BEHIND THE SCENES: COSTUME DESIGN FOR TELEVISION

THERE ARE MANY THINGS YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN

Gamze Toylan
University of Westminster
School of Media, Arts and Design
Communication and Media Research Institute
Watford Road, Northwick Park
Middlesex HA1 3TP
United Kingdom
gamze.toylan@my.westminster.ac.uk

Abstract: Focusing on the award winning costume designer Yves Barre's work for *The League of Gentlemen* (BBC, 1999-2002), this article explores the role of the costume designer in television production. Using an anthropological method that combines original interviews with Barre, Steve Pemberton (one of the writer/performers) and Jon Plowman (the executive producer) as well as second hand material such as DVD extras, the article provides insight into the show's creative process. The underlying objective is to shed light on the costume design process – an understudied stage of television production.

Keywords: Costume design, *The League of Gentlemen*, Yves Barre, Television, Stage

The League of Gentlemen's[1] unique case and multi-medial nature draw together discussions on production in creative industries and adaptation studies that develop various arguments in the context of The League's production processes (stage, television and film), costume designer's role and costume's function in film and television production. This article brings together these issues to discuss collaboration, individual input and creative autonomy in creation and adaptation processes, costume designer as an 'adapter,' and costume's extended function - not just serving the narrative and reflecting the characters but developing them – with particular reference to costume designer Yves Barre's work for *The League of Gentlemen* (BBC, 1999-2002).

Scholars such as Caldwell,[2] Cottle,[3] Ellis,[4] Hesmondhalgh,[5] Millington and Nelson,[6] Steemers,[7] and Ryan and Peterson,[8] to name just a few, provide outlooks on the complex interactions within creative industries – e.g. film and television – while their works acknowledge the collaborative nature of culture production. These works move beyond the romantic view that considers the writer to be single-handedly responsible for the creation of a cultural product, and concentrate on a wide range of contributors of the creation processes. For example, Ryan and Peterson

---

[1] I refer to both 'The League of Gentlemen' and '*The League of Gentlemen*'. Where italised a reference to the television programme. Otherwise: a reference to the comedy group. The same is also valid for 'The League' and '*The League*'.
[2] John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Duke University Press, 2008.
[3] Simon Cottle, 'Media Organisation and Production: Mapping the Field," in *Media Organisation and Production*, ed. Simon Cottle, Sage, 2003, p. 3-24.
[4] John Ellis, 'Television Production,' in *The Television Studies Reader*, ed. Robert C Allen and Annette Hill, Routledge, 2004, p. 275-92.
[5] David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, Sage, 2007.
[6] Bob Millington and Robin Nelson, *'Boys from the Blackstuff': The Making of TV Drama*, Comedia, 1986.
[7] Jeanette Steemers, *Creating Preschool Television: A story of Commerce, Creativity and Curriculum*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
[8] John Ryan and Richard A. Peterson, 'The Product Image: The Fate of Creativity in Country Music Songwriting,' in *Individuals in Mass Media Organizations: Creativity and Constraint*, eds. James S. Ettema and Charles Whitney, Sage, 1982, p. 11-32.

stress the collaborative nature of production in which 'a number of skilled specialists have a part in shaping the final work as it goes through a series of stages.'[9] Ellis argues that while primary creators do come up with ideas, these ideas, however, are shaped and influenced by other creative contributors of production.[10] In a manner that supports these observations, writer Alan Bleasdale notes: '[t]here has never been a piece of mine that hasn't been massively improved by contact with other people, by consensus and talk and their ideas.'[11] These arguments suggest that culture production is not a linear process but a complex system.

Similarly, from an adaptation studies perspective Collard,[12] Stollery[13] and Chapple[14] underline the collaborative nature of adaptation. Chapple's outlook that stresses the non-linear process of adaptation is highly enlightening:

> The effect of the production of new cultural artifacts through the processes of adaptation from one medium – whether that medium be literature, film, television, theatre, or digital media – is to produce an intertextual, polyphonic, intermedial weave that is created by artist of many kinds, whether they be authors, playwrights, film directors, musicians, actors, or technicians, and completed for "a moment in time" by us as we receive and respond to that creation.[15]

Chapple embraces the views of Negus,[16] Jensen[17] and Becker[18] who indicate that 'production of culture' takes place throughout conception, production and reception stages, which as Ryan[19] and Hesmondhalgh[20] explain, encompass various players such as primary creative personnel, technical workers, creative managers, marketing personnel, owners and executives, and unskilled and semi-skilled labour as well as audiences. These insights are particularly relevant to this study in understanding *The League's* production processes, as its incarnations (stage, television and film) are highly branded by the authorial signature of its writer/performers.

Cottle[21] argues that in order to understand the complex interrelations in media production – between industries, organisations, professionals, texts and audiences – one needs to take into account the three levels of media production: macro, meso and micro. Cottle[22] and Mittell[23] indicate that these forces work collectively. They also suggest that micro factors, which refer to the everyday working practices of individuals involved in the creation of programmes including their working relationships, the production atmosphere and the cultural milieu,[24] and a bottom up approach that focuses on the micro level analysis of a process are especially crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the complex 'mediations' involved in cultural production. Similarly, Davis and Scase[25] point to the primary status of professional practices in understanding media organisations and suggest that it is professional practices that tend to shape the execution of tasks, the definition of organisational roles in relation to specific circumstances and conditions.

9 Ibid., p.11
10 Ellis, 2004.
11 Alan Bleasdale in Millington and Nelson, 1986, p. 58.
12 Christophe Collard, 'Adaptive Collaboration, Collaborative Adaptation: Filming the Mamet Canon,' in *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies,* 3-2, 2010, p. 82-98.
13 Martin Stollery, 'Transformation and Enhancement: Film Editors and Theatrical Adaptations in British Cinema of the 1930s and 1940s,' in *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies*, 3-1, 2010, p. 1-20.
14 Freda Chapple, 'Pedagogy and Policy in Intermedial Adaptations,' in *Redefining Adaptation Studies*, eds. D. Cutchins, L. Raw and J. M. Welsh, Scarecrow Press, 2010, p. 55-70.
15 Ibid., p.55-56.
16 Keith Negus, 'The Production of Culture,' in *Production of Culture/Culture of Production*, eds. P. Du Gay, Sage, 1997, p. 70-102.
17 Joli Jensen, 'An Interpretive approach to cultural production,' in *Interpreting Television*, eds. W. D. Rowland and B. Watkins, Sage, 1984, p. 98-118.
18 Howard S. Becker, 'Art Worlds and Social Types', *The Production of Culture*, R. A. Peterson, London, Sage Publications, 1976, p. 41-56.
19 Bill Ryan, *Making Capital from Culture*, Walter de Gruyter, 1992.
20 Hesmondhalgh, 2007.
21 Cottle, 2003.
22 Cottle, 2003.
23 Jason Mittell, 'A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory,' in *The Television Studies Reader*, eds. R. C. Allen and A. Hill, Routledge, 2004, p. 171-181.
24 Ibid.
25 Howard Davis and Richard Scase, *Managing Creativity: The Dynamics of Work and Organisation*, Open University Press, 2000, p.13-18.

The arguments presented here support the micro level approach that this article takes examining the costume design process and role of the costume designer in *The League*. They bring us to the significance of individual input, production atmosphere, and working relationships within media production. In the context of this article they point towards the specificity of each production and signify that costume designers, *per se*, have the weight to shape and negotiate the definition of their roles and level of creative autonomy,[26] which tend to change in every production. This points to, for example, just as *The League* would be a very different show if it was made for a different channel or in a different time period (macro elements), it would also be very different if it was made by different people. This, then, illustrates the significance of the costume designer's input. These insights also underline that through the study of an individual and particular case it is possible to develop our knowledge on costume design in television production without making overgeneralisations.[27]

Though the existing literature on costume design processes in film, television and theatre is limited, it makes similar observations. Richard La Motte,[28] and Barbara and Cletus Anderson[29] chart the general structure of costume design processes in film, television and theatre. Lugli,[30] Landis[31] and Pecktal[32] explore the role of the costume designer in media production, and Bruzzi[33] examines the role costume play in defining gender, sexuality and identity in film narratives. Though eclectic, two overarching arguments emerge from existing work on costume design:

a) costume design as an underexplored area and costume designer as a 'misunderstood' profession.[34]

b) costume designer as an important creative collaborator and costume's ability to develop the visual, narrative and ideological framework, thus influencing the reception/interpretation of a text.[35]

From an adaptation perspective, Stollery[36] and Hutcheon[37] note that apart from the most 'visible' creative agents such as writers and directors, there are other candidates for 'the role of the adapters' in film and television such as costume designers. On a similar note, for example, Briton[38] defines the designer June Hudson's role as an 'author' in *Dr Who* 1979 episode 'The Creature from the Pit.' Costume designer Judiana Makovsky[39] states that costume design is 'about designing a total person, not just clothing. I'm designing a character from head to foot.' This points out that costume designers are possible 'authors' or 'adapters' and can be one of the driving forces behind the visual, narrative and ideological framework of a text. These discussions help understand the role costume designer plays in *The League* productions.

[26] Davis and Scase, 2000; David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries*, Oxon, Routledge, 2011.

[27] Mittell 2004; Manuel Alvarado and Edward Buscombe, *Hazell: the making of a television series*, British Film Institute in association with Latimer, 1978, p.3-4.

[28] Richard La Motte, *Costume Design 101: The Art and Business of costume Design for Film and Television*, Michael Wise Productions, 2001.

[29] Barbara Anderson and Cletus Anderson, *Costume Design- 2nd edition*, Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999.

[30] Emanuele Lugli, 'Costume as Appearance: A Study in the odalities of existence of film costumes,' in *Costume Symposium 2006 - Academic Research Papers,* eds. Nigel West, Violet McClean and Martina Stender, Arts Institute at Bournemouth / FWB printing, 2007.

[31] Deborah Landis, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Motion Picture Costume Design,' in *Costume Symposium 2006 - Academic Research Papers,* eds. Nigel West, Violet McClean and Martina Stender, Arts Institute at Bournemouth / FWB printing, 2007.

[32] Lynn Pecktal, *Costume Design Techniques of the Modern Masters*, Back Stage Books, 1993.

[33] Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*, Routledge, 1997.

[34] See, for example, La Motte, 2001, p.43; Anderson and Anderson, 1999, p.iii; Lindy Hemming in Deborah Nadoolman Landis, *Film Craft: Costume Design*, East Sussex, UK, Ilex, 2012, p.68.

[35] Bruzzi, 997, xvi; Piers D. G. Britton, 'Dress and the Fabric of the Television Series: The Costume Designer as Author in "Dr. Who,"' *Journal of Design History*, 12,4, 1999, p.345

[36] Stollery, 2010, p.1.

[37] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Routledge, 2006, p.75-85.

[38] Britton, 1999.

[39] Judiana Makovsky in Deborah Nadoolman Landis, 2010, p.110.

In terms of the role of costume in media productions, Bruzzi and Gibson[40] note that there is a common understanding of costume's function to serve character and reflect narrative. For example, Anderson and Anderson[41] indicate that costume can reveal elements such as sex, age, occupation, social status, geographic area, season and weather, time of the day and occasion, activity, historical period, psychological factors, while Alvarado and Buscombe[42] underline that it can also help give actors confidence. However, Bruzzi and Gibson[43] in their examination of *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004) illustrate that costume can extend these conventional roles – serving actors' performance, writer's and/or director's vision; as well as, in textual terms, character, location and narrative – but be an independent force in itself. This is an interesting point especially in the context of *The League,* a character-based comedy show that aims for a high production value, in other words a 'cinematic' look, on the small-screen.

Contributing to the existing research on costume design this essay focuses on the award winning costume designer Yves Barre's work for *The League of Gentlemen* to explore the role of the costume designer in television production. With its various incarnations (stage, television and film) *The League* comes across as a highly branded phenomenon by the authorial signature of its writer/performers. This provides a perfect case for exploring the significant contribution of the costume designer for developing a groundbreaking phenomenon. Contributing to our understanding of costume design in production processes this essay sheds light on this relatively 'hidden labour of production.'[44]

The League's multi-medial nature also becomes an interesting setting for an inter-medial discussion on costume design for stage and television. Although an in-depth exploration is unfortunately beyond the scope of this essay, discussions from adaptation studies outlined above are adopted to explore Barre's role in the transformation processes of the show.

1 What Is The League of Gentlemen? Who Is Yves Barre?

The League of Gentlemen is a quartet of British dark comedy writer/performers formed by Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith. While all the members write the material together, Gatiss, Pemberton and Shearsmith between them perform all the characters (male and female).

This partnership started off back in 1995 with a show they put together to fill in a slot in the Timeout Critiques' Choice festival called *I Wish I Have Seen That.*[45] The group did not have their name at this point. The show was called *This is It*! and ran for five nights at London's Cockpit Theatre.[46]

A year later, the group started performing at the Canal Café Theatre in London. This was the first time they manifested as The League of Gentlemen. In these stage shows, The League performed in tuxedos with minimal props.[47] In August 1996, the group took their show to Edinburgh Fringe Festival, which became very successful.[48] Returning back to London, they put together more shows at Battersea Arts Centre and Canal Café Theatre.[49] In 1997 they returned

[40] Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson, '"Fashion is the fifth character': fashion, costume and character in *Sex and the City,"* in *Reading Sex and the City*, in J. McCabe, I.B. Tauris, 2004, 115-129.
[41] Anderson and Anderson, 1999.
[42] Alvarado and Buscombe, 1978.
[43] Bruzzi and Gibson, 2004.
[44] Paddy Scannell, *Media and Communication*, Sage, 2007, p.4.
[45] Gordon Anderson, Interview by Aleks Sierz, *Theatre Voice*, 5 December 2004, http://www.theatrevoice.com/listen_now/player/?audioID=235.
[46] James Abery, 'The League of Gentlemen, part one: Meet the locals,' *TV Zone*, 155, 2002, 10-21.
[47] Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith, 'Making of - Live at Drury Lane,' Disc 1, Special Stuff, *The League of Gentlemen - Live at Drury Lane,* BBC Worldwide, 2001.
[48] Mark Gatiss, 'Interview by Kirsty Young,' *Desert Island Discs*, BBC Radio 4, 2011.
[49] Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith, 'In Conversation with The League of Gentlemen (Full Version),' Christmas Special Disc 1, Christmas Special Stocking Fillers, *The League of Gentlemen - The Complete Collection*, BBC Worldwide, 2005.

to the Fringe, and this time won the Perrier Comedy Award.[50] After seeing their show at Fringe, Sarah Smith, who was a BBC producer at the time, approached the group with a deal to develop a radio show with the understanding that if successful a TV series would follow.[51] Their radio show (a six-episode run) was broadcast in 1997 on BBC Radio 4 with the name *On the Town with the League of Gentlemen*. The series won the Sony Radio Silver Award. The programme, in a simple sense, was a sketch show. Set in a fictional northern town called Spent, it told the stories of the town's bizarre inhabitants.

In 1998 before moving on to the TV series, the team put together a short run of live shows at London's Gatehouse Theatre.[52] Soon after, production for the television series began. The show was titled The League of Gentlemen. The name of the town, in which the series is set, changed to Royston Vasey. The programme ran for three series from 1999 to 2002 – including a Christmas Special in 2000 – and broadcast on BBC 2. The series won several awards including BAFTA, Golden Rose and Royal Television awards.[53] It again roughly followed the sketch show format yet, most importantly, hybridised several other genres such as horror and drama.

Video 1: ***The League of Gentlemen*, clip from TV Series 1 Episode 1**

In 2001 the group had their first major UK tour called *The League of Gentlemen – A Local Show for Local People*. It followed a similar format to their initial stage performances.[54] In 2005 *The League of Gentlemen's Apocalypse*, a feature-length film was released. Their second UK tour took place in 2006. It was a pantomime stage show titled *The League of Gentlemen Are Behind You!*

Video 2: ***The League of Gentlemen - A Local Show for Local People***

Among its various incarnations the television series seem to attract the most attention and can be described as the most collaborative work the group has done. Pemberton explains his outlook on the creation process of the television series:

> There was a lot of it we didn't know about. […] We haven't done television before. […] We felt well supported, well guided. We had a really strong producer, Sarah Smith. We had a great visual director, Steve Bendelack. And we had people who listened to us in every department, who wanted to take our ideas – the costume, the make-up – they didn't want to impose anything on us. And it was a really fruitful collaboration and the way to go forward. You can't be closed off to people's ideas. Because we could have made a show we wanted to make and it would have been very different. […] It would have been not anywhere near as good. You do have to listen to people who have done that before.[55]

One of these people who supported The League and had a major input is the costume designer Yves Barre. Cutting his teeth on stage – working with Nicholas Georgiadis who was an opera and ballet designer – Barre stepped into television by joining the BBC. Barre notes: '…really the BBC re-educated me for working for the screen. Because up to that point I only worked for the stage. And they are two different disciplines. Very, very different.'[56]

The designer elaborates: '…I think you are much freer to do whatever you like on the stage, normally in the theatre than you are on TV. The restrictions on TV are enormous…'[57] For example, Barre points to the technical elements of television production such as 'strobing' – creating something that is viewed on a smaller scale – that can be quite

[50] Gatiss, 2011
[51] Abery, 2002, p. 10-21
[52] Abery, 2002, p. 10-21
[53] BFI, *The League of Gentlemen*, BFI database, 2004.
[54] Dyson, Gatiss, Pemberton and Shearsmith, 2001
[55] Steve Pemberton, interview by the author, March 5, 2012.
[56] Barre, 2012
[57] Ibid.

restricting when compared to stage.[58]

In 1985 **Barre** became a costume assistant for the BBC during summer relief. This was essentially a short-term position (three months) where one would fill in for the regular designers and assistants who were on holiday, and learn the craft. In the following summers of 1986 and 1987 Barre came back to the BBC for further short-term positions. From then on he was made permanent and stayed on for almost ten years, until he was made redundant later on due to the BBC being re-structured by a new system of organisation.[59] Barre still continues working for the BBC as a freelance designer.

Barre describes how he got on board with *The League* as 'being at the right place at the right time.'[60] This is linked to his working relationship with the producer Sarah Smith. Barre explains:

> We were doing *Friday Night Armistice* [BBC2, 1995-99]… and I have worked with Sarah for a couple of years and you know Sarah automatically thought I was the right choice for *The League*. Because that was her next project and that was that.[61]

After that Barre stayed on throughout the television series. He also designed the costumes for the two nation-wide stage shows and the feature film that followed the TV show, becoming The League's long running creative contributor.

2 Key Costume Design Aspects in the Context of *The League of Gentlemen*

In the context of *The League* there are several key dimensions of costume design. These are the analysis and research period, costume fittings and the communication between (especially) the writer/performers and the costume designer. While each designer seems to have a different approach and each production tends to be a unique phenomenon the above aspects can also be observed in other productions.[62]

It was February 1998 when Barre discovered The League. At this point the group was doing their Gatehouse Theatre runs, which gave the designer a chance to actually watch the group on stage and see 'what he got himself into' before filming for the television series began in June that year.[63] Barre noted the tight schedule and described this as a typical constraint that costume designers had to work through. Barre reflected on how limited time influenced the design procedure:

> We usually come on board very, very late. Later than anyone else. […] So you have to really study things very fast … and you have got to become a world expert on what ever you are doing within three, four days. I mean, you know, very little time.[64]

---

[58] For further information on challenges in designing for television see Landis, 2007, p.17-18; Lugli, 2007, p.26; and La Motte, 2001.
[59] For further information about the change in the BBC organisational structure see, for example, David Hendy, *Life on Air: A History of Radio Four*, Oxford University Press, 2007; Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*, Secker & Warburg, 2004.
[60] Barre, 2012
[61] Ibid.
[62] For example, Britton, 1999, explores the designer June Hudson's approach in *Dr Who* 1979 episode 'The Creature from the Pit'; Alvarado and Buscombe (1978:141-145) look into the costume design process in *Hazell; and* in Landis, 2012, various designers reflect on their practices in various productions. For specificity of creative labour see, for example, Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011.
[63] Barre, 2012
[64] Ibid.

Within this limited time frame Barre started off the design procedure by reading the script:

> As I read the script I play the scenes in my mind and I read very slowly [...] As I read the script I look at the language, I look at where it's coming from, and you know… my general knowledge of culture and what I know about cinema and art, all that comes into it.[65]

This first step falls into what we can describe as the analysis and research period. For Barre this period also involved some kind of an 'anthropological' research. He stated that a part of his job was to 'study the tribe' and in the context of *The League* he added, '[t]he material given to me was a new tribe and I had to study, analyse and research.'[66] This new tribe was the inhabitants of the fictional town Royston Vasey nestling in the north of England. Apart from its 'northernness' the town also came across as a unique 'enclosed world' or 'an island in itself.'[67]

As the writers noted on various occasions their collective northern upbringings played an important role in their creations.[68] The characters, the narrative and the location in *The League* flourished from the writers' own experiences, the places they grew up in and the people they met. The influence of the north on the process of writing also shaped Barre's work. As part of his 'anthropological' research Barre went on a recces:

Audio File 1: **Barre speaks about his trip to the north, 2012**

An element that supported Barre's research was his communication with the writer/performers. This included lengthy conversations as well as some sketches of the characters that the writers drew. Barre took all these as a starting point, then processed all the given information and built on them through analysis and research.[69] It is in the following stage, during costume fittings, where the costume designer's input began to crystallise:

Insert Audio File 2: **Barre speaks about costume design for Papa Lazarou, 2012**

Video 3: ***The League of Gentlemen* TV Series 2 Episode 1, Papa Lazarou**

Pemberton[70] underlined that *The League* had very long fitting sessions, which as Barre notes was 'totally unusual.'[71] The long sessions were due to three actors playing all the characters among them, each playing approximately twenty characters in one season. Barre explains:

Audio 3: **Barre talks about the fitting sessions, 2012**

These insights illustrate the specificity of each production yet point that there are also overarching elements. They also signify the importance of collaboration in production processes, in this case between the writer/performers and the costume designer. Anderson and Anderson's observations on costume design and production offer great insight in this context: 'Unity is best achieved through knowledge, understanding and good communication.'[72]

---

[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid. See also, Leon Hunt, *The League of Gentlemen*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; Peter Hutchings, 'Uncanny Landscapes in British Film and Television,' in: *Visual Culture in Britain*, 5-2, 2004, p. 27-40.
[68] See, for example, Jeremy Dyson, 'An Everyday Story of Local Folk,' *The Independent*, 15 October, 2000, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/an-everyday-story-of-local-folk-626124.html.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Pemberton, 2012
[71] Barre, 2012
[72] Anderson and Anderson, 1999, p. 33.

3 Silhouette of a Character

'The way I work is once you do your research, once you know where you are going it's about silhouettes'
Yves Barre, 2012

The next four sections illustrate how the costume designer can have a key role in enhancing the nature of a show, creating a 'cinematic' look, and developing complex characters that hence influence the reception of the end product.

Jon Plowman[73] (the executive producer) and Barre explained that one of the key concepts of *The League* was the fact that there were three actors playing all the main parts. Due to this, as Barre noted, '…the foundation of *The League*, from a costume point of view is in fact, the silhouette of a character – the outline – that has to be changed every time".[74]

Audio 4: **Barre speaking about creating individual silhouettes for the characters, 2012**

Accordingly, in order to differentiate between the characters Barre devised an individual set of paddings for Gatiss, Pemberton and Shearsmith. Barre explained: '[…] each artist had their, what I call a belly-guts padding, they had a head and shoulders, they had a hip and bums, they had a mid rift – a base – which I devised and used to great affect.'[75] Barre described them as almost like 'Mikado kits' from where he could pick and choose to form a character's silhouette and anatomy.[76] By using these **paddings**, Barre was able to transform an actor's body into the various characters he would preform – a short man, a fat old man, a thin old lady and so on.

Barre notes that the writer/performers did not ask him to create paddings, rather it was the designer who came up with the idea. He thought that this approach was necessary and would support key aspects of *The League*: immediacy, intimacy and a sense of authenticity.[77] This links us to significance of micro level analysis in understanding how media production works. Caldwell notes that film and television 'very much function on a microsocial level as local cultures and social communities in their own right.'[78] As Caldwell explains:

> …film/TV production communities themselves are cultural expressions and entities involving all of the symbolic processes and collective practices that other cultures use: to gain and reinforce identity, forge consensus and order, to perpetuate themselves and their interests, and to interpret the media as audience members.[79]

This suggests that media professionals, such as Barre, approach texts with an 'audience-like' self-reflexivity – reading, interpreting, developing new meanings, adding to or subtracting from the initial text – as they collaborate on a production process. Then, we can argue that each production is, in a crude sense, an 'adaptation' process where various professionals, such as the costume designer, embody the role of an 'adapter' who simultaneously provide an individual interpretation and input which feeds into the collaborative production process of negotiation, mutual adjustment, conflict, manipulation and compromise.[80] Barre's initial state as an audience member, when he first watched The League on stage before the production, also builds on to the discussions on self-reflexivity.

---

[73] Jon Plowman, interview by the author, January 11, 2012.
[74] Yves Barre and Mark Gatiss, 'Interview with Costume Designer Yves Barre,' Series 3 Disc 2, Special Stuff, *The League of Gentlemen - The Complete Collection*, BBC Worldwide, 2005.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Barre and Gatiss, 'Interview with Costume Designer Yves Barre'.
[77] Barre, 2012.
[78] Caldwell, 2008, p. 2.
[79] Caldwell, 2008, p. 2.
[80] For discussions on dynamics of work in creative industries see, Davis and Scase, 2000; and Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011.

At this point it is worth to briefly consider the stage shows. Barre's experiences for The League seem to be exceptional especially for the first live tour *A Local Show for Local People.* Here Barre wasn't working on a completely new project. What he did was to transform a vision created for stage to television and then re-transform it back to a stage performance.

Video 4: **A Local Show for Local People, end of part one and beginning of part 2**

The first half of *A Local Show for Local People* follows the format of The League's initial stage shows where the actors wear tuxedos which function as 'uniforms' and only use minimal props (e.g. a hat or a scarf) to differentiate between characters.[81] In the second part of the show the characters appear in full costume. Barre underlines that there was nothing new created for the stage in terms of the visual look and silhouettes, yet the difference was in how these costumes and paddings were made considering stage provisions:

Audio 5: **Barre talks about the remaking of costumes for the stage**

Video 5: ***The League of Gentlemen TV series*, 'Go Johnny, Go Go Go Go!' sketch in the TV incarnation** (The stage incarnation can be seen in Video 2)

The transformation process of the show takes us to the discussions in adaptation. As Babbage, Jones and Williams note, '… the notion of creativity is inscribed at the heart of adaptation as a practice'[82] and suggests that adaptation is both a creative and critical work. This, combined with the discussions on the significance of individual input and creative autonomy can be interpreted as when a professional such as a costume designer starts an adaptation process s/he ultimately embarks on a creative and reflexive practice – although the level of creative autonomy and input depend on the circumstances.

The League's multi-medial nature brings a deeper level to this argument. Although the writer/performers stayed the same through out the transformation processes – which relatively makes them more straightforward – the visual look of the show, especially form the initial stage performances to the television series as well as the other stage shows and the film points to the significant input of the costume designer. It reflects Barre's role as an adapter who helped transform a small stage production into small screen then into big stage, then into big screen and finally back into a big stage production through his designs. Barre's designs, however, do not just influence the visual look (the enhancing characters and creating a cinematic look), but also the ideological framework of the show.

4 The Issue of Drag

For Plowman a key point about The League is that they represent something as it is without stepping aside of a character and commenting on it.[83] Pemberton supports Plowman's observations and describes their aim as to fully-embody a character no matter who s/he might be.[84] This conception also lies behind Barre's paddings and character silhouettes.

Video 6: ***The League of Gentlemen* TV series**, Iris (played by Mark Gatiss) and Mrs Levinson (played by Reece Shearsmith)

[81] Pemberton, 2012.
[82] Frances Babbage, Robert Neumark Jones and Lauren Williams, 'Adapting Wilde for the Performance Classroom: "No Small Parts",' in *Redefining Adaptation Studies*, eds. D. Cutchins, L. Raw and J. M. Welsh, Scarecrow Press, 2010, 1-16, p.1.
[83] Plowman, 2012.
[84] Pemberton, 2012.

Taking inspiration from 'real' people was also important. The writers explain that in their creations they took the 'germ' of a situation or a person and pushed it to extremes.[85] Thus every character had a counterpart in real life. For example, Iris (performed by Gatiss) and Judee (performed by Shearsmith) were in part based on their observations on Dyson's mother and her cleaner (by no means the characters are direct representations of certain people but compilations of various inspirations).[86] This helps us understand the idea behind the physical look of the characters as well as the actors' performances. Although these characters might seem grotesque or exaggerated, their foundations were based on real people.

Barre underlines that trying to make the actors dressed as women look as 'authentic' as possible was not a suggestion he received from the writer/performers: 'they didn't even have to tell me that.'[87] It was the designer who made this creative decision and again it was up to him to deliver it. Barre explains:

> The real revelation for me was to see them on the stage. Because having read the script is was one thing but once I saw them on stage I really realised what this was all about, you know the parameters and what I was really getting myself into really at that point. And then I started thinking how can I make these 'women' women...[88]

Audio 6: **Barre explaining how he created an 'authentic' look for the actors dressed as women**

5 The Concept of 'Timelessness'

Barre's other important contribution is the idea of 'timelessness.' This concept emerged during his conversations with the director of the series, Steve Bendelack, reflecting the collaborative nature of media production. Barre explains what this concept meant and how he achieved it in terms of costume design.

Audio 7: **Barre talking about the 'timelessness' of costumes in The League**

This is an important notion in terms of understanding where and when the series is set. As Barre describes, Royston Vasey is almost an island in itself. Although the location and its inhabitants offer something familiar to the audience, there is always a surprise element in the show. One never really knows what might happen here because while these characters seem familiar, they are also, in Barre's words, a unique 'tribe' with their own rules.

The concept that Barre and Bendelack developed also supports the complexity of the characters and the complex nature of the show – e.g. hybridising different genres and inspirations. For example, the nature of *The League* lies in representing something 'just like real life and a step beyond,' by combining their personal 'real life' experiences with many inspirational texts from English Gothic, horror and drama and tapping into the gothic in everyday life.[89] The 'timeless' concept follows the theme of 'just like real life and a step beyond' through and helps develop something that is familiar yet also very unique, intricate and unpredictable by nodding at different time periods. This takes us to the discussions on costume's function. Here, the costume has an extraordinary relationship with the script. As the script does not specify a time period, costumes (along with other visuals) develop a unique 'time frame' and location for the narrative and the characters to exist in.

---

[85] Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton, Reece Shearsmith, 'Behind the Scenes of Series Two,' Series 2 Disc 2, Special Stuff, *The League of Gentlemen - The Complete Collection*, BBC Worldwide, 2005.
[86] Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton, Reece Shearsmith, 'DVD Commentaries Series 1 Episode 2', Series 1 Disc 1, *The League of Gentlemen - The Complete Collection*, BBC Worldwide, 2005.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Gatiss, 'Interview by Kirsty Young'.

6 Crowd Control and Intensifying Ugliness

Detail is a key aspect of *The League*, which becomes obvious in the writing.[90] This attention to detail also carries through to the visuals. Barre brought this attention to detail to costume design, and crowd control is one of the ways he achieved it.

For Barre background is as important as the foreground. He argues that the audience interprets what the town Royston Vasey is about not only through the main characters but also from the supporting artists who form the fabric of the society that the series depict. Barre had one costume truck for the principle actors and one for the supporting artists, which reflects his commitment to creating an intact visual look. Barre notes:

> I had to re-dress every supporting artist from head to toe in the way I wanted them to look. […] The crowd, the supporting artists initially refused. They said, 'I'm not wearing that' and I said, 'Well you either go home or you wear it'. […] I had countless rows in the early days with the crowd. […] They thought that what I was trying was utterly crazy.[91]

This process is rather unique, as Barre remarks, this is 'something I never done since or has ever been done before.'[92] Another important aspect that the designer developed was 'hyper-ugliness,' which was also something the supporting artists resisted and pushed back against:

Audio 8: **Barre talking about his approach to 'ugliness'**

Barre suggests that although one might think that the costumes were exaggerated they were actually based on the people he observed during his trips to the north of England. He also bought most of these clothes from Oxfam shops located in this area. Accordingly, for him the costumes were pretty much 'straight' and were not created 'for laughs' but mainly to develop a certain aura, authenticity and uniqueness. Barre's control of the supporting artists and the employment of the theme 'hyper-ugliness' reflect that he also had an influence on how the location and the show were interpreted by audiences.

An interesting example to consider here is the second stage tour *The League of Gentlemen are Behind You!* in terms of the visual look and costumes as it is quite different than the television series or the first stage show. This is purely due to the fact that it is a pantomime. Barre describes the new look as 'very visual, very stagey, very theatrical.'[93] For instance, as Barre notes, the characters Pauline and C.C. Smith turn into 'pantomime dames' with their costumes becoming 'very stagey' especially in terms of scale and richness. These outfits are completely new and very different than the TV series. One aspect they share with the first stage show is the necessity for immediacy due to quick costume changes.

7 Conclusion

By building on a bottom up approach this article has shed light on a specific creative process, the costume design for *The League of Gentlemen* and acknowledged the costume designer not only as a key contributor to the visual look of the show but someone who has major influence on the tone of the show, and who helped to keep it intact throughout

---

[90] See Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith, *The League of Gentlemen Scripts and That*, BBC Books, London, 2003.
[91] Barre, 2012.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.

its multi-medial incarnations. The analysis suggests that through thorough research, Barre was able to 'tune himself' to the writers' 'wavelength.' This developed a close relationship between the professionals, which then allowed great creative freedom for the designer. Barre did not merely dress the characters but by developing complex paddings he also created their physical silhouettes, which had great influence on the end product. Barre also had significant control over the look of the supporting actors. Through creating the look of the people in the background, he helped create the atmosphere of the fictional town where these characters lived. Thus, the designer's artistic vision shaped the characters' physical looks as well as the atmosphere, tone and production value of the show. The analysis also reflects the costume designer's role as an 'adapter' who interpreted and added various meanings to the incarnations.

The article has also pointed out some of the important stages in the creative process such as costume fittings and research period. Although this analysis has focused on a specific and a unique programme, it also helped illuminate some of the general features of costume design for television and teased out some of the differences between costume design for stage and television.

List of Programmes

Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith, *On the Town with The League of Gentlemen*, BBC Radio Four, 1997.

Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith, *The League of Gentlemen*, BBC 2, 1999-2002.

Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith, *The League of Gentlemen: A Local Show for Local People,* UK Stage tour, 2001.

Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith, *The League of Gentlemen are Behind You!*, UK Stage Tour, 2006.

Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith, *The League of Gentlemen's Apocalypse*, Universal Pictures, 2005.

Biography

Gamze Toylan is a PhD candidate at the University of Westminster, Communication and Media Research Institute where she is also teaching in various BA modules. With a BA in Communication and Design, and MA in Film and Television, her current research project is on The League of Gentlemen (BBC, 1999-2002). Her thesis aims to provide a detailed study of the creation of the show. Her work develops through original interviews with media professionals, which explore how 'special moments' in television come about. Her key interests are TV production, British comedy, production design, media history and oral history.