

Christian von Hodenberg, *Television's Moment: Sitcom Audiences and the Sixties Cultural Revolution*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015. 324pp.

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The surprising political rise of Donald Trump in the United States, the equally unexpected Brexit vote in Britain, and the growing anti-immigration forces in Germany have all brought back memories, and comparisons, to popular sitcoms of the 1960s and 1970s. Alf Garnett, the main character of the BBC sitcom *Till Death Us Do Part* (1965–1975), has been seen as the quintessential Brexit voter, just like Archie Bunker of *All in the Family* (CBS, 1971–1979) has been called the forbearer to Trump, and Alfred Tetzlaff of *Ein Herz und eine Seele* (WDR, 1973–1976) has been understood as the ancestor of the Alternative für Deutschland voters. Given the current political climate in the Western world, Christina von Hodenberg's new book on these three sitcoms seem very timely indeed.

The three sitcoms, all based on the Johnny Speight's original premise for the BBC, centered on a bigoted, reactionary, middle-aged, working-class man and his wife housing his liberal, counter-culture daughter and son-in-law. All met success, and all became controversial due to the nature of the topics discussed and the racism of the main character. In *Television's Moment: Sitcom Audiences and the Sixties Cultural Revolution*, von Hodenberg presents the first comprehensive historical study of these popular and transformative shows.

The book sets out to explore how the “value change” of the 1960s and 1970s related to the wide reach of television in the same period, showing that “television entertainment indeed accelerated and broadened the wave of sociocultural change (2).” This is done by a heavy focus on the debates in the press and sociological studies on audience reactions, as well as some archival work – especially in regards to *Till Death Us Do Part*. von Hodenberg succeeds in showing how the much maligned and feared group of people sympathetic to the bigotry of the main characters, whether Alf, Archie or Alfred, was actually marginal at best and the overwhelming majority of the audience understood him as representing foolish prejudice. The field of audience reactions to television entertainment is complex

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and von Hodenberg's analysis is handicapped by the historical nature of her study, she has to rely on limited and at times spotty data. The popularity of the shows, however, guarantees her material from everything from the newspapers and magazines of the day, to scholarly journals, oral histories, and congressional records. She is able to bring these diverse source materials together to form a convincing narrative of cultural history. The conclusions on the impact of the shows on the changing values of the sixties and seventies are persuasive if not conclusive.

The decision to focus on three related shows in three Western countries positions the analysis in a transnational perspective. This is both one of the strengths and one of the weaknesses of the book. While the transnational perspective is a refreshing new way to look at television, which usually is understood in rather narrow national ways, it is also problematic. The transnational perspective limits the room given the diverse national, political, and historical contexts. The subject matter is so rich and the political context so intriguing that one cannot help but feel each of the shows, and their national setting, warrants their own study.

von Hodenberg has brought much needed scholarly attention to three of the most influential sitcoms, intertwining the transnational nature of television entertainment with audience reactions to controversial material in three distinct settings. Moving between history and media studies, even if the strengths lay primarily in the audience research, the study is a welcome addition to both fields and an encouragement to adopt transnational perspectives for the study of television entertainment and history. The pricing of the book, almost £70 for 324 pages, makes it clear the intended market is libraries rather than individual scholars. Given the popular appeal of the sitcoms, and the timely nature of the study, this is regrettable. It would, however, make a good addition to university and public libraries with strong media and television sections.