

Mary Whitehouse Right After All? Sex and the British Media

The Connection Between Sexuality and Abuse in The Media and Society

Robin Aitken's *Can We Still Trust The BBC?* (2013) makes fascinating reading (two excerpts appear under Quotes (Quotes 154 and 155)). It is based on an earlier book *Can We Trust The BBC?* (2007 and 2008), which concentrated on the political, pro-EU and pro-death biases of the BBC's "institutional mindset". The later book adds the element of the Jimmy Savile scandal, and other cases of sexual abuse (normally of minors), which went on within the knowledge of several senior BBC officials who kept silent about such practices.

However, the author does not mention one matter which could perhaps have been highlighted, namely, the contribution of the sexualisation of culture to the production of an atmosphere in which Savile's crimes (and those of others) could naturally flourish. I refer to the increasing sexual content of BBC programmes (and those of other British television providers) from the late-1960s. If the BBC now claims to disapprove of what Savile and the others were doing, under the shield of television celebrity status, it must realise that its own productions, and their *mores*, went a long way to make that behaviour desirable and achievable.

In the period ca. 1964-80, the strongest possible objection to sexual programme content was made by a certain Mary Whitehouse and her supporters. Of course, she was despised and pilloried by the fashionable opinion formers and tastemakers (of what is now called "the metropolitan elite"). Whitehouse, after all, was a mere provincial housewife, and (horror of horrors, for the BBC) a Christian. Such people did not, and do not, have any say in the way "popular culture" (ie. culture as promoted by such as the BBC) is ordered.

Against my thesis will be placed Aitken's suggestion that, back in the 1950s, children's radio stars (he cites Derek McCulloch) also abused children who were brought to Broadcasting House on visits (pp. 40-42); if such things went on before the sexualisation of programme content, perhaps that (later) trend was not a causal factor?

Certainly, sexual abuse of minors and others pre-dates the "new morality"; but we are left with considerations of scale. How many times did such things happen (in the BBC, and in society at large) in, say, the 1950s, compared with the post-1965 eras? Of course, these things we will never know by their very nature (Aitken himself, on so many BBC-related issues, points to the inability to acquire statistics, or argue by way of them). But who would honestly claim – except the BBC, perhaps – that the extreme sexualisation of society (that has occurred by way of the media, electronic pornography and government-promoted sex "education") has *not* had *any* formative influence on the culture of abuse in the BBC and elsewhere, by Savile and others? (as well as many other bad things in our world).

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