



**Discourses of Anxiety  
over Childhood and Youth  
across Cultures**

*Edited by*  
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Uncertain Abuse and Insider Credentials:  
Examining Ambiguous Cultural  
Representations of Childhood Sexual  
Abuse in the 2005 British Comedy Series  
'Nathan Barley'

*Bethany Rose Lamont*

INTRODUCTION: THE 'INAUTHENTIC' CSA SURVIVOR IN EARLY  
TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY BRITISH SCREEN COMEDY

To approach the contentious space of child sexual abuse (CSA) one must be mindful of the political contexts that underpin such engagements. CSA is understandably a phrase that carries great weight, for all three terms in this phrase, 'child', 'sexual' and 'abuse' are moveable, and rooted in the ideas of acceptability in the cultures we inhabit (Hacking 1991, 1995).<sup>1</sup> They exist not simply as words, but as constantly shifting manifestations of the moral sensibilities of the popular imagination. In the context of early twenty-first-century Britain, the crime of CSA, and the myths and monsters of who can perpetuate such a crime, who can be the victim of such

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a trauma and even, who can occupy the state of childhood, entangle with wider anxieties surrounding race, gender, class, cultural capital, youth culture and mass media (Wilson and Silverman 2002).<sup>2</sup> These fears of naming and identifying such a frightening figure are in turn exaggerated within the British screen comedy of the time, providing a revealing cultural artefact of the confused and often contradictory public debates surrounding child protection during this period (Lockyer and Attwood 2009).<sup>3</sup>

The study comprises of a close reading of the character of Mandy in the 2005 British Channel Four television satire *Nathan Barley*, written by Chris Morris and Charlie Brooker. This is an adult (white, cis-gender) woman character whose seemingly fabricated position as a CSA survivor serves as the comic force behind the sixth episode of the series. Tensions of the inauthentic, unreliable survivor will be analysed through this screen comedy, with its performative medium mirroring the suspicions towards the uncertain subject of CSA, East London counterculture and documentary broadcasting in early twenty-first-century Britain. The chapter will recognise how such a paradoxical character evokes what essayist Leslie Jamison defines as the 'joke' of female suffering in her 2014 essay '*Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain*' (Jamison 2014).<sup>4</sup> This study is taken with the hope of provoking a wider discussion around the anxieties of CSA cultural representation, closely considering the function of authenticity, misogyny and cultural capital in this humorous example. Whilst, in incorporating both British cultural texts (*Nathan Barley*) and an American theorist (Leslie Jamison), this television study intends to reflect the cross-contamination of CSA mythologies across so-called 'Western', English language speaking, countries. Thus, creating a study of trauma narratives that are both localised and globalised. CSA policy has a similar American-centric history, with US research, theory, criminal terminology and anti-sexual violence movements shaping British understanding and prosecution of CSA (Jenkins 1992).<sup>5</sup>

By selecting an example embedded in the satire and subcultural capital of early twenty-first-century British comedy, the chapter intends to offer a broad introduction to the many incarnations of this previously under researched character trope. This will provide the opportunity to interrogate cultural anxieties of CSA representation within both print and digital mediums. The chapter will use the comic lens of *Nathan Barley* to explore and identify anxieties surrounding the moral worth of mass media of the period, from explicit countercultural magazines, Lolita inflected music videos, and even the seemingly

serious genre of documentary film (Giroux 2000; Bignell 2014; Rothe 2011).<sup>6</sup> Each medium is presented in the television series as entangled and exploitative of the theme of CSA and will be analysed accordingly. Created at a time of moral panic around CSA within British media, the series should be understood in relation to a wider genre of British early 2000s CSA themed satirical comedy. This includes the BBC Three animated series *Monkey Dust* (2003–2005) and the *Brass Eye* special episode ‘Paedogeddon!’ (2001).<sup>7</sup>

Distinct from the false rape accusation plot line but equally embedded in wider conversations on women as unreliable, unbelievable and inauthentic, this study considers the character trope of a cartoonish adult woman’s confession of a fictitious childhood trauma and the humorous elements that underpin this act. To understand the context of these comic inflected would-be victim characters, it is necessary to understand not just the ambiguous and uncertain space of CSA definition but also an existing distaste for expressions of gendered psychological distress. This is what Leslie Jamison, in her 2014 essay ‘*Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain*’ defines as ‘a broader disdain for pain that is understood as performed rather than legitimately felt’ (Jamison 2014, 190). This disdain, Jamison argues, serves as an attempt to ‘draw a boundary between authentic and fabricated pain’ and is pertinent when considering the tension between supposed real-life events of CSA and their cultural representations (ibid., 191). These debates of authenticity and falsehood are grounded in a feminist framework of analysis and are contextualised and defined within Simone De Beauvoir’s argument of the woman as an unconvincing copy to the ‘original’ male (De Beauvoir 2010).<sup>8</sup>

Such cultural manifestations are distinctly focussed on cis-centric, middle class, white ideals of the failings and fallibility of well to do women and poor little rich girls.<sup>9</sup> Here the seriousness of the crime and the misogynistic myth of the shallowness of women creates a comical by-pass. CSA is presented as an essentially authentic trauma, with the contradiction that (white) women’s work is seen as attention seeking, phony and so forth (Jamison 2014).<sup>10</sup> These issues will be closely interrogated through the character of Mandy, utilising these tensions to analyse broader anxieties surrounding the moral value of British media representations of CSA during this time. This analysis will be developed through the study of the character of Nathan Barley, who functions as a symbol of the fakery of East London 2000s

counterculture, with his appropriation of the CSA subject as a form of provocative cultural capital being a key focus of interrogation. This discussion will be developed further through the character of Claire Ashcroft who symbolises anxieties surrounding the self-righteous and exploitative nature of British broadcasting towards vulnerable subjects (Kitzinger 2004).<sup>11</sup>

Alongside the theory of Jamison, the study will be grounded in the scholarship around early twenty-first-century British CSA cultural representation, focussing particularly on the work of Jason Lee due to his focus on the pop-cultural CSA confession.<sup>12</sup> Social and legal studies of the moral panic surrounding CSA, as well as broader fears surrounding mass media in early twenty-first-century Britain and beyond will be drawn upon. Textual analysis will also be informed through accompanying screen related texts, such as film reviews, interviews and think piece style journalism. This is with the intention of grounding the chosen examples within their relevant historical context, in order to better understand the significance and symbolism of the CSA subject within the time and place of its creation.

### ‘AMBIGUOUS ABUSE’: CSA REPRESENTATION AS SUBCULTURAL CAPITAL IN ‘NATHAN BARLEY’

The 2005 British comedy *Nathan Barley* is a six-episode series broadcast on Channel Four following the show’s self-titled character, Nathan Barley, as he attempts to establish his identity in the mid-2000s world of East London counterculture. Played by Nicholas Burns, the exaggerated antagonist is used to denote the excess and opportunism of counterculture, both online and off. Described by Brooker as an ‘an odious twentysomething upper-middle-class media wannabe’, the audience is invited to laugh at the various lengths he goes to assimilate and embody this imagined space of cultural cool (Pettie 2005). Whilst straight faced lead characters, such as the siblings Dan and Claire Ashcroft, operate to problematise a simplistic binary of morality in media representation. Here the pious figures of serious media are inflected with villainy, their hypocrisy and self-righteousness nature consistently emphasised. In each episode these characters are set up to lose against our anti-hero Nathan. For as Burns explains, ‘Nathan will just not die. Whatever happens, someone like him always comes out on top’ (Harrison 2015).

Described ten years after its release as ‘less a comedy and more a documentary about the future’, *Nathan Barley* presents a satirical vision of self-promotion, performative cruelty, social climbing and subcultural capital (ibid.). The show forms a provocative foundation to interrogate the positioning of CSA representations, with its aesthetics of interpersonal violence, within counterculture. This a key focus of debate within the fifth episode of the series, which explores anxieties surrounding the ethics of CSA representation in both mass and marginal culture, and is the central focus of this chapter. Through comic exaggeration, it provokes wider discussions on the issues of utilising childhood trauma as content for cultural capital and personal branding. This is a conversation that is inherently rooted in uncertainty, the confusion of who is an ‘idiot’ and who is a ‘genius’, who is a ‘monster’ and who is simply a ‘poser’, playing at the role of the abuser. These uncertainties should be situated within the social anxieties surrounding CSA during this period of British history, with Nathan Barley serving as continuation of Charlie Brooker and Chris Morris’s earlier satire of CSA panic, most notably the controversial 2001 *Brass Eye* episode ‘Paedogeddon!’<sup>13</sup> Whilst *Brass Eye* lampooned the sensational news reporting of CSA, Nathan Barley interrogates British cultural connections to CSA within the context of the booming creative industries of the time. This industry was concentrated within the East London district of Shoreditch, a space that became shorthand for issues of inner-city gentrification, upper-middle-class entitlement, dot com investments, trust fund start-ups and ironic trendsetters.<sup>14</sup> The ambiguous economics of this space is explained by Neil Boorman, creator of the fanzine ‘The Shoreditch Twat’. Boorman argues that Shoreditch, by the very nature of its success was rooted in uncertainty because, ‘such was the gold rush to Shoreditch that it became difficult to distinguish between genuine creatives and opportunistic charlatans’ (Boorman 2005). This instability between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘idiocy’ and ‘visionary’, and the power and potential these dubious spaces possess, is uncompromisingly emphasised by Brooker and Morris, who describes Barley as:

A bulletproof pebblehead assured of his own brilliance; a preposterous, swaggering swingcock who spends more time contemplating ringtones than the difference between right or wrong, or even up and down; creator of the virulently asinine Trashbat website; a DJ, a film-maker, a berk, a goon, a nurk, and a great big galloping fartbox - Nathan Barley could

be accused of being the principal gushpout of all the world's idiocy, if he were not, alas, merely the principal tool in a shed full of clots. Close equivalents of Barley exist in every walk of life - they are the loudmouthed twits who seem too oafish to do any harm, until you wake up one morning to find one of them has taken your job. (Brooker and Morris 2005)

Morris and Brooker actively problematise the borders between pain and performance, and the endless cycle of violence and vacuousness these structures produce. This vicious system is first introduced through Nathan's career as prank web show host. Here he films cruel tricks on his assistant Pingu (played by Ben Whishaw) to be posted on his website 'Trashbat.co.uk' for his own personal gain. These scenes instantly establish the series' running questions surrounding the borders of acceptability in British entertainment of this time. These are the early twenty-first-century anxieties of who is laughing at what, and why, and how new media such as the internet and mobile phones are pushing these boundaries further, through utilising the position of humour to deflect from accountability for interpersonal harm.<sup>15</sup> Here Barley serves as a fearful warning of the dangers and destruction of such forms of media production.

The writers embrace and exaggerate the contradiction and confusion of early 2000s East London youth culture, through the intentionally absurd dialogue its characters utter. From interspersing nonsensical catchphrases such as 'Michael-fucking-Jackson', 'it's well brown', 'fuck you later', 'well futile' and 'keep it plastic' into casual conversation, to Nathan's declarations that his website *Trashbat* 'is the 9/11 of the mind' and can be summarised as 'two people leaping from the twin towers but they're fucking on the way down'.<sup>16</sup> This is the obscene bravado of the meaningless statement. A provocation posing as insider cool, a point increasingly exaggerated over the course of the six-episode season as we follow the grotesque lengths Nathan will go to ensure his status as an insider of East London counterculture. This is a space of cultural consumption where a reaction is greater than a positive response, because the object of production has no fixed meaning for either its creator or its audience. As the manipulative character of Jonatton Yeah?, played by Charlie Condou, summarises, 'stupid people think it's cool. smart people think it's a joke, also cool'.<sup>17</sup> Working as the editor of the youth culture print magazine 'Sugar Ape', Jonatton specialises in the creation of controversy to stoke sales, particularly through playing with the language

of sexual violence. A point introduced in the first episode through Jonatton's logo redesign, first seen by the horrified Sugar Ape staffer Dan Ashcroft (played by Julian Barratt):

*Dan Ashcroft:* That's not the new logo is it? Rape?

*Sasha:* No it's still sugar ape but the s-u-g-a is inside the r.<sup>18</sup>

The language of violence is something to accessorise with, to hide within, the print magazine title nestling within the invocation of sexual violence (Shinkle 2008).<sup>19</sup> It also functions as a trick, a border between the outraged outsider and the smugly in the knowing insider, a point summarised in all its silliness by Sugar Ape staff members, Rufus Onslatt (played by Spencer Brown) and Ned Smanks (played by Richard Ayoade), two supporting characters who function to emphasise the absurdity and exploitation of this countercultural space. The back and forth set up of the dialogue, exaggerating the vision of an elitist in crowd, ignorantly egging one another on:

*Rufus Onslatt:* They think they're getting pissed off by rape, yeah

*Ned Smanks:* Except it's not even rape, it's still ape.

*Rufus Onslatt:* So yeah so they're getting pissed off at ape<sup>20</sup>

The fifth episode pushes these borders of acceptability even further, opening with Sugar Ape's launch of a controversial photo shoot, carefully curated for maximum publicity. We are shown dimly lit fashion photographs of young white women, we are not yet sure of their age but they appear to be in their teens. They are styled childishly with pigtails, knee-high socks and straw boaters, and are shown in various states of undress. Ned and Rufus are shown lurking in the background of each image, providing an increased sense of unease to an already dubious set of images. The shoot is explained in all its ambiguity once again by Rufus and Ned in an online interview for Nathan's website 'Trash Bat' at the promotional party:

*Nathan Barley:* So what's the fucking concept?

*Rufus:* Right yeah well the idea yeah was to make it look like these models had been molested in a magazine office, yeah

*Ned:* When actually that's sort of what was really happening

*R:* Yeah, only because we're all on it yeah it isn't

*N:* Except we were actually touching them it kind of is.

*NB:* Yeah I touched two of them [laughs] they were really up for it though. (Nathan Barley, episode 5)

Here the back and forth dialogue takes a more sinister tone, far from the self-congratulatory standing of the ‘Sugar Ape/Rape’ conversation, the fast-paced narration of molestation emphasises the uncertain space of sexual violence, the question of who can be proved and disproved of committing a sex crime. The shifting spoken word of sexual violence isn’t merely cultural credibility in this scene, it is an uncanny weapon, with the accompanying photographs of Ned and Rufus interacting with these ‘molested’ models only furthering its uncomfortable affect. Who is in on a joke is one thing, who is in on consenting sex is another. The questionable concept of engaging with abuse aesthetics is developed further when it transpires that the magazine shoot is also exploring (and supposedly actually depicting) themes of CSA. This is explained in a television interview with Sugar Ape editor and mastermind behind the shoot, Jonatton Yeah?:

*Interviewer:* Printing pictures of topless thirteen-year-old girls is illegal isn’t it?

*Jonatton Yeah?:* It would be if they were thirteen.

*I:* Well how old are they?

*JY:* Over 18 etc.

*I:* And can you prove that

*JY:* Have you read it?

*I:* Of course

*JY:* Even the bit here that says all our models are six years older than there stated age? (ibid.)

The falsified images of CSA are presented as simply another inside joke for the subcultural elite of Sugar Ape, designed to both provoke outrage and skirt accountability. These interpersonal engagements with the ambiguous, and uncertain CSA survivor, whose trauma is seen as performed rather than truly experienced is interrogated through the CSA survivor character of Mandy (played by Ophelia Lovibond). Introduced as one of the ‘thirteen-year-old’ models, she is characterised by her cocaine addiction and troubled image. Describing herself as ‘completely out of control’, she explains that ‘I have no idea what I’m doing’ (ibid.). Her confusing confession of CSA, is played

out against loud music in a club, making this hard to follow story also, quite literally, hard to hear:

*Mandy:* Look, you really don't want a drink with me I'm quite fucked up.  
*Nathan:* Yeah I do! Fucked up is great! I'm well fucked up!  
*M:* No, I mean really fucked up  
*N:* Hit me  
*M:* Look you really don't want to know  
*N:* I can take it bring it on  
*M:* Well, I have bonobo syndrome  
*N:* Yeah? Really? What's the problem?  
*M:* You know the monkeys that fuck each other all the time  
*N:* Brilliant. And?  
*M:* My Uncle fucked me when I was eight  
 [uncomfortable pause]  
*N:* I'll kill him!  
*M:* I mean he didn't, I just though he did which is like was doing it to myself and Mummy said that was worse.  
*N:* [uncomfortable pause] Yeah!  
*M:* I mean I don't even have an uncle.  
*N:* Oh what!  
*M:* I'm in music therapy for it.  
*N:* Huh?  
*M:* My therapist gets me to write songs about uncles and we record them  
 (ibid.)

Nathan, embraces this ambiguous CSA experience, thus locating her within the contradictory mythology of the beautifully damaged young white woman in popular culture (Giroux 2000, 69). This is what Jamison summarises as a contradictory 'Janus-faced relationship to female pain. We're attracted to it and revolted by it' (Jamison 2014, 213). The addition of Mandy's 'Bonobo syndrome', references the hyper sexualisation of the unreliable and often unbelieved CSA survivor further, and solidifies her position as a cultural object rather than a nuanced character (Rothe 2011).<sup>21</sup> She is just another trend to opt in and out of, to buy and sell to this increasingly jaded subculture. Describing her with admiration as a 'gorgeous mess' and 'well troubled', Nathan, confident in his creative vision, decides to shoot her CSA story as a lurid music video.<sup>22</sup> He proposes that this should be included in a serious documentary feature about social injustice. This itself serves as a pointed criticism of the opportunistic nature of how survivor's harrowing narratives were

being embraced for mass consumption during this period (Korte and Zipp 2014).<sup>23</sup>

The music video possesses a kinderwhore aesthetic, with a purple, pink, silver and blue palette and a synth style electronic track (Munford 2007, 270). Tinfoil clouds that read 'what about me', 'little mandy', 'don't wrong me', 'shhh', 'crack head' and 'coke baby', spelled out in childish alphabet fridge magnets, rotate slowly above the oversized cot in which she sings. Mandy is styled in a pink hairband, pink clothing and dark rimmed eyes. A pink dummy is tied to the cot. She pouts and raises her eyebrows in her video performance, hugging a cuddly toy orangutan to her chest to represent both her hypersexuality (Bonobo syndrome) and her sexually abusive uncle. She rubs her tearless eyes theatrically as she sings the simple, repetitive lyrics of: 'bad to have a bad uncle/pain, pain of the monkey/I needed, needed a friend/to help/help me to mend/but I found friends could be bad/with this experience I had' (*Nathan Barley*, episode 5).

Here trauma is translated to a technicolour performance, and the moving coordinates of abuse and age brackets are manipulated for capitalist profit. This culminates in Nathan exploiting Mandy's addiction and confused and vulnerable state for 'sexual favours'. He suggests she can 'pay me back now without money' for the £270 she has borrowed, and spent on substance abuse, through oral sex (ibid.). As she performs this act, the sounds of her gagging are interspersed with her 'Bad Uncle' song that Nathan produced, whilst Nathan dances to the music in glee. In short, Nathan becomes the 'bad uncle' to his self-created CSA survivor. However, his joy is quickly interrupted at the discovery that Mandy is 'thirteen'. At first, Nathan is horrified at the realisation he has engaged in sexual acts with an 'underage' girl. This is a discovery he makes whilst midway through the sexual act, going to comic lengths to hide this incriminating information from others. His shame is deeply felt, and his joy when realising that the 'underage' status of the models was a hoax is palpable. However, still embarrassed by the incident, even after he is safely in the knowledge that he is not a sex criminal, Nathan is mortified when Sugar Ape staffers discover he 'got a blow job off a thirteen-year-old' (ibid.). But far from shaming him, they are thrilled, congratulating him with positive reinforcements of, 'no way', 'nice one', 'respect' and 'that's brilliant mate' (ibid.). Once again, the borders of acceptability for abuse are problematised, and sexual violence is positioned as cultural capital. Thus, Nathan, now safe in the borders

between performance and paedophilia uses this hypothetical CSA act as a bragging point, speaking loudly of this escapade on his mobile phone on public transport:

*Nathan Barley*: [talking loudly on bus so all can hear] Matt you rapist! How's it fucking gaping? I'm cool. I've been splashing a few tonsils. Guess the age! Younger...younger. Illegal! Technically a Polanski. Thir-fucking-teen! Thirteen. Thirteen! Absolutely fucking awesome! (ibid.)

But Nathan is no singular villain of this system, Brooker and Morris, similarly questions those who deem themselves above such provocative folly, emphasising their own capacity for harm. Dan Ashcroft, who consistently marks himself as above his fellow Sugar Ape staffers, considering them 'idiots', is presented as selfish, cruel and unlikeable, with Brooker and Morris placing him in increasingly humiliating situations to suggest that he is the most 'idiotic' of them all. Whilst his sister Claire, played by Claire Keelan, is an aspiring documentary film-maker of 'London's underclass' (ibid.). Panned by *Times* critic Caitlin Moran, as another clichéd depiction of 'the miserable, furious women', arguing that, over the course of the series, the character has 'nothing more to do than display exasperated disapproval at the boys, slam a few doors and sigh like a punctured haggis over everything they say' (Moran 2005). Moran attributes this character's failing to her position as 'the moral compass for a whole series' and declares her 'one of the worst TV characters this century', serving as an unpleasant testament to the fact that 'male comedy writers can't seem to create funny women' (ibid.).

This is a reductive reading, that misreads Claire's character function as a simple contrast rather than a challenging parallel to the abuse aesthetics of the show's subcultural spaces. On the surface, Claire may indeed seem like a mere 'moral compass', a surface act encouraged by Keelan's restrained acting style against the exaggerated performances of Ayoade, Brown and Burns. However, through subtle character development across the six episodes, it becomes increasingly clear that the character is no do-gooder. Instead we are presented with a hypocritical, judgemental and self-righteous figure, fetishising poverty, addiction and trauma that she has not experienced under the guise of authenticity. Here Claire stands as a villain character, operating as a critique to the self-righteous binary between moralistic true-life genres and an amoral

or immoral counterculture. She serves as a platform to explore the anxieties surrounding the ethical issues of British documentary broadcasting of the period, a space that was increasingly associated with cruelty and exploitation (Nelson 2011, 33; Bignell 2014, 108–109). Claire is disgusted that television producers respond not with sympathy, but with laughter to her grainy documentary footage of a ‘junkie choir’, with the irony being that she has little respect for the issue of addiction beyond her own career as a ‘political film maker’.

Claire’s only on-screen interaction with a person suffering from addiction is Mandy, and it is dripping with disdain. She describes her dehumanisingly as ‘a sniffer dog in a mini skirt’ and argues that she is an inauthentic woman due to her abuse issues, sniping that ‘she’s so coked up she’s probably stopped menstruating’ (*Nathan Barley*, episode 5). She sees no value in her story because ‘my film is about people with real problems, her only problem is that she had the whole of Selfridges by the time she was five’ (ibid.). Claire only takes an interest in Mandy when, tricked by Sugar Ape’s ‘under age model’ hoax, believes her to be only thirteen, highlighting the movable sympathy for the mentally troubled. Unconcerned with the fact that her brother works in a publication that she believes to be producing child pornography, her only interest is the opportunity to capture the stories of the traumatised for her own personal gain. ‘She is perfect for my film’, ‘she’s a child on coke’, Claire exclaims excitedly to Nathan, making it clear that despite their different cultural positions (the online prankster and sensational music video maker against the gritty documentary creator) they are, in reality, parallel figures (ibid.). When Claire realises she is not a child, she has no relief for Mandy, and only cares that the revelation ‘completely blows my story’ (ibid.).

In the shifting borders of authentic pain in Claire’s judgement of Mandy’s worth as a CSA survivor, and as a woman, we see Jamison’s theory of female pain realised. In suffering from a trauma she has not literally experienced, Mandy’s pain falls into the inauthenticity of affect. This is a system described by Jamison as ‘a causeless pain—inexplicable and seemingly intractable’, that due to its lack of any clear trauma narrative must be dismissed under the ‘sourceless, self-indulgent’ failings of young, (often white and middle to upper class) women.<sup>24</sup>

It is these tensions between affect and impact that are at the heart of *Nathan Barley*’s satirical dissection of abuse as commodity and capital. In opening this discussion within the realm of the subcultural,

with its borders between insiders and outsiders, the story fans outwards to problematise the gritty realism of the documentary subject, so often positioned as the truly authentic deserving figure, to be held against the supposedly fake and selfish Mandy's of the world. This is not merely a representation of CSA survivor, whether unreal or otherwise, but a direct accusation of the industry that fuels the creation of these very characters. Thus, *Nathan Barley* extends beyond its comic criticism of CSA cultural representation, serving as a revealing testament to the overarching anxieties surrounding British media, both mass and marginal, within early twenty-first-century Britain.

### CONCLUSIONS

The *Nathan Barley* series serves as a powerful example of CSA themed comic criticism within early twenty-first-century Britain, embodying the anxiety and uncertainty surrounding CSA during the period. It can thus be situated alongside the work of other political satires of the time such as *Monkey Dust* (2003–2005) and the *Brass Eye* special episode 'Paedogeddon!' (2001). The series utilises the contentious topic of CSA cultural representation as an exaggerated space to explore ethical issues surrounding British media, both mass and marginal, from misogynistic fashion photography to pious documentary broadcasting. The positioning of the show's Shoreditch setting as an ambiguous place where 'genius' and 'idiots' blur drives the comedy of the show, which hinges so often in comic misunderstandings and ethical transgressions.

As Leslie Jamison (2014, 188) argues 'pain that gets performed is still pain' and though *Nathan Barley* utilises the mythology of the inauthentically damaged woman, with her hypersexual allure and lurid cultural output in the character of Mandy, its embrace of ambiguity and problematisation of an originally authentic subject, subverts the misogynistic roots that such figures stem from. This opens a broader conversation on the limits of representation for such a traumatic subject. Through skilful use of comedy, satire, parody and exaggeration the fifth episode of the series provides a uniquely humorous vision of the positioning of CSA as a desirable experience for either abuser or survivor. This contradictory state is utilised as a comic space in which to analyse interpersonal harm, cultural capital, objectifying clichés and

personal prejudices of the deserving victim, whilst also addressing the viewer's own culpability in the very trauma industry in which they critique.

This is developed through the character of Claire Ashcroft, a self-righteous documentary film-maker who seeks to exploit Mandy's alleged experiences of abuse for her own gain. In analysing Claire's character, negative critical receptions of her as a mere 'moral compass' have been actively problematised. Instead Claire is positioned in parallel to Nathan Barley, thus challenging a simplistic binary between the earnest artist, working for social change and the cynical social climber, driven by personal gain. This provokes a wider conversation on the complex web of interpersonal violence that comes with cultural representations of marginalised social subjects in early twenty-first-century Britain. Thus, *Nathan Barley* stands as a provocative testament to the anxiety of uncertainty, both within the act of naming the contentious crime of CSA, the seemingly moveable space of the CSA abuser and the CSA survivor in this series, and the uncertain borders between throwaway youth culture and supposedly serious adult media.

## NOTES

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17. *Nathan Barley*, episode two.
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19. Eugenie Shinkle, *Fashion as Photograph: Viewing and Reviewing Images of Fashion* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 94, 205.
20. *Nathan Barley*, episode one.
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22. *Nathan Barley*, episode five.
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