

‘Another, More Sinister Reality’ (D.W., 1967): Class, Youth and Psychopathology from *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) to *Endless Night* (1972)

As has been argued elsewhere, the “‘working class realism’ (Hill, 1986: 2) that started with *Room at the Top* (1959) emerged shortly after Hammer’s *Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), and had a strong relationship to horror from the start (Jancovich, forthcoming). In fact, key directors of working class realism experimented with horror; and both Clayton and Reisz followed their breakthrough films (*Room at the Top* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, 1960) with horror projects (*The Innocents*, 1961, and *Night Must Fall*, 1964). As early as 1963, then, reviews were claiming:

While it would be early to proclaim that realism is dead in the new British cinema, it is noticeable that during the last year or so many of our newer directors have shown signs that they no longer find it enough. Mr. Jack Clayton has moved from *Room at the Top* to *The Innocents*. Mr. Tony Richardson from *Look Back in Anger* to *Tom Jones*, and the most notable recent recruits to the feature film [have started] by firmly throwing realism out of the window ... (Anon^a, 1963)

If some filmmakers turned to horror due to a dissatisfaction with realism – ‘they no longer find it enough’ – the nature of this dissatisfaction explains the choice of horror as an alternative.

In his discussion of working class realism, John Hill identifies a tension between description and narration, or between the depiction of the objective environments within which characters were located and the subjective worlds of those characters (Hill, 1986). In other words, while working class realism had a strong investment in the psychological study of its protagonists, these were often overwhelmed by the visual focus on locations; and Hutching has therefore quoted Lindsay Anderson in this context, a director who claimed that,

in his own contribution to working class realism, *This Sporting Life* (1963), he had tried ‘not to overemphasize the locations’ and to make the film ‘almost entirely subjective’ (Hutchings, 2001: 148). Consequently, the appeal of horror films, such as *The Innocents* and *Night Must Fall*, was the intense focus on the psychology of their central protagonists. Furthermore, while working class realism may have been felt to ‘overemphasize the locations’ at the expense of psychological studies of character, working class realist films were still acutely concerned with the psychology, and early contributions even presented their protagonists in ways that were directly associated with the horror film.

For example, *Variety*’s review of *Look Back in Anger* (1959) claimed that its central male protagonist was ‘almost psychopathic’ (Rich, 1959), while British reviews of working class realism often described its male protagonists in terms that stressed their psychopathology. For example, Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* might be seen as simply ill-tempered, aggressive and anti-social today, but critics at the time took a different view, with one even claiming in a relation to his explicitly psychopathic role in *Night Must Fall* (1964) that Albert Finney was a star who already developed ‘a line in charming psychopaths’ (Shorter, 1964), a ‘line’ that was established by only two major film roles by this point: as Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and as the eponymous hero of *Tom Jones* (1963). Certainly, their psychopathic qualities were associated with class but not in the way that might be expected. Although these protagonists may appear to be the victims of a system of rigid class hierarchies today, they were usually understood at the time as being the product of changes the class system during the postwar period, and particularly in relation to anxieties about the effects of affluence on the working class, anxieties that absorbed cultural commentators at the time. Nor were such anxieties simply associated with the conservative right but can also be identified in texts such as Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and the films of the ‘Free Cinema’ movement. For

example, the male protagonists of working class realism were usually the beneficiaries of education and/or affluence, advantages that supposedly distanced them from the 'traditional' working class and threatened to erode class distinctions. In other words, these protagonists were seen as representing a nightmare image of a 'new' working class that no longer 'knew its place'; and their psychological problems were associated with this intermediate status. For example, they were either seen as trapped by their own psychological inadequacies or as yearning for omnipotence, in which the world is ordered to gratify their desires or, at the very least, to not frustrate them. Consequently, even if these protagonists were seen as a product of the new affluence, their psychologies were supposedly distinguished by a hostile relationship to the world, a hostility that was due to an egocentric desire for self-gratification; and one that also entails a psychopathic lack of empathy for others or by their inability to accept others as autonomous beings.

Furthermore, the claims about the demise of realism that was quoted earlier were made in a review of *Billy Liar* (1963), a film that can be seen as representing a number of shifts at the time. If the film's protagonist, Billy Fisher, lives in the North, he dreams of escaping to London and, as Geraghty points out, this period saw a 'shift from the North to London, from the working class to the middle class' in film (Geraghty, 1997: 157). Indeed, if Billy does not achieve his dream of escaping to London, his female companion, Liz (played by Julie Christie), does make the move; and Christie would appear a couple of years later in one of the key films about Swinging London, *Darling* (1965), which was directed by John Schlesinger, the director of *Billy Liar*. Also Billy is clearly not a manual worker but a lower middle-class clerk, and so registers a shift from the working class to the lower middle class (or at least a confusion between the two). Finally, Billy is a fantasist but, as films turned from working class subjects to Swinging London, this shift did not signal the end of concerns with affluence. On the contrary, the Swinging London films were usually understood as critiques

of the supposedly shallow, superficial and illusory nature of the new consumerism, of which Swinging London was supposed to be emblematic. Increasingly, then, films became less interested in hostile, confrontational male psychopathologies and were seen as featuring protagonists who retreat into fantasy like Billy. In this way, this shift made explicit the ways in which concerns with the figure of the psychopath were related to anxieties about social isolation and atomisation, i.e. that people don't really know one another, even those supposedly close to them. Indeed, many horror films involving psychopaths have a "whodunit" element in which the plot is organised around the difficulty of distinguishing the psychopath from other, "normal" characters. The psychopath's internal world is not only hidden but follows a logic that cannot be guessed at.

These shifts were also registered through the types of actors associated with these roles. If the male actors that had starred in early examples of working class realism appeared 'manly', reviewers frequently associated their pathologies with youth. It is therefore hardly surprising that, although Finney had starred in *Billy Liar* on the stage, he was replaced by Tom Courtney in the film version and that Courtney was followed by a series of younger, boyishly handsome male leads, Terence Stamp, David Hemmings and Hywel Bennett. Their casting can therefore be seen to bring together issues about affluence, youth and the retreat in fantasy.

However, as the essay will demonstrate, while the shift from working class realism to horror had been due to a concern that the former focused on the visual depiction of location at the expense of psychological investigation, a corresponding concern with horror developed in reviews of the period. Horror films may have allowed more opportunity for psychological study but there was clearly a sense, by the end of the decade, that reviewers felt that these films had lost the sense of social context that made their psychopaths meaningful.

To explore these issues, the article will not try to read these concerns from the films themselves, but rather focus on the analysis film reviews at the time. These reviews were certainly not the only reading available in the period, and they clearly represent the responses of predominantly middle class critics; but they also demonstrate some of the ways in which these films were discussed, and of the ways in which discussions of these films were conducted in relation to broader social discourses within the period. Also, while some of the stars of these films might have been from working class backgrounds, most of the directors shared similar middle class backgrounds to those of the critics; and, as Hill and others have argued, working class realism rarely identifies with its working class protagonists but, instead, displays “a kind of sexual fascination with ‘otherness’” (Hill, 1986: 136) so that these films indulged in a form of middle-class voyeurism that marks “a separation between spectator and subjects” (Hill, 1986: 136). In other words, while these critics may have been writing from a predominantly middle class position, their understanding of these characters may not have been so different from many of those who made the films or from the audiences to which these films were addressed.

The article will therefore start out from a brief account of the ways in which critics discussed the shift from Finney’s Arthur Seaton to Courtney’s Billy Fisher, before moving on to examine reviews of *The Collector* with Terence Stamp, *Blow Up* with David Hemmings and *Twisted Nerve* (1968) and *Endless Night* (1972) both of which featured Hywel Bennett as a psychopathic killer. In the process, it will demonstrate how the protagonists of these films (and to some extent the actors that played them) were understood in relation to debates over the supposed perils of affluence and the erosion of class distinctions that it was presumed to entail. It will also examine the terms in which these issues were discussed within the reviews, terms that were insistently psychological.

‘Charming Psychopaths’: Arthur Seaton, Billy Fisher and the Move from Working Class Realism

By the time Finney played a fully-fledged horror role in *Night Must Fall*, in which he appeared as a ‘homicidal maniac’ (Amis, 1964), he was already seen as ‘an actor with a line in charming psychopaths’ (Shorter, 1964), largely due to the ways in which critics had seen Seaton as an aggressive figure who was in conflict with the world and who resented any frustration of his desires. If Seaton was ‘a lusty young animal, trapped in a working class cage’ (Hinxman, 1960), he was hardly a rebel against class inequality but someone who ‘feverously slaves at the factory machine simply and solely to get oodles of money to spend on beer and girls at the weekend.’ (Harman, 1960) He was therefore directly associated with the new affluence and his hostility was seen as being simply directed at any attempt to frustrate his hedonism: ‘Arthur Seaton is very much All Right, Jack, and nobody is going to stop him being that way.’ (Harman, 1960) He was therefore seen as ‘egotistical’ (Anon, 1961) and as demonstrating no empathy for others. He was not only ‘callous’ (Redburn, 1960) but ‘a rebel [who] tramples on all the rules, not because he is an Angry Young Man, but because he just does not care’ for anything or anyone (Harman, 1960). However, for all his tough manly exterior, reviews were quick to comment on his immaturity and not only was he referred to as a ‘boy’ (Robinson, 1960) and a ‘bully’ (Anon, 1961) but directly identified as a ‘teddy boy’ (Harman, 1960; Gomery, 1960), one of the key images of violent youth at the time.

Finney’s casting in the stage version of *Billy Liar* was therefore hardly seen as being at odds with his established image. The role was even claimed to be ‘a made-to-measure part for Finney’ (Wilson, 1963), in which aspects of Seaton’s character were made explicit, particularly his infantile (and fascistic) desires for omnipotence. Consequently, when reviews of the film discussed Billy’s fantasies, they tended to focus on those in which Billy ‘is

dreaming about a country called Ambrosia, where he is a sort of fabulous dictator.’ (Sharpley, 1963) However, while *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was concerned to depict working class life, *Billy Liar* shifted attention to the lower middle class. Rather than a blue collar factory worker like Seaton, Billy is an ‘undertakers clerk’ (Hinxman, 1963) and his world is not the grim, working class terraces of Nottingham but one of ‘semidetached home-life and hilariously grisly offices’ (Quigly, 1963). Again, however, this only makes explicit elements of the earlier figures, who were already presented as socially mobile through their education (Lampton and Porter) or simply through their affluence (Seaton). If they had been born into the working class, they had also been distanced from the ‘traditional’ working class and were neither content with their class origins nor comfortable with social mobility either. They are neither one thing or the other; and their threat was precisely that of ‘not knowing their place’ and therefore threatening class distinctions, the problem that the lower middle class had repeatedly been seen to represent throughout its history.

Consequently, Billy was claimed to be the beneficiary of ‘a scholarship to the grammar school, so he might have opportunities the Mam and Dad never had’ (Robinson, 1963). But this education had not made him more contented. On the contrary, ‘all that the opportunities have done for him is to distance him from home and parents and fill him with ambitions without giving him the means to realise them.’ (Robinson, 1963). In other words, Billy was seen as being caught in a situation where he has ‘just enough intelligence, education and independence to realize the horrors of his situation, but not quite enough to extract himself from it except in his dreams’ (Anon^a, 1963). Furthermore, Billy was seen as lacking the aggressive urge to make the world conform to his desires that had distinguished Seaton and others. Instead, he was seen as someone who had retreated into passivity and he is described as a ‘layabout’ (Mosley, 1963) who dreams of omnipotence and power, but is incapable of action. If reviews differed as to whether his fantasies were a defence mechanism

or a narcotic, most reviewers ultimately came around to the second position; and his dreams were even described as ‘opium pipe fantasies’ (Mosley, 1963). Elsewhere his fantasies are even referred to as ‘pathological’ (Betts, 1963) or as clichés from popular fiction. Even his escape plan amounts to little more than an ambition is ‘to write scripts for a rotten radio comedian’ (Sleyde, 1963).

Finally, when Billy encounters Liz and has the opportunity escape, it is claimed that he won’t ‘put his dreams to the test’:

It is midnight. The train for London with Liz aboard is waiting. Billy is putting a sixpence in a machine for milk that neither of them want in a desperate, unacknowledged effort not to come to London and put his dreams to the test.

The two containers of milk clunk down on the scales of fate. The train chuffs out. Liz in a last gesture of understanding has put his suitcase out on the platform, where it waits, a tombstone to success. (Sharpley, 1963)

In other words, Billy made explicit what is implicit in Lampton, Porter and Seaton. Like them, Billy was seen as being detached from others, trapped in an internal world of fantasy so that ‘real people are enigmas to Billy’ (Anon^b, 1963). If he lacks the aggression of this precursors, he was supposed to make explicit their inability to see others as autonomous beings. In this way, he also establishes a central feature of later male characters: their entrapment within fantasies that isolate them from others and even from a sense of external reality.

‘Trapped’: Fantasy, Objectification and Lower Middle Class Desire in *The Collector*

These concerns were given a darker treatment in *The Collector* (1965), whose protagonist, Freddie Clegg, is a ‘mousey young bank clerk who collects butterflies’ (Blyth, 1965) but is also ‘imprisoned’ by his class background. Again, like Billy Fisher, this background is a little

ambiguous and while some claimed that he was ‘imprisoned by honest working class notions of respectability, of decency, of cleanliness, shame and modesty’ (David Robinson, 1965), others identified him with ‘*lower-middle-class* morality’ (Knight, 1965; my emphasis). Clegg’s associations with the lower middle (rather than working) class was also implied through references to him as ‘suburban’ (Tynan, 1965), ‘colourless’ (David Robinson, 1965) and even ‘impotent’ (David Robinson, 1965). However, whatever the class origins of his values, critics agreed that Clegg was trapped by them. As the *Daily Worker* put it, his ‘perverse calculating intelligence is encased in a straitjacket or dogmatism and prudery’ (Hibbin, 1965). However, when Clegg wins the pools, he obtains the affluence to indulge his fantasies by kidnapping a ‘posh art student [whom] he has long coveted from afar’ (Coleman, 1965), and most critics therefore identified Clegg as a ‘psychopath’ (Anon^b, 1965) and one whose psychopathy was directly associated with ‘Britain’s caste-consciousness’ (Knight, 1965). This association between class and psychopathology was also emphasized through the casting of Terence Stamp, who played Clegg, an actor of working class origins but one who was also associated with the supposed classlessness of Swinging London.

In this way, the film relates to the “‘new wave’ narratives of male desire’ (Geraghty, 1997: 160), in which issues of social mobility were often handled through working class male desires for the middle class female, a narrative in relation to which *Billy Liar* also operated. Obviously, Clegg takes this desire to pathological extremes, and makes the objectification of women far more explicit, not only by kidnapping of the object of his desire (Miranda), but also through the clear association between this act of kidnapping and his hobby of butterfly collecting. From the start, then, critics saw Clegg as someone who didn’t know how to relate to others and could only see them as objects onto which he projected his fantasies. Consequently, references to him as having ‘long coveted [Miranda] from afar’ (Coleman, 1965) did not present him as a shy romantic but as a ‘stalker’ (Mosley, 1965) and one who

was not just 'introspective' (Thornton 1965) but 'excessive' in his 'introversion' (Gibbs, 1965). He was also seen as a voyeur who is not simply 'content to look rather than touch' (Barker, 1965) but gains a sense of power and control by keeping the object of his desire at a distance: he not only engages in 'stalking girls' (Thornton, 1965) but 'tails [his victim] in his van, watching her movements as if she were a unique butterfly' (Anon^b, 1965). Furthermore, although most reviews were reticent about giving away the ending, the *Monthly Film Bulletin* had no such inhibitions; and its account not only saw Freddie as being in love with a fantasy that he had projected onto Miranda, but also that she would simply be the first of numerous victims. In other words, the review clearly implied that the film was about the genesis of a serial killer: Miranda not only dies at the end but the film closes as 'Freddie gazes speculatively at a pretty nurse' (T.M., 1965).

However, if earlier working class male psychopaths were seen as railing against the external world for frustrating their desires, Clegg, like Billy Fisher, was claimed to retreat into a reclusive fantasy life into which he attempts to draw Miranda. As the *Sun* put it: 'There is something wrong with this man's face, you sense, from the very start. It is too suggestive of private nervousness, of withdrawal, and yet at the same time of exceptional cunning' (Anon^b, 1965). However, this withdrawal also created problems for the film in that it thinned out the sense of social context. The *Monthly Film Bulletin*, for example, complained that the film had largely removed its psychopath from the contemporary urban landscape and that the isolated country house in which the action is located was obviously a studio set with 'a curious air of unreality'. (TM, 1965: 161) Certainly there were claimed to be some 'location exteriors' that were 'a good deal more persuasive ... than the American studio stuff in the cellar' (Coleman, 1965), but the film was generally claimed to lack a sense of authentic social reality: 'The house where the Collector lives is too precisely atmospheric to be true, the cellar

where he keeps the girl should by rights contain the Gainsborough Lady, the very rain is too wet and the cars start first time.’ (Robert Robinson, 1965).

Of course, this lack of social context may be partly because the version that was released in cinemas during the 1960s had been cut down from a much longer, four-hour version; but it is also due to the inevitable focus on the encounter between its psychopathic fantasist and his captive, although there was some disagreement over the precise character of this encounter. For some, this encounter was simply a conflict between ‘the creative spirit and the philistine’ (Gibbs, 1965) but others saw the situation quite differently. While it was generally agreed that Clegg suffers ‘deep feelings of inferiority’ (Gibbs, 1965), many critics were unwilling to accept Miranda as a figure of ‘intelligence, courage and dignity’ (Gibbs, 1965); and the *Times* even derides her as ‘snooty’, which suggests an alternative reading of their relationship as one of misunderstanding on both sides. If, as the *Daily Worker* put it, ‘these two extremes inflame each other to the point of destruction’ (Hibbin, 1965), the *New Statesman* even claimed that ‘mad Freddie’ was ‘much more sinned against than sinning’ (Coleman, 1965), and that our sympathies were at least as much with him as with his captive. Elsewhere, Clegg was described as being ‘at once repellent and pathetic, almost the modern equivalent of Mrs. Shelley’s Frankenstein monster’ (Knight 1965); and even Miranda’s cultural credentials were questioned so that it ‘remains in doubt who comes off best when he and the girl lock horns over a book of Salinger’s and a painting of Picasso’s’ (Coleman, 1965). Certainly most critics seemed to eventually acknowledge that mutual misunderstanding was central to the film, particularly at the end. In other words, although it might seem that the film opposed a sexually repressed Clegg to ‘his sexually emancipated bourgeois captive’ (Tynan, 1965), this misreading is precisely the trap into which Miranda’s ‘poor hip maiden’ blunders (Walker, 1965).

Her ‘mistake’ is claimed to be when she ‘lets her nightgown fall and offers herself to him “sexually”’ (Mosley, 1965) under the misconception that ‘his complaint’ is sexual ‘frustration, pure and simple’ (Gibbs, 1965). Unfortunately, for most reviewers, this action reveals that she has completely misunderstood Clegg, whose fantasies are not sexual, or at least not in the way that she understands them. Clegg ‘wants nothing sexually from the girl – not even if she were to become his wife. What he wants is that painful abstraction, her love.’ (Knight, 1965) Alternatively, as another critic put it, he simply wants her, like his butterflies, as an object ‘to keep and have around the house’ (Walker, 1965). As a result, ‘when she offers sex in a bid for freedom he recoils, disgusted by this behaviour from a creature he has so idealised.’ (Barker, 1965)

‘Appearance Rather than Substance’: The Mysteries of Swinging London

If *The Collector* was described as ‘a Gothic romance’ (Gibbs, 1965), *Blow-Up* was also understood in this context, even though it reversed the gender dynamics of the Gothic drama. Of course, today, the film is conventionally read as a commentary upon the nature of subjective reality (see for example Walker, 1986), but this aspect of the film was not seen as separate from its generic identity as a Hitchcockian mystery. On the contrary, critics evaluated the film’s philosophical ambitions precisely in terms of this generic context. In other words, the film’s male protagonist, Thomas, was seen as occupying a position similar to that of a Gothic heroine when he finds himself caught up in a mystery that challenges his perception of the world.

Thomas is a fashion photographer played by David Hemmings and, after taking some photographs in a park one day, he is approached by a young woman, who goes to considerable lengths to get the negatives from him. Furthermore, her efforts seem to be explained when

Thomas discovers, as he blows up his pictures, that the camera has revealed something that he didn't see; the moment of reality he thought he was capturing on film is only half the truth, and behind it lies another, more sinister reality – his camera is witness to a murder. (D.W., 1967)

Furthermore, when Thomas goes back to the park to investigate, he finds a body. However, by the end of the film, both the negatives and the body have disappeared and the mystery remains unresolved.

Although *Blow-Up* might seem like an odd choice in an article on horror today, critics at the time frequently understood it in these terms and explicitly judged the film through a comparison with one of the key figures of 1960s horror, Alfred Hitchcock, whose reputation as a horror director at the time was not only due to *Psycho* and *The Birds* (Jancovich, 2017), but also his decade-long association with *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (and its follow up, *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*) both of which were identified as television horror at the time (Jancovich, forthcoming). Furthermore, these television programmes sought to evoke memories of his reputation during the 1940s, a period in which he was seen as the pre-eminent director of horror films (Jancovich, 2011). Certainly the comparisons between *Blow-Up* and Hitchcock were usually complaints, in which critics claimed that the film could have been made as a Hitchcockian thriller but that it had failed to deliver on this potential. As one review put it, 'Blow-Up is a cock up': the review also notes that other critics had 'blabbed, giving away the ending' of the film and in a manner that one 'cannot imagine anyone daring to treat a Hitchcock film' (Gilbert, 1967). Of course, not all reviews viewed *Blow-Up* negatively and some even claimed that Antonioni had not failed to make Hitchcockian thriller but that 'he is after something that is not only different in degree, but in kind' (Alpert, 1967). But even here the association with Hitchcock is still present, even if the problem was not that the mystery story had obscured Antonioni's real purpose.

Of course, Hitchcockian ‘suspense’ (Alpert, 1967) does not directly equate to horror, even when linked to the idea of the ‘thriller’ (Barker, 1967; Gilliat, 1967) or ‘mystery’ (David Robinson, 1967; Pacey, 1967). However, these latter terms had strong associations with horror (Jancovich, 2009; Jancovich, 2005), and the film was also described as one that centred on ‘the shock’ that the mystery has upon Thomas (Alpert, 1967), and the ways in which he is ‘horrified’ still further by his discovery of the body in the park (Hirschhorn, 1967). The film was even claimed to be an overt ‘shocker’, even if this term is used as a pun that not only marks the film generically but also condemns its refusal to be ‘intensely dramatic’ in the manner of a Hitchcockian thriller (Betts, 1967). Elsewhere, the film was claimed to feature elements that were ‘chillingly’ or which had ‘an occult tension’ (Gilliatt, 1967); but perhaps the most telling comment was from the *Financial Times*, which compared *Blow-Up* with the horror stories of M.R. James, a comparison that resolves the opposition between its Hitchcockian elements and Antonioni’s refusal of resolution: ‘The recounting of the mystery is masterly. It has the precision and maddening mixture of inevitability and surprise of an M. R. James ghost story’ (David Robinson, 1967).

Consequently, whether they liked the film or not, most reviewers acknowledged that the film was about a man who is unable to distinguish fantasy from reality; and it was this concern that linked the film’s generic features with its philosophical concerns with subjective reality. As one review put it: ‘Is the photographer imposing his own fantasy on life, or is reality brutally interrupting his fantasy’ (Anon, 1967). Consequently, while many critics acknowledged that the film questions whether objective reality even exists, it was this aspect of the film with which they took issue. They recognised that the protagonists struggle to distinguish fantasy from reality was a key aspect of the Hitchcockian thriller and horror more generally, but they saw Antonioni’s questioning of objective reality as having taken things to preposterous extremes. For example, the *Monthly Film Bulletin* objected to the film’s ‘abrupt

and quite unjustified conclusion: that there is no reality, that all perception is appearance' (D.W., 1967). Others were more sympathetic and sought to justify the film's concern with fantasy and reality by ignoring its larger philosophical ambitions. For example, the *Sunday Express* described the film 'a male version of "Darling" with uglier, sharper teeth' (Evans, 1967). This earlier, female-centred story of Swinging London was a key film of the period and, as John Hill has shown, it 'functions as a metaphor for the trivial and shallow values of the consumer society, its slavish devotion to appearance rather than substance' (Hill, 1986: 157). By associating *Blow-Up* with *Darling*, critics presented the former as one that condemned the contemporary preoccupation with fantasy and illusion and its consequent disconnection from reality.

This reading can therefore be found in most reviews of the film, whether or not they invoked *Darling* as a reference point; but it is precisely the larger philosophical ambitions (which have become key to readings of the film today) that were often ridiculed at the time as both a betrayal of its generic potential and of any larger social commentary. For example, as the *Morning Star* claimed of the film's ending: 'The body has gone. Or perhaps it was never there ... So he becomes involved in a symbolic game of tennis mimed with imaginary balls and rackets.' (Hibbin, 1967). If this hints at the reviewer's dissatisfaction with the film, the *Financial Times* bluntly described this ending as 'a sledge hammer clue ... the non-existent ball? The non-existent corpse? Reality? Illusion? Here, on a plate, is at least one of the interpretations open to us.' (David Robinson, 1967)

In this context, it was also claimed to be significant that Thomas is a fashion photographer and that David Hemmings, who plays him, looks like 'a more brattish Terence Stamp' (Anon, 1967). Stamp had not only starred in *The Collector* as another fantasist trapped in a world of illusion but was also the friend of another socially mobile, working class youth, David Bailey, one of the key fashion photographers of the period, a celebrity on

whom Thomas was clearly modelled. In addition, reviews referred to Thomas as a ‘cockney fashion photographer’ (Wilson, 1967) or ‘a long-haired, with-it Cockney youth’ (Hibbin, 1967), comments that emphasized his status as a socially mobile working class youth, an association that was further emphasized through references to him as a ‘pretty boy’ (Barker, 1967) with a ‘baby face’ (Wilson, 1967), even if his is the tainted innocence of an ‘angel faced satyr’ (Barker, 1967) or a ‘depraved choirboy’ (Christie, 1967). If Thomas was not a psychopathic villain but closer to a bewildered Gothic heroine, he still shared many psychological characteristics with other characters in this article. Again, he was ‘vain’ and ‘self-centred’; and he was also ‘arrogant’ (Evens 1967; and Wilson, 1967) and a ‘voyeur’ (David Robinson, 1967; Taylor, 1967), someone who is detached from the world around him. As one critic put it, ‘his relationship to reality is via his camera’ (Houston, 1967), a situation that was seen as both the cause and effect of his inability to make sense of reality. He finds the world strange and mysterious, and so keeps it at a distance; but his detachment only makes the world seem more strange and mysterious. As one critic puts it:

He assails his girl models, desperate to simplify them, to turn them into objects: ‘Give it to me, give it to me, give it to me,’ he rants, wrenching them brutally from pose to pose, and we see the camera as insulating tape, we see the camera as contraceptive. (Robert Robinson, 1967).

The film was therefore seen as yet another ‘psychological study’ (Barker, 1967) and one that was a virtual descent into madness.¹

¹ Some might object that the film does not suggest that Thomas has descended into madness but that he finally sees the world as it really is; but these options are not mutually exclusive in horror fiction and critics at the time frequently saw the ending as one of psychological crisis. This psychological crisis was even seen as being fully consistent with Antonioni’s other films

Again, however, while this madness was clearly associated with ‘the trivial and shallow values of the consumer society, its slavish devotion to appearance rather than substance’ (Hill, 1986: 157), critics also expressed concern with the film’s lack of social context: ‘But this often brilliant narrative is precariously located in a time and place of flimsy unreality. For the fantasy of Swinging London is the fantasy of the popular Press, worked over by an outsider with willing gullibility.’ (David Robinson, 1967). Nor was the *Financial Times*, the only paper to come to this conclusion (Taylor, 1967; Gilbert, 1967). In other words, the problem was not simply claimed to be that ‘if you make a film about essentially shallow people, you risk making a shallow film’ (Roud, 1967), but that the film only offered a series of clichéd images of Swinging London as the context for Thomas’s psychological and perceptual crisis. Certainly the film can be read as capturing the emptiness of Swinging London, but many critics at the time felt that the film was simply empty and lacking in social context.

‘Never-Never’ Lands: The Confused Psychologies of the Late 1960s and early 1970s

The following year, Hywel Bennett was yet another ‘baby faced’ young psychopath in *Twisted Nerve* (1968). He was also another actor ‘from a working-class background’ (Ebert, 1969), and one who had made his name in *The Family Way* (1966), a comedy of working class life in which he played the socially mobile son of a gruff working class father. Indeed, one of the film’s key narrative tensions is that this father didn’t understand the cultured ways of his son; while the son was so intimidated by his father that he cannot consummate his

which are supposed to ‘have studied, in one leading character or another, a mysterious malaise, ranging from mere depression to near-madness of which the cause would seem to be the pressures of modern life’ (Gibbs, 1967).

marriage. Surprisingly, *Twisted Nerve* was the follow up to this successful comedy, and reunited Bennett with the previous film's production team and even his co-star, Hayley Mills, who had played his wife in the earlier film, a partnership that was repeated a third time in *Endless Night* (1972).

Unfortunately, *Twisted Nerve* did not fare well with critics who saw its psychological themes as being confused, and they took particular exception to its handling of 'the subject of mongolism [which] has been criticised by a number of medical health bodies' (Anon, 1968). More specifically, the film was accused of implying that there was a link between the psychopathology of its protagonist, Martin (played by Bennett), and his brother's 'mongolism'; an implication that was described as 'genetic gibberish' (Anon, 1969). Certainly, the filmmakers denied that any such suggestion had been intended, although critics then asked why the issue of mongolism had been raised at all (Hirschhorn, 1968). Nor were matters helped by suggestions of alternative (or non-genetic) explanations for Martin's murderous insanity, suggestions that only seemed to confirm that the film was incoherent and confused.

In one alternative explanation, Martin is another immature young man, but one who has not been 'spoilt' by education or affluence but by an 'over protective' mother (Hirschhorn, 1968), who has 'coddled' the boy (Powell, 1968; Houston, 1968) so that he 'refuses to grow up' (Hirschhorn, 1968). Critics also claimed that the film suggests that he is 'narcissistic and/or homosexual' (Roud, 1968). Certainly, critics agreed that Martin was explicitly presented as a 'psychopath' (Houston, 1968) but they found none of the explanations for his condition to be convincing: 'The Boulting brothers have surrounded the plot with a (very thin) layer of psycho-sociological realism which just doesn't ring true.' (Roud, 1968)

This confusion also extends to the class politics of the film and, despite the casting of Bennett, whose previous and later roles insistently played upon his working class roots, and despite Martin being another fantasist who is incapable of connecting with the world – like Billy Fisher, Martin is another ‘job shirking’ petty criminal (Powell, 1968) - Martin was not presented as being working class, or even lower middle, class. Instead, he was presented as being the step-son of a banker, while the object of his desire is, in class terms, his subordinate, a young librarian whose mother takes in boarders. The location had also changed and was neither the North nor Swinging London, but rather a middle class suburban world of imposing detached houses. Of course, this context might have been interpreted in relation to the anxieties of isolation and atomisation with which the psychopath is often associated, but critics made little of this social context. On the contrary, the film was read as having detached Martin psychopathology from the issues of social mobility that had been so central to British films in the early 1960s.

Instead, while Martin was not associated with affluent working class youth, he was still, almost over-emphatically, associated with youth. He ‘refuses to grow up’ (Hirschhorn, 1968); meets Mills when he shoplifts a toy duck; and has a tendency to ‘withdraw into childishness’ as a defence (Powell, 1968). He is also repeatedly discussed in terms of his boyish good looks. He is a ‘well built lad’ (Robinson, 1968), with ‘angelic good looks’ (Hirschhorn, 1967) and a ‘schoolboy face’ (Richards, 1968). Even his performance is described in these terms and he is praised for the ways in which he ‘turns the killer’s dissociated personality inside out like a boy removing all sorts of horrible things from his school blazer.’ (Walker, 1968)

This concern with Bennett’s good looks also recurs in reviews of *Endless Night*, in which he was claimed to be ‘even lovelier’ than his female co-star, Hayley Mills (Coleman, 1972). But if the film reunited him with Mills, it also returned to the explicitly working class

psychopath of earlier films so that Bennett was claimed to be a ‘chauffeur with dreams above his station’ (Robinson, 1972). In other words, Bennett’s character is another working class psychopath whose education has given him an ‘appreciation of the beautiful’ (Dignam, 1972), or ‘a passion for the fine arts’ (Barker, 1972), so that he no longer knows his place.

If reviewers couldn’t explicitly discuss the psychopathology of Bennett’s character without giving away the film’s twist ending, which many dismissed as a ‘con trick’ (Barkley, 1972), the film’s status as a horror film was none the less strongly implied. If its association with Agatha Christie might seem to distinguish it from horror today, Christie’s adaptations had long been associated with horror, with Rene Clair’s *And Then There Were None* (1945) being a classic example (Jancovich, 2010). Even in 1972, reviews for *Endless Night* referred to her as ‘the old frightener’ (Heyman, 1972), and while the film was described as a ‘grisly murder mystery’ (Malcolm, 1972), the use of the word ‘grisly’ is suggestive here, as is the term ‘mystery’, which had long been associated with horror through its association with the strange, eerie and uncanny (Jancovich, 2005). The film was also described as ‘macabre’ (Gibbs, 1972), and as featuring an ‘air of menace’ (Barkley, 1972); ‘sinister happenings’ (Shaw 1972); and ‘some well-organised shocks’ (Powell, 1972). If some critics complained that the film ‘fails to make the flesh stir, let alone creep’ (Melly, 1972), it was clearly implied that it was designed to make the flesh creep, regardless whether it was successful in achieving this. Elsewhere critics drew attention to its ‘suggestion of witchcraft’ (Hayman, 1972) and the figure of ‘spooky old woman’ (Wilson, 1972) who is associated with ‘some sort of curse’ that may even account for Mills’ eventual death.

However, this story of a working class psychopath was claimed to have lost all contact with social reality so that the juxtaposition of Bennet and Mills with a story by Christie was seen as incongruous: the couple ‘look a bit too modern for this between-the-wars never-world’ (Robinson, 1972). The fault is therefore presumed to be the source

material, which was described as ‘wheezy old stuff’ (Robinson, 1972) and profoundly old fashioned: ‘Remember the kind of film they use to make ten years ago?’ (Shaw, 1972) But the problem was not just the supposedly antiquated material but the setting which had moved from the North and even Swinging London to a ‘never-never Home counties’ (Melly, 1972) or a fantasy land called “Christie Country where villages are named Market Chadwell, local coppers bend over their rose beds, the doctor and his wife are brisk dog-exercisers, antique shops provide an occupation for gentlemen, and the local inn promises crumpets for tea when there’s an “R” in the month...’ (Walker, 1972) In this way, the film was seen as disconnected from the social reality that might have made its working class psychopath credible, and a problem that reflected back onto its stars: ‘The trouble with the present breed of British stars is that they will not grow up and it’s a bit like watching Peter Pan and Wendy as Hayley and Hywel act married’ (Walker 1972). In this way, the film is accused of existing in an unrealistic ‘never-never land’ while the leads are seen as representing the recurrent feature of the working class psychopath, their pathological immaturity.

Conclusion

As we have seen, then, there is a line of development from the psychopathic working class protagonists of the late 1950s and early 1960s to figures such Freddie Clegg in *The Collector*, a line of development that makes explicit their common interest in affluence, class, youth, and pathological fantasy. However, it also involved a series of shifts. If the actors who played these psychopaths were increasingly seen as boyish, they were also seen as less aggressive and as figures who retreated into passivity and fantasy. They were therefore claimed to be characters who were psychologically detached from reality, which became correspondingly mysterious to them. However, as this line developed, critics also became increasingly concerned that the films were losing contact with the social context for these psychopaths.

Certainly, the supposedly classless, image-obsessed world of Swinging London could be clearly related to the debates over affluence and social mobility that had informed understandings of the earlier films but, as it became increasingly clear that the classlessness of Swinging London was an illusion, the social context for the psychopathic protagonist was seen as becoming obscure.

None the less, these reviews demonstrate that working class realism and horror were seen as having shared points of interest within the 1960s, shared interests that have often been repressed by the tendency to compartmentalise British cinema history into separate or even opposed 'traditions'. *Room at the Top* is no more of a horror film than *The Innocents* is an example of working class realism; but this does not mean that they lack a series of strong relationships, the investigation of which might open up surprising aspects of British cinema history that have been concealed by the claim that they represent two distinct or opposed 'traditions' of filmmaking.

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