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I would like to thank

*My parents Tony and Felicity, for keeping me clothed and fed,
My brother Anthony, for keeping me sane,
And my mentor, Christa, for keeping me on.*

1. Introduction

This thesis aims to examine the elements and motifs common to the screenplays originally scripted by Richard Curtis. Several factors influenced the choice of this topic. The strongest motivating factor was the intriguing observation that the characters of William Thacker and Charles from *Notting Hill* and *4 Weddings and a Funeral*, respectively, appear to be so similar as to be almost identical. A second, not unimportant factor is the peculiar quality of many of the scripts, namely the quirky, ironically humorous situational comedy as well as disarmingly witty dialogue. This type of humour has been resoundingly popular in Britain but has seldom fared well abroad, although Curtis' scripts have been relatively successful in the US. Finally, a review in *The Guardian* addressed the issue of reappearing character types and situations more directly.

In a review of *Love Actually*, Mark Lawson writes that "Richard Curtis's Britain is a strange place where middle-class, floppy-haired folk go in search of love - usually in the snow on Christmas Eve. But the man [...] has created a comic formula that has made him a global power in cinema" (Lawson, "It's Magic". *Guardian*, 13 November 2003). The notion of a comic formula is particularly intriguing, especially in view of the fact that Curtis is one of the most popular British screenwriters and has largely succeeded in making Britain palatable internationally. Todd McCarthy writes of the same film that "Curtis has presided over the creation of a package that feels as luxuriously appointed and expertly tooled as a Rolls-Royce" (McCarthy, "Review: Love Actually"). These articles therefore beg the question of whether there is a discernable 'comic formula' to be found in Curtis' scripts.

This question can be answered in part by breaking the scripts down and identifying the features which they share – an interesting task in itself given the difference in plot structure, setting and mood between, say, *Blackadder* and *The Tall Guy* alone, as two radically different early scripts. However, there are certain features which are clearly common to two or more scripts, as critics are all too keen to point out. The most striking similarity is probably the incredibly similar protagonists in *4 Weddings* and *Notting Hill*. Therefore, an examination of the characters is necessary, especially as more of the same type soon become apparent once the trend is established in the mind. Secondly, certain relationship patterns seem to recur in a startlingly similar fashion, especially in the sitcoms. It might be argued that the relationship between Blackadder and Baldrick is reflected in *The Vicar of Dibley* in two different sets of characters, namely in Geraldine and Alice and David and Hugo, respectively. In each case, an

older person of superior intellect is reluctantly forced to cooperate – and partly live – with a dim-witted dependent who is well-meaning but incapable. This explains why relationship patterns will also be of interest in this paper. Thirdly, the nature of humour and in particular the brand of humour used in these texts will be discussed. As comedy texts, these films represent what Britain as a culture finds amusing. Furthermore, these jokes are performed by the chosen collection of characters which continues to appear in each of the texts. A final chapter will attempt to answer the questions raised so far, namely which characters and relationship patterns resurface and why. The analysis should also reveal how these characters are products of the society which creates and consumes them, as well as how they are linked to the national self-image of the English. The question of whether the recurring characters are a result of ‘British humour’ will also be addressed.

The method used in this thesis will be similar to that adopted by the Russian formalists Tzvetan Todorov and Vladimir Propp. Todorov describes his “structural analysis” as an abstract model of the plot of a certain work, in other words theoretical and completely non-descriptive (Todorov 70). In order to illustrate how a plot can be reduced to a minimal formula, he analyses four stories from the *Decameron* and produces a plot formula which suited each of these episodes. In a sequence where an arrow denotes causality, Todorov states that for these four stories the following formula would apply: “X violates a law $\rightarrow$ Y must punish X $\rightarrow$ X tries to avoid being punished” (either “Y violates a law” OR “Y believes that X is not violating a law”) $\rightarrow$ “Y does not punish X” (73-74). Perhaps not unfortunately, such clear-cut similarities in plot are simply not present in Curtis’ work. However, Todorov’s identification of ‘crime and punishment’ as a theme may prove a useful example to follow if a similar scheme is applied to ‘seeking romance’, as reviewer Mark Lawson has pointed out that Curtis’ plots “can be regarded as a series of deep and potentially fatal holes that he [Curtis] digs for himself before somehow clambering out” (Lawson, “It’s Magic”). On the other hand, it could be said that most romantic comedies follow a very similar and predictable plot structure – therefore, this paper will consider striking, original features of Curtis’ work to begin with and only then attempt to describe a reductionist formula for the plotlines.

Vladimir Propp’s approach seems a more viable prospect when addressing Curtis’ work. Propp first published his *Morphology of the Folk Tale* in 1928, a book which reduced Russian folk tales to just seven characters and 31 ‘functions’ or ‘stable, constant elements’ (Propp 9). In his chapter on methodology, Propp explains how the characters in a plot serve

certain functions, and thus one can infer a morphology without merely analyzing the plots of the stories themselves:

The names of the *dramatis personae* change (as well as the attributes of each), but neither their actions nor functions change. From this we can draw the inference that a tale often attributes identical actions to various personages. This makes possible the study of the tale *according to the functions of its dramatis personae* [original emphasis]" (Propp 7).

Propp identifies each function descriptively, as in "[o]ne of the members of the family absents himself from home", then provides a one-word descriptor of this function, in this case "absentation" and finally denotes even this identifier with a symbol, in this case "β" (Propp, 12). The plot functions identified by Propp as being proper to each folk tale are even arranged in a loose chronological order, although some moves may occur in a slightly different order or be combined to fulfil more than one function (Propp 12), i.e., "absentation" and the "assignation of a quest" could both be fulfilled by an elder brother venturing deep into the woods to find a cure for the mother's sickness. The plot functions as identified by Propp include: "I. One of the family members absents himself from the home (absentation)", "II. An interdiction is addressed to the hero (interdiction)", "III. The interdiction is violated (violation)", "IV. The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance (reconnaissance)", "V. The villain receives information about his victim (delivery)", and so on (Propp 12-15). The entire list is too lengthy to enumerate here, especially as the plot moves of a traditional folk tale are far removed from Curtis' slightly off-beat modern rom-com plot.

Propp's identification of stock characters is no less interesting while being no more useful: he distils the Russian folk tale character functions down to the villain, the dispatcher who sends the hero on his quest, the helper, the princess/prize, the donor who gives the hero some knowledge or artifact, the hero and the false hero or pretender (Propp 79-80). These stock characters are not as easy to translate into the modern rom-com as one might think. It is true that each script has a hero, or at least an anti-hero, and a 'princess'. However, there is no quest as such, therefore no dispatcher and no donor, unless advice on relationships may be considered to be valuable support. In Curtis' scripts the role of the villain would be the same as the false hero, in other words, the other man, Carrie's husband Hamish, Anna's boyfriend Jeff, Dr. Dave and Mary's boyfriend Rupert. Only one villain ever appears as such, in the

almost cartoonish form of Alistair Dormandy. In fact, although Curtis' scripts are maligned as being kitsch and predictable, they share precious few elements with the traditional fairy tale.

No single accepted method, therefore, can be directly translated for use in this paper; however, Propp's identification of recurring characters and the functions which they fulfil may be used as a template, albeit for a completely different genre. In order to identify common features and find any underlying "formula" at work, a primarily theoretical approach will be taken towards the texts. Due to the relatively high number of primary texts to be discussed, only the relevant elements will be brought forward, with little reference to the overall mood of the text unless it is truly pertinent to establishing or discounting a pattern. An element or motif will be regarded as being 'recurring' if it appears in two or more of the texts. Particular emphasis will be laid on identifying elements and motifs which are peculiar to Curtis' scripts; naturally, common recurring elements such as happy heterosexual couples will be less central to the discussion and subsequently to finding a specific 'formula' than unusual or original features. The methodology used in this thesis is essentially a formalist approach in which the texts will be examined for commonalities. The first step will be to list and briefly characterise the main characters in each text, which will already give considerable insight as to whether certain types resurface. Frequently recurring character types can then be identified and placed into broad categories. The prototypical character of a certain type can then be described more specifically by discussing which characters and patterns fall into the category, and the description of the category itself can be refined by providing specific descriptors. In this way, recurring characters, relationship patterns and plot motifs can easily be described and denoted by the categories named.

2. Primary texts

This paper will examine the original screenplays by Richard Curtis, including those written in collaboration with other writers but excluding adaptations from novels, such as *Bridget Jones' Diary* and *War Horse*. This exclusion follows because adaptations of work originally by other writers might be indicative of Curtis' style, but would not allow even a glimpse of the stock characters or any formula at work. Although Richard Curtis' career began when he started writing short sequences, sketches such as those for "Not the Nine O'Clock News" or Comic Relief will not be included because they are too numerous and frequently too short to give

much insight. The remaining texts, then, are *Blackadder*, *The Tall Guy*, *Four Weddings and A Funeral*, *The Vicar of Dibley*, *Notting Hill*, *Love Actually*, *The Boat That Rocked* and *About Time*.

Blackadder was a result of Curtis' meeting with Rowan Atkinson at a university dramatic society, which led to sketches being written directly for and with Atkinson ("Blackadder Rides Again" 04:30-06:20). The first season of *Blackadder* aired in 1983 and, after some adjustments, the series continues successfully until 1989, with a few single episodes appearing up until 1999. *The Tall Guy* was the first feature-length script that Curtis sold in 1989; however, it was commercially unsuccessful. The real breakthrough into film was to be with the 1994 film *4 Weddings and A Funeral*, which was filmed within six weeks and cost just 3 million pounds to produce. It was a box office hit both in the UK and abroad, notably in the US. The success of *4 Weddings* allowed great scope for the next, not dissimilar feature-length production, *Notting Hill*, which was released in 1999 to great acclaim. In the meantime, however, *The Vicar of Dibley* had first been aired in 1994 and had become very popular, to the extent that it continued to appear intermittently until 2014. Curtis' next film production and his directorial debut came with the 2003 Christmas-themed *Love Actually*, which performed well at the box office but received mixed reviews from critics. Curtis also directed his 2009 film release, *The Boat That Rocked*, which was granted only a lukewarm reception by viewers and critics alike. *About Time* is Curtis' latest release to date and, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, appears to have been more popular in countries such as South Korea, possibly due to hostility among Anglophone cultures towards the text's focus on the upper middle class. All eight selected texts are necessary for the analysis of common elements as they all share certain commonalities; however, the fact that two of the texts are series and that some texts do not follow cinematic conventions complicates the matter somewhat. In order to analyse familiar elements and characters within the selected texts, the plot structures must be taken into account, as these partly dictate which characters are used and in which constellations.

2.1. Plot structures

Blackadder: The Whole Damn Dynasty is a series comprising four seasons: *The Black Adder* is set in the Middle Ages, *Blackadder II* in Elizabethan London, *Blackadder III* in Georgian

London and *Blackadder Goes Forth* in the trenches of WWI France. There are also several single episodes, partly written for Comic Relief, namely *The Cavalier Years* set during the Civil War, *Blackadder's Christmas Carol* as a parody of Dickens' tale, and *Blackadder: Back and Forth*, a parody of H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, but set at the Millennium. A character named Edmund Blackadder is present in each season and each single episode, in each case apparently the descendant of previous Blackadders. In each episode, he has a servant named Baldrick, who is also the descendant of previous Baldricks. In most episodes, Edmund Blackadder in turn serves a higher power, one who is intellectually inferior but whose wishes he must obey nevertheless. Therefore, although the plot of the entire series might be said to progress in that the Blackadder family steadily loses power and influence until the Time Machine finally allows one Blackadder to resume the throne, in fact the character sets are fairly repetitive. It must be said that there is a radical difference in character set between the first season and the second, the explanation of which requires a minor expedition into production history. The first Edmund Blackadder portrayed by this series was a sycophantic, weak, unpleasant prince who was bullied by his father, the fictitious Richard IV, and effortlessly overshadowed by his elder brother, Henry. Baldrick, intriguingly, was a streetwise servant who hatched the cunning plans. However, the main character was still unformed in the first season and Atkinson and the producer, John Lloyd, agree that too many attributes were assigned to one character ("Blackadder Rides Again" 14:48-15:44). Due to this unappealing lead and the enormous expenditure for an authentic location and extensive cast, the first season was a financial failure. Ben Elton was drafted in to help write a financially more viable second season in the hope that this might persuade the BBC not to axe the series completely ("Blackadder Rides Again" 16:44-17:22). From a much smaller budget, a slimmer cast was born, which was to form the backbone of all subsequent seasons.

4 *Weddings and A Funeral* follows a four-part episodic structure, in which each "episode" – or wedding – is signalled by an invitation card which reveals the names of the couple. There is a certain amount of repetition of structure as each episode begins with Charles – and usually Scarlet – being late for the wedding. This is only subverted in the final wedding, for which Charles' friends wake him far too early. Naturally, the ceremony follows, then the reception, and only then are elements of life outside weddings allowed to encroach, but usually involving people who meet at the reception. The funeral, interestingly, is not accorded its own episode, but is incorporated into Carrie's wedding. In lieu of a "reception"

for this ceremony, Charles and Tom discuss life and love in the rain. Although the structure is loosely episodic, the plot does progress and each episode is usually a result of the previous one; Angus and Laura's wedding prompts Bernard and Lydia's, Bernard and Lydia's causes Charles and Carrie to meet again, Carrie's wedding in part causes Gareth's heart attack which in turn causes Charles to re-evaluate his life and propose to Henrietta, which again causes Carrie to attend the wedding and reveal her marital status to Charles. The structure of the plot therefore makes it inevitable that several elements and patterns occur again and again. Also, although there clearly is a protagonist and his love interest, the cast involves several characters whose love lives are equally under scrutiny.

Love Actually also has an intriguing plot structure, in that it is a multi-stranded love story involving a cast of over twenty. The characters are loosely connected by family or professional ties, or occasionally simply friendships, yet they each have their own separate plotline, of which episodes are shown alternately. Since there are ten different plots to follow, it is difficult to speak of an overall plot per se except to state that each of the characters is looking for love over the Christmas period, be it in a romantic relationship or with family and close friends.

The Boat That Rocked also focuses on a large number of characters but the story does not shift between them, instead gently shifting focus from Carl's love life to the dramatic changes aboard the boat and back again. The only sudden change of focus is in the scenes involving Sir Alistair in London. It must be said that *The Boat* is also the only film selected which is not a romantic comedy as such. Described as a 'comedy' and a 'feelgood movie' on the DVD cover, it actually focuses more on the dynamics between the DJs and their fight against the establishment than on Carl's romantic involvements – as indeed the cover showing Gavin, Dave, the Count and Quentin suggests. Therefore, this text is somewhat of a rogue in the selection of texts as it does not follow the conventions of a romantic comedy.

The other texts follow rather more conventional structures which require little explanation. The plotline of *The Vicar of Dibley* allows for some development, as Alice and Hugo marry and David mellow, whereas *Blackadder* remains static throughout. The cast of *The Vicar* remains largely the same throughout its two series, Christmas, Easter and Seasonal specials and the Wholly Holy Happy Ending. *The Tall Guy*, *Notting Hill* and *About Time* are straightforward plots following a more traditional five-act structure and also involving a less

extensive cast, usually made up of the protagonist, his love interest and his closest family, friends and colleagues (but seldom more than six characters).

2.2. Frequent collaboration and recasting

There are undeniable common elements in the selected texts, mostly caused by re-casting actors from previous productions. It is worth mentioning at this point that some of the production crew remained the same for several productions; Duncan Kenworthy is listed as a producer for *Four Weddings*, *Notting Hill* and *Love Actually*, while Tim Bevan and Eric Fellner are included as producers for *Four Weddings*, *Love Actually* and *About Time*. BBC productions are likely to have included largely the same crew members, such as videotape editor Chris Wadsworth for both of the series. However, the production crew influence the text only in as far as they can impose their own likes and dislikes upon it; intertextual references are far more strongly apparent in the re- or type-casting of certain actors.

Rowan Atkinson has collaborated with Curtis since they met at a dramatic society at university and co-created and co-scripted *The Black Adder*. Unsurprisingly, given this close interaction, Atkinson appears in four of the eight selected texts, most famously as Edmund Blackadder but also as a character based on himself in *The Tall Guy*, and in two minor roles in *4 Weddings* and *Love Actually*. Hugh Grant is possibly the most type-cast reappearing actor, however, playing a strikingly similar character in *Four Weddings* and *Notting Hill*, while *Love Actually*'s Prime Minister David is much in the same style. With an overlap in character traits as well as frequent type-casting, it is difficult not to slip into direct comparisons with other texts (not least because Grant was then given similar roles in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mickey Blue Eyes*). Emma Thompson has also appeared in several of the texts as an outspoken, confident woman who is not afraid to take the men to task, namely as Kate in *The Tall Guy*, Karen in *Love Actually* and Charlotte in *The Boat*. Emma Chambers appears as Honey Thacker in *Notting Hill*, a watered-down version of her Alice Tinker in *The Vicar*, but bearing a definite resemblance in character. Tim McInnerny equally appears as amiable, loving but fairly incompetent Max in *Notting Hill*, a more realistic version of his portrayal of his Sir Percy Percy in *Blackadder*. James Fleet, however, plays almost exactly the same role as Hugo in *The Vicar* as he did as Tom in *Four Weddings*, except that Hugo is even less intelligent and socially skilled. Bill Nighy accomplishes a similar feat as Billy Mack in *Love Actually* and

Quentin in *The Boat*, although Quentin is slightly more mature and responsible. He also appears in much the same role, albeit with a more fatherly touch, in *About Time*. Only Rhys Ifans appears in a radically different role in two films, namely as Spike in *Notting Hill* and the outrageous, hugely popular Gavin Kavanagh in *The Boat*.

2.3. Characters to be discussed

Since this thesis will be discussing over eighty characters from eight different texts, the relevant characters from each text will now be listed and briefly characterised. This step will help to identify immediately which type of character is present in which of the texts and as well as the main functions which they perform. Some of the characters may also be listed with their surnames or nicknames from the text or ascribed another attribute in order to make them more identifiable later in the thesis. It is necessary to make some names more distinctive, as several common names occur more than once, such as Mark, David, Bob and Kate.

The Tall Guy

Dexter: The protagonist, a tall American actor in his early forties living in London and surviving by playing Ron Anderson's sidekick and punch-bag. He is polite and quite sensitive.

Kate Lemmon: The nurse who gives Dexter his hay fever injections. She is very honest and direct.

Ron Anderson: The successful slapstick comedian in whose show Dexter originally stars. He is self-important, insensitive and deeply unpleasant to his subordinates.

Carmen the landlady: The nymphomaniac, ageing hippie in whose ramshackle house Dexter survives.

Mary: The pretty, bored and married actress with whom Dexter apparently has an affair

Tamara: Dexter's wild and still-smitten ex-girlfriend.

Blackadder

Edmund Blackadder: The protagonist of each series. The succession of Edmunds is ruthlessly ambitious and quite cowardly but, with the exception of Prince Edmund in the first series, deeply cunning and intelligently manipulative. Though his wealth and social status decreases with each season, his intelligence and bitter cynicism increase.

Baldrick: Edmund's servant in each series. He has low standards of intelligence and personal hygiene, which are also traits which appear to become more extreme with each series.

Queen Elizabeth I: Appears in *Blackadder II*, *Blackadder's Christmas Carol* and *Blackadder: Back and Forth*. A manic representation of the monarch as a childish, impulsive and tyrannical ruler.

Nursie: Appears in *Blackadder II*, *Blackadder's Christmas Carol* and *Blackadder: Back and Forth*. Elizabeth's imbecilic childhood nurse, who still treats the queen as if she were a toddler.

Lord Melchett: Appears in *Blackadder II*, *Blackadder's Christmas Carol* and *Blackadder: Back and Forth*. The obsequious clergyman who fawns over the queen. Edmund's bitter rival.

Lord Percy: Appears in *Blackadder I* and *II*. Edmund's occasional companion. He is usually wealthy and follows every fashion. Unfortunately he too is very dim.

The Prince Regent, George IV: Appears in *Blackadder III* and *Blackadder's Christmas Carol*. Represented in *Blackadder* as a slimmer, more stupid version of the original, Prince George is a misguided, sexually frustrated socialite with no head for art, politics or finance.

Lieutenant George: Appears in *Blackadder Goes Forth* and *Blackadder: Back and Forth*. The young, obtuse, idealistic, upper-class optimist whom Captain Blackadder has to tolerate in the trenches of WWI. Lieutenant George is incurably cheerful and never questions orders from above.

Col. Melchett: Appears only in *Blackadder Goes Forth*. Their stubborn, narrow-minded superior who bellows every word.

Captain Darling: Appears in *Blackadder Goes Forth* and *Blackadder: Back and Forth*. Col. Melchett's secretary, a cowardly, bitter paper-pusher who is Captain Blackadder's desk-job equivalent and great rival.

4 Weddings

Charles: The protagonist. He is a disorganised, charming but socially awkward young man whose life appears to consist mostly of going to his friends' weddings. He has no apparent occupation.

Carrie: His love interest, a direct, well-spoken American with a good sense of humour.

Scarlett: Charles' flatmate. She is rather childlike and dresses eccentrically.

Tom: Their rather dim aristocratic friend, the seventh-richest man in England. He is awkward, shy and humble but very optimistic.

Fiona: Tom's sister. She is elegant, cynical and far more intelligent than her brother.

Matthew: Another friend, a gay Scot. He appears saturnine, but is quite kind.

Gareth: Matthew's boyfriend, the oldest of the group of friends. He is the kind, bombastic, benevolent patriarch of the group.

David "the Dish": Charles' brother, a perceptive young man with a hearing disability.

Henrietta: Otherwise known as Duck-Face, a nickname bestowed upon her by a disgruntled Fiona. Henrietta is one of Charles' exes, and is earnest and somewhat over-emotional.

The Vicar

Geraldine (Gerry): One of the first female vicars to be sent to a rural district when the previous incumbent dies. She is worldly, charming and provocative, and at times

shows a distinctly irreverent sense of humour. Nevertheless, she does truly appear to have faith in her vocation.

David Horton: The village councillor and resident lord of the manor, who is outraged at being presented with a female vicar and horrified by Gerry's new-fangled ideas and permissive attitude.

Hugo Horton: David's son, an amiable, enthusiastic, yet dim-witted young man who runs the estate. He is delighted with Gerry and calls her Mrs. God for many years.

Alice Tinker: The verger and an ineffectual teacher at the primary school. She is very childlike and slow-witted, yet sensitive and easily upset. Though self-centred, she usually means to be kind. She and Hugo have loved each other for years before Gerry finally encourages their relationship to develop.

Owen Newitt: The local farmer, who is often preoccupied with his livestock but manages to devote quite some time to bemoaning his lonely existence. The fact that he occasionally spouts tracts of lyrics and poetry do little to disguise his deplorable personal hygiene, uncouth and frequently misogynistic behaviour and underlying tendency to violence. However, he also sings a divine tenor in the church choir – hence, this character is full of contradictions.

Jim Trott: A slow-thinking and somewhat lecherous pensioner on the council whose lines are inevitably mangled by his unfortunate speech impediment.

Frank Pickle: The amiable yet meticulous and unfortunately dull secretary to the council. His character is later enlivened by the fact that he reveals his homosexuality during a radio broadcast.

Letitia Crophy: An elderly lady who lives with her two cats, she is otherwise known as “the Dibley poisoner” due to her misguided experiments in the kitchen.

Mary Tinker: Alice's sister, who appears to be severely mentally handicapped despite her cheerful outlook on life.

Notting Hill

William Thacker: The protagonist. The bookish owner of a travel bookstore, he is awkward and humble but dignified. His good nature is sorely tried by his customers, his colleague Martin, and Spike.

Spike: Will's amiable but daft and hopelessly vague Welsh flatmate.

Anna Scott: The famous American actress who represses her spontaneity and passion in order to succeed in her career.

Honey: Will's ditzy sister.

Max: Will's friend. A loving husband and a terrible cook.

Bella: Max's wife, a disabled lawyer.

Bernie: Their friend, who is ineffectual in a job in the City.

Martin: Will's slightly effeminate and completely ineffectual colleague at the bookshop.

Love Actually

Billy Mack: A somewhat camp ageing rock star. He is bluntly honest, cynical, self-deprecating, and swears a lot.

Jamie: A writer whose girlfriend's unfaithfulness drives him to flee to France, where he meets Aurélia.

Aurélia: Jamie's Portuguese household help who speaks no English or French.

"Bad" Harry: A company boss and family man.

Karen: His wife. Her life is put into perspective for her as her brother is the Prime Minister and she is a housewife. She is brave, considerate and loyal.

Mia: The secretary who provokes Harry into buying her an expensive present.

Sarah: One of Harry's employees, who chooses to nurse her mentally disabled brother rather than pursue a relationship with co-worker graphic designer Karl, whom she has loved for years.

Prime Minister David: The new, rather young and largely inappropriate PM.

Natalie: His love interest, the tea girl at Number 10.

Daniel: Karen's Irish brother-in-law and Sam's benevolent yet teasing stepfather.

Sam: A very mature ten-year-old.

Joanna: His love interest, an American girl at his school.

Peter and Juliet: A happy couple who get married at the beginning of the film.

"Lovestruck" Mark: Peter's thoughtful best friend, who rather inconveniently is in love with Juliet. He is considerate, but bitter about his unrequited love and rather awkward around Juliet.

John and Judy: The body doubles who fill in for other actors during sex scenes. They are both very polite and rather shy and awkward when off set.

Colin: An errand boy who decides to go to America, where he believes that girls are bound to be attracted to him.

The Boat

"Young" Carl: Nominally the main protagonist. He is friendly, fairly intelligent and easy-going but lacks social polish.

Quentin: Carl's godfather. He is camp, well-spoken, and perennially overdressed. Though technically a figure of respect and authority, he frequently fails to take himself seriously.

Marianne: Quentin's niece, later Carl's girlfriend.

The Count: The Boat's resident American DJ. He is open, friendly and brave, standing up for his friends and the all-important music.

Sir Alistair Dormandy: The precise, brisk, sadistic, repressed minister who is determined to shut the station down. It can be no coincidence that this character is played by Kenneth Brannagh, who played a very similar role as A.O. Neville in Philip Noyce's *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. Dormandy is almost certainly a parody of Neville.

Gavin: The ageing, iconic cockney DJ who returns to help save the station. Though a bad influence on impressionable young people, he is basically well-intentioned.

Doctor Dave: A coarse, corpulent London DJ who is inexplicably attractive to his many female fans. A very shady character, he does occasionally try to redeem himself but is mostly unkind to underdogs such as Thick Kevin, Carl and Bob Silver.

Thick Kevin: Carl's cabin-mate. As the name suggests, he is not very intelligent, though drinking appears to improve his cognitive processes. He is one of the more likeable characters due to his empathy and his gentle nature.

Bob Silver: Carl's biological father. An ageing, gentle, kindly hippie, over-faced by everyday life, who just wants to listen to and play his records.

Simple Simon Swafford: The cheerful Irish DJ who plays the charts. Although he is not completely obtuse, he is very naïve. After his breakup with Elenore, he tries to remain his optimistic, helpful, upbeat self.

Elenore: The cruel American girl who marries Simon only in order to be able to live with Gavin.

Felicity: The lesbian cook. Possibly because she is the only woman on board, she appears to be one of the lonelier and more vulnerable characters.

Dominic Twatt: Dormandy's ambitious, clever, passionate subordinate who helps to shut down the station. He shows much more humanity and compassion than his superior.

Charlotte: Carl's mother. She is breezy, promiscuous and popular.

Angus "the Nut" Nutsford: The enthusiastic, inexplicably unpopular Australian DJ with a passion for The Seekers.

Midnight Mark: The Boat's smooth night-time DJ who rarely speaks but is hugely successful with women of all ages.

Miss C: Dormandy's secretary, who is originally repressed but eventually succumbs to the boat's charm after listening to their illicit broadcasts for several months.

About Time

Tim: The film's protagonist and narrator, an intelligent and sensitive young man whose main goal in life is to find love.

Mary: Tim's main love interest and later his wife. She is a rather bookish but charming editor.

Dad: Tim's father James, an elegant but rather retiring figure. He is an avid reader but quietly enjoys spending as much time as possible with his children.

Mum: Tim's mother Mary, a down-to-earth character whose sensible outlook extends to her sense of dress and general appearance. She is outspoken and direct.

Uncle Desmond: Tim's vague, impeccably dressed uncle.

Kit Kat: Tim's beloved, outrageous, affectionate sister whose low self-esteem and immature behaviour threaten to ruin her.

Jay: Tim's idiotic best friend and later Kit Kat's boyfriend.

Harry: One of James's friends, a foul-tempered alcoholic playwright with whom Tim lives in London.

Charlotte: Tim's initial love interest.

Jimmy: Kit Kat's first boyfriend, Charlotte's cousin.

Joanna: Mary's scantily clad, outspoken friend.

3. Familiar Characters

This chapter will begin with a brief theoretical introduction into stock characters and stereotypes, especially those appearing in film. The difference between films and purely textual sources is significant here because characterization on film must be as economical as possible if the plot is to progress swiftly. Furthermore, film allows visual as well as descriptive characterization, while the visual characteristics are enhanced if a character actor fills the role or even if an actor is type-cast.

The era of Ancient Greek theatre is particularly pertinent to the topic of stock characters, as the masks employed in these performances shielded the actor from view and thus restricted recognition to the face of the mask the actor donned. There are many interpretations of the functions of the different Greek masks. Scholars such as David Wiles, Jaques Lecoq and Eric Csapo argue variously for alienation of the character as the principal function, enhanced physical performance due to the mask or the neutralisation of physical features (Wiles 1991, Lecoq 2000, Csapo 2002). This last function is of most interest for this thesis, as the neutralizing mask allows the character to appear in the same role as Everyman, the anonymous average citizen with whom the audience can identify. This neutral character is the stock character which is most likely to resurface in a completely different genre, the modern romantic comedy film. In modern texts, however, the function of the mask must be fulfilled by the author, who must script the character in such a way that he or she is neither too bland nor too highly individualistic. Other, minor characters, however, may be stylized to the point of ridicule.

One of the earliest works collecting stock characters is Theophrastus' *The Characters*, which was written in 319 BC to illustrate dozens of common characters in Greek plays. Theophrastus lists and briefly characterises the Dissembler, the Flatterer, the Garrulous Man, the Boor, the Affable Man, the Wilfully Disreputable Man, the Loquacious Man, the Newsmaker, the Shameless Man, the Penurious Man, the Buffoon, the Tactless Man, the Officious Man, the Stupid Man, the Surly Man, the Superstitious Man, the Querulous Man, the Suspicious Man, the Unpleasant Man, the Disgusting Man, the Petty Man, the Parsimonious Man, the Pretentious Man, the Arrogant Man, the Coward, the Oligarch, the Late Learner, the Backbiter, The Friend of Rascals and the Mean Man (Edmonds 37-132). These characters all appear to be defined by one characteristic only and are therefore

completely flat. This type of character lends itself particularly to comedy, as it invites cliché and stereotyping of certain (possibly well-known) figures or groups in society. As J.M. Edmonds states in the introduction to the 1927 translation of the book, “[t]he humour of the Characters is essential. In Aristotle the examples are a means of expression, in Theophrastus they are the thing that is said.” (Edmonds 9). While Theophrastus’ collection of stock characters from Greek theatre is edifying and quite fascinating, it cannot be said that Curtis’ characters, regardless of how briefly they appear, are quite that flat, and would therefore require several character types to complete their characterisation. If *The Vicar of Dibley*’s David is the archetypal Oligarch, he must also count as a Parsimonious Man and a Pretentious Man, not to mention a Mean Man. Then again, the definition of so many character types is a feat in itself given the overlaps between characters such as the Stupid Man, the Buffoon and the Late Learner, all of which Hugo embodies although he also requires the Affable Man in his characterisation. Therefore, while these stock characters are highly specific and one-sided, they can hardly be applied in the discussion of Curtis’ rather more complex and individual characters. However, the method used by Theophrastus, namely identifying a category and describing the key characteristics, will be borrowed in order to organise Curtis’ highly original characters.

Stock characters appear to feature in most forms of historical theatre. In a similar fashion to Greek theatre, Roman theatre features stock characters – perhaps not least because Roman plays were heavily influenced by Greek theatre. Late medieval and early Tudor theatre produced morality plays, which reduced the cast to a fixed set of stock characters including the protagonist Everyman, Justice personified and a range of anthropomorphised vices. The extent to which these characters were individualized is likely to have depended on the length of the play in question. As interludes, the characters would have been completely flat, whereas in Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*, for example, there is more room for character development. As Marlowe’s contemporary, Shakespeare might be said to have employed stock characters in many plays, as most involve royalty, heroes and their loyal friends, a fool, a meddler or puckish character, and many more. Restoration plays feature a very different set of less clearly distinguished characters such as the fop, the rake, the unfaithful wife, the prostitute and so on. It seems inevitable, after more than two thousand years of theatre, that this tradition of using stock characters should be transferred to the medium of film.

Little literature is available on the subject of stock characters in film, as Paul Loukides and Linda K. Fuller note in their introduction to their anthology *Stock Characters in American Popular Film*, which was itself intended to bridge the gap in research (Loukides 3). Loukides and Fuller lament the dearth of literature concerning everyday characters in particular, observing that

“[b]ibliographic searches in the film literature suggest that most attention has been focused on movie characters (other than ‘stars’) in terms of offensive stereotyping – notably, on women and Blacks, with Indians, Jews, and Italians also well represented. Occasional pieces on groups like teenagers, athletes, Arabs and the like have appeared, but such stock figures as the street hood, the Irish street cop [...] and scores of other stock figures are barely mentioned.” (Loukides 3-4)

It is worth noting that the first third of their anthology also consists of essays on racial or ethnic stereotyping, with the rest of the space given over to class and professional stereotyping. However, even the contributors to this volume are unable to draw on established literature or reference books. Therefore, this paper will rely on their conclusions about Hollywood and other more general literature on the subject of commonly occurring characters in film and drama as its theoretical framework.

The purpose of stock characters

Even a one-and-a-half to two-hour film does not provide time to chisel more than a few characters finely; the protagonist is often well characterized, while perhaps a few supporting characters or even the villain are given a similar treatment. However, the other characters appearing in the film usually only appear briefly and often to serve a purpose. It is helpful to the audience if these characters are easily identifiable as a certain “type”, in order that they might be characterized simply by their appearance, profession, accent or behaviour. This helps audiences to predict their social situation, attitudes, habits, likes and dislikes and to attribute any deviation from these expected behaviours as character quirks. Some texts even draw attention to this stereotyping. A good example would be the romantic comedy *How To Lose A Guy in 10 Days*, in which sports writer and basketball fan Ben asks a waitress at a vegetarian restaurant, a heavily made-up young woman dressed “alternatively” in khaki and mud colours and sporting several piercings, whether she knows the score of the game currently running. Her only answer is: “Do I look like the kind of person who knows the score

of the Nicks game?”, to which Ben is forced to agree she does not (*How To Lose A Guy* 43:07-43:18). The woman has been on screen for less than three seconds, yet the viewer is aware of how ridiculous Ben’s question is. As this scene shows, such easy stereotyping provides ample scope for humour.

Much insight can be gained into the culture of the society which produces a film by examining the stock characters more closely. While a film’s protagonist is often used to distinguish the text as original, the simplified supporting cast frequently reflects cultural conventions more clearly than the hero does (Loukides 3), as these characters should be easily recognizable to the audience as conforming to a certain type. This facilitates plot progression and, it might be argued, confirms beliefs about certain cultural conventions, thus affirming the reader’s trust in the text itself. After all, if, say, a typical southwestern hillbilly appeared on screen for a few lines and established him or herself as a polite, reserved pacifist speaking RP English, the reader might be confused to say the least. If characters deviate from type, an explanation is required, which is simply not feasible for the dozens of incidental characters which usually appear in films.

Types of stock characters

Loukides and Fuller provide a typology of stock characters, which divides them into four groups depending on the extent of their role in the film:

1. The conventional environmental figure, or extra
2. The bit role
3. Minor secondary and/or supporting role
4. Major secondary and/or supporting role (Loukides 4)

This paper is concerned only with types three and four, as it investigates the recurrence of characters within a set of films, and in which most of the recurring characters qualify as minor supporting roles at least. Loukides and Fuller claim that this type is “perhaps the most intriguing and complex”, as it “goes beyond instant identifiability through costume or occupation [...]and] has more fully realized human dimensions than either of the two lesser stock types [...]” (Loukides 6). Thus, this type of character has the chance to either conform to or deviate from the norm. Which they choose to do and how offers great insight into the text, the author and the culture from which they originate.

It is worth mentioning that several of Richard Curtis' earlier screenplays, and in particular the sitcoms, were unlikely or unable to use extras for budgetary reasons. *Blackadder III* represents the height of this budget cut with a regular cast of just three characters. Stock characters in supporting roles, such as *Blackadder's* Baldrick, *The Vicar's* Alice or *Notting Hill's* Spike are frequently exaggerated to such an extent that they threaten to dominate the protagonist at times, as they are often given the punchlines and the most time-consuming physical humour. While character development for secondary characters is clearly limited by time in the films, there would be more scope for them to develop in the sitcoms. This is realized by Alice and Hugo in *The Vicar*, but otherwise priority is given to the plot rather than the characters. Frequently their already ridiculous characteristics simply become more exaggerated for comic effect. Finally, it must be said that several of the "stock characters" discussed in this paper are not so much conventional types as original types which resurface within this author's screenplays.

3. 1. The Gauche Young Man

CHARLES: Um, look. Sorry, sorry. I just, um, well, this is a very stupid question and ... particularly in view of our recent shopping excursion ... but I just wondered, by any chance, um, uh, I mean obviously not, because I guess I've only slept with nine people, but, but I-I just wondered... uh. I really feel, uh, in short, to recap it slightly in a clearer version, uh, the words of David Cassidy in fact, uh, while he was still with the Partridge family, uh, "I think I love you," and uh, I-I just wondered by any chance you wouldn't like to... uh... uh... no, no, no of course not... I'm an idiot, he's not... excellent, excellent, fantastic, uh, I was going to say lovely to see you, sorry to disturb. Better get on...

CARRIE: That was very romantic.

CHARLES: Well, I thought it over a lot, you know, I wanted to get it just right.

(4 *Weddings* 01:04:28-01:05:31)

The most striking character type which resurfaces is that of the Gauche Young Man, usually the identifiable protagonist of the feature films. The archetypal representative of this type is upper middle class with a public-school accent, appears to be largely disorganized, falls in love upon first meeting his love interest, and fails to express his love articulately before the climax of the film. He is well-spoken and wittily self-deprecating; though he often has much to be modest about since he is typically an under-achiever. He is never physically imposing and tends towards artily disarranged hair which he may push out of his eyes when under

stress. He is, despite all his faults, very attractive to women. Several of the films' protagonists embody these very characteristics. Dexter, Charles, William and Carl are essentially well-educated and intelligent, charming, partly even very experienced with women, yet they appear shy and struggle to express themselves, partly babbling and unintentionally offending their listeners. This lack of social skill is perhaps best described as 'gauche', signifying wrong, awkward, or ill-fitting. As a group, these characters might count as 'young' men because they are still unattached and appear inexperienced because of their lack of social polish. In fact, these characters are between forty and seventeen, but chronologically grow more youthful with each film. Dexter is approaching forty, while Carl is under eighteen when the narrative begins. Tim's story effectively begins with his childhood, and he is, arguably, one of the most naïve and unwordly protagonists of all. Therefore the group collectively will be referred to as Gauche Young Men.

There are significant differences between the individual characters in this group; Dexter is decidedly less young and less awkward than his fellows but still struggles to express himself clearly. He is professionally unsuccessful, relying on a tyrannical boss to remain employed. He claims that finding work in London as a tall American is practically impossible. However, the greatest problem in his relationship stems from his own indirectly mentioned infidelity, a character flaw which is omitted in subsequent variations of the character.

Charles is possibly the epitome of this character, as the most chaotic, charming, elaborately inarticulate young man. No mention is made of his employment, but the fact that he co-habits a small London flat with an unlikely flatmate does not suggest affluence. Despite his drawbacks and his explicitly mentioned indiscretion, Charles is popular with the opposite sex; he is described by Henrietta as a "serial monogamist" due to his succession of girlfriends (4 *Weddings* 52:59-53:06). William, though in many ways similar, is rather more restrained and mature. His inability to interact with other characters appears to stem more from his educational and professional background – or intellectualism – than any dearth of social skills. The fact that he works in a bookshop, has lived in Notting Hill all his life and rarely watches films accounts for the fact that he finds it hard to identify with Anna Scott and her circle of colleagues, while engaging with Spike on any level appears to be quite a challenge.

The extensive cast of *Love Actually* allows for the inclusion of no less than three Gauche Young Men, namely Prime Minister David, Jamie and Lovestruck Mark. Jamie represents the type most characteristically, as he adopts a stiff upper lip attitude upon

discovering his girlfriend's infidelity and promptly decamps to France. He appears to fall in love with Aurélia early on, if his inarticulate babbling may be taken as an indicator. He is unwilling to display any macho bravery by jumping into the lake and only does so reluctantly because to allow Aurélia to retrieve his papers on her own would appear ungallant and unmanly. Prime Minister David is atypical in that he is a great success professionally and appears to have some social polish, although he is still dangerously outspoken in making rash jokes such as "Who does one have to screw around here to get a cup of tea and a chocolate biscuit?" (*Love Actually* 22:22-22:32). However, he does also fall in love very quickly, as can be seen by the way he groans "Oh, that is soo inconvenient [to be attracted to the tea girl]" immediately after meeting Natalie and his later attempt to "get a grip" (*Love Actually* 09:14-09:20 and 23:08-23:13). He is, however, self-deprecating despite his success, which he couples with keen irony. This can be seen when his sister Karen phones following his election success and he hides his elation by saying "I'm very busy and important" (*Love Actually* 42:37-42:41). The least typical character to still fall into this category is Lovestruck Mark, who fulfills all the criteria of class and accent, but is reasonably successful in his work at the gallery and appears to be socially accomplished in every respect except his coldness towards Juliet. He is the most brooding, melancholy representation of a Gauche Young Man and only babbles once to stop Juliet from comforting him after his secret is revealed. He does, however, find it difficult to express his feelings, which he finally does wittily and self-deprecatingly with the use of cue cards, which underscores how difficult it is for him to express his feelings (or indeed, to keep to the point – he does digress somewhat even on the cards).

The Boat presents one very typical Gauche Young Man in Carl, who is much younger than his Gauche Young Man predecessors and genuinely inexperienced. He is quite chaotic, a characteristic which is enhanced by the fact that he is a follower of the classic disarranged hairstyle. He is also articulately modest, yet finds it difficult to talk to Marianne. This becomes particularly apparent when she returns to the boat after they have been outlawed and Carl is unsure how to proposition her; as they sit on the bed he awkwardly suggests "We could...you know...play...Scrabble?" (*The Boat* 01:34:12-01:34:17). He falls in love straight away and is heartbroken by Marianne's betrayal a matter of hours after their first meeting. Interestingly, however, Carl subverts the Gauche Young Man type somewhat in that he does not babble when under pressure, instead becoming very quiet. This can be seen when

Marianne confronts him about David's parting comment and again later when Marianne returns to the boat (The Boat 35:50-36:34 and 01:33:50-01:34:29). Simple Simon might fall into the Gauche Young Man category were he not Irish – as it is, it is impossible to discern his place in the class system. However, he is able to talk about his feelings quite openly, which further excludes him from the category.

Tim, interestingly, partly deviates from the Gauche Young Man pattern. A certain awareness is shown for the stereotype in the opening lines of the film, in which Tim characterises himself as “too tall, too skinny, too orange”; in the purely physical respect he complies with the pattern except that his hair does not fall forward into his face. Instead, several jokes are made about its ginger colour and the unfortunate cut. Any advantages his build might bring him are swiftly counteracted by his red hair, which in the south of Britain suggests a sensitivity and temperament which are less than macho. Despite these drawbacks and his unflattering self-characterisation, girls clearly are attracted to him, as is illustrated by the blonde at the New Year's party and Jay's best man's speech. In compliance with the pattern, Tim is from an affluent upper-middle class family, as his father is a university lecturer who has taken early retirement and the family can still keep a large house in Cornwall, while his grandfather appears to have been quite successful. He falls in love at first sight not once but twice, with both Charlotte and Mary, as befits the character of GYM. Tim does also babble on occasion, mostly when approaching girls. However, Tim, mainly thanks to his time travelling abilities, has far more agency than the other GYM. He is not a person whom things happen to, for the simple reason that he can go back in time and cause them to happen differently. In this, he differs greatly from the protagonists of other films, who seem quite powerless to control their lives. Tim tries to solve the problems of all his friends and family and has great control over his own life – this sense of control is emphasised at the end of the film, where he states that he no longer travels through time but acts as though he had consciously chosen a particular day to come back to. This attitude of taking control of and appreciating each day is the type of control that each person can assume for themselves, even without time travelling abilities. In this way, Tim can serve as an example of agency and control in a chaotic world, displaying an assertiveness that is beyond the other Gauche Young Men.

3.2. The Confident American

COUNT: I'm an American citizen and I don't give a hootin' Annie goddamn about your nit-pickin' limey laws. I intend to broadcast from this ship twenty-four hours a day 'til the day I die. And then for a couple more days after that.

(*The Boat* 01:27:55-01:28:11)

Several of the selected texts feature an American character. This character is usually likeable and contrasts well with the lead character due to the former's openness, directness and friendly nature. It must be emphasized that the Americans in these texts are not the loud, obnoxious, uneducated tourists depicted elsewhere. In fact, the only gullible Americans in these texts are the guests whom Gareth "tortures" at Carrie's funeral by pretending to have Oscar Wilde's contact details. The American character is, in fact, often shown to be wiler than their English counterparts. In the majority of the selected texts, it is convenient for the love interest to fill this role, as it facilitates the relationship with the Gauche Young Man, which is, in many ways, the antithesis of the Confident American, or Confident American, as the character type will now be named.

Again, *The Tall Guy*, as an early text, is an exception to the rule. In this text, the Gauche Young Man is the American. Although he is open and easy-going, befriending his Mediterranean colleague and the blind man, Dexter lacks the social skill to approach Kate directly. In this case, Kate assumes the tasks usually appointed to the American love interest, namely acknowledging the man's interest and initiating each stage of their relationship. She is also more direct, outspoken and forward than Curtis' English characters typically are.

4 *Weddings* sets the norm for subsequent films by having Carrie as the open, impulsive and unashamedly promiscuous American love interest. This character's impulsiveness partly drives the plot, as she encourages Charles to join her at The Boatman, marries Hamish after a brief engagement and divorces him soon after, having indirectly prompted Charles to propose to Henrietta. Another interesting facet of this type of character is that, even as women, who are usually – if indirectly – censored for promiscuous behavior, this type is seldom judged by her actions, at least by characters within the film. Carrie is rather forward in pursuing Charles and initiating a one-night stand despite his being a total stranger. After getting engaged to Hamish, she invites him to her room despite his expression of concern and sleeps with him again. Later she reveals that she has had sex with over thirty men, one of whom was the father of one of the others. Finally, she is able to trick even the usually-perceptive Charles into temporarily believing that she expects him to propose after a one-night stand – a show of humour which shows her to be on at least the same intellectual

level (4 *Weddings* 32:10-32:50). Because of her experience and confidence, Carrie dominates Charles somewhat. It must be said that a minor character in 4 *Weddings*, Chester, equally represents a strong, intelligent type of American. Chester quickly establishes himself as a well-read, quick-witted character as he displays amusement at Scarlett's introduction of herself and introduces himself as Rhett in return, easily fooling her (4 *Weddings* 01:10:43-01:10:50).

Anna Scott fills a similar role as the American love interest in *Notting Hill*. She too is remarkably self-confident, though this may in part be explained by her success as an actress. When Will gets to know her better and she reveals more about herself, there is the suggestion that this outward appearance may simply be a facade behind which she hides. As an actress, she explains, she has been on a diet for years, is constantly under scrutiny and a target for criticism. She is, however, rather direct and outspoken, and, due to this and their inequality in social terms, she initiates every step of their relationship. It must be said, however, that Will is one of the few characters of his type who takes control of the situation, if only by refusing her offer, and shows great dignity in defending his battered heart. Anna shows the more temperamental side of the outgoing and spontaneous Confident American, as she reacts swiftly to any change and she appears to go through rapid changes of mood. This is the darker side of the spontaneity also shown by Carrie in her quick marriage and divorce.

Love Actually offers some variation on the American love interest theme. The only American lead is Sarah, the protagonist of her own strand. Although she is honest and fairly self-confident in speech, she is too shy to approach Karl, who initiates their meeting at the office party. However, she does dictate the terms of their relationship in that she chooses her brother over her romantic interest, and so continues the tradition of strong American women in Curtis' scripts. The typical love interest is represented only by Joanna, the young American girl whom Sam falls in love with early on and who is successful, confident and the initiator of their first kiss. It must be said, however, that a gaggle of minor characters whom Colin finds in Wisconsin reinforce the myth stated by Colin himself that American girls are friendlier and more easy-going than English women.

The Boat delivers an interesting contrast to previous films on this account. The Count is the American lead and one of the secondary protagonists, acting almost as a foil for Quentin despite their difference in status. He is one of the most vibrant characters in the film, being the most rebellious yet at the same time one of the most authoritative. He is friendly and

supportive towards all the characters except Gavin, soon embracing Carl and even expressing acceptance of Bob. He is literally outspoken, voicing his feelings vociferously and honestly. He appears to abhor dishonesty and hypocrisy, one of his reasons for wanting to “say the F-word” on the radio, because “[i]f you shoot a gun, someone dies; if you drop a bomb, many die; if you hit a woman, love dies; but if you say the F-word, nothing actually happens” (*The Boat* 10:57-11:06). This scene is key to the Count’s character, especially as he outwits Quentin by leaving the microphone in the studio on and provoking him into swearing colourfully on air. This implies that the Count is more than just anarchic or childish, he is also mischievous and smart. Another character trait which began to surface in Anna Scott but becomes clearest in Sarah and the Count is the bravery of the American character. Anna is steely in her resolution to suppress her feelings and face the press, sacrificing her happiness for her career if need be. Sarah is incredibly strong emotionally as she puts her happiness aside and tries to appear happy and cheerful for her brother. The Count’s braveness is of a more traditional ilk. He refuses to obey social conventions, such as not swearing on air, and is the first to defy the law stating that pirate stations may no longer broadcast – even if he is the only one to remain loyal to the cause. However, he also shows great bravery in risking life and limb for Simon’s honour (although this may in part have been motivated by his jealousy of Gavin, as he later shouts “I don’t even like Simon! Cry-baby!”). He is also the only one to go down with the ship, having remained on board until the electrics failed.

Tim’s Mary is an American love interest according to the by-now traditional pattern, though less is made of her nationality than in films such as *4 Weddings* or *Notting Hill*. Mary appears to be perfectly integrated in English life; the only sign of a potential culture clash is when her strait-laced parents visit to find Tim in her flat. Mary is a very appealing character, as despite her almost frumpy appearance initially – especially in contrast to Charlotte’s glamour – she shows keen wit, an impish sense of humour and a kind nature which allow her to be accepted into the family immediately. Any stereotypes about American education are rapidly counteracted by emphasising her job at an editor’s office. It must be said that Mary is rather more of a wallflower than characters such as Carrie and Anna, though she shares their lack of inhibition in entering into a relationship quickly and easily, while taking the initiative most of the time. This is particularly apparent when she easily fabricates a reason for Tim to accompany her home and unquestioningly invites him in. On the other hand, she is not the most blunt and outspoken character in this text; that role is filled by Tim’s mother and Joanna.

Therefore, while Mary's character includes many of the characteristics of a CA, she appears to represent more of a happy medium between nationalities, being a more toned-down, easily accepted American character while retaining the free spirit and openness of other American love interests.

3.3. The eccentric housemate

Several of the Gauche Young Men live with unlikely house- or flatmates, who are either a source of inspiration or frustration, frequently both. These characters often display an eccentric sense of fashion and tend to be unlucky in love. They often provide words of wisdom mixed with a great deal of bad advice.

The prototype of this character appears in *The Tall Guy* in the shape of Carmen, a hippie-style landlady with a string of lovers. Initially puzzled by naked men wandering the corridors of the house, Dexter soon reconciles himself to the fact that they are inevitable and that, if he wants an audience with his landlady, he will have to be introduced to the man – or men – whom she is currently entertaining. Carmen dresses in clashing colours and extravagant costumes involving multiple bead necklaces or scarves and enormous drooping hats. Despite her constant sexual activity, she always appears to be swathed in layers of clothing. She is as parasitic as subsequent versions of the character type, thoughtlessly drinking the last of the orange juice. She also gives Dexter terrible advice regarding his relationship, suggesting that he sleep with Kate and then break off contact with her. Her relationship status does not change in the course of the film.

The second instance of the eccentric housemate is also a woman, but a very different one. Scarlett is not parasitic; she does not mother Charles at all, they are equally irresponsible and chaotic, though he usually wakes her when they are late. She also tends to wear colourful, clashing, extravagant clothes. Perhaps in order to explain their somewhat questionable platonic relationship, Scarlett is presented as rather childlike. She does appear to be very bright, but in fact is almost painfully blunt, in the same way that an *enfant terrible* might be. This bluntness becomes particularly obvious when she meets Chester and blurts out “I always imagine Americans are gonna be dull as shit, but I mean of course you're not, are you?” (4 *Weddings* 01:10:53-01:10:58). Her childlike status is reinforced when Fiona tells Charles that she will take Scarlett home after the funeral, as if Scarlet were his responsibility. Scarlett's

diminutive stature, especially in contrast to tall actors such as James Fleet and Randall Paul (playing Chester), further suggest that she is less than a grown-up. Scarlett is the only housemate not to offer advice or even a good example to the Gauche Young Man, as her relationship with Chester appears untroubled.

Notting Hill provides a slightly different version of the eccentric housemate. Spike is an imbecilic Welshman with no social skills and a casual approach to personal hygiene. Because he neglects to put any clothes through the wash, he too wears unusual clothes, including a series of offensive T-shirts and a wetsuit. Charles tries to ask him for advice on his relationship once, but Spike is clearly unable to follow the conversation, responding instead with a personal anecdote which is only vaguely connected to the problem. However, Spike provides the inspiration for Will to pursue Anna at the end of this text and also risks bodily harm in helping Max to negotiate the dense traffic. Like Scarlett, Spike too finds happiness near the end of the text as Honey informs him that they are engaged.

Finally, *The Boat* offers yet another variation on the theme of the eccentric housemate, or in this case, cabin-mate, in Thick Kevin. Thick Kevin is socially awkward and unlucky in love, but dresses fairly inconspicuously (except at Christmas) and appears to do basic housework. He does offer unsolicited advice to Carl on the subject of Carl's presence on the boat – in fact, it is only thanks to Kevin that Carl even questions his mother about his father's identity and thus gains some sort of closure. He encourages Carl in his quest, offering words of support before Carl speaks to his mother. One of Kevin's childish quirks, however, is his repeated attempt to spy on Carl and Marianne. Kevin is an interesting blend of several stock characters as he is also the only bona fide cretin on board the boat, yet is neither aristocratic nor rustic.

Harry from *About Time* is an eccentric housemate in a more conventional Curtis vein, being a bad-tempered, foul-mouthed alcoholic who appears to be constantly hung over. He owns a flat and is successful to some degree, as one of his plays is performed in a large theatre in the film and gets rave reviews. However, he retains the essential characteristics of the eccentric housemate in being oddly (or rather, badly) dressed, single and socially inappropriate. This is particularly apparent in his tactless treatment of Tim's family members.

Blackadder and the *Vicar of Dibley* may not include housemates in the strictest sense, but they do include characters which are so involved with the protagonists and spend so much time with them that they nearly qualify as such. Baldrick lives in the same house as Edmund

and they share most scenes. Baldrick also offers unsolicited advice and shares a lot of Edmund's problems, as well as sharing anecdotes about his own issues. Alice fulfils the same role in *The Vicar*, as she spends an inordinate amount of time at the Vicarage and tries to solve Gerry's problems while contributing a few of her own.

3.4. The Cynically Superior One

The website TV Tropes identifies this type as a "Deadpan Snarker", which is defined as "[a] character given to gnomish, sarcastic, sometimes bitter, occasionally whimsical asides", often "the most cynical supporting character" and sometimes the only sane character in a text (TV Tropes: Deadpan Snarker). The Cynically Superior One is a character who is more intelligent than those in his or her immediate surroundings and is well aware of this. Due to their superior intelligence they appear to feel isolated and lonely and become bitter and possibly manipulative. Another, milder variation on the theme allows characters to content themselves with gently ragging their friends. Cynically Superior Ones are characters which are frequently jaded and look upon the optimistic views expressed by others with either amused condescension or frustrated anger. They are usually demonstratively single, though those who are in a successful relationship appear to have mellowed somewhat. Due to their intelligence and dry wit, they often appeal to audiences and their cruel put-downs can become legendary; Blackadder is a case in point. This character type is less frequent in the films than in the series; however, there are certain characters who display many of the Cynically Superior One's characteristics.

Edmund Blackadder, from the second series on, is the most extreme example of this type. He is easily the most intelligent character in the regular cast, followed only by Elizabeth I and Captain Darling. Spending the majority of his time with Baldrick and Percy or George as his only company, Blackadder vents his frustration on them. However, they seldom appear to notice, instead remaining friendly towards him and optimistic in outlook. Edmund is incredibly manipulative, ruthlessly using Baldrick, Percy, Melchett or any other character he needs in order to increase his own wealth and standing. Edmund remains resolutely single. The weak Prince in the first series is forced to marry a nine-year-old in name only but has little interaction with her. Elizabethan Blackadder unexpectedly falls in love with Bob/Kate, which is in itself an amusing subversion of his character, as he is forced to suppress his

usually cynical attitude. It must be said that no one is more surprised at this development than Edmund himself, not least because he believes Kate to be a boy. Thereafter, the Edmunds only form relationships on a manipulative basis. His liaison with Amy Hardwood is purely financial – he tells Baldrick that he intends to abandon her as soon as they reach the West Indies – and his affair with Nurse Mary is part of his search for the spy in the field hospital.

A milder form of Cynically Superior One is presented by Fiona in *4 Weddings*. An intelligent woman frustrated by her brother's ineptitude and her unrequited love for Charles, she releases her anger on Tom, as an easy target, and Charles' most difficult girlfriend Henrietta. However, Fiona tries to tamp her anger and frustration down, resisting several opportunities to use her acid tongue to humiliate others. In fact, she only seems able to communicate openly with Charles, who is on a similar intellectual plane. Interestingly, she is not often shown interacting with Gareth and Matthew, who should understand her best. This couple is equally cynical and equally detached from the rest of the world, but both men tend to use their caustic wit benevolently, perhaps mellowed by the fact that they are a happy couple, rather unusually for Cynically Superior Ones. Gareth, for instance, harmlessly amuses himself and Matthew by showing his distaste for the Frightful Folk Duo at the first wedding, and later teases Scarlett and Charles. Matthew gently teases Serena when she points David out, and does the same to Charles on his wedding day. The only time Matthew is truly caustic is at Gareth's funeral, when his rage becomes apparent.

Notting Hill has two mild examples of Cynically Superior Ones, namely Will in his attitude towards Spike and Bella in her general outlook. Will is undeniably superior to Spike in many ways, and is driven to extreme sarcasm in the face of Spike's incompetence, though he remains generally benevolent. Bella's many disappointments in life have caused her to discuss her troubles with brittle, bright cheerfulness which hints at the sadness and anger beneath the surface, but she too does not hurt others. In general, this is the film which shows the most tolerance of intelligent characters for less fortunate ones, with the possible exception of *About Time*.

Love Actually has several Cynically Superior Ones, notably Billy Mack, who ruthlessly humiliates his manager before venting his anger on the boy group Blue. Billy Mack is one of the most honest, ironic and outspoken characters in this text, but he is also easily the most outwardly cynical, especially in his outlook on Christmas. Harry is another, milder example of a Cynically Superior One in this text. He is quite perceptive and very impatient,

becoming frustrated with Sarah's failure to approach Karl and Rufus' involved packaging of the gold necklace. In terms of cynical wit, however, his wife Karen is actually more obviously cynical, as shown by her remarks "There was more than one lobster present at the birth of Jesus?" and "Which doll shall we give Daisy's little friend Emily, the one that looks like a transvestite or the one that looks like a dominatrix?" (*Love Actually* 05:32-05:36 and 43:29-43:35).

The Boat in turn offers Quentin and Dormandy as an example of benevolent and malicious Cynically Superior Ones. Quentin gently provokes certain crew members, such as when he asks Carl "What do you give a man who has *nothing*?" and when he singles Bob out in his address: "Thank you gentlemen ... lady ... strange, bearded thing" without meaning them to take it seriously (*The Boat* 33:13-33:15 and 01:30:26-01:30:31). He too is single and rather camp. Sir Alistair is, rather unusually for a Cynically Superior One, married, although he seldom interacts with his wife, only exchanging a few lines with her in the final cut. He represents the height of malicious cynicism, abusing his position of power to terrorise his subordinates. However, his exaggerated put-downs are highly amusing, and these witty and memorable lines might redeem him somewhat in the public eye. In a vein reminiscent of *Blackadder*, one of his crueller taunts runs as follows: "Speaking of which, I think we might start working on legislation to outlaw that haircut of yours. [...] No one likes it. Apart from blind people, and I'm sure even they can sense its profound ugliness as it passes by" (*The Boat* 13:38-13:54).

The Vicar displays a similar distribution of good and evil, as Gerry and David are the only sane and reasonably well-educated people in the village and, almost inevitably, are rivals. Gerry is the benevolent Cynically Superior One, sniping at Alice but always in the knowledge that it will go over Alice's head. David, on the other hand, takes every opportunity to expose other people's inadequacies and only once almost retracts his caustic remarks when Gerry exposes him on air (and that probably has more to do with the mention of his embarrassing health problems than his barrage of insults towards the villagers). Otherwise he is completely unapologetic.

About Time is singular in this respect as it does not include a single example of a CSO, despite the fact that James, Harry or even Joanna would be ideal characters to pass judgement on the proceedings. They are intelligent and cynical enough to fill the role; however, James is mellowed by experience, Harry too self-absorbed and Joanna too minor a character. There are

also too few unperceptive characters in their immediate vicinity to vent their frustration on. On the whole, this lack of a cynical character may reflect the fact that *About Time* is possibly the most thoughtful and forgiving text of all those examined in this paper.

3.5. The Aristocratic Idiot

The Aristocratic Idiot may be one of the best established stock characters in that it has appeared in works of fiction, especially in comedies, for many years. A sterling example would be P.G. Wodehouse's *Jeeves and Wooster*, which involves a dependency relationship between servant and master which is not unlike that existing between Blackadder and Prince George in *Blackadder III*. The similarity is further brought to mind by the fact that Hugh Laurie was subsequently cast as Bertie Wooster in the 90s production of *Jeeves and Wooster* films, with Stephen Fry playing the inimitable Jeeves. Wodehouse himself faced criticism for overusing this type of young man, as he explains in the preface to *Joy in the Morning*. Writing in 1947, he was already beset by criticism for his apparent anachronisms:

[The fact that I write about a world which is long gone] is pointed out to me every time a new book of mine dealing with the Drones Club of Jeeves and Bertie is published in England. 'Edwardian!' the critics hiss at me. [...] After all, I tell myself, there has been no generic term for the type of young man who figures in my stories since he used to be called a knut in the pre-first-war days, which certainly seems to suggest that the species has died out like the macaronis of the Regency and the whiskered mashers of the Victorian age" (Wodehouse vii).

Wodehouse also characterises his "young men" to some extent, in a manner which is forcefully reminiscent of characters such as the Prince Regent and Tom:

I suppose one thing that makes these drones of mine seem a thing of the past is that [...] they are genial and good tempered, friends of all the world. In these days when everybody hates everybody else, anyone who is not snarling at something – or at everything – is an anachronism. [...] [The Edwardian knut] was a humble, kindly soul who knew he was a silly ass but hoped you wouldn't mind. He liked everybody, and most people liked him" (Wodehouse viii).

Unfortunately, little literature deals specifically with an identified high-born fool. Orrin Klapp's "The Fool as a Social Type" merely states that any "person whose moral code, dress, background, etc., render him 'too nice' for the world of practical affairs" might be considered a fool, which would certainly place most high-born English men and women within the

category of fool (Klapp 158-159). Although there is little theoretical foundation for this character type in literature, the site TV Tropes has identified the type as ‘Upper-Class Twit’, or “‘The Ditz’ with a trust fund”, so the type is acknowledged to exist (TV Tropes: Upper-Class Twit). This site actually provides a still of *Blackadder’s* Prince Regent as an illustration of the character type, which confirms that Curtis has caricatured the type memorably enough to lodge it indelibly in public memory. TV Tropes adds that the Upper-Class Twit often “acts as a foil for ‘The Jeeves’ or some other more intelligent character” (TV Tropes: Upper-Class Twit). As examples from film, one top suggestion is “[m]any of Hugh Grant’s roles [...] particularly in ‘90s comedies”, while Bertie Wooster is said to be “so archetypal that this trope could have been named for him” (TV Tropes: Upper-Class Twit: Films – Live-Action / Literature). Presumably the comedies starring Grant include *Four Weddings*, *Notting Hill*, *The Englishman Who Went Up A Hill But came Down A Mountain* and *Mickey Blue Eyes*, in all of which he plays roughly the same character. This thesis, however, has identified this character type as being the Gauche Young Man, distinct from the Aristocratic Idiot or Upper-Class Twit. There are several reasons for this separation. The most striking difference between the types is that the Gauche Young Man is necessarily more intelligent than a true Aristocratic Idiot. The Gauche Young Man is able to make self-deprecating witticisms where the Aristocratic Idiot can merely bluster. The most radical distinction would be that between upper-middle and upper class; however, this is often difficult to determine from the clues given in the texts. In order to still be considered a traditional aristocrat in film, the character should live in a large house and be waited upon by servants. Thus, Will and Charles, sharing London flats as they do, cannot qualify as upper class, while Prince George, Queen Elizabeth and Tom and Fiona fulfill the criteria.

The Aristocratic Idiot in Curtis’ screenplays is, like Wooster, helpless without his or her servants – and they do have servants because they are wealthy, unlike the Gauche Young Man type which has usually fallen on hard times. They are often very dim-witted, though mostly benevolent. They usually have more power than is good for them and are amiably optimistic. Another characteristic which applies to most of Curtis’ Aristocratic Idiots is that they are frequently very vain.

There are several exceptions to this rule. In *The Tall Guy*, the only even vaguely aristocratic character is Mary, with whom Dexter has an affair. However, she is shown to be more than usually sensitive and reasonably intelligent. *Love Actually* also conspicuously lacks

Aristocratic Idiots, though Jamie's imperceptiveness and privileged upbringing make him come closest to fulfilling the role. *The Boat* is equally free of Aristocratic Idiots, as they would be rather out of place on board – Quentin is roughing it to the extent that he cannot be called pampered or privileged. Dormandy and Twatt are far too intelligent; only Thick Kevin could qualify on the grounds that he speaks RP and is very dim, but as he lacks the other defining characteristics he cannot be counted as an Aristocratic Idiot. *About Time*'s only Aristocratic Idiot is Uncle Desmond, who spends his time “just, well, being Uncle Desmond” and achieving sartorial perfection for every occasion. Desmond tends to forget the names of the girls who visit the house, but proves to have a heart of gold, and to be able to pay attention when it counts when he reveals how proud he is to hear that James loves him. His status as a cretin is also somewhat called into question when he loudly asks Tim whom he is marrying and then Mary whether Tim is the father of her child, which, consciously or unconsciously, provides entertainment for the whole gathering. It is difficult to say whether Desmond is genuinely confused in these scenes, or whether the character of Aristocratic Idiot is, for once, allowed to make a joke at someone else's expense.

Blackadder provides several examples of Aristocratic Idiots. In *Blackadder I*, it is Edmund himself who is privileged and vain, power-hungry yet quite slow-witted. The classic Aristocratic Idiot in this first season, however, is Lord Percy Percy, who is wealthy, yet naïve and unworldly. Another Aristocratic Idiot in this season is Edmund's elder brother Harry. Harry is large, insensitive, and makes up for his lack of intelligence with his great self-confidence. He displays a characteristic of more modern AIs in his preoccupation with the maintenance of the castle, usually the state of the plumbing. In *Blackadder II*, the role of the classic Aristocratic Idiot is illustrated by Lord Percy Percy, who in this season is wealthier and more independent than in the first, but makes up for this by being more inbred and cretinous. In all fairness, however, like previous and subsequent incumbents of the role of friendly Aristocratic Idiot, Percy is very generous and loyal. He offers to help Edmund when his life is in danger due to non-payment of debts and places himself in a very precarious position to help Edmund to extricate himself from the situation. An unfriendly Aristocratic Idiot in *Blackadder II* is Elizabeth I, who may not be able to follow politics or even Edmund's remarks accurately, but makes up for this by wielding her enormous power ruthlessly. *Blackadder III* blends all of the characteristics into one character, Prince George, as the cast is reduced even further. Prince George is amiable, vain, generous, insensitive and incredibly

stupid. On the whole, however, he presents quite a likeable character, as even in his most childish and irritating moments Edmund can easily outwit him; furthermore, George is entirely dependent on Edmund, as can be seen when Edmund pretends to go to France (“Nob and Nobility”) or leaves in high dudgeon for less than five minutes (“Sense and Senility”). *Blackadder Goes Forth* occasionally allows two Aristocratic Idiots to meet, namely Lieutenant George and Colonel Melchett. Lt. George is essentially the same character as Prince George in the previous season, merely with less power. Lt. George is also more relentlessly cheerful than the Prince, as he always encourages Baldrick and Blackadder to have faith in their commanding officers and their eventual victory. Colonel Melchett, it is implied, knows George’s family quite intimately; this seems to be no acknowledgement of the extent of nepotism in the ranks. Col. Melchett is loud, confident and insensitive, and wields far more power than is advisable. This can be seen as he continues to send men over the top when they only gain a few feet of land at a time, and when he orders Edmund to be shot for killing a pidgeon. Stephen Fry presents another intriguing Aristocratic Idiot in *The Cavalier Years*, in which George I is shown as an honest and intellectual but unworldly character.

4 Weddings supplies Tom, one of the most humble and benevolent Aristocratic Idiots in all of the Curtis screenplays. Tom reluctantly admits that he believes his family must be about the seventh-richest in England, yet he behaves very politely and is not arrogant. This becomes particularly apparent when he says that he has proposed to and been rejected by every woman he knows, upon which Scarlett retorts that he never asked her. He hastily offers to marry her, apparently in all honesty, but she declines smilingly. This interchange reveals both a lack of snobbery in Tom, as Scarlett is clearly beneath him socially, and a lack of materialism in Scarlett. Tom would qualify as a *Gauche Young Man* were it not for his financial and social status as well as the fact that he is rather slow mentally. Another factor which excludes him from the *Gauche Young Man* category is his confidence that he will eventually get married, even if he does not passionately love his wife. Despite being rejected frequently – itself a mystery given his wealth and easy-going manner – he appears to believe that he is suave and attractive, as his comment “[I] don’t want to ruin my chances for romance by smelling of dung at the reception” shows (*4 Weddings* 11:56-12:00).

Notting Hill only provides a watered-down version of the Aristocratic Idiot in Bernie, one of Will’s friends. Bernie is from an upper-middle-class background and somehow, probably through his family’s influence or other social ties, landed a well-paid job in the City.

However, he is unhappy, unqualified and inevitably unsuccessful. Although he appears to be generally benevolent, he displays unusual insensitivity in being unwisely condescending towards Anna Scott.

The Vicar has James Fleet fill essentially the same role as he did as Tom in *4 Weddings*. Hugo Horton is similarly cheerful, optimistic, incompetent and frankly thick, though he also lacks the confidence to take any initiative concerning his love life. Hugo, however, like Tom, is benevolent in that he lacks vanity or arrogance. He is overshadowed by his father in the same way as Tom is by his sister. There are certain differences between even these two very similar characters, however; Hugo is far more childish than Tom. He does not know how to approach Alice and generally displays childlike enthusiasm for any new venture or idea. He is also very naïve, as David discovers to his expense when Hugo unwittingly canvasses for David's political rival in even for the Vicar in the episode "Election".

3.6. The Village Idiot

The Village Idiot is another well-established stock character in Anglophone fiction; those appearing in Curtis' screenplays closely resemble those represented in sketches by The Two Ronnies. As Orrin Klapp writes in "The Fool as a Social Type", fools are traditionally given to clumsiness, deformity and pomposity or prank and pratfall (Klapp 158). However, he also writes that "a demonstration of deficiency of intelligence or wit places a person in the category of the simple fool. He [sic] is classed as naïve, senseless, backward, or rustic" (Klapp 158). Curtis' village idiots need not be deformed or perform pratfalls or practical jokes in order to count as fools; they are simply compared to more high-born fools and, more importantly, contrasted with far more intelligent and witty characters, notably the Cynically Superior One. However, the fool has an important function to fulfil. According to Klapp, the fool is "at the nadir of the value system of the group" as their license to operate outside the norms of society causes them to be appreciated as the antithesis of the traditional hero (Klapp 160-161). Fools in Shakespearean drama also often serve not only to entertain, but to reflect on events. They are well placed to do so, as they are, to a certain extent, outsiders of society, and are therefore more free than other characters to 'break the fourth wall' and form a link between audience and players. It appears that these fools were originally country bumpkins, not the entourage of the rich and privileged. In "Wise fools in Shakespeare", Peter Milward

writes: “Not only scholars but also town wits and courtiers prided themselves on their clever repartee in contrast to the dulness [sic] of countrymen, whom they despised as ‘clowns’ (*coloni*, or tillers of the soil). Yet those whom they despised as clowns might often claim a deeper wisdom, based on experience and expressed in few words [...]” (Milward 21). The fool is the ideal character to comment on the text, as his or her social status and function in society (and in the text) is special: “The particular advantage, and so the outstanding quality, of the Fool is that he is free to say what he likes without fear of the contempt of others or the punishment of [sic] his superiors. He is ‘this all-licensed fool’ [...], who utters deep thought in seemingly shallow words, and wisdom in apparent folly” (Milward 22). In *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*, Enid Welsford points out the other apparent dichotomy in the fool’s existence: “[his] mental deficiencies and physical deformities [...] deprive him both of rights and responsibilities and put him in the paradoxical position of virtual outlawry combined with utter dependence on the support of the social group to which he belongs” (Welsford 56). These characteristics certainly hold true for the Village Idiots in Curtis’ texts; neither the village idiot nor the aristocratic one is despised by more than one character, in fact, they tend to be popular due to their easy-going natures. They often speak and act more ‘naturally’, that is to say, in a baser and less artificial manner than the other characters, which makes them appear both honest and outrageous. Klapp also identifies key social functions for fools in disrupting ceremony and easing monotony through their antics (Klapp 161). Again, Curtis’ Village Idiots appear particularly adept at interrupting predictable sequences such as the recital of wedding vows with unwitting mistakes or costume arrangements. Welsford provides an insight into another historical function of the fool which may apply to the primary texts discussed here. She describes “that universal human instinct, the dread of what the Greeks called the sin of ‘hubris’ or presumption” which can be counteracted by self-denigration or allowing oneself to be mocked and taunted by others (Welsford 66). Thus, the presence of the village idiot to detract from the socially superior protagonists may be a result of an age-old instinct to protect the proud against mishap. Welsford also includes a chapter in her book titled “The Fool as Poet and Clairvoyant”, as fools have also long been regarded as “the mouthpiece of a spirit, or power external to [themselves]” and thus be privy to knowledge beyond the rest of society (Welsford 76). Curtis’ Village Idiot must, as the category implies, be stupid, although they are allowed rare moments of insight. This can be seen when the flatmates give advice or the rustics in *The Vicar* develop genuinely cunning

plans. They do not appear to be particularly inspired by cosmic knowledge however, but rather to take their rare insights from childish logic.

The Village Idiots in these texts invariably have regional accents. This feature is more of a geographical indication than a class location, since they are rural accents, not originating from centres such as London, Birmingham or Manchester. This distinction is relevant for the Village Idiot's character, as they are associated with rustic life in England. As Raymond Williams writes in *The Country and the City*, "[...] the country has gathered the idea of the natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue", but also "backwardness, ignorance [and] limitation" (Williams 1). These are the very characteristics that the Village Idiots themselves display: they are innocent, basically harmless and well-intentioned, but they are also irredeemably stupid. In fact, they are often portrayed as large children, who embody many of these characteristics, and like children they also show a sometimes disturbing preoccupation with sex.

This character type appears to go hand in hand with the Aristocratic Idiot, as the exceptions to the rule occur in the same texts. *The Tall Guy*, as it is so often, is an exception to this rule as there is no Village Idiot present in the screenplay. *The Boat* also lacks Village Idiots, as only Thick Kevin comes close to qualifying – in this case his accents and thus his inferred background debars him. Scarlett also fails to qualify as she is too perceptive and is capable of looking after herself. The only Village Idiot that *About Time* provides is Jay, Tim's thick-skinned friend who is socially insensitive and appears to lack loyalty or decorum. However, he lacks the required regional accent and therefore cannot, in all fairness, qualify as a Village Idiot.

Many of the minor characters in *Blackadder* are village idiots, especially in *Blackadder I* in which Edmund has more contact with the peasantry, such as the irritating messenger, the hostler and the woman he tries to marry in order to avoid marrying the Infanta. *Blackadder II* sees Baldrick fill the role most adequately. Baldrick is affable and obedient but very stupid. He and Percy have more interaction in this season than in any other, providing an interesting contrast and competition between unrefined and aristocratic stupidity. Baldrick fills much the same role in *Blackadder III*, although he has lost all sense of initiative (such as trying to catch mice or win competitions) and his sense of personal hygiene has deteriorated further. This role is continued in *Blackadder Goes Forth* and the various single episodes.

Notting Hill supplies a pair of village idiot types in Spike and Honey. Spike seems incapable of putting clothes through the wash and always appears to be unkempt. He also seems to be inordinately slow-witted, as he fails to take Will's messages and reveals Anna's location to the local pub-goers. Spike fulfils an unfortunate national stereotype as his regional accent is Welsh, which adds comic effect to his slow, considered speech. Honey is equally unlucky in love, dresses eccentrically and, like Spike, lacks social skills. This pair represents a particularly benevolent type of village idiot, however, in that they are both brave and incurably romantic.

A less likeable type of village idiot is portrayed by Colin in *Love Actually*. Colin is convinced that he is attractive and that English girls are just "stuck up". He has a regional accent and behaves very insensitively, as can be seen in the scene in which he repeatedly insults the caterer at Peter and Juliet's wedding (*Love Actually* 12:10-12:42). These behaviours show that he is also prejudiced by national stereotypes and preoccupied with sex.

It must be said, however, that with the exception of *Blackadder*, very little class warfare is apparent in Curtis' screenplays. *Blackadder* takes place in a historical setting and is unashamedly hierarchical; the writers and the production team agree that it was this strict hierarchy that increased the comic effect of placing Edmund in a slightly inferior position. In *The Vicar*, both Gerry and David are mostly subtly abusive or plainly condescending to the lower-class villagers – even in their presence – but there is no suggestion of resentment between the classes.

It has been mentioned that Curtis' screenplays often include token characters from minority groups or otherwise disadvantaged sectors of society. Leslie Felperin, writing for *Variety*, states that the inclusion of Uncle Desmond "tick[s] the disability-awareness box required in every Curtis movie" (Felperin August 8, 2013). Since characters such as David the Dish, Bella, Mary Tinker, Uncle Desmond and Thick Kevin are from different character groups and society groups, they will nevertheless be classed with their character types.

By way of conclusion, a table is provided which sums up the relevant characteristics of each character type. A further table follows which shows which characters represent which character types within Curtis' scripts. Not all the types are present in each script. Characters which do not fully comply with the character type completely are included in brackets.

Table 1: Curtis' Stock Character Types

Stock Character Type	Typical Characteristics
The Gauche Young Man	Invariably a main protagonist. Upper-middle-class (thus an RP-speaker), typically professionally unsuccessful/unemployed, well-spoken but socially awkward and bookish, tends to babble. Physically unimposing (usually tall and slim), quite disorganized, tends to be well-dressed but have untidy, rather long hair. Despite all these disadvantages, they tend to be popular with women.
The Confident American	Usually the love interest. They are successful professionally and rather confident and outspoken. Contrary to popular stereotype, they are at least as intelligent as their British counterparts. They tend to be open, friendly, brave and rather promiscuous. Their spontaneity can cause them to appear somewhat temperamental in comparison to the British. However, they are largely very loyal.
The Eccentric Housemate	The housemate lives with the protagonist, and is usually more of a hindrance than a help. They dress eccentrically and are rarely as intelligent as the protagonist. They are usually unsuccessful professionally.
The Cynically Superior One	A character who is more intelligent than the rest and makes this fact known through their dialogue. The protagonist can fulfill this role. These characters can be benevolent but are usually rather caustic – though their remarks rarely affect other characters since they only infrequently understand what is meant.
The Aristocratic Idiot	This character is rich and privileged but slow-witted. They can either be vain and pompous and rather power-mad, or amiable and rather humble. Some manifestations combine vanity and immense generosity, such as Sir Percy and Prince George/Lt. George. They are often unwittingly crass and insensitive.
The Village Idiot	This character has a regional accent and little formal education. They tend to be rather childish and display a preoccupation with sex which is disproportionate to their age. They can, however, display moments of insight and sensitivity.

Table 2: Characters which conform to these types

	Tall G	Black	4 W	VoD	NotHill	LA	TBTR	ATime
Gauche Young Man	(Dexter)	-	Charles	-	Will	Jamie, Mark, PM David	Carl	Tim
Confident American	-	-	Carrie	-	Anna	Sarah	The Count	Mary
Eccentric Housemate	Carmen	(Baldrick)	Scarlett	(Alice)	Spike	(Daniel/Sam)	Kevin	Harry
Cynically Superior One	(Ron)	Edmund, (Elizabeth , Darling)	Fiona	Gerry, David	(Will)	Billy Mack, Harry, Karen	Quentin, Dormandy	-
Aristocratic Idiot	-	Percy, Elizabeth, George, Melchett	Tom	Hugo	(Bernie)	-	-	(Desmond)
Village Idiot	-	Baldrick	(Scarlett)	Alice, Jim, Owen, Frank, Letitia	Spike, Honey	(Colin)	-	-

4. Recurring relationship patterns

4.1. The family of peers

The family of peers is a strong recurring pattern in Curtis' screenplays, which after all place great importance on interpersonal relationships. 'Family of peers' here is used to describe a close circle of friends who choose to spend time with each other, probably as a result of their non-existent family lives. Unfortunately, no literature is available on the subject of the family of peers despite their regular occurrence in popular culture texts. Possibly the best-known example may be the Toretto "family" of the Fast and Furious franchise, which consists of a brother and sister, the brother's girlfriend and two male friends. None of the characters appear to have other family ties and are dependent on each other, though it has to be said that this fictional family of peers operates on a strict hierarchy principle and has a leader/father figure. Other fictional families of peers can be identified in groups which come together under similarly adverse circumstances as the Toretos, such as the "family" constructed around Fagin in *Oliver Twist*. As with the Toretos, this "crew" is linked to crime and observes hierarchy while following the instructions of their leader. In less adverse circumstances, fictional families of peers may consist of colleagues working in close proximity and facing real dangers, such as *The Three (or four) Musketeers*. In all of the texts brought forward so far, friends rely on each other for their livelihood as well as for any chance of affection in a family-like structure. In the context of well-to-do upper-middle-class England, the families of peers are less likely to revolve around crime and protection as around humour and a relaxation of social conventions. More than half of the screenplays under discussion in this paper feature a group of people who spend time together, voluntarily or not, attempting to do just that: relax and sharpen their wit on each other.

Several of Curtis' screenplays include a group of characters who, though not related, behave rather like a family unit. These "families" may not spend as much time together as a genuine family, but they often appear to be closer than many families. Partly Curtis' families of peers choose to spend time together or are at least drawn together by common acquaintances or familial ties, but occasionally they are brought together out of necessity. It is worth mentioning that none of the screenplays involve a complete family unit, with the one startling exception of *About Time* which is primarily occupied with the family unit. This aberration is a case of the exception proving the rule, however, as the theory holds for all the

earlier texts. Most of the characters are quite isolated, and often the absence of an important family member is explicitly mentioned. This emphasizes the loneliness of those who remain and, to some extent, justifies the creation of a close “family” made up of friends.

Blackadder and *The Vicar* are examples of groups being thrown together by necessity. Prince Edmund is one of the few Edmunds to acknowledge having any family at all, and he resents every one of his relations, even his kind mother. Towards the end of the season, it is revealed that Edmund is probably illegitimate anyway. Of the other Edmunds, only Blackadder III admits to a Scottish cousin whom he despises and a distant mother. His lack of affection for his family is illustrated by comments such as: “If I die, please write to my mother and tell her I’ve been alive all the time, I just couldn’t be bothered to get in touch with the old bat” (“Nob and Nobility” 09:21-09:28). All the manifestations of Percy appear to be without family, while Prince George’s only family is “mad” King George III, who does not recognize him. Only Baldrick has any family, but he appears to have little contact with them. Thus, Edmund and Baldrick, and frequently Percy or George, are forced to collaborate and make conversation. Even Elizabeth I, Melchett and Nursie might be considered more distant members of this constituted family.

The Vicar shows a slightly more harmonious picture of a reproduction of family life, as the group has an interest in common in that they are all on the village council. There is still a vast disparity in intelligence and social standing, but they not only forced to spend time together; they occasionally gather voluntarily. This may be because they are mostly single and lonely. In fact, this group can, with some imagination, be seen to represent a somewhat eccentric family unit. Gerry is more intelligent than the villagers and shows a genuine and sympathetic interest in their problems, which she tries to solve. She also offers guidance and acts as a good example; therefore she might be seen as the mother to the group. David, on the other hand, is rather narrow-minded and disciplinarian, but offers opportunities by funding events and trying to organize them. He might be seen as a rather distant and old-fashioned father figure. Letitia Cropley corresponds to a rather unconventional and eccentric grandmotherly figure. Meanwhile, the rest of the cast, Alice, Hugo, Jim, Owen and Frank, behave like children in need of help and guidance. It has to be said that this “family” is happier and generally more tolerant than the characters of *Blackadder*, possibly because they are not completely dependent on each other.

4 *Weddings* provides an example of a ‘family’ put together by friendships and family ties. Charles and his brother David are friends with Tom and Fiona and Matthew and Gareth, while Scarlett is presumably a more recent addition to the group. There is no mention of how Charles came to know Tom, Scarlett or Gareth and Matthew or what they do together besides going to weddings. However, this group appears to meet frequently, as they are happy to invade each other’s houses as Tom and Matthew do before Charles’ wedding. They have also clearly been together as a group for several years, as Tom remarks to Charles after Gareth’s death that Matthew and Gareth had in effect been happily married for years without their realizing it. A much looser “family” consists of Will, Honey, Max, Bella, Bernie, and occasionally Spike and Tony in *Notting Hill*. It is equally unclear how often they meet and how they know each other, although Will states that he was in love with Bella.

Love Actually is an interesting case in this respect as it essentially fragments a family of peers; all of the protagonists are loosely connected, but in many cases the links are not made explicit or only revealed at the end. Thus, the script for *Love Actually*, instead of focusing on the moments when the family of peers is together, follows each one separately, ignoring their commonalities. On the other hand, it is highly unlikely that all ten protagonists would ever gather voluntarily at one single social event.

The Boat that Rocked presents another group of characters which behaves like a family, albeit not a complete one as there are no parent figures. There are adult figures on board the boat, but these are only the ship’s staff and rarely appear in speaking roles. Quentin is nominally in charge but seldom asserts his authority effectively and cannot be said to be fatherly. Bob fails completely in his role as a father, while Charlotte is rather distant and breezy, not providing the best example for Carl. Felicity, understandably, does not fulfil a motherly role despite being in charge of catering. The most popular DJs, the Count, Gavin and Dr. Dave behave like rowdy older brothers, and they are often in competition. Carl and Kevin, as the youngest crew members, are treated like children. Beyond this, the rest of the cast is not assigned a family role as such. They all appear to be rather lonely and isolated, however, being largely unattached and apparently without family. Therefore, they rely heavily on the companionship of their crew. This spirit becomes evident when they decide to continue broadcasting, at which point each one has the opportunity to say why they wish to stay.

4.2. Parent-child relationships

It has already been mentioned that few of the screenplays show complete family units; only *About Time* involves a sprawling, happy family, while *Love Actually* shows Harry and Karen's nuclear family, which is under threat. However, they also only rarely show happy or successful parent-child relationships. Many of the characters are also single and rely on their friends and siblings for companionship. It is this loneliness and isolation of many of the main characters that lead them to constitute alternative families and especially to seek out replacement parents.

Mother-child relationships

The Vicar and *The Boat* are two texts which include failed mother-child relationships. Alice Tinker and Mrs. Tinker appear to be tolerably close, as Alice mentions her mother often enough, but Alice also acknowledges that her mother is often drunk and that she celebrated when Alice's unfaithful father, one of David's relatives, died. Another version of Alice's past is that her mother neither knows nor cares who her father was ("The Handsome Stranger" 06:47-06:53). Her mother is certainly not very affectionate towards Alice, and Alice later reveals that her mother has been institutionalized ("Love and Marriage" 07:15-07:21). Gerry acts as a mother to Alice, suppressing her frustration with the annoying, self-obsessed verger in order to give her advice and help her to start a relationship with Hugo. Hugo's mother is also absent and David has failed to mother Hugo himself or provide a mother figure, so Gerry effectively adopts Hugo as well. Hugo's delight at having a mother figure at last becomes apparent when Gerry briefly becomes engaged to David ("Spring").

Another example of a strained relationship with a mother is that between Carl and Charlotte in *The Boat*. At the beginning of the film, Charlotte is said to be displeased with Carl because he has been expelled for smoking cigarettes and drugs. By the middle of the film, however, the viewer might be excused for expressing surprise at this attitude, since Charlotte herself is remarkably permissive and unrestrained. Her relationship with Carl seems to be rather distant; she contacts Quentin to say that she is coming aboard rather than writing to Carl, and she cannot remember Carl's age. She shows further disrespect for Carl's feelings by shouting back to him that he should thank Midnight Mark "for a lovely time", thus letting her son and anyone on board know that she has slept with a man half her age. It must also be

said that Charlotte's lack of concern regarding Carl's wish to know his father is rather callous. All in all, she does not appear to be a very good mother beyond providing for Carl materially. Although Carl does not find a replacement mother figure on board, he becomes part of a group of bachelors, thus effectively exiting childhood and moving towards maturity.

About Time illustrates an interesting and not entirely untroubled relationship between Tim and his mother. He describes her as "lovely, but not like other mums" and goes on to say that "[t]here was something solid about her, something rectangular, busy and unsentimental" (*About Time* 01:00-01:08). This characterisation demonstrates the lack of motherliness Tim feels that his mother shows; he does not describe a soft, emotionally available woman. In fact, his description of her suggests that he does not feel he knows her very well at all; he describes her more as one would a purely physical being, such as a building or a piece of furniture, describing her vague shape and the impression that she gives rather than who she actually is. Once James is diagnosed, Tim's mother reveals a little more of herself although Tim's vague impressions seem to be accurate; she claims to be "furious" at James' illness. This suggests that she is deeply attached to James but is not dependent on him, almost as if he were a possession of hers. Meanwhile, her comment that life is not worth living without James is casually hurtful towards her children and her brother, an oversight which emphasises the emotional distance between mother and children. Although Tim does not seem to mind not being close to his mother, his strong bond with his affectionate sister may indicate something lacking in his relationship with his mother. A slightly disturbing trend which becomes apparent in this film is that the new partner shares a name with the hero's mother, a coincidence which was first pointed out by Sam in *Love Actually*. Unless there is some unexplained Freudian significance to this nomenclature, it may well be that the protagonist is metaphorically compensating for his lack of a mother figure by combining mother and partner in one; it is implied that a girl sharing the mother's name must be the protagonist's soulmate, though quite why this should be is never made explicit.

On the whole, therefore, Curtis' texts do not provide strong mother figures. When biological mothers are present, they are often cool and distant, characters to be admired rather than embraced. Both Tim's and Carl's mothers appear to be largely self-involved, while remaining absent-mindedly fond of their offspring with infuriating vagueness. Replacement mother figures are also very rare, as only *The Vicar* allows Geraldine to take both Alice and Hugo under her wing despite her lack of mothering instincts. This distance between the

protagonist and their mother, the person they might be assumed to be closest to in the world, is deeply significant. The emotional distance between mother and offspring emphasises the protagonist's isolation and the importance that they mature and find a new family unit of their own before the conclusion of the text. This emotional distance and the search for family may be seen as a comment on patchwork families, stepfamilies or blended families as a social phenomenon. Curtis' texts do not feature any of these types of family – except in Daniel and Sam's case – instead relying on the family of peers to serve as a replacement support system. However, the texts do include a number of single parents such as David Horton and Daniel, who are conspicuously missing their other half. This lack of a partner becomes an integral part of their character so that the gapingly incomplete family becomes a central feature of several of the texts.

Father-child relationships

This section should perhaps properly be called father-son relationships, as it is mostly these relationships that are put under scrutiny in the scripts. However, Alice Tinker does try to appropriate David Horton as a father figure as soon as she and Hugo become engaged. She begins to refer to him as “father-in-law-to-be”, which irritates David excessively, as he is initially opposed to the union and certainly wants no connection with the Tinkers himself. A similar distaste for this connection is shown by Frank, who wears a sign on his back at Alice's wedding which firmly states that he is *not* her father. Alice does not find a father figure in the course of the series but instead becomes a mother herself and so appears to gain more self-reliance; like Carl, she exits childhood and becomes mature, to some extent removing the need for parent figures.

The other father-child relationships in these texts mostly concern fathers and sons. It has already been mentioned that George III is an unsuitable father to Prince George, and it is implied that Edmund has looked after George since their childhood (“Duel and Duality” 23:16-23:23). Hugo and David also appear to be alienated even though they have a great deal of contact. When Hugo is being particularly childish on one occasion, David groans “contraception...why didn't I think of contraception?” (“Election” 14:00-14:03). Their relationship is rather strained due to Hugo's lack of intelligence and David's extreme reserve. They share moments of what approaches affection, such as the scene in which David decides that Dibley must be saved from the reservoir and Hugo asks permission to kiss him. David

replies “If you must” and stiffly submits to being embraced, but thanks Hugo afterwards (“Summer” 23:00-23:20). Other characters in Curtis’ texts may not have fathers present but mention the lack of a father more often than is necessary; Charles’s father is dead at the time that *4 Weddings* is set, but he is mentioned twice. Tellingly, Charles says of a disastrous wedding that it is “right up there with my Dad’s funeral for sheer entertainment value”, which suggests that the funeral was one of the worst days he can think of (*4 Weddings* 53:53-54:02). This loneliness and isolation makes the characters appear more vulnerable and increases the bond that they share with their fellow characters. *Love Actually* depicts a happy father-son relationship which is born out of tragedy; when Sam’s mother dies, Daniel says that “the whole step-dad thing suddenly seems to matter like it never did before”, yet they still appear to have a close bond (*Love Actually* 26:14-26:18).

It is significant that many of the characters form bonds with older men who are not their biological fathers. Daniel and Sam seem to be closer and happier than Harry and his children, despite the fact that Daniel is frankly inappropriate at times, as he swears a great deal and fails to impose much discipline on Sam. Another case of a boy finding alternative father figures is that of Carl on board the boat. Needless to say, Carl’s relationship with his biological father, Bob Silver, is far from close; when Carl reveals the news to Bob, Bob merely looks slightly surprised and says nothing but “Wow”. When Carl presses for a response, Bob avoids the issue by insisting on changing the record before he replies, then remaining silent. The anti-climactic scene is well summed up when John enters and asks what is going on, to which both Bob and a dispirited Carl reply “nothing”. Later, Bob’s role as a father is further undermined by the fact that Carl has to save him from drowning instead of the other way around, which emphasises just how unworldly and irresponsible Bob is. Luckily for Carl, however, his arrival on the boat some time previously had allowed him access to several other adults who are able to offer some sort of guidance. While none of the DJs are mature and responsible – not to say respectable – enough to be a father figure, together the four main crew members could be said to form a semi-functioning parental body. Quentin is nominally Carl’s godfather, so a fatherly figure is implied. In fact, Quentin is quite distant from the rest of the crew, but does try to give Carl help in some respects. He sets Carl up with “the sweetest and prettiest girl” – who may or may not actually be his niece – but who Quentin must have been sure was quite promiscuous, in much the same way as Dr. Dave invites Carl to sleep with his current conquest. In as far as there is any discipline on board, it is administered by

Quentin, as he is the one who tries to regulate the Count's language, reminds the crew that Elenore is off limits and orders Twatt out of the engine rooms. It is also he who advises Carl to brush his hair and hide his pornography in preparation for Charlotte's arrival. Dr. Dave, as has already been mentioned, offers practical assistance but nothing in the way of moral guidance. Gavin could be said to act as a role model for Carl's later life – not one that many parents would condone, but he is universally popular and is considered to be a success. The Count is the most paternal figure on board, especially towards Carl. The transmission of the father role onto this character is made easier by the fact that he is one of the older crew members. He is easily the best role model for Carl and shows the most moral fibre. He is the only character shown having a lengthy and serious discussion with Carl, namely the scene in which he tells Carl that these are most likely the best days of their lives. Although he is hardly encouraging ("You might have better days...I doubt it" 01:27:07), he gives sound advice to Carl – to enjoy the moment – which is more than the other characters do.

Without a doubt the most poignant and central father-son relationship in these texts is that between Tim and James. Somewhat ironically, they do not comply with traditional father-and-son behaviour patterns, as they act more like best friends than anything else. They spend much of their time together in "leisurely chats", having tea on the beach or playing table tennis. In this respect, James' relationship to Tim is uncannily like Quentin's relationship to Carl, except that James is slightly more relaxed and informal. When James reveals the family secret to Tim, in a scene which is strongly reminiscent of Quentin's first interview with Carl, Tim assumes that this is another of James' jokes, which suggests that they have indulged in many practical jokes in the past. This type of behaviour is hardly common in father-son relationships, particularly among the affluent middle classes, where more restraint between parents and children is expected. The expected distance is still present, however, in the fact that James is effectively physically absent for much of the time. His displacement in time combines with his vague and elusive character; he is always present and yet never truly available to Tim until Tim too learns James' secret. This dichotomy in presence and absence is illustrated well in Tim's first characterisation of James: "Dad, well, he was more normal. He always seemed to have time on his hands after giving up teaching university students on his fiftieth birthday. He was eternally available for a leisurely chat or to let me win at table tennis" (*About Time* 1:11-1:22). The words "eternally available" suggest that James is always

there when Tim needs him, but they also emphasise his elusiveness, as anything which is always present becomes all but invisible.

This strange quality of being simultaneously present and absent is effectively encapsulated in the scene before James' funeral, when Tim travels back in time to hear James read a passage from Dickens. In this scene, James is shown to be dead, yet at the same time reading in the next room. This representation of simultaneous availability and distance metaphorically represents James' strong paternal love for his children combined with his natural restraint. He can put his affection into words and travels back in time repeatedly to spend more time with his children, but he remains intentionally physically undemonstrative in the best British tradition of unsentimentality. In his conversation with Tim after the revelation about the gravity of his illness, James says "I rather let myself down last time – I hugged you" (*About Time* 01:33:34-01:33:39). James' tactic of behaving more like a friend than a father actually affords him more closeness and informality with his children than would be expected from a parent. The context of being admitted into James' study, however, underlines the formality of the occasion – as Tim notes early on – and they cannot slip into the role of friends.

This most recent text, therefore, most openly addresses the issue of distance between fathers and sons which is touched upon in many of the texts. Where biological fathers are present they are distant, like George III or David Horton, or incompetent like Bob Silver. The closest father-son relationships are those between replacement fathers and sons, such as Daniel and Sam, or characters who do not behave like fathers, like James.

4.3. Siblings

The relationships between siblings are equally uneasy in these texts as those between parents and children. *Blackadder* sees extreme sibling rivalry between Edmund and Henry, although the rivalry is entirely one-sided. Henry is earnest, honest and somewhat slow-witted at times but popular at court, whereas Edmund seems to be intellectually superior but universally despised. Edmund appears to bear his sibling no brotherly feeling at all, as he tries to expose Henry as a bastard and attempts to seize power on several occasions. The only other time Edmund mentions a character close to being a sibling, he refers to his cousin McAdder. He regards his cousin's superior physical and inferior intellectual strength with the same sneering

disdain as the first incarnation of Edmund reserves for Henry. Therefore, for Edmund, siblings exist to be exploited and manipulated.

4 Weddings shows a similar, though less abusive relationship between Fiona and Tom. Fiona appears to regard her brother as a tiresome housemate, and at one point asks Matthew “Do you think I’d hate him so much if he wasn’t my brother?” when Tom makes a particularly asinine remark (*4 Weddings* 11:50). However, she may look down on Tom from a purely intellectual level but she does not manipulate or tease him. A similar intellectual imbalance is shown in *Notting Hill*, where Will is more intelligent and socially adept than Honey, but, perhaps because he no longer lives with her, reserves a fond indulgence for her eccentricities rather than sneering at them. This recurring imbalance in sibling intelligence is ironically commented on when Alice’s sister Mary is introduced in *The Vicar*’s “Christmas Lunch Incident”. While Alice would be expected to be at a disadvantage in any comparison of mental powers, Mary is quickly proven to be even less intellectually developed than Alice, which is quite an achievement in itself.

The only early film to show a more or less harmonious sibling relationship is *4 Weddings*, in that Charles’ brother David “the Dish” is only disadvantaged by being deaf, but appears to be perfectly well integrated despite his handicap. Charles and David seem to be quite close, as there is no sense of reunion when they meet and going to the cinema together is such a normal occurrence that Charles actually overlooks the time at which he should leave. Interestingly, David is shown to be rather less complicated and slightly superior to Charles in that women approach him rather than the other way around, and that he is very perceptive, saving Charles from marrying unhappily. One ingredient of his success is very likely to be that he simply cannot babble desperately as Charles does, but is instead forcibly cast as the strong, silent type. He does prove to have adequate social skills when interacting with Serena, when he glosses over her mistakes and manages to stay friendly without putting a foot wrong.

Love Actually shows an extreme imbalance in sibling status between office worker Sarah and her brother. Sarah explains to Karl that their parents are dead and that the siblings are “all they have left” (*Love Actually* 01:09:14-01:09:28). Sarah sacrifices any chance she has of a personal life to provide for her brother’s needs, despite the fact that Harry has previously revealed that she loves Karl and would like to marry him (*Love Actually* 18:08-18:49). Her brother appears to be severely mentally handicapped, as he displays paranoia and persecution mania as well as attempting to strike his sister. Their bond is very close despite

the tension between them caused by his imbalanced condition and her implied guilty conscience; at the end of the film, when other happy couples unite, they are shown celebrating together quietly in the ward, she cradling his head to her chest in a maternal fashion. The sibling bond is particularly prominent in Sarah's story, but for the text as a whole, it characterises her as a thoroughly good person who deserves happiness but sacrifices her own needs for the good of others – in the true spirit of Christmas, of course.

Tim seems to share the closest sibling bond with Kit Kat. Her offhand and occasionally downright rude behaviour towards him is excused as being part of her deeply affectionate nature, which she appears to be able to express physically better than verbally. The importance of Kit Kat in Tim's life is established in his initial voiceover:

And then, finally, there was Katherine...Katie...Kit Kat – my sister. In a household of sensible jackets and haircuts, there was this – what can I call her? – Nature thing, with her elfin eyes, her purple T-shirts and her eternally bare feet. She was then, and still is, to me, about the most wonderful thing in the world.

(*About Time* 01:39-02:00)

The fact that Tim characterises Kit Kat last of all his family members, even placing Uncle Desmond before her, shows how much he values her. He lingers over her description for much longer than he spends on his parents, and gives her full name, two of her nicknames and only then his relationship to her. His parents' names are not mentioned until he meets Harry and Mary, respectively. Tim seems to love Kit Kat because she does not fit in to his regulated, conservative and restrained surroundings, yet this is the very reason for her general lack of success in choosing boyfriends and remaining in employment. Despite the strong sibling bond between the protagonist and his sister, this text too places the protagonist in a superior position socially, as he has the self-respect and restraint that his sister lacks. Therefore, Tim too acts as an indulgent protector of a less advantaged sister. Interestingly, there is more than one imbalance in a sibling relationship in *About Time*. While Tim's mother is brusque, businesslike and unsentimental, her brother Desmond is emotional, vague and impractical. Though this might at first be ascribed to his travels through time, Desmond is *Mary's* brother, not James', so he has not inherited the ability to time travel. Desmond is essentially an amiable parasite, as he is clearly unemployable; however, such is his vagueness and lack of perception that he appears to be mentally handicapped in some way. The imbalance in sibling

power concerning material success or mental superiority stretches over two generations in this text.

The theme of an uneasy or unequal relationship between siblings, therefore, occurs fairly frequently but rarely in a very prominent position. It might be argued that this imbalance is used as a device to help define a character by determining how they behave towards their closest family ties, particularly in view of the fact that the character better known to the viewer is usually the intellectually superior sibling. Giving a protagonist a disadvantaged sibling, be it through a mental, physical or behavioural handicap, allows them to show a sensitive side of their nature. If the modern middle-class English family behaves with the correct decorum, sensitivity and raw emotion are only shown towards children or animals, in the great English tradition of being sensible and restrained. Earnest, verbally formulated affection, especially voiced within earshot of others, would be viewed with squeamishness and cause acute embarrassment on all sides. In this way, the siblings fulfil an important role in characterising the protagonist. Each of the siblings is in some way ‘not quite normal’, which allows this rule of restraint to be waived for the protagonist.

4.4. The platonic friends

Several of the screenplays also include male-female friendships in which the nature of the relationship is not made clear, so that they appear to be platonic friends. This relationship pattern, it must be said, is mostly present in the earlier screenplays, rather than in later ones. *The Tall Guy* has Dexter living with his nymphomaniac landlady Carmen, who seems to have sexual relations with almost every man she meets – yet Dexter remains unscathed, despite being allowed to enter her bedroom while she is entertaining other men. Their relationship is never explained fully. The bizarre, inexplicable relationship between lodger and landlady – which is far more informal than might be expected – has several effects. The most striking consequence of this apparently platonic relationship is comic effect. The bizarre situations in which Dexter finds himself, such as encountering nude police officers, are comic because he has no relationship to either party and thus experiences only embarrassment. On the other hand the very lack of relationship between Dexter and Carmen may cause the viewer some confusion, as they appear to share a house, food and confidences, yet to be neither friends nor lovers, nor enemies. This lack of emotional attachment is more unnerving than a casual

physical relationship might be, as platonic cohabitation by two opposite-sex heterosexuals seems unlikely, not to say unnatural in the common perception of gender relations. Alternatively, this relationship pattern may be read as a variation of the mother-child relationship, in which the child has found a replacement mother figure. In this case, it is interesting that the characters in these relationships appear to be so close in age, rather than allowing an age gap to indicate a maternal influence. Certainly, the lack of physical relationship while still living together and supporting each other is entirely reminiscent of a small ‘family’ of peers. However, it might be argued that from a purely pragmatic point of view, Dexter must seek advice from a promiscuous female so that he can evaluate and reject it. The advice that Carmen gives him is both immoral and misogynistic, thus rejecting it establishes Dexter as a more moral person than her.

4 *Weddings* uses a similar relationship pattern, albeit for a different effect. While there is no explanation of why or how Charles and Scarlett have come to live together, there is no question of a sexual relationship between them. They act rather like a brother and sister. To aid this impression, Scarlett is portrayed as being rather childlike. It might be argued that living with Scarlett allows even the chaotic and disorganized Charles to assume responsibility over another person, making him appear more adult and protective despite his own isolated vulnerability. In other words, this relationship may exist simply to make Charles into a more likeable character. If this is assumed to be the case, a similar setup is used in *Notting Hill*, where Will’s younger sister Honey represents the disadvantaged and childlike female who needs special looking after. Will specifically refers to Honey as his “baby sister”, which further emphasizes her infantile status and thus his own maturity – incidentally, it also places him in the role of a potential father (*Notting Hill* 34:10).

4.5. Remarkable couples

Several of the screenplays feature unlikely couples. Here, it is important to draw the distinction between couples and friends, as the couples are not always romantically involved and yet still constitute a relationship. The relationship between the protagonist and the eccentric housemate might be considered as a subcategory of this chapter, in that they form unlikely friendships. Interestingly, same-sex couples are often remarkable in these

screenplays not for their frequency, but for the fact that they usually embody the happiest and most uncomplicated relationship in the film or series.

Chronologically, the first odd couples appear in *Blackadder*. Although the character is designed to be a bachelor, he is in fact involved with three very unlikely women. The first is eight-year-old Princess Leia of Hungary, whom he is obliged to marry for political reasons and with whom he appears to have a tolerant and undemanding relationship, as she spends most of her time with Edmund's mother. In the second series Edmund falls in love with Kate, who is posing as a boy named Bob – thus, their relationship is somewhat strained due to their mutual attraction and their unwillingness to acknowledge it. A certain uneasiness in their relationship even after Kate reveals that she is a woman is explained by her confession to Lord Flashheart that she feels more comfortable wearing a man's clothes – upon which he rejoins that he feels better wearing a dress. Minor incidents such as these show that there are very few conventional couples in Curtis' earlier screenplays. The third woman with whom Edmund is romantically involved is Amy Hardwood in series three, who is also a cross-dresser and a highwayman. The nurse from series four could be included as a romantic interlude; however, even if her affection was genuine, Edmund reveals that he was merely attempting to locate the spy and used their pillow talk to trick her into contradicting herself. Thus, all of Edmund Blackadder's relationships are rather skewed and uncomfortable; the woman is made to be an unsuitable partner, whether through her youth or her preference for men's clothes, while two of them also have criminal backgrounds.

4 Weddings features one of the physically least suited couples, namely Scarlett and Chester. Here, Scarlett's appearance seems to be used for comic effect, as her petite figure, outrageous behaviour and flame-red hair is contrasted with Chester's height and conservative behaviour and dress. However, the most intriguing couple in this film is Matthew and Gareth. Tom and Charles only truly reflect on Matthew and Gareth's relationship after Gareth's funeral. Tom remarks to Charles that "all these years we've been single and proud of it, and never noticed that two of us were, to all intents and purposes, married all this time" (*4 Weddings* 01:26:30-01:26:36). This is a curious remark given that the group of friends was clearly aware of the close relationship between the two men but did not realise until after Gareth's death that their bond was at least as strong as a bond of marriage. It is the ruin of this relationship and the realisation that there is such a thing, albeit a rare thing, as true love, that prompts Charles to review his life and propose to Henrietta. In this respect, Matthew and

Gareth are not so much an odd couple as the ideal relationship in this film; theirs is the happiest “marriage” that the group of friends witness and they are an example to others.

Notting Hill may be the best example of a functioning unlikely couple, as this is the premise of the plot. Curtis admits in one interview that the screenplay was born from an idle daydream about what life would be like if one happened to meet a celebrity on the street (Millard “An Interview with Richard Curtis [...]”). Will and Anna might be seen as unlikely to succeed given his unworldliness and her career, not to mention their different attitudes to life; she overreacts where he tends to be rather laid back. However, the film centres around the relationship between this odd couple, which demonstrates that ill-matched pairs can be far more interesting than well-suited ones. *Notting Hill* is also the first film to feature a meeting of the minds in pairing off sub-normal couples. Spike and Alice may be equally off-kilter, but they hardly seem likely to make a successful couple. However, they appear to be quite content with the idea.

A similar coupling can be seen in *The Vicar*, in which the Aristocratic Idiot Hugo is paired with Village Idiot Alice. David, naturally, violently opposes the idea on the grounds that his daughter-in-law will be jointly responsible for looking after the manor and David himself in his dotage. Gerry agrees that Alice is intellectually disadvantaged but points out that she and Hugo are very well suited:

GERRY: Alice does indeed have all the intellectual capacity and charisma of a cactus. Alice is Cactus Woman. But the trouble is, and it pains me to tell you this David, you are the father of Cactus Man. And these simple succulents were made for each other. Actually, as cacti go, I think they’re rather wonderful together.

(*The Vicar*, “Engagement” 33:20-33:46)

Alice and Hugo necessarily occupy a special place in *The Vicar*, as they are the only couple which is consistently portrayed and they appear to remain completely smitten with each other, even after over a decade of marriage and several children. Other unlikely couplings are suggested when Owen and David propose to Gerry; again, these seem unlikely to succeed given the characters’ radically different political and social views. Gerry’s affair with Simon again plays with the physical differences between the two, as his size is constantly contrasted with her small, rotund figure. When Harry arrives in the village, similarities are made apparent rather than differences, such as Harry’s love of books and nature as well as his

wicked sense of humour, which match Gerry's interests well. The element most likely to cause friction between them is the fact that both of their professions are heavily stereotyped. Although Richard Armitage is still tall and slender in comparison to Dawn French, this contrast is not emphasised cinematically.

Love Actually runs along more conservative lines as far as couples are concerned, in fact, several of the relationships could be said to be quite clichéd. No fewer than three of the men discover that they are attracted to women in their employment, namely Harry to Mia, Jamie to Aurélia and Prime Minister David to Natalie. Sarah is attracted to brooding graphic designer Carl, who, to increase the stereotype, also has a Latino accent. However, the text also presents a rather cryptic pair in Billy Mack and his manager, Joe. It is clear that the men spend a great deal of time together as the one is rarely seen without the other in this film. On the other hand, Billy makes a point of publicly insulting and humiliating Joe at every opportunity, also appearing to sabotage his own work wherever possible and so showing disrespect towards his long-suffering employee. However, Billy decides to spend Christmas with his loved ones, and "it turns out that the people [he] love[s] is actually [Joe]" (*Love Actually* 01:35:53). Joe feels compelled to ask, albeit jokingly, whether Billy has suddenly turned gay – this matter is never fully cleared, although Billy does bring a woman back from America. This suggests that Billy and Joe enjoy a platonic couple-type relationship, albeit an abusive one, which continues in the same fashion after they have admitted affection for each other.

In *The Boat*, the mostly masculine composition of the crew means that there are few couples available for analysis. The ideal couple in this film is, once again, gay. Felicity and Margaret appear to fall in love at their first meeting, soon cement their relationship physically and never waver in their affections. In contrast to this happy, easy love, the married heterosexual couples are shown in a particularly unhappy light. Simon's marriage to Elenore lasts only seventeen hours and leaves Simon heartbroken. Sir Alistair's relationship with his wife appears to be chilly and rather distant despite attempts on her part to lighten the mood.

In a relationship not dissimilar to Honey and Spike in *Notting Hill*, *About Time* sees Kit Kat and Jay as well suited to each other. Similarly to Honey's story in *Notting Hill*, Kit Kat too exercises very bad judgement when it comes to boyfriends. This can be seen in *Notting Hill* during the musical montage through the market, where Honey stumbles through in tears, and in *About Time* in Jimmy's cavalier attitude and Kit Kat's alcoholism. There is no

mention of interference on Will's side, but when Tim shows Kit Kat how Jimmy behaves on the evening they meet, she is inspired to make better choices and immediately lights on Jay, Tim's slightly obnoxious loudmouthed friend whose demeanour and appearance are not dissimilar to Spike's. In this text, too, two rather alternative and slightly odd young people find unlikely happiness together.

4.6. Grudging dependency or unequal power relations

The earliest screenplay, *Blackadder*, has the most extreme and outspoken inequality in power relations of any of the texts discussed here. Prince George, despite his incompetence and unsuitability as Regent, has power over the people. This power balance is extremely uneasy, as episodes such as "Sense and Senility" illustrate when anarchy threatens and Edmund is forced to point out why the people might resent the prince. George also has absolute power over Edmund, a fact that Edmund frequently laments. Edmund may be intellectually superior to the rest of the characters, but only has real power over Baldrick. Hierarchy is one of the key themes of this series, however, and so each character has a strictly predefined relationship with the others – and the closer in social class the characters are, the more uneasy their relationship is. Baldrick seldom has any trouble getting along with the Prince, Elizabeth I or Colonel Melchett because he knows that they are far removed from his own class and are thus comfortably separate. Edmund, on the other hand, is usually in the middle of the hierarchy and so finds fault with the classes above and below him, while his most acerbic and caustic relationships are with those who are in his own class and most similar to himself. This can be seen in his relationship with Captain Darling, who shares Edmund's rank and class and, in many ways, serves as his foil for the fourth series. The dependency issue is particularly pertinent in this sitcom, however, as the nobility is entirely dependent on their servants. Prince George's utter helplessness becomes most apparent in the episode "Nob and Nobility" in which Edmund and Baldrick pretend to go to France for a week, leaving the prince to fend for himself; it soon transpires that George cannot even dress himself. On the other hand, Edmund depends on characters such as Elizabeth and George for his life and livelihood, which often hang in the balance given the capricious dispositions of his superiors. Edmund must also depend on Baldrick to do the dirty work, while at the same time despairing of his lack of intelligence. Baldrick depends on Edmund for employment and instruction, but he is also the

least careworn of these characters, as he appears unable to appreciate his precarious position in the household.

A similarly grudging dependency is evident in *Notting Hill*, where Will is forced to depend on Spike. Spike is expected to take messages and cooperate in keeping secrets. Primarily, however, it is a grudging dependency in that Spike requires material support while Will needs companionship and organisational help. The same type of relationship can be seen between Dexter and Carmen in *The Tall Guy*, except that in their case the lodger is the organised provider while the owner of the property is ditzy and messy. Again, the housemates share food, resources and advice, but the eccentric ones annoy the hard workers with their messy habits and casual attitudes.

The Vicar displays very similar grudging dependency relationships as are shown in *Blackadder*. Geraldine relies on her verger, Alice, for information about the village and the locals, while Alice's childlike disposition and inexperience incline her to depend on Geraldine's advice in most matters. David and Hugo are tied by family bonds rather than professional ones, but appear equally reluctant to be dependent on each other. It must be said, however, that neither Hugo nor Alice appear to resent their dependency greatly, partly because of their easygoing natures. David, on the other hand, makes his distaste clear. Hugo may depend on David for a home and financial support, but Hugo is David's dogsbody and power base, as he appears to manage the estate while performing all of David's public relations work and carrying out his wishes during council meetings. Hugo is frequently prompted to utter a proposition which has clearly been drummed into him previously by his father. This type of callous behaviour on David's part shows that the dependency relationship between David and Hugo is rather more grudging than that between Geraldine and Alice. There can be no doubt, however, that there is an unequal power relationship in each case, as the vicar and the local landlord are prominent and powerful figures in most villages, while the verger is seldom as well regarded. Hugo, as the landlord's son, seems to be an exception in this case – he clearly has little power and is not greatly respected, although he appears widely liked. David seems to have retained all the power, making Hugo dependent on him in every way.

Tim's status as Harry's temporary houseguest causes a continuation of grudging dependency between housemates, albeit on a much more subtle level. Harry is very antagonistic towards Tim and is completely unaware of how much he owes to Tim's time

travelling on his behalf. Tim is dependent on Harry for a place to live and appears to tread cautiously around him at first, but later appears to learn that Harry's bark is worse than his bite. It is clear that the two have become close despite Harry's temper, as he is present at all the family occasions despite never having laid eyes on Tim before his arrival in London. Their unequal power relationship is also a case of dramatic irony. Although outwardly Harry is a reasonably successful, independent playwright with his own terraced house, his family life is in ruins and he appears to be utterly miserable. Tim, on the other hand, who arrives with nothing but a backpack and a hopeful smile, has great power which could potentially make Tim very rich and certainly helps Harry considerably. On a purely material level, therefore, Harry appears far more powerful, whereas Tim has unimaginable power but very little material wealth. This imbalance is rather reminiscent of the way that less intelligent individuals such as Spike and Alice often provide the most lucid and honest analysis of a certain situation, in that they are supposedly at a disadvantage but they know what really counts.

4.7. A Rabble led by a Rebel

Several of the texts discussed in this paper address the issue of challenging authority and authority figures. This pattern reflects the theme of progress challenging tradition which goes hand in hand with these character relationships. Two texts provide excellent examples of a conservative authority figure who is challenged by another character who is slightly subordinate but propounds progressive views and gains the support of much of the remaining cast.

In *The Vicar*, David represents the absolutely conservative authority figure. He is a Tory landowner who protests violently against the idea of a woman vicar, let alone being presented with one for his own parish. To some extent he represents the Establishment, though his strong characterisation and personality quirks make him too singular to act as a metaphor for an entire social class; however, this is the role that he fulfils early on in the series, voicing the thoughts of many conservative authority figures. In a sense, therefore, the first series is a dialogue between the Establishment and a new, outside influence. At the beginning of the series, David has the grudging respect of the villagers. However, the imbalance in their relationship is confirmed at the end of the series when Frank says that

parish meetings used to be much shorter because they “just did what [David] said” (“The Vicar in White” 2:06-2:09). When Geradine arrives, however, she challenges David’s views indirectly simply by being a woman vicar, and directly by delivering modern sermons. She also goes against David’s interests by encouraging aspects of Christianity which he would prefer to ignore, such as giving to the poor and making sacrifices for the good of the community. In David’s eyes, therefore, and probably for most viewers in the early 1990s, Geraldine is quite a rebel, if only because she appears to value her portraits of Jesus and Sean Bean equally. She is also subversive on a less obvious level in that she defies the stock character of the village vicar completely. She is wordly and flirtatious and frequently shows a lack of restraint in her appetite for chocolate and men, which is an uneasy topic as no one seemed quite sure what the prescribed behaviour was for women vicars when they were first ordained. Therefore she is rebellious on more than one level, surprising both the other characters and most viewers. By defying David and disrupting the monopoly which he had previously held over the village merely by dint of being the only educated authority figure, Geraldine soon gains the support of the villagers. She represents their point of view and articulates the sentiments which they have neither the temerity nor the vocabulary to express. This is particularly well demonstrated in the episode “Election”, in which David is made to realise just how much of a threat Geraldine is to his position in the village. By representing the interests of the villagers, Geraldine soon gains their unquestioning support; she is able to use her considerable influence over them in several subsequent episodes when she wishes to defy David.

A similar tension is shown in *The Boat*, although this second version is even more complex because it is reproduced again and again in more subtle forms. The most obvious rebellion against authority is the fact that the pirate radio station exists in defiance of the radio licensing laws. Therefore, Sir Alistair Dormandy, the precise, suited minister with his conservative views and clipped accents represents repressive authority at its most restrictive. Quentin and the crew of the boat represent the new, outside influence which challenges Domandy’s authority and threaten to depose him. This threat is voiced when Gavin announces that in a recent survey, Britons claimed that “they would vote for the pirates rather than the government” (*The Boat* 01:12:52). The boat and its crew advocate easy living, looser morals and a genuine *carpe diem* philosophy which is in absolute contrast to the rigid morals and “good taste” which the government wishes to propagate. Therefore, on the most abstract level

the challenge is to the Establishment by popular culture (with particular reference to American influences) with the support of the people of Great Britain, who represent the rabble in this case. As has been discussed in this section, the focus of the film is on the challenge to Dormandy and the cabinet's authority by the pirate radio station with the support of the crew and their fans, led by Quentin, so that Quentin is the rebel and the crew the rabble. However, there is yet another concrete layer of defiance of authority within the crew itself. The strongest authority figure on the boat is Quentin, who, while progressive in the traditional sense of the world, has set world views and is realistic about how far the station should rebel against authority. His fossilisation as a rebel figure is exposed metaphorically when he decides to move the boat to escape arrest and stands on the bridge remarking "We should have set sail *years* ago" (*The Boat* 01:40:22). This remark demonstrates his realisation of how set in his ways he had become. Quentin's authority is challenged by the Count, who takes on the role of the rebel in leading the crew astray, swearing on air and generally rocking the boat in every sense of the word. This defiance is particularly clear in the scene in which the Count announces that he will do A Very Foolish Thing and swear on air and Quentin uses his authority to stop him but fails (*The Boat* 10:35-13:05). Although Quentin takes this defiance fairly well, he clearly does not approve of being disobeyed. He may not be the strongest authority figure in an everyday context, but his restricting influence is clearly felt by the crew. After Quentin has delivered a few words about Simon's engagement, for example, the Count cranes around to check that he really has left before saying "I think I can safely say, now that Quentin has departed, the one word which I believe is the only word in the world that now matters...[...] Stag!", before they embark on a pub crawl without Quentin (*The Boat* 47:46-48:00). In this respect, the Count and the crew behave very much like schoolboys when the teacher is absent when they act outside Quentin's authority. One of the lengthy deleted scenes from this text includes the only episode in which the crew does behave like pirates when they sally forth without Quentin's knowledge or permission to sabotage a rival pirate station, Radio Sunshine. Therefore, this text presents challenges to authority on more levels than *The Vicar*, although the two texts show similar tensions between authority figures and rebels.

This section has shown that there are several themes which reoccur in Curtis' texts in the form of relationships between his stock characters. The main protagonists seldom have a close and loving relationship with their parents and often have a socially disadvantaged sibling whom they indulgently protect. Because of their isolation they frequently join a family

of peers and, due to their characteristic lack of success, are in a grudging dependency relationship with another character. They occasionally form friendships with the opposite sex which are entirely platonic, though this seems to be more of a plot device than a theme as such. Several of the texts include unlikely or unusual couples, who invariably have a happy and uncomplicated relationship which serves as an example to the protagonist. Finally, two of the texts thematise the subject of challenging authority by having an authority figure defied by a rebellious character and a motley crew of supporters.

Table 3: Curtis' stock relationship patterns:

Relationship pattern	Features
Family of peers	Protagonists tend to be rather isolated, lonely characters who are surrounded by friends or companions, whether by choice or necessity, who form an alternative family unit.
Parent-child	Rarely happy or successful; mother-child relationships are strained and partly quite cold if they are mentioned at all. Father-child relationships are more complicated. Often one of the protagonists is missing a father figure and either finds one in the course of the text or matures to the extent that they become adult and no longer rely on a father figure. Fathers are often dead or die during the narrative.
Siblings	The power imbalance is continued on an intellectual level in the relationships between siblings, where one is usually more intelligent than their less fortunate brother or sister. In one text, the less fortunate sibling is handicapped, yet the focus is still on how the protagonist interacts with him and does not belittle him.
Remarkable couples	There is invariably one homosexual couple, one involving at least one cross-dresser, or one in which two extraordinarily dim but amiable people find each other. An interesting point here is that the ideal, loving, uncomplicated couple is usually the gay couple.
Grudging dependency	The characters who spend the most time together are usually forced into each other's company by profession or circumstance and there is often an imbalance in power between them which causes one to sap the resources of the other, yet they continue to exist in symbiosis.
Platonic friends	Possibly a plot device more than a theme proper, as it usually involves the male protagonist and the woman with whom he lives. This pattern could also be seen as a quirky, provocative challenge to the commonly held view that men and women cannot have platonic relationships.

Rabble led by a Rebel	In two texts, a conservative authority figure is challenged by a rebellious outside influence which supports progressive views and has the support of the masses.
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Overleaf,

Table 4: Relationships which conform to these patterns

	<i>Tall Guy</i>	<i>Blackadder</i>	<i>4 Weddings</i>	<i>The Vicar</i>	<i>Notting Hill</i>	<i>Love Actually</i>	<i>The Boat</i>	<i>About Time</i>
Family of peers	Charlie, Carmen, Mr. B?	Baldrick, Percy	Tom, Fiona, Matthew, Gareth	Villagers	Max, Bella, Martin	Most of the ties between protagonists	The crew	-
Parent-child	Dexter is alone in England	Mad George III, Baldrick's mad mother, otherwise none	Charles' father dead	Hugo and David, Alice and her parents	-	Sarah and her brother orphaned, Daniel and Sam	Carl and his parents	Tim and James
Platonic friends	Carmen	(Mrs. Miggins)	Scarlett	-	Bella?	-	-	-
Remarkable couples	-	Flash and Kate	Matthew and Gareth, Tom and Deirdre.	Alice and Hugo	Honey and Spike	(Billy Mack and Joe)	Felicity and Margaret	Kit Kat and Jay
Grudging dependency	Dexter and Carmen, Dexter and Kate?	Royalty on servants, Edmund on royalty, Edmund on Baldrick	Charles and Scarlett, Tom and Fiona	David and Geraldine, David and villagers	Will and Spike	-	-	Tim and Harry
Siblings	-	Edmund and Henry	Charles and David	Alice/Mary, David/Simon	Will and Honey	Sarah and her brother	-	Tim and Kit Kat, Desmond
Rabble led by a rebel	-	-	-	Geraldine and villagers against David	-	-	Quentin/crew against government/Dormandy, the Count and crew against Quentin	-

5. Analysis

5. 1. The British and Humour

The analysis of the texts thus far has shown that several character types resurface in most of the texts, while there are also some commonly recurring relationships between these characters. This result prompts several questions: Why do these characters keep reappearing? What do these characters reveal about the society which produced them, consumes them and gives meaning to them? Why are these characters perceived to be ‘typically British’? How are they a result of British humour? In order to discuss these and other issues which surface in the analysis of the results of the investigation, several complex topics of national identity, humour theory and creative writing must be addressed.

Britishness (or rather, Englishness) in the texts

CHARLES: Do you think there really are people who just go up to someone and say:
‘Hey babe. Name’s Charles. This is your lucky night’?
MATTHEW: Well, if there are ... they’re not English.
(4 *Weddings* 19:29-19:38)

As Curtis’ texts deal primarily with the British, or rather, the English, it seems only proper to begin this section with a short chapter on the English as they are represented in these texts. Whether it is Charles stammering a proposition to Carrie, Quentin addressing his crew or even Colin decamping to America, the vast majority of the characters in these texts represent a certain type or class of Englishness. While some of the characters may have vastly different backgrounds, however, there are certain preconceived national characteristics which they share. In order to discuss this topic in a methodical manner, however, one must first determine what the typical characteristics of an English character are. In her popular anthropology *Watching the English* social anthropologist Kate Fox identifies the quintessential characteristic of the English as “social dis-ease”, “a shorthand term for all our chronic social inhibitions and handicaps” (Fox 401). Fox’s description of “social dis-ease” reads almost like a characterisation of the *Gauche Young Man*: “It is our lack of ease, discomfort and incompetence in the field [...] of social interaction; our embarrassment, insularity, awkwardness, perverse obliqueness, emotional constipation, fear of intimacy and general

inability to engage in a normal and straightforward fashion with other human beings” (Fox 401). Fox also identifies three “reflexes” or involuntary reactions which are constantly in operation. The first and most predominant of these reflexes is humour, which Fox claims counteracts social dis-ease according to the motto “when in doubt, joke” in order to release tension (Fox 402). The second reflex is moderation, an aversion to extremes or excess such as unwarranted zeal, earnestness or an excess of emotion (Fox 62-64, 403). The final reflex is hypocrisy, which she defines as a tacit agreement to delude oneself and others – at least superficially – in order to avoid conflict or embarrassment (Fox 404). Fox also lists several outlooks or world-views to which the English as a nation subscribe, namely empiricism (pragmatism and anti-intellectualism), eyorishness (“socially therapeutic” [...] “mock-moaning” which allows for social bonding) and class-consciousness, which is so all-pervasive that Fox declines to relegate it to a separate chapter but instead includes it in all aspects of English behaviour (Fox 404-406). As a final component of her map of Englishness, she describes the core values of the English as fair play (and supporting the underdog), courtesy and modesty, or at least the appearance of modesty (Fox 406-409).

Of these characteristics, social dis-ease and the three reflexes are perhaps the most outwardly apparent, and certainly are best represented in the texts discussed here. With the exception of *The Tall Guy*, each of the texts discussed in this paper includes a protagonist who has social dis-ease. It is difficult to determine specific national characteristics with great confidence, but it appears that the English, even when characterising themselves, do so with a great deal of self-deprecation, especially when it comes to showing emotion or affection. Even Fox – who remains reasonably objective – states that “[a]t home, among close family, friends and lovers, we can be warm and spontaneous and really quite remarkably human. This is the side of us that many visitors to the country never see, or only catch rare glimpses of. You have to be patient to witness it – like waiting for giant pandas to mate” (Fox 399).

Love and romance seem to be areas in which the English are perceived to be particularly awkward, unsurprisingly. However, this myth appears to have been perpetuated by the nation itself. To remain in keeping with this stereotype, or indeed to remain believable, while spinning a tale of whirlwind passion and romance seems a difficult task – as indeed Charles and Matthew lament at Angus’s wedding.

All of the Gauche Young Men are socially handicapped despite having all the advantages that a privileged life has to offer; looks, intelligence and independent means. The

Confident American beckons as the ideal love interest in texts such as these for the simple reason that the English protagonist would be unlikely to fall into a relationship easily with a similarly disadvantaged fellow countrywoman. Fox discusses the image of the English as naive and frigid, referring to “the awkward, tongue-tied, timid, public-schoolboy character, and his equally clueless horsey female counterpart who cannot stop giggling” as a popular stereotype of English flirtation in the upper classes (Fox 324). While no doubt amusing for some time, these encounters are hardly likely to provide gripping material for an entire film (as well as being embarrassing and frustrating to watch). Therefore, if an author is to conform with national stereotypes – or indeed retain credibility, as Fox’s research suggests that the stereotypes hold true – the Confident American must rush in to the rescue.

The reflexes of humour and moderation are certainly well represented in the texts. Humour is used to defuse many moments when there is a danger that genuine emotion or excess may be displayed. Any of the wedding proposals serve as excellent examples of this avoidance. When Hugo proposes to Alice, for instance, his choice of words is genuinely touching. However, the mood is lightened by the fact that she is allowed to interrupt him with humorous suggestions, and even her heartfelt answer is followed up by a joke. Such is the embarrassment surrounding excess that, in a knee-jerk reaction, it is supposed to be humorous in itself, as Simon and the crew’s pub-crawl demonstrates. The fact that Gavin and Dave hug and kiss, or that Simon celebrates in his underwear are so far beyond the spectrum of normal decorum that they are a cause for laughter.

Although English stereotypes are not well documented officially, the Gauche Young Man or “awkward, tongue-tied, timid, public-schoolboy character” as Fox calls him clearly appears frequently in film and literature. *The Boat* also provides Sir Alistair Dormandy as a caricature of an Englishman working in the City. This is compounded by the fact that his scenes include shots of London and red telephone boxes and that he wears pinstripes, carries an umbrella and has a portrait of the Queen in his office. In this, he may be compared to *The Avengers*’ Steed, who displays much the same characteristics though with considerably more charm. Dormandy is the ultimate in British repression and, unusually for a British production, enforces the American trope that “all (well-spoken) Brits are evil” or rather “all villains are (well-spoken) Brits”. Other character types such as the Aristocratic Idiot or Village Idiot are not confined to the sphere of Britishness and may be considered to be trans-cultural – it is likely that they also translate better.

Humour and the texts

According to Freud, humour is the expression of repressed desires, in much the same way as dreams allow repressed thoughts to surface (Billig 452). Through humour, sexual and aggressive thoughts, those most taboo in society, can be aired simply because the speaker supposedly does not intend for them to be taken seriously (Billig 452-453). At the same time, the voicing of taboo topics shocks the audience, which can result in laughter as a release of tension or through sheer embarrassment. In this way, humour can be a way of subverting the social order by refusing to comply with the rules of polite society (Billig 452-453). Curtis' texts certainly include a great many obscenities which serve as stand-alone gags rather than having any relation to the plot. Whether it is Spike posing in his underwear or Edmund describing how he would like to punish Baldrick, sexuality and aggression are almost omnipresent in most of the texts. Profanity is used to shock, as streams of expletives are employed in *4 Weddings* and the pillars of the community, Dormandy and Twatt, swear precisely and deliberately in *The Boat* (indeed, the name Twatt itself is an excellent example of the frankly childish humour found in obscenity). In exploiting the release of repressed ideas and desires, Edmund can make non-PC jokes about women, the class system and the disabled, David Horton can reveal his egomaniac nature and the Gauche Young Man can babble and blurt out his innermost thoughts, however inappropriate. Intelligent characters can rail against their dimmer interlocutors. Because these are comedy texts, the characters can be scripted to say things that even the most proficient wit or obscene joker might hesitate to say aloud. The audience shares a vicarious thrill when these taboo topics are brought up. Because these are comedy texts, however, the question of whether they are supposed not to be taken seriously is problematic. Who can say whether the character who speaks the line really intends what they say to be taken lightly or literally? The taboos placed by society are stretched even further by this problem, as these characters deliver their lines in such a deadpan manner that it seems unlikely that they are, in fact, only joking. The character is offensive but, because the medium is "not serious", the scene can be presented as a joke.

If it is indeed uncertain whether or not someone is joking, what then is the point of making a joke? It appears that humour in fact serves a function in society. Erving Goffmann put forward the theory that the fear of social embarrassment alone is enough to cause members of a society to conform to the rules, merely in order to avoid becoming an object of mockery – as, he argues, signs of embarrassment include all the features of body language

usually associated with lower-status members of society, such as avoiding eye contact, a lowered head, fidgeting and so on (Goffman 97-112). Anyone who “does” humour has the power to mock and embarrass other individuals; however, this reduction in status through mockery can be extended to entire groups. Goffman states that “[...] if the individual for whom embarrassment is felt happens to be perceived as a responsible representative of some faction or subgroup (as is very often the case in three-or-more-person interaction) then the members of this faction are likely to feel embarrassed and to feel it for themselves” (Goffman 99). In other words, in order not to lose one’s social standing, one must never display embarrassment. This aspect is particularly interesting in regard to the texts analysed in this paper, as the main protagonists in the romantic comedies in particular are subject to such intense embarrassment that the films are sometimes difficult to watch without cringing in sympathy. Their embarrassment should, according to Goffman’s theory, lower their social status. However, it is interesting to note that, possibly because their behaviour is scripted and therefore unnatural, they display few signs of real inferiority, such as weaving, hand-wringing, sweating visibly or head-ducking. Grant’s characters only betray their discomfort by stammering slightly and failing to form coherent sentences. The embarrassed *Gauche Young Man* character usually also manages to slip a few clever self-deprecating remarks into his otherwise incoherent babbling, which gains him more power over the character or situation which is causing his embarrassment. Therefore, while technically the *Gauche Young Man*’s status in society should be called into question by his frequent embarrassment, the fact that he fails to display any obvious signs of discomfort that cannot be remedied by a few smart remarks saves him from being consigned an inferior status. It might even be argued that, according to Goffman’s theory of group inclusion, viewers watching the *Gauche Young Man*’s embarrassment who have an affiliation with the character type, whether through class, type or having experienced the same problems, may be caused to feel embarrassment. The question is whether this embarrassment is viewed by other groups in society (which seems unlikely) and therefore somehow linked to their social status, or indeed whether the viewers identify with the *Gauche Young Man* to the point that they end the experience virtually unscathed, as he does.

Michael Billig combines these two theories of Freud’s and Goffman’s in order to argue the role of mockery in maintaining social order. He reasons that humour is not only a weapon for the supposedly inferior to subvert the social order by mocking their oppressors,

but also as a tool for the oppressors to mock their inferiors, causing them embarrassment and thus maintaining the social structure (Billig 454). The idea of an inferior mocking his or her superiors is certainly a popular one. In an abstract sense, this is what the crew of *The Boat* could be said to do throughout the film. This thesis has already discussed texts which centre around a relationship between wily servant and witless master, such as Jeeves and Wooster. However, Jeeves only mocks Bertie when severely tried. Edmund Blackadder, on the other hand, derives great pleasure from mocking the prince at every opportunity; in fact, it is one of the only ways that he can rebel, apart from cheating his employer whenever he can. Edmund mocks George without the benefit of an audience to appreciate his wit, as neither Baldrick nor George understand when Edmund mocks them. However, most of the texts employ the method outlined by Billig in which the conservative power figure mocks his or her inferiors. This is the case throughout *The Vicar*, where David and Geraldine's mockery of the villagers is particularly striking. Even in the romantic comedies, the character types which make the most use of conscious humour are the Gauche Young Men and the Cynically Superior Ones. These are invariably upper-middle or upper class, and frequently aim their mockery at the Village Idiot or the Eccentric Housemate. Oddly enough, the Confident American is never ridiculed by a fellow character – only the Count is presented in a ridiculous light when he challenges Gavin, and this mockery is created mostly by the score and the use of the camera.

Goffman's theory that embarrassment causes the embarrassed person to appear socially inferior begs the question of whether the Gauche Young Man, the most embarrassed character to grace the screen in these texts, becomes in any way less superior through his humiliation. These characters seem to bear humiliation quite well, as they are aware of how ridiculous they appear and are able to joke about it. Certainly the viewer is not given the impression that Charles or William, as sterling examples, are any less upper-middle class than they appear to be at first. However, this humiliation of the Gauche Young Man may have a subtler function. By showing the character's discomfort, the author of the text renders the character vulnerable and humble, as the character is shown to be at an extreme disadvantage. This may be a way of making the upper-middle class appear less "posh" and more likeable, as a typical representative of the class is shown to be harmless and somewhat bumbling. Therefore, displaying embarrassed characters has a function beyond amusement; this strategy can be used to make a character more likeable – or at least less of a threat – and thus avoid criticism of the class system.

It certainly seems that humour is a far more powerful than it appears. In his 1927 essay “Humour”, Freud states that “[t]here are two ways in which the humorous process can take place: either one person is humorous and the other appreciates it, or one person is made the object of humorous contemplation by the other” (Freud 161). In other words, and as he later rephrases it, “[h]umour is directed toward the subject’s self or towards other people”. This suggests a limited approach to humour, consisting of self-deprecation, self-mockery or ironic self-aggrandisement, or mockery and ridicule of another. It seems, therefore, that any act of humour is an enactment of social power roles, and a rather fine-tuned and potentially aggressive enactment at that. Furthermore, this distinction between the mocker, the object of mockery and the audience lays bare the power imbalance between the three parties; the object of mockery is a helpless, even unwitting victim of the mocker’s wit, while the audience becomes an accomplice, even an unwilling accessory, to this jest. In a sense, this power imbalance is somewhat reminiscent of the power imbalance in scopophilia, in which the object of the gaze is looked at and is unable to look back at the looker, who has implied power over the object of the gaze (Mulvey 6-18). Not for nothing does Billig state early on in his article that “humour can be antisocial”: not only do jokes often raise otherwise taboo subjects such as violence and sexuality, but they also afford the accomplished wit great power in society. Regarding the antisocial aspect, Curtis’ texts reinforce Billig’s theory that humour can be used to preserve the social order. In the screenplays, the most sophisticated, aggressive and acerbic jokers, the Cynically Superior Ones, are incredibly misanthropic. The friendliest and most innocently amusing (if occasionally obscene) characters are the Village Idiots. Thus, the texts display a preservation of the class system through almost ritual humiliation and mockery of the socially inferior characters. Humour, then, is a very powerful social tool, especially as it is superficially supposed not to be taken seriously and therefore is difficult to defend against.

However, Freud distinguishes between ‘innocent’ and ‘tendentious’ jokes. Innocent jokes are humour for the sake of humour, such as plays on words, and have no underlying meaning or unvoiced desire. In Curtis’ texts, these jokes are viewed with contempt at worst, bored resignation at best. An excellent example of this can be seen in *The Vicar* when Jim submits an article for the parish newsletter and is terribly proud of his “little joke”. The note reads: “Want to take up bell-ringing? Why not come by the church next Saturday and let us show you the ropes” (“Engagement” 25:00-25:31). He then proceeds to explain the joke

painstakingly to Geraldine despite her protests that she really does understand it. The only innocent puns that are acceptable are the jokes that Geraldine tells Alice at the end of every episode, and even these are made funny mostly by the fact that Alice fails to understand most of them. This embarrassment of Alice, though she is rarely shown to be conscious of it, is a confirmation of her lowly status, both intellectual and social. The other kind of joke is the tendentious joke, which allows repressed thoughts to be voiced and thus fulfils a psychological function. An example of this type of joke would be one of Geraldine's responses to Alice's stupidity, namely: "I'm starting to think that Herod had the right idea – kill 'em when they're young" ("Engagement" 40:44-40:48) The author was joking when he wrote the line, Geraldine was almost certainly joking when she said it, but at the same time it is likely that most people have felt the urge to cause someone bodily harm out of frustration at some point. The joke is not only unacceptable for its aggression, however, but also for its irreverence and its implied violence to children. The actual idea of smothering a baby because it will grow up not to understand jokes is ridiculous, but horribly callous at the same time and obviously could not be put forward as a serious suggestion in our society. Another even more tendentious joke is the ongoing battle between David and Geraldine as to whether women vicars are acceptable. When David claims that "If Jesus had wanted women vicars he would have appointed them: It's Mathew, Mark, Luke and John, not Tara, Tracey, Sharon and Debbie" or "Are we to have topless sunbathing on the rectory lawn come summer?" the character is clearly being pompous and ridiculous ("The Arrival" 15:02-15:10 and 14:46-14:49). However, these were the prevailing views of many conservatives at the time, so David's behaviour may be read as a vicious barb directed at them while critics of female vicars may have been applauding the sentiments that the character expresses.

Interestingly, the stock characters in these texts can be roughly subdivided into groups according to which type of humour they are likely to use: Visual comedy (looking funny) is the province of Eccentric Housemates and Village Idiots, while physical comedy (doing funny things) is performed by Eccentric Housemates, Village Idiots and Aristocratic Idiots. Verbal comedy must again be subdivided into intentional, tendentious jokes, which are delivered almost exclusively by Cynically Superior Ones and Gauche Young Men, and unintentional, innocent jokes made by Village Idiots and Aristocratic Idiots. The more sophisticated, barbed humour is reserved for the socially and intellectually superior characters, while the only truly non-aggressive humour is unintentional. Intriguingly, the American characters are seldom

amusing. When they do temporarily deceive their English counterparts, as Carrie and Anna temporarily do at the Boatman and the dinner party respectively, it is the rarity of these jokes which makes them amusing. Because the characters are so earnest much of the time, it is difficult for the viewer to believe that they are capable of a deadpan delivery. The reason for the American character to be excluded from the role of joker is unclear. It may be that the cultural stereotype of Americans does not suggest the same talent for satirical humour. The Count, after all, is the joker of the crew on *The Boat*, yet his humour is rather innocent and tends towards practical jokes. One major function of the Confident American seems to be that they are the one of the few main protagonists who are capable of taking anything seriously without breaking the Importance of Not Being Earnest rule. The Village Idiot, meanwhile, refuses to take even the protagonists seriously and often wounds their egos. Fox writes that being pompous and taking oneself too seriously is one of the cardinal sins in British society (Fox 62-64). In mocking them, the Village Idiot performs the function described by Enid Welsford, namely counteracting the hubris of their superiors.

British humour

Billig takes care to point out that “there is a politics, morality and aesthetics of humour”, as humour is universal, yet what we laugh at is peculiar to each culture (Billig 452). Certainly, different societies seem to have different ways of making jokes, and these differences can cause tensions. British humour seems to be almost a special case, as it is widely praised and equally widely misunderstood – the traditional deadpan delivery, along with the subtlety of some jokes, can cause listeners from other cultures to be unsure whether or not the speaker is being serious.

Kate Fox feels compelled to give humour its own chapter in her popular anthropology, as she claims that “the most noticeable and important ‘rule’ about humour in English conversation is its dominance and pervasiveness. Humour rules. Humour governs. Humour is omnipresent and omnipotent. I wasn’t even going to do a separate chapter on humour because I knew that, like class, it permeates every aspect of English life and culture” (Fox 61). However, she soon dispels the commonly held view that there is a special brand of humour that is specific to the British, instead explaining that the one ‘defining characteristic’ of British humour is the value that is placed on humour, and its omnipresence in conversation.

Fox describes the central value of humour for the British as a part of a person's cultural make-up:

In other cultures, there is 'a time and a place' for humour; it is a special, separate kind of talk. In English conversation, there is always an undercurrent of humour. We can barely manage to say 'hello' or comment on the weather without somehow contriving to make a bit of a joke of it, and most English conversations will involve at least some degree of banter, teasing, irony, understatement, humorous self-deprecation, mockery or just silliness. Humour is our 'default mode' [...] (Fox 61-62).

The omnipresence of humour, then is the core characteristic of interactions between the British. Fox argues that far from being masters of a special sense of humour, it is quantity, not quality of humour that has earned the British their reputation (Fox 65). Thus, even sophisticated humour devices such as irony may be used more in Britain simply because the British have more practice at using it, not because the speaker is more sophisticated. However, irony is valued because, like a tendentious joke, it allows the speaker to be simultaneously joking and serious, which is important for a nation which suffers from social dis-ease and finds it hard to express emotions. Irony and sarcasm allow the speaker to remain ambiguous and elusive, especially as deadpan delivery often makes it difficult to tell whether the speaker is joking or not. Fox reports that this causes considerable frustration even among Anglophone visitors and business partners (Fox 65). The avoidance of any display of emotion seems to be a national tendency. It may spring from what Fox calls 'The Importance of Not Being Earnest', the unwritten rule of English behaviour which prescribes that serious matters may be discussed in a serious manner, but one may not be earnest, solemn or take oneself seriously. This distinction is perhaps best described in Fox's own example:

[T]he kind of hand-on-heart, gushing earnestness and Bible-thumping solemnity favoured by almost all American politicians would never win a single vote in this country. [...] When we are not feeling smugly amused, we are cringing with vicarious embarrassment: how can these politicians bring themselves to utter such shamefully earnest platitudes, in such ludicrously solemn tones? We expect politicians to speak largely in platitudes, of course [...] – it is the earnestness that makes us wince (Fox 62-63).

As a counter-example, Prime Minister David's speech from *Love Actually* borders on the dangerously patriotic for a few moments before he injects enough self-deprecating humour into it and thus makes the speech acceptable:

PRIME MINISTER DAVID: I love that word - “relationship”. Covers all manner of sins, doesn't it? I fear that this has become a *bad* relationship; a relationship based on the President taking exactly what he wants and casually ignoring all those things that really matter to, um... Britain. We may be a small country, but we're a great one, too. The country of Shakespeare, Churchill, the Beatles, Sean Connery, Harry Potter. David Beckham's right foot. David Beckham's left foot, come to that. A friend who bullies us is no longer a friend. And since bullies only respond to strength, from now onward I will be prepared to be much stronger. And the President should be prepared for that.

(Love Actually 41:23-42-14)

It must be said that irony and its twin, sarcasm, are not the only types of joke common to the all-encompassing British humour. The British make frequent and effective use of self-deprecation and understatement. However, these jokes have a double function. Self-deprecation does indeed amuse the listeners because the ‘joker’ exaggerates his or her shortcomings to the point of ridicule. The statement “Don’t worry if you’ve forgotten my name – even my mother can’t remember it sometimes” is clearly hyperbole, possibly to relieve the tension from an awkward moment when a name was forgotten. Understatement is amusing because it trivialises concepts and points out a gap between reality and the perception (or vocalisation) of reality, such as “Herod was not nice to children”. The second function of this type of jokes, after amusement, is to change the listener’s perception of the speaker or the situation, at least in British society. Understatement is perhaps the simpler form of these jokes: The understatement “Herod was not nice to children” is so clearly an understatement that the listener will interpret the actual meaning of the message as “Herod was very nasty to children”. Self-deprecation works in a similar way. Not only is the speaker quick-witted enough to have made a quip about how boring or stupid they are, they are also pointing out their own weaknesses. Since one would not disclose one’s actual weaknesses (according to the Importance of Not Being Earnest) the speaker is delivering a mock blow to their own ego. The effect is that the listener disbelieves the claim and interprets the very opposite of what the speaker’s words, in this case, that nobody ever forgets his or her name. This type of joke, therefore, actually raises the joker’s social status, as they will be perceived as being both clever and apparently modest (even though they may be covertly bragging). The veiled nature of the actual, hidden claim makes the boasting nature of the jokes acceptable. Also, no boastfulness can be proven, because the speaker can always claim that it was “just a joke”. This type of joke is, understandably, frequently misinterpreted by listeners from other

cultures. If there is a time and a place for humour, then the listener may not be anticipating a joke and take the joker's statement at face value. In the case of understatement and self-deprecation, this is most damaging to the speaker, as they will be perceived as under-achieving and/or stupid. Claiming that one's mother does not remember one's name may be seen as tragic at best, attention-seeking at worst. Therefore, this type of potentially status-raising joke may backfire if it is not correctly deconstructed by the audience.

British humour, due to its ubiquity and ambiguous nature, may be perceived as being somewhat aggressive. Certainly, the culture of making practically anything into a joke does not cater for the misinterpretation which it occasionally faces. Many jokes may offend if they are not recognised as irony, understatement or just friendly banter. In the texts, however, there can be no doubt that the characters are genuinely hostile towards one another. When a character, usually a Cynically Superior One, is particularly scathing or derogatory about another character, instead of being shocked and outraged the viewer is amused by the speaker's intelligence and dry wit – besides vicariously being thrilled by the voicing of their own repressed aggression. The British love of words may, therefore, pardon many inappropriate jokes.

Humour certainly is omnipresent in Curtis' screenplays, with the possible exception of *The Tall Guy*, which is much darker than the other texts. Regarding the later screenplays, there are seldom truly earnest scenes; only *About Time* has characters who express their emotions seriously. *About Time* is also the only text to deal with themes such as death and loss in a serious manner. When James dies, it is with dignity and dry humour; when Mrs. Cropley dies, she and the villagers are still making silly jokes. Mostly it is this refusal to take anything seriously which encompasses the British attitude towards humour in the texts, if we are to accept Fox's assertion that the defining characteristic of British humour is its ubiquity. The scene in which the crew of Radio Rock decide to continue broadcasting springs to mind; the crew members stand up one by one to pledge allegiance in a would-be patriotic act of solidarity. The stirring music and their serious expressions suggest a deeply emotional moment. However, the lines they deliver, along with the mock salute that they give at the end, show that even this scene is an elaborate joke – even though the reasons they give for staying are probably true, albeit exaggerated.

Irony and sarcasm are often used by Edmund Blackadder, Geraldine and David Horton, because it allows them to be scathing about their inferiors (and superiors, in

Edmund's case). Because the Village Idiots and the Aristocratic Idiots do not understand or react to these jibes, even the most offensive jokes are, essentially victimless crimes and therefore pardonable. Self-deprecation is used extensively by the Gauche Young Men, ostensibly for the character to fill awkward silences in conversations by babbling amusingly about his shortcomings. However, as previously discussed, this type of joke often causes the listener to infer the opposite of what is said.

British humour, or rather, the ubiquity of humour in (particularly) English society may have a function beyond enhancing the speaker's prestige. In "Humour enhancers in the study of humorous literature" Katrina Triezenberg states that the use of humour enhancers

serve[s] to please us and make us feel generally well disposed toward the text, to trust the author's mastery of his/her subject, to please our sense of aesthetics, to make us feel that we are possessed of particularly good understanding and knowledge, that we are part of the author's intellectual in-crowd, and generally to put us in a good mood, to make us feel good about ourselves and the text. (Triezenberg 413)

If the joker is the author of the text, he or she can, therefore, affect the listener quite strongly and perhaps even alter the listener's perception of themselves. By sharing a joke, the joker allows their audience to feel privileged and superior because they have been included – especially when others, perhaps, were not. It seems, therefore, that frequent use of humour, particularly in its function as a gatekeeping or exclusionary device, can ostensibly raise the audience's prestige by including them in certain jokes. This issue will be readdressed towards the end of the next chapter, as it is inextricably entwined with the functions of humour in transmitting ideologies.

5.2. Themes and underlying ideology

The types of humour in these texts, as well as the vulnerable characters at whom caustic humour is aimed, might suggest that the texts transmit a thoroughly conservative ideology. However, there are several recurring themes which indicate that the texts may also serve as ironic comments on change and progress at the time of writing.

One of the most striking elements common to each of these texts is that the cast is male-dominated. The protagonist is almost invariably a young straight white middle-class male, who also happens to be from a (currently high-prestige) Anglophone country. He is

socially privileged in every conventional sense. The rest of the cast is also overwhelmingly male. Although the cast lists in section 2 are not exhaustive, they name all of the principal recurring characters. Using this list as a reference, the average number of male protagonists in one of the texts is seven (rounded up from 6,8) and the average number of female protagonists only four (rounded down from 4,4). However, the character of the Gauche Young Man is such that he lacks agency and control – therefore, in fact, females often have the power to control his fate, as is the case in the romantic comedies. Here, the female protagonist appears to be the stronger character who makes the decisions. *The Vicar* openly challenges expectations by having a female vicar as the protagonist. This sets a precedent for Curtis as well as for the Church. Geraldine is a quirky, unpredictable character who is far more multidimensional than any of the other main protagonists, or even Blackadder. She is also a socialist, which sets her even further apart from the other main protagonists.

Having the privileged, conventional straight white male as the protagonist of a text also offers advantages besides empowering his love interest. The Gauche Young Man can also be presented in contrast to the multiculturalist society which is so often presented as the ideal in these texts. Differences need not be in ethnicity, ability or sexual orientation, however. Individualism and quirkiness are not only tolerated in these texts, they are accepted almost as the norm. Characters such as Scarlett and KitKat are not judged for their inappropriate dress and behaviour, they are all but applauded for being honest, courageous and spontaneous. Eccentric housemates such as Harry and Spike are regarded as being more amusing than obstructive. Apart from the main protagonist, in fact, very few characters are without their quirks and idiosyncracies. This has the effect of making even stock characters more rounded, but also makes the characters more appealing. In their arrogant individualism, they neither seem to know nor care what people think of them. Fox writes that in real life, such eccentricities are usually displayed by the highest and the lowest classes, never by the angst-ridden middle classes (Fox 118-119). Eccentricities allow the characters to stand out to the extent that the main protagonist almost seems to fade in comparison, but he is saved from disappearing by his intelligence and humour.

Although the casts remain stubbornly white, the protagonists are frequently surrounded by characters from all walks of life, from different classes and professions. Admittedly, these other characters are usually presented as being vastly inferior in sophistication and intelligence, but there is an air of inspiring bonhomie which suggests that

the texts advocate multiculturalist society. This impression is emphasised by the prevalence of the family of peers in several of the texts. Charles, David, Scarlett, Tom, Fiona, Gareth and Matthew are from dramatically different backgrounds, while one is disabled, one frightfully common, one stupid, one gay and the last undeniably working class. All together, though, they present a happy, united front as an ideal heterogeneous group. The crew of *The Boat* are equally mismatched, as they are international, multi-ethnic, different generations and of vastly different social backgrounds. Despite these disadvantages – if they can be seen as such – their existence is presented in an almost utopian fashion. This frequent use of small heterogeneous groups in the texts may be in order to advocate multiculturalism due to changes in society at the time of writing. On the other hand, it may simply serve as a subtle characterisation of the protagonists by comparing and contrasting them with several forms of Otherness. By avoiding negativity in comparison, friendly relations are preserved and an attitude of tolerant acceptance for others is suggested. This contrasting may also be a form of social criticism. The *Gauche Young Man* represents the Establishment; he has every advantage but exists in stasis and needs outside impulses and influences in order to develop and reach his potential. Thus, the texts also suggest that the Establishment must adapt and evolve in order to survive.

The Vicar presents the darker side of the advance of change and progress, as David and Geraldine frequently clash over innovative ideas. Geraldine even remains hostile towards marginal groups in society, as demonstrated in the scene in which she shouts at a group of environmentalists. This series in particular deals with the clash between the Establishment and progress, which is frequently represented more concretely as the clash between country values and encroaching citification. As Raymond Williams writes in his introduction to *The Country and the City*, the country has come to represent peace, innocence and simple virtue as well as ignorance and backwardness. The city represents learning, communication and achievement, but also “noise, worldliness and ambition” (Williams 1). This clash of lifestyles and values is apparent from the beginning of the series. The title sequence itself alludes to the idyllic pastoralism of Dibley, which is shown as a rural jewel nestling safely far away from the busy motorway which is shown at the beginning of the sequence. On character level, David resists the changes and new attitudes that Geraldine brings with her. Later in the series, Geraldine adopts a more conservative line when it comes to saving the village from being sacrificed for a reservoir, or being slowly bought up by town-dwelling weekenders. The series shows a constant struggle between old and new values, most commonly illustrated by the fight to

preserve the nature of the idyllic English village. The same resistance to progress is shown from an entirely different angle in *The Boat*. In this text, progress is presented as being entirely positive, while the Establishment is shown as rigid, repressed and stuffy. In the case of this text, the struggle is represented by accepted ‘improving’ radio programmes and new music, primarily influenced by the American music scene. On the whole, therefore, the texts do not appear to be entirely conservative nor particularly liberal in their treatment of change and progress in society. Instead, both *The Vicar* and *The Boat* appear to suggest that, depending on which social group one belongs to, the best policy is to adapt to the times while preserving one’s core values. Interestingly, the theme of adaptability surfaces early in the texts. Blackadder’s genius lies in his ability to adapt incredibly swiftly to new situations, whether it is a new political situation or the whim of his capricious employer which necessitates a change. Although Blackadder is a cad and a coward, there is no denying that he is tactically adept at choosing the best strategy to succeed. Therefore, even in a negative context, the texts appear to suggest that resisting change is unwise. Many of the texts show characters happily embracing a changing and heterogeneous society.

Despite the amount of aggression shown towards supposedly inferior characters by Cynically Superior Ones, the implied message of the texts appears to be that tolerance for others is of essential. The main protagonists are surrounded, voluntarily or not, by characters disadvantaged by intelligence, class, physical ability or merely by belonging to a minority such as homosexuals. The Cynically Superior Ones mock these characters shamelessly, while the main protagonist, usually the Gauche Young Man, only taunts his or her inferiors under extreme provocation. Geraldine actively protects the villagers, especially Alice, from David’s spite. This recurring situation, due to the frequency with which it reappears, must have a function besides characterising the main protagonist as a good person. Intelligence seems to be a particular bone of contention, since it is the one social disadvantage which is not taboo. Physical disability, mental deficiency, ethnicity and even class may be barred from aggressive mockery, but a person’s intelligence is still fair game. Therefore, most of the Cynically Superior One’s aggression is directed towards Village Idiots, as easy targets. So much emphasis is laid on this point, however, that these jokes become almost bland with time. As the usually-meek Hugo points out after David has been particularly scathing about Alice, “[t]here’s more to life than just being clever” (“Dibley Live” 18:25). This bid for tolerance is often somewhat obscured, however, by the aggressive means used to argue for more

understanding. When Geraldine refers to Alice as Cactus Woman, for instance, she says that Alice and Hugo are stupid but happy together, and that to interfere would be cruel and futile. The same air of defeated acceptance prevails when Honey and Spike and KitKat and Jay announce their intentions to form relationships. The superficial 'message' imparted by the texts is that it is best to accept and appreciate people for what they are, because attempting to reform or shape them is pointless.

The use of stereotypes to shape this message is particularly fitting, since stock characters, which are necessarily stereotyped after some time, are virtually incapable of change. This is the very basis of their appeal. As Triezenberg writes,

[p]eople enjoy reading about things they understand because it makes the action that much easier to understand and the experience that much deeper and more satisfying. Stereotypes are a cheap way to invoke this feeling of knowingness in one's readers; most stereotypes are stock characters that have been used in countless other texts and have countless other jokes attached to them. A reader who stumbles upon one therefore finds himself/herself in the realm of a familiar fiction. (Triezenberg 415)

Because stock characters have other jokes already attached to them, they are almost automatically funny and therefore useful to writers of humorous texts. However, they also allow the reader to feel superior because he or she has been allowed to share a joke with the author against another social or ethnic group. This function refers back to the theme discussed in the previous chapter, the idea that including the audience in jokes which exclude certain other groups allows them to feel an almost smug sense of superiority and privilege. Were the stereotype allowed to change and develop, however, the illusion of knowability would be shattered and the audience no longer sure of their superiority.

This perpetuation of stock characters and stereotypes is clearly continued in the texts. When Geraldine refers to Alice as Cactus Woman, it is with an air of condescending fondness. The sententious attitude, however, conceals the fact that by concluding a text with a happy ending in which two or more of the characters have been abandoned as intellectual failures suggests that this state of affairs *is* the happy ending. In other words, in the ideal situation as presented by the texts, each of the characters stays in their assigned social box and is not encouraged to change or better themselves. Quite the opposite; by claiming that Alice and Hugo are perfect for each other simply *because* of their intellectual deficiencies reduces them to a status approaching the subhuman, as they are not to be allowed to form relationships with 'normal' people. The perpetuation of this state of affairs is, however, conducted with a

startlingly caustic array of tendentious jokes which shock initially but are easily shrugged off as ‘just a joke’ on a superficial level. The audience’s sense of self is boosted, however, as the joke against the disadvantaged group works on an almost subconscious level, where it is clear that the attack was not merely a jest.

The subject of target audience is a delicate matter at the best of times, yet it is even more difficult to approach when the texts in question are eight internationally released films and TV series. However, the humour and ideologies used in these texts may allow some insight into whom they are intended for. The social status of the protagonists is of little value, as many countries appear to enjoy the image of the British upper classes. However, the caustic and unrelenting humour suggests that the texts are aimed at the educated upper middle classes, who would also understand *Blackadder*’s historical and literary references and Geraldine’s political barbs. It is no coincidence that the middle classes are also the most anxious about their precarious position in the class system, and are therefore likely to welcome any confirmation that the social order is to be preserved – while, of course, superficially reassuring themselves that they are in favour of a heterogeneous society and the breaking down of class barriers. Fox’s idea of prevalent hypocrisy has never been more appropriate.

While the texts appear outwardly to support a multicultural society – and may indeed do so on a certain level – they also assure the conservative target audience that no major social change is necessary, perhaps not even possible. Embarrassing the *Gauche Young Man* is poking fun at the Establishment, but the character never changes or adapts throughout the texts, instead remaining static. In fact, he often succeeds simply because of his awkward, old-fashioned charm. Therefore, the texts suggest a happy camaraderie between members of radically different social groups as long as each member knows their place and accepts – maybe even makes – jokes against themselves and their groups.

It is difficult to determine whether or not this cruel satire of the disadvantaged groups in society is peculiar to Britain without conducting extensive research. However, British humour is generally acknowledged to be ‘dark’, allowing laughter in situations which would usually not be seen as humorous and exploiting taboos as subjects of mirth. Perhaps it is the ubiquity of humour in British society which allows verbal attacks on the joker’s supposed inferiors and which may, to other nations, appear to be heartless, cowardly or even vicious. Certainly, the issue of understanding humour across cultures merits further research.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the primary texts has shown that there are stock characters which frequently reappear in Curtis' screenplays. These characters represent a range of social classes and dispositions. Each character appears to have a function, much in the way that Propp was able to identify functions linked to the characters in fairy tales. The Gauche Young Man is the linchpin which holds the cast together. He is more like the damsel in distress than the hero, since he is rather static and lacks agency. The Confident American is his love interest and often the unsung hero of the text. This character also often serves to anchor the text, as they are one of the few characters who refuse to make a joke out of everything. By lending an air of gravity, they prevent the texts from sinking into farce. The Eccentric Housemate serves as a sort of comic sidekick and/or confidant(e), as well as providing physical comedy and chipping in with inappropriate ideas. The Cynically Superior One fills the role of the (mock) villain, bullying his or her inferiors. The Village Idiot often serves as the unwitting victim of these attacks. This character also serves to relieve the monotony of familiar ritual such as weddings, and to prick the hubris of the proud protagonists. The Aristocratic Idiot is an interesting character type as it overlaps in many points with the type of the Gauche Young Man. However, these similarities are easily explained if we accept that the Aristocratic Idiot serves as a foil for the Gauche Young Man; they are the same and yet different. The Aristocratic Idiot is almost a cruel caricature of the Gauche Young Man, as he is richer, more privileged and sheltered, more awkward and stupider, yet the similarities are undeniable. In this fashion, the Gauche Young Man is presented as being more appealing in contrast.

Analysis also showed that certain relationship patterns recur. The heterogeneous family of peers, the mismatched siblings and the remarkable couples almost certainly serve a similar function, namely to promote tolerance for diversity and the less advantaged members of society. The rabble led by a rebel may symbolise the struggle between convention and progress, which is another recurring theme. The troubled and frequently chilly parent-child relationships may well be a satire of the apparent distance in middle-class families. Judging by the central position of this theme in *The Boat* and *About Time*, the texts may be a plea for change. The power imbalance between main characters, meanwhile, is likely to be a parody of the tenacious shackles of the class system. These stock characters may continue to reappear for structural reasons.

Several theories of humour were outlined in the discussion of Britishness and humour. Applying Michael Billig's theory, it appears that the Cynically Superior Characters in particular use humour to subjugate characters whom they perceive to be inferior in order to preserve the social order. The texts themselves are presented in a medium which is clearly not serious, but the offensive jokes made remain tendentious, as there is a darker underlying meaning to them. It might be said that in order to maintain the dynamic required for the aggressive humour used, the balance between neutral parties (Gauche Young Men), aggressors (Cynically Superior Ones) and victims (Village Idiots) must be maintained. There must be some level of imbalance in order for the aggressor to use humour to maintain his or her place in the social order. This composition of characters is needed for a range of other functions as well. The conservative straight white middle-class male must be contrasted with a range of eccentric characters in order to characterise the protagonists, to promote tolerance for diversity and to present a range of different viewpoints on subjects such as change and progress. A certain heterogeneity must also be present in each of the texts in order to provide the clash of the character types which allows for scathing mockery as well as a peaceful, tolerant resolution to the clash. The Gauche Young Man, as an embodiment of the Establishment, must also be exposed to new influences which will cause him to change and progress – this may be a covert criticism suggesting that the Establishment needs to adapt and move with the times.

In this, the characters might be said to be results of 'British humour', if there is such a thing, because jokes exploit unvoiced aggressive and sexual urges. The victim, being intellectually inferior (and, conveniently, often lower-class) cannot understand and be hurt by the jokes. This appears to be sufficient legitimation for aggressors such as Edmund and David Horton to make jokes at the expense of their intellectual inferiors. Thus, frustration and aggression can be openly voiced and viewers may rejoice in the wit and dexterity of the bully. The character of the Gauche Young Man in particular is a result of British humour, in that he is a triumph of humour over substance. He frequently makes jokes which rely on understatement and self-deprecation, so that very little the character says is taken at face value. His modesty is reconstructed as greatness, his restrained, dry statements as incredible intelligence and style. In many ways, the Gauche Young Man may be the ideal for the middle classes; he is well-spoken, well-educated, amusing, effortlessly attractive though apparently unstyled, and yet he remains socially uneasy, which, according to Fox, is a prerequisite for

functioning in polite British society (Fox 401-402). Even his inevitable embarrassment makes him more appealing, as it makes him appear more accessible. The Cynically Superior One might also be claimed as a product of British society, which like the character type uses humour to reinforce the social order. The Cynically Superior One's impeccably crafted taunts make them popular despite their mistreatment of weaker characters. In this, they are the British *übermensch*, as they have all the advantages of the Gauche Young Man but are also fearless, ambitious and aggressively assertive. The Village Idiot in his or her capacity as a protector against the Evil Eye by taunting the proud also appears to be peculiarly British, as Fox states that one of the social solecisms in British society is to take oneself too seriously and become pompous. Therefore, the fool serves a culturally significant function.

The use of heavy stereotyping and the creation of original stock characters in these texts are particularly interesting in the analysis of the ideology transmitted by the texts. Indeed, the texts can be read in such a way as to reveal a great deal about the culture which produced them. The fact that stereotypes and stock characters are not expected to change or develop in any way reassures the audience that social roles and class barriers will remain in place. This is of particular relevance to class-conscious Britain. Meanwhile, the superficial 'message' of the texts suggests an at times almost utopian vision of a happy heterogeneous society as embodied by the multicultural family of peers. Thus, the educated yet angst-ridden middle classes at whom the texts are primarily aimed are able to consume a text which appears to promote an entirely positive ideology of acceptance and tolerance while in fact reinforcing the status quo of society.

Humour naturally plays an important role in these texts, as they are primarily comedy texts. However, the brand of humour used is culture-specific because the British mentality allows – even encourages – jokes 'against' groups which are perceived to be inferior, such as the lower classes or the intellectually disadvantaged. These jokes are, without exception, entirely tendentious and therefore subconsciously intended to be taken seriously. While these cruel jokes shock and initially inspire laughter, on later contemplation they take on a certain ugly significance: The joker frequently exploits weaker characters – representatives of disadvantaged social groups – for the pleasure of the audience and to enhance his or her own status in the fictional world and the mind of the viewer. This opportunity to abuse the 'underdog' may only be open to the British, as their culture and mentality allow them to make a joke out of anything – something which would not be acceptable in other cultures.

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8. Appendix

Abstract

Diese Arbeit untersucht acht von Richard Curtis geschriebene Originaldrehbücher um die wiederkehrende Elemente und Motive zu identifizieren. Grund für diese Betrachtung ist die auffallende Ähnlichkeit zwischen gewissen Protagonisten verschiedener Texte, sowie die Wiederholung einiger Beziehungsmuster zwischen den Charakteren. Gesamtziel dieser Arbeit ist festzustellen, weswegen diese Charaktere wiederkehren und warum sie so unverkennbar britisch sind. Um diese Fragen zu beantworten wird eine Diskussion über die britische Mentalität sowie den bekannten britischen Humor geführt, zwei Aspekte die zur Bildung der Stammcharaktere beitragen. Die Methodologie dieser Arbeit stützt sich auf die großen Formalisten der Literatur, von Theophrastus bis Vladimir Propp und Tzvetan Todorov. Diese reduzierten die Figuren einiger Geschichten bis auf wenige Merkmale und Funktionen. Daher werden in dieser Arbeit die Hauptfiguren aller Filme gelistet und kurz beschrieben. Rasch werden Charaktertypen erkennbar, die in der Folge genauer definiert werden und deren Primärfunktionen identifizierbar werden. Im Anschluss wird die Aufmerksamkeit der britischen Mentalität und dem gewichtigen Status des Humors in britischer Gesellschaft gewidmet. Die Stammcharaktere erhalten nun eine tiefere Signifikanz, da sie einen ewigen, durch Humor als scheinbar harmlos verkleideten Machtkampf zwischen sozialen und gesellschaftlichen Klassen führen. Tatsächlich wird, wie in dieser Arbeit ausgeführt, Humor auch als Medium zur sozialen Kontrolle benutzt und kann dazu beitragen Barrieren zwischen den Klassen aufrecht zu erhalten. Die Tatsache, dass es sich bei den Texten um Komödien handelt erlaubt allerdings die Auslegung auch der gewagtesten politischen Aussagen der Protagonisten als reiner Witz.

Curriculum Vitae

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