plays a baby.

*Bees in Paradise* (1944), directed by Val Guest.

*Blithe Spirit* (1945), directed by David Lean.

*The Seventh Veil* (1945), directed by Compton Bennett.

*The Wicked Lady* (1945), directed by Leslie Arliss.

*Brighton Rock* (1947), directed by John Boulting.

\*diminutive actor Richard Attenborough plays Pinkie Brown a small-town hoodlum.

*Killer McCoy* (1947), directed by Roy Rowland.

\*Mickey Rooney plays Tommy “Killer” McCoy.

*Possessed* (1947), directed by Curtis Bernhardt.

*A Date with a Dream* (1948), directed by Dicky Leeman.

\*Norman Wisdom plays a shadow boxer.

*Anna Karenina* (1948), directed by Julien Duvivier.

*Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948), directed by Charles T. Barton.

*The Snake Pit* (1948), directed by Anatole Litvak.

*The History of Mr Polly* (1949), directed by Anthony Pelissier.

\* John Mills plays Alfred Polly.

*Abbott and Costello Meet the Killer, Boris Karloff* (1949), directed by Charles T. Barton.

*Samson and Delilah* (1949), directed by Cecil B. DeMille.

*White Heat* (1949), directed by Raoul Walsh.

\* James Cagney plays psychopathic criminal Cody Jarrett.

*Whirlpool* (1949), directed by Otto Preminger.

*The Magnet* (1950), directed by Charles Frend.

*Alice in Wonderland* (1951), directed by Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson & Hamilton Luske.

*Monsieur Verdoux* (1951), directed by Charles Chaplin.

*Limelight* (1952), directed by Charles Chaplin.

*Road to Bali* (1952), directed by Hal Walker.

*Monkey Business* (1952), directed by Howard Hawks.

*Hobson’s Choice* (1953), directed by David Lean.

\* John Mills plays “Willie” Mossop.

*Trouble in Store* (1953), directed by John Paddy Carstairs.

*Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1953), directed by Charles Lamont.

*The Wild One* (1953), directed by Laslo Benedek.

\* one of the Black Rebels motorcycle gang is a 'little' guy and by association, the joker in the pack. He challenges a cop who orders them out of town with a sarcastic joke: 'But we wanna watch the thrilling races daddy!' He hero worships Johnny (Brando) the leader of the gang.

*One Good Turn* (1954), directed by John Paddy Carstairs.

*Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy* (1955), directed by Charles Lamont.

*Man of the Moment* (1955), directed by John Paddy Carstairs.

*Doctor at Sea* (1955), directed by Ralph Thomas.

*Up in the World* (1956), directed by John Paddy Carstairs.

*Forbidden Planet* (1956), directed Fred McLeod Wilcox.

*Reach for the Sky* (1956), directed by Lewis Gilbert.

*Moby Dick* (1956), directed by John Huston.

*A Man of a Thousand Faces* (1957), directed by Joseph Pevney.

*Baby Face Nelson* (1957), directed by Don Siegel.

\*Mickey Rooney plays "Baby Face" Nelson. "If you don't like my size [...] I'll buy a pair of elevator shoes" he retorts when gang-land leader Rocca calls him a "shrimp".

*The Story of Mankind* (1957), directed by Irwin Allen.

\* Peter Lorre plays Nero.

*Just My Luck* (1957), directed by John Paddy Carstairs.

*The Square Peg* (1958), directed by John Paddy Carstairs.

*Carry On Sergeant* (1958), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Norman Hudis. Kenneth Connor plays Horace Strong.

*Sea of Sand* (1958), directed by Guy Green.

\* Richard Attenborough plays Brody. Percy Herbert plays White.

*Girls at Sea* (1958), directed by Gilbert Gunn.

*Carry On Nurse* (1959), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Norman Hudis. Kenneth Connor plays boxer Bernie Bishop.

*Carry On Teacher* (1959), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\*screenplay by Norman Hudis. Kenneth Connor plays Gregory Adams.

*Nun's Story* (1959), directed by Fred Zinnemann.

*Follow a Star* (1959), directed by Robert Asher.

*The Bulldog Breed* (1960), directed by Robert Asher.

*Carry On Constable* (1960), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Norman Hudis. Kenneth Connor plays Constable Charlie Constable.

*Tunes of Glory* (1960), directed by Ronald Neame.

\* John Mills plays the neurotic Lt. Col. Basil Barrow. Alec Guinness plays bullying Maj. Jock Sinclair.

*Peeping Tom* (1960), directed by Michael Powell.

*The Golden Rabbit* (1961), directed by David MacDonald.

*The Innocents* (1961), directed by Jack Clayton.

*Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), directed by Blake Edwards.

\* Mickey Rooney plays Mr. Yunioshi.

*Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), directed by Ingmar Bergman.

*One, Two, Three* (1961), directed by Billy Wilder.

\* James Cagney plays C.R. MacNamara who is asked to wear shoes with built up heels by Coca Cola executives to appear more authoritative.

*What a Carve Up!* (1961, directed by Pat Jackson.

\* Kenneth Connor plays Ernest Broughton.

*The Rebel* (1961), directed by Robert Day.

*Carry On Regardless* (1961), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Norman Hudis. Kenneth Connor plays Sam Twist.

*Carry On Cruising* (1962), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Norman Hudis. Kenneth Connor plays Dr. Arthur Binn.

*On the Beat* (1962), directed by Robert Asher.

*Freud – The Secret Passion* (1962), directed by John Huston.

\* Montgomery Clift plays Freud.

*Carry On Cabby* (1963), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Talbot Rothwell. Kenneth Connor plays Ted Watson.

*Carry On Cleo* (1964), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Talbot Rothwell. Kenneth Connor plays Hengist Pod.

*Gonks Go Beat* (1965), directed by Robert Hartford-Davies.

\* Kenneth Connor plays alien Wilco Roger.

*The Intelligence Men* (1965), directed by Robert Asher.

*Carry On Screaming!* (1966), directed by Gerald Thomas.

*Carry On Don't Lose Your Head* (1966), directed by Gerald Thomas.

*That Riviera Touch* (1966), directed by Cliff Owen.

*Carry On Follow That Camel* (1967), directed by Gerald Thomas.

*The Magnificent Two* (1967), directed by Cliff Owen.

*Oedipus Rex* (1967), directed by Pier Paolo Gasoline.

*The Producers* (1968), directed by Mel Brooks.

*Carry On Up the Khyber* (1968), directed by Gerald Thomas.

*Carry On Camping* (1969), directed by Gerald Thomas.

*Carry On Up The Jungle* (1970), directed by Gerald Thomas

\* screenplay by Talbot Rothwell. Kenneth Connor plays Claude Chumley.

*Little Big Man* (1970), directed by Arthur Penn.

\* Diminutive actor Dustin Hoffman plays Jack Crabb.

*I, Monster* (1971), directed by Stephen Weeks.

*Carry On Henry* (1971), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Talbot Rothwell. Kenneth Connor plays Lord Hampton of Wick.

*Carry On At Your Convenience* (1971), directed by Gerald Thomas.

*Carry On Matron* (1971), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Talbot Rothwell. Kenneth Connor plays Mr. Tidey.

*On the Buses* (1971), directed by Harry Booth.

\* Reg Varney plays Stan Butler.

*Carry On Abroad* (1972), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Talbot Rothwell. Kenneth Connor plays Stanley Blunt.

*Mutiny On the Buses* (1972), directed by Harry Booth.

\* Reg Varney plays Stan Butler.

*Holiday On the Buses* (1973), directed by Bryan Izzard.

\* Reg Varney plays Stan Butler.

*Carry On Girls* (1973), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Talbot Rothwell. Kenneth Connor plays Mayor Frederick Bumble.

*High Plains Drifter* (1973), directed by Clint Eastwood.

\* midget actor Billy Curtis plays Mordecai.

*The Baby* (1973), directed by Ted Post.

\* David Mooney plays David Manzy a 21 year old diaper-clad bottle-sucking baby.

*Frightmare* (1974), directed by Pete Walker.

*Carry On Dick* (1974), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Talbot Rothwell. Kenneth Connor plays a Constable.

*Confessions of a Window Cleaner* (1974), directed by Val Guest.

*Confessions of a Pop Performer* (1975), directed by Norman Cohen.

*Carry On Behind* (1975), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Dave Freeman. Kenneth Connor plays Major Leep.

*Confessions of a Driving Instructor* (1976), directed by Norman Cohen.

*Carry On England* (1976), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by David Pursell & Jack Seddon. Kenneth Connor plays Captain S. Melly.

*Rocky* (1976), *Rocky V* (1990), directed by John G. Avildson. *Rocky II* (1979), *III* (1982), *IV* (1985), directed by Sylvester Stallone.

*High Anxiety* (1977), directed by Mel Brooks.

*Confessions from a Holiday Camp* (1977), directed by Norman Cohen.

*Carry On Emmannuelle* (1978), directed by Gerald Thomas.

\* screenplay by Lance Peters. Kenneth Connor plays Leyland.

*Scarface* (1983), directed by Brian De Palma.

\* Al Pacino plays psychopathic criminal Tony Montana.

*The Man with Two Brains* (1983), directed by Carl Reiner.

*Zina* (1985), directed by Ken McMullen.

*Pale Rider* (1985), directed by Clint Eastwood.

*Spaceballs* (1987), directed by Mel Brooks.

*Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988), directed by Robert Zemeckis.

*Twins* (1988), directed by Ivan Reitman.

\*diminutive actor Danny DeVito and Arnold Schwarzenegger as twin brothers.

*Dead Again* (1991), directed by Kenneth Branagh.

*Double-X* (1992), directed by Shani S. Grewal.

\* Norman Wisdom plays underworld safe-cracker Arthur Clutten.

*Dumb and Dumber* (1994), directed by Peter Farrelly.

*Flubber* (1997), directed by Les Mayfield.

*Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (1999), directed by Jay Roach.

*Shrek* (2001), directed by Andrew Adamson, Vicky Jenson.

\*Lord Farquard is a dwarf (and therefore wicked) and so the butt of many jokes. The name Farquard is a typical example of the kind of anal humour joking pun based on mispronunciation and foreign malapropisms in the British comedy *Carry On Abroad* (1972). When Pepe (Peter Butterworth) the Spanish hotel owner is introduced to Mr. Farquhar played by Kenneth Williams he splutters, “Far-ki Harse, Farki-who?” (the H is not silent but emphasises *arse*) played by Kenneth Williams a camp actor who was suspected of being a closet homosexual (therefore the butt of many anal jokes).

*A Cock and Bull Story* (2005), directed by Michael Winterbottom.

*Big Momma’s House 2* (2006), directed by John Whitesell.

*A Dangerous Method* (2011), directed by David Cronenberg.

\* Viggo Mortensen plays Freud.