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## 'Cash and Catamarans': 1980s British society through *Howards' Way*

'The sphere of the economic, the public and the cultural are made meaningful in narrative form' (2005: 32). A compelling demonstration of this maxim is provided by the BBC drama series *Howards' Way* (1985-90). This article argues that by utilising leisure and commerce as its central themes and the maritime as its backdrop, the series narrativizes a temporally and culturally specific form of British national identity, referencing both historical past as well as 1980s present. *Howards' Way* arranged and presented public and private spaces by an economic logic which resulted in a 'monetisation' of the British landscape. By virtue of its position as publicly funded culture, the 'public' and the 'cultural' are made 'meaningful' entirely in terms of the 'economic' in *Howards' Way* in an uncannily prescient manner. This article will consider this remarkably successful BBC series, focusing on its treatment of class and gender dynamics, economics, national identity and its representation of physical and metaphorical space to suggest how *Howards' Way* was in many ways a highly 'meaningful expression' of 1980s Britain. The alacrity with Margaret Thatcher's tenure is underlined by the fact that the last episode was broadcast on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1990, two days after Margaret Thatcher resigned as Prime Minister of Great Britain.

### *Howards' Way* and the 1980s

*Howards' Way* focused on the rich and the nouveau riche of the fictional Hampshire town of Tarrant (filmed in the real town of Bursledon) and was produced by the BBC with a substantial budget (The 'BBC Cult TV' website cites the original budget was £1million whilst Glaister & Evans quote average filming as costing £5000 a day, 1988: 14). It was highly successful, and according to claims on the BBC website it is the only drama series to achieve viewing figures of over ten million for all six of its series, and became a regular fixture on Sunday evenings on BBC1 for five years (BBC Hampshire, 2009). Originally planned as a thirteen part series, it ran for six series and seventy-eight episodes in total and was eventually cancelled after the premature death of one of the main stars Maurice Colbourne (who played Tom Howard). *Howards' Way* was originally conceived along two different but converging lines. Firstly, it was intended to be a BBC equivalent of the American series' *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, in which the lives of the rich were presented against lavish and exotic

backdrops, and the glamorous clothes and glossy decor could act as a primary appeal. This was referenced in the casting of Kate O' Mara in the last two series, following her time on *Dynasty*. But, secondly *Howards' Way* was conceived as a show about yachting and sailing, originally intended to be called *The Boat Builders* (Glaister & Evans, 1988: 14).

The show was the creation of veteran producer Gerard Glaister (although in his biography, director Michael E. Briant claims that it was he who proposed the idea to Glaister around five years previously, 2012: 146) who was responsible for such successful series as *Colditz* (1972-4), *Secret Army* (1977-79), *Kessler* (1981) and *The Brothers* (1972-3). *The Brothers* provided a template for *Howards' Way*, with the drama centred on a lorry haulage business in the same way that the latter series was to revolve around a boatyard. The difference was that *The Brothers* had been produced in the austerity of the early 1970s which saw industrial unrest and economic downturn. In that era, yachting and sailing was associated somewhat with older men like the admirable but venerable Sir Francis Chichester and Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath who led the country from 1970-74. By the mid 1980s there was an economic upturn and the yacht and the leisure industry were encountering a boom time. The yacht, in particular, had begun to represent the glamour of conspicuous consumption, exemplified by the music video accompanying 'new romantic' group Duran Duran's hit record 'Rio'. As historian Alwyn Turner describes: 'Part of the new Britain that was being built was a desire to take centre-stage in the sporting world, reflecting the growing financial muscle of what was known as the leisure industry', (2010: 244).

Tellingly, Turner also points out that 'by 1986, it was estimated that there were as many people employed making pleasure-boats in the south as there were building ships in the yards of the north' (2010: 132), tying in the growth of yachting to the demise of the traditional heavy industry heartlands of Northern Britain. At the same time, sites previously used for commercial manufacture and upkeep were turned into marina's and themes parks alongside the closure of Naval dockyards at Chatham and Plymouth.

From its outset, *Howard's Way* dealt with questions of industrial change and the adoption of new business methods. Recently unemployed aircraft designer, Tom Howard (Maurice Colbourne), takes the plunge and invests his redundancy money in the Mermaid Boat Yard, run by Jack Rolfe (Glyn Owen), to become "his own boss" and design world-leading boats. As Bradley describes of this era: 'The moral crusade against the permissive, anti-capitalist ethos of the 'social democratic consensus' was to replace unproductive artistic and intellectual thought with a new enterprise culture, stressing the entrepreneur and the self-made man', (1998: 6).

Tom's ambition to become a 'self-made' man compares favourably with the same desire exhibited in Ken Masters (Stephen Yardley). Ken is the key 'working-class' character and intermittent villain: an economic aspirant whose devious business dealings astounds and disgusts those around him ("sincerity tends to make me a little bit tongue tied", Series 1:11). Although frequently stymied by the 'old boy's network', he makes it his mission to break into these upper echelons. Masters' constant concern over the course of the series is to reach this economic rank and he often expresses awareness that he is not the right sort of money, talking of an "absence of the old school tie" and describes fellow businessman and fellow 'villain' Charles Frere (Tony Anholt) and his associates as "old money, joining ranks and protecting members of the club" (4:9). He decides that the best way of doing this is by involving himself in the leisure industry, declaring, "apart from psychiatry, leisure is the boom industry of the 80s" (4:7). He perhaps best exemplifies the 'self-made' or 'yuppie' aesthetic of the 1980s, treating everything and everybody as an opportunity to exploit for personal profit and advancement. Like the other main characters in the series, he displays the conspicuous trappings of wealth, or the iconography of aspiration. Helicopters, yachts, speedboats and Jaguar cars are the vehicles of choice whilst ski resorts, fashion boutiques, racing stables, country mansions and yacht clubs are the man-made (literally) spaces of display. Again, this indicates a definite and deliberate choice on the part of the producers. As Ray Evans describes of the show, 'Design is vital in a drama whose characters are conscious of taste...the glossy image of the new affluence and its visual and entertainment values' (1987: 17).

Yet at the same time, *Howards' Way* makes clear who really owns the money and power in Britain, and who safeguards the means of attaining it. Sir Edward Frere,

portrayed by Nigel Davenport, and his estranged son Charles Frere (Tony Anholt) represent the 'old money', whilst Charles, his lawyer Gerald Urquhart (Ivor Danvers) and his wife Polly (Patricia Shakesby) are all acquainted from their "Cambridge days". Between them, they use Ken Masters as a pawn in their manoeuvres against each other, and continually frustrate Ken's attempts to penetrate their upper circle. They dominate any decisions made by the other character by obstruction and manipulation, embodying the power structures of 'old money'.

*Howard's Way* was also characterised by the tension between a definite masculine hierarchy being increasingly questioned and challenged by the businesswomen in the show. Sir Edward Frere casts a long shadow over everything, even after he dies in series six, and one of the most important story arcs across the entire six series, is a custody battle between himself, an American counterpart Robert Hudson (Bruce Boa) and virtually every main character in the show, over which line of succession their respective grandson will follow. The antiquated notion of siring a male heir to carry on the dynasty is very much in evidence here. The image of the two on horseback, in front of the stately home conjures images of representations of land-owning gentry in visual culture.

The appearance of 'working-class' characters in *Howard's Way* is a rarity. Ken claims to be of humble stock but also takes pride in displaying the distance he has achieved from it. The only other significant 'working-class' character is Bill Sayers (Robert Vahey) the old boat builder, who is a minor character throughout the series. The working classes are rarely seen or heard and the rest of the show concerns itself with the superficial gloss of appearance. The working-class are not seen enjoying leisure time or its rewards. The ideology the show appears to perpetuate is that leisure can be purchased, and therefore not the product and reward of hard labour. There is a brief suggestion of unionisation in the first season as the Mermaid workers declare "we down tools at 12.30" (1:4) but this storyline soon evaporates and despite a lone speech by Bill in episode 5:13 about the community in Tarrant- "the church, the pub-people living and working together", the show focuses on ruthless individualism, often at the expense of close friends, lovers and family members. As Gerard Glaister states: "Everything has been selected to look good...The cast are all very easy on the eye" (1987: 121). It was also the intention to 'replace the familiar locations of kitchen,

back garden, corner-shop and public bar' (1987: 10). This is particularly significant, as these are key locations in the depiction of working-class lives, particularly in soaps, as they tend to mirror the spaces inhabited by the working classes in actuality. As Such, *Howards' Way* also presented itself at the opposite end of the spectrum to the BBC soap opera *Eastenders*, which was also launched in 1985. It is interesting, therefore, that it is often claimed that *Howards' Way* morphed from a 'drama' into a 'soap' (see for example Edge, 2010). There were similarities in the format. Geraghty (1981, 1991, 2005) and others have traditionally associated certain features to the soap form, including an open-ended narrative form or 'unwritten future' (Geraghty, 1981: 12), 'cliff-hanger' endings, a regular broadcast slot which encourages habitual viewing and a large appeal to female audiences. *Howards' Way* shared all of these but at the same time provided the antithesis of the 'teacherly text' and the assertion that, '...soaps have the function of representing groups or figures who tend to be under-represented in other dramas, characters whose political attitudes, ethnicity, sexuality or age makes them different from the standard hero, (Geraghty, 2005: 20). As shall be demonstrated, there is mention of more transgressive or less accepted lifestyles, and storylines which incorporate broader social concerns, but as a general rule, they are rare or serve to function as a temporary impediment to the overarching narrative of economic progress.

Notwithstanding, old money or new, the characters in *Howards' Way* are constantly over-stretching themselves financially, borrowing heavily from banks and corporations and are constantly on the precipice of financial disaster, indirectly echoing the late 80s housing bubble that eventually led to early 90s recession in Britain. Indeed, property acquisition is a central theme. Similarly, several of the characters are tried for fraud and insider trading, whilst venture capitalism, hostile take-overs, Swiss bank accounts, oil and the practice of 'warehousing' all form the basis of prominent storylines. Another key storyline is the attempt by Ken, Edward and Charles to build a luxury marina on land allotted as a nature reserve. The re-development of docklands areas as luxury marina districts was a particular cultural strand of 1980s Britain. As Charles Frere declares, "They'll be intense pressure to leave things as they are", to which Viscount Cunningham (Richard Wilson) laments "That's one of our faults as a nation" (2:3), thus invoking nationality in a discussion of capitalist ideology and 'small 'c'' conservatism.

In an extra-textual parallel, *The Guardian* reported in 1989 that the Marina Development Group, who operated on the River Hamble, ‘the background for the Howards’ Way sailing soap opera’ was being investigated by the Office of Fair Trading following a ‘flurry of complaints’ regarding 25% rent rises (Rodgers, 1989). Such is the synchronicity between the show’s aims and events in 1980s Britain that a slightly incestuous relationship between fiction and reality occurs. In the official accompanying book about the series, Producer Ray Evans proudly talks about the show in terms of numbers and profits. In particular, he describes the positive effect that the show has had on the leisure industry, stating that it ‘has undoubtedly stimulated interest in the small boats among the public’, and also that ‘Howards’ Way mirrors what already exists, and has also indirectly encouraged its expansion’ (1987: 23). He also mentions the exclusive design for a ‘spring’, a smaller yacht that was developed alongside the show and that, ‘Personal appearances by Howards’ Way stars at boat shows haven’t done any harm either’ (1987: 156). Between September 1987 and March 1988, 150 springs were sold.’ adding that, “Of course, the BBC is not financially involved, but its weight convinced others of the viability of the design” (1987: 156). This is validated by the designer Tony Castro who states that “there is no doubt in my mind that the series has had a good effect on the entire British marine industry”. *The Times* reported in January 1987 (Lean-Vercoe, 1987) that the London International Boat Show ‘smashed all attendance records’ at the weekend, stating: ‘The figures undoubtedly reflect the increasing popularity of the sport, spurred on by media coverage of the Americas’ Cup and the continuing success of BBC television’s popular soap, Howards’ Way’ (1987).

The same newspaper reported in June that year that Castro’s *Barracuda* from the show has received orders of eleven for the firm who manufacture it, Sadler Yachts, at ‘pounds 75,000 plus VAT’ (Gee-Smith, 1987) and on October 15<sup>th</sup> that the same vessel won The Channel Handicap Division of the yachting championship (Pickthall, 1987). Similar effects of the show’s success are attributed to the rejuvenation of the Southampton area in general and the renewal of the Wolf Rock boat race (Glaister & Evans: 158). So the show, produced by the publically funded Institution of the BBC and its specific limitations of sponsorship, became intrinsically integrated into the economy of the South of England.

This incestuous fiscal entanglement only exacerbated as the series continued and grew in popularity. A minor scandal arose when the BBC received a financial incentive to film the final series in Bermuda. As the *Evening Standard* Reported, ‘The BBC has accepted thousands of pounds of hospitality from the Bermuda Tourist Board as an inducement to film the final episodes of Howard’s Way on the island, it was disclosed today’, (Hellen, 1990). The BBC defended their position by stating that the BBC guidelines instruct producers to: “Avoid giving publicity to individual persons, products, firms or organisations except insofar as it is necessary in providing effective and informative programmes” (1990). As can be seen above, the BBC tended to push the boundaries of this resolve with regards to *Howards’ Way*.

Indeed, there seemed to be a confusion and conflict as to what exactly constituted ‘commercial’, ‘quality’ or ‘elitist’ television. As the *Courier Mail* reported in August 1989, something of a public debate arose after Rupert Murdoch, who was launching Satellite television in the UK at the time, claimed that British television was ‘elitist and backward- looking’: “Much of what passes for quality on British Television is really no more than a reflection of the values of the narrow elite which controls it” (Hunter, 1989). BBC managing director of the time, Paul Fox challenged this assumption, giving the examples of *Eastenders*, *Coronation Street*, *Minder* and *Howard’s Way*, whilst the paper reported that the commercial channels also rejected these claims. The Courier reports:

...ITV Channel 4 chief executive Mr Michael Grade responded to Murdoch’s attack by saying “To Rupert, television is just another commercial area to be exploited. To us, it has been an attempt to contribute to the cultural life of this country” Lord Rees-Mogg of the Broadcast Standards Council agreed with Mr Murdoch that existing broadcasting monopolies should end. “But I do not want the result to be a McDonald’s culture, in which television provides the international fast food of the mind,” he said (Hunter, 1989).

The clash of old dynasties and values and new money and the commercial aesthetic narrativised in *Howards’ Way* is also evident in the televisual culture which produced it, alongside a tension between quality and commercial, elitist and popular.

**“We live in a commercial world Ken, everything is for sale” *Howards’ Way* and the Spaces of Capitalism**

Jean Seaton suggests that ‘British ‘exceptionalism’ has been defined and reinforced by a unique media institution which has played a role in metabolising the nation’s sense of itself...the BBC’ (2009: 78). Similarly, Jeanette Steemers suggests that the BBC retains a tradition of representing Britain, ‘In Britain the concept of nation and national identity was linked to public service broadcasting from the beginning, and the BBC, as the premier public broadcaster, has always underlined its cultural contribution to the nation’, (2004: 15).

The cultural residues of the age on screen in *Howards’ Way* are tied up to business and leisure, with one informing the other: leisure is a product of business acumen and the acquisition of wealth. Concomitantly, the ‘spaces’ of leisure, particularly seascapes and shorelines are also almost entirely shown as being populated by those with the wealth necessary to inhabit them. This is underlined by the treatment of space and landscape in the series, as illustrated in episode 4:6 in which Avril Rolfe declares “I claim this beach in the name of Frere Holdings”. In this way, leisure is bracketed as the exclusive preserve of the wealthy, and by extension the spaces that allow it. Thus the BBC in this instance, was in danger of substituting culture for commerce, yet this seemed to reflect the ‘meaningful expression’ of the culture of the time.

In his book *Social Justice and the City* (1973) David Harvey reflects that if urban processes under capitalism are to be understood, then an examination of the nature and use of spaces is necessary (1973: 120). He proposes a tripartite understanding of space that includes absolute space, relative space and relational space. Absolute space includes all those spaces we can touch and feel, relative space is slightly less corporeal but incorporates ‘flows of energy’, topology and geometry, speed, distance and motion (which also rely on temporal structure) and relational space which can include sounds, odours and sensations which are then related to a space, as evinced by such seemingly intangible concepts as surrealism and existentialism (1973: 135). Harvey’s taxonomy can be usefully applied to the different uses and representations

of space in *Howards' Way*. As broadcast television, divisions of labour and space decree that filming takes place in certain internal locations (Pebble Mill studios) and external locations (Hampshire, Malta, Gibraltar etc.). The specific arrangement and juxtapositions of these recorded images fulfil an aesthetic and industrial logic (narrative reason, verisimilitude, visual style and budgetary concern). As Fiske and Hartley attest, 'television is a human construct, and the job that it does is the result of human choice, cultural decisions and social pressure' (2003: 5). Producer Glaister points out, specific decisions were made regarding the use of wide- angle shots of the landscape (1988: 14). Whereas these are often used for aesthetic beauty and display in their own right, this idea was deliberately rejected in favour of a more static and contained camera. This is explained as the choice of Glaister in establishing his own 'house style and keeping the style aligned to the central family, 'The Style extends to the way the programme is shot, and no pandering to scenic backgrounds- when they are they are integrated. Shots are kept tight and angles interesting' (1988: 14). The idea of containment and reduction is thus evidenced by these stylistic choices.

The next important spaces to consider are the spaces of exhibition (or 'display' as Fish, 2007: 3, posits), the homes and individual rooms in which the show was watched on television: the domestic sphere (often still dominated by the lounge or living room in this era). Here the idea of containment takes on a gendered connotation, as this sphere is often considered as a feminine realm due to its relationship with traditional hetero-normative conceptions of the roles of housewife and mother. John Caughie has described the cinematic sphere as being characterised as masculine desire for escape whilst television by contrast is 'maternal- providing, nourishing, invisibly mediating' (in Thornham & Purvis, 2005:23). Similarly, Jane Feuer talks of television as a medium of 'containment' which 'constructs spectators as domestic, familial subjects' (in Thornham & Purvis, 2005:9). Clearly, this is a negative conception of the medium, related to out-dated or chauvinistic concepts and conditioning which will be returned to later.

Perhaps the most important construction of spaces with regards to this analysis is the juxtaposition of sound and image in the text itself. It is here that intended and unconscious meaning is presented in relation to the narrative and the aims of the show. It is important to acknowledge that in this regard, what is excluded is as

important a consideration as what is included. It is worth considering that this would be prescribed as 'relational space' in Harvey's schema, with the actions taken in absolute space only making sense in relational terms (136) removed further by the process of filming and the mechanics of editing, broadcasting and reception: 'Symbolic space generates distinctive meanings through readings and interpretations' (1973: 136).

### **Space and Power Relations**

It is not to strain the imaginative powers to link the display of wealth, space and landscape in this specific form of national visual culture to certain cultural antecedents. In particular, the painting *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (1750) by the English landscape artist Thomas Gainsborough evokes issues of landscape and ownership. This famous painting is often cited in debates surrounding the demarcation of public and private land. John Berger, citing Panofsky's 'layers of meaning' suggests that the 'They are not a couple in nature as Rousseau imagined nature', but simply landowners, and therefore 'landscape art served to naturalise, and hence to mystify property relations' (1988: 5). In a similar way, the characters in *Howard's Way* are arranged and presented primarily as land and property owners- their relationship to the environment predicated on a class and economic pretext, and the construction of televisual drama the process of both naturalising (by projecting within the cultural sphere) and mystifying (through the process of aspirational distancing) this relationship. Raymond Williams similarly claims that the 'whole pastoral tradition in English literature has class connotations' (2006: 22), whilst Burden and Kohl suggests that a 'capitalist trinity [is] established in space...endowed with exchange value and is a commodity and a resource'. Burden and Kohl elaborate, 'A Place (the English countryside) is a spatial practice (as landscape, scenery, farm, theme park) encoded with aesthetic, cultural relations- including those of class and power' (2002: 18). This is expressed particularly in *Howards' Way* in the manner in which it imbues the spaces of the sea and the maritime with the same ideologically. The countryside has a specific association with national identity ('the dominant mobilising myth of the British people', Higson, 1995: 274) with green pastures, hedgerows and rolling fields insinuating themselves into the cultural life of the nation. However, the sea and maritime spaces also perform a similar function as part of the physical and

imaginative landscape of national mythology. The sea was the site at which the prosperity and Imperialist ascendancy of the British and the British Empire was established by the mercantile expansion of the British merchant navy and the martial endeavours of the Royal Navy. Yet another layer of associative meaning is added to the text in the way it presents the sea and liminal spaces as romanticised, fetishized and exoticised. Here, the relational and juxtapositional configuration of the visual and aural elements, hint at a provenance of British maritime history and national relationship with the sea, but by association, render it a space only accessible or occupied by the moneyed or aspirational classes.

The opening titles of *Howards' Way* acts as signifier of the show's intended meanings and links it back to this national conception. Romance is established through the use of sound and image, with the sea and sailing at the centre of this visual display. It begins with close-up shots of ropes, ties and sails as the music's gentle staccato pulse establishes an anticipatory and relaxed forward momentum. We then see the prow of a ship, in sun-dappled water (nautical visual language, or synecdoche for linear progress or for literal or metaphorical journeys) which makes way for the show's title, displayed over flowing and sun-dappled seas.

A classical guitar riff is introduced after forty- five seconds as a sailor is silhouetted against the sun, followed by a yacht in full sail in the same perspective, evoking yet more romance between sailing and the sea. After one minute, the chorus bursts forth with increased orchestration as the forward momentum of the sailing images increases: a sequence depicting the perspective of a yacht, tilted towards the sky as it glides forward majestically is followed by a shot of the masts and sails seen upright from a low perspective (again, in nautical visual language, this depicts either the grandeur or majesty of sailing, or the dizzying and foreboding aspects of a sea voyage).

Finally, the music adopts a more plaintive tone as the yacht is seen sailing off into the sunset.

Sailing and the sea are therefore linked to romance and adventure; relaxation, exoticism, and beauty. The ship and the sea are therefore fetishized- a landscape and a

leisure activity conflated into one romantic package. This occurs throughout the series, and is not confined to the credits, but used throughout episodes to decoratively augment the passage of time or to bookend the opening and closing of the narrative. It is also employed to provide a ‘nautical panacea’: a seductive and escapist interstitial chapter in the narrative which is often juxtaposed to the harsh realities of business or life on land (Fryers, 2013). For example, in episode 1:2, following two domestic scenes in which Jan Howard (Jan Harvey) discusses domestic duty with her daughter (“bang went all my ambitions”) and one in which Tom confronts Jan about investing all his redundancy money on the Mermaid Boatyard, a sense of calm is restored with scenes aboard Tom’s yacht. Similarly, in episode 3:8, following Gerald Urquhart’s moving description of his friend’s death from AIDS (another 80s referent- this was one of the first mentions of the disease in mainstream British fictional programming) addressed to his wife Polly, there follows a long sequence of sailing romance as the two are brought together and reconciled. As we have seen though, *Howards’ Way* takes this concept of material readings of natural landscapes to its logical conclusion, providing the opposite of what Klein and Mackenthun propose:

The most important effect of bringing the critical categories of working-class history to bear on the analysis of seafaring is that the history of modern maritime capitalism can be viewed from the bottom-up. (2004: 3)

In contrast, not only does *Howard’s Way* present modern marine capitalism from the top-down, the bottom is barely visible. Therefore, not only is the shows’ conception of a national maritime nation defined narratively by the dominant ideology of its age, it is also imbricated in its treatment of spaces and visual display.

### **“I don’t think I’ll ever love a man as much as The Flying Fish” Gender politics in *Howards’ Way***

In many ways, both in its narrative thrust and mechanics of presentation, *Howards’ Way* shares much in common with the 1970s costume drama *The Onedin Line* (1971-1980). *The Onedin Line* was a hugely successful BBC costume drama which focused on the familial and business machinations of James Onedin, a nineteenth Century

Merchant Ship Master who builds a merchant shipping empire from the bottom- up by ruthless business dealings: an economic aspirant before the term ‘Thatcherite’ had been invented. The show also blended sailing romance (Onedin utilised Katchaturian’s Spartacus theme in its opening titles and interstitial chapters and both *Onedin’s* and *Howards’ Way* theme tunes were successfully released as singles in the pop charts), the graceful beauty of the age of tall ships with the more prosaic and less romantic aspects of nineteenth century life. Unlike *Howards’ Way*, *The Onedin Line* depicted what Victorian life was like for both privileged and under-privileged citizens alike.

The original aim of *The Onedin Line* was to detail the transition from the age of sail to the age of steam, fetishizing the former and lamenting the encroachment on the latter on the age of tall ships. In *Howards’ Way*, it is the same dichotomy created over the building of plastic or fibre-glass yachts in a production line-context, against the traditional artisanal craft of wooden boat- building (hence the original title). In this schema, a constant narrative antagonism is played out between uneasy Mermaid Yard partners, Tom Howard and Jack Rolfe- Jack representing the ‘old ways’ (“robots have replaced craftsmen”) against Tom’s modern business methods. However, they do agree on the sea as a site of wonder and escape and there are numerous sequences in which the sea journey is a masculine rite-of-passage for both men: their space of escape and contemplation.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that the series merely perpetuated the masculine rite-of-passage narrative. *The Onedin Line* was extremely rare in that it highlighted the role of women in the maritime industry during the nineteenth century, often portraying a woman aboard ship. *Howards’ Way* takes this concept even further by showing women not only succeeding in business but also sharing a deep love and affinity with the sea. From the opening episodes, this is embodied in the central characters of mother and daughter Jan and Lynn Howard (Tracey Childs). Lynn is particularly enamoured with the sea and sailing and is devastated at the prospect of her father having to sell his self-designed yacht ‘The Flying Fish’, to pay for his stake in *The Mermaid*, declaring “I don’t think I’ll ever love a man as much as The Flying Fish” at once professing her love for the sea and sailing (masculine dominated arenas), as well as her independence from men. In 6:9 Lynn declares, “Dad was right,

there's nothing like going out to open sea. It offers a different perspective". This is underlined in episodes 2:5-2.6, in which Lynn is chosen to publicise the launch of her father's new yacht *Barracuda* by sailing it single-handed across the Atlantic. As Abby Rolfe suggests it will have "ten times better publicity value" than if a man did it (2:5). Lynn had already been part of an-all female crew who won the Fastnet race (1:9) gaining revenge on Phil Norton (Patrick Head) who lured her with a promise of a place in his male crew, only to try and seduce her. When she rejects his advances he snarls, "Oh God, a professional virgin" to which she replies "no, a professional sailor" (1:6). Her sequences sailing are accompanied by the same romantic aural and visual treatment as the male characters (and in 2:5 she is even privileged a narrative voiceover-a device absent throughout the rest of the entire series). Her female maritime rite-of-passage is echoed in the final series in which Jenny Richards (Charmaine Gradwell), another solo sails-woman, is recruited by Ken Masters with the promise of sponsorship. It is soon apparent that Ken is more interested in having her as his secretary and using her as 'eye-candy' to sell his boats. When Ken attempts to school her on the way of the world, she declares "That doesn't mean I have to sit around like a bimbo" to which he replies "yes it does!" Jenny proves him wrong by successfully circumnavigating the globe solo in the final episode (foreshadowing the real-life achievement of Dame Ellen MacArthur in 2005).

Furthermore, *Howards' Way* does represent the increasing expansion of women into the male-dominated workforce that typified the 1980s. In series six, the establishment of a company that produces an organic line of cosmetics by Jan and Lynn, mirrors the creation of the highly successful 'Body Shop' founded in 1976 by female businesswoman Anita Ruddock (which expanded annually by 50% until she sold the business in 1987, Entine, 2002). As Hills argues, 'the re-structuring of the labour force along more 'flexible' lines also had consequences for gender divisions, creating a pool of long-term unemployed males while drawing increasing numbers of women into the workforce' (1999: 7), and this finds expression in this narrative thread.

Interesting questions of gender politics are also evident in the manner in which the series was conceived. Jill Hyem was one of the initial writers on the series and was instrumental in establishing the Jan Howard character who became fundamental to the development of the series. She describes, 'in the treatment I was first shown they

[female characters] were very black and white and one-dimensional: ‘Jan Howard-baddie’ and so on’ (*Express*, 2010: 24-5)). In other interviews, she is more vociferous about this and what she terms the ‘male mafias’ (1987: 157) on certain police, spy or genre series,

I went to see the producer. The buzzwords were ‘glossy’, ‘fast moving’, ‘slick’, ‘Dallas’. He told me that the two other writers were to be men but he felt they ‘ought to have the feminine touch’. My first impulse was to run a mile, but I took the format home. I read it, and was so incensed by the biased and unsympathetic biography of the central female character that I determined to take the job, if only to redress the balance a little, (1987:158).

Hyems was not entirely alone. Sarah Hellings (*Angels*, 1975-83, *Juliet Bravo*, 1982-3) directed a number of episodes in the first two series (nine in total, including several written by Hyems, thus establishing a female auteur partnership). Yet this is where any female writing and directing ended and after series three, the show was entirely authored and directed by males, many of them veterans of *The Onedin Line*, including Tristan de Vere Cole, Pennant Roberts and Michael E. Briant, despite the fact that a female target audience was deliberately courted by featuring romantic storylines and the iconography of the fashion industry (‘one of the legitimate cultural pursuits of the eighties’, Turner: 243). As Hyems bemoans,

‘A cynical male production team- more concerned with cash and catamarans- soon caused me too seek fresh waters. It is interesting to note that although other women writers were commissioned to write episodes over the subsequent series none of their scripts was used’ (1990: 45).

*Howards’ Way* therefore represents a constant tension between nostalgia for an old, patriarchal world and the changes taking place in contemporary Britain as women became more prominent in business and other male-dominated fields. This is complicated by a further internal tension between surface appearance and actual statistics, as Hill also describes, ‘in 1990, women represented over 43 per cent of the labour force. However, 76 per cent of these were in part-time work and, as such, were

more likely to face low pay, diminished employment rights, and limited opportunities for advancement' (1999: 8).

The 'old order' is perfectly embodied by Jack Rolfe (Glynne Madoc) who is identified with a history of Britain linked to the sea for prosperity and for practices long lost. He is befuddled both by the production-line mentality of the modern maritime industry and by the manner in which women are increasingly intruding in those spaces. The 'new order', is therefore best embodied in the character of Jan Howard. When Tom decides to go into business for himself, she does the same, opening up a string of fashion boutiques. However she runs into prejudice at every turn, and on more than one occasion is reliant on the whims of rich men who want to wed or bed her in order to sustain the business (Ken Masters and Sir Edward Frere chief amongst them). At one point she comes into direct conflict with Jack when she buys shares in the Mermaid and insists on modernising it. She is wolf-whistled by the male employees who show a lack of respect for their employer, and tensions between the pair force Jack to declare "boat-building is a man's business" (3:13). These conflicts leave Jack concluding that he is irrelevant and he seeks to quit the business (he is aptly described as "an old boating museum", in episode 3:11, "forever living in the past"). Series four of *Howards' Way* therefore links Jack, boats and the sea in a premature elegiac epitaph for masculinity. In episode 4:3, Rolfe meets old Merchant sailor Harry Sellers (Conrad Phillips, a Royal Navy veteran) who is sailing the waterways with a sick old dog, and the following exchange takes place:

Harry: "The old sea never changes. A man can't get a grip on her like he does with the land. Nature's still alive for us"

Jack: "I've got to accept it Harry. I'm no bloody use anymore.

Harry: "Anchor up, it's time to come in. But whatever you say, boats don't change. It's always the same."

The episode ends with Jack sailing romantically into the sunset, much like Lynne in 2:5. The sea is therefore not the exclusive preserve of either sex, yet still reserved for a particular class. Tracey Childs herself is quoted as saying:

“It was absolutely a Thatcherite drama: ‘me’ generation, selfishness, greed, climbing to the top. And it started out as a 13-part drama series rather than a soap opera. Then, towards the end of series one, everything just cranked up a notch or two”, (*The Express*, 2010: 24-5).

The on-screen life of the Howard children exemplifies this point. Leo Howard begins the series as a sensitive teenager, dedicating his life to environmental issues (another cultural concern of the 1980s). However by series four and five, Leo has gone into business with Ken Masters and become a professional speed-boat racer. After a traumatic crash at the series four finale, Leo declares “life has no meaning” when he faces the prospect of not racing again (5:1). Similarly, despite her individualism in the first two seasons and love of boats over men, Lynn marries the designer Claude Dupont (Malcolm Jamieson) in series two before he is killed in a boating accident, and in the final episode (6:13) is pregnant with Charles Frere’s child, declaring that it’s “everything I’ve ever wanted” (again, this may be due to authorship, with Lynn’s lines by this time being entirely written by male writers).

## **Conclusion**

To invoke Thornham and Purvis once more, with *Howards’ Way*, the BBC rendered ‘the economic, the public and the cultural’ sphere of 1980s Britain, meaningful in dramatic visual form. *Howards’ Way* therefore provides a striking example in which a national identity in flux is presented in cultural and economic form. Issues of class and gender struggles and the machinations of business are rendered narratively alongside the specific demarcation of landscape as an extension of culture and commerce. Landscape and its use in cultural history, specifically the sea and its relation to Britain are added to the package to provide a vivid visual evocation of Britain (or more specifically, a Southern England which often purports to speak synechdochically for the entire British Isles) at a particular moment in history. The specific capitalisation of space and leisure and the exclusion of certain classes from the depiction of these lifestyles in particular resonates with the dominant hyper-monetised ideology of the 1980s, indicating just how vital are popular cultural forms in providing vibrant examples of cultural history.

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