

# *The Birmingham Post*

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## ***The Birmingham Post Debate: ‘Why American TV is thinking out of the box’.***

Where are the best television shows made – Britain or America? Adam Aspinall looks at the issue and two experts – Dan Jones, a BAFTA winning editor, and Dr Gëzim Alpion, a lecturer in Media and Film Studies – compare the programmes on offer on both sides of the Atlantic. *Is States the best?* – Dan Jones says the small number of high-quality American TV shows don’t make up for other programmes. *Is British the best?* – Dr Gëzim Alpion feels American shows bear no resemblance to real life.

### *A fairytale land that we just don’t live in*

By Dr Gëzim Alpion

Like all nations, the British and American television networks have produced their own fair share of pearls and obvious rubbish.

For almost half a century we have imported to, and exported from, the Americans some wonderful programmes, as well as some pure nonsense.

Television programmes like *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire*, *The Weakest Link* and *Pop Idol* are not necessarily every viewer's cup of tea in this country – certainly not mine – but they seem to have drawn the attention of TV executives and audiences in the States.

Apparently, there must be something good we can still do in Britain. *The Office* is the latest British export to the US, and we have to wait and see what the Americans will do with it.

Some American TV shows, like *Friends*, *Frasier* and *The Simpsons*, are quite funny.

The problem with them is that, like most Hollywood films, they introduce our audiences not to the real America but to a fairytale land where people seem to experience none of the problems an ordinary citizen in the US would go through on a daily basis.

The tendency in American films and television to ignore reality, to beautify it, is followed closely by the Australian television, especially in soaps like *Neighbours*.

American television humour is fun to watch but it's fun without content.

In spite of the clever script and superb acting, *Friends* remains the closest we can get to laughter for laughter's sake.

Which is hardly the case in the best British sitcoms, especially *Only Fools and Horses* where fun, tears, comedy and tragedy blend superbly.

*My Family* and *My Hero* are clear signs that laughter for the sake of laughter à la American style is well on the way to becoming one of the features of contemporary British sitcoms, which is a pity.

Channel 4 became watchable mainly as a result of some American hits like *Fraser* and *Friends*, an example Channel Five are keen to follow.

The BBC does not broadcast American sitcoms but *My Family* and *My Hero* seem to indicate that the corporation's executives feel they have to make sure that they too can feed their viewers with a dose of contentless humour.

Like the tabloid editors, the British executives often justify the Americanisation of British television by arguing they broadcast the programmes the viewers want to watch.

The British producers have apparently forgotten the Reithian maxim: 'Don't give them what they want, give them something better'.

- *Dr Gëzim Alpion is a lecturer in Media and Film Studies at the Department of Sociology at the University of Birmingham*