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High Concept, Small Screen: Reperceiving the Industrial and Stylistic Origins of the American Made-for-TV Movie

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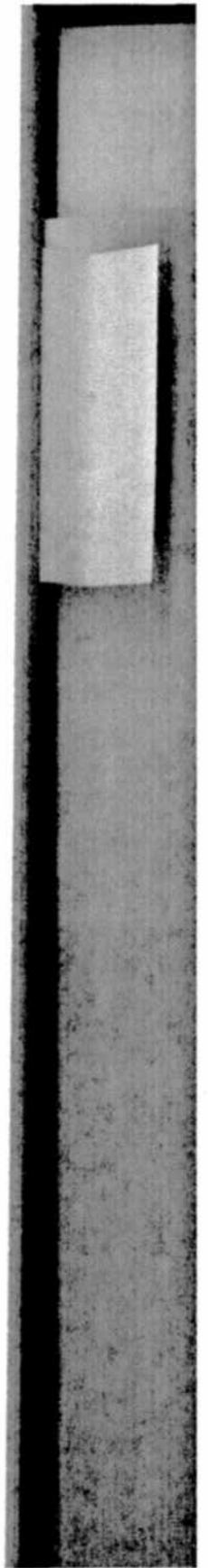
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High Concept, Small Screen

Reperceiving the Industrial and Stylistic Origins of the American Made-for-TV Movie

GARY EDGERTON

Made-for-TV movies are often castigated by film scholars as being on the same level as B films, those low-budget and exploitative features made by Hollywood to turn a quick profit. They are therefore judged according to cinematic ideals and aesthetics. Television scholar Gary Edgerton refutes that analysis, locating made-for-TV movies squarely within the contexts and traditions of television programming. Edgerton argues that made-for-TV movies, which first appeared in the mid-1960s, were envisioned, designed, and budgeted as and for television.

By the mid-1960s, there was a shortage of appropriate theatrical releases for exhibition on television. In addition, Hollywood films were evolving beyond television's norms for the depiction of sex and violence. Television networks already had the production personnel and talent in place for the creation of made-for-TV movies, as well as appropriate generic and formal conventions. Made-for-TV movies did not function as a "farm system" for the movie industry but as a genre specific to the needs and constraints of television. As such, the genre was able to evolve by taking advantage of the nature of television

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production. For example, because television programs take less time to produce than theatrical releases, made-for-TV movies were able to reflect current issues and events, leading to the creation of the docudrama.

MIXING APPLES AND ORANGES

TV films . . . are increasingly cinema films in all but name; they rely upon cinematic techniques, and they invite their audiences to try to view them with the attitudes and intensity of concentration that is more characteristic of cinema. For broadcast TV, the culturally respectable is increasingly equated with the cinematic.

—JOHN ELLIS, 1982¹

The made-for-TV movie is consistently the most misunderstood and maligned genre on television. No doubt a worse fate was accorded the once-lowlly soap opera more than a decade ago before a move in the related fields of television and cinema studies began resurrecting this form from critical oblivion.² The number of publications on the television movie remains relatively small, however, especially when considering the major impact this genre has had on the economics, topicality, and production values of primetime programming in America over the last three decades.

Indeed, the few sources that do exist on television movies are typically polarized in nature, ranging from outright repugnance to a few instances of lavish praise.³ The term itself, “TV movie,” is often used pejoratively by movie critics to describe what bad theatrical pictures tend to resemble; even a recent reassessment in *American Film* entitled “TV Movies—Better Than the Real Thing (Are You Kidding?),” which heralds a “Golden Age [for] today’s TV movies and mini-series,” tends to exhibit the kind of ambivalence that is characteristic about this subject from most film quarters.⁴ The made-for-TV movie is invariably judged against some higher “cinematic” and “culturally respectable” ideal, while, ironically, preferences in TV movie style, technique, propriety, preferred themes, budgets, shooting schedules, talent, target audiences, and administrative supervision have all along been more a reflection of the customs and priorities of television than the separate market and industrial sphere of the theatrical movie business.

It is crucial at the outset, therefore, to reconsider the tendency of most film scholars to frame the made-for-TV movie within an agenda set by the movie business: the television movie is thus conceived of as a byproduct of the motion picture industry, rather than as a fundamental programming staple of network TV. Another case in point is Douglas Gomery’s skillful examination of *Brian’s Song*, which, nevertheless, situates the television movie firmly within the traditions of the classical Hollywood style:

The made-for-TV movie in the early 1970s had become what the B film was to Hollywood in earlier eras. Contending with restrictions in budgets, language and sex, rating-minded networks, and a format demanding an opening "teaser" and six climactic "act curtains" before commercial breaks, creators had to work quickly and efficiently.⁵

The positioning of the telefeature within the context of the film industry almost always leads to the conclusion that the TV movie is today's "B" picture, an inferior feature film form modeled on the Hollywood paradigm. From this perspective, television movies are viewed as having comparatively meager budgets (generally five times smaller than theatrical films), paltry shooting schedules (four times smaller), and tame and antiseptic presentations. This supposition, however, misrepresents the industrial origins and stylistic conventions that are most common of movies made exclusively for television.

The made-for-TV movie needs, first and foremost, to be re-perceived as a product of network TV. When Hollywood's movie companies expanded their services and identities during the 1950s to become primetime program suppliers, these studios created new telefilm divisions that operated firmly under the purview of ABC, CBS, and NBC; likewise, NBC was the commissioning force that sponsored Universal TV when it produced the first telefeature in 1964. Asserting this distinction is more than splitting hairs; it also place television movies squarely within the context and traditions of network programming, where this genre has extended the acceptable boundaries of dramatic length, thematic concern, and production value for primetime. From this adjusted vantage point, the TV movie was never a "B" product; in contrast, it was always envisioned, designed, and budgeted as a prestige vehicle for television. It is also more accurate to liken inferior telefeatures to overblown TV series episodes than to the "formula quickies" that were churned out decades ago by the old Hollywood studio system.

The subindustry that manufactures the made-for-TV movie is solidly beholden to the presidents of primetime programming at ABC, CBS, and NBC because television has always served this sector as its primary distribution venue. Programming executives at the networks, including the respective vice presidents for telefeature and mini-series production, acquire contractual rights to approve scripts, budgets, above-the-line personnel, shooting schedules, and promotional strategies. Even at the inception of this TV genre in the mid-1960s, a newer group of small-screen moguls, who had been enculturated within the milieu and dictates of primetime television, dominated the creation and development of made-for-TV movies, although Hollywood and network radio drama were certainly secondary influences with respect to story ideas and production techniques.

By 1991, the total number of television movies made in America has now reached 2,500, including such innovations in product variations from the 1970s as the docudrama and the miniseries.⁶ More than 15 telefeature and mini-series episodes, in fact, have attracted audiences of more than 100 million, placing them among the most watched television programs ever.⁷ TV movies have also been regularly honored with Emmy and Peabody awards since the early 1970s, while

the Museum of Modern Art in New York formally recognized the maturation of this television genre with a symposium in 1979, just 15 short years after the broadcast of the first telefeature.⁸ These indicators of widespread popularity and institutional recognition were doubtlessly inconceivable 27 years ago when NBC in 1964, and later ABC in 1969, first began responding in earnest to the growing cost and impending shortage of appropriate theatrical films for primetime scheduling by nurturing the brainchild of an executive at Universal TV, Jennings Lang.

THE GREENING OF THE MADE-FOR-TV MOVIE, 1964-1969

For network-movie watchers, in the beginning there were movies.
Then came the nonmovies. And now it's minimovies. For the audience,
it's a puzzlement and a frustration. For the networks, it's big business.
And where it's all leading no one will guess.

—JUDITH CRIST, 1969⁹

The precise birthdate of the American made-for-TV movie is arguable, although only a handful of pretenders exists before the 1964-1965 television season. Claims range from Ron Amateau's B-Western, *The Bushwackers*, which first appeared for public consumption on CBS in 1951; to Disney's *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier*, which was initially broadcast as three separate segments during the 1954-1955 debut season of *The Wonderful World of Disney*; to the theatrical offering, *The Scarface Mob* (1962), which was shown on television in 1959 as the two-part pilot for the ABC series, *The Untouchables*.¹⁰ By the late 1950s, several of television's dramatic anthologies, for instance *Bob Hope Presents, the Chrysler Theatre*, and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, were frequently producing their teleplays on film, and it was not uncommon for a number of these presentations to be expanded into a second hour for airing the following week as a finale of a two-part drama.¹¹ These sporadic and haphazard examples, however, predate the systematic and conscious development of feature-length motion pictures exclusively for the small screen.

Propitious conditions for the birth of the made-for-TV movie began to take shape in the mid-1950s and became imminent during the early 1960s. When Hollywood's major studios entered the fray of series television production between 1955 and 1958, all of the smaller telefilm companies were either hurt by the added competition, driven from the business, or absorbed by larger firms. These independents, most notably MCA's Revue, Columbia's Screen Gems, United Artists' Ziv-TV, Hal Roach Productions, and Desilu, had composed a modest, though burgeoning production sector in Hollywood that successfully provided the television industry with episodic TV on film since 1948. Jennings Lang began promoting longer and more novel programming formats in the final years of the 1950s as his way of counteracting Warner Brothers, Paramount,

Twentieth Century-Fox, and MGM's influential move into TV production; his motivation was a desire to create an advantage for Revue in the face of this newly emerging challenge from the major movie studios.

Lang was ideally positioned between two merging traditions when he started to innovate on two TV programming concepts: the "special-event" and the "long-form" (which refers to television programming that extends past a 60-minute time slot). He had already established himself as one of the leading talent agents in the film industry when he joined the Music Corporation of America (MCA) agency in 1950. The next year, MCA created Revue, and Lang was placed in charge of TV program development. Toward the end of the decade, his dual experiences in both the motion picture and television industries led him to consider feature-length storytelling at a time when growing competition between NBC and CBS first motivated NBC to start funding program proposals for film that extended the usual conventions of primetime scheduling.¹²

Lang "began his [two-parter] experiments with anthology shows like 'The Alfred Hitchcock Hour' and 'The Chrysler Theater,' in the one-hour format, and he had a big hand in the first 90-minute regularly scheduled series, 'The Virginian,' " which premiered on NBC in September 1962.¹³ This was also the year that MCA, the most powerful talent agency in Hollywood at this juncture, purchased Universal Pictures. As a result, Revue was consolidated as Universal TV in this corporate takeover, and Jennings Lang was selected to direct what immediately became a more expanded and influential operation.

Now coming from Universal TV, NBC programmers were simply more receptive to Lang's proposals for repackaging the anthology format as a series of "TV epic[s] (or special events), when an entire evening [would] be given over to a single spectacular, made for the occasion."¹⁴ Lang and Universal TV convinced NBC to invest in what were originally called "mini-movies" in 1963. Although Jennings Lang is the man most responsible for championing the telefeature as a viable programming form for television, the made-for-TV movie was really an idea whose time had come. It is clear in retrospect that once television production moved to the West Coast for good during the mid-1950s, it was simply a matter of years before one of the new television executives who also had contacts and experience with the motion picture industry, such as Lang, would induce some company to produce features on film for TV.

For its part, NBC initially considered Lang's overtures for "mini-movies" because theatrical films were performing well in primetime beginning in 1961. NBC finally decided to invest in telefeature production two years later because of both an impending shortage of theatrical motion pictures for nighttime scheduling and the rapidly escalating price of leasing these movies from the studios. Appendix 1 suggests the increasing cost effectiveness of TV movies: Bidding competition between ABC, CBS, and NBC had actually caused the cost of leasing a theatrical feature film for television to increase twice as fast as the average telefeature budget between 1965 to 1971. TV movies were not only an economical alternative, they also held three other key incentives for the networks by 1970: movies made for TV were virtual ratings equals to theatricals on TV from their inception; their style and content were better shaped to the priorities of

television, especially when considering the growing sexual and violent explicitness that was evident in theatrical films during the late 1960s and early 1970s; and their production supported in-house staffs within the television industry.

Some personnel crossover did, in fact, exist between made-for-TV movies and films produced for theaters, although most above- and below-the-line employees in both telefeatures and later mini-series stayed within this unique genre or worked in series TV for most of their careers. Despite glamorous examples, such as Steven Spielberg, the television movie has not so much served as a kind of "farm system" for the theatrical feature, which is implied by the B movie label, as it has developed its own cadre of more than 2,000 actors, actresses, producers, directors, and screenwriters, most of them borrowed from primetime series production or originally supplanted from the "live" dramatic anthologies of TV's so-called Golden Age during the 1950s.¹⁵

The success of *The Virginian* during the 1962-1963 season, telecast on NBC between 7:30 and 9:00 P.M. on Wednesdays, was the final impetus that motivated this network to contract with Lang and Universal to produce self-contained, feature-length films that would fit into a two-hour time slot to be tentatively scheduled during the 1963-1964 television year under the title *Project 120*, a never fully actualized weekly series whose very name echoed the "live" dramatic anthologies of the previous decade. NBC allotted \$250,000 in 1963 for its first planned telefeature (which was the same average amount of money budgeted that season for two 1-hour primetime episodes), as Universal TV hired Hollywood journeyman Don Siegel to direct "Johnny North," an adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's short story, "The Killers," starring John Cassavetes, Lee Marvin, Angie Dickinson, and Ronald Reagan" in his last role.¹⁶ The movie that resulted eventually cost more than \$900,000, and was deemed by the network "too spicy, expensive, and violent for TV screens."¹⁷

In early 1964, *Johnny North* was retitled *The Killers* (like its 1946 Hollywood predecessor), and this motion picture was subsequently released that spring to movie theaters nationwide by Universal Pictures. Mort Werner, NBC-TV vice president in charge of programming at the time, reflected in May 1964 on this whole experience: "We've learned to control the budget. Two new 'movies' will get started soon, and the series (*Project 120*) probably will show up on television in 1965."¹⁸

The first made-for-TV movie, *See How They Run*, premiered on 17 October 1964, a few months earlier than Werner suggested in his public pronouncement. This telefeature appeared under the aegis of MCA-Universal and NBC's *Project 120*. *See How They Run* follows the murder of a father by an international crime syndicate and the subsequent pursuit of his three teenaged daughters who unwittingly stumble upon some damaging evidence. This routine crime melo-drama was quickly followed six weeks later by the NBC broadcast of Don Siegel's next excursion into the made-for-TV genre, *The Hanged Man*. Like *The Killers* before it, Siegel's second assignment for *Project 120* is another remake of a classic film noir, *Ride the Pink Horse* (1947). Although television movies were now a reality, there would be a two-year hiatus before NBC and MCA-Universal presented another telefeature to the American viewing public.

ABC began its sponsorship of the made-for-TV movie during the 1965–1966 season with the March 10th telecast of *Scalplock*. This Western, starring Dale Robertson and produced by Columbia's Screen Gems, deals with a gambler who wins a railroad in a poker game and then assumes control over his new enterprise. *Scalplock* is actually characteristic of many subsequent telefeatures in that it is a pilot as well as a TV movie, meaning that this telefilm also served as the first episode of a prospective primetime series (in this case, *The Iron Horse*, 1966–1968) by introducing an original storyline and a new set of characters. This strategy of creating telefeatures as pilots provided primetime suppliers, such as Screen Gems, with a way of recouping more of their initial investment by encouraging greater network participation in financing a property with more than one scheduling purpose; the TV production company would then seek additional distribution opportunities through the overseas television and theatrical markets.

Programming executives at the major networks were alerted to the ratings potential of the made-for-television movie as early as the 1966–1967 season. On Saturday evening during the 1966 Thanksgiving weekend, NBC hyped its two-hour pilot, *Fame Is the Name of the Game*, as a "World Premiere" on *NBC Saturday Night at the Movies* rather than as part of *Project 120*. Corporate wisdom had now decided that it was better not to remind target audiences that stars and story types would not recur on a regular basis, even though a semi-frequent series of telefeatures was an obvious reprise of the anthology format. Extensive pretesting had instead convinced NBC to emphasize that these telefeatures were being presented to the public for the very first time. No one at the network would later argue with what turned out to be windfall results.

Fame Is the Name of the Game, a series pilot (*The Name of the Game*, 1968–1971), starring Tony Franciosa, Jill St. John, and Susan Saint James, which involves an enterprising reporter investigating the murder of a prostitute, surprised everyone at NBC by attracting nearly 35 million viewers. A staggering figure about the nine "World Premieres" that NBC broadcast during the 1966–1967 season is that each and every one had a Nielsen rating over 20 (which at the time meant approximately 25 million viewers); and "they [also] had, on the average, an audience of 20 percent more people than the average of all other movies (142 theatricals and two telefeatures) shown on the networks."¹⁹ "The 1967–68 season" would be an even greater source of optimism as "'World Premiere' movies attracted 42.2 percent of the audience, while the theatrical films claimed 38 percent" in comparison.²⁰

The success of NBC's "World Premieres" merely serves to counterpose a continuing problem: Hollywood's leasing price to ABC, CBS, and NBC for its "blockbuster" pictures increased 250 percent between 1965 and 1970; at the same time, network demand for theatrical movies kept well ahead of the available supply through 1968.²¹ In response, CBS and ABC felt compelled to take a different kind of initiative than the partnership entered into between NBC and Universal TV. In the summer of 1967, CBS and ABC created subsidiaries, CBS Cinema Center and ABC Pictures, for the express purpose of producing features for theaters that would eventually be made obtainable for broadcast use at a more reasonable rate. This foray into the motion picture business, which lasted until 1972, was an unmitigated disaster for both networks, costing each tens of

millions of dollars in losses. The move did prove to be one crucial part of the corrective for the feature shortage on primetime, however, glutting the market with product and thus stabilizing lease prices as network inventories remained overstocked with theatricals through 1972.

The other component that filled the need for more movies on TV was, of course, the rise of the telefeature. Neither CBS Cinema Center nor ABC Pictures was ever an important player in television movie production, accounting for only 4 percent and less than 1 percent, respectively, of the 228 made-for-TV [movies] that were telecast from 1964 through the 1971–1972 season.²² Following NBC's lead, ABC and CBS decided against using ABC Pictures and CBS Cinema Center for further telefeature production after January 1972; they learned from experience that sponsorship of the major TV movie suppliers afforded them greater control and fewer legal problems in the long run.²³

During the first decade (1964–1973) of the made-for-TV movie, in fact, six firms generated more than 70 percent of the genre's output. Ranked according to productivity, these companies were Universal TV, Aaron Spelling Productions or Danny Thomas/Aaron Spelling Productions, Paramount TV, 20th Century-Fox TV, Columbia's Screen Gems, and Metromedia.²⁴ Together, the networks and these major TV movie suppliers rapidly propelled the made-for-TV movie beyond its humble beginnings during the early 1970s. Many of the better producers, writers, actors, and directors in the television industry experimented with the telefeature in this period as their way of progressing past the relentless work regimen of series TV. As a result, the made-for-TV movie started evincing what would become its primary aesthetic strategy: Continuing efforts at producing NBC's "World Premiere" movies, ABC's *Movie of the Week* (1969–1975), and later *The New CBS Friday Night Movie* (1971–1975) forged the identity of the tele-feature into a feature-length, small screen form that personally dramatizes high-profile concepts and topical themes.

THE REALIZATION OF THE MADE-FOR-TV MOVIE, 1970–1977

For every social and moral problem there is an equal and apposite TV movie.

—DANIEL MENAKER, 1980.²⁵

The American made-for-television movie came of age in the 1970s. This maturation process proceeded rapidly on several fronts, as the TV movie genre was decisively fulfilled as both a viable industrial product and a distinctly televisual form by the end of the decade. Theatricals remained the film of choice on primetime until 1972–1973 when the seasonal output of made-for-TV movies began to inch past its predecessor for three critical reasons: the number of available theatrical films from the major movie studios plummeted from an average of 180

during the late 1960s to around 120 by the mid-1970s²⁶; second, theatrical films were both more dated and less appropriate for primetime audiences than TV movies (between 1970s and 1975, the average age of a theatrical film was more than four years old before its first exposure on the networks, and 35 percent to 40 percent of MPAA-rated films during this same period were awarded either an R or X rating²⁷); and, lastly, the overall quality of made-for-TV movies continued to improve throughout the 1970s.

CBS joined NBC and ABC by starting to seriously invest in telefeature production during the 1971–1972 season. All three networks had now institutionalized positions for a vice president of television movies within the hierarchy of their entertainment divisions, signaling the newly arrived importance of this genre in planning their primetime schedules. In retrospect, NBC and ABC were also the proven leaders in creating innovations in the TV movie form during the decade (i.e., the docudrama and the mini-series), although all of network TV was quick to copy each new programming breakthrough within a season or two of its first appearance.

In like manner, made-for-television movies have never varied much in design, practice, or ideology from network to network. The inclination of ABC, CBS, and NBC to follow similar lines of program development is a long established pattern that results from the high degree of insularity and interdependence within their oligopoly. The networks pioneered the TV movie genre with an identical group of suppliers; and they virtually geared their primetime features toward the same general target audience (i.e., women from 18 of 49 with slight demographic variations depending on which evening the made-for-television movies were being scheduled²⁸). The overall growth of the TV movie genre is, therefore, best understood as a shared experience—allowing for brief break-out periods for experimentations in topical subject matter, the docudrama, and the mini-series—shaped in large part by the common traditions and mutual priorities of all three networks.

The differences between theatrical and television movies were readily apparent from the outset of the genre. Made-for-TV movies were always more suggestive of the scale and techniques of series TV and the “live” anthology dramas from the 1950s and early 1960s that the larger-than-life narratives and protagonists that are typically associated with the classical Hollywood style. Even those early television movies that most reminded film critics of the Hollywood B movie, such as the aforementioned Western *Scalplock*, had televised antecedents that were well established, numerous, and tailored to primetime long before the broadcast of the first telefeature. The tendency in *Scalplock*, for example, toward a more sociable cowboy hero, plenty of conversation, and intimate camerawork rather than epic sweep and physical action is expressly derivative of the literally dozens of “live” Western teleplays (e.g., Rod Serling’s “A Town Has Turned to Dust” for *Play-house 90*) and the more than 50 Western series (e.g., *Gunsmoke*, 1955–1975) that abounded on primetime during the 1950s.

The proponents of the new television movie were evidently working within a different set of strictures from what had ever been standardized in the motion picture industry. The constraints of creating drama for a 25-inch screen had

always inspired producers to stress performance over plot; now the telefeature discovered its own unique voice within the contours of this long-standing tradition. The individualized and informal depiction of everyday characters in an assortment of medium shots and close-ups quickly became the forte of the TV movie, more so than in any other feature film form. Plot structure and setting were accordingly scaled back as a means of better shaping these conventions to the shorter length and commercial segmentation of primetime and the lower definition and smaller ratio of the TV screen. As writer-producer Rod Serling recalled in 1969, "the key to television is intimacy. The facial study on a small screen carries with it a meaning and power far beyond its usage in motion pictures."²⁹ A case in point is the first major critical success of the genre—Universal TV and NBC's *My Sweet Charlie*, which premiered 20 January 1970.

My Sweet Charlie is characteristic of the TV movie form in many important ways. This telefilm is a small, social melodrama that concentrates its primary focus on a limited number of characters; in this specific instance, two principals dominate the entire program. The story is "soft" by motion picture standards, meaning there is no graphic sex, very little violence, and a minimum of action clichés that demand elaborate special effects. The premise, based on a successful novel and Broadway play of the same name, is also decidedly topical for the time this telefeature was made, addressing race relations, runaways, and unwed motherhood.

My Sweet Charlie concerns a young white woman, Marlene Chambers (Patty Duke), who is forced by circumstances to share an abandoned summer house in a rural town on the Texas coast for several days with a black lawyer from New York, Charles Roberts (Al Freeman, Jr.), who has just killed a white man in self-defense at a nearby civil rights demonstration. Marlene has been cast-off by her father because she is pregnant and unwed. Both characters are, therefore, hiding out, forced into being outsiders for different reasons.

One of the most interesting aspects of this TV movie is that the usual stereotypes of the period are reversed as Marlene is presented as a poor and ignorant member of the Southern underclass, whereas Charlie is an accomplished, sophisticated, and intelligent professional. Marlene is also a scared and angry bigot, hurling the epithet "nigger" at Charlie whenever she is cornered; the hostility in her characterization was a television breakthrough, especially considering the climate of primetime prior to *All in the Family* (which was first telecast 12 January 1971). Charlie is similarly more than just a noble black prototype; he is racist in his own right, as the two individuals learn to recognize their prejudices and identify somewhat with their respective fates on the periphery of society. Both Duke's and Freeman's performances are resilient even today, underplaying sentiment and creating two desperate characters with honesty and compassion.

The key to understanding the fundamental nature of any TV movie, such as *My Sweet Charlie*, is to assess its position as a creation of the television industry, not as a motion picture byproduct. Bob Banner, an independent television producer, actually attempted to first package *My Sweet Charlie* as a theatrical film property with Sidney Poitier and Mia Farrow in the lead roles. No movie studio was interested, though, because *My Sweet Charlie* is essentially a two-character sketch, however well drawn, with very little happening. This apparent large-

screen liability was, in fact, the central reason why the story appeared attractive to two screenwriter-producers, Richard Levinson and William Link. Their conventional wisdom dictated that "television can usually deal with an intimate personal story better than a large-scale event."³⁰

Levinson and Link were eight-year veterans of TV (writing for such series as *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Burke's Law*, and *The Fugitive*) when they were hired by Jennings Lang and placed under contract at Universal TV in 1967. After creating the successful program *Mannix*, Levinson and Link were rewarded by Universal TV with an opportunity to "liberate [themselves] from the constraints of series television" by producing their first made-for-TV movie.³¹ Attracted by the story elements and relevancy of *My Sweet Charlie*, they secured its rights for Universal TV from Bob Banner, who remained on the project as the executive producer. Levinson and Link then wrote the script themselves.

The rest of the cast and crew selection, budgeting, and shooting schedule are all examples of extending the usual conventions of primetime TV. For instance, Levinson and Link procured their above-the-line talent from within the ranks of the television sector and were provided with in-house, below-the-line workers from Universal TV. They first hired an experienced television director, Lamont Johnson (who had directed for several anthologies, *Peter Gunn*, *Have Gun—Will Travel*, *The Twilight Zone*, and *The Defenders*, among others), because they admired his understated and intimate style, his feeling for character, and his liberal sensibility.

Levinson and Link next selected Patty Duke to star in *My Sweet Charlie* because she was an accomplished and bankable TV performer with credits earned on "live" anthology dramas, commercials, and *The Patty Duke Show* (1963–1966). Her casting is especially indicative of a new cadre of home-grown TV movie stars (e.g., Jane Alexander, Ed Asner, Richard Chamberlain, Hal Holbrook, Elizabeth Montgomery, Stephanie Powers, Dennis Weaver, etc.), who consistently eclipsed comparable theatrical stars in television movie ratings even in the early 1970s. (For example, ABC was the first network to learn that motion picture stardom did not necessarily translate into success in TV movies when Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton "bombed out in 'Divorce His/Divorce Hers' " in 1973.³²)

Comparative figures in Appendix 1, moreover, indicate that *My Sweet Charlie's* \$450,000 budget was approximately four times less than the average cost of a theatrical feature in 1970. The rationale for NBC and Universal TV's investment must, nevertheless, be evaluated within the context of primetime dramatic programming to be understood clearly. *My Sweet Charlie* was always considered a prestige project in television terms and its budget was actually calculated "high" for April 1969.³³ The allocation of \$450,000 for a projected 90-minute TV movie easily exceeded the cost-per-minute ratio for two episodes of the most expensive one-hour series on television at the time, including *The Wonderful World of Disney* (\$450,000), *Gunsmoke* (\$430,000), and *Mission: Impossible* (\$420,000).³⁴ Likewise, the shooting schedule (5 May to 27 May 1969) was 50 percent longer than what was typically allotted for the production of 120 minutes of primetime drama. As is customary with most made-for-television movies, *My Sweet Charlie* was always envisioned and designed as a first-class, quality production, surpassing in resources any other kind of project being developed by the networks.

The production values of most TV movies are correspondingly closer to series television than to the technical finesse and state-of-the-art sophistication of a major theatrical film. The lighting quality in *My Sweet Charlie*, for instance, is often slightly underexposed, while its soundtrack is similarly problematic, employing very little sound sweetening and almost no incidental music. Still, TV movie producers are never expected by primetime audiences to approach the quality and style of a major motion picture. As Pauline Kael so perceptively stated in 1971, “We almost never think of calling a television show ‘beautiful,’ or even complaining about the absence of beauty, because we take it for granted that television operates without beauty.”³⁵

On 7 June 1970, *My Sweet Charlie* became the first made-for-TV movie to be recognized by the Television Academy of Arts and Sciences by winning three Emmys for Best Actress in a Single Performance (Patty Duke), Best Dramatic Screenplay (Richard Levinson and William Link), and Best Editing (Ed Abrams). These awards affirmed the acceptance and position of the TV movie genre within the television industry. *My Sweet Charlie*’s congruent popularity (41 million viewers) with the American viewing public also encouraged the proliferation of scores of other telefeatures whose main purpose was to dramatize social issues. NBC and Universal TV had taken the first step in establishing an indigenous voice for the TV movie; now ABC in tandem with the major TV movie suppliers would offer a different innovation of its own.

ABC’s Tuesday *Movie of the Week*, the most popular movie series in television history, premiered on 23 September 1969. Barry Diller, a former advertising agency executive and newly appointed head of primetime programming at ABC, is the man responsible for devising the “TV movie of the week” concept at his network. Diller and his boss, Leonard Goldberg, the vice president in charge of programming, negotiated a deal with Universal TV that in effect doubled the combined output of telefeatures on commercial television in just one year. “It was an innovative twenty-six week series of original, ninety-minute ‘world premiere’ movies specially produced (at an average cost of \$375,000 per movie) for television, and it became a roaring success.”³⁶ In 1970–1971, ABC’s *Movie of the Week* was TV’s sixth most-watched program; the next season this series climbed to number 5. In 1980, Barry Diller remembered

In the early period, we did a lot of junk movies, but we also proved that you could do movies every week. And some of what we did was truly landmark for television—the first thing on television about homosexuality [*That Certain Summer* (1972)], about the Vietnam War [*The Ballad of Andy Crocker* (1969)], about drugs [*Go Ask Alice* (1973)]. It gave people in television a way to grow.³⁷

The ABC *Movie of the Week*’s most significant contribution to the TV movie genre was converting the topicality of the new telefeature into the fact-based formula of the docudrama between 1971 and 1973. The growth of the topical telefeature had indeed changed the entertainment landscape of the made-for-television movie forever. Older narrative types (e.g., Westerns, crime melodramas, etc.) were quickly abandoned in favor of an abundance of present-day stories inspired by social controversies, cultural trends, or whatever was on the

public agenda. Appendix 2 suggests the totality of this transformation in its listing of the most popular telefeatures in television history.

Programmatic planning by TV movie executives at the networks now affirmed the conventional wisdom that higher concept subject matter was required because “there is no word of mouth” for a TV movie. It has “only one shot at an audience.”³⁸ In turn, ABC, CBS, and NBC remained on the lookout during the rest of the 1970s for “a strong story premise and a promotable hook—something that [could] be summed up in one line in TV Guide.”³⁹ The contemporaneity of the docudrama lent itself perfectly to this new demand: ABC introduced this innovation in 1971–1972 by extending the strategies of the topical telefeature to include the recreation of “real” events, people, and places.

ABC’s reasons for sponsoring the first docudramas were threefold. First, this network was directing its appeal toward the same young adult and urban demographics that all three networks were concerned with cultivating after 1971. ABC began addressing the tastes of this target audience by probing America’s headlines and popular culture for TV movie topics that were both relevant and attention-grabbing. Second, the telefeature form was ideally geared to the currency of most docudramatic ideas by having a gestation period of only six months to a year; in this way, a television movie could be created and telecast while the newsworthiness of the subject was still fresh in the public’s consciousness. And most important, made-for-television movie production skyrocketed in the 1970s, leaving all three networks desperate for 30 to 50 workable TV movie ideas a season. (The yearly output of television movies soared from approximately 50 in 1970 to 120 by 1975 to around 150 by 1980.) The ABC *Movie of the Week*, in particular, labored under the rigorous imperative of producing a movie a week for 39 weeks over six straight seasons. The docudrama, therefore, resulted in large part from this relentless demand for more producible and easily accessible TV movie concepts.

ABC’s origination of the telefeature-as-docudrama cannot be considered a radical departure, in retrospect, because the history of the docudrama is long and varied and includes examples from literature, theater, film, radio, and even a few “live” anthology dramas from the 1950s and early 1960s for such series as *Hallmark Hall of Fame*, *Armstrong Circle Theater*, and *Profiles in Courage*. ABC first started its experiments in feature-length reality programming with Columbia’s Screen Gems when they premiered *Brian’s Song* on 30 November 1971. This “real-life” melodrama, an adaptation of *I Am Third* by Gayle Sayers with Al Silverman, is an excellent example of how the made-for-television docudrama blends aspects of the documentary and narrative modes with the demands of fiction usually dominant on primetime.

Brian’s Song chronicles the interracial friendship between two professional football players, Brian Piccolo (James Caan) and Gale Sayers (Billy Dee Williams), and the slow cancerous deterioration and death of Piccolo. In a broad sense, this scenario is a fact-inspired drama, meaning that it promises to be an accurate retelling of a historical, socially significant, or controversial story. *Brian’s Song* neutralizes the latter criterion, however, by characterizing the racial interaction between Sayers and Piccolo as much more comforting than discordant (e.g., in

one scene Sayers even good naturedly laughs at being called a “nigger” by Piccolo, who is trying to motivate him to work harder). Piccolo’s illness is, moreover, presented in typical “disease-of-the-week” manner, complete with bedside goodbyes and an excess of tears and sentiment.

Brian’s Song was, nevertheless, the popular (44 million viewers) and critical success of the 1971–1972 television season, capturing the 1972 Best Dramatic Program Emmy as well as being the first TV movie to ever receive a George Foster Peabody Award for Outstanding Achievement in Entertainment, the most prestigious nonindustry acknowledgment that is available for a broadcast program. These accolades and the overwhelming viewer numbers for *Brian’s Song* were important catalysts in convincing ABC to permanently pursue its new departure in TV movie form with more fact-based subjects in 1972–1973 and thereafter. NBC and CBS soon followed suit by commissioning docudramas of their own during 1973–1974.

The docudrama actually flourished so rapidly that it comprised one-third of the total output for all TV movies by 1975–1976. That season was the verifiable turning point on which the notion of fact-inspired recreations was broadened to include famous events and figures from history. ABC again led the way with *Eleanor and Franklin*, which aired on 11 and 12 January 1976 and dramatized the early formative years and beginning political career of FDR (Edward Herrmann) and Eleanor Roosevelt (Jane Alexander), winning nine Emmys in the process. The historical approach raised both the profile of the docudrama as well as the number of complaints from journalists and historians over distortions in dialogue and fabrications in plot structure. The major controversy over the docudrama has always been and still remains the inveterate tension between fact and fiction that is embodied in its very name.

The mid-1970s were years of impending flux for both the supply side of the television movie subindustry as well as the three networks. Five out of the top-six telefeature producers from 1964 to 1973 continued their major status for the remainder of the decade. Universal TV, Aaron Spelling Productions or Spelling/Goldberg Productions, Paramount TV, Columbia TV, and 20th Century-Fox TV were now joined by a bevy of new program providers, most notably ABC Circle Films, David L. Wolper Productions, Lorimar Productions, Quinn Martin Productions, Charles Fries Productions, and Filmways.⁴⁰ This group of 11 suppliers usually furnished from half (1973–1976) to one-third (1977–1980) of all TV movies annually (as opposed to 70 percent for the top-six firms between 1964 and 1973).⁴¹ This drop in market share is directly attributable to the rapid rise in the number of independent producers that entered the television movie marketplace beginning in 1973.

The TV movie production sector experienced a 12-year transformation between 1973 and 1984 in which the major suppliers virtually relinquished their dominance to literally dozens of independent companies.⁴² The reason for this slow abdication was simply due to the limited profitability of TV movie product in syndication (which is where suppliers recoup their production deficits and generate most of their profits). The ratings responses to most television movies in rerun were consistently poor. Between 1975 and 1980, in fact, only 43 percent of all primetime TV movies were ever repeated by the networks; comparatively,

91 percent of theatricals had encore showings and performed respectably.⁴³ As a result, the first generation of major made-for-television movie suppliers grew increasingly disenchanted with TV movie production and shifted more of their attention toward the windfall syndication potential of sitcoms and one-hour series. "The independents," in turn, became "specialists in TV movies" by the early 1980s "because they often [didn't] have any other business."⁴⁴

ABC, CBS, and NBC's interest in made-for-television movies remained strong and abiding by contrast. TV movies continued to meet the long-form programming demands of the networks by continuously outpointing theatricals during their first-runs in primetime. CBS first inaugurated *The New CBS Friday Night Movie* in 1971–1972 and instantly matched the TV movie output of ABC and NBC. Appendix 1 also indicates how production costs continued to rise because of the increased efforts of concept testing, developing, and promoting variations in TV movie product, especially the docudrama and, beginning in earnest in 1976, the mini-series.⁴⁵

The structural and stylistic roots of the mini-series are directly traceable to programming innovations explored a decade earlier by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in both its originally scripted productions and its novels-to-television. American audiences had their initial taste of this longer format when National Education Television (NET) programmed the 26-part, BBC-produced *Forsyte Saga* on a weekly basis beginning in October 1969. On 5 October 1970, the newly formed Public Broadcasting System (PBS) next brought the mini-series to stay on domestic television when it began telecasting the perennially popular *Masterpiece Theatre*, hosted by Alistair Cooke.

The first American production to approach the scope and style of the British mini-series was ABC and Universal TV's 12-hour *Rich Man, Poor Man*, which was scheduled in six 2-hour segments over seven weeks between February and March of 1976. *Rich Man, Poor Man* captured and translated the British strategy of creating a primetime soap opera with socio-historical resonances: the story follows two brothers, Rudy (Peter Strauss) and Tom Jordache (Nick Nolte), and their dual pursuit of professional success and the same woman (Susan Blakely) from World War II through the late 1960s. The immense popularity of *Rich Man, Poor Man* (41 million viewers) encouraged ABC to proceed with the even more ambitious plan of contracting with David L. Wolper Productions for \$6 million to produce a 12-hour version of Alex Haley's *Roots*.⁴⁶

Roots ran on eight consecutive evenings from Sunday, 23 January, through Sunday, 30 January 1977. In reporting this media and cultural phenomenon, *Broadcasting* proclaimed "television may never be the same again."⁴⁷ *Roots* so completely captured the imagination of middle-America that seven of the eight segments placed in the top-ten list of most-watched television programs of all time, while the other remaining episode ranked 13th. Overall, "the A. C. Nielsen Co. recorded an average 66 share of the audience—130 million people—more than had watched anything, anytime, anywhere."⁴⁸ A case can be made that *Roots* was the programming peak of the network era. ABC, CBS, and NBC were at their apex as the nations' purveyors of family-oriented, mass entertainment in the mid-1970s. *Roots* provided the network system with its greatest success in its most prestigious genre. The made-for-TV movie was indisputably realized with

this mini-series, fulfilling with a vengeance its earliest promise of becoming a television "special event" in "longform."

ABC, NBC, and, to a lesser degree, CBS combined to sponsor 68 first-run mini-series over the next decade in their haste to reconstruct the success of *Roots*.⁴⁹ Appendix 3 suggests the analogous levels of popularity for nearly 20 percent of these efforts, although *Roots* still remains the highest rated mini-series in the history of American television. The mini-series stretched the limits of the TV movie genre, staking out a midpoint between the longform and the television series. This program innovation also became the primary scheduling strategy that the three major networks employed in counteracting the incessant erosion of their share of the primetime audience (from 90 percent in 1975 to 61 percent in 1991) by the ever-growing number of cable networks after 1975.

Outside media forces assure the continued longevity of the television movie genre. The pay-TV portion of the cable industry grew astronomically in the decade following 1977, soon replacing the three major networks as the second window of distribution for Hollywood's theatrical features. ABC, CBS, and NBC responded by increasing their already strong reliance on television movies, since their comparative interest in expensive, cable-saturated theatricals waned steadily. HBO also premiered the first made-for-pay TV movie, *The Terry Fox Story*, in May 1983. This story of a young Canadian athlete (Eric Fryer) who completes a cross-country marathon after losing a leg to cancer is obviously derivative of many network counterparts. Showtime, the Disney Channel, the USA Network, the Family Channel, and Turner Network Television (TNT) soon joined HBO in producing approximately 30 television films annually with budgets averaging 50 percent higher than network movies, but these cable-features have contributed little to the form in terms of stylistic and topical inventiveness.

The TV movie genre actually entered a mature phase after 1977. Appendix 1 illustrates how budgets have more than tripled since the mid-1970s; product variation and innovation has virtually ceased; and the cable industry now is a secondary developer of television product. ABC, CBS and NBC still combine to produce around 150 TV movies annually, as this genre has comprised approximately 15 percent of primetime programming since the 1977-1978 season. In the most recent attempt to establish a viable and competitive fourth network, in fact, Fox Broadcasting now presents a two-hour Monday night block devoted to original television movies and mini-series produced by Fox TV. For the foreseeable future, at least, the principal economic and creative habitat for the American made-for-TV movie continues to be primetime network television.

CONCLUSIONS

America is the impression I get from looking in the television set.

—ALLEN GINSBERG FROM HIS POEM "AMERICA"⁵⁰

From humble beginnings in 1964, the TV movie quickly flourished through cycles that spotlighted a "disease-of-the-week," then, an "issue-of-the-week," and

has since proved to be among the most resilient and popular primetime staples, along with sitcoms and crime shows. Born of propitious mingling between NBC, ABC, CBS, and several of Hollywood's more ambitious telefilm companies, the made-for-TV movie soon developed two distinct structural subsets—the telefeature and the mini-series. Television films fast became identifiable with a small-screen, televisual style and a high-concept approach to subject matter. News-worthy events, national issues and controversies, and bits of historical lore and legend promptly became this genre's stock-in-trade. Headline hunting even spawned the docudrama, a logical extension of the high-concept formula, whose accessible style adapted equally well to the telefeature and the mini-series.

Contrary to popular opinion, television movies have never functioned as byproducts of the motion picture industry, even though many examples from this genre were once produced by several of the more established and prominent corporate names in Hollywood, including Universal TV, Columbia's Screen Gems, Paramount TV, and 20 Century-Fox TV. Likewise, TV films were never designed as "B" products by the executives and above-the-line talent from the television industry who worked within this genre; nor were telefeatures and mini-series ever presumed to be second-rate forms by the tens of millions of American television watchers who have regularly tuned into these feature-length TV programs over the past 27 years. ABC, CBS, and NBC presently attract an average of more than 30 million viewers for a typical primetime made-for-TV film, whereas only 20 million people attend all the movies in all the theaters nationwide each week. Like the television medium itself, the popularity of television movies in sheer numbers is truly revolutionary.

The core audience for movies made-for-TV (generally women between the ages of 18 and 49) also varies widely from the distinctly younger grouping (67 percent are 12 to 29, with the most targeted segment being teenaged males between 17 and 19) that most frequently attends theatrical motion pictures in the United States. Besides nudity, profanity, and graphic violence, matures themes and message pictures are actually more common on the small screen today, reflecting the more seasoned perspective of TV's older and broader audience. As early as 1969, the television movie has served as a pioneer into bolder and untapped subject areas on primetime. The broadcast standards departments at the three networks traditionally allowed this genre more freedom in its handling of controversial topics because of its noncontinuous format and because of the TV movie's special quality and higher status within the sphere of nighttime programming.

Not all television films have challenged the strictest parameters of primetime, of course, as many have fallen victim to the ratings imperative and rendered the controversial sentimental, trivialized the poignant, and turned scores of high concepts into clichés. To renew our understanding of TV movies, however, it is fundamental to remember the economic and industrial conditions in which television films are made (just as it is critical for future research to begin analyzing the core viewers who most attend to this genre). The best made-for-TV movies of any year, such as *Playing for Time* (1980), *Something About Amelia* (1984), or *Lonesome Dove* (1989), are as meaningful to their viewers within the dictates of television as any theatrical motion picture is to its audience within the separate context of cinema.

**Appendix 1 Estimated Cost per Episode of First-Run Primetime Fare
(in Hundred of Dollars)**

Season	Thirty-minute sitcom	One-hour drama	Two-hour made-for- TV movie	Theatrical movies	
				Production cost for major movie studios	Lease price to networks
1955-1956	30.0	67.5	—	1,100.0	100.0
1960-1961	49.5	105.5	—	1,300.0	180.0
1965-1966	72.5	155.0	300.0	1,500.0	290.0
1970-1971	98.5	205.0	400.0	1,750.0	725.0
1975-1976	115.0	255.0	775.0	4,000.0	1,100.0
1980-1981	265.0	525.0	1,475.0	8,500.0	Not available
1985-1986	365.0	765.0	2,275.0	12,000.0	2,300.0
1989-1990	455.0	925.0	2,475.0	18,500.0	Not available

SOURCES: Compiled from data found in Charles S. Aaronson, ed., *1965 International Motion Picture Almanac*, 37th ed. (New York: Quigley, 1965), p. 64A; "Curtain Falling on Theatrical Films on TV," *Broadcasting*, 3 September 1984, pp. 42, 44; John Dempsey, "Majors Pass or Vidpix, Minis," *Daily Variety*, 17 October 1984, pp. 1, 11; Richard Gertner, ed., *1987 International Motion Picture Almanac*, 58th ed. (New York: Quigley, 1987), p. 32A; Lawrence W. Lichty and Malachi C. Topping, eds., *A Source Book on the History of Radio and Television* (New York: Hastings, 1975), p. 440; "Prime-Time Program Costs: A Three Decade Analysis," *Media Matters: The Newsletter for the Media and Advertising Industries*, August 1986, pp. 8-9; "The Returning Shows," *Channels*, September 1986, pp. 58-59; and "Can the Major Networks Curb Primetime Program Costs Over 'Long Haul?'" *Media Matters: The Newsletter for the Media and Advertising Industries*, November 1989, pp. 8-9.

Appendix 2 The Most Popular Telefeatures, 7 October 1964 through 10 June 1990

Rank	Show name	Date	Network	Rating	Share
1	<i>The Day After</i>	11/20/83	ABC	46.0	62
2	<i>Helter Skelter</i> (Part 2)	4/2/76	CBS	37.5	60
3	<i>Little Ladies of the Night</i>	1/16/77	ABC	36.9	53
4	<i>The Burning Bed</i>	10/8/84	NBC	36.2	52
5	<i>Helter Skelter</i> (Part 1)	4/1/76	CBS	35.2	57
6	<i>The Waltons' Thanksgiving Story</i>	11/15/73	CBS	33.5	51
7	<i>Night Stalker</i>	1/11/72	ABC	33.2	48
8	<i>A Case of Rape</i>	2/20/74	NBC	33.1	49
9 (tie)	<i>Return to Mayberry</i>	4/13/86	NBC	33.0	49
	<i>Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders</i>	1/14/79	ABC	33.0	48
11	<i>Brian's Song</i>	11/30/71	ABC	32.9	48
12	<i>Fatal Vision</i> (Part 2)	11/19/84	NBC	32.7	49
13 (tie)	<i>Women in Chains</i>	1/24/72	ABC	32.3	48
	<i>Jesus of Nazareth</i> (Part 1)	4/3/77	NBC	32.3	50
15	<i>Something About Amelia</i>	1/9/84	ABC	31.9	46
16	<i>Heidi</i>	11/17/68	NBC	31.8	47
17 (tie)	<i>Guyana Tragedy: The Story of Jim Jones</i> (Part 2)	4/16/80	CBS	31.7	50
	<i>My Sweet Charlie</i>	1/20/70	NBC	31.7	48
19	<i>Feminist and the Fuzz</i>	1/26/71	ABC	31.6	46
20 (tie)	<i>Something for Joey</i>	4/6/77	CBS	31.5	51
	<i>Dawn: Portrait of a Teenage Runaway</i>	9/27/76	NBC	31.5	46

SOURCES: Compiled from data found in "Hit Movies on U.S. TV Since '61," *Variety*, 24 January 1990, pp. 160, 162; and "The Best and Worst by the Numbers," *TV Guide*, 7 July 1990, p. 13.

**Appendix 3 The Most Popular Mini-Series,
13 November 1973 Through 10 June 1990**

Rank	Show name	Date	Network	Rating	Share
1	<i>Roots</i>	1/77	ABC	45.0	66
2	<i>The Thorn Birds</i>	3/83	ABC	41.9	59
3	<i>The Winds of War</i>	2/83	ABC	38.6	53
4	<i>Shogun</i>	9/80	NBC	32.6	51
5	<i>How the West Was Won</i>	2/77	ABC	32.5	50
6	<i>Holocaust</i>	4/78	NBC	31.1	49
7	<i>Roots: The Next Generation</i>	2/79	ABC	30.2	45
8	<i>Pearl</i>	11/78	ABC	28.6	45
9	<i>Rich Man, Poor Man</i>	4/76	ABC	27.0	43
10 (tie)	<i>79 Park Avenue</i>	10/77	NBC	26.7	40
	<i>Master of the Game</i>	2/84	CBS	26.7	39
12	<i>Masada</i>	4/81	ABC	26.5	41
13	<i>Scruples</i>	2/80	CBS	26.3	40
14	<i>Lonesome Dove</i>	2/89	CBS	26.1	39
15	<i>North and South</i>	11/85	ABC	26.0	38
16	<i>The blue and the Gray</i>	11/82	CBS	25.9	39
17	<i>East of Eden</i>	2/81	ABC	25.7	37

SOURCES: Compiled from data found in Alvin H. Marill, ed., *Movies Made for Television: the Telefeature and the Mini-Series, 1964-1986* (New York: Zoetrope, 1987); David L. Wolper, "Yes, A.D. and Space Died—but don't Bury the Miniseries Form Yet," *TV Guide*, 5 October 1985, pp. 6-11; "The Best and Worst by the Numbers," *TV Guide*, 27 June 1987, p. 13; "Dove' Pulls CBS Up the Ladder," *Broadcasting*, 20 February 1989, p. 39; and "The Best and Worst by the Numbers," *TV Guide*, 7 July 1990, p. 13.

NOTES

1. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 116.
2. For two of the better examples, see Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Operas* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); and Robert Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1985).
3. For a review of the literature on the made-for-television movie, see Gary Edgerton, "The American Made-for-TV Movie," in *TV Genres: A Handbook and Reference Guide*, ed. Brian G. Rose (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985), pp. 173-175; and the works cited in Gregory Waller, "Re-placing *The Day After*," *Cinema Journal* 26 (Spring 1987), pp. 3-20. Also see Laurie Schulze, "Getting Physical: Text/Context/Reading and the Made-for-Television Movie," *Cinema Journal* 25 (Winter 1986), pp. 35-60; and Elayne Rapping, "Made for TV Movies: The Domestication of Social Issue," *Cineaste* 14, No. 2 (1985), pp. 30-33.
4. Laurence Jarvik and Nancy Strickland, "TV Movies—Better Than the Real Thing (Are You Kidding?)," *American Film*, December 1988, pp. 40-43, 56.
5. Douglas Gomery, "Brian's Song: Television, Hollywood, and the Evolution of the Movie Made for Television," in *American History/American Television: Interpreting the Video Past*, ed. John E. O'Connor, with a foreword by Erik Barnouw (New York: Ungar, 1983), pp. 215-216.
6. A *telefeature* is a self-contained filmed or videotaped narrative for television of four hours or fewer that is scheduled over no more than two primetime evenings. The *mini-series* further extends the sweep of the made-for-television movie into at least "three broadcast parts,"

- according to the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, and typically presents a historical saga or a literary epic in more than four hours.
7. "All-Time Top 75 Programs," *Variety*, 17–23 May 1989, p. 66.
 8. Judith Crist, "The 10-Best TV-Movies of 1979," *TV Guide*, 29 December 1979, p. 2.
 9. Judith Crist, "Tailored for Television," *TV Guide*, 30 August 1969, p. 6.
 10. Darrell Y. Hamamoto, "Interview with Television Producer Rod Amateau of *Dukes of Hazzard*," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 9 (Winter 1982), p. 166; and Alvin H. Marill, ed., *Movies Made for Television* (New York: De Capo, 1980), p. 10.
 11. Douglas Brode, "The Made-for-TV Movie: Emergence of an Art Form," *Television Quarterly* 156 (Fall 1981), p. 55.
 12. "Specials, Specials," *The Hollywood Reporter: Television's Fall Issue*, September 1978, pp. 29–30. Longform spectaculars were developed at NBC but soon became popular with all three networks. These specials routinely exhibited the ability to attract viewers from the opposition, allowing NBC, for example, to "stunt" or promote itself and its upcoming programming to a newer and wider audience.
 13. Bill Davidson, "Every Night at the Movies," *Saturday Evening Post*, 7 October 1967, p. 32.
 14. Henry Ehrlich, "Every Night at the Movies," *Look*, 7 September 1971, p. 62.
 15. Alvin H. Marill, ed., *Movies Made for Television: The Telefeature and the Mini-Series, 1964–1986* (New York: Zoetrope, 1987), pp. 459–566.
 16. "Johnny North," *TV Guide*, 2 May 1964, p. 8.
 17. Henry Harding, "First Attempts at Making Movies for TV," *TV Guide*, 4 July 1964, p. 14.
 18. "Johnny North," p. 9.
 19. Davidson, p. 32.
 20. Crist, "Tailored for Television," p. 7.
 21. John Izod, *Hollywood and the Box Office, 1895–1986* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 173–174.
 22. These percentages are compiled from data found in Alvin H. Marill, ed., *Movies Made for Television*, pp. 11–99.
 23. For background information on the legal problems experienced by the networks as a result of their production activities, see Michael Conant, "The Paramount Decrees Reconsidered," in *The American Film Industry*, rev. ed., ed. Tino Balio (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 537–573; and Gary Edgerton and Cathy Pratt, "The Influence of the Paramount Decision on Network Television in America," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 8 (Summer 1983), pp. 9–23.
 24. Marill, *Movies Made for Television*, pp. 11–99.
 25. Daniel Menaker, "Television: Apposite Reactions," *Film Comment*, July–August 1980, p. 76.
 26. Thomas Guback, "Theatrical Film," in *Anatomy of the Communications Industry: Who Owns the Media?* ed. Benjamin M. Compaine (White Plains, NY: Knowledge Industry, 1982), p. 247.
 27. Christopher H. Sterling and Timothy R. Haight, eds., *The Mass Media: Aspen Institute Guide to Communication Industry Trends* (New York: Praeger, 1978), pp. 297–298.
 28. Women are highlighted because research data support the contention that they make most of the buying decisions in American households, except for a few product such as cars, life insurance, and beer. In addition, counterprogramming strategies determine the demographic variation; for example, *NBC Monday Night at the Movies* has long emphasized family dramas and strong women characters to compete against the traditionally male-oriented, action entertainment of *ABC Monday Night Football*.

29. William I. Kaufman, ed., *Great Television Plays*, with an introduction by Ned E. Hoopes (New York: Dell, 1969), p. 10.
30. Richard Levinson and William Link, *Stay Tuned* (New York: Ace, 1981), p. 28.
31. Levinson and Link, p. 4.
32. Dwight Whitney, "The Boom in Made-for-TV Movies: Cinema's Stepchild Grows Up," *TV Guide*, 20 July 1974, p. 26.
33. Levinson and Link, p. 41.
34. Cobbett Steinberg, *TV Facts*, rev. and updated (New York: Facts on File, 1985), pp. 79–81.
35. Pauline Kael, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (New York: Bantam, 1971), p. 277.
36. Patrick Milligan, "Movies Are Better Than Ever—On Television," *American Film*, March 1980, p. 52.
37. Milligan, p. 52.
38. Benjamin Stein, "Words That Sell in TV-Movie Titles," *TV Guide*, 25 July 1981, p. 34.
39. "Movies on the Tube," *Newsweek*, 10 April 1972, p. 87.
40. ABC Circle Films is ABC's telefilm subsidiary and was wholly separate from ABC Pictures, the theatrical film entity. Similarly, CBS Cinema Center was part of the film industry, whereas CBS Entertainment and NBC Production are part of the television industry.
41. These estimates are compiled from data found in Marill, *Movies Made for Television*, pp. 147–315.
42. John Dempsey, "Majors Pass on Vidpix, Minis," *Daily Variety*, 17 October 1984, pp. 1, 11.
43. Joseph D. Zaleski, "Successful Syndication of Completed Motion Pictures to Television," in *The Selling of Motion Pictures in the '80s: New Producer/Distributor/Exhibitor Relationships*, eds., Peter J. Dekom, Michael I. Adler, David Ginsburg, and Michael H. Lauer (Los Angeles: The Regents of the University of California, 1980), p. 292.
44. Dempsey, p. 11.
45. The first move toward extending the telefeature beyond two nights was NBC and Lorimar's *The Blue Knight*, which telecasted from 13 November through 16 November 1973. This drama was not longer than the four-hour requirement for a mini-series, though, nor did NBC follow it up until 30 September, 7, 14, 28 October, 4, 11 November 1976 with the nine-hour *Captains and Kings*.
46. Stephen Zito, "Out of Africa," *American Film*, October 1976, pp. 8–17.
47. "The Effects of 'Roots' Will Be with TV for a Long Time," *Broadcasting*, 7 February 1977, p. 52.
48. Dwight Whitney, "When Miniseries Become Megaflops," *TV Guide*, 19 July 1980, p. 3.
49. "Running the Numbers: Megadrop in Miniseries," *Channels*, March 1989, p. 72.
50. Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1956), p. 34.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why are made-for-TV movies more closely associated with exploring social issues than are series TV shows? Does this still hold true?
2. What is a "docudrama" and how does it differ from both documentary and drama? Why did the 1970s see a rise in this form?

3. This author does not specifically mention the strong emphasis on female characters and issues of particular concern to women in the made-for-TV movies, but it can be seen in his list of the most highly rated. Race, too, is frequently a narrative element. How do these emphases mesh with the industrial framework discussed?
4. How did the passage of the financial interest and syndication (fin/syn) rules affect made-for-TV movie production? What about the introduction of PBS?



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Look under "miniseries" and "docudrama" on InfoTrac College Edition to follow up on this topic. Also see titles of specific made-for-TV movies and series.

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