

SIMULTANEOUSLY 'QUALITY' AND  
'POPULAR'? : LAYERED POLYSEMY  
AND NOSTALGIC DISCOURSES IN  
*DOCTOR WHO* (BBC 2005- )

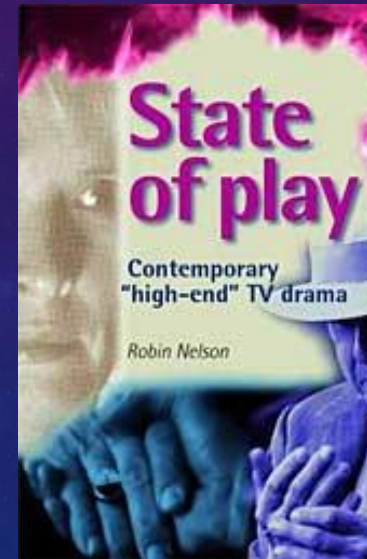
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# 'QUALITY POPULAR' TELEVISION AND STRUCTURED POLYSEMY

- Nelson (2007: 174-9) on 'quality popular' television drama:
  - Drawn from industrial discourses circulating in British television – ITV.
  - Extends to include 'mainstream' broadcasters – e.g. BBC One.
  - 'Quality' signifiers:
    - Production values.
    - Generic hybridity.
    - Construction of author-function.
  - 'Popular' signifiers:
    - "the relative predictability of TV genres" (175)
    - Structured polysemy - "all meanings do not exist 'equally' in the message: it has been structured in dominance, despite the impossibility of a 'total closure' of meaning ...the 'preferred reading' is itself part of the message, can be identified within its linguistic and communicative structure." (Morley 1995: 301)





# 'QUALITY POPULAR': INHERENTLY CONTRADICTIONARY?

- Case study: Jenny's death scene from 'The Doctor's Daughter' (2008).
- RTD era *Who* and discourses of nostalgia:
  - Post-2005 *Doctor Who* is "about time travel imprinted by loss" (Hills 2010a: 210)
  - Burling (2006: 8) – the "temporal contrast" time travel narrative.
  - 'Personal nostalgia' – arises from the combination of 'time travel' and 'soap drama' (Creeber 2004) elements (see also Hills 2010b).





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## 'Popular' Conventions

- Accentuation and foregrounding of emotional content.
- Deployment of 'soap opera' aesthetics – e.g. movement to the close-up.
- Melodramatic performance codes.
- “blaring music” (Feuer 1995: 116).



## 'Quality' Conventions

- Smith (2006: 89) – “good television distinguishes itself not by rejecting the practices of ordinary television but by using elegantly efficient instances of standard techniques.”
- Pearson (1992: 55) – “verisimilar codes”
- Music – Murray Gold’s ‘Gallifrey’ theme:
  - “a sense of stylistic integrity, in which themes and style are intertwined in an expressive and impressive way” (Cardwell 2007: 26).



# DISCUSSION

- Singular 'quality popular' reading position unattainable.
- 'Layered polysemy':
  - Arises from necessities of the production context.
  - Offering incongruous, yet co-existing, preferred reading positions.
- Agreeing with Morley (1995) – need to retain textualist focus.
- Layered polysemy sits alongside, but differs from, existing TV Studies positions:
  - Ross (2008: 20-6) – 'aesthetics of multiplicity'.
  - Johnson (2012: 160-5) – branding and paratextuality.
  - Post-structuralist avoidances of 'the text' as producer of meaning – e.g. McKee (2003), Sandvoss (2005).



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