



Travolta: writes of 'slander'

Travolta begs Channel 4 not to attack Scientology

By Chris Blackhurst

JOHN Travolta, the actor, has written to Michael Jackson, Channel 4's controller, imploring him not to allow the showing of a documentary on the life of L Ron Hubbard, founder of the controversial Church of Scientology.

A committed Scientologist, Mr Travolta accuses Mr Jackson and Alan Hayling, the programme's commissioning editor, of being prepared to slander him and all the members of the church. He claims they seem intent on inciting hatred of the sect, as had been happening in Germany, where the

authorities are suppressing its activities. The actor mysteriously asks whether the persecution of Scientologists will stop only when someone like himself becomes a victim.

The star of *Saturday Night Fever* and *Pulp Fiction* implores the television executives to let true friends of Mr Hubbard, who died in 1986, to be interviewed for the *Secret Lives* edition scheduled for 19 November. The

programme, which has been completed, pulls apart the Hubbard legend, accusing him of being a fraud. Several of those interviewed were among his inner circle.

The sect has reacted with fury to the programme and has fought hard to have it cancelled. Channel 4 has been bombarded with letters and phone calls from members around the world. Senior sect officials have twice had to be asked to leave the channel's London headquarters after turning up and demanding to meet Mr Jackson.

The crew from the independent company making the programme were followed across America and have been visited by private detectives acting for the church at their homes in England. They even visited the stables where the director, Jill Robinson, keeps her horse. She found the visit threatening. "I was not there at the time and I cannot see what they were trying to do except make it clear to me that they knew where I kept my horse," she said. "I regard it as intimidating."

In the past few days, the campaign

against the programme has taken on a surreal aspect, with a camera crew from "Freedom Films", thought to be a Scientology production unit, arriving unannounced and filming the programme makers at their homes.

Mr Hayling said there was no question of the programme being changed or stopped. It was based on factual material and interviews with people who had known Mr Hubbard well. When first asked to cooperate, the church had not responded. Only later did it offer access but on condition that

it had editorial control. Mr Hayling described as "deplorable" the visits of members of the film crew at the homes.

The Church of Scientology said it was "absolutely untrue" that it had initially refused to cooperate. The private detectives were justified, a spokesman said, because the organisation was making its own inquiry into whether those involved in the making of the programme were linked to people America who had been trying to extort cash from it.

Focus: Page

Last night's TV Adam Sweeting

Take me to your lucre

The received wisdom about L Ron Hubbard, founder of the Church of Scientology, is that he was a charlatan and a con-man. **Secret Lives** (Channel 4) confirmed that these perceptions are wholly justified, in a profile of a man who wanted to be bigger than God but ended up as a fridge-magnet version of Howard Hughes.

Hubbard's bizarre character ensured that his story could hardly be less than sensational, even though **Secret Lives** made heavy weather of it. A compulsive fantasist, young Ron found that writing science fiction was easier than telling the truth. He soon became the living exemplar of the Big Lie theory — the more preposterous the

proposition, the more people were likely to believe it. Instead of selling sci-fi, he started selling his own half-baked religion. Soon he had them queuing up to pay 500 bucks to join his Dianetics Auditing Courses.

It was all going so well that Ron thought it might be nice to take over a country. He tried Rhodesia, but Ian Smith gave him the burn's rush. When various other governments banned him, he went to sea, surrounded himself with a coterie of 14-year-old girls, and treated his followers with megalomaniac harshness. His ship's captain, Hana, convinced him that she flew space-craft in a previous life.

Where **Secret Lives** failed was in conveying exactly how Hubbard

managed to get so many people to believe so much transparent bilge, or by what methods Scientologists were able to infiltrate and take over the Florida town of Clearwater.

Perhaps the film-makers' style was cramped by the Scientologists who harassed them relentlessly throughout filming, or by the letter from John Travolta and his Scientific friends to Channel 4's Michael Jackson, urging him not to broadcast the programme. Hubbard's continuing influence is alarming and inexplicable, but the programme didn't discuss it.

The Bubble is apparently what British chaperons call their head-in-the-clouds lifestyle. **Modern Times** (BBC2) packed its Bolle sunglasses and ski-wax and went for a slalom among these high-altitude hedonists. It found a lot of indecisive people who probably weren't having as much fun as they'd like you to think.

Nevertheless, they were still having quite a bit of fun, and while Michael Kitchen's narration seemed

to think it was probing with mordant precision behind the desperate facade of a lost generation of *jeunesse dorée*, in fact the interviews were well aware that they were merely postponing decisions that would have to be made eventually. "Everything continues to be for the best in the best of all possible worlds," intoned Kitchen, but the irony was wasted because his subjects already knew it didn't.

Henrietta, a 23-year-old from Henley-on-Thames, was in Meribel because she couldn't decide what to do with her life. Ollie, oozing self-assurance and just graduated from university, was there to pull girls. His roommate Andy, 32, kept reeling off shrewd philosophical observations about life in The Bubble. "Ollie's just a young boy seeking knowledge," he said oracularly. He fears becoming Meribel's oldest chalet boy, but maybe he should write a book about it. Curiously, nobody said they were in Meribel because they liked skiing.

Inspector Morse (ITV) made

his latest annual appearance in *Death Is Now My Neighbour*, a portentous title for a taut little tale of professional and sexual jealousy, blackmail, murder and crossword puzzles. The plot centred around the selection of a new Master at Lonsdale College, and was a typical Morse-esque farrajo of red herrings and intellectual snobbery.

Mercifully, John Thaw had reined in that exasperating mannerism of growling in the back of his throat, and Richard Briers was perfectly cast as the spiteful philanthropist and manipulative outgoing Master, Sir Clixby Bream.

Love may be in the air between Morse and svelte music teacher Adele Cecil (Judy Loe), but you'll have to wait another year to see if it advances beyond hand-holding and visits to the pub. However, the prospects are good, since Adele was good enough at crosswords to crack Morse's clue to his Christian name: "My whole life's effort has revolved around Eve — nine letters." Oh, come on. It's easy.

Name-calling and cryptic crossword clues

As our schools paddle in the shallow intellectual waters of multiple choice and continuous assessment, how quaint to find **Inspector Morse** (ITV) banging the drum for traditional mental exercise last night by setting us cryptic crossword clues — an extra brain-teaser for those hungry to solve more than just the plot of Colin Dexter's latest Morse saga. *Death Is Now My Neighbour*.

So what, after 31 Morse films, is the man's first name? Humm? "Morse," mumbles John Thaw to his would-be lover, Adele, trying to make it sound as sexy as when Agent 007 introduces himself simply as "Bond." "Everyone just... calls me Morse. I do have a first name, of course, but I'd have to know you better," he adds, which must have made Lewis feel loved.

But when Adele warns the Inspector that he won't get to know her better unless he coughs up his

first name, Morse fudges: "My whole life's effort has revolved around Eve. Nine letters. And that's the truth. The whole truth."

Can you imagine Morse's reaction if a murder suspect he was interviewing tried to be this cute with him? ("Was I at the scene of the crime, Inspector? Well, let me put it this way, if I may — My first is in toy, but not in hot; my second is in hell, but not in hot; my last's not in bet, but is in Bess. So was I at the scene? You'll just have to guess.") Closely followed by "Loowoo! Get this cretin out of my sight, before I do something I'll regret. Like pay for my own pint.")

The anagram of "around Eve", as crossword solvers will know, is *Endeavour*. But why? "My father," he tells Adele, while Lewis is at the bar buying yet another round for the tight-lipped Morse, "was obsessed by Captain Cook and his ship was called *HMS*..." "Poor sod!" said Lewis, who

managed to eavesdrop just in time. "I'm not calling you *Endeavour*," said Adele. "I'll stick to Morse, like everyone else."

Endeavour is not so bad, especially when you consider what might have happened if his father had been obsessed by gay, Sir Francis Drake, or Charles Darwin, or Christopher Columbus, or even Jacques Cousteau. Of course, by the time they film the remake of *Death Is Now My Neighbour*, ITV will have replaced Morse's cryptic crossword caper with a more viewer-friendly multiple-choice option. Adele: "So what's your full name, Morse?" Morse: "I do have a full name, of course, born of my father's obsession with Captain Cook. So is it: (a) Golden Hind Morse; (b) Beagle Morse; (c) Santa Maria Morse; (d) Calypso Morse; or (e) *Endeavour Morse*?"

John Thaw, as Morse, and

REVIEW



Joe Joseph

Isaiah Berlin, envying him his long, uplifting life of academic contemplation, along came Sir Clixby, the viperish outgoing master of Lonsdale College, Oxford, to remind us how bitchy academia can be: Julius Caesar's back bore fewer stab wounds than that of even the lowliest university don.

Sadly, Channel 4's *Secret Lives* on L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, failed to enter into the spirit of the evening by challenging us to guess what the "L" stood for. So let me make you an offer on their behalf: "Ear, fly, eat ordered the combative French marquis. Nine letters" (answer at the bottom of the column).

The gist of the programme itself was not so secret either, even before John Travolta made the documentary front-page news by pleading with Channel 4 not to show it. Most people who are not Scientologists have long thought that "L" Ron Hubbard was a

fantasist and charlatan who was lucky to have found people eager to believe his science fiction. As Cyril Vospert, once on Hubbard's staff, said: "He told so many stories of his exploits in South America and West Indies and places that he would have had to be at least 483 years old to have had enough time to have done all those things. But that doesn't matter. It was just very entertaining, really. Except that he turned it into a religion." Not so entertaining, though, for the little boy Hubbard imprisoned in a wet, dark cell for two days for committing some teeny misdemeanour, nor for Hubbard's son, Quentin, who committed suicide rather than tell his father that he was gay.

It doesn't seem too surprising that people such as Lisa Marie Presley and Tom Cruise have succumbed. But Travolta? It would have been useful to see someone like him baring for Hubbard's

ideas, because they don't look like the sort that the Travolta we know would swallow — certainly not the Travolta of Vincent Vega in *Pulp Fiction*? Just consider: **INT. 74 CHEVY. MORNING.** *Vincent*: "You know what they call The Big Cheese, L. Ron Hubbard, in Paris?" *Jules*: "They don't call him The Big Cheese?" *Vincent*: "No, man, they got the French language over there." *Jules*: "What'd they call him?" *Vincent*: "They call him Le Grand Fromage." *Jules*: "Le Grand Fromage?" *Vincent*: "Yeah, that's right." *Jules*: "What'd they call Scientology?" *Vincent*: "Well, Scientology's Scientology, but they call it *Le Scientology*." *Jules*: "*Le Scientology*. What'd they call Judaism?" *Vincent*: "I dunno, I didn't go into a synagogue."

See what I mean? Oh, and that crossword clue answer, if it makes Morse feel any better, is Lafayette.

BBC1

- 6.00am Business Breakfast (8675/9)
- 7.00 BBC Breakfast News (7482/7)
- 9.00 Carri's Cook, Won't Cook (7) (5477730)
- 9.25 Style Challenge (5496865)
- 9.50 Kilroy (7) (2275597)
- 10.30 News (7) and weather (8459407)
- 10.35 The Queen's Golden Wedding Anniversary

BBC2

- 6.00am Science: Our Invisible Sun (9044/0)
- 6.30 Seasonal Affective Disorder (4582/7)
- 7.00 See Hear Breakfast News (6232597)
- 7.15 Teletubbies (484844/0) 7.40 Panelope Pispop (2122681) 8.05 Blue Peter (2719778) 8.30 Mouse and Mole (9506730) 8.35 Johnson and Friends (1111111) 8.45 The Bandwidth Gangster

CENTRAL

- 6.00am GMTV (4949020)
- 9.25 Supermarket Sweep (7) (5472285)
- 9.55 Regional News (7) (6999914)
- 10.00 The Time, the Place (58933)
- 10.30 This Morning (7) (48275759)
- 12.20pm Central News (7) (6160285)

YTV/CAN5

- As Central except:
- 12.55 Home and Away (7198575)
- 1.20-1.50 Emmerdale (79298575)
- 5.10-5.40 Home and Away (9705407)
- 5.55 Calendar (110575) C5NE: Weather (455914) 6.00-7.00 NE Tonight (477198)
- 6.30-7.00 Tonight (643)
- 11.35 Highlander (7)

CHANNEL 4

- 7.00am The Big Breakfast (90865)
- 9.00 Schools: History in Action (2098575)
- 9.20 Geographical Eye Over Britain (2018339) 9.40 The Maths Programme (7) (7540594) 10.00 Middle English (7) (796737) 10.15 Le Petit Monde de Pierre (7112932) 10.30 Scientific Eye (7) (2209001) 10.50 Film and Video (2229865) 11.10 The

CHANNEL 5

- CHANNEL 5 ON SATELLITE**
- Channel 5 is now broadcasting on transponder No 63 on the Astra Satellite. Viewers with a Videocrypt decoder will be able to receive the channel free of charge. Frequencies for transponder No 63 are picture: 10.92075 GHz; sound: 7.02 and 7.20 MHz



TV: THOMAS SUTCLIFFE

Scientology was a church built on the granite foundations of human gullibility. It would have been virtually impossible to come up with something that Scientologists wouldn't swallow whole.

TELEVISION: 12

Whatever happened to the population explosion? Scare Stories BBC2 9.20

SATELLITE AND RADIO: 11

Is it possible to have a sense of humour and be a member of the Church of Scientology? Simply on the law of averages you imagine it must be, but you can't help feeling it would be a serious handicap to advancement within the organisation.

You would, for example, have to steel yourself not to grin whenever you saw that deliciously absurd photograph of the mullet-lipped founder, staring beadily at a tomato that has been wired up to an E-meter (a photograph which raises the question of whether tomatoes have bad memories too, and if they do, how they pay the substantial fees that Scientology requires for every stage of its healing ministry?) And if you were required to spout the B-movie jargon on which Hubbard's garage-built religion rests, there would be the constant danger of an ill-judged giggle. Halfway through persuading someone to cash in their pension-plan so that they could attain the status of an Operating Thetan, you'd have to disguise your involuntary splutter as a coughing fit.

On the other hand how *could* you have a sense of the ridiculous and not burst out laughing at this mish-mash of Buck Rogers and hand-me-down Freud? You would, surely, have to be bad or mad.

In its assessment of Hubbard's career as a self-styled cosmic saviour, **Secret Lives** (Channel 4) opted for an unpleasant cocktail of the two. They began by demonstrating that he was a man for whom lying was as natural as breathing – and, initially at least, nearly as innocent. Every delusive exhalation was designed to enhance his glamour and mystery. His grandfather's modest livery stable was retrospectively converted into one of the biggest ranches in Montana, and Hubbard's mundane boyhood into a life of frontier adventure in the saddle. After an out-of-body experience brought on by dental anaesthetic, Hubbard became convinced that he had more to offer the world than science-fiction pot-boilers, and developed the "science" of dianetics, which treated all illness as psychosomatic in origin. Hubbard claimed to have cured himself of wartime blindness (a disability not recorded in his military medical record, unless you take a decidedly hysterical view of conjunctivitis) and promised to extend the benefits of his wisdom to others, in return for sizeable wads of cash.

Towards the end of this engrossing film a former member of the church described what happened after Hubbard had died – an awkward departure, given the guru's teachings on mind over matter. It was finally announced to the faithful that Hubbard had checked out of his earthly shell and gone on an extended research trip to the next plane.

"What's amazing is how the Scientologists bought this," said the man, "without any questioning!" His astonishment suggested that he still hadn't quite got the point. In truth it would have been virtually impossible to come up with something that Scientologists *wouldn't* swallow whole – it was a church built on the granite foundations of human gullibility. Of the handful of escapees who talked here, it was telling just how many had been close to the centre of the organisation – where the contradictions between Hubbard's increasingly brutal behaviour and the sanctimony of the organisation's public face could not be ignored forever. But, as the church reaction to this programme has already demonstrated, those spared an intimate encounter with this psychotic quack find it all too easy to maintain the faith.

Not everybody runs away from life in the same way. In his BBC2 film "The Bubble" (**Modern Times**) Daniel Reed looked at those who retreat from hard choices into the down-insulated, high-altitude nirvana of an Alpine ski-resort. His film beautifully caught the strange wooziness of these surroundings – a pristine world of swooping falls and effortless ascent. The soundtrack was lovely too, combining collages of raucous laughter and tinkling music boxes in a way that accentuated the strange dissociation of living in a place where fun is the highest aspiration.

But in the end, though, his structuring metaphor – that of a novelty snowstorm paperweight – was just a little too accurate. Every now and then you'd feel the energy sinking away and he would have to pick it up and shake it all over again.

Jorie Lewis

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