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**Shane Meadows: Representations of Liminality,
Masculinity and Class**

Clair Schwarz

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the
West of England, Bristol for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Faculty of Arts, Creative Industries and Education, University of the West of
England, Bristol**

June 2013

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Shane Meadows: Representations of Liminality, Masculinity and Class

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Abstract

This thesis offers a new approach to the work of the British filmmaker Shane Meadows. In contradiction to the conventional reading of his work as part of the long tradition of social realism in British cinema, this thesis offers a new approach which argues that the term ‘liminal realism’ best describes both the in-between nature of the texts and Meadows’ place in British screen culture. In order to construct this alternative reading of Shane Meadows, this interdisciplinary study draws upon work from anthropology, folk culture and myth to describe the particular ways in which Meadows’ work demonstrates liminality, most especially via the Jungian archetype of the trickster.

The thesis argues that the figure of the trickster describes the cultural construct of the filmmaker himself which can be described as being in-between, whether critically positioned between the mainstream and art-house; between the cultural imaginaries of the British north and the south, residing in the liminal elsewhere of the Midlands; and moving between autographical and biographical registers, arguing how he responds to that positioning with a tricksterish sensibility. Focusing on the ways in which masculinity and class are represented, the thesis explores the centrality of homosociality in Meadows’ work, explaining how it demonstrates a particular dynamic of desire which operates between men.

The first chapter identifies the reason existing paradigms for Meadows inadequately describe the particular, liminal quality of both Meadows’ films and the positioning of the filmmaker himself. Chapter Two explores the tradition of social realism in British cinema and how it works as a discourse. It goes on to argue why this conventional paradigm is not adequate as a way of understanding Meadows’ work. Chapter Three demonstrates how the production of the films is liminal, positioned between art-house and commerce, and how a reading of the body of the filmmaker as a text is a productive way to approach the representation of masculinity and class. Chapter Four analyses the film texts using a Jungian archetypal framework to explain the ways in which they are liminal. The study concludes that Meadows can be best understood through the concept of liminal realism, a new paradigm with potentially wider applications for analyses of screen culture.

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My thanks and apologies go to my children Edward, Evie and Mimi for their patience and understanding while I was occupied with research, and to Tobias who arrived just in time for corrections. I must also thank my wonderful mother-in-law, Jan Bragg for her emotional and practical support, without whom I would have been unable to undertake this study.

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Introduction

I am Shane Meadows, Nottingham's premier director - please don't harm me.¹

The above quotation by Shane Meadows is taken from a profile of Meadows on *The South Bank Show* (April 2007), in particular the production of his 2009 film *This is England*. It obliquely sums up much of what is interesting about the man whom many consider to be, not only Nottingham's premier director within an implied category of one, but also, in the words of James Leggott, "arguably the most influential realist British filmmaker of the era".² The qualifier of "realist" is an important one; it is the conventional way through which Meadows' work is culturally conceived. His entry in *Contemporary British and Irish Film Directors* claims Meadows is, "very much part of the British tradition of social realist cinema", a statement which firmly embeds Meadows' work within what is regarded as the dominant mode of British filmmaking practice.³

This thesis critically analyses this conventional understanding of Shane Meadows, scrutinising the various cultural discourses which constitute the figure of the white, working-class, regional filmmaker. What makes this study distinctive is the way in which it questions the critical tendencies and intellectual pressures to consider Meadows as part of British social realism, arguing instead that a fuller understanding of the filmmaker and his work can be achieved through the utilization of other critical discourses, brought together under the term, 'liminal realism', a term invented specifically in order to more adequately delineate Meadows, but which has wider applications for film studies.

Meadows' statement refers to his experience of interacting with the local community of the St Ann's council estate in Nottingham whilst scouting it as a possible location for *This is England* in 2008. The physical presence of the director within the environs of a 'real' space, among the pebble-dashed architecture of social housing, rather than a studio

¹ Shane Meadows in *The South Bank Show: The Scorsese of the North*, Shane Meadows, (2007).

² James Leggott, *Contemporary British Cinema: From Heritage to Horror* (London: Wallflower, 2008), p. 74.

³ Emily Sumner and Ian Haydn Smith, 'Shane Meadows', in Allon, Cullen and Patterson (eds), *Contemporary British and Irish Film Directors* (London: Wallflower, 2001), pp. 227-8.

set, is itself indicative of Meadows' sensitivity to social conditions, particularly amongst working-class communities. It also gestures to his preference for the aesthetic of documentary realism, a style which is associated with social realist texts. It overtly suggests Meadows' documentary approach to his work, a view upheld by Meadows with his statement to Melvyn Bragg: "my work is halfway between cinema and documentary". That *The South Bank Show* also chose to film the director in such a location is telling. It indicates the tendency for the mediated image of a working-class director to be presented through physical terms, whereby the body of the filmmaker is immediately associated with his body of work. This location of the issues and themes of working-class realism back onto the body of the director himself is one consideration of this study. Moreover, Meadows' evaluation of his work as "halfway between cinema and documentary", in-between the two modes, mobilizes the concept of liminality which, I argue, is the defining schema of his work and of his cultural significance.

Been There, Done That, Imagined the T-shirt

Meadows' full statement to Bragg was "I should just have a t-shirt made saying, 'I am Shane Meadows, Nottingham's premier director – please don't harm me'". This seemingly throwaway quip is a valuable route towards comprehending the director's cultural positioning in a number of ways. Firstly, it wittily exhibits Meadows' knowing self-awareness of his cultural role as an eminent, yet regionally configured, filmmaker, pointing to a notional 'big-fish-in-a small-pool' status. The citing of the city of Nottingham as the geographical and cultural yardstick of his eminence is figured comically; if it were exchanged with 'London', the implications would be very different. Similarly ironic is the second marker of Meadowsian sensibility, an awareness of the potential, or latency of violence, indicated through his plea to the community of St Ann's to not commit physical harm upon his person. The inclusion of the qualifying "please", exhibits an acknowledgement of social manners as expressed through language, a comment on the occasional disparity between word and act; it is striking how, even when committing acts of extreme violence, Meadowsian characters maintain such social niceties.

Any questioning of the legitimacy of his presence on the St. Ann's estate is thus countered in two ways. One constitutes the third purpose of the t-shirt; to argue for his cultural status through authenticity. The t-shirt stands synecdochically: it is utilitarian, commonplace and popular, an 'everyman' item of clothing. It is also branded with the place name of "Nottingham", thus marking it, and by association, Meadows, as local, in a symbiotic relationship between authenticity of object (the t-shirt) and authenticity of subjects (Nottingham and Meadows).

A further point concerns marketing, where a t-shirt becomes a wearable billboard marked with the insignia of a brand name and Meadows' own acute awareness of his commodified status: in this case the name of "Shane Meadows". The branded t-shirt is doubly protective of the artist through the layering of authenticity *and* celebrity. Meadows is both nationally recognized artist and local boy made good, a critically acclaimed filmmaker and Midlands lad with unpretentious tastes in clothing. Thus the t-shirt figures rather like the metaphorical shield of Perseus, but this time an impenetrable barrier is fashioned through the magic power of celebrity rather than the skills of the Greek goddess Athena. While the mythical may seem out of place here, the use of a 'magical' item of clothing in its contemporary context does have implications for this study. The re-cycling of ancient myth in order to create new mythologies of gender and class is something important to an appreciation of Meadows' work.

As well as a device of protection, the latter part of the t-shirt's written text operates as a referent to the filmic texts, where the threat of violence is a recurrent theme. Here then, the fictional t-shirt operates as an advertising tool beyond the confines of the St Ann's Estate, and speaks to the putative television audience. It presents the Meadows brand as predicated upon an implication of physical violence, inflected with comic irony, which obfuscates the horror of violence.

The final signifier proffered through the t-shirt is expressed through the emphatic phrase, "I am Shane Meadows". It connotes his autobiographical self-awareness which figures as a constant address in his work, acknowledging the critical insistence that the films are

transparently autobiographical; a position this study questions. This is aligned with the concept of authenticity which inflects his work and persona. Meadows' strategies of both embrace and disavowal of autobiographical authenticity engenders a liminal positioning which this study argues is central to understanding his work.

Through this imagined t-shirt, the distinguishing factors of Meadows are signalled: regional sensibility and identity; legitimacy and authenticity; an awareness of personal brand and image; the threat of violence; a comedic register and an autobiographical address. That the t-shirt is figuratively worn by the body of the filmmaker is important; his personal identity is partially formed through his being, amongst other things, a male, white and working-class, East-Midlander, forms of identity which are expressed through performative activities. Meadows' gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and life experiences are all central to his films as texts, to their context of reception, and to how they have been understood.

For example, the main protagonists of films such as *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999) and *This is England* (2006) are presented by Meadows through contextual material as versions of his younger self, avatars which express his autobiographical experiences. I use the term avatar both in its modern sense, as a mediated persona within an artificial reality, and in its original religious sense, where avatar refers to a manifestation of a deity in another form. This notion of spiritual manifestation is an important one which resonates with the mythical elements of Meadows' work. It is this highly reflexive articulation of the self within the films together with contextual discourses which make him an interesting object of study figure in contemporary British filmmaking. Through the mythology of the filmmaker himself and the textual representations of versions of those myths within the films, Meadows' work engages directly with contemporary discourses around masculinity and class, and this thesis is concerned with the specific ways in which those representations operate. In particular, it is concerned with the liminal ways in which homosociality is ambivalently presented as the loci of performative play, disavowed homoerotic encounter, and violent competition.

This study examines the cultural construct that is Shane Meadows and the work produced by him. It does this for a number of key reasons: to offer a sustained analysis of the work and practice of an important contemporary British filmmaker; to use those analyses to make broader comments about the homosocial networks which exist contextually around Meadows' film practice and within the texts themselves; to recognize and comment upon the sexual dynamics of desire which occur in the homosocial environments presented in Meadows' work, dynamics which operate at the levels of homoerotic desire and its violent disavowal; to question the appropriateness of the term social realism as an apt and adequate descriptor of Meadows and his work; and to investigate those generic elements of his work which have been overlooked or critically dismissed. This, I argue is mainly due to the overuse of a social realist critical framework which Julian Petley has described as a "stifling blanket".⁴ Reconsidering Meadows' work and its non-realist components, whether generic, fantastical or mythical, will invigorate debates around this filmmaker's work and present new ways to consider British film culture by and about the working-class. This study repositions Meadows' work within a new critical paradigm of 'liminal realism', a model which is more appropriate and productive than existing theoretical approaches currently used for analyses of the filmmaker and his work.

This work is done via the employment of liminality as an organizing principle, where the state of being in-between is, I argue, an invigorating and productive way to consider Meadows' position within film culture, being neither mainstream nor art-house. Liminality extends to the texts and is central to the analyses of them, most especially in considerations of the representation of gender and class; homosocial desire; the foregrounding of autobiography and biography in his work; spatial constructs and the idea of place and regionality, and in the tension created between the different modes adopted by the filmmaker. Meadows deploys the conventions of social realism but also draws on other traditions, such as slapstick, folk customs and aspects of myth as well as generic conventions, such as horror, the western and the revenge drama.

⁴ Julian Petley, 'The Lost Continent', in Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986), p. 100.

This thesis contributes to current understandings of contemporary working-class masculinity in film culture and offers a contribution to knowledge through its detailed consideration of an important figure in contemporary British film. It questions the prevailing cultural and academic understandings of his work, suggesting that liminality is a more productive way to approach the subject of Meadows. It offers the term liminal realism as a new way of considering the mode of Meadows' practice and the texts produced, suggesting how this term could be productively utilized elsewhere. Through a detailed study of the filmmaker and his work, I suggest that Meadows can be conceived of as a contemporary trickster who uses strategies of liminality to negotiate the difficult intersection between the worthiness of the social realist project and the seeming vacuity of contemporary celebrity culture, all the while sustained by a homosocial environment.

Structure

Chapter One presents a review of the existing literature about Meadows and his work. It organizes the various lines of argument, commenting upon areas of consensus and disagreement, before evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the different critical positions. The second chapter focuses on a specific aspect, the tradition of social realism and its important though ambivalent relationship to Meadows. Rather than presenting an historical survey of social realism, this chapter explores those aspects which have direct relevance for a consideration of Meadows and also analyses the ways in which it operates as a discourse. Chapter Three describes the concept of liminality, suggesting how it is a valuable term for use in film culture in general, before discussing how it best describes Meadows and his work. The initial section of the fourth chapter links together the findings of chapters two and three, suggesting how the terms realism and liminal can be brought together neologically to describe the production context of Meadows' work. It continues with an examination of the funding, budgets and distribution of the films, before discussing Meadows' presentation of his work as autobiographical and the possible tensions that creates with his improvisatory mode of filmmaking. The fourth section of Chapter Three discusses the concept of the homosocial body, the networks of men who work within the film industry and how these contextually support the homosocial emphasis within screen culture. The final section examines the physical body

of the filmmaker as it is culturally mediated, commenting on how the body of the filmmaker stands synecdochically for the masculinity represented in his films, a concept suggested earlier in this study through the discussion of Meadows' appearance in *The South Bank Show*.

Chapter Four analyses texts by Meadows via a typological schema. It groups together different types presented in the films, arguing how they all relate in various ways to the notion of liminality. It is here that notions of social realism are stripped away to reveal a more mythic take on aspects of community exhibited in Meadows' work. Here I argue how community is predicted on folk culture, but through a decidedly homosocial subjectivity and informed by contemporary sensibilities. The chapter examines aspects of genre, mainly through characterization, linking those characters to generic iconography and specificities of place. The final chapter concludes the study, reiterating the major arguments of the thesis and offering several potentially fruitful areas for further study.

Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

The study adopts an eclectic theoretical approach, drawing upon a wide range of studies and debates from a variety of disciplines and fields of study, in order to situate Meadows within a liminal matrix. These include studies in anthropology; masculinity; class constructs; folk tales and myth; British cinema and genre theory; cinema industry including funding and production studies; cultural geography; literary studies and psychological theory. Work on liminality will be central to the thesis; these include anthropological works by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, in particular their concepts of liminality as experienced through the initiation rites and rituals of young men in certain tribal cultures.⁵

Alongside liminality, the other foci of this study are the ways in which masculinity and class, especially the working-class, are represented in the work of Meadows. Primary

⁵ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960). Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967); *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (London: Cornell University Press, 1974); *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982); *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1997).

texts on masculinity consulted in this study include those by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, especially her concept of homosocial desire as articulated through a triangular relationship between two men and one woman in *Between Men*.⁶ Sedgwick's concept of homosocial desire as defined through an erotic triangle is central to this thesis and my understanding of Meadows' work. However, where Sedgwick identified a particular geometry of gender, where two men compete over a third subject of desire, a female character that legitimizes their erotic struggle and thus occludes the homoerotic link between the two men and their 'true' feelings for each other, such strict gendering is not applied in Meadows' work. Other than *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* (2002) which most fully represents the 'conventional' erotic triangle of two men competing for the affection of one woman, Meadows' films often relocate the gendered positioning on the points of the erotic triangle; the standard places of male and female characters may be switched, with a man and a woman competing for the affection of another man, a dynamic explored in *Smalltime* (1996) or, as in the case of *Dead Man's Shoes* (2004), the triangle may consist of an all-male groups.

A further triangulated relationship of witness/perpetrator/victim is a structural and thematic motif in Meadows' films and this paradigm can also be understood through the concept of liminality. The interconnected roles of witness, perpetrator and victim are often presented around episodes of ludic play or violent outburst, where one or more character 'playfully' or violently attacks another. Such activities are often presented as liminal, being between the playfully violent or the violently playful, with the distinction often difficult to discern within the dynamic of the homosocial group. Much of this activity involves performances by the characters to others within the group and to the ostensible audience, with the performances connected to notions of gender. These performances are complicated though the repeated use of drag, where male characters dress in culturally normative 'female' clothing and perform for others. The idea of drag and its performative power evokes Judith Butler's thesis of performativity and the gestural power of clothing. Butler's work is used in this study to interrogate the ways in

⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

which the cultural figure of Meadows and the male characters in his films perform aspects of gender.⁷ A major consideration of the thesis is an exploration of this homosocial dynamic and what implications it has for representations of working-class masculinity, especially the disavowal of homoeroticism as a barely expressed, yet oppressive force which plays upon and through the Meadowsian screen.

The thesis pays particular attention to representations of masculinity and class, more specifically the working-class or ‘under-class’, the dominant concerns of Meadows’ work. His work overwhelmingly depicts homosocial relationships within an under-class milieu, and while the socio-economic factors which affect these characters are explored, such as unemployment, family break-down and criminality, this thesis argues that such representations, which have become the standard foci of British social realist film, are approached in ways which explore older and more universal traditions, whether myth or folk culture. The representation of masculinity is configured as liminal in Meadows’ work, through the presentation of episodes of liminal undertaking, such as the initiation of an individual into a group, a dynamic repeated in *TwentyFourSeven*, *A Room for Romeo Brass*, *Dead Man’s Shoes* and *This is England* and through the way in which male characters are representative of liminal archetypes, such as the trickster, the tramp, or the monster. Similarly, Meadows’ under-class milieu is presented as a world of folk culture, which engages with liminal activities, whether drag performances, bacchanalia or foolish play, activities which signal liminal interruptions into ‘everyday’ life.

Scope of Study

The thesis will look in particular at a distinct period of Meadows’ work, beginning with Meadows’ first featurette, *Smalltime*, including *TwentyFourSeven*, *A Room for Romeo Brass*, *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands*, *Dead Man’s Shoes* and *This is England*. This can be described as a central period for Meadows for a number of reasons: it is distinctly concerned with a limited geographical terrain close to Uttoxeter, the place of his birth; it makes extensive use of supposedly autobiographical experiences; and the films of this

⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999).

period employ a narrative arc which moves towards a scene of explosive violence. I argue that work after *This is England*, can be described as post-central, in that they signal departures for the filmmaker. For example, *Somers Town* (2008) was the first film to be shot in a location outside of the East Midlands, even having a ‘foreign’ coda, set in Paris. Similarly, *Le Donk and Scor-Zay-Zee* (2009) was filmed outside the traditional Meadowsian region of the East Midlands, being mainly shot on location in Manchester at the Oxegen music festival.⁸ Neither works have been presented in interviews with the same claims to autobiographical content of the earlier films. Although continuities are present, such as the prevalence of homosocial relationships and the continuum created through the use of the actors Thomas Turgoose and Paddy Considine who appeared in earlier work, they are lighter in tone with less emphasis on autobiographical contextualization. Indeed, Meadows signals his move away from the autobiographical to the biographical through a proposed intention of making a bio-pic of the British Road Racing cyclist, Tommy Simpson through a post on his official website.⁹

This is England '86 and *This is England '88* were made as spin-offs from *This is England* for Channel 4. As well as continuing certain themes present in the films and thus offering further prospects for textual analysis, attention to these programmes provides particular opportunities to discuss the televisual qualities of Meadows’ work, both in terms of aesthetics and the intertextual references and indebtedness to television productions such as those made by Alan Clarke, whom Meadows cites as a key influence.¹⁰ Similarly, reference to other work, such as the television documentary *King of the Gypsies* (1995) and certain short films will augment the central discussion of the central period of feature films. However, as television occupies a different cultural field to film, considerations of television work are an adjunct to the central concerns of the film texts.

The study focuses on the major concerns of Meadows’ work; the representation of masculinity, especially homosocially-constructed male relationships, as lived within a

⁸ See Index 1 for a map of filming locations.

⁹ www.shanemeadows.co.uk. Posted 23 February 2011; accessed 1 March 2011.

¹⁰ Gerard Gilbert, ‘England rebooted: Shane Meadows is revisiting *This is England* on the small screen’, *The Independent*, 02 September 2010; available at www.independent; accessed 10 October 2010.

working-class environment. The companionate themes of masculinity and the working-class as expressed through Meadows' work are, I argue, best understood through a consideration of liminality as the organizing principle which orders and describes Meadows' unique approach to these phenomena. The concept of liminality describes a state of intermediacy, of being in-between two points, with the etymology of the term derived from the Latin, *līmen*, meaning threshold. It is the idea of a threshold, a place or space which is partially defined by what comes before or after it, but not wholly so, a shifting, indeterminate point between two disparate states which contains part of each, yet is different and distinct from each. It is distinct from marginal, which suggests something pushed to one side, away from the centre and to a greater or lesser extent, ignored. Conversely, the liminal concerns the centre, but a specified centre which may exist away from, or alongside other centres. This has particular relevance for the representation of working or under-class masculinity, which cannot be described as marginal within British screen culture; indeed, it is the central concern of many texts. In Meadows' work this central concern is presented as liminal via archetypal characterization and liminal activities.

Where the term marginality can be legitimately used when discussing Meadows' work is in connection to the under-representation of women in the films, both in terms of screen time and agency; here they are indeed pushed to one side and to a greater extent, ignored. Women are represented as liminal inasmuch as they exist between men in the triangle of desire as described by Sedgwick; however, this position is relegated to one of marginality where the more important relationship between the male characters is revealed. Female marginality is best expressed in Meadows' work where women and/or images of them become objects of exchange within a homosocial economy. This dynamic is discussed at length in Chapter Four, in particular the first section, where it is linked to aspects of folk culture and the carnivalesque. Here work by Mikhail Bakhtin is used to examine the particular way in which Meadows uses the carnivalesque; however, this study problematizes the potential of carnivalesque to affect positive change for the working-class, in particular working-class women, because of the seeming gender blindness which

accompanies Bakhtin's work.¹¹ In addition to the discussion of the carnivalesque, other aspects of folk culture will be examined, with works by Enid Welsford and William Willeford drawn upon in order to discuss those aspects of folk culture which are manifested in Meadows' work and to formulate the construct of Meadows as a contemporary trickster.¹²

¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984).

¹² Enid Welsford, *The Fool and His Social and Literary History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955); William Willeford, *The Fool and His Scepter: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and their Audience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969).

Chapter One: Literature Review

This chapter surveys existing academic discourses on Shane Meadows in order to critically place him within debates in contemporary film culture. Critical discourses around Meadows and his work broadly place his practice and productions within the category of social realism. However, within that category there are various convergences and disagreements about the specific way Meadows' work should be read. This section brings together these discussions, identifying the critical tendencies which surround his work and discussing the various positions taken. It does this in order to establish the conventional ways in which the work of Shane Meadows is critically regarded, identifying any gaps and misapprehensions, before considering how this study relates to such positions. It will argue how conventional readings of Meadows' work are marked by a tendency to overemphasise the social realist aspects of the work, twinned with an under appreciation of the generic elements which inform the films, a tendency which ignores the liminal quality of his work. Accordingly, works on liminality pertinent to this study are also discussed in this chapter, as are works on masculinity and class which are used as primary texts for the textual analyses in Chapter Four.

This chapter also locates the work critically within current studies of contemporary British film. It refers to those works which directly cite the filmmaker and/or his films in order to categorize the ways in which the work is critically received and conceived. The critical consensus claims Meadows as part of the tradition of social realism, a position I problematize during this thesis. The tradition of social realism in British film and Meadows' relationship to it will be discussed more fully in Chapter Two.

One of the earliest critical acknowledgements of Meadows was the entry in *Contemporary British and Irish Film Directors*.¹³ Published in 2001, the piece could only consider work up to and including *A Room for Romeo Brass*, yet the entry by Emily Sumner and Ian Hadyn Smith instigate many commonly held views on Meadows' work, namely: that it belongs in the category of social realism and is visually composed with a

¹³ Sumner and Smith, 'Shane Meadows', p. 227.

documentary realist style; that the sense of place is very much foregrounded, so much so that “the locations arguably become characters in their own right”; that the films demonstrate a sensitivity to social conditions, but “do not carry the explicit political messages of a Ken Loach film”; that the films owe a debt to the work of Mike Leigh; that there is a distinct concentration upon homosocial environments in which crises of male identities are carried out; that the films easily switch from the comic to the violent; that, in contrast to the representation of masculinity as problematic, femininity is shown as positively opposite, where female characters are “the only voices of stability... able to hold all their lives together”.¹⁴

The short entries on Meadows in the first and third editions of the *Encyclopedia of British Film* vary only through the addition of film titles released between the publication of each edition, without any adjustment to the original judgement.¹⁵ Here, Melinda Hildebrandt reproduces many of the identifying features presented by Sumner and Smith, especially through the emphasis on autobiography, an emphasis made clear through her description of Meadows as a “self-taught film-maker who tells stories that relate to his youth and working-class background”, stories which are “highly personal” and demonstrate an “autobiographical strain”.¹⁶ Hildebrandt identifies influences as originating in the “contemporary realism” of Loach and Leigh and in the “realist films of the New Wave” and that through *TwentyFourSeven*, Meadows’ “affection for the black and white films of the 50s is (made) obvious”.¹⁷ The lack of change in subsequent editions demonstrates a static understanding of Meadows, where new film titles can be slotted into existing descriptions in a seemingly unproblematic way.

It is evident that these early entries demonstrate the early positioning of Meadows within a decidedly British film culture, identifying influences on Meadows’ work as originating from social realist practitioners and movements. While Meadows’ engagement with

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Melinda Hildebrandt, ‘Shane Meadows’, in McFarlane (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of British Film* (London: BFI, Methuen, 2003), p. 445; Melinda Hildebrandt, ‘Shane Meadows’, in McFarlane (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of British Film: Third Edition* (London: BFI, Methuen, 2011), p. 494.

¹⁶ Hildebrandt, ‘Shane Meadows’, in McFarlane (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of British Film: Second Edition* (London: BFI, Methuen, 2011), p. 494.

¹⁷ Ibid.

genre was less overt in his early features than in his early shorts and became more obvious in his later films, especially *Dead Man's Shoes* and *Once upon A Time in the Midlands*, the failure to recognize American influences, especially *Raging Bull* (1980) and *Rocky* (1976) on *TwentyFourSeven* and its use of generic devices common to boxing films, such as the training montage, is illustrative of the impetus to identify Meadows' work as an indigenous product, influenced by indigenous practitioners and styles.

This alignment with social realist practitioners is corroborated by Robert Shail who concurs with the social realist positioning of Meadows, stating that “*This is England* is solidly in the tradition of British Social Realism”.¹⁸ Terms such as “solidly” implies a comfortable and secure fit within the tradition while suggesting rigidity about Meadows' social realist credentials. This is made clear in Shail's summary of Meadows where, “in just four feature films Meadows has already established a considerable reputation ... and forged a recognizable cinematic signature, bringing a distinctive visual style, warmth and idiosyncrasy to familiar material. The spirit of British realism appears to be in safe hands”.¹⁹ Shail's final sentence implies an approving sense of relief: that British realism is a precious commodity which should be protected and that Meadows has proved himself capable of being careful with such a cargo. Such critical reverence for realism has, I argue, impeded discussions of British film culture, imposing a narrow set of criteria against which texts and practices are measured. Moreover, it creates a pressure to conceive of filmmakers and their work as operating within the mode, even when other factors, such as genre, are at play.

Geoff Brown also considers Meadows' work as continuing in the realist tradition, tracing a thread from John Grierson's *Drifters* (1929) to “the urban flotsam of Mike Leigh's *Naked* (1993) or Shane Meadows' *Smalltime* (1997)”.²⁰ This is updated in the third edition of *The British Cinema Book* to “the urban flotsam of Andrea Arnold's *Red Road*

¹⁸ Robert Shail, *British Film Directors: A Critical Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 148.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 149.

²⁰ Geoff Brown, ‘Paradise Found and Lost: The Course of British Realism in Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book: Second Edition* (London: BFI, 2001), p. 249.

(2006) or Shane Meadows' *This is England*'.²¹ In a replication of Hildebrandt's unchanged assessment of Meadows' work over a number of years, for Brown, not only is Meadows' early work clearly part of the tradition of social realism, but that work *continues* to exemplify that tradition to the extent that one film title can be replaced with another without any alteration. It also indicates Brown's identification of a seemingly prolific representation of "urban flotsam", a term presumably used to describe the working-class subjects of the films. The pejorative noun, "flotsam", suggests a lack of agency for the characters who exist as a type of floating scum, while the qualifier of "urban" prescribes the oscillations of that scum within the confines of an inner-city environment. This is troubling in two distinct ways: the first in the negative view of working-class subjects as represented in contemporary film and the second in Brown's misrecognition of Meadows' work as urban, when the majority of the films are set in suburban or semi-rural settings. Indeed, the quality of space in Meadows' work is often predicated on this liminal aspect of being set between the city and the countryside, a quality overlooked by Brown.

The spirit of British realism is, in the view of Sheldon Hall, an aesthetic rather than a political dynamic in Meadows' work. His assessment of *TwentyFourSeven* contends that "it is as much poetic as naturalistic, suggesting that for Meadows social realism is an artistic means rather than a political end".²² This view of a de-politicized use of a social realist aesthetic concur with Sumner and Smith's view of Meadows' adoption of a Loachian style which is denuded of its "explicit political messages".²³ These critical assessments imply that British social realism can be an aesthetic choice, rather than a political position and that the two can be simply divided. However, they fail to recognize that a seeming absence of an overt political message does not equate with a film being apolitical; rather it suggests that the politics of the film are complex and possibly contradictory. Moreover, separating aesthetics from politics creates a false division, suggesting an either/or dynamic. I argue instead that aesthetic choices are intrinsically

²¹ Geoff Brown, 'Paradise Found and Lost: The Course of British Realism', in Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book: Third Edition* (London: BFI, 2008), p. 249.

²² Sheldon Hall, 'Shane Meadows', in Murphy (ed.), *Directors in British and Irish Cinema: A Reference Companion* (London: BFI Publishing, 2006), p. 421.

²³ Sumner and Smith, 'Shane Meadows', pp. 227-8.

political, that the framing of space always involves a political decision and that Meadows' work is, like any other cultural product, politically invested.

The fallacious split between politics and aesthetics is continued by David Forrest; here Shail's evocation of Meadows' "safe hands" pre-empt's Forrest's relay concept, where Meadows takes up the "baton" of an inter-related, yet distinct aspect of British screen culture; that of British art cinema.²⁴ Using David Bordwell's definitions of art cinema, Forrest contests that social realism should be considered for its aesthetic as well as socio-political contribution to British film culture and that conventional criticism should be awakened to the potential of considering indigenous social realist film in similar ways to the art cinema of Europe. Forrest problematizes Andrew Higson and John Hill's dominant discourse of social realism, which he argues is predicated upon a model of class-inflected observation, where the middle class filmmaker and/or audience watch the working-class subject. Forrest contests that Meadows' 'insider' position, partially formed through his own working-class identity, does not necessitate a split from the filmmakers of the New Wave; rather that they can be viewed collectively as practitioners of art cinema. While Forrest's approach attempts to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of Meadows' work, it does so through the orthodoxy of social realism, albeit from the aesthetic rather than the political perspective, he does not consider seriously the generic conventions used in the films, an aspect of Meadows' practice which seems to be critically overlooked in general.

Sharing a similar perspective to David Forrest, Takako Seino identifies Meadows' work as social realist, situated within a tradition of art cinema.²⁵ Seino attests that Meadows exemplifies "the new medium of British social realism, which explores the poetic view of contemporary society and that of magic realism".²⁶ Seino uses the term magic realism to bring together the fantastic and realist properties of Meadows' work, suggesting that such dualisms exhibit a novel progression of social realist filmmaking. Seino argues:

²⁴ David Forrest, 'Shane Meadows and the British New Wave: Britain's Hidden Art Cinema', *Studies in European Cinema*, vol. 6, nos. 2&3 (December 2009), pp. 191-201.

²⁵ Takako Seino, 'Realism and Representations of the Working-class in Contemporary British Cinema' (MPhil thesis, De Montfort University, 2010).

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 54.

Meadows' filmmaking style, embedded in the ordinary lives of his locality, clearly aligns his works within the social realist tradition. Nevertheless, his use of cinematography and editing, the deployment of music and eclectic use of camera techniques gives his films a fantasy feel, which, when placed with the realist element of the film, explores the new realm of British social realism.²⁷

The recognition of the elements of fantasy in Meadows' work is pertinent to this study which also places importance on the metaphysical play which persists in the films. However, the term magic realism has a specificity of meaning which does not include the generic conventions which attend some of Meadows' work; neither does it adequately describe Meadows' position of being in-between different areas of filmmaking practice and style. Seino's emphasis on newness deviates from Forrest's more direct link to the established practices of the New Wave; however both share the view of Meadows' work as representative of art cinema. They also share a similar view of Meadows' biographical links to his subject matter and claims to authenticity provided via autobiographical experience. However, Seino unproblematically presents *This is England* as "an autobiographical film", without unpacking what such a construction means.²⁸

Forrest goes further than Seino, attesting that his configuration of Meadows' as a contemporary exponent of New Wave aesthetic practices collapses the class-based criticisms of the externally located and observational eye of the middle class filmmakers of the 1960s.²⁹ Indeed, Forrest contends that Meadows' working-class background helps to:

Destabilize these class-based criticisms ... Meadows (who incidentally grew up and still lives in the areas around where most of his films were made) shares and builds upon many of the stylistic and formal motifs of the British New Wave, defusing the possibility of similar criticisms.³⁰

Such class-based criticisms are firmly presented in the MPhil thesis by Stuart Duncan Brown. Brown's study examines *Dead Man's Shoes* alongside *Nil by Mouth* (1997),

²⁷ Ibid, p. 53.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 52.

²⁹ These criticisms originate in the work of Andrew Higson and John Hill, and are discussed in the following chapter.

³⁰ Forrest, 'Shane Meadows and the British New Wave', *Journal of European Cinema*, p. 196.

using the films as case studies to argue how laughter functions in texts which represent working-class characters.³¹ Brown uses the term “emotional realism” to describe Meadows work, underlining the psychological, rather than the aesthetic effect considered by Forrest and Seino. Here Brown restates the class-based criticisms Forrest sought to defuse, arguing that:

Emotional realism harnesses the potentiality to position the spectator within, rather than outside the lives of the working-class subjects portrayed. Thus, this mode of spectatorship elucidates an attempt to collectively involve the audience in a way that removes them from the potentially patronizing position of sympathetic outsider, which has been of such detriment to the appreciation of British social realism since its conception.³²

For Brown, the problems of patronizing sympathy are expelled via Meadows’ working-class credentials, where “unlike so many other social realist directors in the past, both Oldman and Meadows originated from the environments that they have committed to screen”.³³ This view accords with that of Sheldon Hall who deftly disassociates Meadows from key social practitioners by virtue of his internal vantage point, stating that “unlike the work of Ken Loach and Mike Leigh, the film-makers with whom he is most often compared, Meadows’ observations of lower-class losers and misfits are made from the perspective of a native insider rather than a sympathetic visitor”.³⁴

Such clear delineations between a middle class, external observational eye and a working-class, internal participative eye set up a simplistic binary, and although their positions are different, Forrest, Seino, Brown and Hall all accept the implications of Meadows’ class position and early life experiences unproblematically. Such face value judgements ignore the complexities of power relations involved in any observational and representational activity, even if they involve practitioners who share socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, such a view is effectively essentialist, suggesting that one man’s

³¹ Stuart Duncan Brown, ‘The Subversion of Sympathy in British Social Realism: Uses of Laughter in the Cinematic Representation of the British Working-Class’. (MPhil thesis, University of Glasgow, December, 2007).

³² Ibid, p. 4.

³³ Ibid, pp. 4-5.

³⁴ Hall, ‘Shane Meadows’, p. 421.

experience of being working-class qualifies him to be representative of that class, or at least a qualified documenter of the representation of that class, despite all the individual experiences involved in such a broad sociological sector. As well as racial and cultural differences, the most obvious blind spot for such a view is the way in which female experience is subsumed into a seemingly holistic working-class experience.

Critical attention to the representation of class results in many commentators identifying Meadows' work as representing characters from the 'under-class'. This term is best described by Chris Haylett who states:

'Under-class' is generally held to refer to social groups at the base of the working-class whose characteristics are those of long-term unemployment or highly irregular employment, single-parenthood and criminality, where some or all of these characteristics are tendentially if not causally related.³⁵

Paul Dave is careful to state how the term and its use in political discourses around the welfare-dependant, 'undeserving poor', "conceals the systematically destructive effects of capitalism on particular sections of the working-class".³⁶ Dave describes how the narrative of *TwentyFourSeven* relocates under-class problems from the young men to the "fragile sensitivity" of the ageing Darcy.³⁷ For Dave, the scenes of communality and nurturing in the film refute the divisive characteristic attendant to descriptions of the under-class. In this way, Dave sees Meadows as presenting an under-class milieu while problematizing some negative aspects of its construction. James Leggott considers the way in which the under-class film is marketed outside the domestic market, where alongside the heritage film it is "something of export value".³⁸ The representation of the under-class and the way in which such filmed representations are marketed are considered later in this thesis.

³⁵ Chris Haylett, "This is About Us, This is Our Film!": Personal and Popular Discourses of 'Under-class', in Munt, (ed.), *Cultural Studies and the Working-class: Subject to Change* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), p. 70.

³⁶ Paul Dave, *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), p. 83.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 85.

³⁸ Leggott, *Contemporary British Cinema*, p. 88

Some of the most extensive writing on Meadows comes from Martin Fradley who co-organized a conference on the director.³⁹ As in Brown's thesis previously discussed, Fradley's work pays attention to laughter in Meadows' work, but with particular reference to the carnivalesque as described by Mikhail Bakhtin. Fradley emphasizes the homosocial centrality of Meadows' work, and the attendant fascination with the body and its excretions, seeing them as positive moments of communality. Drawing upon Kristeva's configuration of the abject, Fradley contends that such playful fascinations enable a politicized performance of carnivalesque resistance; that "the director's preoccupation with the corporeal has no shortage of social and political resonance".⁴⁰ Fradley modifies the social realist descriptor to include the comic and the incongruous, assessing Meadows' oeuvre as "grotesque realism" and "gentle social *surrealism*".⁴¹ Such modifications reflect the necessity to consider Meadows' work outside of the confines of social realism; however, they only go so far in describing the nature of the texts; only parts of the films concern the comic, the grotesque or the absurd. While elements of Meadows' cultural persona could potentially be described in such terms, grotesque realism and social surrealism cannot be usefully applied outside of the film texts; they do not describe his working methods, funding strategies or critical placement within screen culture. Therefore, my suggestion of liminal realism is more productive as a comprehensive descriptor of Meadows, his work, its production and reception. Moreover, Fradley's positive reading of the exchange of images of women and/or their bodily excretions is problematized in this study; while they indeed serve to cement social bonds as Fradley attests, these bonds are I argue, exclusively between men, although Fradley describes them as indicative of a "working-class *commonality*".⁴² This term echoes Hildebrandt's gender inclusive expression, "social connectedness", which also assumes a comprehensiveness that requires some unpacking. While Fradley's neat italicization of 'common' intertwines his dual themes of coarse bodily humour and community identity, it also infers a universally felt sensibility within a discrete area. Such descriptions elude

³⁹ *Straight Outta Uttoxeter*, University of East Anglia, 15-16th April 2010. Organizers Melanie Williams (UEA), Sarah Godfrey (UEA), Martin Fradley (Staffordshire University).

⁴⁰ Martin Fradley, "'Al Fresco? That's up Your Anus, Innit?'" Shane Meadows and the Politics of Abjection', in Fradley, Godfrey and Williams (eds), *Straight Outta Uttoxeter! Critical Essays on Shane Meadows* [working title] (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2013), p. 3.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, p. 4. Original emphasis.

the particular dynamic of homosocial desire I argue operates in Meadows' films, where female characters serve as supporting structures of the triangular schema, with the significant romance occurring between the male characters. The marginalization of female characters is nominally acknowledged by Fradley without being analysed.

The marginalization of women is recognized by Graham Fuller, who contests the view of positive female representation in Meadows' work as articulated by Shaw and Haydn Smith. For Fuller, women's marginal presence implies that "they daunt him" and that many of Meadows' female characters "are portraits of women who are more forceful or angrier, than the men around them".⁴³ Fuller's insightful recognition of the quiet anger held by Meadows' female characters and Meadows' difficulty in dealing with them on screen is important to consider alongside the central concerns of this study. Though often marginal, female characters perform a facilitating function in the homosocial dynamics of Meadows' work, where an erotic triangle persists as a mode through which homosexual desire can be both disavowed and experienced.

John Fitzgerald makes reference to a more typical romantic triangle in his assessment of *Somers Town*, seeing it as a "rough approximation of *Jules et Jim* (1962)".⁴⁴ While the association with a seminal French film is particularly understandable in the context of *Somers Town* with its Paris-set coda, it is also a rare example of the critical broadening out of intertextual influences beyond the confines of British social realism, especially in Meadows' later work. However, Fitzgerald's reading of *This is England* does not recognize the debt the film owes Truffaut, especially the final scene which echoes *Les quatre cents coups* (1959) which Meadows has acknowledged as influential.⁴⁵ Fitzgerald contends that the film is "close in spirit to early 1980s British social-realism, such as Mike Leigh's *Meantime* (1983) ... and there are nods to Alan Clarke's *Made in Britain* (1982)".⁴⁶ Nonetheless, while Fitzgerald clearly claims Meadows as an auteur, his listing

⁴³ Graham Fuller, 'Boys to Men', *Film Comment*, vol. 43, no. 4 (July/August 2007), p. 46.

⁴⁴ John Fitzgerald, *Studying British Cinema: 1999-2009* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2010), p. 136.

⁴⁵ Shane Meadows, 'Shane Meadows on This is England', *Film4*. Available at www.film4.com; accessed 17 August 2011.

⁴⁶ Fitzgerald, *Studying British Cinema: 1999-2009*, p. 135.

of Meadows' attributes repeats the conventional rhetoric around the filmmaker, which emphasizes autobiography and region:

His films are rooted in his own background and experiences. His locations are resolutely provincial – focusing on the unfashionable East Midlands, these locations are vitally important in constructing a context for his characters. His thematic preoccupations with patriarchy, male identity, rites of passage, violence and community provide the basis for much of his work. The combination of shocking tragedy and laugh-out-loud comedy, and his ability to switch almost seamlessly between both, is also a key signature.⁴⁷

Robert Murphy also views Meadows as a British auteur. His chapter, 'Bright Hopes, Dark Dreams: A Guide to New British Cinema' in *The British Cinema Book*, places Meadows under the sub-heading of "Auteur", among a peer-group which includes: Danny Boyle, Marc Evans, Nick Hamm, Nick Love, David Mackenzie, Roger Mitchell, Lynne Ramsay and Michael Winterbottom.⁴⁸ Here, Murphy, like Fitzgerald, emphasizes Meadows' auteurism via a strict attention to place, especially the "poorest and least fashionable parts of the Midlands", a geographical specificity augmented by autobiographical sensibility where "Meadows continues to draw on his Nottingham experiences and presents, with increasing competence and confidence, an England where language, morality, lifestyle, particularly among the working-classes, are vigorously different from the metropolitan norm".⁴⁹

While Murphy recognizes the specifics of Meadows' locations and settings as Midlands-based, he is culpable of the geographical conflation of the Midlands with the North, even though that distinction is reflexively indicated through his use of the phrase "to those of us born North of the Watford Gap" when discussing the representation of England in *This is England*. The grouping together of this film with *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* in terms of place, rather than masculinity, performance, issues of class or some other connection furthers the pernicious tendency of confusing the two regions, the Midlands and the North.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Robert Murphy, 'Bright Hopes, Dark Dreams: A Guide to New British Cinema', in Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book: Third Edition* (London: BFI, 2009), pp. 395-407.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 401.

Fradley is careful to attend to the specifics of place in Meadows' work, an attention to detail often overlooked in discourses around the filmmaker. His entry on Meadows in *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors* carefully untangles the specifics of Meadows' locations from the subsuming tendency of those critics who locate his work as originating in the North rather than the East Midlands, thereby conflating wide areas of the country into one amorphous northern hinterland.⁵⁰ Fradley furthers the focus on specificities of place while adeptly critiquing southern-centric metropolitan attitudes, stating "since the earliest features on Shane Meadows, it has become standard practice to describe the director as 'Nottingham-based' while only making fleeting reference to his unremarkable birthplace in Staffordshire".⁵¹

Whilst acknowledging that "authenticity is a contentious and provisional term", Fradley does not interrogate further Meadows' validity as a documenter of the environs of Uttoxeter, stating "there are few contemporary British filmmakers with Meadows's genuine understanding of the community he represents".⁵² Like Hildebrandt, Forrest, Seino and Brown, Fradley draws an intimate link between authenticity and autobiographical detail stating, "Meadows's affectionate semi-autobiographical stories have an intuitive understanding of both character and locale".⁵³ Fradley refers to the Alan Clarke, Ken Loach and Mike Leigh triptych of influence which attends Meadowsian discourse whilst shifting him historically and ideologically asserting that "Meadows is fundamentally a product of the 1980s conflicting ideologies," noting the dualism such a position creates, resulting in a "director who is both creative romantic and self-made businessman".⁵⁴ Such a configuration hints at, yet does not specify the liminal position I argue is emblematic of Meadows, opting instead for one of duality.

⁵⁰ Martin Fradley, 'Shane Meadows', in Tasker, (ed.), *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 280-88.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 280.

⁵² Ibid, p. 282.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 280.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 281.

James Leggott objects to the critical clustering of Loach, Leigh and Meadows who “tend to be lazily lumped together as keepers of the same realist flame” but suggests that comparisons between their different methodological approaches is illustrative of the breadth of the “realist strategies available to the contemporary filmmaker”.⁵⁵ Similarly, Graham Fuller also recognizes that “it’s possible to overlay the comparisons between Meadows and the Loach-Clarke-Leigh trinity of social realists”, rightly stating that “the agonizing over male identity and the role of violence in Martin Scorsese’s films suggest he is a more likely role model for Meadows”.⁵⁶

Edward Lawrenson also acknowledges both American and British traditions, stating that “Meadows’ style is a nimbler version of British social realism and as reminiscent of the street-smart sensibilities of US indie film-making as, say, the work of Ken Loach”.⁵⁷ Fuller and Lawrenson’s remarks suggest an acknowledgement of those elements of Meadows’ work which originate outside of the British social realist canon. Serious contemplation of Meadows’ employment of genre is refused by Brown who states that “*Dead Man’s Shoes* is, in principle, a ‘revenge thriller’, however it is important to refrain from such unequivocal generic consideration.”⁵⁸ This study takes the opposite view, arguing that it is vitally important to consider Meadows’ use of genre, and moreover, to ask questions about this plea for critical refrain, looking at the pressures that are in play in British screen culture to encourage such viewpoints.

Critical discourses over Meadows’ use of genre sometimes view it as compatible with social realist intent as in Leggott’s contention that:

In general, Meadows has used generic references not in the service of empty pastiche, but as a framework for the consideration of social issues of pressing concern in contemporary Britain: the bullying of vulnerable teenagers, the spread of racism, alienated youth and the problems of male violence and alcoholism.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Leggott, *Contemporary British Cinema*, p. 72.

⁵⁶ Fuller, ‘Boys to Men’, p. 45.

⁵⁷ Edward Lawrenson ‘Getting Personal’, *Sight and Sound*, vol. 14, no. 10 (October 2004), p. 35

⁵⁸ Brown, ‘The Subversion of Sympathy in British Social Realism’, p. 89.

⁵⁹ Leggott, *Contemporary British Cinema*, p. 74.

Such concordance between social realist project and the employment of genre is supported by Paul Dave who views Meadows in a similar way to Leggott. For Dave “Meadows’ interest in social realism is crossed with an interest in popular genres, particularly the gangster film with its dependence on a tragic motif of the suffering human body”.⁶⁰ Such assessments by Leggott and Dave are illustrative of a critical tendency to ascribe Meadows’ generic engagement as indigenously located, formed through traditions of British filmmaking, although Dave is not so specific about from where the gangster influences are derived.

Notions of indigenous cinema are discussed by William Brown, whose dissection of the conjunction of the words ‘British’ and ‘cinema’ as a seeming paradox, incorporates *This is England* into a disparate cluster of films which are at one at the same time both British and “post-British”, in terms of post-nationalism, or, in the case of *This is England*, a critique of British nationalism. Brown extends this critique to British cinema itself where Meadows might be “warning us ... that a national cinema might ... become a perversion of more innocent aims”.⁶¹ Brown’s contention of a post-national British cinema is interesting, if contentious, offering something different to the broad category of social realist filmmaking. Indeed, the suggestion of a ‘post-Britain’ suggests a crisis of identity in the way the nation is represented, signalling the need for more nuanced approach to representation.

This crisis echoes the crises felt in discourses around masculinity. However, it also suggests a prior uniformity of nationhood which was nominally unproblematic without deconstructing this ‘ideal’ as a mythical construction, missing the plurality of representation before the late 1990s and early 2000s, which is the span of Brown’s study. At the very least, the previous decade of the 1980s challenged ideas of nationhood to the same, if not greater extent than the later films, possessing a more overt political urgency than Meadows’ personally orientated and reflexive sensibility. Brown’s employment of a

⁶⁰ Paul Dave, ‘Tragedy, Ethics and History in Contemporary British Social Realist Film’, in Tucker (ed.), *British Social Realism in the Arts Since 1940* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 19.

⁶¹ William Brown, ‘Not Flagwaving, but Flag Drowning, or Postcards from Post-Britain’, in Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, Macmillan Palgrave, 2008), p. 412.

paradoxical relationship between British and cinema (and the filmmakers connected to both) suggests an antithetical relationship between two parts in an irreconcilable binary. A re-shifting of the focus from the two, seemingly paradoxical poles, to the complex area which lies between them, is, this study argues, a more potentially fruitful way to conceive of such difficulties; the liminal allows more room than the strict linearity of the paradoxical.

Greater attention to the representation of gender and generic conceits are given by Claire Monk who identified *Smalltime* as an ‘under-class’ film in her chapter ‘Underbelly UK: The 1990s Under-class Film, Masculinity and the Ideologies of ‘New’ Britain’.⁶² While the film was not mentioned any further in this paper it was discussed at length in another paper: ‘From Underworld to Under-class’, which assessed *Smalltime* in relation to British crime films of the 1990s.⁶³ Here, according to Monk, Meadows achieved the difficult feat of employing the generic devices of the organized crime film whilst also problematizing them, whether from the perspective of socioeconomics or through issues of gender. This destabilizing of the masculinist gangster myth, alongside Meadows’ unique attention to petty theft, rather than organized crime, marked *Smalltime* as exceptional when compared to films which appeared to still be “in thrall” to their 1980s progenitors.⁶⁴ Monk’s mentioning of *TwentyFourSeven* alongside films texts of the 1990s which articulated different aspects of and manifestations of, masculinity in crisis in ‘Men in the 90s’ supports the rationale of this literature survey, although the remainder of the chapter does not critique the film in any detail. This lacuna provides an opportunity for this study to address Meadows’ engagement with ‘laddism’, arguing how it develops the theme in a more nuanced way which is predicated on the unfit male body and its appropriation of culturally figured femininity.

The difficulty encountered in categorizing Meadows’ work is described by William Brown who states that *This is England* displays an “ahistoricising tendency (which)

⁶² Claire Monk, ‘Underbelly UK: The 1990s Under-class Film, Masculinity and the Ideologies of ‘New’ Britain’, in Ashby and Higson (eds), *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 275.

⁶³ Claire Monk, ‘From Underworld to Under-class: Crime and British Cinema in the 1990s’, in Chibnall and Murphy (eds), *British Crime Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 172-88.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 187.

contributes to the accusations of naivety, but it also means that these films resist easy definition, both in terms of genre and in terms of established political trends”.⁶⁵ While *This is England* may be critically resistant in terms of political trends, it does, according to James Leggott, have more to say about contemporary Britain than other films which, through funding streams, use of stars, writers and locations can be classified as British under “a generous umbrella”.⁶⁶ The production context of Meadows’ work has been explored by Jason Scott who pays particular attention to the role played by Mark Herbert, the producer with whom Meadows has worked closely since *Dead Man’s Shoes*. As the first feature produced through Warp Films, Scott notes how “the film would also demonstrate a production model for Warp, and produce formalised relationships with funders and distributors (regionally, nationally and internationally)”.⁶⁷ Through the case study of Mark Herbert, Warp Films and Shane Meadows, Scott describes how the “producer role synthesises creative, commercial, and logistical dimensions”.⁶⁸ The way in which Meadows gets his films made is relevant to this study; in Chapter Three I describe how the persona of Meadows is predicated upon a tricksterish characterisation which involves collaborations with others, predominantly in a homosocial environment, a contextual model which replicates the textual models of homosociality within his films.

The intimate relationship between funding and regional representation in Meadows’ work is recognized by Samantha Lay, who suggests that the various European and British funding with which the filmmaker was involved encouraged such geographical specificity.⁶⁹ Citing *This is England* as an example, Lay states how the film was “produced with regional sensibilities using funds and facilities specifically designed to encourage regional film-making” and that in collaboration with Warp X, Meadows could make the film locally, a convenience which has resulted in the filmmaker “not

⁶⁵ Brown, ‘Not Flagwaving but Flagdrowning or Postcards from Post-Britain’, p. 415. Emphasis added.

⁶⁶ Leggott, *Contemporary British Cinema*, p. 9.

⁶⁷ Jason Scott, ‘Mark Herbert, Warp Films and producing creatively: negotiating the ever shifting contexts of the British independent film producer’, conference paper, *Creative Accounting*, University of the West of England (April 19-20, 2011), p. 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 17.

⁶⁹ Samantha Lay, ‘Good Intentions, High Hopes and Low Budgets: Contemporary Social Realist Film-making in Britain’, *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*. vol. 5, no. 3 (2007), pp. 231-44.

compromising on his regional sensibilities”.⁷⁰ Lay sees such a move as provocative inasmuch as “for self-proclaimed regional film-maker, Shane Meadows, the link with Warp X in Sheffield represents a direct challenge to the Southern-centric film industry”.⁷¹ While not explicitly stating that Meadows is probably inclined to make regionally sensitive films due to their likelihood of being funded, Lay’s paper suggests that economic encouragements may prescribe the films he is likely to make. Lay’s use of the descriptor “self-proclaimed regional film-maker” hints at Meadows’ knowing performance of regional identity and investment in continuing to be identified with his ‘patch’ of the East Midlands.

Like Scott, Jack Newsinger uses Meadows as a case study for his thesis on regional film policy in England.⁷² Here, Newsinger describes Meadows as an example of a filmmaker who operates within the “new creative industries”. Such studies are important in understanding how Meadows’ has created a particular position within the British film industry and how his regional identity and textual specificity are so intimately tied to issues of funding. Newsinger’s summation of regionally-produced feature films is suggestive of a dual position:

Regionally produced feature films can ... be said to stand in a somewhat contradictory position: on the one hand a product of the commercialization of regional film production sectors during the period and therefore part of a retreat from the model for politically and culturally progressive regional production sectors that characterised the workshop period; on the other as a continuation in the progressive, socially committed ‘realistic’ filmmaking that stretches back to the Documentary Movement of the 1930s and would include the regional documentarists of the 1970s and 1980s.⁷³

For Newsinger, Meadows’ work exemplifies such a “contradictory position”, bifurcated between contemporary economic imperatives and politically motivated cultural traditions. The recognition of such dualisms is important to this study; however, I argue

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 235.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 236.

⁷² Jack Newsinger, ‘From the Grassroots: Regional Film Policy in England’ (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, September 2009).

⁷³ Ibid, p. 207.

that a paradigm of liminality best describes Meadows' particular navigation around such seeming contradictions. Newsinger presents Meadows' work as successfully negotiating these contradictions, stating: "despite the commercial orientation of the strategies employed, Meadows' films have been critically constructed within the social realist tradition as authentic representations of contemporary Britain".⁷⁴ This view supports the consensus around authenticity discussed earlier, whilst suggesting that the economic drivers behind the work are overcome through his 'authenticity'. This study is sensitive to such drivers, and includes details of funding and production in order to understand some of the reasons for Meadows' cultural significance.

While the majority of Newsinger's thesis is concerned with the production, distribution and exhibition of Meadows' work, some attention is given to textual analysis of the films. His description of *Dead Man's Shoes* articulates another dualism between the representation of violent working-class masculinity and a sympathetic view of interpersonal relationships, where "the film is repeatedly sentimental towards childhood and family relationships".⁷⁵ Much critical attention is afforded to this dynamic, especially that between fathers and sons or their figurative equivalents. Andrew Spicer evaluates *TwentyFourSeven* as a film which "is about the desperate need of under-class sons for their fathers", with the character of Darcy and his subsequent death, precipitating a reconciliation between the male parents and offspring.⁷⁶ As examples of what Spicer calls "damaged" men, these under-class males are "often irreparably damaged by social disintegration".⁷⁷ A persistent question for this study is how the theme of damage is presented in Meadows' work, and how the dynamic of homosociality plays out among a backdrop of social breakdown.

John Fitzgerald notes how the "alternative father figure (is) ... a key feature" of Meadows' work.⁷⁸ Similarly, for James Leggott, Meadows' work is centred upon the

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 240.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 239.

⁷⁶ Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*. (I.B. Tauris: London and New York, 2003), p. 197.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 195.

⁷⁸ Fitzgerald, *Studying British Cinema*, p. 125.

father and son relationship; a dynamic he suggests is a persistent and central one in contemporary British cinema.⁷⁹ However, Meadows' particular take on this relationship has specific consequences where, in the case of *This is England*, "parental relations are often used to explore – and sometimes to evade – schisms of class and cultural identity".⁸⁰ In his chapter, 'Like Father?: Failing Parents and Angelic Children in Contemporary British Social Realist Cinema', Leggott identifies the emergence of the father-son narrative alongside that of masculinity in crisis, with texts split between the paterno or filio-centric subjectivity.⁸¹ Placing *TwentyFourSeven* in the 'Fathers and Sons' section, alongside *The Full Monty* (1997), *Brassed Off* (1996) and *My Name is Joe* (1998), Leggott identifies the connection between the spaces over which the characters try to reassert their authority, and, via the instigation of a mentor, the male body as means through which such struggles are played out. This has significant relevance for this study which looks at the mobilization of the working-class male body in Meadows' work.

Sarah Street presents the alternative father/son relationship in *This is England* as one which involves a violent movement into knowledge, stating "as with *Romeo Brass*, the emotional seduction of a youngster by a charismatic older man has resulted in a tragic learning experience whereby a promised stable identity is seen to crumble when the violent and racist tendencies upon which it is based are exposed".⁸² Street's phrase "emotional seduction" is apt; it alludes to the uncomfortable intensity of feeling between the predatory male masquerading as a paternal mentor and his naïve figurative son. This persistent dynamic of Meadows' work is of considerable interest to this study. It forms one of the instances of performances by men to other men. Street describes *This is England* as a film which "steers a shifting course through the dynamics of persuasion".⁸³ This study adopts the phrase Street attributes to one film by Meadows to describe, in general, the strategic methodologies of the mediated cultural construction that is

⁷⁹ Leggott, *Contemporary British Cinema*, p. 99

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ James Leggott, 'Like Father?: Failing Parents and Angelic Children in Contemporary British Social Realist Cinema', in Powrie, Davies and Babington (eds), *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema* (London: Wallflower, 2004), pp. 163-73.

⁸² Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 145.

⁸³ Ibid.

Meadows, arguing that ‘he’ has his hand on the tiller in terms of self-consciously performing the role of a locally defined, working-class British filmmaker.

As indicated in the introduction, an extensive study on Meadows, such as a monograph, has yet to be published. However, from the initial inception of this thesis in 2007, more, often lengthier pieces have started to emerge, which indicates a growing interest in, and acknowledgement of, the importance of Meadows in contemporary film culture. *This is England* has engendered such interest, as proved by *The South Bank Show* which centred upon that film, followed by a conference at the University of East Anglia in April 2010, dedicated to the filmmaker; and a profusion of articles in industry publications and the popular press.

Conclusion of Critical Positions on the Work of Shane Meadows

A survey of existing discourses around the work of Meadows identifies a number of tendencies and assumptions: that Meadows is identified as a social realist filmmaker following in the tradition of Leigh, Loach and Clarke; that latterly, the narrowness of these influences has been criticized, with other filmmakers and traditions acknowledged as influential; that his sustained focus on a geographical and social area is sometimes viewed as a substantiative marker of authenticity; that his work is identified with a discrete area of the East Midlands, but that specificity is often subsumed into discussions of films with northern settings; that particular funding strategies are favourable to Meadows’ regional identity and representational focus; that the greater attention given to male characters, their relationships and the environments in which they take place is seen to be indicative of crises in masculine identity; that theorists identify particular qualities in Meadows’ work which render the work recognizable as being produced by him, and that such authorial signatures point to an auteurist positioning.

While the introduction of terms such as “poetic realism” (Forrest), “grotesque realism” (Fradley) and “emotional realism” (Brown) suggest a shared critical recognition that the term social realism is inadequate to wholly describe Meadows’ work, each is still conceptually restrictive. Each term aligns the realist elements they recognize in

Meadows' work with one other particular theme, whether this is sociologically based or aesthetically orientated. While such gestures indicate attempts to reframe Meadows' work within a social realist context, none successfully negotiate the inter-layered complexities which include socio-political, mythological, aesthetic, generic and stylistic concerns, alongside working practices, the filmmaker's cultural persona and his relationship with the film industry. Grotesque realism summarizes the messy play constituted via the body within the film texts, yet it cannot be used extratextually as a descriptor of Meadows' methodology or relationship with the film industry. Similarly, emotional realism and poetic realism are only textually illustrative; each places Meadows at one end of a competing spectrum, effectively engendering a taxonomical see-saw. Conversely, the term liminal realism places the work at the centre, between these two points, yet is broader than textual concerns. This study will demonstrate how liminal realism best describes a filmmaker who has so far evaded satisfactory classification.

In order to do this, is it first necessary to introduce the key theorists and texts which are primarily used in this study and its investigation of the representation of liminality, masculinity and class as it occurs in the work of Shane Meadows. The following section introduces those texts central to this study, describing in what ways they are particularly useful for a critical reassessment of the filmmaker Shane Meadows and the work he produces. It begins with an examination of key discussions of liminality, suggesting how the concept can be usefully employed in this study, as well as introducing associated themes of folk culture, the carnivalesque and the abject. In addition, those texts which concern aspects of masculinity and class pertinent to this study will also be introduced here, with their key arguments presented in order to illustrate their usefulness for an understanding of the way working-class men are presented by Meadows, whether through his work or through the public cultural figure of the filmmaker.

Liminality, Masculinity and Class: Primary Literature

There is a particular synergy between studies of the working-class experience, its representation in film, British screen culture and anthropology. As a response to a letter in the *New Statesman and Nation*, Charles Madge, co-founder alongside Humphrey

Jennings and Tom Harrison, of the Mass Observation movement, introduced the phrase “an anthropology of our own people”.⁸⁴ Methodologically organized via “anthropology, psychology, and the sciences which study man”, the endeavours of mass observation were highly influential for films which represented the lives of ‘ordinary people’, those from the working-classes who would be later represented in the social realist category.⁸⁵ Andrew Higson argues how the tradition of mass observation resulted in the people and places represented in the films of the New Wave, such as *A Taste of Honey* (1961), being received by the cosmopolitan critics of London as an exotic other.⁸⁶ It is through the more traditional form of anthropology which consists of an external and non-native observer and their observations of the culturally ‘othered’ native, that the concept of liminality was first introduced by Arnold van Gennep following his studies of rituals of initiation described in *Les Rites de Passage* (1908). Here, van Gennep described initiation ceremonies as composed of three parts, stating, “I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, preliminary rites, those executed during the transitional stage liminal (or threshold) rites and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world postliminal rites”.⁸⁷ Van Gennep’s model introduced the idea of separation from one state to another by a certain pause, an in-between space - the liminal - which constituted greater significance than simple transition. Developing the term from *limen*, the Latin for threshold, for van Gennep the liminal was markedly different from the uninitiated stage which preceded it and the end goal of initiation. This transition was fraught with jeopardy, as anthropologist Mary Douglas explains, stating that van Gennep:

saw society as a house with rooms and corridors in which passage from one to another is dangerous. Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition

⁸⁴ Charles Madge, ‘Anthropology at Home’, *The New Statesman and Nation*, (12 December 1936), p.12. Available at www.archiveadventure.wordpress.com/mass-observation-a-history; accessed 21 September 2012.

⁸⁵ Charles Madge, Tom Harrison and Humphrey Jennings, ‘Anthropology at Home’, *The New Statesman and Nation*, (30 January 1937), p. 155. Available at www.archiveadventure.wordpress.com/mass-observation-a-history; accessed 21 September 2012.

⁸⁶ Andrew Higson, ‘Space, Place, Spectacle’ in Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), p. 143.

⁸⁷ van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, p. 21

is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others.⁸⁸

Mary Douglas' recognition of van Gennep's association between liminality and danger is an important consideration to this study which proposes that the liminal is often presented as dangerous in Meadows' work. However, not everyone saw danger as the automatic consequence of the liminal; building on Douglas, it was fellow anthropologist Victor Turner who most fully recognized the liminal stage's potential as a space of fruitful separateness.⁸⁹ Turner developed the idea of the liminal beyond initiation rites, applying it to cultural phenomena and products, especially literature: as Edith Turner attests, "on many occasions Turner took the work of a literary figure and analyzed it on the basis of one of the theories he had devised for traditional ritual".⁹⁰ This discursive approach enabled a useful synthesis of anthropological observation and textual analysis, forming a methodology which enabled the anthropological to explain the literary. This methodology is adapted for this study and its observations of film culture.

The liminal is the central part of the eternal beginning, middle and end of narrative structure, but as Manuel Aguirre attests, this middle space is a place of action:

between X and Y there lays an intermediate space: Alice does not simply go through but into the rabbit-hole. The threshold becomes a space that one enters, but because this site does not respond to 'normal' space – because it turns out to be a 'phantom' locus between X and Y, it is aptly named, in Turner's phrase, "a place that is not a place": a paradoxical one-dimensional object that has spatial qualities, one that both exists and does not exist as a space.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 96.

⁸⁹ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual; Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society; From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play; The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*.

⁹⁰ Edith Turner, 'The Literary Roots of Victor Turner's Anthropology', in Ashley (ed.) *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 163.

⁹¹ Manuel Aguirre, 'Nabokov's Pale Fire and the Question of Liminality', in Navarro, Ferrando and Crespo (eds), *In-roads of Language: Essays in English Studies* (Castelló de Plana: Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I. D. L., 2006), p. 123.

Aguirre's association between the liminal and the spatial is a partnership which has most clearly been adopted for liminal approaches to film culture and for broader studies of cultural practice. *Places on the Margin* by Rob Shields details the liminal aspect of seaside resorts and introduces discussions of the carnivalesque and the ludic to those places of pleasure and leisure which are often associated with sexual indulgence and episodic violence.⁹² This text is useful for considerations of the coast, the carnivalesque and the violent in Meadows' work; however the geographical focus of Shields' work circumscribe its applicability to concepts of liminality broader than spatial concerns. Similarly, studies of British films which utilize the liminal concept are most frequently concerned with the spatial liminality of the British coast.⁹³ Regretfully, one example misses an opportunity to discuss Meadows' liminal associations: Steve Allen's 'British Cinema at the Seaside – The Limits of Liminality'.⁹⁴ Here, Allen discusses Meadows alongside three other directors proclaimed as exceptional new talents in *Sight and Sound*: Gurinder Chadha, Pawel Pawlikowski and Michael Winterbottom who all utilize the trope of liminality within seaside locations in their films: *Bahja on the Beach* (1993); *The Last Resort* (2000) and *I Want You* (1998). Allen's exclusion of Meadows from this group of coastally-sensitive directors is rather ironic; it ignores the important use of coastal scenes in his films (*Smalltime*, *A Room for Romeo Brass*, *This is England* and even, arguably *Somers Town*), imagining instead that "the exception, Shane Meadows has centred his films upon the Midlands, but nonetheless works within a highly location-specific mindset".⁹⁵ This misconception of Meadows as somehow landlocked, ignores the trope of movement in his work, movement which often entails a trip to the seaside. Allen's observation is unintentionally ironic when one reads the concluding remarks of his article: "that we find certain groups at the margins becoming ever more marginalized

⁹² Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁹³ See John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Steven Allen, 'British Cinema at the Seaside: The Limits of Liminality', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, vol. 5, no.1 (May 2008), pp. 53-71; Justine Ashby, 'It's Been Emotional: Reassessing the Contemporary British Film', in Bell and Williams (eds), *British Women's Cinema* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 155-69; Simon Ward, 'Danger Zones: The British 'Road Move' and the Liminal Landscape', in Andrews and Roberts (eds), *Liminal Landscapes* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 185-99.

⁹⁴ Allen, 'British Cinema at the Seaside', pp. 53-71.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

might not be a great surprise, but the fact that this is happening in seaside towns, with all their liminal and subversive potentials, makes their exclusion here all the more damning”.⁹⁶

Through his immediate (and erroneous) exclusion of Meadows from his very insightful and convincing analysis of filmic coastal liminality, Allen, in effect, critically marginalizes Meadows. The paper would have been enriched by his inclusion; indeed, two of the films which he does consider: *The Last Resort* and *I Want You*, feature Meadows’ friend and creative collaborator, Paddy Considine, an intertextual correlation which should not be ignored. One (semi-serious) question to consider could be whether Considine then, is in some way a ‘liminal actor’, does his presence signal liminality through repetition of roles set within coastal locations and with liminal qualities? Certainly, Considine’s career oscillates between his work with Meadows, such as the small-budget British independent film, e.g. *Le Donk and Scor-Zay-Zee* and the Hollywood blockbuster e.g. *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007).

Perhaps Allen’s inclusion of Meadows would have problematized his thesis of the limitations of liminality, where “liminality is not mythical... but is shown to be elusive and culturally dependent” which “prevents the liminality of the landscape as being anything other than fleeting”.⁹⁷ While any sense of escape felt by Meadows’ characters may be temporary, there is a persistence of myth in his work which disrupts the purely social terms of Allen’s argument.

While the work discussed above have some application for Meadows’ work and its occurrences of coastal scenes, there is a danger of limiting the potential of liminality to spatial concepts alone. This ignores the potential to explore liminal states, whether emotional, sexual, developmental, economic or political, and the richness of liminal characterization, a concept discussed at length in Chapter Four. Just as there is a tendency for British films which represent working-class characters to be almost routinely considered as party to social realist principles - a tendency critiqued in this study - the

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 69.

critical association of liminality with spatial concepts only, is similarly intellectually restrictive.

There are broader concepts of liminality applied to screen culture, in particular the work by Terrie Waddell which applies Jungian analytical psychology, especially in the form of archetypes, to a range of visual texts. In *Mis/takes*, Waddell draws upon Jungian psychology to analyze visual representation, arguing that “film and television are particularly receptive to theories of the archetype”.⁹⁸ However, it is her later work, *Wild/lives* which most fully engages with liminal concepts, furthering the earlier work on the trickster initiated in *Mis/takes*.⁹⁹ This work is important to this study which utilizes the figure of the trickster as a defining symbol in Meadows’ work, whether as manifested as a character in the film texts or through the cultural figure of the filmmaker himself, which I argue can be described as a contemporary equivalent of Jung’s archetype. Jung’s work on the archetype as described in *Man and His Symbols* is used in this study to organize the latter part of the study which concerns analyses of the film and television texts.¹⁰⁰ Turner’s description of the liminal as “the realm of primitive hypothesis” is suggestive of Jung’s theory of the universal archetype, which Jung proposed, pre-exists an individual within a universal consciousness.¹⁰¹

The trickster archetype is often associated with play and revelry, most fully expressed via carnivalesque activity. Building on van Gennep’s identification of the existence of a liminal middle stage during ceremonial rites, Turner invested the term with certain qualities which emphasized the dynamic of elusiveness and play, where “liminality may involve a complex sequence of episodes in sacred space-time, (and may also include subversive and ludic or playful) events”.¹⁰² The notion of subversion and play evokes Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of carnival, a concept also figured as liminal, where roles are reversed and masks appropriated. This link between the carnivalesque and the liminal

⁹⁸ Terrie Waddell, *Mis/takes: Archetype, Myth and Identity in Screen Fiction* (Hove: Routledge, 2006), p.1.

⁹⁹ Terrie Waddell, *Wild/lives: Trickster, Place and Liminality on Screen* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁰⁰ Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (London: Arkana, 1990).

¹⁰¹ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 106.

¹⁰² Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 27.

was made by Turner in 1979 and the connection between Bakhtin and Turner has since been made critically explicit.¹⁰³ Carnival forms part of the array of activities and traditions which make up folk culture and discussions of the rituals, practices and characters connected to folk is an illuminating approach to Meadows' oeuvre, in particular the prevalence of the figure of the fool. Studies of the figure by Enid Wellsford and William Willeford are drawn upon here to illustrate the prevalence of the character in Meadows' work and its close association with the liminal archetype of the trickster.¹⁰⁴

The associated idea of play, in carnivalesque terms, as an activity which involves performance, while not equivalent, is associative of Judith Butler's hypothesis of gender performativity. However, Butler's thesis of gender is careful to distinguish between the temporariness of a performance role and the inescapability of a performative act. Butler states:

Gender cannot be understood as a *role* which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self', whether that 'self' is sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act', broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority.¹⁰⁵

Butler's thesis of gender as a pre-existing state constituted through language into which an individual or "subject" is born and required to embody gender as "an act which has been rehearsed" echoes in some way Jung's concept of universal archetypes which pre-date the individual inasmuch as they share the view of individuals retroactively engaging with something that pre-dates their experience.¹⁰⁶ Such positions raise questions for historically contingent theories such as Marxism, which are dependent upon certain temporal phenomena. While Marxism explains issues of class, it is less useful when

¹⁰³ Victor Turner, 'Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4 (December 1979), pp. 465-99.

See Dominick LaCapra, 'Bakhtin, Marxism and the Carnivalesque', *Rethinking Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 291-324; Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1989); Terrie Waddell, *Mis/takes: Archetype, Myth and Identity in Screen Fiction*; Terrie Waddell, *Wild/Lives: Trickster, Place and Liminality on Screen*.

¹⁰⁴ Wellsford, *The Fool and His Social and Literary History*; Willeford, *The Fool and His Scepter*.

¹⁰⁵ Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', in Case (ed.), *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 279.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

considering gender. Gail Rubin adroitly expresses this when she states that “women are oppressed in societies which can by no stretch of the imagination be described as capitalist” and that “to explain women’s usefulness to capitalism is one thing. To argue that this usefulness explains the genesis of the oppression of women is quite another. It is precisely at this point that the analysis of capitalism ceases to explain very much about women and the oppression of women”.¹⁰⁷ Such arguments sustain the rationale for this study: to seek wider theoretical sources to approach a subject – films by and about the working-class – in a way which resists the cul-de-sac of traditional social realist theory.

For Turner, the liminal as experienced through the rites of passage of an initiation ceremony has an intimate relationship with the establishing of peered bonds, where “the liminal group is a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions”.¹⁰⁸ Turner later developed this idea into the more fully formed concept of *communitas*, defined as “an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders”.¹⁰⁹ For the purposes of this study, I am using Turner’s concept of *communitas* as a unit of homosociality, in particular the specific way in which the interpersonal relationships between men has been defined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as a means of male bonding which is contingent upon a notional woman and may “be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality”.¹¹⁰ The three-part structure of ritual, which constitutes a localized, self-contained narrative - of which the liminal is again the middle part - echoes geometrically the three-part dynamic of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s triangular schema of male homosocial desire. This numerical analogy may be somewhat crude, but the undisclosed homosocial desire from which the triangle is formed can be described in liminal terms, as it hovers between two poles of sexuality; the homosexual and the heterosexual, held in tension between that which is desired, disavowed and detested (the

¹⁰⁷ Gayle Rubin, ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy of Sex”’, in Jaggar and Rothenberg (eds), *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1984), p. 157.

¹⁰⁸ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁹ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96.

¹¹⁰ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 1.

homosexual) and that which is claimed but not truly desired (the heterosexual). In *Between Men*, Sedgwick explores homosociality in connection to male desire, as represented in a number of literary texts, arguing that female-to-female relationships whether social or sexual, have enjoyed an uninterrupted history, whereas male-to-male relationships have suffered a “radically discontinuous relation of male homosocial and homosexual bonds”.¹¹¹

Sedgwick’s thesis that male homosociality is structured through desire, whether manifested as homophobic, homosexual or more neutral responses, raises questions for any discussion around male-orientated social relationships. In this study, attention to the ways in which desire is manifested, whether as admiration, love, physical attraction, fear, hatred or cruelty and the dialectic between subject and object; who desires whom and how that is manifested, is vital to an understanding of the mobilization of homosociality in Meadows’ work. Sedgwick uses the term desire to mean “the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship”.¹¹² Accordingly, it underpins much of the textual analyses which follow later in this study. In particular, these analyses are concerned with the way in which homosocial desire is played out within the working-class milieu of Meadows’ work, noting the heteronormative emphasis placed there. This study approaches the representation of class in Meadows’ work via a particular focus which looks at the way working-class men interact with each other, rather than examining the economic drivers which create class position. It is working-class homosociality which forms the focus and homosociality in Meadows’ work is often predicated upon the cementing of bonds, often achieved through mutual exchanges, in particular the exchange of women, their images and/or their bodily fluids. Such exchanges are, according to Gail Rubin, indicative of the kinship networks as observed during the anthropological studies by Claude Levi-Strauss. Rubin notes the unequal distribution of power predicated upon gender where “if women are the gifts, then it is the men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 5.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 2.

mystical power of social linkage”.¹¹³ Rubin’s observation of the continued homosocial economy is important to a discussion of such transactions in the work of Meadows, where I argue that notions of the carnivalesque are less about a gender-inclusive community, than they are about the sustaining of homosocial community, an ongoing process which necessitates that women be pushed to the margins.

In summary, this study draws upon the theories detailed above in order to devise a new framework of liminal realism which, when applied to Shane Meadows, offers a new and more productive way to consider a filmmaker who has so far proved taxonomically difficult to place within discourses around British screen culture.

¹¹³ Rubin, ‘The Traffic in Women’, p. 163.

Chapter Two

Problematizing Social Realism

As the review of existing discussions around Meadows reveals, social realism, that extensively used category of British film culture, has been the major way in which the work of the filmmaker has been critically received. However, the over-use of the social realist label to categorize Meadows in particular and a large proportion of British cinema in general, poses many issues and problems. While there is much debate about the constituent parts of social realism, mostly concerned with whether greater emphasis should be placed on social concerns or aesthetic form, there has been less interrogation of the usefulness of the term itself. In the conclusion of her survey of British social realism, Samantha Lay tentatively proposes such a venture, suggesting that:

it appears that it may not be possible to speak of British social realism in the same ways, and that the term 'British social realism' may no longer be accurate or relevant. I am not suggesting we abandon it completely but rather we question it and we question film production, distribution and content with those criticisms in mind.¹¹⁴

This study responds to Lay's proposal through a questioning of the term and its application to Meadows and his work, considering elements of production, distribution and content. Borrowing from Stephen Lacey and his study of social realism in post-war theatre, the question posed in this section is not 'are Meadows' films social realist?' but rather 'what is there in Meadows' work which is social realist?'¹¹⁵ The power of the social realist discourse is acknowledged here; it is arguably seen as the most prevalent mode within British filmmaking. However, it is important to resist the label of social realism as necessarily the most suitable way to read work about working-class characters, made by a filmmaker with a persona culturally figured as working-class. Accordingly, my reconfiguration of Meadows as a liminal realist involves questioning the routine acceptance of the term as an adequate descriptor. It suggests in what ways realism can be

¹¹⁴ Lay, *British Social Realism*, p. 122.

¹¹⁵ Stephen Lacey, 'Staging the Contemporary: Politics and Practice in Post-War Social Realist Theatre', in Tucker (ed.), *British Social Realism in the Arts Since 1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 58.

usefully uncoupled from the social and joined to the liminal in order to reconfigure a paradigm which has particular applicability to Meadows, but can also be fruitfully used elsewhere. In order for this analysis to take place, it is only necessary to discuss those elements of social realism which have direct significance to Meadows' work. Therefore, the following chapter is not an exhaustive historical survey of the development of social realism in British film culture; rather it discusses the way in which social realism has become critically attached to Meadows, while at the same time, responding to Lay's proposition of questioning the value of the term as an adequate label for significant elements of British cinema.

Elements of his work use modes of filmmaking which have become synonymous with social realism, these include: the representation of working-class characters and their environment, most particularly male characters in homosocial environments; sensitivity to the socioeconomic factors which affect their actions; recognizable narratives, often concerning a particular social issue; location shooting; and a visual style that favours low-key, naturalistic cinematography. Examples of this final aspect include the use of natural light and unobtrusive camera work often achieved through a fixed focal length with medium to medium-close ups, with few cuts, pans or changes in focus, allowing many scenes to be presented as if observed from within the space in which the events are being played out, suturing the audience as an observer within the scene. However, there are other elements which are equally evident in his work, often in tension with aspects of social realism and these should not be considered as marginal additions. Rather, they should be considered as indicative of Meadows' liminal position within the social realist paradigm.

Introduction

A major aim of this study is to question some of the assumptions around Meadows' work in relation to social realism. Through dedicating this chapter to a discussion of the tradition of social realism in British screen culture, it seeks to first understand and then question the conventional critical positioning of the work of Shane Meadows. It does this, not only because Meadows is critically located within the tradition of social realism, but

also because the filmmaker presents himself as equivocally engaged with the form, as indicated in his statement “alongside this British realism in my films...(is)...a lot of influence of how Scorsese used music and visuals. So it goes a little bit beyond the kitchen sink drama”.¹¹⁶ This activity provides a framework against which Meadows’ relationship with social realism can be further explored during the textual analyses in Chapter Four. In part, these suggest how the texts adhere to or diverge from existing or traditional forms and thus describe Meadows’ distinctiveness as a contemporary filmmaker.

The Tradition of Social Realism

As a widely used term for a broad range of texts, social realism has become what Samantha Lay has described as a “catch all term”.¹¹⁷ Applied to a range of media exhibiting a variety of styles, defining the term involves constant negotiation with what constitutes social realism at any given time. As John Hill states, social realist discourse involves “what has gone before ... uncovering reality by exposing the artificiality and conventionality of what has passed for ‘reality’ previously”.¹¹⁸ Through this logic, social realism – and realism in general – is not a fixed truth, but an historical, relative concept and filmmaking practice, involving comparison with past examples and a renewed consensus of what constitutes new forms of realism. In part, the shifting nature of the concept explains how Meadows can be critically incorporated into and be said to represent current concepts of social realist practice; however it is important to question such positions, resisting any premature critical consensus.

Raymond Williams’ entry under ‘realism’ in his 1988 edition of *Keywords* repeatedly stresses the complex nature of the term: it is “difficult”, a site of “almost endless play” which engenders a “fierce and so often so confused a controversy.”¹¹⁹ In particular, Williams notes the difficulty when the term is used to describe an artistic mode which was first used in relation to exactitude, but later evolved into an ideological standpoint

¹¹⁶ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Amber Wilkinson, ‘In the Somers Town’, *Eye For Film* (no date). Available at www.eyeforfilm.com/feature; accessed 21 September 2012.

¹¹⁷ Lay, *British Social Realism*, p. 5.

¹¹⁸ John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963* (London: BFI, 1986), p. 127.

¹¹⁹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana, 1988), p. 259.

concerned with veracious representation. This split further into “psychological realism” and the politicized “socialist realism” which sought to destabilize superficial appearances via a “conscious commitment” to the form.¹²⁰ It is this commitment which best describes the social realist credentials of filmmakers who engage with the form; it is as much about *intent* as it is about *content*. The aesthetics of naturalism, with unobtrusive camerawork, continuity editing, the use of locations rather than sets and natural lighting have become the defining visual factors of British social realism; however they need not be. The Brechtian model of realism, where artifice is presented as such – as a construction - in order to question the social constructs of ‘reality’, is the antithesis of naturalism, yet it is ‘real’ in the socio-political sense. The confusion over what does or should constitute social realism explains how films as diverse as *The Full Monty* (1997) and *The War Zone* (1999) can be critically housed within one catch-all term despite their huge differences in subject matter and tone.

Julian Petley has stressed the dangers inherent in valuing realism over any other mode, arguing that:

the realist aesthetic is so deeply ingrained in British film culture that it not only renders ‘deviant’ movies either marginal or completely invisible ... but also imposes a ‘realist’ framework of interpretation like a stifling blanket over the entire area of British cinema.¹²¹

This ‘realist framework of interpretation’ has certainly been applied to Meadows, with the ‘stifling blanket’ obscuring those non-realist elements which this study seeks to bring to the surface. While social realism is a prevailing concept of British film culture, it is not universally accepted as the noble goal critics such as Robert Shail and Geoff Brown describe it as.¹²² The filmmaker Danny Boyle clearly disassociated himself with the social realist label and with the conventions of the form when he stated:

Social realism’s objective eye creates victims. I don’t know what value showing that has any more. We’ve moved from social welfare in Britain when it was useful to identify victims. We collectively decided – and we elected Thatcher for

¹²⁰ Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana, 1988), p. 261.

¹²¹ Petley, ‘The Lost Continent’, p. 100.

¹²² Shail, *British Film Directors*, p. 148; Brown, ‘Paradise Found and Lost’, p. 249.

twelve years to do it – that we don't want to do that any more. We've moved away from the great post-war ideal that we can be communal.¹²³

Boyle's overt rejection of the communal ideal is not completely echoed by Meadows who repeatedly emphasizes the social aspect of his work. This is augmented by his insistence on an experiential authenticity which differentiates him from other practitioners within the mode, as illustrated in his claim: "lots of working-class dramas are the same on paper, but what sets me aside is the fact that I kind of grew up within it".¹²⁴ However, Meadows' dissatisfaction with being labeled "Ken Loach's nephew, Mike Leigh's cousin, working exclusively on working-class and social-realist subjects" suggests that he is not entirely comfortable with the mantle of social realism.¹²⁵ Meadows' artistic and ideological position in relation to social realism is therefore a liminal one, involving an equivocal dialectic which moves between strategies of rejection, acceptance and use, positioned "alongside this British realism ... (and) beyond the kitchen sink drama".¹²⁶ Chapter Three provides further discussion of Meadows' relationship with and reliance upon an aura of authenticity predicated upon personal experience; however, it is important in this section to be mindful of the concept of authenticity in relationship to discourses around social realism. Therefore, the following discussion will be sensitive to representations of the white, regionally located, working-class male as not only is this the persona emphasized by the filmmaker, it is the predominant means of characterization in texts deemed as social realist.

Social Realist Subjects: Masculinity, the Working-Class and the Under-Class The importance of social realism and as a way of representing the working-class is commonly understood. As John Hill states, "social realism within Britain has been associated with the making visible of the working-class and, indeed, it is not uncommon for realism almost by definition to be associated with the representation of the industrial

¹²³ Xan Brooks, *Choose Life: Ewan McGregor and the British Film Revival* (London; Chameleon, 1998), p. 68.

¹²⁴ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Hannah Rothschild, 'Shane Meadows', *Article 9, Channel 4 at 25 Book*. Available online at http://25by4.channel4.com/chapter_25/article_9; accessed 13/01/2011.

¹²⁵ Shane Meadows, 'Introduction' in, Paul Fraser and Shane Meadows, *A Room for Romeo Brass: The Original Shooting Script* (Southwold: ScreenPress Books, 2000), p. i.

¹²⁶ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Amber Wilkinson, 'In the Somers Town', *Eye For Film* (no date). Available at www.eyeforfilm.com/feature; accessed 21 September 2012.

working-class”.¹²⁷ Characters from other socio-economic groups may be present, often as a means of exploring the working-class condition via a juxtapositional arrangement of those with power and those without. Thus *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) represents a series of encounters between working-class characters and those who hold power over them. These include scenes between a widow and the employer of her deceased husband; the protagonist and officers of the law, the Governor of the borstal where he is sent, the master of a rival public school and some of the pupils of the school who constitute his competitors in the race. *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985) sees the protagonist negotiate with a Foreign Office official over her planned trip to Soviet Russia, in a scene which opposes the forces of the spirited passion of a young, working-class, Liverpoolian woman with an older, upper-class, home county accented male, supported in his position of authority by the office which surrounds him and the expansive desk which divides the two.

Similarly, the work of Ken Loach often explores the power differentials between the working-class subjects and the middle class figures of authority with whom they become involved, often through precipitating issues brought about through socioeconomic circumstances, whether criminality in *Raining Stones* (1993), child neglect in *Ladybird*, *Ladybird* (1994) or alcohol abuse in *My Name Is Joe* (1998). John Hill has noted how Loach critiques the “failure of the professional middle-classes – such as teachers and social workers – to understand, or provide relevant support, to the working-classes”, thus illustrating the socio-political mechanics of everyday life, whereby there is a schism of understanding between what needs to be changed in the political system and what the middle-class arbiters of working-class life, actually do.¹²⁸ However, in Meadows’ work, characters from a class outside the working-class are rarely glimpsed. Authority figures such as the police are briefly shown in *Where’s the Money Ronnie?*, *Smalltime* and *TwentyFourSeven*; where they are included in the court scene alongside a sympathetically drawn magistrate. Similarly, there are small roles for teachers in *Romeo Brass* and *This is England*, although the dishing out of corporal punishment by the aggressive pedagogue in

¹²⁷ John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), p. 135.

¹²⁸ John Hill, ‘Failure and Utopianism: Representations of the Working-class in British Cinema of the 1990s’, in Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: BFI, 2000), p. 182.

this film is in sharp contrast to the concerned reason of the judge in *TwentyFourSeven*. However, the Meadowsian world is generally shown as separate from the controlling powers of state, with hierarchies of power presented through the homosocial networks of the working-class men who live there. In contemporary social realist film, the “social extension” of social realism as suggested by Raymond Williams as one of the defining tenets of the mode, can be witnessed through the recent attention given to the ‘under-class’, a group described by Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment as people who “inhabit post-industrial, post-colonial spaces that international capitalism can no longer find a use for ... These are the places where others live ... *living in the gaps* left by successive waves of industrialization”.¹²⁹ This description is suggestive of liminality through its use of the interspatial phrase “living in the gaps”, whereby such a socio-economic class is created in the vacuum caused through boom and bust economies and changing technologies. Moreover, representations of the under-class in contemporary British social realist film are particularly masculinist, focused upon the experiences of men in a post-industrial society who suffer the economic and emotional hardship of unemployment. In contrast, women are often shown *in* employment, a switch in traditional roles which is may be presented as a root cause of masculine crisis, as in *The Full Monty* (1997). Williams’ social extension is therefore curtailed in many under-class films in favour of a masculinist re-focusing of male angst. This argument is presented by Paul Marris in his consideration of ‘northern realism’ – a sub-set or closely aligned twin of social realism which is specifically set in the north, primarily the industrial or post-industrial north, where Marris views *The Full Monty* and *Billy Elliot* (2000) as films which “effectively cast the crisis of post-industrialism as the crisis of masculinity”.¹³⁰

The ‘men at enforced leisure’ subject of the under-class film stands in contrast to earlier work in terms of approach, if not gender. As precursors to social realism, films produced during the Documentary film movement often presented the working-class through the representation of men at work, their hands purposefully filled with the implements of their roles, whether pick, fishing net or fire hose. The films stressed a masculinity of

¹²⁹ Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 193. Emphasis added.

¹³⁰ Paul Marris, ‘Northern Realism: An Exhausted Tradition’, *Cineaste*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Fall 2001), p. 51.

utility, whereby the working-class male was represented as productively involved with useful activity, performed through an active body which was visibly fit for purpose, presenting what John Grierson described as “the ardour and bravery of common labour”.¹³¹ This concept of a ‘fit for purpose’ masculinity is, I will later argue in Chapter Three, problematized by Meadows.

This display of physically adept, industrious masculinity was seen as representative of a progressive and healthy nation. However, the idea of unity through nation was at tension with the anxiety over changing gender roles during the inter-war period. Kathryn Dodd and Philip Dodd argue that the homoeroticism of lingering shots on physiques perfected by activity and the inscribed class division of the middle class gaze upon the working-class subject, illustrated anxieties about the figure of the virile young man which had been damaged by the catastrophic loss of life in the First World War.¹³² Not only did this anxiety relate to class, where the place of the privileged imperialist white man had been undermined, it also, Dodd and Dodd argue, was due to gender conflict, where “the documentary film movement should be seen as an offensive against the feminization of Englishness in the 1930s, a process which was part of the crisis of dominant manly Englishness”.¹³³ Moreover, this new model was placed regionally, with the north representing an ‘authentic’ male domain, undiluted by feminine influences, unlike the ‘soft’ and feminized south.

Such sensibilities have persisted into understandings of contemporary social realism, with films such as *Brassed Off* (1996), *The Full Monty* and *Up ‘n’ Under* (1998) presenting narratives which express anxieties over the female encroachment into traditionally male spaces. Sharing northern settings, these texts present moments of crisis for gendered activity, whether mining, steel production or rugby league, where the decline of traditional industries and the resulting unemployment is seemingly concomitant with the move of women into those previously male locations and/or activities.

¹³¹ John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber, 1966), p. 205.

¹³² Kathryn Dodd and Philip Dodd, ‘Engendering the Nation: British Documentary Film, 1930-39’, in Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 38-50.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

In her discussion of films of the 1990s, Claire Monk contests that “the dominant mood colouring the British films of the decade (was) that men were already, non-voluntarily, disempowered”.¹³⁴ For Monk, issues of gender override those of class, so much so that parallels can be drawn between *Brassed Off*, *The Full Monty* and the middle-class comedy *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994) because in these films, class consciousness was not present as a provocation to political action or intellectual engagement; it was merely a backdrop to the drama of gender. For Monk, *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty* are concerned with homosocial, rather than working-class relationships, transforming the subjects of “male unemployment and social exclusion and related psychic crises into incongruously feelgood comedy”.¹³⁵ Monk’s pairing of the middle class, home-counties set, *Four Weddings* with the northern working-class texts is an interesting and invigorating way of viewing film outside the lens of social realism, re-drawing lines according to representations of gender rather than class or geography.

It is important to state here an obvious, yet often unacknowledged feature; that films about the working-class are often automatically labelled as social realist even when other generic factors are in play. This critical habit requires a degree of questioning; the cultural representation of a class has widespread, ideological implications. The marrying together of notions of the ‘real’ with the working-class suggests that experiences of that class are somehow ‘more real’ than that of another and that texts which represent the working-class are also ‘more real’. This concept obfuscates textual construction. Meadows’ work problematizes such tendencies through its unveiling of its own construction, whether that is achieved through the wearing of wigs in *Smalltime* - for no obvious reason other than drawing attention to a performance - or through the employment of generic hybridity, where the amalgamation of different film modes draws explicit attention to some of the means of textual construction. There is a particular synergy between Meadows’ oeuvre and British cinema’s attachment to social realism; the funding of Meadows’ films is, in part, due to their regional sensibility, a quality which

¹³⁴ Claire Monk, ‘Men in the 90s’, in Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: BFI, 2000), p. 159.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

has been encouraged by the regional funding bodies.¹³⁶ The consistent attachment to the East Midlands differentiates Meadows from other filmmakers competing for the same funds and differentiates him in cultural terms inasmuch he is viewed as the definitive East Midlands filmmaker. In much the same way, British film differentiates itself in a global marketplace through a strategy of exportation of British identities, whether that is the broadly middle-class heritage or more pertinent to this study, the social realism of the working-class.

While social realism is most intimately linked to texts which represent the working-class, the overwhelming majority of those texts are concerned with masculinity. The rare examples of films which foreground female experience – with the exception of *A Taste of Honey* (1961) – can be located in the cluster of films produced through Film4 in the 1980s. Films such as *Wish You Were Here* (1987), *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985), and *Blonde Fist* (1991) promised some momentum in the representation of the experience of working-class women in film; however the momentum was not sustained. More contemporary examples such as *London to Brighton* (2006), *Red Road* (2006) and *Fish Tank* (2009) are yet still minority texts within a masculinist field. With the majority of films focusing upon male characters and their experience, the marginalization of women can be legitimately presented as one of the common factors of social realism, with most films concerned with perceived crises in masculine identity. Unfortunately, such marginalization is widely prevalent in other modes and genres, and is therefore not particular to social realism; however, the particular coupling of the mode with a notional representation of the working-class ignores the gender bias which persists in social realism which, I argue, is a largely masculinist discourse. The majority of social realist texts can be more legitimately described as *homosocial* realism as half of the working-class experience is largely ignored, or at least marginalized. Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment contend that social realism can be acknowledged through “the attention it pays to characters who usually figure as background presences in the generic mainstream,

¹³⁶ See Jeongmee Kim, ‘The Funding and Distribution Structure of the British Film Industry in the 1990s: Localization and Commercialization of British Cinema towards a Global Audience’, *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 25, no. 3 (May 2003), pp. 405-13.

those marginalized by virtue of their social status”.¹³⁷ Such a contention must be tempered with the reality that in general, women remain as background presences in British social realism, even more so non-white, non-heterosexual women. Social realism overwhelmingly concerns white, heterosexual, working-class masculinity, and accordingly, few characters are drawn from outside this select grouping. Discussing film culture in the UK, Christopher Williams claims that “the main British tradition is social.”¹³⁸ I would go further, arguing that the main tradition is *homosocial*. To state that social realist texts are dominated by masculine production and representation is neither a controversial nor a unique claim.¹³⁹ Surveys of films which have been clustered together under the social realist umbrella indicate that *homosocial* realism is a more apt descriptor of much of the texts produced and/or received under the auspices of social realism.

This homosocial realism is, at the surface, decidedly heterosexual. As Paul Marris has noted in relation to *The Full Monty* and *Billy Elliot* (2000), homosexuality in these films is clearly differentiated from the central heterosexuality of the homosocial group where the films are:

mindful to distinguish male friendship and entertainment occupations from gayness: two of *The Full Monty* troupe do fall in love but in this they are marked off from the other four; Billy’s best friend Michael is beginning to come out at twelve, but Billy makes it plain that this choice is not for him.¹⁴⁰

Therefore through this overt bracketing off of homosexual characters from ostensibly heterosexual characters, the films display tactics of disavowal over the potential operation of homoeroticism within the homosocial group and such a move can be witnessed in *TwentyFourSeven*. Another tactic of disavowal has been identified by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick; in this model, rather than a bracketing off, there is an addition of a female ‘dummy’ who forms the apex of the triangle of desire, acting as a legitimizing cover for the real romance which exists between the two men who make up the rest of the

¹³⁷ Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, p. 190.

¹³⁸ Christopher Williams, ‘The Social Art Cinema: A Moment in the History of British Film and Television Culture’, in Williams (ed.), *Cinema: The Beginnings and the Future* (London: University of Westminster Press, 1996), p. 193.

¹³⁹ See Monk, ‘Underbelly UK’, pp. 274-287; Monk, ‘Men in the 90s’, pp. 156-166.

¹⁴⁰ Marris, ‘Northern Realism: An Exhausted Tradition’, p. 135.

paradigm of desire.¹⁴¹ This triangle is, I argue, more symptomatic of Meadows' work than the bracketing off tactic employed in *TwentyFourSeven*.

Social Realism as a Brand

Heteronormativity, masculinist representation and the aspiration to widen representation were embedded in social realist discourse early on; the documentary film movement of the 1930s introduced many of the ideas which would be continued through social realist form and practice. One of the most notable was the impetus to differentiate British film from American. Andrew Higson makes this clear when he states:

In order to make sense of the documentary idea, it is necessary to relate its development to another ideological struggle taking place on the terrain of cinema: the struggle to establish an authentic, indigenous national cinema in response to the dominance of Hollywood, or rather to the idea of Hollywood as an irresponsible cinema of spectacle and 'escapism'.¹⁴²

This drive to differentiation involved an evaluative distinction between the seemingly superficial and the seemingly worthy, a distinction which persists into contemporary debates about British film culture and what it should be. Ashby and Higson stress the continued emphases placed on aspects of film culture from the 1930s onwards when they contend that "the realist tradition from the 1930s to the 1990s has always been promoted in terms of cultural value, pitting the authentic, indigenous culture of 'ordinary people' against the Americanised culture of glamour, spectacle, commercialism and mere entertainment".¹⁴³ This suggests that social realism has enjoyed a privileged place in British screen culture, actively promoted as a something of value.

Chapter One indicated the critical consensus that Meadows' work continues the social realist project and that he is a 'safe pair of hands' for this important endeavour. Such a view assumes a degree of satisfaction with the social realist mode itself, ignoring any

¹⁴¹ Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.

¹⁴² Andrew Higson, 'Britain's Outstanding Contribution to Film: The Documentary Realist Tradition', in Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays* (London: BFI, 1986), p. 74.

¹⁴³ Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson, 'Introduction' in Ashby and Higson (eds), *British Cinema Past and Present* (Routledge, 2000), p. 9.

necessary questioning of its assumed value, for example how representation in the mode has favoured white, heterosexual masculinity, despite the supposed drive to social extension. Such binary distinctions between Hollywood and British social realism as respectively irresponsible and so the logic goes, responsible, assumes that there is some social benefit to the particular ways in which society is represented in social realist texts. However, Meadows' appropriation of elements of Hollywood style and his declared appreciation of certain American directors, such as Martin Scorsese, suggest a shift in the geographical and cultural division between American and British traditions.

The initial project of differentiation has been sustained into contemporary social realism; however here differentiation has been developed into a something of exportable value. Mike Wayne argues how films such as *The Full Monty*, *Little Voice* (1998) and *Billy Elliot* "represent the recently acquired viability within the North American market of a certain kind of British film (low budget) offering a specific regional focus within Britishness (they are all set "up north")".¹⁴⁴ Wayne's attention to the production context of the abovementioned films, explains how the Cultural Transnational Corporations (CTNCs) operate globally while exploiting those aspects of local culture which can be repacked as an exportable commodity.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, Wayne concludes with the assertion that "it is now the case that the CTNCs are today shaping the kinds of 'realist' films that were once thought to be the authentic representations of a national film culture".¹⁴⁶

The very notion of authenticity is therefore textually promoted whilst being ideologically undermined by the production context of global capitalism. Julia Hallam describes this phenomenon in terms which could be described as liminal in that it stands between the local and the global. This is implied when she states that "the working-class films of the 1990s occupy an ambiguous cultural terrain. They celebrate locality, yet at the same time

¹⁴⁴ Mike Wayne, 'The Performing Northern Working-class in British Cinema: Cultural Representation and its Political Economy', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 23, no. 4 (August 2006), p. 287.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

they commodify the cultural identities of economically marginalized communities, re-packaging their experiences for sale in the global marketplace”.¹⁴⁷

In this sense, the class-based divide, described by Andrew Higson as “global tourism” widens, opening up the opportunity for new tourists from around the world to gaze upon the working-class of northern England.¹⁴⁸ It is within this context that Meadows began his filmmaking career, producing films which appear to appeal in some respects, to the global appetite for what Wayne describes as “the performing northern working-class”.¹⁴⁹ Meadows’ early success at European film festivals – discussed at greater length in Chapter Three – may suggest how his work appeals to a foreign market. Certainly, the packaging of the work around the figure of the filmmaker who is marketed as an authentic voice of regional subjectivity suggests how important that persona is in the dissemination and reception of texts within a global marketplace. It is possible to consider British social realism as a brand, which advertises to possible domestic and foreign audiences a certain type of ‘quality’ film. Social realism has become a powerful way to market British films within a global market place, simplistically bracketing together films about the working-class into one group, with the other socio-economic groups bound together under the auspices of heritage or the middle-class niche of the Richard Curtis comedy-drama.

The social realist mode is intimately tied to the representation of place, with the geographical and iconographical aspects of a certain area seen as important to the authentic presentation of a social space. As Wayne suggests, the majority of those places are set “up north”, and these northern settings are often linked to a limited iconography. Geoff Brown offers a list of the visual cues of social realism:

Think British realism, and you think inevitably of kitchen sinks, tall chimneys, cobblestones, railway arches, bleak stretches of moor or beach, graffiti-lined

¹⁴⁷ Julia Hallam, ‘Film, Class and National Identity: Re-Imagining Communities in the Age of Devolution’, in Ashby and Higson (eds.), *British Cinema: Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 270.

¹⁴⁸ Higson, ‘Space, Place, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the “Kitchen Sink” Film’, p. 149.

¹⁴⁹ Wayne, ‘The Performing Northern Working-class in British Cinema: Cultural Representation and its Political Economy’, pp, 287-297.

council estates, people and landscapes placed in spare and striking juxtaposition. You also tend to think black-and-white: the perfect colour scheme for gloomy skies, smokestacks and poetic melancholy.¹⁵⁰

Meadows' work makes some use of the above iconography. Indeed, his first feature was shot with black-and-white film, and other than the notable absence of cobbles, tall chimneys and smokestacks, Meadows' work fully exploits the iconography listed by Brown, yet there seems to be a different quality to the way Meadows approaches the landscapes and architecture which have become familiar through their visual representation in film. This may be in part due to the setting of Meadows' work in the East Midlands, rather than the north. The relative unfamiliarity of the East Midlands as represented through visual culture combined with Meadows' use of places undefined by common landmarks results in a less hackneyed representation of space. The critical association of Meadows with Nottingham is undermined by Meadows' use of locations outside the city, with the smaller conurbations of Sneinton used in *Smalltime*, or the housing estate of St Anne's, the major location of *This is England*, not occupying a place within the cultural imaginary and therefore less burdened by social realist assumptions. Conversely, the city of Nottingham, the setting of the second film of the New Wave, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) represents fully the cobbles, smokestacks and tall chimneys of the industrial parts of the city in the late 1950s.

Social Realism and Authenticity

Andrew Higson evaluates the use of space in films of the New Wave, especially the treatment of locations in the Midlands or the North following in the "Mass-Observation tradition of 'an anthropology of our own people'" where such an activity others the places and the people who occupy them.¹⁵¹ However, Higson contends that the poetic aestheticization of the landscapes, a *mise-en-scène* predicated on spectacle which offers up the scenes as pleasurable sites for the spectator, neutralize the dangers posed by the exotic 'othering' of space.¹⁵² Higson contends that the ubiquitous framing of the urban centre from an elevated exterior position, crystallized through the phrase "That Long

¹⁵⁰ Brown, 'Paradise Found and Lost: The Course of British Realism', p. 29.

¹⁵¹ Higson, 'Space, Place, Spectacle', p. 143.

¹⁵² Ibid, pp. 142-143.

Shot of Our Town from That Hill” replicates an authorial position of class authority, an historical looking back at what one has left. In this sense, the shot performs a moment of auto-biography, creating a filmic memory where what has been escaped from now forms a site of contemplation which can be received as aesthetically pleasing. In reference to Hoggart’s influential text on the changes felt by the working-class through mass culture and economic change, Terry Lovell sees this shot as constructed in particular for the subject of *Uses of Literacy* (1957), where there is “one category of viewer who is best placed to enjoy the pleasures of these texts from that space, namely Hoggart’s scholarship boy: the adult working-class male looking back with nostalgia at a remembered childhood landscape”.¹⁵³

Higson makes clear this relationship between the observer who has escaped that which they observe and what they see whilst looking back, an activity which requires some distance, whether physical, temporal or social, stating “it is only from a class position outside the city that the city can appear beautiful.”¹⁵⁴ John Hill concurs with this assessment of ‘That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill’ - what he calls “an iconographic cliché” - which creates a schism between the observer and the observed, forming an obtrusive interruption which “draws attention to itself”.¹⁵⁵ Hill makes explicit the implication of authorial control through this shot, which is “so transformed into a stylistic assertion of a controlling eye/I.”¹⁵⁶ For Higson, this eye/I is classed, enjoying positions of “visual mastery” and “class authority” in “a position of mastery to which the working-class protagonists of the ‘kitchen sink’ film has only a limited access”.¹⁵⁷ Higson resists seeing the films of the New Wave as wholly progressive through their extension of representation to the working-class, arguing that the films’ perspectives were not from the working-class characters within it. Rather, the formal construct of the films

¹⁵³ Terry Lovell, ‘Landscapes and Stories in 1960s British Realism’, in Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), p. 171.

¹⁵⁴ Higson, ‘Space, Place, Spectacle’, p. 151.

¹⁵⁵ Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism in British Cinema 1956-1963*, p. 132.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Higson, ‘Space, Place, Spectacle’, p. 150.

produced “a lingering sense of the bourgeois-class looking at this working-class ‘other’ from a position of superiority”.¹⁵⁸

Rob Shields critiques Higson’s proposed dialectic between a bourgeois audience and a working-class subject as over simplistic; for Shields, Higson’s argument is couched in terms of class, but it carries a certain presumption, that “realist films were seen only by bourgeois audiences”.¹⁵⁹ Shields defines the two groups in spatial rather than socio-political terms, and notes another function of the New Wave films: their ability to represent “the old myths about the North” which allows an insider/outsider dynamic to form between those who are familiar with the myths or ‘yarns’ and those who are not.¹⁶⁰ The idea of intimate knowledge of local mythology has a particular resonance for the work of Meadows and its relationship with folk culture. This is combined with other avenues to identification based on geography, culture and class. As Shields states:

Nationalism, always a myth of space to begin with, locates people in a space. It constructs a relation of identity between them and that space. In this case, the mechanism (undoubtedly one of many) of shared ‘yarns’ and myths reinforces a process of spatialising people, placing them as citizens within communities and a nation-territory. This is mirrored by the symbolism of the myth which takes up a space and identifies it with a particular group of people, the Working-class.¹⁶¹

The recognition of the imbalances of power formed through the different class positions enjoyed by the producers of the New Wave films and the characters who form the textual subject have engendered debates about authenticity predicated on an outsider/insider positioning. This has particular implications for critical assessments of Shane Meadows and his work. As indicated in the critical review of writing about Meadows in Chapter One, many contemporary writers see Meadows’ class position as a means of overcoming the insider/outsider split, viewing Meadows as an authentic exponent of working-class experience. For Forrest, Meadows’ working-class background and first-hand knowledge of the environments he films “destabilize these class-based criticisms”, avoiding Higson

¹⁵⁸ Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 271.

¹⁵⁹ Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, p. 220.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

and Hill's critique of the positions of privilege enjoyed by previous filmmakers.¹⁶² This opens up the possibility for Meadows to be seen as continuing the work of the New Wave through the aesthetic concerns of poetic realism, with its emphasized artistic aesthetic. This view is suggested by Takako Seino, who emphasizes the poetic in Meadows work while suggesting an authenticity through experience where "unlike Richardson, Schlesinger et al, Meadows comes from the community whose stories he is telling".¹⁶³

Authenticity through experience is also emphasized by Brown, who argues that Meadows' origins differentiate him from the New Wave directors. Brown's label "emotional realism" is offered as an apt descriptor, intimately tied to this geographical and social knowledge. Influenced by Lovell, Brown argues that:

Emotional realism harnesses the potentiality to position the spectator within, rather than outside, the lives of the working-class subjects portrayed. Thus, this mode of spectatorship elucidates an attempt to collectively involve the audience in a way that removes them from the potentially patronizing position of sympathetic outsider, which has been of much detriment to the appreciation of British social realism since its conception.¹⁶⁴

While the idea of an insider position formed through the filmmaker's own background and experience is a seductive one, seemingly offering authentic texts, which are made by, for and representative of the working-class, such a claim places too much emphasis on an individual filmmaker's biographical knowledge. All too simplistically, the 'insider eye/I' model assumes that the filmmaker can sustain a direct link to the community from where they came, without acknowledging the changes in circumstances that are felt through the very process of filmmaking itself where the power inherent in the very process produces power imbalances between those who film (and edit) and those who are filmed.

Moreover, Meadows makes fictional films, albeit ostensibly based on 'real-life' events, but it must be remembered that they are as much theatre as the work of Mike Leigh who

¹⁶² Forrest, 'Shane Meadows and the British New Wave: Britain's Hidden Art Cinema', p. 196.

¹⁶³ Seino, 'Realism and Representations of the Working-class in Contemporary British Cinema'.

¹⁶⁴ Brown, 'The Subversion of Sympathy in British Social Realism: Uses of Laughter in the Cinematic Representation of the British Working-Class', p. 4.

shares the methodology of improvisation. Imbalances of power are themselves overshadowed through the powers of celebrity that occur after the film is released and the filmmaker becomes a cultural figure. In the case of Gary Oldman - Brown's other example of a filmmaker working from an insider position - celebrity exists prior to the film's production, whereas Meadows' celebrity has grown alongside the films. Samantha Lay applies Lovell's idea of Hoggart's scholarship boy to the international star figure of Gary Oldman, stating, "Oldman's status as a 'working-class film-maker' is somewhat undermined by his celebrity and wealth. He is the 1990s equivalent of the scholarship boy, looking back but glad to have escaped".¹⁶⁵ Such observations undermine the seemingly neat division between observing filmmakers defined by a class-based insider or outsider position.

The predication of authenticity on a filmmaker's personal knowledge of the place and people whom they film is therefore destabilized in several ways. The first concerns the act of filming itself, with an unequal relationship of between the person in front of the camera and the subject who is filmed. The second concerns the shaping of representation through decisions in editing, shot construction and sequence, choice of soundtrack and/or voice-over narration. The third is the tension engendered through the filmmaker's own celebrity. Whilst not necessarily a mainstream figure, Meadows can no longer be considered a marginal filmmaker - hence my proposal of his liminal positioning within the cultural scene - and his increasing celebrity must break down any proposed logic of authenticity through experience. Meadows appears very aware of this position in his more recent work; *Le Donk and Scor-Zay-Zee* foregrounds Meadows' overt self-reflexivity as he performs the role of filmmaker. He is himself filmed – and is therefore a subject for the viewer - as he films the subject of his 'documentary', *Le Donk* (Paddy Considine). This begs the question of whether it is possible to truly represent an insider's view of class via a social realist framework. While Meadows may contextualize his films as texts produced from his own experiences, suggesting some class authenticity, the irreverence displayed in the films to the social realist tradition, the use of whimsy,

¹⁶⁵ Lay, *British Social Realism*, p. 112.

generic conventions and absurd humour undermines this suggestion, presenting instead a liminal representation of the Meadowsian hybrid; the working-class trickster.

The most serious problem posed by the authentic insider model presented by Forrest, Seino and Brown is that it assumes a unitary notion of class which is blind to other determinants of identity, such as gender, race and sexuality. The tendency for texts which mainly represent men and/or offer a male subjectivity to be considered as representative of the general population, or more particularly, the working-class, must be challenged. It replicates the idea of masculinity, especially white, heterosexual masculinity as natural, unconstructed and therefore invisible, a notion challenged by the critical studies of masculinity.¹⁶⁶

The idea that Meadows' knowledge of working-class life provides an authentic view of that life as textually represented can only go so far. To note that Meadows comes from the area he represents, presenting narratives which purport autobiographical material does not mean that an unproblematic extrapolation can be made which extends this representation to a wider group. Meadows' films represent specifically that which Meadows and those with whom he works, is most interested in. That interest is, I argue, most notably located in male subjectivity, especially that which is experienced within the male homosocial group. The homosocial emphasis in his work underscores the gendered aspect of his work, which presents men from a decidedly male perspective.

If, as I have argued, the themes and styles attached to social realism can be found elsewhere, such as the prevalence of homosociality in the gangster and the western genre, two possibilities can be deduced; either that social realism as a category does not exist, or that there is something other than the thematic or stylistic which separates social realist film from other texts. I see this something else as contingent upon the origin of the film, the reason the filmmaker chose to make that film and their intention for the film upon its

¹⁶⁶ See David. D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990); Peter Lehman, *Running Scared* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1994); R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1995); Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).

reception. While such a position suggests an intentional fallacy, I think it is important to stake a claim for social realism within a political arena, and by this I mean that at its core a social realist film must be conceived with a political agenda which has a meaningful connection to the wish for political and social change. Such a definition returns us to Raymond Williams and his definition of social realism's "conscious commitment", a refocusing of the term back to some specificity.¹⁶⁷ Such a definition reduces greatly the number of films and filmmakers which can be legitimately categorized as social realist. The origin of the film is important, the reason by which it was first conceived. Ken Loach is the superlative social realist filmmaker, for example *It's a Free World* (2007). The oft-critical twinning of Loach, Mike Leigh does not make films which according to the above definition, be described as social realist. *Life is Sweet* (1990) may be set in a tower block of social housing flats, and concern the social problems of unemployment and obesity, yet it derives from the theatrical practice of improvisation and is character-led, the narrative driven by the thoughts and actions of the characters as they are imagined by the actors who created them. Leigh's work is class-conscious, it rallies against the petty concerns of the middle-class, yet it does not have the same political impetus as the work of Loach. What relevance does this specific refocusing of social realism on the political have for the work of Meadows? I do not consider Meadows' work as social realist; his work, especially the texts discussed in this study are contingent upon his tricksterish play, whether with notions of authenticity through the auto/biographical, generic hybridity or aesthetics.

In this chapter I have discussed those aspects of social realism which have relevance to Meadows' work, arguing how the masculinist bias of the mode is the main connection between the filmmaking tradition and the work produced by Meadows with its concentration of the homosocial relationships within a working or under-class milieu. While some themes in Meadows' work may be common to the social realist canon, such as the representation of working-class subjects; the exploration of social issues such as alcoholism and drug-use; the depiction of violence, especially male violence towards women and children and economic hardship often resulting from unemployment,

¹⁶⁷ Williams, *Keywords*, p. 261.

Meadows' approach to those themes is not circumscribed by a social realist style. Meadows engages with aspects of social realism thematically, yet his approach to the way in which those themes are represented points elsewhere; to the generic conventions of the thriller, the horror film, the ghost story, the western or the musical and it is this crucial distinction which is important to consider if a more productive understanding of Meadows' work can be reached. It is this distinction which positions Meadows in-between the subject of the social realist mode and the way in which those subjects are represented. This explains how a film such as *Smalltime* can be described as a drama of domestic abuse and petty criminality which depicts drug use and casual violence but it also contains slapstick comedy where characters wear badly-fitting wigs, a comically inept physical assault is halted with the touch of a finger and café customers break into an impromptu dance. These elements cannot be contained within the category of social realism and neither are they singular examples. Such fantastical whimsy and comic incongruity persists through all the films, whether, for example, the cartoon decorated Citroen 2CV car which is used by the gangsters of *Dead Man's Shoes*, or the magic show presented in the final scene of *A Room for Romeo Brass*. Meadows' stylistic approach to the themes common to the social realist mode, combined with aspects of genre can be fruitfully explained via the term liminal realism, a term which encompasses the themes, stylistic and aesthetic approaches and most interestingly, the filmmaker himself, a position which is reproduced in the texts via the inclusion of liminal archetypes.

Chapter Three

King of the Tricksters: Meadows the Liminal Realist

Lots of working-class dramas are the same on paper, but what sets me aside is the fact that I kind of grew up within it. I was a small time thief, I was a gambler and I was a hustler.¹⁶⁸

I didn't even get fined the day I stole the breast pump. It was probably on that same day that I became a film-maker.¹⁶⁹

It is the misfortune of Trickster to embody two or more social and ethical domains (that is, he has a liminal rather than a marginal status) that creates his dilemma and our crisis of interpretation.¹⁷⁰

The quotations given above indicate some of the main considerations of this section; namely Meadows' self-construct as an authentic, working-class filmmaker who presents the working-class as constituted of and defined by, petty criminality, risk-taking and ruses of the confidence trickster. The third quotation from Andrew Wiget defines the trickster as a liminal archetype who is caught between taxonomical categories, a status of liminality which produces confusion, both for the character, and for those who study him. This is another consideration of this section and the thesis generally; the current inadequacy of definition which attends the work of Meadows, a problem this study intends to address through its liminal reading of the filmmaker and his work, arguing that a re-definition of liminal realism solves many of the current problems around the critical evaluation of Meadows.

The second quotation is illustrative of Meadows' approach to self-mythologizing which involves an interdependent relationship between his personal history of criminality which is rendered as comic both through ineptitude and appropriation of gendered objects, and his emergence as a filmmaker, a birth which is signalled as unreliable, or artistically

¹⁶⁸ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Hannah Rothschild, 'Shane Meadows', *Article 9, Channel 4 at 25 Book*. Available online at http://25by4.channel4.com/chapter_25/article_9; accessed 13 January 2011.

¹⁶⁹ Shane Meadows, in Paul Fraser and Shane Meadows, *TwentyFourSeven* (Eye: ScreenPress Books, 1998), p. ix.

¹⁷⁰ Andrew Wiget, 'His Life in His Tail: The Native American Trickster and the Literature of Possibility', in Ruoff and Ward (eds), *Redefining American Literary History* (New York: MLA, 1990), p. 92.

figurative through the reflexive use of “probably”. These quotations serve as points of departure for a discussion around the cultural construct that is Shane Meadows. It is important to stress here that the following discussion can only concern mediated constructs of Meadows, rather than any direct access to the human entity. In this sense, reference to Meadows is always a qualified one, whereby the name suggests the mediated construct which can be read as a text. This study utilizes the liminal archetype of the trickster to illustrate the various ruses employed by Meadows, such as his claims to an autobiographically authentic, first-hand knowledge of working-class masculinity which constitute his body of work. These claims can be supported by, or at tension with, notions of authorship, and accordingly, the concept of Meadows as Auteur is also considered in this chapter.

Building on Chapter One which discussed the critical discourses around Meadows within film studies and the persistent tendency for him to be considered as a social realist filmmaker, the following discussion also explores the ‘crisis of interpretation’ which such delineated categorization engenders, broadening the scope of study to include material found outside of the academic discourses already examined, such as newspaper, magazine and web-based interviews. It sustains the metaphor of liminality in two interconnected ways; firstly by approaching all discourse around and by Meadows as forms of biography, arguing that such discourses produce a cultural construct which exists outside both the physical man and the film texts, yet serve as liminal contexts through which these two phenomena are bridged. Secondly, this section argues that such a cultural construct is presented and received in such a way as to evoke the liminal archetype of the trickster; a form which by its nature engenders equivocation, asking is he this or that? So far, I argue, the response by theorists in film studies has been to say ‘he is this – a social realist filmmaker’, albeit latterly with some qualification, whether Martin Fradley’s “grotesque realism”, or Stuart Duncan Brown’s “emotional realism”. This section does not seek to take the polarized position of ‘he is that’; rather it takes the middle position, arguing that he is situated in the liminal space between different traditions of filmmaking practice.

The discussion begins with an examination of the critical construction of Meadows, remarking upon Meadows' reactions to and engagements with these constructions as presented through mediated texts. It looks at the various strategies employed by the filmmaker in producing the cultural construct known as Shane Meadows, and suggests what this construct claims to represent. It employs a metaphor of liminality as a means of understanding the position taken by the filmmaker, suggesting that the mediated construct which is arrived at via printed, digital and visual texts evokes the liminal archetype of the trickster. It is through this archetype that the cultural figure of Meadows can be best understood, as it operates at a knowing level of play and performance. Here I argue that Meadows enacts his white, regional, working-class masculinity through a constructed personae which embodies a tricksterish performance within the decidedly homosocial arena of the film industry.

Further to the discussion of the constructed figure of Meadows, the study returns to the critical positioning of Meadows through an examination of his cultural position as a filmmaker, looking at the way in which his films are distributed, exhibited and discussed via a range of discourses. Here I stress that liminality is the most appropriate descriptor of the work, the cultural construct that is Meadows and the reception of the films, stating that they seem to reside in the cultural psyche as being somewhere between the traditional high cultural form of theatre and art house cinema and the 'low' or popular forms of entertainment shown at chain cinemas, television, or file-exchange websites.

I. From Social Realism to Liminal Realism

Writing about the inception of *A Room for Romeo Brass*, Meadows describes how he and co-writer Paul Fraser, a childhood friend who also co-wrote *TwentyFourSeven*, wanted to write a western. This conceptual recourse to genre was due to Meadows' "kicking against the feeling that people were beginning to see me as Ken Loach's nephew, Mike Leigh's cousin, working exclusively on working-class and social-realist subjects".¹⁷¹ Such reflexivity illustrates Meadows' acute understanding of his critical positioning which is heavily informed by the dominant tradition of British film culture; it also illustrates his rebellious response to such placements. However, Meadows goes on to state that while the western, which later became *Once upon a Time in the Midlands*, was in "a lot of ways ... the wrong thing to do", it did serve as a salutary lesson in what films he felt he should be making. Grounds for this are made explicit in his claim that "the reason I was making films about my own past, about things that I understood and things that were working-class, was because that was where I was from and what was closest to my heart at twenty-five years old".¹⁷²

Such a contextualization of the motivations behind his work illustrates the various strategies and claims employed by the filmmaker. In this way Meadows is in a liminal bind, caught between degrees of resistance to the mantle of social realism and yet wanting to foreground an authenticity through personal experience of the narratives he presents on screen. The notion of authenticity is complex and contentious, involving the presentation of certain truth claims: such presentations by and for Meadows are problematized in this study.

One method employed by Meadows to substantiate his authenticity is provided in the form of a facsimile of his charge sheet for theft of a breast pump, reproduced in the

¹⁷¹ Meadows, 'Introduction' in Fraser and Meadows, *A Room for Romeo Brass: The Original Shooting Script*, p. i.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. i.

published script of *TwentyFourSeven*.¹⁷³ In a typically self-mythologizing gesture, Meadows' describes how his criminal appropriation of this gendered object was temporally bound to the start of his filmmaking career, stating: "I didn't even get fined the day I stole the breast pump. It was probably on that same day that I became a filmmaker."¹⁷⁴ Such a proclamation combines elements of entrepreneurial criminality and comic ineptitude, alleviated by a degree of luck which prevented even an economic punishment. It gestures to a 'ducking and diving' methodology which is cleverly employed by the filmmaker, demonstrated through the event itself and, most pertinently via Meadows' exploitation of this event in his construction of a public persona which is representative of the archetypal trickster. Examples of this archetype are textually represented in the films, with one of the major characters often displaying some of its traits. The intimate relationship between the cultural figure of the filmmaker and the film characters which can be seen as a corollary of that figure can be read as a strategic intertextuality between the off-screen and on-screen tricksters. This relationship evokes some sense of autobiographical authenticity, however slight, which is dependent upon a close connection between the personality of the filmmaker and the personalities of the characters within the film texts. These archetypal personalities are discussed further in Chapter Four.

¹⁷³ Meadows, *TwentyFourSeven; Where's the Money Ronnie and Left (Smalltime)*, p. ix.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. x.

II. Between the Micro and the Small (Time)

Anyone and everyone is capable of making a film... There's no point complaining that it takes thousands of pounds and isn't for the likes of us ... You can make a film, no sweat for £100.¹⁷⁵

You could say my film career was launched by the DSS.¹⁷⁶

Meadows' description of the economic and practical means through which his film career started is characteristically tricksterish, involving a 'ducking and diving' methodology and a frugal resourcefulness which saw him casting friends as actors, sourcing costumes from charity shops and adapting wheelie bins into highly effective camera dollies. Such practices are described in his introduction to the published script for *TwentyFourSeven*, where Meadows also details how his unpaid volunteer work at Nottingham-based Intermedia Film and Video workshop, enabled access to video-recording equipment and an editing suite, where he edited video tape purchased with money he received through unemployment benefit. According to Meadows, his first attempt at filmmaking attracted enthusiasm from the "people on the street", after which he and his friends made a film a month for the next year, before securing £200 from Intermedia to fund a short.¹⁷⁷

The lack of exhibition available for the medium of video engendered an entrepreneurial self-sufficiency, where Meadows attests, he and his friends set up their own bi-monthly exhibition of video films called 'Six of the Best' in a local cinema, an event which later developed into Flip Side, an international festival for films made on video. Such entrepreneurial creativity is aligned to Meadows' self-construction of petty criminality through his claim that he set up of a number of student loans under false identities in order to fund further films. Between 1994 and 1997, such practices produced twenty eight short films, and following the release of *TwentyFourSeven* in 1997, Meadows made a further twenty-six shorts between 1998 and 2009.¹⁷⁸ These films demonstrate Meadows' sustained interest in generic conventions, especially those connected with

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p. xii.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Film titles are taken from the official Shane Meadows website, available at www.shanemeadows.co.uk. Titles are listed in the filmography which follows the bibliography.

gangsterism. These may include the direct to camera conceit employed in the three versions of *Where's the Money Ronnie?* (two in 1994 with the final version released in 1996) or *The Murderer* (1994); or elements of whimsy, such as the dancing gangsters of *The Pasta Twist* (1995). Dance features in the comedic horror of *The Zombie Squad* (1995) as well as being a recurring theme in the longer features *Smalltime* and *TwentyFourSeven* and there is a distinct methodology of repetition and return, where certain subjects and titles appear more than once, whether dance, or the boxing/wrestling theme of *Three Tears for Jimmy Prophet* (2000), *Northern Soul* (2004) or *TwentyFourSeven*. Meadows extends the idea of repetition to the short film format itself; unlike the more typical operation of filmmakers who make a single or small number of shorts as apprentice pieces with which they can introduce themselves to the industry; indeed, Meadows demonstrates a continued dedication to and love of the short film, with shorts such as *The Stairwell* (2005) being made between features.

This section examines the budgets, funding, production, distribution and exhibition of the work of Meadows, mainly focusing upon the films discussed in Chapter Four. Other films, such as *Le Donk and Scor-Zay-Zee* will also be included as the particular way in which that film was funded demonstrates a culmination of previous funding strategies employed by Meadows. This section does this in order to situate Meadows within the British film industry, arguing that the ways and means through which Meadows gets his films made and seen is itself liminally positioned: they are neither mainstream nor art-house but somewhere in-between.

The section begins with a discussion of the various agencies with which Meadows has been involved, remarking on the particular political and economic policies which enabled the production of his work. Such a consideration also relates to the model of homosocial working practices discussed in the fourth section of this chapter.

“I’m a big fish in a small pond.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Shane Meadows interviewed by Sarah Cooper, ‘Meadows Takes Five’, *Screen Daily* 10 September, 2009 Available at www.screendaily.com; accessed 11 September 2012.

The relative wealth of filmmaking practice in the East Midlands region may in part explain Meadows' decision to remain working from this area, rather than re-locating to the larger centres of filmmaking such as London or even Hollywood. In his PhD thesis, Jack Newsinger describes in detail the development of film policy and practice in the East Midlands, initialized through workshops partnered with the BFI in the 1960s, which later moved to the creative industries model through the forming of the UKFC and the various Regional Screen Agencies (disbanded in September 2011 under the Coalition Government). Formed in 2001, EM Media, the Regional Screen Agency for the East Midlands (now a private company) was well-placed to assist Meadows' fledgling filmmaking career. As the producer of *Smalltime*, EM Media was not only the first Regional Screen agency to be formed; it was, between 2004 and 2005, also the most economically successful.¹⁸⁰ The association between the region and commercially successful filmmaking prompted Kate Opie, the one-time chair of EM Media, to describe the East Midlands as "a key out-of-London talent hub".¹⁸¹ This suggests that while Meadows' could be described as the most well-known filmmaker from that region, he works within a lively and growing creative community which was well-served by the regionally distributed funding sources. Newsinger describes how Meadows' career "demonstrates the way that regionally-produced feature films, and regionally-based filmmakers, were cultivated, funded and marketed within a commercial framework under the 'creative industries' model".¹⁸²

Meadows' close and continued association with the region positions him as the exemplary Nottingham-based filmmaker, a role wryly identified by Meadows in the South Bank Show documentary through his statement: "I am Nottingham's premier director".¹⁸³ Films by other filmmakers have been produced in the region via the very same contexts of access to funds, production and associated bodies, which facilitate the budgeting, shooting, editing, and distribution of small-scale British films. Indeed, his friend and collaborator Paddy Considine shot his short film *Dog Altogether* (2008) and

¹⁸⁰ Newsinger, 'From the Grass Roots: Regional Film Policy and Practice in England', p. 187.

¹⁸¹ Kate Opie, *EM Media Creative Achievements 2009/2010: Local Talent Global Reach*, p. 2. Available at www.em-medi.org.uk; accessed 10 May 2012.

¹⁸² Newsinger, 'From the Grassroots: Regional Film Policy and Practice in England', p. 209

¹⁸³ *The South Bank Show: Shane Meadows*.

the follow-up feature *Tyrannosaur* (2011) on location in Nottingham, with funds received via EM Media, Film4, UK Film Council and Screen Yorkshire.¹⁸⁴ However, what makes Meadows distinctive was, until *Somers Town*, his sustained adherence to the region in terms of choice of location where films are shot within a relatively discrete geographical area.

While Meadows' decision to make films in this specific region is in part due to textual concerns, a consideration discussed more fully in a later section, economic considerations also play a part. In an interview for *Screen Daily*, Meadows makes his financial acuity clear through his statement: "we have a regional film fund, EM Media, and whereas in London you have so many people vying for the same funds, here there are far fewer people trying to get money. It means I'm a big fish in a small pond".¹⁸⁵

For Meadows, the development of a regionally-positioned, 'niche product' ensured a greater likelihood of getting his films made, with the repeated attention given to a specific region securing Meadows' cultural link with that area. Such a link – aligned with Meadows' claims of biographical knowledge – helps to engender the sense of authenticity which critically attends his work. Increasingly, specificity of place has emerged as an important cultural yardstick of quality. For example, discourses around food production have in recent years, placed particular stress upon provenance, the place where the food originated, and a direct, artisanal relationship between the producer and their product. Meadows' association with place and his small-scale productions involving a crew of 'friends and family' echo such practices, indicating how Meadows' own practice can be read as conforming to an 'authentic ideal' which is considered important in contemporary cultural discourse. In this way, Meadows' can be said to embody the ideals of provenance, making films in a way which suggest independent and authored practices, closely aligned with a discrete spatial area of the East Midlands. While Meadows can be considered as a brand within the global culture, it is a brand predicated upon that geographically specific provenance, an identity which brings together notions

¹⁸⁴ *EM Media Creative Achievements 2009/2010: Local Talent Global Reach*, p. 3. Available at www.em-medi.org.uk; accessed 10 May 2012.

¹⁸⁵ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Sarah Cooper, 'Meadows Takes Five', *Screen Daily*, 10 September, 2009. Available at www.screendaily.com; accessed 10 May 2012.

of authenticity and cultural heredity. It also speaks to the notion of folk culture, whereby a community of people are involved in an activity, in this case the production of film while evoking the spirit of DIY culture, where Meadows' statement of "anyone can make a film for £100 quid" suggests filmmaking as a socially accessible activity.

It is interesting to consider Meadows in relation to provenance, a term associated with the traditional high culture of art and antiques and the current middle-class interest in quality food production. Meadows' association with food demonstrates an overt embracing of mass-produced junk food, whether dehydrated Vesta beef curry which he named when asked what is his guiltiest pleasure, or another dehydrated snack; Pot Noodle.¹⁸⁶ Trays of the instant snack are shown stacked in a lavatory in *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands*, associating the foodstuff with the activity of ablution, marking it as worthless fodder, on a par with the faecal matter produced by Charlie (Ricky Tomlinson). The correct preparation of the snack engenders much debate in *Dead Man's Shoes*, in a scene which comically enacts epicurean discourse, before the food is revealed as dangerous indeed, being the means through which the anti-hero secretly administers LSD to his enemies before murdering them. However, the nutritional worthlessness of the food is contrasted with its economic value in that there is a commercial link between Meadows and the foodstuff produced by Unilever; Mother, the production company for *Somers Town*, also produced *Pot Noodle: The Musical*, a live advertising campaign which played in venues at the Edinburgh Festival in 2008.¹⁸⁷

The low quality, mass-consumption foodstuff repeatedly presented in and around Meadows' work, stands in antithesis to the idea of Meadows' localized sensibility which can be said to echo the French notion of *terroir*, or sense of place, which describes the particular quality inscribed into a product, particularly wine, from the place in which it is produced. On the one hand, Meadows' close association with a discrete area of the East Midlands suggests *terroir* and/or provenance, on the other, the mass-produced, widely

¹⁸⁶ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Roseanna Greenstreet, 'Starters: Q&A', *Guardian Weekend*, Saturday 16 August 2008, p. 9.

¹⁸⁷ Jon Swaine, 'Advertisers Create Pot Noodle: The Musical', *The Telegraph*, 05 August 2008. Available at www.telegraph.co.uk; accessed 11 September 2012.

distributed and consumed generic foodstuff, presented in and around the films resists such a high brow intellectualization of place.

Meadows' embrace of the low-brow can be read as speaking from a class position, an overt gesture of mass consumption of the mass produced in the Benjaminian sense. A link can be made between low cost food and low budget size. Meadows' proclaimed preference for working with a low budget can also be read as an indicator of working-class sensibility. Similarly, while Meadows' statement that "anyone can make a film for a tenner" can be read as an egalitarian call to involvement which is contingent of Meadows' tricksterish entrepreneurialism, it can be equally read as predicated on the diminutive size of the budget. The corollary of 'anyone' making a film for such a modest sum is the logical extension; that few people are equipped to make a film for the multi-million budgets of the majority of mainstream cinema. This notion has implications for Meadows and his track record of film budgets. A comparison with filmmaking peer Christopher Nolan and his international career presents an interesting contrast to Meadows' continued adherence to making films on a modest budget within a discrete geography. With a budget of approximately \$6,000, Nolan's 'calling card film' *Following* (1998) had a similar budget to Meadows' *Smalltime* (£5,000) and his second feature, *Memento* (2000) with a budget of approximately \$5m resembles in budgetary terms Meadows' *A Room for Romeo Brass* (£2.5m).¹⁸⁸ However, while Nolan's subsequent films were major productions, made with huge budgets and featuring well-known Hollywood stars, other than *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands*, with a budget of £4m and featuring some well-known British actors, Meadows' work continues to be low budget, small productions, mainly cast with relative unknowns (other than their familiarity through repeated appearances in Meadows' work). Much of this is explained through Meadows' negative experience with *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* where "everything that could go wrong on a shoot went wrong" and his creative response to that experience:

¹⁸⁸ Budgets for Nolan films are estimated figures taken from IMDB. Available at www.imdb.com; accessed 11 September 2012. Sources for Meadows' films are supplied with the Budget Graph, p. 279.

I didn't have complete creative control, I didn't have the final cut. That was the flag in the ground that made me say I'd rather make a film for a fiver and own it than make a film for £4m and have it feel like not one of my own films, because it doesn't. I made *Dead Man's Shoes* for after that almost out of anger, like: I'll show you what I can do for three quarters of a million quid, I'm gonna scare the pants off everyone. Because I had £4m and wasted it, through not having creative control, not having the right mentality, I learnt so much from making that mistake.¹⁸⁹

The intimate relationship between budget size and degree of creative control – as one goes up the other goes down – is one explanation for Meadows' preference for working with small budgets. Additional reasons may be predicated upon notions of class and the attached 'entitlements' and access to cultural capital which accompany such positions. Meadows' seeming reticence towards engagement with large budgets may suggest his discomfort with large sums and an abhorrence of the responsibilities such financial excesses entails. Meadows' comfort within the 'small time' may be illustrative of class-based and cultural circumscription, which the cosmopolitan, University College London educated Nolan may not be burdened with. Indeed, the major budgets of the trilogy of Batman films directed by Nolan: *Batman Begins* (2005) \$150m; *The Dark Knight* (2008) \$185m; *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) \$250m combined with their high visibility as markers of American culture distributed within a global marketplace stand in stark contrast to Meadows' latest home-grown project. This is a documentary of the re-formed British group The Stone Roses, whom Meadows describes as his "most favourite band of all time", mostly concerning the initial tour following their re-formation, of which Meadows shot over 700 hours of footage.¹⁹⁰ Meadows' return to smaller budgets following the cost of production peak of *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* also points to a stylistic preference for an unpolished, rough aesthetic and a stripped-down way of working with "no tracks, no lights...one lamp on a van".¹⁹¹ This is the method Meadows first used to make his short films, producing the rough aesthetic which is distinctive and

¹⁸⁹ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Alex Godfrey, 'Shane Meadows Works with What He's Got', *Vice*. (no date). Available at www.vice.com/en_uk/read/shane-meadows-works-with-what-hes-got; accessed 21 September 2012.

¹⁹⁰ Shane Meadows, 'Wow, I've Just Been on Tour with the Roses!', Forum Post on www.shanemeadows.co.uk. Posted August 13, 2012, 10:41 am; accessed 11 September 2012.

¹⁹¹ Shane Meadows, 'Shane Meadows on *This is England*', *Film4*. Available at www.film4.co/features/articles/shane-meadows-on-this-is-england; accessed 01 September 2012.

identifiable. Meadows' epiphany of this return to his first way of working was according to Meadows, facilitated by Mark Herbert:

I fell into that trap of I had a million for *TwentyFourSeven*, 2.5 (million pounds) for *Romeo Brass* and thinking you always have to improve on your budgets. So when Mark came around I had no idea what I was going to do. When I showed Mark these shorts, and he was the first person who actually said there is a technique you're using there.¹⁹²

This indicates that Meadows has found a fit between his favoured way of working, the aesthetic he wishes to achieve creatively and the budget size he need to produce those things. The low budget of *Dead Man's Shoes* at £750,000 was followed by the £1.5m production coast of *This is England*, which was co-funded by UKFC (through the New Cinema Fund), Film4, EM-Media and Screen Yorkshire.¹⁹³ Rather than wishing for more money in order to make something grander, Meadows presents himself as a filmmaker who requires less money to create a film which is representative of his authorial signature and which allows him to retain creative control.

The merging of commercial marketing with feature film came together in his 2008 film *Somers Town*, which was funded by Eurostar for £50,000 (although distribution was boosted by a £140,000 award from the UK Film Council's Print and Advertising Fund).¹⁹⁴ His next project, *Le Donk and Scor-Zay-Zee* was a co-funded production, financed through the production company Warp Films, with additional funds personally supplied by Meadows and the producer Mark Herbert, combining to a modest budget of £46,000.¹⁹⁵

In 2007 Meadows was ambiguous about his desire to work with studios, remarking:

¹⁹² Shane Meadows, 'The Shane and Mark Show', *NWPD* (North West Producers and Directors) *Newsletter*. Available at www.shanemeadows.co.uk/downloads/nwpd/pdf; accessed 10 September 2012.

¹⁹³ Figures taken from IMDb. Available from www.imdb.com.

¹⁹⁴ Announcement: 'Shane Meadows' coming-of-age comedy/drama gets lottery boost for wider distribution', UK Film Council. Available at www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/14636; accessed 13 January 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Sarah Cooper, 'Meadows Takes Five', *Screen Daily* 10 September, 2009 Available at www.screendaily.com; accessed 10 May 2012.

I think that the UK is an interesting place right now, as many more private firms are willing to back UK directors. It's great that Danny Boyle et al. are getting money to be able to make their dream projects. Personally I don't know if I'll ever take advantage of the growing studio presence, but you never know.¹⁹⁶

More recently Meadows has been more direct in his position to working with American studios: in response to the question "would you go the Hollywood route if it was the right project?" Meadows emphatically replied "no I wouldn't, no. Not Hollywood mate, no"; however he did concede to directing other people's scripts, stating "yes I would, of course. *Somers Town* was someone else's script. I'd make a film in America, I just wouldn't make a Hollywood film. I've got nothing against the country".¹⁹⁷

A survey of the funding and distribution of Meadows' work indicates the liminal position of the filmmaker in terms of scale and reception. Ranging from no-budget to mid-budget, his work cannot be simply defined through budget size, especially as the more usual pattern of the increase in experience and success of the director corresponding with a growth in budget size is not followed here. Similarly, the number of opening screens do not indicate a simple growth pattern. The 60 minute running time of *Somers Town* suggests a featurette, equivalent to *Smalltime*, making distribution in mainstream cinemas problematic. Meadows' increasing profile as an important filmmaker is not matched by an increase in the distribution of his work in mainstream cinemas. DVD sales do indicate however, that the consumption of the films in a domestic setting provides an additional distribution stream and significant income.¹⁹⁸ Meadows' move into television with *This is England '86* and *This is England '88* and the success of both series, suggest that, as with DVD sales, it is through non-theatrical consumption that his work is most widely appreciated.

¹⁹⁶ Benjamin Crossley-Marra, *Interview: Shane Meadows*, IonCinema. 27, July, 2007. www.ioncinema.com/news/id/1245; accessed 05 June 2012

¹⁹⁷ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Alex Godfrey, 'Shane Meadows Works with What He's Got', *Vice*. (no date). Available at www.vice.com/en_uk/read/shane-meadows-works-with-what-hes-got; accessed 21 September 2012.

¹⁹⁸ See Index 1: DVD Sales Graph.

III. Between Repetition and Innovation: Liminal Ways of Working

This section considers a number of interrelated areas around the cultural figure that is Meadows and the creative methodologies employed by the filmmaker. Two relate to certain claims and assertions made by him or those connected to him which are provided in contextual material such as interviews: the first concerns the autobiographical and biographical details which are posed as source material for the films; the second is the connected theme of authenticity which accompanies such affirmations of events as ‘having happened’. Another area considered here, the process of improvisation, could be said to undermine such truth claims as it potentially replaces past events with newly created ones. The creative input from actors provided through the improvisation process could also be said to undermine concepts of authorship and auteurism, concepts also considered here. Lastly this section examines Meadows’ construct as film fan, a model which could potentially be at odds with that of auteur. Here I argue that while these areas could be considered at tension with one another, or even contradictory, such tensions and seeming contradictions instead exemplify the liminal qualities of Meadows and his work.

Usefully combining the terms autobiography and biography in a neological construct which emphasizes the shifting borders between the two, Liz Stanley stresses the problems of autobiography and biography stating that “auto/biography is not and cannot be referential of a life”.¹⁹⁹ Rather, Stanley suggests that the processes involved in writing about one or another person requires both a remembering and a forgetting of past events and a creation of a new narrative. For Stanley, “auto/biography is more properly to be seen as artful construction within a narrative that more often than not employs a variety of methods and tools which imply referentiality”.²⁰⁰ The methods and tools employed by Meadows involve contextual material attached to the films such as interviews and prefaces to published scripts which presents the films as informed by auto/biographical material as well as textual representation of the self through his various on-screen performances in his films.

¹⁹⁹ Liz Stanley, *The auto/biographical I: The theory and practice of feminist auto/biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 128.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

For example, the introduction to the published script of *TwentyFourSeven* describes the auto/biographical inspiration for the film, which was based upon the youthful experiences of Meadows and his co-writer Paul Fraser. Their involvement with a local football club and its coach, Naishe Higgs, provided a narrative base for the film and the character of Darcy, a re-imagined version of the local man. Notions of homosocial mentoring, key themes of the Meadowsian cannon are apparent in Meadows' statement: "the spirit and belief of men like Naishe inspired myself and Paul to write, celebrate and give dignity to *TwentyFourSeven*".²⁰¹ Here Meadows makes claims that characters are displaced versions of him and that events on scenes are often altered versions of things that occurred in his personal history. Texts such as the introductions to published scripts function as direct autobiographical address to the reader and suggest an authentic link between the filmmaker and the work he produces.

Stanley's discussion of the fallibility of memory in written autobiography is acknowledged by Meadows when he relates his misremembering of being prevented from visiting Paul Fraser during Fraser's enforced bed-rest following a back injury (an event fictionally reproduced in *Romeo Brass*). Meadows imagined that this sanction was put in place by Fraser's mother as a punishment for Meadows' earlier shooting of his friend with an air gun; however, Meadows revealed this sanction to be a fantasy produced by his unconscious to mask his shame at not visiting his friend because he was too busy elsewhere with new, older and more exciting friends.²⁰² Such auto/biographical assertions by Meadows serve as authenticating interventions, details which connect 'real life' experiences with created events depicted on film. Such details serve to create an ambience of authenticity which Meadows seems keen to propagate in statements such as: "lots of working-class dramas are the same on paper, but *what sets me aside is the fact that I kind of grew up within it*".²⁰³

²⁰¹ Meadows, *TwentyFourSeven; Where's the Money Ronnie and Left (Smalltime)*, p. ix.

²⁰² Meadows in Fraser and Meadows, *A Room for Romeo Brass*, p. ii.

²⁰³ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Hannah Rothschild, 'Shane Meadows', *Article 9, Channel 4 at 25 Book*. Available online at <http://25by4.channel4.com/chapter25/article9>; accessed 13 January 2011. Emphasis added.

Such a statement highlights the process of differentiation employed by Meadows, where he presents a view of himself as representative of an authentic working-class experience, speaking from the centre as it were. Stanley explains the central purpose of the auto/biographical mode as an act of creation, rather than remembering, suggesting that “auto/biography has at its heart a project which is concerned with the artful construction of a self-in-writing, a self which can be as it were looked in the eye”.²⁰⁴

Applied to Meadows, the “self-in-writing” conceit can be extended to the ‘self-on-screen’, both through the narratives which are claimed as formed from auto/biographical sources and directly through Meadows’ performances on screen as an actor in those narratives. Meadows appears in most of his short films, whether in a sole performance, for example *The Caretaker* (1994) which features an impromptu dance and *The Murderer* (1994) or with central roles, such as John in *Jock and John are Neighbours* (1995) alongside James (Jimmy) Hynd as Jock. After playing Jumbo in *Smalltime*, Meadows’ roles reduced in scale to cameos, such as ‘Fish and Chip Shop Man’ in *A Room For Romeo Brass*, or ‘Bingo Caller’ in *Once upon a Time in the Midlands*. His physical presence in the films facilitate an actualization of being “looked in the eye”, where the viewer can see Meadows in character in the particular film. It also involves Meadows’ looking out at the viewer, acknowledging the gaze, through the spatial and temporal displacement of film. The eye which returns, in absentia, the viewers’ gaze is the eye of the trickster.

The slipperiness of the trickster, both in the character’s modus operandi and the task of tracing this archetypal figure, echoes one of the rationales behind this study; the absence of an adequate understanding of the work of Shane Meadows and the tendency to force a fit to social realism. As a filmmaker, Shane Meadows is akin to the trickster in his evasion of the partisan system of categorization of British directors, whereby he resists the “son of Loach” label, yet he has not followed his contemporaries, such as Christopher Nolan, Danny Boyle and more recently, Lynne Ramsay, in their move to Hollywood. He, or at least the cultural construct called Shane Meadows, resides in the middle, the

²⁰⁴ Stanley, *The auto/biographical I*, p. 131.

liminal space, where he is both critically lauded and retains the personae of a ‘chancer’, a self-taught opportunist who happened upon filmmaking as a career.

The ‘truth’ of this status is not as important (or interesting) as its advantages. Whether Meadows is an adept manipulator of post-modern culture, or a ‘provincial’ man made good, is, in a colloquially liminal turn of phrase, ‘neither here nor there’. But the recognition that the qualities of the trickster are represented through and by the filmmaker is notable and significant. His proclamations of what he once was; thief, gambler and hustler, indicate a self-conscious allegiance with the trickster character. That he states it in the past tense; “I was” rather than “I am”, suggests a clever negotiation between the adoptions of the skills of the trickster whilst simultaneously disavowing any negative association via a relegation to a (personal) history which, the use of tense suggests, has been overcome. Such clear expressions of controlled personal history signal a keen process of authorship over the filmmaker’s auto/biography. Such processes are constitutive of performance, whereby Meadows enacts a seemingly already constructed version of an earlier self which is representative of regional, white, working-class masculinity.

The use of autobiographical material by artists has a long history and is often intimately linked to the notion of authorship. Despite their clear differences, some similarities can be drawn between Meadows, the writer and television dramatist Dennis Potter and filmmaker Terence Davis. They all have strong associations with place: Meadows with the East Midlands; Potter with the Forest of Dean, and Davies with Liverpool, as well as sharing working-class backgrounds. Most pertinently, each present problems and challenges around critical categorization, with Potter and Davies sharing the quality of liminality I argue is striking in the personality and work of Meadows. *Dennis Potter: Between Two Worlds*, the title of Glen Creeber’s study of Potter and two of the chapter titles contained therein: ‘Between Two Worlds’ and ‘Between Good and Evil’, are suggestive of liminality through their use of the intermediate proposition, “between”.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Glen Creeber, *Dennis Potter Between Two Worlds: A Critical Reassessment* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1998).

This implies that for Creeber, Potter exists equivocally between two points, or “between two worlds”, the title of the second chapter. Similarly, Wendy Everett’s assessment of Davies in the book’s introduction can be read in liminal terms when she states:

Davies is neither a straightforward nor an easy director, and the innovative nature of his films, and the way they continually subvert conventional categories and expectations, frequently confuses those critics who seek to pigeon-hole them neatly into specific categories; as will be seen, this confusion has had repercussions for the films’ wider critical reception...it is precisely their tendency to elude classification that constitutes the strength of his films.²⁰⁶

If the name Davies were exchanged for Meadows, then this introduction reads very similarly to my assessment of the subject of my thesis. Everett’s recognition of the critical difficulties of classification which surround Davis’ work concurs with my own issues with the current critical placement of Meadows. While not sharing the extent of Potter’s particular use of fantasy, nor Davies’ aesthetic, there are certain thematic preoccupations and stylistic approaches shared between the three. These include the attention afforded to masculine violence, whether the explosive rage of father (Pete Postlethwaite) in Davies’ *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) which prefigures Combo’s outburst in *This is England*, or the hierarchical violent politics of Potter’s *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979), which is echoed in Meadows’ work, especially through the rural locations used as a backdrop for these performances of power. However, it is the artists’ use of music and the importance afforded to the sonic texture of the texts which most clearly links their approaches. In particular, the way in which Potter and Meadows engage with popular culture through music is particularly remarkable, forming a major part of their individual aesthetics.

While Meadows is critically received as a social realist film maker who makes films intuitively, a persona supported by Meadows through his disavowal of intellectual effort, and Potter is seen as engaging with popular culture and the medium of television in a highly intellectual way, much of this split speaks to a class-based position. While Potter came from a working-class background, he was the product of a grammar school education,

²⁰⁶ Wendy Everett, *Terence Davies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 1.

one of Hoggart's grammar school boys, before higher education and a career in journalism in London. While Meadows repeatedly underlines his resolution to stay put, Potter moved; geographically, socially and intellectually and accordingly, his work can be more easily read without the burdensome lens of social realism, even though Potter can be described as originally working-class. Meadows' working-class credentials are overtly positional, identifiable through a degree of stasis, where he does not seem to particularly move, whether in terms of geography, budget size, the people with whom he works, his methodological approaches, or subject matter. This seeming stasis can be read as a liminal position and some recognition of the liminal aspects of artists such as Potter and Davies opens up the possibility for the framework of liminal realism proposed in this study to be applied to other subjects. It also provides evidence for wider and more imaginative associations between Meadows and filmmakers and writers outside of the narrow category of social realism, especially Loach and Leigh, who Leggott complained "tend to be lazily lumped together as keepers of the same realist flame".²⁰⁷

While Davies is associated with Liverpool, a city with a highly distinctive and culturally recognizable iconography, Potter and Meadows are associated with places which do not enjoy such a high profile in the cultural imaginary. The Forest of Dean and areas such as Sneinton or Matlock, the locations of *Smalltime* and *Dead Man's Shoes* are not as widely culturally recognizable. Nor indeed is the Derbyshire accent as immediately sonically recognizable as the distinct sound of the 'scouse' voice of Liverpool. Part of Meadows' distinctiveness is ironically this lack of distinctive signifiers of place; the films are distinctly placed somewhere specific, yet the specificity of that place is not easy to recognize other than for those relative few already familiar with that area of the East Midlands. Such a relationship with place within the films establishes a liminal sense of them being from somewhere, yet that somewhere hovers somewhat in the cultural imaginary; it is not here nor there, but somewhere in-between.

²⁰⁷ Leggott, *Contemporary British Cinema*, p. 72.

Meadows seems aligned to a regional specificity rather than attempting a move to the great centres of filmmaking, whether Hollywood or London. Meadows stresses his need for independent control in statements such as:

If I make a mistake, if I make a crap film, I want it to be on my own terms, I don't want to set off knowing it's crap. I've turned my back on two or three projects like that. I've turned my back on Hollywood projects because I just can't live with the pain of making shit.²⁰⁸

Meadows acknowledges the differentiating benefits of working away from the crowded marketplace of the nation's capital, remarking "I would much rather be a new filmmaker in Sheffield or Nottingham or Manchester than I would in London because there isn't the mass of people to overshadow you. You can actually get your voice heard".²⁰⁹

Yet, his pragmatism is matched by a sense of regional identity, illustrated by his statement "I'm obviously first and foremost a British Filmmaker on a global scale, but when it comes to narrowing it down, I really feel like my voice is in the Midlands and outside of London".²¹⁰ Such a statement presents Meadows' self-assessment as being that of a globally recognized filmmaker, yet one defined by his national and regional identity. Such an identity is descriptive of that of an author, with the author Meadows speaking with a decidedly East Midlands accent. It conforms to Foucault's construct of the author, whose function is to "characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society".²¹¹ Meadows' authorship concerns not only the self projected by Meadows into the public arena, through his films, interviews and other communications, but also the *project* of Meadows itself. By this I mean the egocentric endeavours which make up the greater scheme of materializing the self into each text. To a greater or lesser extent, Meadows' films are always about some aspect of himself, albeit of a highly constructed nature.

²⁰⁸ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Damon Wise, *Wonderland Magazine*, December 9, 2011. Available at www.wonderlandmagazine.com/2011/12/flashback-shane-meadows; accessed 21 September 2012.

²⁰⁹ *Little White Lies*, issue 11, (April/May 2007), p. 28.

²¹⁰ Shane Meadows, 'Shane Meadows: This is England', *Tiscali*. Available at www.tiscali.co.uk/enhtertainment/film/interviews/shane_meadows2.html; accessed 07 June 2007

²¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 124.

The precedence of adept self-publicists from the world of film directors is well set. The concept of the film director as superstar has been promulgated from early cinematic history. The interest generated through the auteurist approach lead to collections of interviews such as Joseph Gelmis' *The Film Director as Superstar* which situated the filmmaker in the same critical and cultural place as the on-screen star performer.²¹² While many independent filmmakers draw upon their own experiences as source material for their work, none seem to mine their own lives in quite the same way or to the same extent. For example, Lynne Ramsay's *Gasman* (1997) replays her own childhood experience of meeting her father's other family one Christmastime, sensitively evoking the time and place of 1970s Glasgow. Her most celebrated feature, *Ratcatcher* (1999), similarly engenders those temporal and geographical roots without such a direct recourse to autobiography. Indeed, her later work diverges completely from the autobiographical, involving instead the adaptation of existing material, authored by another: Lionel Shriver's 2003 novel, *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2011).

The 'self' Meadows intentionally projects is couched very much in terms of his autobiographical relationship to the text, often purportedly inspired by a 'real life' experience of his youth. The opening sequence of *Smalltime* concerns a clumsy theft of cheap dog food, an event Meadows claims was lifted directly from his experience as an inept petty criminal.²¹³ The characters of Romeo and Woolley in *A Room for Romeo Brass* are based upon Meadows and the co-writer Paul Fraser, his childhood friend and neighbour. *Dead Man's Shoes* was written in response to a childhood's friend's victimization and subsequent suicide. *This is England* recalled Meadows' experiences of joining a skinhead gang and his disillusionment of violence following his witnessing of a sustained physical assault. Meadows' body of work up this point are almost presented as creative therapy, as cathartic endeavours which not only work through Meadows' own psychic daemons, but also form the avenue away from the lifestyles and economic conditions of the characters he creates on screen. While there is a clear shift in direction away from the auto/biographical in later work, from *Somers Town* onwards, the texts

²¹² Joseph Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971).

²¹³ Jonathan Romney, 'Shane Meadows: Shane's World', *The Independent*, Sunday, 3 October, 2004. Available at www.independent.co.uk; accessed 20 April 2012.

pursuant to this study are all contextualized by a high degree of claims to the auto/biographical. Meadows' constant reminder that 'he could be these people' serves as a plea for his emotional verisimilitude to the people and places of his roots; an overt claim of authenticity. But of course, evidentially this cannot be true. It is impossible for an internationally recognized creative entity to remain the same, even if he lived in the same house and kept the same friends. However, this truism is elided over in the exchanges of the interviews, where Meadows' appeal as a bone fide example of a working-class filmmaker is foregrounded, with the more glamorous aspects of filmmaking celebrity disavowed.

Auteurism and Authorship

Meadows' role as writer or co-writer of his films cannot be underestimated. In part it dissolves the contention between the rival statuses of writer and director which first instigated the auteur debate in cinema. It was in argument against the elevated position of the writer, (or more specifically the adaptor of literary works, the '*Tradition de la Qualité*') in French cinema, that François Truffaut wrote his seminal 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma française' for *Cahiers du Cinéma*.²¹⁴ Truffaut's argument extended beyond the change of artistic emphasis from writer to director, from *littérateurs* to *metteurs en scène* and appealed instead for the recognition of the *hommes de cinema*. This developed the idea of the auteur upon which the journal was founded, capitalizing upon ideas already in circulation.²¹⁵ At the very least, Meadows' construction of each film's concept before shooting, the 'writing stage', secures him as the film's 'author' (with a metaphorical small a), before any further tests of his auteurist credentials are applied, although of course, it is not necessary for the originator of a film to write the script.

Historically, one set of tests are those described by Andrew Sarris in 1962. The first is qualitative, concerning "technical competence", whereby "a great director has to be at

²¹⁴ François Truffaut, 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma française', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 31, January 1954, in Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 15-28.

²¹⁵ For a discussion on the development of auteurism, see John Caughie (ed.), *Theories of Authorship* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

least a good director”.²¹⁶ The second considers the director’s signature, their personal style as exhibited through “certain recurring characteristics” in the filmic text. For Sarris, this style is intimately linked to the ideological position of the director, the way they “think and feel”. Somewhat counter-intuitively Sarris detects this more immediately in the work of directors who film existing material (such as those working in Hollywood) rather than those who film scripts as the former has to develop a rigorous technique in order to display their individual style, rather than rely on the content. The third is less tangibly grasped, described by Sarris somewhat ethereally as “an élan of the soul”, which differentiates one individual from another.²¹⁷

It could be argued that Meadows could fall short of these criteria; certainly *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* would struggle to pass the first test and his other work, whether through design or constraints of time or budget have an unpolished finish which may bar their acceptance as ‘technically competent’. However, the case of *Midlands* may be explained by the absence of authorial control, a key component of the achievement of auteurist mastery; it is in some ways the exception which proves the rule. While there may be some value in assessing technical competence, it is not my primary concern here. Likewise, Meadows’ involvement with the writing may, somewhat perversely, hinder him according to the second test as prescribed by Sarris. However, I will argue that the formulation of each text’s content, its genesis and development prior to shooting, is vitally important to Meadows’ formulation as an auteur. The detection of motifs which persist through his body of work is a less contentious activity and it is this task, coupled with the detection of Meadows’ meeting of the third criterion that I intend to pursue throughout this chapter.

This is not to say however, that the three signs of the auteur described by Sarris are concrete or unproblematic. They must be understood in their historical context, coming at a relatively early stage in the exchange of ideas around the subject of authorship in

²¹⁶ Andrew Sarris, ‘Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962’, in Braudy and Marshall, (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings: Sixth Edition* (New York/London: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 561-4.

²¹⁷ Ibid, p. 563.

cinema. They can be considered as an orthodoxy of auteurism and I invoke them, not only due to their seeming neatness and relative simplicity in what is a very contentious and complex area, but also in order to locate Meadows' against such an orthodox construction. Moving on from this, I draw upon Foucault to consider Meadows as author, interrogating the way in which his name functions. Foucault's argument is particularly apt for this study as it is sensitive to the qualities of liminality (although he never uses that term) in relation to the term author. This can be detected in Foucault's statement: "the author's name is not a function of a man's civil status, nor is it fictional; *it is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities* which give rise to new groups of discourse".²¹⁸

The liminal quality of the abstract author is echoed through the concrete (yet linguistically slippery) figure of Shane Meadows. As argued throughout this study, liminality defines Meadows, whether inter or extra-textually. The subject of his work concerns people 'on the margins of society' (the under-class rather than the working-class), located in marginal places (the East Midlands rather than 'The North'). As a director, he works 'from the margins' relative to international standards of filmmaking practice (Britain rather than the USA, Nottingham rather than London). This sense of being on the edge, or between, is important when considering Meadows as an auteur. He cites Martin Scorsese as a major influence, especially *Mean Streets* (1973) which made him realise that "maybe you don't have to make a film about genre, maybe you can make a film about your own life".²¹⁹ Indeed the moniker "the Midlands' Scorsese" accompanies many interviews.²²⁰ Of course, Meadows is not alone in citing Scorsese as a key influence; the influence of an Italian-American filmmaker who makes films in and about America, upon young British filmmakers is notable. For example, Paul Hills, a Stevenage-based director whose *Boston Kickout* (1996) echoes the work of Meadows, remarked that "I've been influenced by everyone from Fellini to Ken Loach, but my hero

²¹⁸ Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 123. (My emphasis).

²¹⁹ S.F. Said, 'Filmmakers on Film: Shane Meadows on *Mean Streets*', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 September, 2002; accessed 14 August 2008.

²²⁰ See Said, 'Filmmakers on Film: Shane Meadows on *Mean Streets*', and Ed Potton, 'Small is Beautiful for Shane Meadows', *TimesOnline*, 24. September, 2005; accessed 14 August 2008.

is Martin Scorsese”.²²¹ Through this evocation of key figures of film, Hills and Meadows overtly associate themselves with auteurs and reveal an aspiration to be regarded as such. However, Meadows orientates himself at odds with this position in statements such as “I never really thought of myself as a director, even when I was doing it. Most people who want to be a director look at Spielberg, Scorsese or Jim Jarmusch. I was making films just to have a laugh and get people together”.²²²

Yet Meadows is not reticent in also referring to works by directors with less cultural prestige as providing inspiration, such as Michael Winner’s *Death Wish* (1974), which is referenced in *Dead Man’s Shoes*. Any consideration of Meadows as an auteur must be mindful of this oscillation between the high and low, within the margins of filmmaking practice, a dynamic which even extends into his way of working. The following section discusses the processes and products of Meadows’ practice.

Meadows’ configuration of himself as an insider is an important one which regulates his function as author, placed within the subject as an active participant, rather than without as an authoritative observer. In this way Meadows’ compassionate and intimate approach to his subject can be explained and partially understood. In Foucaultian terms, Meadows as author is a discursive entity, functioning as a locus of discourse around and through which themes can be discussed. Primarily, these have been heavily concerned with notions of social realism within British cinema (hence the attention given to this area at the beginning of my study), which seek to locate Meadows historically and ideologically in relation to this tradition of British filmmaking.

“The Happy Accident”: Meadows and Improvisation

In his discussion of *Le Donk and Scor-zay-Zee* at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 2009, Meadows describes a seemingly serendipitous mode of filmmaking, where for him “there was no script at all, just my faith on my relationship with Paddy, and that behind the camera, in that environment, I would find the story. Everything was about believing in

²²¹ Said, ‘Filmmakers on Film: Shane Meadows on *Mean Streets*’.

²²² Shane Meadows, interviewed by Chris Sullivan, ‘Boots and Bovver’, in *The Times*, April 21, 2007. Available online at www.timesonline.co.uk; accessed 12 July 2007.

the happy accident”.²²³ It also attests to the enduring bond of trust between Meadows and his long-time friend and creative collaborator, Paddy Considine.

In her discussion of emerging filmmakers in the 1990s, Kate Ogborn dedicates a couple of paragraphs to Meadows, describing his journey from micro-budget films shot with borrowed equipment to the full feature debut of *TwentyFourSeven*.²²⁴ Here, Ogborn is careful to temper the descriptions of an individual maverick filmmaker offered through critical discourses, with an acknowledgement of the importance of others who were (and still are) instrumental in Meadows’ success. The collaborative nature of Meadows’ work may have originated from economic necessity, a need to produce his films cheaply, thus crewing and casting his early films through friendships, family and favours rather than payment. However, *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* notwithstanding, Meadows has continued to employ the same approaches to filmmaking he used for his early shorts.

Interviews with Meadows often reveal his approach to filmmaking as democratically improvisational, in particular the way in which he encourages creative input from cast and crew. Filming often begins with only a loose script in place which may be dramatically changed during the shoot, a method employed for *TwentyFourSeven* and *A Room for Romeo Brass*. Or there may be even less formal preparation at the commencement of filming, where a general concept, rather than a script is followed as happened in the case of *Dead Man’s Shoes*. This approach was facilitated through Meadows’ generous use of expensive 35 mm film stock to capture improvised scenes, and his post-shoot manipulation of scenes into a coherent narrative; as he states it was essentially “made in the edit”.²²⁵ Meadows’ encouragement of a participatory atmosphere, where cast and crew can influence dialogue and plot development demonstrates a democratic directorial style. This may seem at odds with one view of auteurist methodology as authoritarian, driven by a single vision; however it does not

²²³ Shane Meadows, ‘How to Make a Film in Five Days’, *The Guardian FilmBlog*. available at www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2009/jun/26; accessed 10 January 2011.

²²⁴ Kate Ogborn, ‘Pathways into the Industry’, in Murphy (ed), *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: BFI, 2000), p. 65.

²²⁵ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Edward Lawrenson, ‘Getting Personal’, *Sight and Sound*, vol. 14, no. 10 (October 2004), p. 36.

exclude Meadows from such a description as it is the final edited text, rather than contributory elements of it, which establish his auteurist position.

The use of improvisation is potentially in tension with the idea of authorship in that the final text is not a realization of a clear idea, the manifestation of one artist's vision; rather it is a bastard child with a number of sires. In this sense, the promotion of an improvisational working atmosphere is more honest in the collective medium of film which always carries the mark of many hands, unlike the discrete creation of a sole artist, such as fine art (although, of course, even this is complicated by the influences of other artists which filter into original work). The director Danny Boyle acknowledges such collectiveness, stating "I've always tried to build a team, where it feels like you're on a bit of a campaign together... I like to think of the team as mini directors".²²⁶ Like Boyle, Meadows' celebration of the technique of improvisation refuses authorial possessiveness, allowing the importance of other creative voices to be recognized.

However, it is disingenuous to suggest that this relaxed control over elements of script and story negate the figure of Meadows as the author of the text. His desire for authorial control is clearly demonstrated in his reaction to the loss of autonomy felt through his experience with the studio-financed *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands*, which he described as "a strange experience" made with producer Andrea Calderwood, with whom he "quite publicly did not get on".²²⁷ Indeed, Meadows' clear enjoyment of the editing process, and his obvious distress in any interference in his final vision, indicates that it is less about an erosion of authorial power which is replaced with a foregrounded collectivity; rather it is a question of a change of emphasis, where it is the final shaping, rather than the continued control, which drives Meadows' authority and pleasure. This is made clear through his assertion: "editing for me is the most enjoyable part, as it's got a control that none of the other areas have... I think for me editing is what I am waiting for

²²⁶ Danny Boyle, *The Observer Book of Film* (London: Observer Books, 2007), p. 10.

²²⁷ Shane Meadows, 'Getting Personal', *Sight and Sound*, p. 35.

on a film, as I know I have all the material. It's in my hands and I can make something of it."²²⁸

This pleasure in the activity of cutting and splicing together the reams of film, video or the manipulation of digital material echoes similar statements from the French filmmaker Jean-Pierre Melville (1917-73) who stated in an interview in 1962: "you really create a film in the editing room, in the silence and night"²²⁹ Melville's pleasure extended to the writing stage, but was curtailed in the shoot as illustrated in his statement: "for me, paradise consists in writing the script all alone at home and then editing it. But I hate the shoot. All this time wasted in useless talk!"²³⁰ This reverses Meadows' avoidance of the creation of a polished script in favour of a lengthy improvisational shoot; for him, the "useless talk" becomes the script.

Improvisation in film is a broad term, encompassing diverse practices. Examples include the spontaneity of the 'mockumentaries' of Christopher Guest (writer of *This is Spinal Tap* [1984] [directed by Rob Reiner], and writer and director of *Best in Show* [2000], and *A Mighty Wind* [2003]); the radical manifesto of Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg's *Dogme95* movement or the lengthy improvisational creations of Mike Leigh. Meadows has engaged with all three. He describes *Le Donk and Scor-Zay-Zee* as being "like *Spinal Tap* on the road"²³¹ His dalliance with *Dogme* is less celebratory, where he dismisses the rules of filmmaking set down in the Manifesto:

I woke up at 2am while editing *This is England* and thought I've got to have some fun next time, so I started looking at the internet for ideas. I looked at *Dogme*. But with them you can't bend over on set, you're not allowed to call anyone Kelvin, you have to cut hedges while operating the video. I thought 'This is meant to be liberating, but it's really restrictive'. There was nothing there for me.²³²

²²⁸ Meadows, *A Room for Romeo Brass: The Original Shooting Script*, pp. 7-8.

²²⁹ Jean-Pierre Melville, *Télérama*, no. 670, 18 November 1962, p. 58. Quoted in Ginette Vincendeau, *Jean-Pierre Melville: An American in Paris* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), p. 19.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Phil de Semlyn, 'Exclusive: Shane Meadows on *Le Donk: Its Spinal Tap*, *Dogme-Style*', *Empire*, 30 March, 2009. Available at www.empireonline.com; accessed 13 January 2011.

²³² Shane Meadows, 'How to Make a Film in Five Days', *The Guardian FilmBlog*. available at www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2009/jun/26; accessed 10 January 2011.

The association between Meadows and Mike Leigh is most pertinent. Alongside Ken Loach, Leigh plays a central role in the recent development of social realist British cinema. Meadows' acknowledges the influence of Leigh, especially "early Mike Leigh stuff like *Meantime*" and *Naked* (1993), where:

Naked is one of those films I love to hate. I always find in Mike Leigh's films a couple of characters who send me potty. But when I saw *Naked*, I came out of the cinema and spent two months thinking about it. It just wouldn't leave me. David Thewlis's performance is among the finest I've ever seen.²³³

It is not surprising that *Naked* should have left such a lingering impression on Meadows. It shares the same central theme of disaffected and violent masculinity which permeates Meadows' work. Meadows' observation on the quality of acting expressed by Thewlis (who plays the central role of Johnny), indicates his appreciation of performance and the two directors share a similar emphasis on performance achieved through an extended and developmental improvisatory pre-shoot stage.

For Meadows, this favouring of improvisation is due to a number of factors: creative expediency, lessening the need for full scripts to be written and extensive storyboarding. The second is due to the casting of young and/or inexperienced actors who require a great deal of coaching and guidance from their director. This development of a mentoring relationship between Meadows and his cast is an identifiable mode of working which signals his particular style and is one of the recurring topics which form part of the discourses around the filmmaker.

Leigh's motivations are different. Working with (mainly) experienced, and often the same set of actors, who have become familiar with his approach, his practice is informed through techniques which originate in experimental theatre. In an interview with Mark Lawson, Imelda Staunton describes the lengthy improvisation around the central idea of a 1950s abortionist which formed the central conceit of Mike Leigh's *Vera Drake*

²³³ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Brian Logan, 'The Shane Event', *Guardian*, Friday, 19 November 1999. Available at www.guardian.co.uk/film/1999; accessed 13 October 2011.

(2004).²³⁴ Some six weeks of improvisation of dialogue and plot improvisation between cast and director secured a final script which was adhered to religiously once shooting had started.

In his discussion of his 2002 film, *All or Nothing*, Leigh describes a similar approach where a lengthy rehearsal period is dedicated to characterization and the creation of “the world” they inhabit, without the film, its storyline or script being approached.²³⁵ It is only after the characters are emotionally formed that the storyline is developed and a script evolved, with each actor only being made aware of their own character’s words and motivations one stage at a time. This isolation of each character from another was adopted by Meadows for *This is England*, most noticeably in the scene where Combo (Stephen Graham) attacks Milky (Andrew Shim), with the actor playing Shaun Fields (Thomas Turgoose) unaware of this planned event.²³⁶ The resulting reaction of Turgoose was therefore motivated (in part at least) from genuine shock, rather than a display of accomplished acting.

In response to Ian Kingsbury’s observation that *Romeo Brass* “has a very improvised feel to it”, Andrew Shim, titular star of the film explains:

To be honest, Shane always works like that. He basically uses the script as a guide. You read through your scene in rehearsal, but we put the script aside and he’ll basically say ‘well, you know where it starts and you know where it needs to end up’. It’s a really good way of working.²³⁷

The clear delineation between pre-shoot preparation and the discipline of the shoot is not, however a model employed by Meadows. Leigh’s approach incorporates the creative energy of a group rehearsal garnered from theatrical practice, but retains the discipline of sticking to the final script. Leigh’s fluidity starts at the beginning of the process but is

²³⁴ *Mark Lawson Talks to: Imelda Staunton*. BBC 4. Broadcast 11 April 2010.

²³⁵ *The South Bank Show*, ITV1. Broadcast 13 October 2002

²³⁶ I learned this detail through the actress Joanne Hartley (Cynthia in *This is England*), whom I met at the Short Film Festival, Bristol Watershed, November 2007.

²³⁷ Andrew Shim, interviewed by Ian Kingsbury, ‘This is Acting’, *Leflion*, issue 16, (April/May 2007), pp. 24-25.

stopped during production, whereas Meadows' continues throughout production. It is only at the other end when shooting has finished that his autonomy is cemented through the editing of the material.

Improvisation is therefore a key trait of Meadows' work. The spontaneity engendered through the loose way Meadows approaches script development, plotting and characterization indicates a fluid methodology and ethos, where the resulting film is a collaborative and plastic creation. His films are not the end result of a clear and precise initial vision, scripted and storyboarded to the finest detail. Indeed, *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* aside, Meadows' small budget films do not necessitate the fully-budgeted blueprint script and detailed storyboard which are usually required for films with larger budgets and/or greater controls over production. Rather, they are the result of a loose idea of the director with or without an accompanying co-writer, added to or changed as filming progresses, with the final film only emerging through the edit. However, this is not to say that the text is totally freeform or experimental; the imperative of any work by Meadows is the part it plays in the greater schema of the construction of Meadows, its role in the grand Meadowsian project.

Meadows' use of improvisation is intimately linked to this persona. His declaration of waiting for the happy accident twinned with the dislike of writing detailed scripts, infers a particular casualness which resists intellectualization of the medium and suggests a rejection of the struggle of the artist, at the writing stage at least. There is a degree of bravado to this stance; unlike the theatrical tradition of improvisation which informs the work of Mike Leigh, Meadows' use of improvisation is seemingly divorced from tradition and offered up as a means of intellectual economy, a way of avoiding work, rather like the work-shy, non-working-class characters of his films. The validity of Meadows' claims is not as important as the hand-in-glove relationship it has with the discourses around him, the way in which Meadows plays the part of the 'great white hope of British cinema'. The presentation of Meadows as a non-intellectual, non-schooled filmmaker, who produces texts in a seemingly serendipitous way is propagated by Meadows himself and continued through the critical discourses which surround him. Of

course, this raises the question of whether Meadows is free to present himself as otherwise. Is he cleverly directing his own mediated image, or is his seeming autonomy restricted to a negotiation of the narrow parameters accessible to a filmmaker of a working-class background, making regionally-specific films with a relatively narrow audience?

Fandom

I adore films but I think the nature of it is that you're a watcher or a doer, and I'm definitely a watcher.²³⁸

Whatever his critical positioning within British cinema, Meadows is clearly an avid film viewer. Indeed, he readily references several influential directors in interviews. However, it is the position Meadows takes, that of fan, rather than cineaste or scholar, which is important here. In her study of Quentin Tarantino, Sharon Willis notes Tarantino's configuration of himself as fan and how this operates as a means of constructing a particular persona which informs critical and audience reception.²³⁹ Similarly, Meadows' construction of himself as fan works to locate him in the same ideological position as his audience, furthering the sense of 'being one of them'. It forms part of the mythology of the director and his fandom is informed by his preoccupation with homosocial relationships, especially those connected to the figure of the father, as Meadows' description of early film consumption makes clear:

When we first got a video recorder, there was this Hell's Angel that lived about three fields away in this mad little hut who had a big collection of pirate videos. I used to go over there on a Saturday morning and get five or six Clint Eastwood films or, you know, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, and I'd sit there with my father and watch five or six films a day.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Shane Meadows, *Little White Lies*, issue. 11 (April/May 2007), p. 19.

²³⁹ Sharon Willis, *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

²⁴⁰ "The Good, the Bad and the English", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 12, 2003. Available from www.smh.com.au; accessed 12 September 2009.

It is important here to recognize the historical placement of Meadows in terms of his early consumption of films, the way in which his film education came about. Meadows was of the first generation (on a large scale) to consume films via home video. Therefore Meadows' early introduction to film would have been, alongside television and cinema, augmented by video, with the new technology offering unique viewing practices that greatly differed from the cinematic experience which inform, for example, the work of Terence Davies or Bill Douglas.²⁴¹

The consumption of film through video moves the experience from the public arena of the cinema theatre to the domestic space of the home. However, it does not necessarily mean it is always a private experience as Meadows' above quotation contests; it may form a major site of experiential bonding. The quotation also expresses the illicit frisson which accompanied the video, which may have been a pirated copy and/or of a subject matter which may not have been available to under-eighteens in the cinema. Obtained through illegal means, and of a certificate which should have prevented the underage Meadows from viewing them, the films of Eastwood or the western *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1969), provided an education in screen masculinity which was couched in working-class mythology predicated upon illicit distribution and consumption (a Hell's Angel providing pirate recordings).

Moreover, the level of control offered through the technology (the repeated viewings, the slowing down or speeding up of certain scenes, the freeze-frame) creates a feeling of mastery which not only fragments the film into pieces at the discretion of the viewer (and thus introducing the child Meadows to the possibilities of editing and its pleasures), it also allows the viewer(s) to enjoy the didactic possibilities of replaying certain scenes to others while providing a commentary. Thus, the television screen and video player work together as a means of social interaction and bonding over the given direction "look at this." This may be played upon gender-based lines, with homosocial bonding taking place

²⁴¹ Davies' reflexive relationship with cinema spectatorship is most readily shown in *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988). Indeed, the importance of this relationship is underscored through the adoption of a still from the film showing cinema spectatorship as a recurrent motif in the marketing material of the British Film Institute. Similarly, Bill Douglas' *My Ain Folk* (1973) includes a scene of cinema spectatorship, enlivened with Technicolor which contrasts against the monochrome of the rest of the film.

over the sharing of observations over scenes of violent hyper-masculinity or indeed, pornography, which also proliferated following the adoption of the video player. Few young males from the 1970s and beyond have not gathered around a screen in order to deconstruct the fight scenes of *Enter the Dragon* (1973) and other martial arts films.²⁴² Indeed, the film poster of Bruce Lee's film which adorns the wall of Sonny's home in *Dead Man's Shoes* is a nod to the legacy of male adoration of screen masculinity.

Thus education in film offered through consumption via video is an informal undertaking which bypasses academic and theoretical endeavours in favour of shared experiences and intimate knowledge of the text. Appreciation of a film is predicated on notions of fandom, with directors intertextually referencing other's work from that particular position; we see the influence of Scorsese directly in Meadows and indirectly via Tarantino, through a series of indexical linkages and intertextual references.²⁴³ Thus homage to the American directors is visible in Meadows' early work, with the gangster conceit used in *Where's the Money Ronnie?* and *Smalltime* depicted with some references to a 'Scorsese-esque' and/or 'Tarantino-esque' sensibility. Most importantly, it is the shared themes of homosocial relationships and underlying homoerotic tensions which are channelled through extreme violence that are the basis for much of the work by all three filmmakers, and, for the purposes of this thesis, it is here where the greatest interest lies.

However, Meadows' approach can be seen as antithetical to Scorsese and, in particular, Tarantino as his work deliberately undermines any sense of 'coolness' that the American films exude. This may be a matter of reception; American audiences may receive Meadows' films as an exotic other, with the sense of northern, British working-class culture operating in the same register of 'coolness' offered by Tarantino to his non-American audiences. However, it is more complex than this. Tarantino is received as a 'cool geek' who makes 'cool' films in the domestic and international marketplace.

²⁴² Of course, girls and women do this too. I did in the 1970s and still do today. However, I broadly locate the activity as mainly 'male' inasmuch as it marks such an iconic avenue to 'becoming' male through shared debate about what it means to be 'a real hard man' in order to locate oneself, and be located by your peers, within that inner circle.

²⁴³ Famously, Tarantino's early position as a video store clerk provided him with a library of source material which would later inform his aesthetic and thematic style.

Meadows' work eschews such cultural sophistication, choosing instead a deliberate absence of glamour that (unlike *Trainspotting* [1996] for example which operated with an aesthetic form of 'heroin chic') signals or claims an authenticity of subject through its very ordinariness.

What is important when considering Meadows in terms of fandom is the decidedly homosocial way in which he does this; narrating his initiation into film fandom via an enabling male elder who is tellingly a Hell's Angel, a semi-criminal male archetype who belongs to an overtly homosocial group. The films gained through this figure were consumed domestically, yet shared with the paternal rather than maternal figure, a move away from the usual twinning of the domestic space with femininity. The films consumed in this setting were representative of hegemonically powerful masculinity, often embodied through a particular male star. Therefore, Meadows presents his early education in film culture as a form of initiation ceremony as observed and described by van Gennep and Turner, overseen by the instructors of Hell's Angel and father, with Meadows an initiate into a homosocial endeavor. His position as fan extends beyond that presented on screen to the men who provide and share the films. In this sense, Meadows' observation of masculinity can be seen as liminally positioned, placed at the center of a number of homosocial exchanges, whether that exchange is the physical video tape, the visual narrative of the film, or the shared viewing pleasures gained from it. Such homosociality is discussed further in the following section.

IV. The Homosocial Corps

I never really thought of myself as a director, even when I was doing it. Most people who want to be a director look at Spielberg, Scorsese or Jim Jarmusch. I was making films just to have a laugh and get people together.²⁴⁴

As well as illustrating Meadows' tendencies of disavowal, Meadows' claim he was "making films just to have a laugh and get people together" is indicative of the way in which Meadows presents his filmmaking methodology as a means of achieving collective pleasure.²⁴⁵ In her description of the most common route into the filmmaking industry, initiated through a formal education, Kate Ogborn notes Meadows' typical evasion of the norm, stating:

It is a route that is often short-circuited or deviated from. Peter Carlton of Nottingham film workshop, Intermedia, described Shane Meadows as an 'immaculate conception' – a film-maker who came from nowhere, who proved that you didn't need to go to film school, that all you needed was the gift of the gab.²⁴⁶

However, Ogborn is careful to question this construction, contesting that "though he has been marketed as the maverick outsider who begged, stole and borrowed to get his films made, a lot of people were involved in his 'immaculate conception'".²⁴⁷ As a production executive for *Dead Man's Shoes*, and executive producer for *This is England*, Ogborn was well-placed to make such an observation. This section discusses those people, arguing how such a group forms a predominantly homosocial corps, which replicates, in miniature, the larger homosocial group of the filmmaking community.

Some working relationships were formed from existing friendships, most notably Paul Fraser, Meadows' childhood friend and co-writer on *TwentyFourSeven*. Fraser wrote the screenplay for *Somers Town* and directed the Paris sequence which formed the final coda

²⁴⁴ Shane Meadows, interviewed by Chris Sullivan, 'Boots and Bovver', in *The Times*, April 21, 2007. Available online at www.timesonline.co.uk; accessed 12 June 2007.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ogborn, 'Pathways into the Industry', p. 65.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

of the film. Fraser also provided additional material for *Dead Man's Shoes* which was co-written by Meadows and Paddy Considine, whom Meadows met at Burton College in Burton on Trent where Considine was studying photography.²⁴⁸ Considine appeared in a number of Meadows' short films before his feature debut in *Romeo Brass*, playing the psychologically disturbed Morell, followed by his appearance as Richard in *Dead Man's Shoes*, and as the titular star of the mock documentary *Le Donk-and-Scor-Zay-Zee*. Considine's career has seen success in large Hollywood productions such as *Cinderella Man* (2005) and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) as well as other film and television productions such as *Red Riding: In the Year of Our Lord 1980* (2009). His directorial career has seen critical success with a BAFTA in the Best Short Film category for *Dog Altogether* (2007) and a further BAFTA in the Outstanding Debut by a British Writer/Producer/Director for the feature which elaborated upon the previous short *Tyrannosaur* (2011).

The striking physical similarity between Considine and Johnny Harris who played Mick, in *This is England '88*, suggests a lingering presence of the internationally successful actor within the television series, with Harris as a visual and thematic *Doppelgänger* of the characters previously played by Considine. A comparison of Richard and Mick makes such associations clear, with facial similarities emphasized by gesture, costume, hair and shot construction. Considine's directorial work shares Meadows' fascination with emotionally damaged and violent masculinity through its central character Joseph, played by Peter Mullins, an actor and filmmaker whose own film *NEDS* (2010) explores similar themes to *TwentyFourSeven*, through its narrative of disaffected working-class male youth. Such connectivity between people and texts is illustrative of the homosocial networks which exist within pockets of filmmaking, where intertextuality is twinned with 'intercorporality' where bodies of work and bodies of men work together through and around the texts, producing a homosocial film culture.

²⁴⁸ Such biographical details are available on the official Shane Meadows website www.shanemeadows.co.uk.

This is most clearly shown through Meadows' close association with the producer Mark Herbert, CEO and founder of Warp Films. There is something of the chivalrous rescuing knight about Herbert in his response to Meadows' distress following his creative disappointment with *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands*, as Meadows' suggests through his statement:

After Midlands, the phone wasn't ringing. Then Mark Herbert was starting up this new exciting company [Warp Films] and wanted me to be at the centre of it. It was a huge compliment. Mark said 'Obviously, you need £200,000 to make a film' - and he came back with £800,000! Paddy [Considine] had also moved back, living in Burton, and we spent a week to 10 days writing a script, one draft, no changes....It was the equivalent of the punk movement. 'All I need is a bass, a guitar and some drums,' enforced simplicity. There were no tracks, no lights - I think we had one lamp on a van - and it was absolutely liberating... Since Midlands, when I made a decision I was just going to do things my own way, it's really paid off.²⁴⁹

Other than *Somers Town*, which was produced by among other executive and associate producers, Barnaby Spurrier who was also executive producer of *Le-Donk-and-Scor-Zay-Zee*, Herbert has produced all of Meadows' work since they first collaborated on *Dead Man's Shoes*. Herbert has also produced, or been executive producer of work by the friends and associates of Meadows who are in satellite around him, including Considine's *Dog Altogether* and *Tyrannosaur*.

A significant contribution to the Meadowsian aesthetic is facilitated through the repeated employment of certain cast and crew members. While some cinematographers worked on only one film, such as Helene Whitehall (*Smalltime*) and Brian Tufano (*Once Upon a Time in the Midlands*), other such as Ashley Rowe and Danny Cohen worked on two films each, with Rowe's work on *Romeo Brass* and *TwentyFourSeven* facilitating the romantic lyricism of the visuals, while the bleaker aesthetics of *Dead Man's Shoes* and *This is England* were achieved through Danny Cohen's photography. Visual signatures achieved through cinematography are augmented by the aural aesthetics achieved through soundtracks and scores which accompany the Derbyshire accented dialogue. While much

²⁴⁹ Shane Meadows, 'Shane Meadows on *This is England*', *Film4*. Available at www.film4.co/features/articles/shane-meadows-on-this-is-england; accessed 17 August 2011.

of the soundtrack consists of artists from the Warp record label, a subsidiary company of Warp Films, the common sonic thread which weaves through Meadows' texts, is that produced by the musician Gavin Clark, a personal friend of Meadows.

Music seems to be integral to Meadows' work. His relationship with Considine was consolidated through their group *She Talks to Angels*, with Meadows on vocals and Considine on drums. While the group no longer exists, Considine still performs in his band and both men have a strong association with the Sheffield group, *The Artic Monkeys*. Considine appeared in their video for *Leave Before the Light Comes On* (2006) and a short film *Scummy Man* (2006) based upon their video *When the Sun Goes Down* (2006) was written by Paul Fraser, the co-writer of *Romeo Brass* and starred Stephen Graham (Combo in *This is England*). It was also produced by Mark Herbert. The group played a central position in *Le Donk and Scor-Zay-Zee*; their performance at the *Oxegen* Festival providing the backdrop of the action, with Considine as Le Donk playing their roadie.

Filming musicians was not a new experience for Meadows. In 2007 he wrote and directed two music videos for Richard Hawley: *Valentine* and *Serious*, both from his 2007 album, *Lady Bridge*. Hawley wrote and performed *Steel 2* for *Dead Man's Shoes*, which appears on the released soundtrack. The conceit of *Valentine*, (a performance to an elderly audience), echoed the dance sequence of *Romeo Brass*, with a cameo appearance by Andrew Shim, replete with aging make up and costume, completing the association. Similarly *The Living Room* (1999), Meadows' documentary about Gavin Clarke, the main musical contributor of his films, illustrates his commitment to local musicianship. Whether as a sole artist or in the groups *Sunhouse* or *Clayhill*, Clarke's music has featured heavily in Meadows' work, appearing in all of his features; indeed, Clarke wrote five of the eight tracks for *Somers Town*.

The sense of place Meadows evokes through his use of regionally specific musicians echoes his admiration of the way Scorsese employs music, especially in *Mean Streets* made clear through Meadows' statement: "when we were at college, it was all, 'you have

to get a score'. But the soundtrack in *Mean Streets* far more echoed the time and gave a sense of place".²⁵⁰ However, not all music used by Meadows is of northern or even British origin; the ska soundtrack of *This is England* incorporates Jamaican music as well as indigenous versions of the ska sound, but this does not reduce the specificity of the film's geographical place, rather it works as a means to infer other places within the created nostalgia of the text. As a signifier of liminality, a bridge stands between two points and music in Meadows work can be heard as a sonic bridge which points to two or more places.

The television sequels of *This is England* necessitated the repeated appearance of actors in their previously filmed roles, yet Meadows' casting practices points more to preference rather than logical necessity. As well as Considine, other actors appear in more than one film: for example, Mat Hand and Dena Smiles had appearances in a number of shorts before their central roles as Malc and Kate in *Smalltime* and later roles as Fagash and Leslie in *TwentyFourSeven*. Toby Kebble played Anthony in *Dead Man's Shoes* and in a pun on producer Mark Herbert, he appeared as Mark Sherbert in *Northern Soul* (2004), a short film which revisited the idea of a man's pursuit of physical prowess, this time through wrestling rather than the boxing theme of *TwentyFourSeven*. George Newton took the roles of Gypsy John in *Dead Man's Shoes* and Banjo in *This is England* and its television sequels which also saw Perry Benson perform as Meggy, later playing Graham in *Somers Town*. Ladene Hall played Pob in *TwentyFourSeven*, Carol in *Romeo Brass* and 'Bingo Woman' in *Once upon a Time in the Midlands*. Vicky McClure played Hall's daughter in *Romeo Brass*, with McClure's character Ladine, being a variant spelling of Hall's first name, before appearing alongside Andrew Shim in Meadows' short film *The Stairwell*, followed by her performances as Lol in each of the *This is England* texts.

McClure is clearly the most notable female creative individual to have emerged from the success which attends many of the people who have worked with, and continue to collaborate with Meadows. Winning a BAFTA Television award in 2011 for her

²⁵⁰ Shane Meadows, S.F. Said, 'Filmmakers on Film: Shane Meadows on *Mean Streets*', *The Telegraph*, 14 September, 2002. Available at www.telegraph.co.uk; accessed 30 June 2009.

performance in *This is England '86*, McClure has found television work which includes playing Kelly in *Rough Skin* (2011), part of Channel Four's *Coming Up* season of television dramas; Serena in the drama *True Love* (2012) and DC Kate Fleming in the television series *Line of Duty* (2012). It is interesting that the exceptional case of McClure, whose performances as Ladine and Lol are more central than many of the female characters in Meadows' work, most of whom are only marginal presences, is subject to an acceptance (or seeming acceptance) of the homosocial norms of the Meadowsian milieu.

In an interview, McClure is keen to stress her assimilation into the homosocial environment of the Meadowsian group, describing her credentials as a tomboy, her preference for the masculine normative clothes of "hoodies and jeans" and her assimilating to the homosocial environment, stating: "I've always grown up hanging around with lads...I was definitely one of the lads on *This is England* and generally through life".²⁵¹ Meadows is reflexive about McClure's centrality within *This is England '86*, describing her in terms which evoke female-to-male drag and the adoption of culturally normative masculine traits. This is signalled through his statement: "it's been said that my work has been male-dominated, as my childhood was male-dominated, and luckily, in the wings, I had this very macho lady waiting, with a Ben Sherman on. She looked pretty tough and I thought, *I can still have my man and she's a lady*".²⁵² Such a statement emphasizes his desire to continue the homosocial culture and to allow McClure access to it by imagining her as 'one of the boys'. His description of McClure as "macho" and "tough" suggests a liminal construct of masculine traits presented via a female body which is disguised in the skinhead uniform of the Ben Sherman shirt. In this way, the female marginality in Meadows' work switches to intermediate liminality, through the exceptional figure of McClure.

²⁵¹ Vicky McClure, interviewed by James Calvert, 'Soul Survivor', *Hunger TV* 14 June 2012. Available at www.hungertv.com; accessed 11 September 2012.

²⁵² Shane Meadows, interviewed by Gerard Gilbert, 'England Rebooted: Shane Meadows is revisiting *This is England* on the Small Screen', *The Independent* 02 September 2010. Available at www.independent.co.uk; accessed 15 September 2011. My emphasis.

Two of the lads with which McClure argues she assimilated are Andrew Shim and Thomas Turgoose. McClure featured alongside Shim in *A Room for Romeo Brass* and with both actors in *This is England*. Shim and Turgoose are intimately linked to the pedagogical aspects of the cultural figure that is Meadows, where Meadows is discussed as a teacher in discourses by and around him.

Toby Kebbell, who played Anthony in *Dead Man's Shoes* and Mark Sherbert in *Northern Soul* (2004) describes his relationship with Meadows as one of a pupil and his teacher:

The education I got from Shane I'll never be able to forget and I owe him a great deal. And he's very benevolent Shane, He'll always be like "no man, you did that" and he'll probably say that with all his actors but it's not true. He's one of the best actors/directors I've ever met, he can act brilliantly well and that ability helps your performance no end.²⁵³

Meadows as Teacher

The Meadows as Trickster construct can be augmented by his creation of practical pedagogy, where Meadows presents moments of education in filmmaking practice outside of his film texts. His films often include teaching figures, an element considered in detail in the third section of Chapter Four, with such characters often problematized in terms of motivation and effect. Whether such equivocation is apt for any consideration of Meadows' own teaching is debatable, but there is certainly a mix of enthusiasm, a 'just do it attitude', tempered with a disavowal of his own level of activity.

Teaching opportunities are formalized in a number of other sites such as the linking pieces between the short films collected together in *Shane's World* (2000). Here, Meadows dispenses filmmaking advice in a performance which foregrounds the comic inflection of his approach. As his on-screen alter-ego Tank Bullock, Meadows offers budget filmmaking advice which combines practicality, humour and a sense of the absurd, presented on a farm, with Tank as a 'yokel' director. In 2009, alongside the producer Mark Herbert of Warp films, Meadows issued the 'Five Day Feature Scheme',

²⁵³ Toby Kebbell, interviewed by Alex Simpson, 'In Control', *Hunger TV* 29 August 2012. Available at www.hungertv.com; accessed 11 September 2012.

in which Herbert and Meadows were “looking for potential partners” to help them fund similar projects (to *Le Donk and Scor-Zay-Zee*) involving micro-budgets of £50,000 and 5 day shoots.²⁵⁴ The announcement caused some excitement, prompting James Mottram to suggest that “this could have as big an impact on the industry as Dogme95 ... having the potential to usher in a new era of directors who otherwise might find themselves outside the system.”²⁵⁵ However, Mottram’s concern that “Meadows’ movement – rather like Dogme95 – could just be a marketing gimmick to plug *Le Donk*” seems possible inasmuch as little has been heard since. However, gimmick or genuine strategy, the launch of the Five Day Feature project indicates how Meadows is received as an influential filmmaker who (potentially) facilitates the careers of other, fledgling filmmakers in much the same pedagogical approach as some of his characters, particularly through a low-budget approach, signalling the tricksterish entrepreneurialism of the ‘small time’. Meadows’ claims to pleasure and disavowal of effort come together in his consideration of the Dogme95 movement and the strict rules imposed in the manifesto. Tellingly, the only rule proposed for his Five Day Features project was tautological: it had to be made in five days.²⁵⁶

Alongside Mark Herbert, Meadows has populated his working life with key homosocial relationships, those with creative partners Paul Fraser, Paddy Considine and Herbert and those with protégées Andrew Shim and Thomas Turgoose. The repeated involvement of other people in work recognized as authored by Meadows indicates a distinctive methodology which can be categorized as communal, an approach which echoes themes of folk culture which are present in the texts. While women are involved in his work, especially McClure, it is the relationships with male friends which are most overt and influential. Community is ostensibly male, with a recognizable folk sensibility, or phallo-folk sensibility. This notion is discussed further in Chapter Four, where the textual dynamics of homosocial groups is explored.

²⁵⁴ Warp Films, *5 Day Feature Scheme*. 05 Oct 2009. Available at www.warp.net; accessed 16 January 2012.

²⁵⁵ James Mottram, ‘Shane Meadows: All You Need to Make A Movie...’, *The Independent*, 03 July, 2009. Available at www.independent.co.uk; accessed 16 January 2012.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

The correlation between a body of people, the body of work they collectively produce and the body of the figure designated as the author of that work, is neatly packaged through the oeuvre of Meadows. Just as male bodies are important motifs within the filmmaker's body of work, so too is a great deal of attention afforded to the filmmaker's physicality in journalistic discourses. The following section looks at such discourses, noting how they emphasize the corporeal aspects of the filmmaker, a move which disavows the intellectual in accordance with Meadows' own strategies of disavowal.

V: The Working-Class Male Body: Unfit or Re-Fitted?

This section examines the mediated performances of Meadows, discussing how the physical body of the filmmaker is offered as an organizing site for discourses around Meadows, both by the filmmaker and those who write about him. It does this in order to evaluate the performances of Meadows as trickster, performances which are intimately tied to notions of autobiography, biography and authenticity, notions which cannot be taken at face value. Indeed, Meadows' credentials as trickster, a character defined by his ability to tell tales, requires that they must be problematized.

Twinned with Meadows' own role in projecting a certain persona is the part played by the interviewer and the means through which the interview is mediated, such as the choice of headline, accompanying photographs and articles which sandwich it. While the standard opening of many interviews is an observation of the physical appearance of the subject, their attire and the surroundings, in order to orientate the reader to the recorded event and create a visual picture, it is striking when reading journalist interviews with Meadows just how much attention is given to his physical appearance. Examples include: "Thickset and shaven-headed, Meadows has lost none of his native Midlands since becoming the toast of the world's film festivals"; "Shane Meadows, a chunky, shaven-headed man"; "Shaven-scalped, barrel-shaped and cheerfully garrulous"; "Meadows still has some of that menace from the old days, with his bald, sculpted head, and a great Dane of a frame like a second row forward just going to seed", and "a stocky figure in a baseball cap and a Hawaiian shirt so noisy it shrieks, Shane Meadows doesn't fit conventional ideas of the glamorous young film director".²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Chris Sullivan, 'Boots and Bovver', *The Times*, 21 April 2007. Available at www.timesonline.co.uk; accessed 12 June 2007.

Craig McLean, 'Another Country', *Telegraph Magazine*, 14 April 2007. Available online at www.telegraph.co.uk; accessed 12 June 2007.

Jonathan Romney, 'Shane Meadows: Shane's World', *The Independent*, 3 October 2004. Available at www.TheIndependent.co.uk; accessed 02 February 2010.

Matt Bochenski, 'Original Skin: Shane Meadows', *Little White Lies*, issue 11, (April/May 2007), p. 28.

Neil Spencer, 'Suburban Guerrilla', *The Observer*, Sunday 25 August 2002. Available at www.guardian.co.uk; accessed 17 April 2009.

The preoccupation with his height, weight, haircut and dress is akin to the surfeit of scrutiny usually reserved for women, where physical attributes and adornment are invariably part of the discourses which surround them. Here, this ‘feminized’ attention is couched in hyper-masculine terms, emphasizing Meadows’ physical presence. What this attention proves is how Meadows’ is received as ‘other’ in relation to the majority of filmmakers, ostensibly because of his class, but also because of the way in which he produces his films and the dominant theme of working-class masculinities within them. It also confirms the conception of Meadows as physically, emotionally and intuitively orientated director rather than an intellectually-based filmmaker; a conception furthered by Meadows himself. Whether Meadows freely chooses to play up to this view, or whether this is the only way in which he is allowed to present himself (whether he is aware of this limitation or not) due to an ascribed cultural categorization, is debatable. What is interesting is how he is continually presented and received as ‘different’, in physical and intellectual terms, despite his relatively well-established career. Meadows’ carefully crafted persona indicates a calculated intelligence and an appreciation of the machinations of the media. He seemingly fits comfortably into a particular niche and expertly plays the part of the working-class lad made good through an artistic outlet while still presenting himself as located within that class, rather than having escaped from it.

Journalistic accounts of Meadows’ physicality are augmented by actor Bob Hoskins who assigns a physical affinity between him and Meadows through his observation, “I’m a short, fat, middle aged man... Then I met him. He was five foot six, cubic with a shaved head, I thought ‘ello, I seem to recognize you from somewhere, us cubes must stick together.”²⁵⁸ The physical affinity between the two is also journalistically noted; writing for *Variety*, Sheila Johnston makes a metaphorical genetic link between them when she writes: “when the chunky Shane Meadows stepped onstage next to Bob Hoskins, star of his feature debut *TwentyFourSeven* at the London Film Festival, they easily could be mistaken for father and son”.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Bob Hoskins, interviewed by David Lister, ‘Appy Days for a Crafty Cockney’, *The Independent*, 20 March 1998. Available at www.independent.co.uk; accessed 14 May 2010.

²⁵⁹ Sheila Johnston, ‘Shane Meadows’, *Variety*. 13 Jan 1998. Available at www.variety.co./article; accessed 06 September 2012.

The genetic link can also be extended to the body of work. Hoskins' IMDb entry states the actor's grandmother was a German Romani, and her stories of gypsy life prompted him to write, direct and feature in a film based on those tales: *Raggedy Rawney* (1988). This film, with its carnivalesque conceit of cross-dressing pre-figures Meadows' interest in similar themes, however the major connection is the shared interest in gypsy mythology, with Meadows' documentary *King of the Gypsies*, and his long-cherished, yet not realized project of a feature based on the same subject, linking to Hoskins' film and the physical body of the man through his genealogy. According to Turner, the figure of the gypsy is not strictly liminal; alongside "shamans, diviners, mediums, priests, those in monastic seclusion, hippies (and) hoboes" gypsies indicate outsiderhood, which together with liminality and structural inferiority, form his idea of *communitas*.²⁶⁰ However, neither Meadows nor Hoskins are gypsies, and are not therefore defined by outsiderhood; rather they form liminal bridges between the nomadic figure and the means of their representation in culture.

Hoskins' lineage provides a sense of authentic connection between that he has knowledge of and that which he represents in film. Similarly, Meadows substantiates authenticity through the supplying of autobiographical 'evidence', details of his life which build a particular persona of benign criminality, inflected with a comic ineptitude. One particular detail, his theft of a breast pump, which Meadows weaves together with his birth as a filmmaker, is extensively reproduced in interviews, in an almost obligatory introduction to the cultural figure, with each successive mention adding to his self-mythology.²⁶¹

This detail is seemingly so important to Meadows that he provides the provenance of the act of petty crime through the inclusion of a facsimile of his charge sheet in the published

²⁶⁰ Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors*, p. 233.

²⁶¹ Examples include: Larushka Ivan-Zadeh, 'A Working-class Apart for Shane Meadows', *The Metro*, 17 August 2008. Available at www.metro.co.uk; accessed 1 August 2009; Fiachra Gibbons, 'The Shane Gang', *The Guardian*, 28 January 2000. Available at www.guardian.co.uk; accessed 1 August 2009; Liz Hoggard, 'I Was a Skinhead Myself in 1983', *Observer* 1 April 2007. Available at www.guardian.co.uk; accessed 1 August 2009.

script of *TwentyFourSeven*.²⁶² Meadows' proclamation that he "didn't even get fined" for his crime overtly presents a tricksterish sensibility combining entrepreneurial criminality, comedy and a degree of luck which prevented even an economic punishment. Such themes are textually represented in his films, most clearly through the trickster characters and such demonstrations are discussed at length later in this study in the first section of Chapter Four.

It is interesting to consider how Meadows' citing as a breast pump, an object which suggests the feminine, is returned to somewhat obliquely at the height of his recognition by the British film industry, along with a element of luck provided through the talisman of the breast. In 2008, *This is England* won the Best British Film award at the British Film and Television Awards. His acceptance speech recalls his earlier attempts at physical betterment following a nomination, which did not produce an award, and his decision to relinquish his fitness aims when he states: "last time I was nominated I took up a regime after Christmas, lots of sit-ups and press-ups and that sort of thing. This year I gave up on that idea and thought I'd go with the man-boobs, and it's turned my luck around".²⁶³

In this way, Meadows' beginning and height of his career is bracketed by mammiferous imagery, brought together through Meadows' comment of "it's quite a journey from stealing breast pumps to having Sylvester Stallone handing you a Bafta".²⁶⁴ The first evokes a displaced female breast, its function as an organ of sustenance suggested through the machine designed to augment such a facility. The second evocation involves the vocalization of the Meadowsian unfit body, a motif which persists in the film texts, where the once lauded working-class body, celebrated in earlier works for its purposeful physical fitness which facilitated manual labour, is turned in Meadows' work into the under-class male body which, removed from the demands of work, becomes unfit for purpose. Meadows' jocular statement that his previous efforts at personal fitness had not

²⁶² Meadows, *TwentyFourSeven; Where's the Money Ronnie and Left (Smalltime)*, p. ix.

²⁶³ Shane Meadows, quoted in Eman Kazmi, *Local Heroes: Shane Meadows*. Available at www.bbc.co.uk/stoke; accessed 30 May 2009.

²⁶⁴ Larushka Ivan-Zadeh, 'A Working-class Apart for Shane Meadows', *The Metro*, 17 August 2008. Available at www.metro.co.uk; accessed 1 August 2009.

resulted in industry success, yet by allowing of his body to acquire the softness of “man-boobs” proved to be lucky, suggests something about the particular way in which Meadows’ presents his persona in bodily terms; a body which is male, yet possesses a prominent symbol of female physiology.

The presentation of man-boobs, or gynaecomastia, evokes a number of readings. One involves erotic contemplation of gender hybridity, probably the least likely in this context, where the presence of female breasts and male genitals on the same body provides a particular site for erotic contemplation. This is most clearly embodied by the Thai transsexual performance artists The Ladyboys, who have been the subject of some fascination in Western culture. This is explored to comic effect in an episode of the television comedy *Alan Partridge* where Alan (Steve Coogan) explains his interest in men he describes as “fascinating creatures” in a ‘confession’ concomitant with shame and disavowed homoeroticism, stating “I don’t find them attractive; it’s just confusing.”²⁶⁵ This is taken further in the closing credit scene of *Le Donk and Scor-Zay-Zee*, where Donk (Paddy Considine) within the homosocial environment of the post-performance green room, relays his sexual encounter with a hermaphrodite, where Donk states: “I felt sorry for her, so I fucked her.” This narrative, a probably imagined event, relayed to the band members of The Arctic Monkeys, exemplifies the homosocial exchange of stories of sexual encounters within Meadows’ work. This time though, the fantasy of sexual congress with a hermaphrodite person complicates the usual Meadowsian motif of the homosocial exchange of women, their images and their sexual fluids – a motif discussed more fully in Chapter Four – when Donk explains the specificities of the positions taken by him and his lover where he warned her: “just don’t spunk on my chest”.

As well as continuing abject motifs, the scene is rendered comically and the comic is another of the possible readings of Meadows’ Bafta speech, where the incongruity of female breasts on a male body creates a comic juxtaposition. Such a conjunction points back to the homosocial through its appearance in the culture of laddism prevalent in the 1990s, epitomized by the figure of the false breast wearing footballer Paul Gascoigne

²⁶⁵ *I’m Alan Partridge: Watership Alan*, BBC2, Series 1, Episode 3. 1997.

(Fig.1) who was feted in magazines such as *Loaded*, a publication which also represented male preoccupation with female breasts in the more usual form of images of semi-naked women. The association between Meadows, the phenomenon of laddism and pornographic images of women is an important and persistent one.

Claire Monk attests that a swathe of films of the 1990s, including *Smalltime* and *TwentyFourSeven*, provide particular representations of masculinity alongside other emerging cultural products such as the ‘lad-mag’ phenomenon, and should be comprehended as an articulation of the “contradicting tensions” between a progressive society - in terms of sexual tolerance and increased opportunities for women - and the reactions and resistance to this progress.²⁶⁶ In this sense, the appropriation of the breast cannot be read as uncomplicatedly comic, but as something more indicative of a specific response to crises in masculinity, of which, films of the 1990s were, according to Monk, “to an almost unprecedented extent...preoccupied”.²⁶⁷

Such appropriation echoes the similar dynamic in the films where male characters dress up in female clothing, a dynamic discussed at length in Chapter Four. This chapter also discusses the abject, which is the third result of gynaecomastia; the development of breast tissue on a man suggests the abject in that it crosses taxonomical boundaries of gender and, more pertinently, it makes obvious the physical state of the unfit male body.

Sally Robinson notes that “there is something irresistible about the logic whereby white male angst gets represented in bodily terms”.²⁶⁸ This irresistibility extends to Meadows, especially in the attention afforded to male physicality in his work, most notably in *TwentyFourSeven* and its theme of boxing. In his paper on boxing films and their shared narratives of the physical and psychic struggle of their working-class male protagonists, James Rhodes argues how a dominant number of such films concern a redemptive white

²⁶⁶ Monk, ‘Men in the 90s’, p. 158.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 156.

²⁶⁸ Sally Robinson, *Masked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 6.

working-class mythology, especially those produced in Hollywood.²⁶⁹ There is a particular synergy between that dynamic and the means through which Meadows' received his award; its presentation by Sylvester Stallone, the writer and star of the film *Rocky* (1976) and its sequels, as well as *Rambo: First Blood* (1982) and its sequels, texts which informed Meadows' *TwentyFourSeven* and *Dead Man's Shoes*. Such a moment invites some analysis.

The moment was represented by Meadows in a sketch produced for the charitable National Doodle Day (Fig.2) which shows Meadows, replete with 'man-boobs', holding the Bafta award with Stallone in the background. Such a moment is symbolically significant: it brings together those elements which define Meadows' work, the British and American traditions of filmmaking; the white working-class male; the boxing genre; themes of the returning soldier; and most importantly, Meadows' integration into the homosocially dominant arena of filmmaking, both British and American. It marked Meadows' entry into the 'Boys' Club', complete with 'man-boobs'. Moreover, Meadows' reproduction of the event in the sketch is a significant illustration of one of the ways through which Meadows' contributes to his cultural image, and how that image is predicated on the comedy engendered via an unfit male body. It indicates a shift in the physical state of the white, working-class, male body. Sylvester Stallone's physicality is predicated on strength, physical prowess and the pursuit of the corporeal ideal, a notion textually realized in his first *Rocky* film, especially the much referenced training montage sequence, which is repeated in *TwentyFourSeven*. Apart from his deliberate relinquishing of the physical ideal for his role of Sheriff Freddy Heflin in *Copland* (1997), Stallone has maintained a career predicated upon an iconographical muscular image.

It is interesting that it is in this particular moment of the men meeting, when a major cultural figure of Hollywood masculinity presents an industry award to a British filmmaker defined by regional sensitivity, that Meadows' makes his flippant statement, suggesting that his relinquishing of the 'get fit' objective proved "luckier", i.e. more

²⁶⁹ James Rhodes, 'Fighting for "Respectability": Media Representations of the White, "Working-Class" Male Boxing "Hero"', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol. 35, no. 4 (November 2011), p. 350.

advantageous for his career than the meeting of it. Does this gesture of the rejection of a hegemonic ideal of masculinity suggest a new model of 'soft-body' masculinity for the contemporary male? Certainly, the presentation of the pursuit and subsequent abandonment of physical betterment in Meadows' work, especially *TwentyFourSeven*, a film which references *Rocky* directly through a still image of Stallone in the role contained in the *mise en scène* of the 101 Boxing Club, suggests at least the possibility of such a rejection strategy.

An important question to consider here is what does such a moment suggest about contemporary images of masculinity, especially white, working-class masculinity in a British context? The physical transition of an object invested with cultural significance such as a film industry award, from a man synonymous with the physicality and political ideology of America of the 1980s, to a younger British man who seems to have embraced a more relaxed approach to physicality suggests some shift in the existing paradigms of normative masculinity from that of the 1980s and 90s into the new millennium. Can Meadows' appropriation of breast imagery and physiology into a male body which celebrates its physical imperfection and unfitness be read as a new or alternative version of the 'new man' figure, or even a working-class version? Where the original new man supposedly represented the adoption of some parts of culturally normative qualities of femininity through sensitive parenting and emotional connectedness, a construct which was ostensibly middle-class, the 'new new man' suggested by Meadows' physicality involves an appropriation of the feminine via incorporation of breast imagery as an external representation of femininity, which suggests the very opposite of the masculine physical ideal; itself a reversal of the metrosexual attention to physical beauty which was connected to the original new man. Rather than internalize 'feminine feelings', the alternative new man externalizes them via the body in a performative way which, rather than suggesting a positive development of masculinity and a redrawing of gender divisions, instead presents masculinity 'gone to seed'. In this way, Meadows can be seen as an exemplar of a more nuanced response to the new man which employs similar tactics to those used by the exponents of laddism.

However, the nuances of Meadows' performance are more sophisticated and complex than Paul Gascoigne's donning of a pair of plastic breasts. It is intrinsically tied to a working-class body which is removed from the physical exertions of the factory, mine, or indeed, the football field. Rather than the breasts representing an aggressive misogyny, they present a mutation of the traditional male body which has reacclimatized itself into the new post-industrial social economy. The working-class male characters of Meadows' films may be physically unfit and therefore unfit for purpose when a clear purpose exists through employment, but when the sense of purpose is no longer there does this reverse the formula, where the physical state of the men makes them instead 'fit' for the 'non-purposefulness' of post-Thatcherite Britain? The overt material consumerism by women critiqued in the New Wave films of the 1960s is here overturned. Instead we are presented with men who do not produce the goods which were once shown to be consumed by working-class women; rather the men physically consume to excess, whether food, drugs or alcohol, a process of incorporation which results in a new male working-class/under-class body which visually performs its new role of the unemployed. Thus the weekend pleasures of Arthur Seaton's Saturday night, through to Sunday morning is extended into the tedious perpetuity 'twenty four seven' in the post-Thatcherite world of Shane Meadows. The only route out of this, it seems, is to do what Meadows has done, and appropriate the entrepreneurialism extolled by Thatcherite economics, but through a decidedly tricksterish methodology. This involves taking advantage of the specificities of one's circumstances – being a white, working-class, East Midlander male – in order to most fully exploit the limited resources available, whilst seemingly promoting those aspects which find most favour within British screen culture; an authentic, socially-aware realism.

This chapter has demonstrated the liminal position of the cultural figure of Meadows within British screen culture. It has done this through distancing Meadows from the critical alignment with social realism, introducing new associations with other practitioners and practices which indicate that Meadows can be considered outside of the confines of the mode. The chapter has discussed the production context of his work, illustrating how Meadows has exploited the resources available to him, utilizing his niche

positioning within a discrete geographical area to secure funds for films which occupy a liminal position between micro and medium production budgets. It also argued how Meadows' approach to budgets, his disavowal of physical effort, and his seemingly serendipitous approach, speaks from a class position while indicating a tricksterish personality which is presented through the public body. This body can be read as a complex text upon which debates about gender are visually played out, linking orthodox gender traits in one liminal site. It has also discussed the decidedly homosocial body of men with whom Meadows' works, and introduced the companionate themes of initiation into homosocial culture, *communitas*, and folk culture, themes which are developed in the film texts.

Chapter Four

Textual Liminality: Archetypes, Themes and Representation

The previous chapter focused upon Shane Meadows as a cultural figure constructed through the texts and discourses surrounding the filmmaker. It argues that Meadows can be usefully read as the embodiment of co-existing liminal properties that play between two seemingly disparate states of economic and homosocial structures. Similar liminal dynamics will be further explored in this chapter through analysis of Meadows' texts, which I will suggest can be characterised through recourse to the archetypal figures of folk narratives identified in anthropological approaches to literary narrative research by scholars including Enid Welsford. As she argues, archetypal figures such as the trickster and the fool help us understand the dynamic between narrative and the concerns and attitudes of 'real' world situations from the point of view of marginalised positions. The usefulness of exploring film through archetypal figures has been demonstrated by Reinhild Steingroever in his study of two post GDR films; Egon Günther's *Stein* (1991) and Jörg Stoth's *Letzes Au der DaDaer* (1990).²⁷⁰ Crucially, the production of Meadows as authentically working-class is suggestive that his narratives can be seen as contemporary versions of folk tales. Like the folk tale of earlier periods, Meadows' films can be seen to represent the voice or point of view of a section of society typically silenced or ignored; that is 'liminalised'.

This chapter is divided into five sections, each dedicated to an elaboration of particular couplings of archetypes or figures drawn from literary anthropology, and themes associated with them. Section One builds on the previous argument that Meadows can be read through Jungian accounts of universal archetypal figures, notably the trickster, by suggesting that this archetype is also represented in his films. This analysis will be further developed by the deployment of the trickster's associated or inverse figure: the fool. Existing scholarship by Enid Welsford and William Willeford, emphasize the sustained

²⁷⁰ Reinhild Steingroever, 'On Fools and Clowns: Farewell to the GDR in Two Final DEFA Films: Egon Günther's *Stein* and Jörg Foth's *Letzes aus der DaDaer*', *The German Quarterly*, vol. 78, no. 4 (October 2005), pp. 441-60.

cultural importance of ‘the fool’ which can be traced from classical, medieval literature through to more recent European literary, art and cultural practices, especially those of traditional folk cultures.²⁷¹ Welsford’s and Willeford’s research underpins the analysis staged in this section in order to suggest that Meadows knowingly utilizes such figures. Equally, this engagement with traditions of folk culture invokes Bahktinian understandings of the ‘carnavalesque’ which enable interrogation of community spirit in Meadows’ films, as well highlighting the theory’s problematic blind-spots or limitations. These problems often concern issues of gender, especially the overemphasis of celebratory community which ignores a homosocial economy of exchange through which male characters are positioned as consumers of women, and women as objects of that consumption. Crucially, this forges a link to Gayle Rubin’s feminist anthropological study of homosocial relations in which she builds on Levi Strauss’s account of kinship networks to identify the centrality of an exchange in women in homosocial relations.²⁷² In Meadows’ work, such homosocial exchanges are evident in the exchange in female fluids between male characters and in turn, this raises questions of abjection. However, as I will argue, the exchange of fluids and images between men in Meadows’ films not only signal a patriarchal, homosocial economy but also serves as a scatological retort to middle class respectability.²⁷³

The second section examines the figurative presence of heteromorphic liminal beings in the work, whether the protean man or the Minotaur, arguing how such representations illustrate responses to external phenomena, presented as adaptive measures to change. Section three builds on this heteromorphic theme by noting instances of pedagogy represented in the films that correspond to the anthropological figure of the ‘mentoring centaur’. In section four connections are forged to the folk figure of the tramp and/or supernatural spirit in order to interrogate representations of memory, loss and concepts of the numinous. Finally, section five suggests that the doubling figures of the *Doppelgänger* and the monster are versions of the uncanny in the films. Consistently,

²⁷¹ Welsford, *The Fool*; Willeford, *The Fool and His Scepter*.

²⁷² Rubin, ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy of Sex”’.

²⁷³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

each section presents the way in which archetypes are representative of liminality, illustrating the various ways in which such a quality is characterized in Meadows' work.

I. The Trickster and the Fool: Magic, Buffoonery and the Telling of Tales

If you want to play games, you know if you want to play tricks on people then you've got to receive [*sic*] a little bit back. Redemption.²⁷⁴ Morell, *A Room for Romeo Brass*

The above dialogue from *Romeo Brass* explicitly evokes the figure of the trickster, one of anthropology's archetypal figures that as well as being linked to the cultural figure of Meadows can be linked to his work. Willeford suggests that the trickster can be seen as "a special mythological form of the fool".²⁷⁵ However, the fool and the trickster should not be conflated; rather they should be seen as interrelated, mutually supportive doubles. Therefore, the following discussion will initially examine each separately in order to tease out the specific differences between them as they are presented in Meadows' work. The relationship between them is however an important consideration, as it suggests a permeability between boundaries that enables characters to embody traits of more than one archetype. For example, not only can a character be a trickster and a fool, a dualism which has already been made critically explicit, they could also exhibit traits of another, less directly associated character such as the mentor figure.²⁷⁶ Thus, in the Meadowsian world, a film character may be representative of more than one archetype, or at least a number of the archetype's traits. Rather than indicating a weakness in archetypal taxonomy, such layering should be seen as exhibiting the very qualities of liminality with which this study is concerned. In effect, characters are positioned between one archetype and another or a concentric numbers of archetypes, with the resulting position being a liminal one.

Theorising the trickster figure, Terrie Waddell suggests that it, "embodies the psychological energy of threshold spaces" and is therefore indicative of liminality.²⁷⁷ As

²⁷⁴ Fraser and Meadows, *A Room for Romeo Brass*, p. 56.

²⁷⁵ Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*, p. 132.

²⁷⁶ See Welsford, *The Fool* and Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*.

²⁷⁷ Waddell, *Wild/Lives*, p. 1.

one of the most enduring mythologems of folk culture, the trickster figure has a long history and wide geographical reach. From Loki of Norse myth to ‘Verbal’ (Kevin Spacey) in *The Usual Suspects* (1995), the trickster character is an enduring one, as mutable and adaptable as its name suggests. The trickster is a long-standing figure of a wide range of cultures and traditions, notably the Winnebago tribe of North America, studies of whom by Dr Paul Radin in 1964 led to Carl Jung’s appropriation of the trickster within his account of archetypal figures structuring the unconscious. Here, Jung described the trickster as “a figure whose physical appetites dominate his behaviour; he has the mentality of an infant”.²⁷⁸ Yet, for all its scatological immaturity, or even because of it, the trickster performs an important function in the social order through *his* (typically the trickster is figured as male, especially in Meadows’ phallogentric world) unsettling transgressions of controlling social conventions.. These transgressions ridicule ‘naturalised’ social conventions and thus push at the lines and boundaries which constitute and regulate social activity.

Drawing upon Turner, Terri Waddell suggests that:

in their capacity as grotesque shape-shifters and boundary transgressors, tricksters aren’t beholden to rules, social structures, authority or even gender, and so cannot be contained in either the liminal state or social structures. They are however, central to liminality – inducing it, governing it, or even in their psychopomp aspect, steering passengers through it.²⁷⁹

The extent of this activity is, according to American folklorist John Greenway, dependant on the strength and rigour of perceived lines and boundaries, where “the occurrence of trickster tales is directly proportionate to the degree of oppressiveness of socioreligious restrictions”.²⁸⁰ Here it is crucial to mark the difference between the socio-political aspirations of social realist filmmakers, such as Ken Loach, and Meadows’ work: where Meadows’ work is concerned with characters with little aspiration or possibility of aspiration, Loach’s work clearly adopts the model of progressive politics in which

²⁷⁸ Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, p. 112.

²⁷⁹ Waddell, *Wild/lives*, p. 15.

²⁸⁰ John Greenaway, *Literature among the Primitives* (Haboro, Pen: Folklore Associates, 1964), pp. 89-90.

positive political change is offered as at least a notional possibility. This is managed because Loach's films unveil the mechanisms of capitalism by suggesting that if one can show how something works then it could potentially be changed. Meadows' work is more static or cyclical, a quality encapsulated in the opening lines of *TwentyFourSeven*; "we all die in the beginning", a troubling phrase which suggests a death-in-life existence of the working-class. Through this, striking correspondences can be drawn between Meadows' work and the traditions of folk narratives which are typically structured through stasis and absence of social mobility. In Meadowsian texts, as with folk tales, the working-class perform their dissatisfaction via recourse to an ancient mode of 'folk resistance', presented through pastiche performances of traditions in which the trickster and the fool are key figures. In this sense, Meadows' work conforms to a conservative, rather than revolutionary model, with the folk traditions of a pre-industrial society being appropriated by the non-working-class/under-class of a post-industrial society in order to signal how little has changed in regards to the distribution of wealth and power.

In Meadow's films, injury frequently operates as a form of entrapment for tricksterish characters; that is Meadows' characters may be physically static due to injury. One example is shown in *A Room for Romeo Brass* through the character of Gavin Woolley (Ben Marshall) who is friends with fellow schoolboy and neighbour, Romeo (Andrew Shim). Their friendship changes after an older, emotionally unstable local man Morell (Paddy Considine) breaks up a fight with which they are involved. Gavin's congenital problems lead to surgery and enforced bed-rest and it is during this enforced stasis that Romeo becomes increasingly involved with Morell. Morell becomes progressively more dangerous and violent, until at the moment of crisis, a physical intervention by Romeo's father prevents Morell harming Romeo. Finally, the boys are reunited in their friendship.

A similar cycle of stasis and physical recuperation shapes the narrative of the earlier film, *TwentyFourSeven*, which depicts the attempts of a local man Darcy (Bob Hoskins) to resurrect a boxing club in order to bring together two rival faction of local 'lads'. A key scene shows Darcy's careful attention to one of the lads, Fagash (Mat Hand) during his drug-induced stupor. This pattern of chemically assisted violent breakdown followed

by nurturing support from a male friend is repeated in a scene when Darcy returns to the local community, physically broken by alcoholism and homelessness following his self-imposed exile after an earlier violent outburst. Here, Darcy's nursing of Fagash is replicated by Tim (Danny Nausbaum) who tends the dying Darcy, bringing together the now-grown lads in the final scene which depicts the funeral of Darcy, with death as the ultimate moment of stasis. All of these are examples of a physical stasis accruing from injury or the excesses of alcohol and drugs that trap characters within the cycles of deprivation and social marginalisation that haunt the Meadowsian text. Such prolonged periods of stasis can be seen to follow the pattern of stasis and change outlined by Waddell and must surely be considered as liminal, sandwiched as they are between the activities or states which preceded them and those which followed.

Mightiness Meets Misery: The Trickster as Prologue

But stasis is not the only characteristic that entraps the trickster. Often, stasis is the result of the trickster's own machinations, as Roger B. Anderson states, "for all his cleverness he is invariably a failure. He seeks to trap himself while seeking to entrap others".²⁸¹ Indeed, "the trickster cannot be loved or trusted, but neither can he be ignored or done without".²⁸² The trickster is certainly not 'done without' in the work of Meadows. Each film presents a character or characters who exhibit some archetypal traits; the majority of which are constituted through or by a performative activity, whether oral or physical. Oral performances are often initiated at the very beginning of the text, where a central character introduces the forthcoming story via a pre-title voice-over. This occurs in Meadows' 'calling-card' short film *Where's the Money Ronnie?* which introduces elements of trickery via the device of the unreliable narrator. Here, the eponymous Ronnie (played by Meadows) states: "I'm starting to get the feeling that I have become the victim of a conspiracy" before the flashback structure unsettles this claim through four conflicting individual perspectives of the characters' violent encounters. The trickery of the unstable narrative structure is underscored by the framing devices of Ronnie's

²⁸¹ Roger B. Anderson, *Dostoevsky: Myths of Duality* (Gainesville, Florida: Florida University Press, 1986), p. 31.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

voice. Where the pre-title statement suggests he is the victim of the conspiracy, the question “Where is the Money Ronnie?” posed in the final inter-titling receives the answer “You Decide!” The film’s switching perceptions refuse the finality of a fixed closure leaving the audience unsure of both aural and ocular evidence. Thus it is the film itself, rather than Ronnie’s criminal associates, that is the ultimate site of tricksterish play.

This chimes with earlier discussion of Meadows’ own conceit of unreliable narration in which his persona is formulated through a layering of, and affinities with, different identities such as: bullied schoolboy, skinhead, petty criminal, or artist, that variously narrate his autobiography. These multiple voices are not necessarily unreliable, in the sense of a deliberate falsehood - although this may be the case given Meadows’ professed role as ‘hustler’ - but should be seen as polyphonic tricksters, who play with expectations of what an author/filmmaker should or could be, pointing to the multiplicity and unreliability of narrating voices in the films.

TwentyFourSeven also employs the slippages of narration that invoke Meadows’ hallmark tricksterish strategies when a voice over represents Tim reading Darcy’s diary. Here, Tim functions as a reflective narrator, through which Darcy’s thoughts, including those about Tim and the other young men of the boxing club, are relayed. This sets up a series of embedded narrations, where the three loci of narration – the diary, Darcy and Tim - are intermingled. In effect, the audience can never be sure who is speaking, or who is facilitating what they are seeing; is it Darcy’s experience or Tim’s imagining of what Darcy had written? Such unreliability is furthered by the fallibility of Darcy’s narration. Initially, Darcy’s first ‘voice-over’ suggests heartfelt and insightful analysis of the socio-economic conditions and subsequent breakdown of identity and purpose of the working person:

I was a forgotten thirty-something in the eighties; everything was a boom, a transaction, a big take-over. The birth of the computer age and the death of the small-town work force. Money was God, money is God. When our town died, we, with our young in hand, were beginning, but we weren’t living. I feel as though I’m a casualty, but that’s cool I suppose, because most of us feel that way.

At this macro level, Darcy speaks with some confidence and authority as he relates his experience as part of the whole experience of the small-town workforce. However, as demonstrated in the later stages of the film, at the micro level of his own world, Darcy is found wanting; while he has the emotional drive to re-build the boxing club, he does not have the practical knowledge to acquire all the necessary licences, thus dooming the club to failure through a breach of bureaucracy. Through this instability Darcy performs the position of fool; a role which Willeford suggests lacks the necessary self-reflexivity to transform awareness of social restrictions and limitations into transformative change.

Notably, Darcy's voiceover narrations at the beginning and end of *TwentyFourSeven* seemingly impose brackets of subjectivity and introduce Darcy as the narrator of events and the commentator upon the socio-political context in which they occur. Of course, his reliability is suspect; events unknown to Darcy are included and the diary does not stand up logically to much scrutiny. Grammatical tenses which suit the time in which they are spoken do not make sense when viewed as a diary entry, for example Tim silently reads Darcy's diary as Hoskins provides a voiceover of what he is reading, but reads "Tim was" instead of Tim *is*.

The vagaries of grammar may betray a lack of attention to detail, but whether through mistake or intention, such moves introduce an unsettled sense of time to the film which encourages Darcy's voiceover to be viewed as something almost supernatural, a ghost-like presence which observes unseen. This numinous quality is discussed in greater depth in the later two parts of this section of the study, but here I invoke it to suggest ways in which the Meadowsian prologue can be perceived as having a tricksterish dimension not simply as a bridge between the liminal space between screen and audience, but as a playful, liminal tease with narrative certainty.

The device of a diary allows the film to unfold in a series of past and present events, with flashback sequences making up the majority of the screen time. Like the pre-title voiceover, each entry acts as a prologue to the scene which follows. Douglas Bruster and

Robert Weimann's study of the form and function of the prologue in Elizabethan theatre uses the concept of liminality, remarking how the prologue bridges the gap between the stage and the auditorium, between the spatial divide between actors and audience.²⁸³ Such a concept is useful when considering the various prologues offered through Meadows' work. While an uncomplicated equivalence cannot be easily drawn between the theatrical classical prologue, where an actor addresses the audience directly and encourages them to pay attention to the stage (rather than the off-stage entertainments), and a recorded work such as a film, there are formal devices in Meadows' work which function in similar ways to the theatrical predecessor. The diary functions as a soliloquy, in that it is a personal text, written by and read by an individual; however through the mediating factor of Tim, the soliloquy transforms into a monologue, shared between the homosocial interrelationships of the members of the 101 Boxing Club, and of course, the audience. A more direct connection can be made between the prologue and the pre-title voice-over of Richard in *Dead Man's Shoes*.

In this playful bridging of liminality, Tim is the conduit between Darcy and the audience, his 'reading' of the diary allows the device to operate within a 'realist' mode. However, it is Darcy's voice we hear reading his own words, not Tim's. This suggests an unmediated access to Darcy; however, his inability to reflect on and articulate his thoughts established by the narrative unsettle this position and point to the impossibility of this kind of direct access. Throughout the film, Darcy is articulate with the boys, the magistrates, the parents, yet, he is unable to articulate his feelings for Jo who is presented as the notional love object. In this, the narrative unsettles the prologue's suggestion that the bridging of liminal space is offering unmediated access to Darcy. It is significant that Tim is the voice of the complex liminal trickery since ultimately it is he who telephones his fellow Club members to tell them of Darcy's death thus forging a bridge between the prologue diary and the death of its author. Tim is thus the mechanism of both the liminal bridging between screen and audience, but also the ultimate liminal stasis that signals Darcy's failure as a transformative trickster and his position as a 'fool'.

²⁸³ Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann, *Prologues to Shakespeare's Theatre: Performance and Liminality in Early Modern Drama* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 11.

However, the tricksterish mesh of the Meadowsian narrative is further exacerbated via the physical dynamics which puncture the opposing scenes of stasis. For example, while the film's final funeral scene could have been redolent of death and stillness, Meadows uses the movement of his characters to illustrate their emotional state. For instance, Tim's moves from the front pew to the back to place his arms around his father in a loving embrace and thus bringing his father back into the homosocial fold. This reverses the earlier scenes between them when his father moved with violent purpose, physically assaulting Tim, and his wife, Pat, before he himself is physically assaulted by Darcy, the catastrophic event which precipitated Darcy's break from the homosocial group. While such a move could be read positively as one signaling the father's redemption and the son's forgiveness, the film suggests it comes at a price: the sacrifice of Darcy who can be read as a Christ-like figure. More pertinently, the seeming harmony suggested at the film's denouement elides the persistent problems of masculine violence which persist, suggesting the cyclical nature of a violent act met by forgiveness, only for that act to be repeated. Such a scene replicates the final coda of Gary Oldman's *Nil by Mouth* which also presents familial harmony which can only be a short arc in the cycle of violence. Here then, the locus of the Trickster figure is hard to pin down; it shifts between the diary, Darcy and Tim in a liminal move which produces, in much the same way as in *Where's the Money Ronnie?*, a sense of disquiet and uncertainty.

As in *TwentyFourSeven*, Meadows' later film, *Dead Man's Shoes* begins with a liminal pre-title voice over from the lead character Richard who states: "God will forgive them. He'll forgive them and allow them into heaven. I can't live with that." This bridge across the divide between screen and audience also functions as a prologue, coming before the film 'begins', introducing the tropes of forgiveness and its antonym and thus shaping the expectations of the audience. At the same time, as Bruster and Weimann suggests, it operates as "a covert claim on authority."²⁸⁴ It is a proclamation which boldly locates the text within the revenge narrative tradition. Here, Richard replaces the voice and active position of God in a move that overlays religious rhetoric onto the human drive for *lex*

²⁸⁴ Ibid, p. vii.

talionis, that is, overriding the ‘rule’ of the symbolic father, acknowledging His existence yet challenging His omnipotence. From the very beginning, Richard is shown as appropriating the word of law, pointing the moral compass and creating the axis of action. However, such a pronouncement suggests possible future hubris, a punishment for his transgression. Moreover, it complicates, refuses even, the secularist position of social realist cinema, aligning itself instead with the metaphysical, allowing space for an allegorical or mythic reading of the forthcoming narrative. Here then Richard’s narration is signaled as unreliable as it transgresses the divine order and establishes a mythical, tricksterism in the liminal bridge between screen and auditorium.

A more secular approach is adopted in *Smalltime*, where the liminal title sequence voice-over (provided by Meadows as the character Jumbo) announces the film’s framing of liminal place and class, in that it differentiates Sneinton, the film’s location (a poor working-class town on the outskirts of Nottingham), from more cosmopolitan locales:

There’s one thing you’ve gotta understand, right, this ain’t fuckin’ London. This ain’t even Nottingham, man; this is Sneinton. And all that matters in Sneinton is having a tenner in your pocket, you know what I mean? It don’t matter how you get it.

The ironic register of the voiceover is at once comedic, highlighting the small town/small time sensibilities of the characters of the film and their milieu, exhibited in the lack of ambition, even illogically stupid endeavours of the petty crimes committed, such as stealing low value items. Yet the very knowingness of the voiceover is posited as a defiant gesture against any disapprobation, a declaration of bravado which acknowledges the limitations of the provincial in contrast to the supposed glamour attached to the cosmopolitanism of the large capitals and, perversely, glorying in its very provincialism. There is at the same time a barely acknowledged shame, disguised through ironic humour, at the meagerness of opportunity, ambition and scale offered through the environs of Sneinton and a perverse pride which revels in those very same things. It reveals a site-specific moral code where “all that matters in Sneinton,” is effectively all that matters *in toto*, to the individuals living there. This suturing together of place and its

inhabitants into a monolithic whole of limited and liminal expectation and moral laxity is made questionable as this judgment is shown to be as precarious as other narratives discussed. However, the eventual flight of Malc and Kate to a new life at the coast supports the proposed logic of Jumbo's voice over; that in order to find emotional growth and true happiness, one must leave the original environment which is limiting.

In the work of Meadows, the prologue voice-over can therefore be seen as an ambivalent address which professes an authority which is ultimately eroded. The 'mightiness' of the authorial voice is typically undermined resulting in the 'misery' of the character who is effectively 'punished' for assuming authority. Such moves can be read in a number of ways. Firstly it can be seen as a critique of the patriarchal voice, problematizing a unitary version of events. In this sense it adopts the voice-overs of early 'Griersonian' documentaries such as Anstey and Elton's *Housing Problems* (1936) which uses a stable male voice of authority to direct audiences to expected responses. However, in marked contrast, Meadowsian voice-overs are unstable and refuse the certainties of the 'Griersonian' critique.

Alternatively, it can be viewed as one example of the polyphonic voices spoken in Meadows' work; this is demonstrated through undulating passages of speech which shift from the hyperbolic to the everyday and from the poetically sublime to the crudely base. Such tricksterish shifts and contrasts may not be strictly liminal, but the dynamics of such changes can be considered as occupying a middle-place or liminal between the high and the low in terms of taste and culture. This dynamic of contrasting shifts is echoed via the similar tonal switches which repeatedly occur between the comic and the tragic and from the emotionally tender to the violent which constitute the make-up of Meadows' work. While each state stands apart from the other, the majority of the screen time consists of the uneasy ambiguity which lies between. This uneasy middle-way can certainly be read as liminal.

As well as (unreliably) narrating events, Meadowsian Tricksters also perform their trickery: the character of Gavin Woolley, the best friend and neighbour of the titular

protagonist of *A Room for Romeo Brass* demonstrates qualities associated with the trickster. His nick-name of ‘Knock Knock’ indicates his comedic nature through an association with quick-fire, call and response joke telling. This also doubles the association of friendship between him and Romeo via the ‘knocking’ at Romeo’s door and the two-way communication dynamic of the ‘knock knock’ joke which requires another who is both audience and participant. It also alludes to ‘knocking’ or mocking, the playing of tricks on others. Indeed it is Gavin who instigates the trick on Morell facilitated through his obtaining unfashionable clothes (although Morell is unaware of the item’s passé quality), more specifically a shell-suit which he assures Morrell will impress Romeo’s sister Ladine, in whom Morell is romantically interested.

The shell suit (or synthetic fibre track-suit) is an item of clothing which began life as high-end designer sportswear, associated with the glamour of international competition, but as it reduced in price and became universally available as the stock-in-trade of cheap sportswear chains and charity shops, its connotations changed into an ubiquitous non-working, working-class male uniform, most specifically so-called ‘chavs’. This highly problematic, pejorative term is often used to pathologize this economically liminal section of society and is used interchangeably with the equally pejorative term ‘under-class’, especially in connection with ostentatious dress and/or the habitual wearing of sportswear outside of a sporting context. Meadows utilized the comic potential of the shell suit in *Smalltime*, where Jumbo asks Ruby “have you got your suit on?” a question which poses an expectation of respectability performed through dress. This is then punctured when Ruby appears wearing the garish polyester leisure wear, rather than a tailored item fashioned from a natural fabric. Pre-figuring a legion of comedy television series, the evocative potential of the shell suit is thus mobilized reflexively here. Received as the costume of choice of the ‘unrespectable’ working-class or the under-class, Meadows knowingly presents the working-class as performing for the middle-class audience who are rewarded for their recognition of the suit/shell suit dichotomy with a moment of comedy.

Moreover, in *Romeo Brass*, Morell's theft, rather than purchase, of the clothing from a charity shop, repeats the *modus operandi* of Jumbo in *Smalltime*. This is illustrative of Meadows' resistance to the glamorization of theft which accompanies many British films through the portrayal of 'legitimate' targets, as well as showing the intertextual referencing between Meadows' films. Costume is also used in similar liminal capacities in other Meadows films. In *Romeo Brass*, Ladine's negative response to the culturally-loaded clothes results in Morell's initial threat to Gavin; a move which escalates both in scale and scope throughout the film, with Ladine, Romeo and Gavin's parents assaulted or threatened with violence. This threat is specifically aimed at Gavin because of his figuring as a funny trickster, a sense of identity which Morell warns comes at a price: "If you want to play games, you know if you want to play tricks on people then you've got to receive [*sic*] a little bit back. Redemption."²⁸⁵

Here, Gavin's trickster credentials are temporarily halted through Morell's threats, a hiatus which is made manifest through his enforced physical inertia following an operation on his back. Contained, restrained even, within the body cast, Gavin can only know the world through the sounds which travel from outside through his window. Through this liminal architectural threshold, Gavin can hear the movements of his friend entering and leaving his home next door, but is unable to evoke a response to his calls to Romeo. Thus, the dynamic of the 'knock-knock' call is broken, the gesture is unreturned. The break in their friendship is clearly rendered through physical space; Gavin plaintive calls to his Romeo, knowingly rearticulates the balcony scene of Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers, but with Meadows' Romeo ignoring the calls of Gavin-as-Juliet in favour of his new friendship with the interloper Morell.

Homosocial exchanges

The spatial arrangement between the three characters mapped above illustrates the triangular schema which repeatedly appears in Meadowsian texts. Gavin and Morell are effectively involved in a struggle for Romeo's affection, a purely male struggle which echoes, yet does not repeat the dynamic of male homosocial desire identified by Eve

²⁸⁵ Fraser and Meadows, *A Room for Romeo Brass*, p. 56.

Kosofsky Sedgwick, which involves one female and two male characters in an erotic triangle.²⁸⁶

However, women and/or their images which often function as proxy, are also present in a dynamic more akin to Sedgwick's classical arrangement. This is often portrayed through windows which operate as spatial, rather than archetypal, nexus of liminality between the inside and outside realms. These sites of liminality also operate as sites of sexual consciousness, often centered upon homosocial economies based on the exchange in women and images of them. For instance Gavin's bedroom window serves as a site of pornographic exchange between Gavin and Romeo, the latter's dialogue "you've got to give me *my* girls", claiming possession of magazines purloined from Gavin's father. Through this liminal portal of homosocial exchange the boys witness and interrupt Morell and Ladine's kiss. In a later scene, which echoes Darcy's infatuation with shop assistant Jo in *TwentyFourSeven*, Morell and Romeo watch Ladine through the window of the shop where she works. Here Morell imagines Ladine with fantasized lovers declaring "I'm getting that feeling already of people with their hands on her. Makes me quite angry, I think I've been overcome with love." He later magnifies his possessive imaginings, and verbalizes his violent jealousy via recourse to misogynist language, calling her a "slag" and a "whore".

Romeo and Morell's possessive ire illustrates the general presumption of male ownership of female bodies. Yet, Morell's disgust at Ladine's assumed sexual promiscuity that underpins his order for Romeo to 'look' also completes the circle of scopophilic pleasure that indulges both his enjoyment of pornography and a subsequent misogynistic rage, a rage completely divorced from the actuality of the female object, whether photographed or embodied. Crucially then, Gavin and Romeo's close homosocial friendship is the locus of their emerging sexuality in that its initiation is centered upon homosocially shared pornography. This trope of homosocial sharing of sexually-charged images of women is repeated in the majority of Meadows' films. For example, *Somers Town*, details the growing friendship between Tommo (Thomas Turgoose) a runaway from a northern

²⁸⁶ Sedgwick, *Between Men*.

town, and a Polish immigrant Marek (Piotr Jagiello) in the area of Somers Town in London, where friendship is enacted around the photographs of their shared love object Maria (Elisa Lasowski). Images of her are taken by Marek and used by Tommo as a masturbatory prop. The ways in which the boys approach the images through the virgin/whore dichotomy usefully illustrates the shifts between idealized female imagery and pornographic function in the dynamics of homosocial exchange.

Whether Gavin and Romeo (or Tommo and Marek) look at the pornography together or alone, their shared ‘knowledge’ of the women fuses a psychological link which serves as a precursor to physical knowledge. In this way then, pornography can be seen as the liminal text through which the boys negotiate anticipation and experience of heterosexual encounters. Equally, the film illustrates how the exchange of heterosexual knowledge between pubescent males fosters homosocial friendships predicated on voyeurism and the objectification of women. These exchanges of images and perceived sexual knowledge about women disturbingly re-enact both the exchange of women in kinship networks first identified by Levi-Strauss as fundamental to tribal societies and subsequently framed by Rubin in terms of patriarchal power structures and the imperatives of a western gendered economy.²⁸⁷

Whilst ‘real’ embodied girls do not appear in the lives of Gavin and Romeo, the narrative suggests some development from image to ‘real’ woman for the schoolboy characters when a school trip provides occasion for Gavin to recount his sexual fantasies about one particular female teacher. However, this desired object remains as unattainable as the pornographic models of magazine culture. However, the sharing of this sexual fantasy with a school mate means that his ideas can be enjoyed within an economy of homosocial exchange that not only serves as a trade in women but also serves as a triangulated economy of desire illuminated by Sedgwick’s thesis.

However, the third female figure can be eliminated when the liminal third figure of homosocial exchange is rendered ‘feminine’ through transvestism. This is achieved in

²⁸⁷ Rubin, *The Traffic in Women*.

Romeo Brass when Gavin, dressed as a magician directs a ‘dragged up’ Romeo in a parodic performance of the ‘glamorous assistant’. Here, Romeo performs femininity through drag, just as Gavin performs his role of trickster by donning the top hat and cloak of the magician. The two-way dynamic of the ‘knock-knock’ joke is thus transformed through its development into the physical trick, a move which requires a third body to witness the routine. This role is fulfilled by the parents who see and hear Romeo accepting the servile position of sexualized help-mate as penance for his previous rejection of their friendship.

The transformation of Gavin from his initial compromised physical state (he walked with a limp), to the liminal stasis of enforced bed-rest, through to his physical mastery of the sacred physical space of the imaginary stage upon which he performs indicates a series of movements between different states, all of which are marked in some way by aspects of liminality. In the first he is awaiting a corrective surgical procedure; his limp and impeded physical movement mark him as different from Romeo. It is this difference that Morell chooses to target as an avenue through which he can destabilize the boys’ friendship, through his suggestion that he “is putting it on”. Morell’s suggestion that Gavin is exaggerating his impairment is a clever one; it evokes the ruse taken by Shakespeare’s most famous trickster, Iago who uses the knowledge of Desdemona’s love of stories to incite Othello’s jealous rage. Morell employs the shared knowledge of Gavin’s adept trickery – a truth – in order to parcel a lie into a plausible possibility. Morell suggests Gavin could be ‘putting it on’ through his adept trickery, performing his limp as convincingly as ‘Verbal’ of *The Usual Suspects*. Within the context of the film which repeatedly signals economic dependency and the exploitation of one character by another, whether Romeo’s theft of his mother’s chips or Ladine providing her unemployed father with money, Morell’s suggestion of Gavin’s physical subterfuge could also be read as gesturing to moral anxieties about welfare dependency.

Where the second stage of liminal stasis is manifested through enforced bed-rest, the final stage is coded liminal in terms of performance, halting the ‘reality’ of ‘real’ life, which as the crisis point of the film showed – Morell’s potential harming of Gavin’s

father and the other inhabitants of the house - is potentially devastating. Coming after such an emotionally-charged scene where Romeo, Gavin and Gavin's parents are saved from Morell's violence via the violent intervention of Romeo's father, the final scene is cathartic, bringing the family members, neighbours and friends together in a moment of *communitas*, to borrow Turner's phrase. It is also, in Bakhtinian terms, carnivalesque: it reverses the parent/child power relationship and switches the dynamic of desire between Gavin and Romeo. Previously we had witnessed Gavin wishing for a return to friendship, but now Romeo is presented as the one who desires a return to a secure relationship. The adoption of fantasy roles and costume signal an exit from the norm into the realm of play.

Drag is a persistent motif in Meadows' work. It moves from Romeo's conscious adoption of female clothing in *Romeo Brass* through to the infliction of cosmetics on an unconscious victim, as occurs in *Dead Man's Shoes*. This film details the story of Richard (Paddy Considine) a soldier who returns home to track down and kill the men he thinks are responsible for the suicide of Anthony (Toby Kebbel), his mentally disturbed brother. The pursued men are members of a small-time group of gangsters, lead by Sonny (Gary Stretch) who are shown in flashbacks as the architects of Anthony's physical and mental torment. In an act of revenge which echoes traditional 'folk' forms of punishment, such as the stocks, Richard paints Sonny's face in clownish make-up as a means of public humiliation. Other films and television programmes by Meadows, such as *Somers Town*, *This is England*, *This is England 86* and *This is England 88*, present dressing up as a means of play, where men and boys adopt the liminal gendering of transvestism as rituals of homosocial exchanges that strengthen their ties of friendship, whilst the inversions of gender signal the pleasurable excesses of the carnivalesque: drinking, eating, singing and destruction of property. Such transvestite activities can be located within folk traditions, especially mumming plays and Molly Dancing.²⁸⁸ Geographically pertinent to Meadows are the Plough Plays of Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire which involved men cross-dressing as women.²⁸⁹ Customs such as these are the local equivalent of medieval

²⁸⁸ Simpson and Roud, *Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 243, 250-253.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

European folk festivities, source of the writings of Rabelais, upon which Mikhail Bakhtin based his theories of the carnivalesque.

The Carnavalesque and the Liminal Politics of Gender

Meadows' association with the carnivalesque has been observed by other scholars. Notably, an unpublished paper by Martin Fradley draws upon both Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva to analyse the scatological impact of Meadows' carnival.²⁹⁰ Fradley argues that this is "characterized by toilet humour and the corporeal lexicon of the provincial everyday, (where) order *endures* in Shane's world".²⁹¹ Fradley views Meadows' work as a "valorisation of mutuality and working-class commonality", where the body and its functions acts as a levelling entity through which feelings of community can be expressed and shared.²⁹² Moreover, Fradley figures Meadows' preoccupation with bodily excreta, especially faeces as a place where "the corporeal self is re-imagined as a site of everyday social resistance".²⁹³

However, one has to question whether such resistance is politically powerful, or whether it merely serves as impotent play. My reading of Meadows' work is less positive than Fradley's; I view the coprophilic play as regressive without being revolutionary. One has to ask if carnival in its strictest sense is actually possible in the post-industrial 'under-class'? If carnival can be described as a cyclical rupture in the usual fabric of socio-political relations which allows frustrations to be cathartically released before the old order is re-imposed, what of a group, most particularly a male group, whose *only* activities are carnivalesque because there is nothing else to return to? As the enforced 'leisure' of the unemployed effectively becomes 'work', does not the permanent play of carnival debunk the myth of subversion professed in the traditional model which in effect conserves the social order through the form of a ritualized decompression? The Meadowsian carnivalesque exists as a limbo state, exhausted of political danger, in terms of revolutionary thought or action. However, it persists as a means of homosocial

²⁹⁰ Fradley, "Al Fresco? That's Up Yer Anus, Innit?"

²⁹¹ Ibid, p. 3.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid, p. 5.

bonding through pleasure in the absence of other avenues to male power, such as that offered through employment. Moreover, the Meadowsian corporeal self is decidedly male; it is the male body and his fascination with himself and with other male bodies and their products which brings together the male bodies into a corpus of homosociality which is separate from the female experience. If, as Fradley contests, the Meadowsian body is representative of the working-class, we must remember it is a male body and is therefore only partially representative.

For example, Fradley's positive reading of the exchange of female excretions fails to recognize how such economies replicate and reinforce the assumed legitimacy of homosocial trade in women and their products. His citing of a scene in *This is England*, where Shaun shares with his male friends the vaginal secretions of his girlfriend Smell (a pseudonym for her real name Melanie which function here as an instruction) which linger on his finger, assumes a level playing field of gendered power. Fradley views such an event as positive, stating that "rather than being predicated on disgust...it is in moments such as these that Meadows offers an affirmative vision of the (vaginal) mucous which binds".²⁹⁴ This is true, but it is specifically male bonding which takes place, not gender-inclusive social bonding. The trophy of vaginal mucus which Shaun proudly wields before his friends is a modern reinterpretation of the testing of female virginity through the testament of blood, where the hymen as the physical manifestation of virtue supposedly remains unbroken until the first time of sexual intercourse.

My response to Shaun's triumph was one of disgust, not because it involved female secretions, but the way in which such matter was being used as a sign of male ownership. It brought to mind a scene of a different, yet similar practice in the film *Yentl* (1983). Here, one scene detailed a supposed tradition of the testing of virginity prior to sex and the validity of the first sex act through the secretion of blood from the broken hymen. This was absorbed by a bandaged finger inserted into the 'broken bride' and then offered to the waiting group of family and wedding guests outside the bridal bedroom. The bloodied bandage was then worn around the head of the father of the bride in a

²⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 7.

celebration of the transference of ownership of the woman from the father to the husband. In the film, this practice was posed as a tradition of orthodox Jewish culture and was cleverly subverted by the woman-posing-as-a-man ‘husband’ and his/her colluding ‘wife’ who fool the wedding guests and thus make ridiculous the credibility of the test and its resultant celebrations. While *Yentl* details the cultural importance of virginity before marriage, *This is England* celebrates the sexual practices of Shaun and Smell outside of marriage. However, Shaun’s actions are the post-sexual revolution contemporary equivalent of the paternalism of *Yentl*, illustrating one of the ways in which paternalism has changed rather than disappeared. There are vestiges of such practices which persist, such as the ‘giving away’ of the bride by a father (or symbolic equivalent) to her future husband, a ritual prescribed in the wedding ceremony which Rubin includes in her study of male exchange of women, calling it a “curious custom”.²⁹⁵

The persistence of homosocial economies based upon the exchange of women is stressed by Rubin, who states that “far from being confined to the ‘primitive’ world, these practices seem only to become more pronounced and commercialized in more ‘civilized’ societies”.²⁹⁶ Rubin makes the distinction between the gift and giver and the social function of such exchanges clear when she states:

If women are the gifts, then it is the men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges – social organization.²⁹⁷

It is easier to recognize the mechanics of this particular homosocial organization when one reverses the gender positions of the gift and giver. If one imagined a scene of ‘connoisseurship’ of sexual secretions similar to the one shown in *This is England*, where instead of two young men we imagined two young women bonding over the shared appreciation of the residual seminal fluid of one of their lovers, then such a scene would

²⁹⁵ Rubin, ‘The Traffic in Women’, p. 164.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 163.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

be so farcical as to over-shoot even the absurdity of the Meadowsian oeuvre. In addition, such interaction and exchange cannot be read as equivalent to the scene outlined by Fradley. Both in Meadows' world and in society generally, such women would be read as marked – and thus owned – by the seminal excretions of the absent male, rather than owning it and thus able to exchange it as a social commodity. Conversely, the two young men of *This is England* exchange the vaginal secretion in a homosocial transaction which emphasizes their assumed ownership of the substance and by extension the girl or woman from whom it came. It also replicates Sedgwick's triangle of desire, with two men sharing sexual desires via the conduit of a woman, who in this case is reduced to the mere symbolism of her sexual residues. Fradley's example of the presence of female sexual excretions in Meadows' work proves a rule through the identification of its exception. It is a singular occurrence of feminine 'waste' among a sea of masculine excreta. Nowhere is this more horrifically obvious than in *This is England 86*, where Lol's father, Mick (Johnny Harris), complaining that Trev (Danielle Watson), the young woman he is attempting to rape is too "dry", transfers his own spit to his penis in order to facilitate his act of violation. The fact that Mick sexually abused Lol when she was a child illustrates the monstrous and dangerous extremities of assumed male ownership of female children and women.

Other than the one detailed, while female bodily fluids are noticeably absent, male fluids and excreta are excessively present, especially faeces. Fradley quotes Bakhtin's assessment of excreta as "something *intermediate between earth and body*, as something relating the one to the other...*intermediate between the living body and dead disintegrating matter that is being transformed into earth*".²⁹⁸ Here then, Bakhtin ascribes excreta as liminal through its quality of intermediacy, it being between somewhere between the living and the dead. For Fradley "the grotesque imagination thus privileges excremental fecundity and regeneration over abject debasement and disgust".²⁹⁹ I see this fecundity as peculiarly male, with attention given to men and their excreta. Meggy of *TwentyFourSeven* defecates in the woods; Charlie (Ricky Tomlinson) of *Once Upon A*

²⁹⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1965 [1984]), p. 175, in Fradley, "'Al Fresco? That's Up Yer Anus, Innit?'" , p. 8.

²⁹⁹ Fradley, "'Al Fresco? That's Up Yer Anus, Innit?'" , p. 8. Emphasis added.

Time in the Midlands, sings whilst on the lavatory; in *Dead Man's Shoes* Soz evacuates his bowels watched over by his friends and in *This is England* a different Meggy attempts to befoul the floor owned by an Asian shopkeeper in a grotesque act of racism. Here the supposed comedy of scatology is subsumed by the violent rendering of racism expressed via the most base of forms. However, these characters can also be read as Meadowsian equivalents of the *el caganer*, the shitting peasant figure of Catalan culture. Their defecation involves a revealing of the buttocks in the colloquially named act of mooning. Linda Woodbridge describes the use of mooning as a means of reversing the disapproving gaze, where:

Mooning turns the tables on stripping – of a beggar or prostitute – as a punitive humiliation. Stripping exposes (to the punishing gaze of decently clothed citizens) the naked skins of a vulnerable wretch about to be whipped... But mooning thumbs its nose at onlookers, shifting the shame and embarrassment from the naked person to the onlookers. Like mirrors or amulets against the evil eye, mooning reflects the shaming gaze back on the voyeur. Its exposure of “shameful” anatomical parts indicts the gazer of the prurient voyeurism that must often have actuated public rituals of humiliation involving stripping. Mooning makes the observer complicit in an exposure of humankind’s animal nature.³⁰⁰

So mooning can be assessed as a way of appropriating the power generated through approbation. Certainly, Meadows’ work does this, but the unveiling of male buttocks extends to the act or at least the threat of defecation itself. The buttock moon is not only a mirror which reflects, it is a generator which produces, bearing little shit babies for comic or horrific effects. Such acts respond to the cloacal theory of creation, described by Freud where “*the baby must be evacuated like a piece of excrement, like a stool*”.³⁰¹ Here Freud explains the logic of the child who imagines that babies can be born from the anus and thus theorizes that:

If babies are born through the anus, then a man can give birth just as well as a woman. It is therefore possible for a boy to imagine that he, too, has children of

³⁰⁰ Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness and English Renaissance Literature* (City: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 139.

³⁰¹ Sigmund Freud, ‘On the Sexual Theories of Children (1908)’, in Strachey and Freud (eds), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IX* (1906-1908) Jensen’s ‘Gradiva’ and Other Works (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1962), p.219. Original emphasis.

his own, without there being any need to accuse him on that account of having feminine inclinations. He is merely giving evidence in this of the anal eroticism which is still alive in him.”³⁰²

Following this, the men of Meadows’ world give birth to abject symbols of disorder. Such faecal offspring serve as subversive disruptions of poor taste, unsettling the respectable eye and stomach of the middle-class audience, however, despite their potential use as fertilizing manure, they are shown to be effectively sterile in that they do not go on to produce matter; they are literally the end product. This view is supported by scenes where men masturbate into lavatories, shown in *Somers Town* or *This is England* ‘88, where Shaun rejects Smell’s sexual advances and instead goes to the bathroom to relieve himself manually into the lavatory bowl. Here, semen is withheld from the desirous woman and becomes, along with shit, an indistinguishable mass of male waste products. As I have previously argued, just as female excreta is figured as owned by men, such scenes underscore men’s ownership and control of their own bodily fluids. To put this another way, rather than performing the function of bridge between the gendered liminality of men and women, these excretions become the cement that bonds the homosocial. A clear example of this is the handshake between Combo and Shaun which takes place in *This is England*. Here, Combo instructs Shaun to copy him in spitting on his own hand before ritualistically pressing their palms together in what Combo describes as “a man’s handshake”.

Bodily fluids, along with other excreta, certain foodstuffs, and decaying flesh are among such matter which disgust that can be identified as abject. Julia Kristeva’s assessment of such substances as abject, not because of their polluting properties but because of the way in which they upset taxonomic order is made clear when she says “it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. *The in-between*, the ambiguous, the composite”.³⁰³ We can deduce from this that the abject is liminal precisely because it evades order and rests “in-between” that which we understand through its position in an

³⁰² Freud, ‘On the Sexual Theories of Children (1908)’, pp. 219-220.

³⁰³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4. Emphasis added.

ascribed place. In this sense, rather than the coprology of Meadows' work generating the abject, it is the liminal which produces the abject through its denial of concrete order.

The 'Liminalities' of Homosocial Hunting

Building on Kristeva, the following section discusses the way in which the abject is manifested in the texts and how this relates to the trickster and his qualities of liminality. In Meadows' work, 'hunting' is a diffuse term which generally describes scenes or events where a group of male friends dress up and sojourn into rural spaces armed with air-rifles and catapults and partake in diverse activities, whether looking for rabbits or vandalizing abandoned buildings. *TwentyFourSeven* delivers its first hunting scene comically, providing a moment of scatological and physical humour. However, the second scene where Darcy teaches Tim to tickle trout complicates the earlier scene, removing the mask of comedy to reveal the sadness beneath. A comparison of the two scenes indicates problems and issues related to cultural and gendered practices around sufficiency and survival. The first involves an ensemble of characters and the quest of rabbiting is half-hearted: the young men amble, talk loudly, smoke and push each other, acts which demonstrate their lack of attention to and conviction for the task in hand. Rather than trapping or shooting a live rabbit, Gadget shows the group the decaying corpse of a rabbit he found whilst returning from his act of defecation behind a tree, with such production – of both corpse and faeces - effecting a scatological take on the magicians' trick of pulling a rabbit from a hat, an act which brings forth derisive laughter from his friends. However, the association with death, decay and bodily function marks the finding of the rabbit as abject, rather than serendipitous.

The dead rabbit can also be read symbolically in the context of folk tradition and mythology. Rabbits or hares are most often associated with femininity, fertility and re-birth.³⁰⁴ The death of the rabbit and the horror of its decay are abject in terms of the unclean and the polluting; but the maggoty corpse also alludes to the death of the feminine spirit and its rejection by the homosocial group which leads to the halting of

³⁰⁴ Terri Windling, *The Symbolism of Rabbits and Hares*. Available at www.endicott-studio.com; accessed 19 February 2012.

cyclical rebirth. The hunting quest is marked not only as futile but also as puerile, displaying an absence of any knowledge of hunting skills, replaced with a fascination with bodily function as a route to humour and homosocial bonding. This figuratively results in a liminal mood of ‘masculinity in stases’ (rather than ‘masculinity in crisis’) where the natural rhythm of the rural is no longer known.

The rabbit or hare is also intimately connected to trickster tales; the artist and author Terri Windling describes leporid representations as showing “contradictory, paradoxical creatures: symbols of both cleverness and foolishness, of femininity and androgyny, of cowardice and courage, of rampant sexuality and virginal purity”.³⁰⁵ The rabbit from the hat conceit is employed in a more orthodox manner at the end of *Romeo Brass*, providing Gavin with additional Trickster qualities, yet just as his ‘magic’ involves a sham, so too does the hunting by the men of *TwentyFourSeven* involve the act of pretence; they play at hunting, rather than carry out the act.

In contrast, Darcy’s transference of skills to Tim, discussed more fully later, involves authenticity rather than pretence and poses questions of power via knowledge. The skill of ‘tickling’ trout entails a direct relationship between hand and prey, the discounting of rod and line, and proves an immediacy of connection and thus a return to ancient skills devoid of the need for technical apparatus. It is an act of ‘getting back to nature’ through the most direct access, a harking back to a pre-industrial age, in a very British take on the ‘Iron John’ movement proposed by Robert Bly.³⁰⁶ This movement encouraged such a return to nature as a means through which men could overcome contemporary crises in identity and re-find meaning through purposeful activity. While the first scene undermines the idea of man’s *communitas* with nature as therapeutic, the second scene suggests such restorative effects can be achieved if an older mentor is present to guide the younger man through the lesson. In this sense, while the Trickster’s powers are shown to be productive of laughter, they do not provide materially; whereas the instruction of an older pedagogue brings forth bounty in a scene which suggests an elegiac nostalgia for

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (Shaftsbury: Element, 1992).

previous models of masculinity. Effectively, it is not nature that heals the crisis of masculinity, but nature provides an opportunity and excuse for homosocial exchange.

Moreover, tricksterish elements can be formally detected in Darcy's tutelage. The direct line from food to mouth relinquishes the role of the producer/retailer which underpins capitalist economics. However, in Meadows' film we do not have the self-sufficiency dream of the middle-classes as expressed in the 1970s sit-com *The Good Life*, but the surreptitious and deviant skill of the poacher. The act of poaching is therefore shown as a key skill of the trickster; it is posed as liminal, being both theft and/or a dissent against the landowner and born from the necessity for providing for one's family though means classed as illegal but with a mythology of moral right.

Meadows' citing of Roald Dahl's *Danny the Champion of the World* as an influential book of his childhood points to the romantic mythology of poaching.³⁰⁷ Dahl's association with liminality furthers the association, with the author famous for his use of liminal characters and trickster tales, such as the tricksters Willy Wonka in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and the titular *Fantastic Mr Fox*.³⁰⁸ In *Danny the Champion of the World*, Danny's father's extensive knowledge of nature and his passing on of that knowledge is echoed in miniature through Darcy's passing on of the skill of trout tickling. Dahl's book also involves the plot to poach large numbers of pheasants from the local buffoonish landowner and Danny's ingenious plan of drugging raisins to stupefy the game birds demonstrates a child's ambition to both please and outgrow their parent, generically bound up in a heist plot within a text of class conflict and defiance. The dangers (of being caught or injured) that poaching poses evokes the same emotional resonances as childhood tales of pirates and highwaymen, of Robin Hood characters who took without asking (or paying) by means of their skill, strength and ingenuity. Such romantic associations link the activity with a historicized past, where class conflict was

³⁰⁷ In a response to the question "What books and films did you like when you were growing up", posed on a children's film website, Meadows answered "The Roald Dahl books really did it for me like *Danny the Champion of the World*; these books had lots of layers and depth to them and they have stayed with me." Downloaded from www.filmstreet.co.uk/articleview.aspx?PageId=737; accessed 25 November 2008.

³⁰⁸ Roald Dahl, *Fantastic Mr Fox* (London: Collins, 1991), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (London: Collins, 1991); *Danny the Champion of the World* (London: Puffin, 1975).

crystallized into ‘liminalized’ individual heroes who struck back at the existing order through acts of transgression. This arena of class conflict offers up its participants as players of a game of cat and mouse, with the, invariably male, players, displaying ‘admirable’ male attributes of strength, ingenuity and (partially) legitimized violence whose exclusive homosocial webs effectively place female experience even beyond the multiply layered ‘liminalities’ of the Meadowsian narrative.

From Robin Hood to Robber Fools

The Nottingham association with the quasi-mythical character of Robin Hood is directly addressed in *Smalltime*. As a trickster, Jumbo’s initial voice over alludes to the *modus operandi* of the local trickster hero, where he states “You can trust us. We’re not into anything heavy. We rob from the rich, and we sell to the poor at half price.” The barrow boy commercialism of “selling” rather than giving to the poor, albeit at “half price” indicates the egocentricity of wealth creation at that juncture of post-Thatcherite Britain and while the statement is couched in terms which ameliorate the act of theft, that it is not “heavy”, i.e. does not involve violence and that “the rich” are the victims, and “the poor” benefit through a fifty percent discount, the unfolding narrative reveals Jumbo’s self-justification to be false. Indeed, targets of his thievery are part of the community to which he professes such allegiance; the corner shop, possible neighbours at a local car boot sale and the office of a local charity. Jumbo’s distinctly amateurish efforts turn to ashes, nothing of value results. He chooses to steal cheap pet food, a commodity of such a low value that the potential profit margin would be negligible. The videos stolen at the car boot sale by Jumbo and his gang are soon re-stolen. The planned ‘big heist’ of the office of the charitable organization ends disastrously, with a safe which proves to be empty and capture by the police.

The results indicate an ineptitude which fuels the comedy of the piece and continues the conceit of ‘small time’ provinciality, yet the targets of the bungled crimes reveal a more disturbing aspect of Jumbo’s sensibilities and, by extension a break down in working-class community bonds. It is not the rich who suffer from Jumbo’s dishonesty, but the self-same people he professes to help. Unlike the gangster/crime genre to which

Smalltime professes it belongs, there is no elaborate heist, organized by attractive protagonists, whose clever schemes outwit greedy corporate entities, only the callousness of an attempted robbery of a new-age charitable organization. Thus, the myth of a romanticized 'Robin Hoodism' is dispelled, replaced by the unsavoury realism of sections of the 'non-working' class preying upon their peers.

While this representation of class cannibalism is not recognized by Claire Monk, her lengthy discussion of the film alongside other examples of the British crime genre, does appreciate the "achievements" of Meadows' film; its attention to the bland realism of petty crime rather than a captivation with dirty glamour and the central focus upon gender politics and a decidedly contemporary focus rather than the nostalgic tendency of other texts which yearn for the old-school masculine posing of the 1980s model.³⁰⁹ However, Monk assesses the film as positively social, where it "mark(s) a renewed belief in community and a kind of social morality that seemed to herald a new, anti-nihilistic, fighting spirit in British cinema as the 1990s drew to a close".³¹⁰ This view misses the greater commentary on the social realities of working-class life that the film offers where local people steal from their equally impoverished neighbours or charities, not from economic giants grown rich through the exploitation of the masses. The realities of community break-down and opportunistic exploitation is not erased by the arrests of Jumbo et al, it remains and Malc and Kate have to leave the environs of Sneinton to escape it.

Jumbo's role as trickster is thus switched to that of fool; he professes to understand the market economies of survival and is prepared to do anything to thrive in a harsh world, yet he is clearly stupid, organizing raids on targets which would not offer any profit. He is even 'cuckolded' via the vibrator with which his partner Ruby has a fulfilling sexual relationship. Tricksters become fools in Meadows' work, even Gavin, with his assumed superiority at the end of *Romeo Brass* is only shown victorious through the episodic nature of Meadows' work. Returning to Gavin some years later one assumes he could be

³⁰⁹ Monk, 'From Underworld to Under-class: Crime and British Cinema in the 1990s', pp.172-88.

³¹⁰ Ibid. p. 185.

one of the 'lads' of *TwentyFourSeven*, unless he escaped such a future through moving away from the local community. All other Meadowsian tricksters eventually descend into foolishness; the following discussion charts their descent.

The liminal qualities of the fool can be detected in Welsford's introduction to her study of the archetype where she writes: "as a dramatic character he usually stands apart from the main action of the play, having a tendency not to focus but to dissolve events, and also to act as intermediary between the stage and the auditorium".³¹¹ This role of intermediary between the action and the audience is a reproduction of Bruster and Weimann's formulation of the function of the prologue discussed earlier, where I argue that the voice-over functions as the filmic equivalent of the theatrical device. So, like the trickster, the fool has a particular role in directly addressing the audience in order to comment on the events on stage or screen, a role which involves a certain detachment from the action which allows a liminal space of reflexivity. This can be witnessed in Meadows' work where characters inflected as the fool watch events from the position of outsider, such as the scene in *This is England '88* where Woody watches the jollities of the karaoke night through the social club window in yet another example of fenestral liminality.

Welsford's conception of the fool figure is presented in wholly masculine terms; female fools, it seems, do not figure in cultural form here. However, Willeford extends the gender boundaries of the fool through his discussion of the various derivations of Harlequin's feminine double, whether Columbine, Harlequina or Arlecchina and though the figure of Mother Folly, the dominating matriarch of the fool as mother's boy.³¹² Yet the Meadowsian textual realm is not occupied by female Fools, indeed, it is often only the female characters that recognize the fools for what they are, especially when played by Vicky McClure, who as Ladine or Lol, names men as such, whether "guizoid" for Morell, or "idiot" for Woody. Willeford describes the fool as "a silly or idiotic or mad person, or one who is made by circumstances (or the action of others) to appear a fool in

³¹¹ Welsford, *The Fool*, p. xii.

³¹² Willeford, *The Fool and His Scepter*, pp. 183 and 175.

that sense, or as person who imitates for non-fools the foolishness of being innately silly or made to look so”.³¹³ He, like Welsford intimates the liminal quality of the fool, calling it “a borderline figure”.³¹⁴

Jumbo is such a borderline figure, who professes trickster capabilities, yet is shown to be a Fool, a buffoon with poor command of mental and physical faculties. He falls over fences when fleeing from a crime scene; his attempt to hit Chris, the ‘yuppie’ with whom his friends Malc and Kate are socializing, is deflected by Chris via a comically quick application of two pinching fingers on a pressure point on Jumbo’s neck, and he is easily caught by the police after the failed robbery of the new age charity. Such ineptitude is indicative of the fool as Willesford states:

The fool is often clumsy as well as stupid. He is lacking, that is to say, in his ability to perceive, understand, or act in accordance with the order of things as it appears to others. His perception, understanding, and actions are thus relatively uncoordinated, even chaotic. What he says and does seems symptomatic of an inadequacy or aberration. He has difficulties with physical objects, with social forms, and with the rules that govern both. These difficulties and his failure to master them result in what strikes us as a ridiculous loss of dignity. Often, however, he does not feel the pain and embarrassment that such oddity and failure would cause in us – he may even be proud of them.³¹⁵

In a clever take on the cuckold schema with which the fool is connected, Jumbo is unaware of Ruby’s sexual ‘coupling’ with a vibrator. Here Ruby, in her denial of Jumbo’s sexual requests while maintaining her own sexual needs is effectively cuckolding Jumbo through her own agency, without the need of a living lover; technology it seems has provided for that role, batteries included. Unlike the later films which foreground the homosocial economy of the exchange in women, most pointedly through their excretions, this early film presents a moment of female refusal to be part of such an economy, whereby Ruby controls her own sexuality, meets her own sexual needs and thus manages the products of such activity. Cuckoldry is also evident in *This is England ’86* and *This is England ’88*, where Lol and Milky’s affair strengthens the

³¹³ Ibid, pp, 10-11.

³¹⁴ Ibid, p. 137.

³¹⁵ Ibid, p. 27.

symbolic positioning of Woody as a fool. The association with the fool and avian paraphernalia such as the coxcomb and feathers is manifested via Woody's pet parrot; a creature he claims is his only true friend.

Both Darcy and Morell are presented as Fools via their romantic ambitions which present them, in Willeford's words as the "yearning loner(s) of the angelically pure woman".³¹⁶ The pure woman forms the apex of Sedgwick's triangle, with her unavailability increasing the fool's desire for her *because* she is unobtainable and therefore unthreatening. If the fool could obtain the desired female object, then he would be forced into action. This action is unlikely to occur, as Willeford states, the fool is "outside the rush of weddings, outside the personal encounter between man and woman. His sexuality, like everything else about him assumes forms expressive of his *indeterminate* status".³¹⁷ Here then, the fool is figured as a liminal being in all things including his sexuality. Willeford goes on:

The yearning of the fool for a woman is often ill-defined: he blindly gropes after an inchoate something, often hoping that it will serve as an object of his random and diffuse sexuality. Yet the fool often suffers painfully acute yearnings for a woman who will be, like the morning star, above the urgent mess of his inarticulate will.³¹⁸

Such "acute yearning" is expressed in *Romeo Brass*, where Morell's desire for Ladine is represented as the obsessions of a fool. Scenes of him attempting to woo her parody rituals and practices of courtly love, such as his performance of his love poem *Weetabeet*:

One beat, two beat, three beat, sugar beet
Four beat, five beat, six beat, weetabeat
Seven beat, eight beat, nine beat, heartbeat
My heartbeat
My heart
Is beating for you

³¹⁶ Ibid, p. 175.

³¹⁷ Ibid. Emphasis added.

³¹⁸ Ibid, p. 188.

The nonsensical verse aligned with Ladine's assessment of him as a "guizoid" however show his efforts as those of the jester rather than the knight.

Morell and Ladine's relationship is reminiscent of the one had by Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) and Betsy (Cybill Sheppard) of Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1973). Meadows' admiration of Scorsese is, as discussed earlier, well recorded and there is a clear correlation between the two characters of Morell and Bickle. Both are obsessed with female sexuality. Bickle takes Betsy to a pornographic film for their first date, and Morell's first 'date' with Ladine involves him inviting her to his flat where they watch television. While in the film of *Romeo Brass* the audio of the television sounds like a documentary, in the published script it is suggested that they are watching the British soft-porn film *The Bitch* (1979).³¹⁹

Like Bickle, Morell is obsessed with female sexual purity, yet, or even because of such an obsession, he tries to coerce her into sex on their first date. This leads to a disturbing scene which details the possible plot trajectory of a date-rape scenario, with Morell physically threatening Ladine, who manages to make her escape. Despite Bickle and Morell's involvement with the sex industry as consumers, where sexual images of women serve as points of pleasure, they are enraged by the notion of female sexuality beyond their control. They disavow their own complicity in the economies of the sex industry, and continue to judge women as 'slags' or 'whores' once the fantasies of their 'Madonna' object are dissipated.

The self-conscious rehearsal of performed masculinity by Scorsese's anti-hero in the much-parodied "are you talking to me" scene is echoed by Morell via his appropriation of behaviours from other models of masculinity, such as Elvis, Bruce Lee or the mythologized 'gypsy' indicated through his use of syntax and accents borrowed from Traveler's speech patterns. His adoption of a costume of seduction through 'slipping into something more comfortable' while Ladine watches television, illustrates his

³¹⁹ Fraser and Meadows, *A Room for Romeo Brass*, p. 85.

performance through imitation. He is devoid of any self-reflexivity; he merely copies what he has seen elsewhere and adorns himself with his idea of the costume of a seducer. His transformation into an ersatz hip hop figure, engineered by the trickster Gavin, illustrates his mutability, his readiness to 'act the fool'. It is also indicative of his playing this role 'straight', being comic to others while not generating that comedy from a conscious place. He looks in the mirror and likes what he sees; he does not recognize the fool looking back at him.

In *TwentyFourSeven*, Darcy is shown to be the fool in romantic terms through his courting of Jo. She is considerably younger and more attractive than Darcy, yet his attempt to woo her at first seem promising when she agrees to a date. However, the schema of the homosocial triangle dictates that Darcy self-sabotages such romantic success, sabotage which is achieved via Darcy's nursing of the drug-intoxicated Fagash. While the scene in which Darcy attends the stuporous Fagash, stripping and washing his body before tucking him into bed, is not overtly homoerotic, the fact that Darcy chooses to perform this role rather than telephone for an ambulance indicates that his priorities are for his "lads" and that the Jo must remain unobtainable in order to be desirable.

Desirability through distance is suggested in an earlier scene which showed Darcy placing his hand upon Jo's residual handprint left upon the shop counter. This shot echoes the courtly quest for a lady's favour, with the "inchoate something" of the grease and sweat replacing the handkerchief.³²⁰ Moreover, it shows how Darcy wishes to touch Jo, yet only if this touch is rendered via an act of remove, where the symbol of the woman, in this case the grease and sweat of her hands, is touched by Darcy, rather than the flesh of her being. This is another, albeit more subtle and romantic example, of men's appropriation of female fluids in Meadows' work.

The transvestitism of the trickster is repeated in the sartorial performances of the fool. Here, the appropriation of clothing which has been culturally gendered as female serves as comic costume. In *Romeo Brass*, Romeo, as 'glamorous assistant,' is fool to Gavin's

³²⁰ Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*, p. 188.

conjuring trickster. In *Dead Man's Shoes*, Sonny is the cosmetically-enhanced fool to Richard's nighttime trickster. In *This is England 86* and *This is England 88*, Woody is the sartorially-feminized fool to Milky's cuckoldry. Men's foolishness is represented through the appropriation or enforced adoption of culturally ascribed female clothing, a move which uses the application of signs of the female gender pejoratively. The liminal construct of man-dressed-as-woman functions in the same ontologically disruptive way as Kristeva's definition of the abject in that it "disturbs identity, system, order".³²¹

In general, men are culturally classed as 'funny' when they are dressed as women in a group context. This is evident in the material practices of everyday life when the incongruity of the culturally normative feminine clothing adorns the hyper-masculine physiques of rugby teams on stag nights out - a case in point which also illustrates that comic transvestism is an example of masculine japey shared across the middle-class 'rugby boys' and Meadows' working-class lads and indicative of a commonality which cuts across class, but not gender. The seeming liberation offered through drag is decidedly one-sided. As Estella Tincknell and Deborah Chambers argue, "drag may well open up the possibility of fluidity for masculinity—that is, for men to "take-on" femininity—but it does so by representing femaleness as fixed, immutable, and fundamentally absurd".³²²

However, potential liberation through drag is, for Judith Butler, not necessarily secured for anyone. In a reply to a perceived misreading of her previous publication, *Gender Trouble*, as promoting the subversive potential of drag, Butler sets out in *Bodies that Matter*, a re-emphasized assertion that subversion is not an automatic goal or result of drag. Butler stresses that "there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual norms".³²³

³²¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

³²² Estella Tincknell and Deborah Chambers, 'Performing the Crisis: Fathering, Gender and Representation in two 1990s films', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Winter 2002), p, 154.

³²³ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 125.

Meadowsian transvestitism, of which there are many examples, can, as in the case of *Romeo Brass*, signal a gender stereotypical ‘corrective’, where one character is reduced to the role of helpmate, a performance indicated via female costume. Elsewhere, the appropriation of clothing indicates a performance of carnivalesque revelry. It is important here to recognize the gender-specificity of such moves. Men in Meadows’ work adopt female clothes as an extraordinary performance over their permanent performance of masculinity, the performativity of gender as formulated by Butler. They do not attempt to ‘pass’ as women, indeed, the grotesque excess of their adornments juxtaposed with the vestiges of masculinity, such as body shape, facial hair and the cultural signs of male clothing which remain underneath, only highlights gender differences rather than collapsing them in verisimilitude. The partial adoption of stray items of clothing and make up does not constitute a male body externally transformed; there is no attempt at ‘passing’, rather it is illustrative of play through fantasy, with the hodge-podge arrangement of apparel, wigs and make up worn by the characters a conscious decision to play ‘dress-up’.

Male adoption of culturally female clothing in Meadows’ work then, is on the surface, more concerned with leisure and comedy, rather than the erotic. This eroticism occurs elsewhere in texts such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) where transvestism collapses the constructs of gender boundaries and presents cross-dressing characters as potential sites of erotic contemplation to both sexes. In a recent television adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* (2005), updated to a contemporary setting, Petruchio is played by Rufus Sewell who performs the role of a ‘straight’ transvestite, not only in that he is heterosexual, but more importantly that the role and Sewell’s performance is not played as comic, but as an expression of identity which sustains the erotic potential of the leading man role. Petruchio arrives at his wedding to Kate (played by Shirley Henderson who took the role of Shirley in Meadows’ *Once Upon a Time in the West Midlands*) in attire from both male and female traditions of dress. This liminal presentation of costume suggests that as Petruchio, Sewell can be a man who wears a dress without undermining his physical attractiveness, masculinity or power. Rather, it

does the opposite, emphasizing his beauty in a way which sustains the normative surface dynamics of heterosexual attraction.

The wedding scene in this play stands in contrast to the wedding scene of *This is England 86*, where Lol attends her own wedding in her usual clothes, thus refusing to perform the costumed aspect of the bride role. Wearing mod clothes rather than a white dress, Lol is admonished by her mother for her lack of “proper” clothes. Female transvestism does not occur in the films, neither is cross-dressing by women contemplated in a comic way. Clothes worn by the female characters are always indicative of their primary performance as women; even when the clothes can be said to resemble costumes, such as Smell’s emulation of the style of the goth music duo Strawberry Switchblade in *This is England* and its television sequels. Here clothes function as signs of belonging, signaling affinities with a particular subculture whilst concurrently performing gender via an embrace of its excesses. Adversely, characters such as Lol adopt the culturally masculine attire of a subculture, wearing Ben Sherman shirts, jeans and Doctor Marten boots normally ascribed to the male members of skinhead subculture. Here the way women wear clothes indicates either an overt performance of their femininity or an attempt to deny it. The wearing of male clothes does not evoke comedy, rather it illustrates the woman’s attempt to avoid cultural gendering, albeit a futile one, as proved by their continued exploitation by men. Women are presented as essentially bound to their gender despite the various ways through which they present themselves.

In the Meadowsian world men, unlike women, can literally play the fool, via extra-performative activities such as dressing up where they adopt female clothes as a form of leisure through play. This activity has a long historical precedence; folk traditions which involve pagan and Christian symbolism often involved men dressing in female clothes, such as the Molly or Bessy figure of the mumming and Plough plays mentioned earlier. Meadows’ male characters adorn themselves in female clothes as a form of modern motley, evoking this historical tradition of cross-dressing. The fool figure of folk tradition was often presented as mentally deficient and while the recognition of Anthony as a fool because of his mental disability may seem politically incorrect, the construction of

Anthony as the 'village idiot' of the community of the film intersects with the folk traditions of May Day celebrations, carnival activities, Mummers' plays and the like. The scene of Anthony's torment presented as a flashback by Mark, evokes both the mock-king of these celebrations before his hanging and the sacrificial scapegoat during and after it (Fig.3).

Wellsford notes the dual aspect of European folk festivals involving religious worship on the one hand and subversive revelry on the other, with roots in Christian and pagan antecedents. Anthony's torment can be read as both indicative of Christian allegory and pagan ritual. As mock-king, Anthony is crowned by Sonny who, in the local economy is the effective 'king' in control of his subjects through physical intimidation (demonstrated in the scene where he threatens Patti) and his economic control as the local head drug-dealer. In Christian terms, the cruel teasing of Anthony resembles the tormenting of his sainted namesake. Saint Anthony was tempted by devils who sought to bring the saint, elevated above the ground through his ascetic devotion to God, back to earth by violent means. Visual representations of the biblical tale, such as the engraving by Martin Schongauer circa 1470 (Fig.4) and a painting by Michelangelo circa 1487-88 (Fig.5) illustrate the struggle of the saint, and the formal arrangement of the figures is echoed in *Dead Man's Shoes* (Fig.6). The Saturnalian play of pagan tradition is here distilled into the binary of good versus evil, via the struggle between the naïve Anthony and his daemonic tormentors of Sonny, Soz, Tuff et al. The crowning of Anthony with the circle of wire brings together pagan and Christian iconography of sacrifice in a liminal space of cultural and spiritual practice.

Wellsford notes how the figure of the folk-fool is euphemistically 'killed' during the ritualized sacrifice of scapegoat rites and this occurs in actuality on *Dead Man's Shoes*. As folk-fool, Anthony is encouraged by his tormentors to commit suicide, a form of self-sacrifice. The wire basket placed upon his head represents the crown of thorns of Jesus' passion, a gesture repeated in scenes of folk-culture which brought together some traditions of pagan and Christian rituals. Wellsford explains the community effect of such practices, where:

the folk-festivals seem to consist of concentric rings of folly. They are times of universal licentiousness, when all revelers who take part in them are in a vaguely defined way infected with the prevailing ‘foolishness’. This ‘foolishness’ is, however, concentrated in certain performances which are regarded as buffoon-dances or fool-plays; and in these performances themselves, certain characters – often mere supernumeraries – specialize in folly.³²⁴

Foolish supernumeraries figure in the group dynamic of Meadows’ work. Indeed, the main function of characters such as Soz and Tuff in *Dead Man’s Shoes*; Meggy of *TwentyFourSeven* and the same-named yet different Meggy of *This is England* and its television sequels seems to be their “buffoon dances or “fool-plays”. One scene in *Dead Man’s Shoes* does nothing to drive the plot, yet serves as a fool-play between the buffoonish Soz and Tuff. Here in an anti-intellectual take on *Waiting for Godot*, the Meadowsian equivalents of Beckett’s tramps discuss the meaning of the written text of their pornographic magazines. Here Soz demonstrates his idiocy through the comment “Al fresco? That’s up yer anus, innit?” This, alongside Tuff’s rejoinders and their discussion of the bouquet of the marijuana they are smoking, not only provides a moment of comic relief from the dark horror of the majority of the film, it furthers the multiple conceits of the folk-fool, the abject and homosocial bonding via the exchange of sexual images of women. Moreover, Soz’s imagining that an Italian phrase for a meal eaten outside refers to anal intercourse sutures together homoerotic contemplation, consumption and excretion, a triptych which is repeated in the bathroom scene where Sonny bathes, Herbie defecates and Soz reads pornography. Here the sexual images of women do not represent a site of erotic contemplation; rather they serve as a tactical disavowal of homoeroticism within a scene of homosocial communitās. By taking the pornographic magazine into the bathroom, Soz maintains the feminine presence required for the erotic triangle described by Sedgwick. The magazine therefore serves as a disguising agent which seemingly neutralizes the homoerotic dynamic which persists in the arrangement of men.

The Trickster and the Fool: Conclusion

³²⁴ Welsford, *The Fool*, pp. 71-2.

The pre-occupation of Meadows with the substances which emerge from the body, in particular the male body indicates a certain stance towards the critical middle-class gaze. Constructed as the poster-boy of contemporary social realism in British cinema, Meadows' response to the middle-class gaze is to provide a hyperbolic show where the figurative working-class male apes perform behind the separating glass, transposed from the zoo to the cinema screen. Busy with their excessive interest with each other's orifices, appendages and substances, the male characters explore, with fascination, every piece of faeces, every ejaculation of spermatozoa, every urination, every spit of saliva, before flinging them gleefully at the transparent border between their Saturnalian play and the returning gaze, which looks aghast at the repeated presentations of the body via the offerings of its waste products. In this sense, Meadows' work can be read as Fradley reads it, as a celebration. However, this celebration is highly gendered; it is only the men who whoop and holler. Nonetheless, these performances can be read as a strategy through which Meadows wrangles with the unwanted mantle of social realism through an excessive presentation of those elements which have stereo-typified the working-class as represented in film. Thus unhygienic practices, preoccupation with sensual pleasures, such as drinking eating and sexual activity, profligacy and laziness are presented as things to be defiantly celebrated. Bakhtin described the 'folk carnival humour' in the work of Rabelais as a "boundless world of humourous forms and manifestations (which) opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture".³²⁵ Meadows' works imitates this, presenting instead a 'gender-bound world which opposes the censoring tone of middle-class culture'.

These presentations though are particularly rooted in the male body, a body which has grown infantile and flabby, in its enforced and permanent leisure. Unlike the perfected physicality of the working-class figure of the New Wave, honed through physical labour, the un-laboured male body of the Meadowsian text is unfit for purpose, left to play with those toys which emanate from that unfit body in all its weak and flabby physicality, as a manifestation of Bakhtin's 'grotesque body'.³²⁶ However, while the male body is

³²⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 5.

³²⁶ Ibid.

presented as an object of defiance, ‘moon[ing]’ back those activities and behaviours which ‘should’ shame, the female body is not shown in such terms. Rather the female body is rendered as passive; an object of exchange within the homosocial economy.

The imbalance of power in the gendered body is not the only limitation suggested by Meadows’ corporeal performance of working-class political resistance. By presenting the working-class in bodily terms, whether the male at play or the female as object of exchange, Meadows’ work risks securing the gendered working-class subject within the confines of the body. Of course, we are all secured within the mortal coil, but the representation of other classes is not as materially subject. Rather than suggesting that everyone is the same, such foregrounding of the male working-class body may risk the opposite: that the working-class only live atavistically through their bodies. To return to the motif of mooning via a pun, the working-class mind is left, developmentally, *behind*.

The fool functions in Meadows as the corporeal twin of the cerebral brother of the trickster. These two forms may reside in the same character in a deliberate conflation of the body and mind, yet the trickster element is not brought down to the base level of the fool, neither is the fool raised to the higher plain of his cunning brother. Rather the two negotiate the confines of their environment with the limited skills at their disposal. Both Welsford and Willeman end their studies of the fool by stressing the important function such a figure serves. For Welsford “the Fool is wiser than the Humanist”.³²⁷ For Willeman “folly is ... one of our deepest necessities. The fool actor makes of it the delight of his show”.³²⁸

In Meadows’ world, tricksters and fools perform their trickery and foolishness with delight, displaying with excessive abandon the follies of the unrespectable working-class. Such excessive displays exceed the already low expectations of the observing middle-class and while these displays can be read as subversive manoeuvres which upset the social order they can also be read less progressively. This depends on how one views the

³²⁷ Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 323.

³²⁸ Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*, p. 235.

carnavalesque; either it is an important means of social and political subversion, a ritualized corrective by the masses which brings the ruling classes into some form of balance; or it works the other way as a form of ‘bread and circuses’ where the threat of the mob is dispersed via the sanctioning of a ritualized and performative play. In the latter sense, the fools of the carnival are doubly so, being both fools in their performance and fools/fooled into thinking that their actions are in some way politically progressive.

In respect of Meadows’ work, this begs the question whether the trickster and the fool are presented as agent provocateurs who seek to upset the status quo, or alternatively functionaries of the cyclical reenactments of carnivalesque performances sutured into a tradition which manages and thus dilutes the spirit of revolution. In this sense, Meadows’ work can be read as socially conservative. This position refutes the political aspirations usually aligned with the social realist tradition, thereby indicating one reason why Meadows’ association with the mode is particularly problematic. Yet the liminality of Meadows’ work resists an either/or dialectic, suggesting instead a deliberate evasion of the engagement with overt political struggle. His work presents the vestiges of working-class sentiment and spirit of community, figured through the male corpus; both the individual body and the homosocial group in which it moves, combined with skepticism about the possibility of sociopolitical change following the bruising blows of Thatcherite policies upon that body. The Meadowsian body, unfit for the purposes of traditional work, puts on the motley of the fool and performs the work-through-leisure role of the under-class trickster.

The previous chapter figured the cultural construct that is Meadows as a contemporary trickster. The discussion above showed how Meadowsian tricksters are turned to fools. This begs the question whether the cultural construct that is Meadows is also a fool. While Meadows presents and is received as exhibiting buffoonish performances, which involve vulgar language, play, and general ‘messaging about’ rather than a detailed attention to the rigours of filmmaking craft, this presentation of the foolish is what moves him into the adept moves of the trickster. Meadows the construct is the inverse of his

textual doubles, he *plays* the fool in order to *become* the trickster; a trick-enabled becoming which involves yet another performance.

II. Protean Man and the Minotaur: Hybridity, Adaptation and the Labyrinth

The fool and the trickster give birth to a hybrid form, a ‘foolster’ if you will, which exists in a liminal state between the two parent forms. The subject of hybridity and adaptation forms the basis of the following discussion. The cover of the DVD for *A Room for Romeo Brass* quotes from a review of the film by *Total Film* magazine, with the statement “will leave you wondering whether to laugh or cry” used as a marketing strap-line.³²⁹ While such marketing techniques are commonplace and can be found on most film posters, book jackets and other marketing paraphernalia, it is apt at this juncture to reflect on the meaning of such a statement and comment on its relevance, not only to that particular film but to Meadows’ work more generally. The statement poses a dilemma of reception, inviting the viewer to reflect on their emotional response to the film which is presented as emotionally equivocal. This equivocation suggests yet another way in which Meadows’ work can be considered as liminal, founded upon the uneasy emotional register of the texts which lurch from comedy to violence, or from the violently comic to the comically violent and vice versa.

Through its posing a choice between laughter and tears, the strap-line evokes the aims and intended results of genre. It suggests that *A Room for Romeo Brass* is the generic hybrid of the comedy-drama, in that it employs devices from one genre which offers the prospect of laughter and one which offers, amongst other things, tears; an approach which can be detected elsewhere in Meadows’ generically hybrid texts. The first part of this section looks at Meadows’ use of genre, suggesting how formal hybridity is informed by liminality through its relational position between two or more genres.

However the trope of hybridity is not limited to matters of genre; other manifestations of liminal hybridity occur at other intersections, whether between character and place, realism and myth, man and beast or other such combinations. Earlier, I argued for the conception of Meadows as a contemporary trickster, an archetypal figure of folk myth

³²⁹ Total Film, ‘Review: *A Room for Romeo Brass*’, *Total Film*. Feb 4 2000. Available at www.totalfilm.com; accessed 7/03/2012.

which exhibits shape-shifting abilities, an altogether fluid construct which is repeatedly presented in the film texts. Here I discuss the idea of the protean Man, another figure defined by his mutability, along with his physical inverse, the Minotaur. These two figures are related to liminality through their physical bridging of the human and the bestial.

The protean man is derived from the figure of Proteus, a shape-shifting mythical entity formed from a human top half with a piscine remainder below. The Minotaur reverses that dynamic, with its human body and bovine head representing a bestial mentality combined with a human physicality. The ‘man as beast’ and ‘beast as man’ dialectic is thus offered via the two figures and it is this dynamic which is explored in the latter part of this section. This is augmented by an exploration of the representation of spatial liminality via the allusion to the home of the Minotaur; the labyrinth. The liminal symbol of the maze is, I argue, a constructive way to conceptually approach Meadows use of space and to tease out its implications for masculinity and class.

Turner aligns the observed behaviours of non-industrial societies with those of industrialized cultures via a shared interest in variety, stating:

Just as when tribesmen make masks, disguise themselves as monsters, heap up disparate ritual symbols, invert or parody profane reality in myths and folk-tales, so do the genres of industrial leisure...film etc, *play* with the factors of culture, sometimes assembling them in random, grotesque, improbable, surprising, shocking, usually experimental combinations.³³⁰

Meadows’ work involves a generic plurality, where different generic forms are drawn into a single text. Terms borrowed from studies of literature and its different forms are useful to describe the films: *Smalltime* is a picaresque domestic drama which involves gangsterism and the ‘heist gone wrong’ plot device; *TwentyFourSeven* uses an epistolary conceit to structure a sports drama combined with social drama; *A Room for Romeo Brass* combines the *bildungsroman* with social drama; *Dead Man’s Shoes* explores the revenge narrative alongside a supernatural ghost story and *This is England* can be described as a

³³⁰ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 40.

bildungsroman within an historical drama. The common theme which underpins all of the texts is the homosocially constructed triangle of desire; in this sense all of the films are also romances. The following discussion will examine some of these approaches, noting how liminality informs representations of masculinity and class within the work of Meadows.

The roguish characters of the picaresque novel have contemporary equivalents in Meadows' films. Characters such as Jumbo of *Smalltime* echo the comically inflected exploits of a character trying to find their way in the world in a liminal hybridity of the picaresque and the gangsteresque. In Meadows' case, this dynamic is dependant upon nefarious activities, the 'wheeling and dealing' of a working-class character who, in the absence of legitimate employment opportunities, presents the spirit of entrepreneurialism via a recourse to criminality. With its origins in film through the character of the 'spiv', whom Andrew Spicer describes as "a darker version of the Rogue", such examples have enjoyed much popularity in British television culture, most particularly in the comedy genre.³³¹ From the spivish Walker of *Dad's Army* to the benign 'back of a lorry' figures of Del Boy of *Only Fools and Horses*, Arthur Daley of *Minder* and Twiggy of *The Royle Family*, through to the more overt fraudulency of Frank of *Shameless*, the comedic potential of these characters is usually mined via narratives of failure, rather than success.

The particular British fondness for the 'little man' and his cycle of failed exploits, is echoed in Meadows' work where characters such as Jumbo present correlative stories of resilient ambition held in check by ineptitude. Even seemingly more successful characters such as Sonny are not afforded the same level of success as say Arthur Daley, where Sonny's automotive phallic symbol, a decrepit Citroen 2CV (Fig.7), stands in comic contrast to Daley's Jaguar (Fig.8). Jumbo's similar activities align him with these characters and his figuring as a fool, a conceit discussed earlier, furthers the allusion. However, the comedy engendered via Jumbo's ineptness is hybridized with violence, bringing together the laughter and tears synecdochically through the body of Jumbo. His recourse to violence, indicated through his assault of Ruby and his attempted assault of

³³¹ Spicer, *Typical Men*, p. 27.

the ‘yuppie’ Chris who stands as a threat to his relationship with Malc, is indicative of a cheek by jowl existence of violence and comedy. Such dualism often tempers each, with the horror of violence obfuscated by comedy and the release of tension which is usually offered through comedy instead challenged through its violent inflection. The equivocation suggested in the tag-line of “will leave you wondering whether to laugh or cry”, is therefore persistently employed in Meadows’ work, where laughter and tears are often concurrent, rather than alternative emotional responses.

Jumbo’s ineptitude extends to his business acumen and financially successful men are rarely shown in Meadows’ work. The obvious exception is Ronnie of *TwentyFourSeven*, whose economic clout is matched by his physical bulk. As well as sharing the same first name of one of the most infamous gangsters of British history, Ronnie has all the hackneyed accoutrements of the gangster: an expensive car, jewellery, funds to support the 101 Boxing Club, social influence and a ‘Moll’ figure through the character of his much-younger girlfriend Sharon. However, throughout the film, the representation of these trappings as signs of success is subtly undermined: Sharon’s flirtation with Tim suggests a future infidelity; his social influence cannot contain the uncontrollable violence of the boxers, Geoff or Darcy; and the reasons for his funding the Club in the first place – his desire for his son to lose weight – are not fulfilled. For all his money and influence, even Ronnie, the alpha-male of Meadowsian texts, is eventually shown to be powerless to control all eventualities.

Physical and economic power is presented through another gangster figure, Sonny, of *Dead Man’s Shoes*. The casting of the ex-boxer Gary Stretch in the role brings with it a certain legitimacy of male power, engendered through Stretch’s connection to sporting prowess and strength. Just as the casting of the East End star Bob Hoskins in *TwentyFourSeven* could be read as irreconcilable with the claims of authenticity which Meadows makes, so too could the figure of Stretch and his celebrity be seen as an obvious mistake in *Dead Man’s Shoes*. The imposition of a known actor/sports figure within a text otherwise cast with relative unknowns risks a potential schism with the aesthetic realism of the film. However, the employment of an actor within a film involves

an importation of their previous roles and identities from without the text, in a move which hybridizes the past and present personae. Stretch's credentials as an alpha male 'hard man' is brought to the film, but crucially, just as in the case of Ronnie of *TwentyFourSeven*, this masculine construct is undermined and eroded in the film.

As one of few examples of a male Meadowsian character who physically resembles the 'hard body' model of the masculine ideal - as opposed to the unfit, soft-bodies of many of the other characters - Stretch as Sonny could have been presented as representative of hegemonic masculinity which is fit for purpose. However, rather than the 'hard-man' figurehead of a criminal gang, Sonny is revealed to be both ineffectual and cowardly when confronted by Richard. He is intimidated by him when they come face to face (Fig.9) and he sends Gypsy John to confront him as he waits at a safe distance. Later he is humiliated in front of his gang when Richard paints his face in clownish make up which signals him as a fool (Fig.10).

His emasculation by Richard is made horrifically complete through Richard's murder of his gang, before Richard kills him through suffocation with a plastic bag, a *modus operandi* which allows him to witness his own murder. Richard's treatment of Sonny complicates the notion of carnival described by Fradley. It involves certain activities associated with play, but with an important shift in relationships of power in that elements of drag, such as cosmetics, are impositions, enforced by Richard onto Sonny. In this sense, the seeming autonomy of play is replaced with the imposition of enforced performance. This is crucial to an understanding of the way 'play' works in Meadows' films; the term encompasses a range of activities which slide from the relatively benign – smashing up an abandoned building – to the deadly serious – smashing another man with a hammer. Richard's 'play' with Sonny, his covering his face in make-up, is received by Sonny's friends as comic, despite it being a figurative violation by Richard. This suggests that the comic potential of violence and the violent potential of comedy are intimately linked and concomitant elements of the homosocial community.

The gangster can be read as superlatively adaptive figure, changing his (I use the pronoun deliberately in that textual gangsters are overwhelmingly male) behaviour in order to best exploit that which is at his disposal. His parasitism can be read as one way through which success is achieved in narratives of the working-class, with such narratives engendering myths and iconography which persists as areas of interest and even a bizarre form of respect. The British gangster twins Reggie and Ronnie Kray are a case in point. In this way, the gangster can be viewed, somewhat perversely, as a protean man, someone who adapts to take advantage of the circumstances around him.

This figure is usually seen positively. In his treatise on mankind's ability to adapt to socio-political conditions, Robert Jay Lifton argues that psychological mutability is ostensibly a positive response to "the restlessness and flux of our time".³³² In describing this contemporary coping strategy to the pressures of contemporary life, Lifton draws upon the myth of Proteus, postulating that the 'protean self' is a modern phenomenon of creative self identity, which, like the mythical figure of Proteus, mutates to accommodate external conditions. Meadows' gangster figure Jumbo attempts to do just that, a move made explicit in his statement: "all that matters ... is having a tenner in your pocket... It doesn't matter how you get it".

Lifton's model does not distinguish between genders, indeed he states that "there is virtually no manifestation of the protean self that either sex cannot express. Any differences are mainly in nuance".³³³ However, although not present in his argument, the thesis of adaptation is useful when considering the concept of masculinity in crisis. It could be that rather than an accommodating malleability of the self, the protean reaction is an aggressive response to change, at once a superficial exteriority of acceptance which masks an inner resentment of the need for change or adaptation, the psychic wound of challenged masculinity which threatens to erupt and destroy. Meadows offers different versions of this protean man in his work, which shows men who wear an emotional, or, in the case of Richard, a real mask. Such a covering belies their inner monster, until

³³² Robert Jay Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 1.

³³³ *Ibid*, p. 9.

following a challenge to their masculine authority the mask is dropped in favour of a violent act.

The presentation of Sonny and his ‘employees’ evokes the gangster texts of British cinema. These films constitute a significant strand of British film culture, what Steve Chibnall describes as “British cinema’s most significant cycle of films since the New Wave of the 1960s”.³³⁴ The shared attention afforded to the gangster milieu in these films does not necessarily dictate the mode through which such attention is presented. The variance in style between the particular realism of *The Long Good Friday* (1980) and *Face* (1997) (which starred Robert Carlisle who played Jimmy in *Once upon a Time in the Midlands*), stands in contrast to the mix of realism, surrealism and highly stylized aesthetics of *Performance* (1970) and *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989). Between these two poles lay another range of styles from *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998); *Gangster No.1* (2000); *Mr In-Between* (2001); and *Layer Cake* (2004), which vary in style from the downbeat and quotidian to Hollywood gloss. In this sense, the British gangster genre could be described as the most liminal genetic form in its intimate relationship to both British and American traditions of filmmaking.

Meadows is connected to these traditions, producing films which concern low-level gangsterism which incorporate elements from American and British approaches. The references to the British tradition can be detected in *Dead Man’s Shoes* through the allusions to *Get Carter* (1971). Meadows’ film foregrounds its debt to Hodges’ preceding text through its *mise en scène* with Considine as Richard echoing Michael Caine’s Jack Carter via a distinct physical stance. It also employs a knowing use of dialogue which connects the two films, demonstrated in the scene where Sonny and his gang drive to the abandoned farm where Richard is staying in order to scare him away. Here, Richard confronts the approaching Big Al stating “you’ve got some guts coming to my joint in that shape.” This paraphrases Carter’s vocal counter to an attempted physical assault by Cliff Brumby (Bryan Mosley) when he says “you’re a big man, but you’re out

³³⁴ Steve Chibnall, ‘Travels in Ladland: The British Gangster Film Cycle, 1998-2001’, in Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book: Third Edition* (London: BFI, 2008), p. 384.

of shape”. Such statements reference the primacy of physical fitness as a measure of masculine power and are a pointed reminder of the symbolic function of the unfit male body which is so central to the work of Meadows discussed elsewhere in this study.

Attention to the male body in the gangster genre is predominantly homoerotic. American and British texts such as *Performance*; *Reservoir Dogs* (1991); and *I’ll Sleep When I’m Dead* (2003) present instances of homoerotic encounters which are often violently rendered. *Dead Man’s Shoes* continues in this tradition, illustrated by Sonny’s ordering of Anthony to fellate him, displaying the intimate relationship between power, sex and violence which is constituted as predatorily homoerotic. Such encounters and their violent aftermath are often the spur to vengeance, with the pursuit of vengeance forming the narrative structure of not only the gangster film, but also the western.

In his detailed study of *Get Carter*, Steve Chibnall discusses the generic cross-fertilization between the western and the gangster film detectable in Hodges’ film, stating “in this ‘north-eastern’, the familiar iconography of the western genre is knowingly adapted to give Newcastle a frontier quality,” warning against a Hollywood-centric view of its generic roots where “to think of the terraces and back alleys of Tyneside as merely substitutes for the mean streets of Los Angeles or Dodge City, however, is to ignore the fact that the generic roots of *Get Carter* run deep into European soil,” whether the tragedies of ancient Greece or Jacobean revenge theatre.³³⁵ Carter’s death scene takes place in the superlative liminal space of the coast, a site rich with a sense of the in-between within the cultural imaginary. Many films of the gangster genre exploit the liminal qualities of a coastal location, such as *Brighton Rock* (1947) *Circus* (2000); and *London to Brighton* (2006) and Meadows’ engagement with coastal locations intertextually links to this tradition whilst sustaining the notion of vengeance. For example, Morell’s threatening of Gavin during their seaside trip is instigated by his desire to avenge his perceived slight to his pride following Gavin’s trick.

³³⁵ Steve Chibnall, *Get Carter* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 7.

Similarly, *Dead Man's Shoes* draws heavily upon traditions of revenge drama as exhibited in theatre, literature and film. The trajectory of the revenge narrative is neatly explained by Katherine Eisaman Maus in her introduction to a quartet of Jacobean revenge tragedies:

The revenge plays of the English Renaissance mark neither the beginning nor the end of a tradition. Their forbears are Greek and Latin tragedies which derive their plot from still more ancient legends. Their modern descendants are film westerns and detective thrillers in which a man (the revenger is usually but not always male) hunts down the killer of his partner or family, assuming some of his adversary's most sinister traits in the process.³³⁶

This adoption of parts of the avenger's personality by the avenged is an important aspect of *Dead Man's Shoes*, where a clear dialectic between Richard and Sonny is developed, with aspects of mirroring or displacement oscillating with areas of contrast between the characters. This aspect is discussed more fully in a later section, however it is important to note here how such structures dissolve strict conventions of binary oppositions, introducing instead liminal possibilities and equivocations. It is not a simple case of Richard being here and Sonny being there, rather they are both betwixt and between the two constructed roles of loving brother and local 'hard man'; two constructs which are eroded as the film progresses.

Thematic concerns are shared by *Get Carter* and *Dead Man's Shoes*, with each film showing the exploits of a man who avenges the death of his brother. The revenge narrative is often central to the western or the crime/gangster thriller, extensively distributed within the genres, with key examples being John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), Eastwood's *Pale Rider* (1985) and John Boorman's *Point Blank* (1967). The influences of these Hollywood films can also be detected, especially *Point Blank* and *Pale Rider* which share a dual explanatory logic, where realist materialism or metaphysical fantasy offer contrasting, yet equally plausible explanations for the events depicted on screen. This dualism is present in *Dead Man's Shoes*, where Anthony is eventually revealed as an imagined entity, whether a supernatural ghost or a

³³⁶ Katherine Eisaman Maus (ed.), *Four Revenge Tragedies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. ix.

psychological projection by his brother Richard. However, equivocal readings also extend to Richard himself; he could most simply be a live man seeking out the men who tormented his brother; or an agent of a higher power as suggested in *Pale Rider*, or the narrative could be explained as the fantasies of a dying man, much like the dream logic of *Point Blank*. While a reading of *Point Blank* may straightforwardly accept the events as happening according to the conventions of cinematic suspension of disbelief, another may see the plot following Walker's shooting as the projected fantasy of a dying man (among others). *Pale Rider* displays its metaphysicality more readily, with The Stranger (Clint Eastwood) acting as scourge to the townsfolk of the aptly named "Hell".

James J. Clauss deconstructs the mythic elements of Ford's western in his essay 'Descent into Hell,' which details the alignment to Greek tragedy, in particular the structuring form of *katabasis*, or descent (into hell).³³⁷ Not only does *Dead Man's Shoes* share the revenge theme, with Richard echoing the character of Ethan (John Wayne), but the descent motif is continued in Meadows' film with Sonny as a figurative King of the Underworld. As a contemporary Hades, Sonny rules the 'underworld' realm of the small time criminal, with his club substituting the subterranean environs of hell. Richard's travels into this arena mark a moral descent, a downwards movement from his elevated position as a decorated soldier to a vengeful murderer, moving among the depths of the lower social strata. This trope of movement is central to the revenge narrative. Indeed, Chibnall describes the liminal mobility of Jack Carter, stating: "like the Jacobean figure of the malcontent, Carter is a socially marginal character, a displaced person, his social and geographical mobility suggested by the train journey he takes".³³⁸

Richard's movement from without to within the location of his brother's death and the habitat of those he holds responsible echoes Carter's journey from the South to the North and it is this notion of the return which resonates most clearly in both texts. The cosmopolitanism of Carter, displayed through his fashionable dress and his insistence on drinking from "a straight glass", contrasts with Richard's utilitarian dress and association

³³⁷ James J. Clauss, 'Descent into Hell: Mythic Paradigms in *The Searchers*,' *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 27, no.3 (Fall 1999), pp. 2-17.

³³⁸ Chibnall, *Get Carter*, p. 49.

with the land rather than the city, as shown through his field craft. However, both are armed with skills learned from without the place of their birth and both are thus implicated in a complex pattern of guilt, burdened by the shame of those who have escaped their working-class origins. The avenger's journey then is coloured by the emotional dynamics of the return, which overlay the purpose of vengeance.

However, while a connection between the two films can be easily read, Meadows and the film's co-writer and leading actor Paddy Considine were careful not to follow the earlier film too closely. Meadows makes this clear when he explains how one location was rejected because of its visual similarity to the mining shoreline of Carter's death scene, stating "the original concept for the final scene, for instance, was in a quarry, but as we were driving there Paddy said it reminded him of *Get Carter* so we vetoed it".³³⁹

Dead Man's Shoes can be seen as a creative reaction against the filmmaker's negative experience with *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands*, an attempt to creatively 'erase' the aberrant film which he later disassociated himself from due to his lack of editorial control. Meadows refers to this motivation during his talk delivered at the *Brief Encounters Film Festival* held in Bristol in November 2004:

I think *Dead Man's Shoes* is what *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* was meant to be. If you look at the very, very barebones of the story, it's the story of a stranger that comes back to town to confront a situation ... I almost push that film (*Midlands*) out of what I think of the films I've made and put *Dead Man's Shoes* in its place as kind of my first feature.³⁴⁰

However, while both films share a keen acuity to the codes and conventions of genre (*Midlands* adopting the conceit of a Western and *Dead Man's Shoes* that of a revenge-thriller), the above quote suggests that - for the director - the latter film is the superior twin of the earlier 'disappointing child,' and thus meets the expectations of what Meadows meant the 'elder sibling' to be. This contextual notion of expectation, disappointment and the quest for atonement resonates within the very narrative of *Dead*

³³⁹ Edward Lawrenson, 'Getting Personal', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 14, no. 10 (October 2004), p. 36.

³⁴⁰ *Brief Encounters Film Festival* Event Transcript (2004) available at www.shanemeadows.co.uk; accessed 1 August 2009.

Man's Shoes, which explores troubled fraternal and quasi-paternal relationships. The idea of expectation also points to the role of genre and the marketing of films introduced at the beginning of this section.

“One Down”: Sequential Murder and Generic Horror

In his discussion of a select number of films which share a narrative of serial murder, Martin Rubin argues that films such as *The Honeymoon Killers* (1970), *Badlands* (1973), *The Boys Next Door* (1985), *Murder One* (1988) and *Henry; Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1990) exhibit a generic pluralism which indicates their taxonomical trickiness. Rubin describes the films as exhibiting almost parasitic or at least symbiotic qualities of mutability when he writes that “they incompletely fill gaps left by moribund or decadent genres, and they lodge in the margins of other, more vital genres. They are by no means outside the genre: *instead they hover around a wide range of generic contexts without settling comfortably into any of them*”.³⁴¹

While Rubin does not explicitly refer to liminality, the above statement evokes the liminal through its adjective descriptor of ‘hovering’. This is augmented by the suggestion of volatility, where Rubin, drawing upon the work of the literary theorists Budick and Iser and their construct of aesthetic negativity, describes how the abovementioned films are “exercises in instability”.³⁴² To this, Rubin adds obfuscation where he describes the main focus of his essay, *The Honeymoon Killers* as “an exercise in purposeful confusion”.³⁴³ *Dead Man's Shoes* can be described in similar terms as its generic mix is equally ontologically slippery. It could be expressed, in the words of Robin Wood as an “incomprehensible text”.³⁴⁴

This is succinctly expressed via the architectural landmark of Riber Castle, used as a location in the film. Commissioned in 1862 by Smedley, the building's mix of styles

³⁴¹ Martin Rubin, ‘The Grayness of Darkness: *The Honeymoon Killers* and its Impact on Psychokiller Cinema’, in Christopher Sharrett (ed.) *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), p. 53. Emphasis added.

³⁴² Ibid, p. 54.

³⁴³ Ibid, p. 50.

³⁴⁴ Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989).

drew the following remark, attributed to the poet Sir John Summerson: “had Smedley employed a professional he would have got a house unmistakably, however crudely, shaped with style – Italian Gothic or baronial. As it was, he produced an object of *indecipherable bastardry* – a true monster”.³⁴⁵

Looming over the small town which makes up the primary diegesis of *Dead Man’s Shoes*, Riber Castle is a visual metaphor for a range of male follies: the actual folly of Riber Castle; the folly of its architect’s ambition, and metaphorically through the follies of the characters in the film. The object of the Castle accents the Gothic ambience of the film, portentously heralding a future tragedy. It is the castle of Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, with Richard as ‘the Monster’.³⁴⁶ Indeed, the film itself, with its amalgam of generic conventions can be read as a monstrous hybrid of cannibalized material gathered from textual ‘corpses’. Indecipherable bastardry suggests an unreadable mongrel entity, yet the generic roots of *Dead Man’s Shoes* can be teased out.

Meadows described *This is England* as his “first period film”.³⁴⁷ While *TwentyFourSeven* and *Dead Man’s Shoes* employ dual time-frames, *This is England* is, to date, the only Meadows film to be wholly set in the past. The title sequence involves a montage of mediated images from 1983 which represent different aspects of British culture and news events, culminating in footage of the Falklands Conflict. Images of shivering youthful Argentinean soldiers are inter-cut with triumphant islanders raising Union Jacks and impassive professional British soldiers carting enemy corpses with cigarettes hanging from their mouths. The particular way in which these images are put together does not signify a nationalist triumph, indeed the footage of the then prime-minister Margaret Thatcher riding aloft a tank, her lacquered coiffure helmet-like against the razing winds of the Falkland plains can be read as an ironic reference to Boudicca in her chariot, the favoured image of Britain’s imperialist history (Figs.11 and 12.)

³⁴⁵ Ross King, ‘In Need of Modernization?’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 March 2005. Available at www.telegraph.co.uk/property; accessed 13 September 2009. Emphasis added.

³⁴⁶ This construction of monstrosity is discussed at greater length in the last part of this section, v: The *Doppelgänger* and the Monster.

³⁴⁷ Shane Meadows, www.film.guardian.co.uk, Saturday April 21, 2007, p.1

The film interrogates British heritage, the problems of imperialism and the fall-out of post-colonialism from the three major factors of identity: class, race and gender. Using the visual power of costume and the sonic power of music, the film draws upon the devices of the costume and the heritage genres, more usually aligned to the landed-classes, re-interpreting them from a working-class perspective. Thus, in protean guise, Meadows forces a generic mutation in his film, adapting generic devices from texts usually associated with a different class and applying them to a text concerned with working-class characters.

The concept of liminality is particularly apt in a discussion of identity as represented in Meadows' work. The unitary identity of white, argued for by the character Combo in *This is England* is undermined by the 'liminal' racial identity of the actor Stephen Graham who plays him. Although the character was originally written as white, Graham explained in an interview that "I'm mixed race myself, and we made Combo that way in the film".³⁴⁸ That the actor is from ethnically mixed heritage is a serendipitous layering which enriches the original white character. It brings a greater complexity to the character's emotional motivation and his ambivalence towards Milky with his physically obvious black ancestry. In a confusion of contradiction, he both desires to be and is repulsed by that which he both is (secretly) and is not (he is not visually 'black' and does not enjoy the rich Jamaican family culture of Milky). His nick-name suggests cohesion, but like Milky's nick-name it is intentionally antonymic. However, that Combo's genetic make-up is not known in the text, that everyone assumes he is 'white' undermines the notion of 'racial purity' itself, unveiling it for the nonsense it is.

Via a representation of skinhead culture as experienced and performed by a small group of people, the film interrogates appropriation of cultural symbols and phenomena by that group. Music from Jamaica forms the sonic scene, incorporating the sounds produced from a former colony into a film which concerns the issues and problems of racial integration. The ambivalence that Combo feels towards Milky is more generally evinced

³⁴⁸ Stephen Graham, Interviewed by David Jones, 'This is England', *BBCMovies*, 23rd April 2007. Available at www.bbcfilms/2007/04/23; accessed 01 August 2010.

in the anachronistic relationship between some elements of Skinhead culture and the music which forms the cultural sonic scene. The reggae, rock-steady and most significantly, ska rhythms of black Jamaica, were appropriated by white, working-class British youth as the accompanying sound track to their sub-culture, much in the same way Teddy Boys adopted American rock and roll in the 1950s. The racist and neo-Nazi off-shoots of Skinhead culture were faced with the problem of loving the music produced by a racial group they professed to hate, engendering the same dynamic of attraction and repulsion felt by Combo towards Milky.

This was partially ‘overcome’ and disavowed through the creation of Oi music, a particularly aggressive form of ska performed by white musicians. This enabled a racist disassociation from the cultural roots of the music while still exploiting them. This repeats the earlier ‘whitening’ of the rhythm and blues music of black American musicians, repackaging it for white performers to deliver it to a white audience. It also repeats the exploitative ruses of colonialism and the imperialist prerogative of theft disguised as appropriation. Eventually packaged as a construct native to the imperial power, such moves represent the most violent form of generic hybridity. The residue of the violence of Oi music is evidenced in the pre-release publicity brochure of *This is England*, when the film had the working title *Oi This is England*. Here Oi is combined with part of the title from the essay by Dick Hebdige *This is England! And They Don’t Live Here*.³⁴⁹ This was published in the Nick Knight ‘bible’ of skinhead culture which also provided the images for the publicity brochure: *Oi! This is England*.³⁵⁰ Hebdige’s description of a teenage skin ‘Harry the Duck’ presents him and, by extension, skinheads in general, as liminal entities which, like Kristeva’s evaluation of the abject, resist ontological certainty. Hebdige writes:

He is the social worker’s nightmare. He *doesn’t correspond to any of the multiple fictions* produced over the last hundred years or so by a long line of social reformers and slum missionaries of what the working-class should be. He isn’t

³⁴⁹ Dick Hebdige, ‘This is England! And They Don’t Live Here’, in Nick Knight, *Skinhead* (London: Omnibus, 1982), pp. 26-35.

³⁵⁰ Nick Knight, *Skinhead* (London: Omnibus, 1982), pp. 26-35.
Oi! This is England publicity brochure.

grateful or contrite. He isn't even heroically rebellious. Instead he is as *incomprehensible* as the blurred tattoos which decorate his skinny arms.... He is himself *unreadable* and hence ungovernable – a walking accusation leveled at the sympathetic educated sensibility which seeks simultaneously to understand him and to set him on the straight and narrow. He is that most traditional of stereotypes – the working-class gone bad. He is the Lout, the Urchin, the Wild Boy who haunts the pages of Charles Dickens and a thousand official reports on Juvenile Delinquency. He is *the point where Bill Sykes meets the Artful Dodger*.³⁵¹

Hebdige's evocation of Sykes points to the continued abuse of women by men, especially as it is represented in British culture. Nancy's misplaced, yet continued faithfulness in Sykes is poignantly vocalized through the song, 'As Long as He Needs Me', of the musical *Oliver*:

Who else would love him still
When they've been used so ill?
He knows I always will
As long as he needs me.³⁵²

Such a fatalistic adherence to a violent partner is repeated through the character Kath in *Nil By Mouth* and the song 'Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man' from the musical *Show Boat*, which attends her:

Fish got to swim, birds got to fly,
I got to love one man till I die,
I got to love one man till I die. Can't
help lovin' dat man of mine. Tell me
he's lazy, tell me he's slow, Tell me
I'm crazy (maybe I know). Can't help
lovin' dat man of mine.³⁵³

As Amy Sargeant suggests, the way in which women fatalistically embrace their lot in films such as *Nil By Mouth* "seem to reinvest the mythology of pathetic/heroic shit-

³⁵¹ Hebdige, 'This is England!', p. 27. Emphasis added.

³⁵² *Oliver*, Music and Lyrics by Lionel Bart. First produced 1960.

³⁵³ *Show Boat*, Music by Jerome Kern, Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein. First produced 1827.

putting-up-with and put-upon working-class women”, with Dickens’ Nancy an enduring role model for such behaviour.³⁵⁴

In Meadows’ work such continuations of the beating man/beaten woman dynamic is repeated through Jumbo and Ruby in *Small Time* and Sonny and Patti in *Dead Man’s Shoes*. The twinning of Sykes with the Artful Dodger is a decidedly homosocial encounter, which is suggestive of the slide of the archetype of the youthful trickster, Dodger, into the mature monster of Sykes.

Hebdige’s recognition of the Dickensian aspects of disaffected youth of Britain of the 1970s also recognizes the cross-class representation which occurs in texts most commonly associated with another class in terms of consumption. Working-class characters do exist in texts normally associated with the heritage film, but they tend to be in the background, or in roles which depict their struggle to move outside their class. While Dickens’ work represents different levels of the British class system in the Victorian era and Meadows’ work examines a much more circumscribed group, Meadows could be considered as a contemporary equivalent of Dickens; both employ comedy and violence, both document the exploits of highly drawn characters, often with a sense of theatricality and both episodically express heavy sentimentality alongside nuanced understanding of human behaviour. Shaun could be considered a present day Pip in the *bildungsroman* conceit of the film, with Combo as Magwitch through his exploitation of his naïve neophyte. The employment of such a range of genres and styles in Meadows’ work; the Jacobean tragedy; the gangster film; the *bildungsroman* or coming of age drama; the domestic drama or the heritage film, signals both the use of generic conceits, and a rejection of any holistic incorporation of a single genre into the text, opting instead for a series of hybrids which operate as liminal links between proceeding artistic forms.

Rather than the frock coats of Victorian England, *This is England* depicts the particular costume of a sub-culture of the recent past. The costume of the skinhead hybridizes

³⁵⁴ Amy Sargeant, *British Cinema: A Critical History* (London: BFI, 2005), p. 339.

elements of utilitarian clothing into a precise rendering of attire which represents membership of that sub-culture while rejecting membership of the general community. Such adaptations can be compared to the carnivalesque employment of costume discussed earlier where clothes are periodically employed to upset categories of class and gender through performative play. In contrast, the costume of the skinhead reinforces notions of class identity through its purposeful adoption of items designed for utility such as the Dr Marten boot or the donkey jacket, adapting them as expressions of identity. Shaun's attempt at aligning himself with the skinhead culture through consumerism is problematized in *This is England*. In a scene at the local shop, This 'N' That, the traditional fairytale of Cinderella is playfully evoked where Shaun's feet prove to be too small for the boots he covets. Instead he is convinced by his mother and the shopkeeper to accept the children's boots which they disassemble as being "from London" in order to invest them with a cosmopolitan allure.

This scene is yet another example of the Meadowsian working-class unfit body, where being too small, rather than too fat instigates problems of self-identity. Adaptation of clothes worn in the duties of employment by those denied opportunities to such employment demonstrates a protean response to the circumstances of unemployment. Shaven heads and Dr Marten boots top and tail the working-class (or under-class) body which stands adorned as an aggressive reminder of the now distant employment which once defined it. Here, costume *is* drama.

Meadows' employment of genre hybridizes different elements from different forms whether they originate from British or American traditions. Such deployment results in an ontological problem, being that the work cannot be adequately classified as simply one thing or another. It is necessary to recognize the generic liminality of Meadows' work and the various influences within it which are at tension with a reductive positioning of his work as simply social realist. Victor Turner states that "in liminality people 'play' with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar events".³⁵⁵ This summary of liminal play

³⁵⁵ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 27.

perfectly describes Meadows' approach to genre. Hybridity extends into symbolic hybridity via heteromorphic figures such as Proteus, the etymological father of Protean Man. The following section discusses his inverse, the mythical Minotaur.

The Minotaur

The inverse of the figure of Proteus, the fish-tailed man, is the bull-headed Minotaur of the labyrinth. This construct can be useful when considering the beast as man/man as beast masculine dynamic. One of the questions to consider when looking at Meadows' work is whether the behaviour of the characters springs from innate personality traits or is a result of social contexts. The nature/nurture dialectic is embodied via the two figures of the Protean Man and the Minotaur. With his ability to adapt to the conditions in which he finds himself, the Protean Man illustrates the latter model; he changes to fit the circumstances of his situation. Conversely, the Minotaur represents a biologically determined construction, with his bestiality and humanity bound within genetic codes. It pre-figures the monstrosity which emerges through action which is discussed in the final section of this chapter: The *Doppelgänger* and the Monster.

An important question to consider is whether Meadowsian characters are protean or Minotaur-like. The liminal subtleties of Meadows' work allow for ambivalence, where some men seem to become evil, or at least do evil things through reaction, such as Richard of *Dead Man's Shoes*. Others like Mick (Johnny Harris) of *This is England '88* are presented without an explanatory back-story, reasons which may explain and thus excuse their abhorrent behaviour. This tactic of explaining and thus mitigating men's bad behaviour has been given increasing representation in film. Films such as *Nil by Mouth* present a monstrous masculinity which is explained as the natural results of cycles of abuse where men are brutalized by their fathers and visit such brutalities on their wives. Sons and daughters are therefore taught gendered expectations of behaviour which involve inflicting and receiving violence.

The cyclical nature of abuse is one of the manifestations of the labyrinth in Meadows' work. In the end, all of Meadows' characters are trapped in a labyrinth, fostered from

socio-political walls. Some characters, such as Meggy and Banjo, play out their extended youth, eschewing the usual routes of adulthood in favour of a permanent homosocial domesticity. The notion of the under-class as being stuck within the vortex of an ever-declining dynamic is visually represented via the concentricity of the labyrinth and its inescapable walls.

The concept of the labyrinth has been identified in the work of another cultural figure connected to Nottingham, Alan Sillitoe, script writer for the adaptation of his own novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and author of the short story which was made into the film *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. Sillitoe is an important figure of working-class culture with his work seen as key texts of the social realist canon. Sillitoe's foregrounded working-class roots, his use of autobiographical inspiration and his close ties with Nottingham - a city with which Meadows is also closely related - invokes an associative relationship between the writer and the filmmaker. As well as gender and class, the most important connection between the two men is spatial. This makes a discussion around space and the Minotaur particularly relevant.

In their article 'Mapping the Modern City: Alan Sillitoe's Nottingham Novels', Stephen Daniels and Simon Ryecroft discuss the ways in which Sillitoe describes the city of Nottingham as labyrinthine. They argue that Sillitoe's work was informed by the work of writers such as Victor Hugo and Daniel Defoe whose stories of vengeance utilized the spaces and places of their locations to create maze-like topographies, which supported and informed the spiraling plotlines.³⁵⁶ Through attention to Sillitoe's specialist knowledge of maps and the influence of cartography on his work, Daniels and Ryecroft's study is a reconsideration of the usual understanding of Sillitoe's writing in much the same way that this study aims to revise the conventional reading of Meadows. Meadows could be exchanged for Sillitoe when they write "Sillitoe is concerned accurately to document local characters and their environment".³⁵⁷ They argue that Sillitoe "cannot simply be grouped with consciously English, realist contemporaries ... In its continental

³⁵⁶ Stephen Daniels and Simon Ryecroft, 'Mapping the Modern City: Alan Sillitoe's Nottingham Novels', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1993), pp. 460-480.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

allusions ... and mythological register, Sillitoe's writing may be situated in an earlier modernist tradition".³⁵⁸ The modernism of European literature and transformative architecture in Sillitoe's work cannot be evinced in Meadows' work which does not engage with the anxieties of modernism based upon change. Rather, themes of stasis and decline seem to be more detectable. However, what is remarkable about the two East Midlanders is the split between Sillitoe and his contemporaries and the differences between Meadows and other filmmakers with whom he is critically clustered; both men seem to be doing something different to their contemporaries. These differences are partially predicated on their drawing upon non-British influences. As discussed earlier, in the case of Meadows, continental influences such as Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups* are detectable; however European influences are joined by the American flavours of generic Hollywood.

Labyrinthine Liminality

While *Dead Man's Shoes* is not set in Nottingham, but in the unnamed smaller Derbyshire town of Matlock, the common link to labyrinthine worlds cannot be missed. Richard's soldiering career, one assumes because of the film's temporal setting, would have been carried out in Northern Ireland. Here the streets of Derry or Belfast form an urban, circuitous realm. Indeed, Richard as the metaphorical Minotaur, the half-bull, half-man monstrous son of Pasiphaë, is a liminal hybrid, hovering between the human and the animal world, performing his monstrosity through the adoption of a mask.

Daniels and Rycroft provide a caveat to Sillitoe's alignment with modernism based upon gender. They argue that, unlike much Modernist literature, Sillitoe's writing was "comprehensively masculine, structured almost entirely on the expression or repression of male desire" and that the belligerent misogyny of his leading male characters provides the "gritty realism" upon which a comparison with his contemporary writers can be legitimately placed.³⁵⁹ Such a partisan approach to gender, they argue, is predicated upon space because "the prevailing mythology of modern Nottingham is feminine", describing

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 468.

how the largely feminine workforce, aligned with the civic figure of the ‘Queen of the Midlands’ was disavowed by Sillitoe who sought to masculinize the working and public spaces of the city. What better re-masculating figure to populate the maze-like streets than the bull-headed Minotaur? Meadows’ work differs from Sillitoe’s in this aggressively represented misogyny. Daniels and Rycroft explain Sillitoe’s approach through the rationalization of the engendering of female energetic visibility remarking that “the very belligerence of Sillitoe’s heroes, and the portrayal of Nottingham as a sexual battleground does at least make his women characters a force to be reckoned with”.³⁶⁰

In contrast, Meadows’ female characters are generally marginal, suggesting if not the same aggressive misogyny of Sillitoe, at least a subtle form of sexism through marginalization, and an unquestioning acquiescence of poor treatment by men. Prior to *This is England* ‘86 which saw Lol’s appropriation of power through direct action, female agency is not so readily present in Meadows’ work. As previously argued, women are most frequently the objects of exchange between homosocial groups or the normative figure which forms the apex of Sedgwick’s triangle of desire. Rather than express gender-based battles, Meadows’ work revolves around the homosocial and homoerotic aspects of “the expression or repression of male desire.”³⁶¹

That the labyrinth represents entrapment is quite clear; it does this in spatial and metaphorical terms. In *Smalltime*, Kate is Ariadne to Malc’s Theseus, leading him out of the closed-off realm of Sneinton via the quotidian promise of a doughnut stall and family life at the coast. This code of escape is, however, compromised by the concomitant presence of Mad Terry, the getaway driver whom Malc convinces to join him and Kate in their ‘get-away’ to the seaside. They may escape the labyrinth of Sneinton and the gangster milieu, yet through this action, Malc effectively takes the Minotaur - in the guise of Mad Terry - with him and thus sustains the homosocial link.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

As stated previously, all of Meadows' work discussed in this study can be described as romances. The least important romances are those which involve heterosexual relationships such as Kate and Malc of *Smalltime*; Jo and Darcy of *TwentyFourSeven*; Ladine and Morell of *Romeo Brass* and Shaun and Smell of *This is England*. Even *Dead Man's Shoes* presents one via the character of Mark, who survives Richard's murderous endeavours and his wife Jo. However, it is the male relationships which are the most urgent and animated. While the heterosexual relationships are largely doomed to failure, homosocial love persists.

This result has particular implications for the consideration of Meadows alongside the traditions of British social realism which is contingent upon the perceived crisis of masculinity brought about through the collapse of traditional industries and the breakdown of working-class communities based around such industries. Meadows' characters exist in a timeframe which comes after such changes, born into communities already altered from the industrial paradigm. In Meadows' work, the recuperation of (male) community is achieved via the homosocial, which is dependent upon the dynamics of desire as identified by Sedgwick; a shift which may signal an erosion of heterosexual structures.

As well as reversing the man and beast combination of Proteus, the Minotaur is also the physical inverse of the centaur reversing the bestial and human parts. That both figures can be detected in Meadows' work suggest that the dialectic is not resolved, rather there exists liminal resonances of the two. The following discussion will examine how the figure of the centaur is utilized in the work of Meadows, exploring the pedagogic aspects of the heteromorphic entity.

III. The Teacher and the Centaur: Initiation, Pedagogy and the Homosocial Tradition

Man is composed of two natures, the *ideal* and the *physical*, the one of which he is always trying to keep a secret from the other. He is the *Centaur not fabulous*.³⁶²

Morell: "Have you seen the Rocky films?"

Romeo: "Course."

Morell: "There [*sic*] some of the greatest films ever been made. They should be studied really for what they are. There's somthing [*sic*] sentimental in everyone of them to learn from."³⁶³

The quotation by Hazlitt suggests an unacknowledged dichotomy in man between the perfect and the flawed, with each branch hiding itself from the other. Borrowing from Edward Young's epistolary text of 1846 *The Centaur Not Fabulous*, Hazlitt's statement is useful in a consideration of Meadows' work where characters are often at pains to hide part of their nature from others, or indeed themselves.³⁶⁴ The motif of the centaur as a model of masculinity has undergone many cultural changes, whether represented as the model of strength and knowledge; the debauched, drunken and bestial; or a manifestation of homoerotic sensuality. While the previous section discussed the figure of the Minotaur, a similarly culturally mutable figure of heteromorphic proportions, the following discussion uses the inverse figure of the bull-headed man, drawing upon the allusions of the horse-bodied centaur figure.

The centaur is a liminal construct, a hybrid of the human and the equine, yet through its very bifurcation it is neither one nor the other. Rather, like the Minotaur, it resides between the state of man or beast. In her paper on the figure of the centaur in the Christian allegory of St Jerome, Patricia Cox Miller states that as: "a hybrid figure, the centaur carries both idyllic and barbaric connotations and functions as a marker of a

³⁶² A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover (eds), *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt* (London: Dent and Co, 1904), p. 228. Emphasis added.

³⁶³ Fraser and Meadows, *A Room for Romeo Brass*, p. 64.

³⁶⁴ Edward Young, *Centaur Not Fabulous: In Five Letters to a Friend* (Philadelphia: G. B. Zieber and Company, 1846).

‘wildness’ that was fundamental to ascetic identity”.³⁶⁵ As king of the centaurs, Chiron the instructor is a useful cipher for a discussion around the education of young men by a mentor figure. According to Greek myth, Chiron taught hero figures such as Achilles, Aeneas, Heracles and Jason, initiating them into the ways of adult masculinity via instruction, particularly hunting and fighting. These two activities are particularly prevalent in the work of Meadows and occur at instances of homosocial instruction, often between an older man and his younger pupil. Such a dynamic is the mainstay of many generic films, often found in the sports drama, where traditions of instruction in the particular sport and, more importantly how to become a ‘man’ are told.

This section examines the way in which such traditions are manifested in the work of Meadows, relating them to the social context of working-class masculinity. Building on the previous section, it suggests the way in which Meadows’ work adopts factors of the sports genre and subverts them, creating a liminal realism which exists between the upbeat dynamic of Hollywood and the downbeat pessimism of British social realism. It uses the liminal archetype of the centaur to approach the pedagogic aspects of Meadows’ work, discussing the various ways in which the recurring presentations of teacher and pupil scenarios are problematized, and myths of male knowledge exchange unravelled. The teacher characters are primarily paternal figures, who initiate the young man into masculine knowledge and while some of these initiations are seemingly benign, other takes on much more worrying aspects. This section also examines the escalation of violence and fear in the narratives of teaching, suggesting how the homosocial extends to the homoerotic through a pedagogic schema.

Homosocial Space

While films such as *Smalltime* and *TwentyFourSeven* begin with voice-overs that seem to include the general community through their use of the gender-neutral third person plural, this is merely a short-lived suggestion of gender inclusiveness. By far the greater emphasis of Meadowsian texts is that given to gender-specific places and spaces

³⁶⁵ Patricia Cox Miller, ‘Jerome’s Centaur: A Hyper-Icon of the Desert’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Summer 1996), Abstract, pp. 209-233.

occupied by groups of young men. General public spaces are transmuted into specific places of homosocial activity, whether the exterior places of nature or urbanity, or the interior spaces of a shared van, flat or even the culturally loaded exemplars of homosocial activity, such as the gymnasium and the boxing ring. These places are sites of homosocial exchange where dialectical movements between the teacher and the pupil, between one peer and another, between the initiate and those already within the club take place, shaped by tradition and ritualized gestures.

The second epitaph quotation at the head of this section indicates the sensitivity of Meadows' work to the importance of media as a route to male identity. It may be read ironically, with Morell's suggestion that the *Rocky* films are worthy of academic study seen as the declarations of a misguided fool. It could also be a pointed joke at the expense of academic studies of popular film texts. However, ironic or not, such a statement introduces the theme of cultural heroes as represented in popular culture, with Sylvester Stallone as Rocky Balboa, alongside the didactic properties of generic texts such as the 'rags-to-riches' or 'triumph over diversity' contemporary fairytale of the sports drama. The inclusion of an image of Stallone as Rocky through a poster pinned to the wall of the 101 Boxing Club sutures this mediated construct of the sporting hero into Meadows' work. It is a pointed reminder of the generic roots of the film which draws upon Hollywood narratives, generating a liminal intertextuality. It is not a photograph of a famous British boxer which hangs above the heads of the boys in training, but an image from a fictional film.

The activity of boxing and the unique qualities of its arena, the boxing ring, are rich sites for a discussion of liminality and homosocial activity. Victor Turner states that for the "electronically advanced" society in which we live, film is the "dominant mode of public liminality" and that the act of public reflexivity involves the placing of a frame around the area to be inspected.³⁶⁶ While the camera and the screen literally do that, the boxing ring itself furthers the idea, creating a frame within a frame where inspection, reflection

³⁶⁶ Victor Turner, 'Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4 (December 1979), p. 466.

and, most importantly, creation of representations of gender and class can occur. Moreover, the figure of the fighter is in itself liminal, oscillating between control and violence, being simultaneously socially reviled and revered.

Reverence for the activity of fighting between individual men is determined within histo-cultural formulations such as the mediaeval chivalric code. In *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, Richard W. Kaeuper describes the connection between violence and male bonding as expressed in romantic literature of or about the medieval period. Here the “pattern of truly savage fighting, respect, reconciliation, and great affection between two knights is repeated often enough at least to raise questions about a process of bonding that would be a powerful element understanding the primacy of prowess in chivalry”.³⁶⁷

Here Kaeuper describes the homoerotic charge of the fight, with a fighter’s desire to win subsumed within a desire for contact with an opponent who can equal or even best him. The chivalric codes of courtly love involve a female presence, and this unobtainable female love object combined with the desire for the male opponent evokes the homoerotic triangle of desire described by Sedgwick. Considerations of this element are important in discussions of male-to-male fighting within a competitive, rather than a combative environment. While contemporary representations of homosocial contest is far removed from the histo-cultural context of medieval knights and even the gentleman fighter figure of the eighteenth century, there are residual traces of practices gone by which still persist in the sports arena.

Concepts such as fair play and gentlemanly conduct still persist in discourses on sport. For example, the moniker given to one character of *TwentyFourSeven* can be seen as a nod to the chivalric tradition; the name ‘Knighty’ plays with the idea of knightly behaviour. However, in Meadows’ film, the name proves antonymic as Knighty demonstrates behaviours during his fight which disrupt the rules of boxing, kicking and

³⁶⁷ Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 216.

biting his opponent when his anger at losing the fight erupts. The discipline that Darcy had tried to instill in the young men of the club is thus shown to fail at its testing. Together with other failings such as Fagash's intoxication and Darcy's violent rage, the concept of the working-class hero is unraveled in this film. Alongside football, boxing dominates as the working-class sport, not only in terms of consumption, but also as a route for an individual from the working-class to achieve success if they possess the necessary *physical* skills required. As previously argued, the working-class male body is decidedly unfit in the work of Meadows, even when strategies to transform them are employed, such as Darcy's training of the young men in *TwentyFourSeven*.

In his article on the subject of boxing and the construction of the white, working-class hero, James Rhodes describes how a high number of boxing films:

proffer tales of the boxer as a redemptive figure, self-made men who embody historically prized masculine values of strength, toughness, and determination. (And that) it is no coincidence that all of the characters in these films ... are white, male, "working-class" fighters.³⁶⁸

Meadows' *TwentyFourSeven* is highly conscious of such a construction of the white, male, working-class fighter, and utilizes the promise of redemption offered through such readings of the fighter in order to discredit them. The creation of the 101 Boxing Club in *TwentyFourSeven* affords a site-specific opportunity for the continuation of male traditions based through a pedagogic model. Here Darcy as teacher resolves the initial enmity between the two groups of men through teaching them skills of boxing and field craft, bringing them together in one homosocial unit. Alternating between the traits of Tim and Geoff, Darcy is an example of a liminal being, albeit in a realist, rather than a fantastical setting and his mentoring role evokes the mythological figure of Chiron the centaur. This hybrid character was identified by Turner as a key figure in the instruction of the young men of royal households, assisting in their initiation into manhood, a move which Turner identified as liminal.³⁶⁹ Darcy's hybridity is not manifested physically, as

³⁶⁸ James Rhodes, 'Fighting for "Respectability": Media Representations of the White, "Working-Class" Male Boxing "Hero"', p. 351.

³⁶⁹ Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, p. 253.

in the man/horse combination of the centaur (although Hoskin's square and hirsute frame could allude to this), but in the dual aspect of his personality divided between emotional intelligence, tenderness and humour on one side and naked rage and violence on the other. Importantly however, the figure of Chiron embodied representations of both "outsiderhood and liminality."³⁷⁰

Such an association is important when considering the nature of Darcy and his marginal relationship to the other characters. He is an outsider who cannot enjoy the same intimate relationships as those about him enjoy: his is the celibate life of the classical pedagogue. Unattainable or absent romantic love is common to the other outsider characters which inhabit Meadows' films. These men also act as mentors and teachers to younger charges, initiating them into ways of adult masculinity, whether Morell teaching Romeo hand-to-hand fighting skills, Anthony's memories of Richard teaching him football, or Combo's awakening of Shaun's political awareness, albeit in a deeply flawed and racist form. Their relationship with the younger men or boys takes place in the absence of a romantic adult relationship. Darcy, Morell and Combo are all shown to fail in their attempts to form relationships with women. This failure eventually extends to their relationships with their young 'pupils', yet before this collapse, their relationships take on the emotional intensity most commonly associated with romantic love.

Sedgwick's erotic triangle can be overlaid this formal arrangement of teacher, pupil and the notional female love object. That this ostensible object of love is so easily relinquished, while the pupil is so thoroughly pursued by the self-appointed mentor, is illustrative of the central dynamic of homosocial endeavor; here the true object of desire is not the female object but the pupil. The female character thus functions as a normative figure which blurs the contours of the homoerotically-charged homosociality which specifically exists between teacher and pupil and can be read more generally in the wider relations between other male characters.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

Such blurring becomes unnecessary during specific instances of pure homosocial convergences. Such a convergence is exemplified by the sport of boxing. Joyce Carol Oates' treatise on pugilism can be read as a synthesis of Sedgwick's erotic triangle within the boxing arena. Oates makes explicit the homoerotic potential of the sport and its displacement of the feminine love object by the eroticized opponent when she writes:

No sport is more physical, more direct, than boxing. No sport appears more powerfully homoerotic: the confrontation in the ring – the disrobing – the sweaty heated combat that is part dance, courtship, coupling – the frequent urgent pursuit by one boxer of the other in the fight's natural and violent movement towards the “knockout”: surely boxing derives much of its appeal from this mimicry of a species of erotic love in which one man overcomes the other in an exhibition of superior strength and will. The heralded celibacy of the fighter-in-training is very much part of boxing lore: instead of focusing his energies and fantasies upon a woman the boxer focuses them upon an opponent. Where Woman has been, Opponent must be.³⁷¹

The male-to-male intimacy suggested by Oates has a corollary in the other physical performance in the film: ballroom dancing. There is an affinity between the two activities which proves accordant with the film's mirroring/oppositional dynamic. The parallels between both activities are overt; both involve physical prowess and skill, with a set of rules which control amateur activity or competitive sport. The space in which both take place is akin, with boundaries demarking that space, whether the square of a boxing ring or a dance floor. Both involve physical proximity, a coming together of flesh upon flesh in close embrace, whether to halt blows or to create a hold and a fluidity and grace of movement necessary for mastery. However, *TwentyFourSeven* plays with the notions of boxing and dancing, where the associative romance of dancing is undermined.

Partnered dancing for Darcy is familial and dutiful; he takes his Aunt Iris to dances, but there is no romantic partner who he can embrace in the intimacy of movement. His lone performance in front of a mirror is anticipatory of an imagined event, the securing of a date with the shop-girl Jo. Here he rehearses a number of chat up lines, employing

³⁷¹ Joyce Carol Oates, *On Boxing* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), p. 30.

different styles of language and voice which emphasizes the performative aspect of his assumed role of suitor. His performance which enacts the chivalric codes of courtship whilst anticipating an imagined date that never materializes is halted by his own violent eruption of anger, an eruption that both reflects on his 'failure' at heteronormative courtship practices and the bonds of the homosocial which are both restrictive and comforting.

Darcy's reflected and reflexive performance also operates intertextually in its references to other texts which employ the 'wearing' of different personas (rather than different clothes) by characters that engage with self inspection and creative fantasy, such as Travis Bickle of *Taxi Driver* and Tony (John Travolta) of *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) and where iconic performances with mirrors offer, different yet equally loaded notions of masculine display. Such affinities suggest a homosocial intertextuality, where traditions of masculine performances are culturally exchanged and developed. Reference to other films and characters maintains the fascination in troubled masculinity which dominates film culture. It continues a tradition by providing these key moments which can be copied and adapted becoming a transferable marker of culturally recognizable masculinity which fuels the very study suggested in Morell's evaluation of the *Rocky* films cited at the start of this section.

In Meadows' films, dance, like boxing discussed earlier, offers opportunities for the transfer of homosocial knowledge. A similar transfer is enacted through the move to rural space which is a recurring trope in Meadows' films. In the journey to rural space focus is placed on the learning of field crafts in ways that chime with the ceremonies and rituals of initiation observed by Victor Turner in his anthropological studies. Turner describes the initiation of young men into manhood as "separation (which) comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or the group from either an earlier fixed point in the social structure or from an established set of cultural conditions".³⁷² Excursions into rural spaces in Meadows' work are often described by the characters as "hunting"; these takes place in *This is England* and in an early scene of

³⁷² Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, p. 232.

TwentyFourSeven. However, as previously discussed, the description is ironic; the excursions are opportunities for dressing-up and play, instances which combine the carnivalesque and the abject, with mere ersatz performances of the hunter figure, rather than any affinity with the land and the pursuit of game. With neither the skills of the hunter nor the gamekeeper, the ‘hunting trips’ serve to foreground the liminality of the characters.

In contrast to this, the trip to Wales in *TwentyFourSeven* organized by Darcy, is designed as a genuine moment of homosocial bonding for the members of the 101 Boxing Club, which involves the transference of skills, such as sustaining oneself from the land. For example, Tim’s success at catching a trout through the poacher’s trick of ‘tickling’ (stroking its belly until it becomes entranced, enabling one to flip it out onto the bank) is achieved under Darcy’s tutelage. While the source of Darcy’s knowledge of this skill is not revealed in the film, the connection between Bob Hoskins, who plays the character, and the gypsy knowledge supplied by his Romani grandmother, which Hoskins used in his film *Raggedy Rawney*, may point to the mythology of gypsy self-sufficiency provided through their knowledge of exploiting the resources of the countryside.

Expeditions into the countryside in Meadows’ work resemble the journeys undertaken by boys undergoing tribal initiation rites which move them symbolically into manhood. Removed from the safety of the familial home, the initiates undergo a series of tests which often concern hunting and survival, just the sort of tasks Darcy, as mentor, tries to guide the lads through. This activity carried out away from the family home is liminal in that it represents the threshold between boyhood and manhood; the initiate leave home while in the former stage and return once the latter has been achieved. Such moves echo the Iron John movement begun by Robert Bly, which prescribed such practices, with the members banging drums in forests in an attempt to return to an ostensible ‘primitive essence’ of masculinity and to reverse or at least hold in check the perceived crises in the male gender occasioned by industrial modernity.³⁷³ As well as this retrospective approach

³⁷³ Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men*.

which sought to return to a male idyll, the potential of the associated activity of hunting has a contemporary resonance.

David D. Gilmore's anthropological study *Manhood in the Making* emphasizes the figurative potential of the hunt as it is represented in culture, remarking that it functions as "a metaphor for manhood because it demonstrates a tenacity of purpose that supposedly reflects the character traits needed for male success in a tough, competitive world".³⁷⁴ One has to take pause over such a view and question; in the schema of the hunt, just who or what is the prey? Such configurations semantically secure a hunter and object dialectic with presumably women, money, winning, and wealth etc collapsing into a homogenous prey object. One also has to ask what happens to those men who do not succeed in the hunt. Observation of Meadowsian men often supplies the answer: in *TwentyFourSeven* they shoot each other, rather than prey, with air rifles with the only product of their hunt a decaying rabbit corpse and in *This is England*, they smash up an abandoned building, rather than hunting something of sustenance. Hunting thus becomes opportunities for leisure which involves homosocial interaction, rather than a purposeful activity which would supply food for the family. The 'one for the pot' rationale for hunting or poaching thus slides into an opportunity for smoking pot.

However, Gilmore's "tenacity of purpose" suggests an ambition which is reflected in Darcy's hopes for the Club: the bringing together of the two rival factions of local young men into a homologous homosociality; the relinquishing of drugs; and public recognition of their and his success through beating the local competition the Staffordshire Terriers. The relevance of the Club to the local community is well demonstrated, it is resurrected from an earlier incarnation where Darcy and some of the lads' fathers used to train and thus represents both a renewal and a continuation of local traditions formed through paternally homosocial links. The sending of a photographer (a cameo from co-writer Paul Fraser) from the local paper to photograph the fighters and the published image and story engenders local and familial responses. These include the fathers' reminiscing about their own prowess, including Geoff's overt competitiveness with his son Tim, manifested

³⁷⁴ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*, p. 116.

through his mockery of his son's efforts. This particularly combative and condescending paternalism demonstrates that not all traditions and father-to-son lessons are positive ones. They can involve regressive tactics which pass on psychological damage, shoring up the labyrinthine walls of abuse.

The scene of the boxing match emphasizes identity geographically. Before each bout, each fighter is introduced in terms which emphasize their regional belonging, whether as a "home town boy" (Fagash and Knighty) or a "local boy" (Tim). The opposition, The Staffordshire Terriers Boxers, is a regiment team with a hyperbolic motto of 'death in the ring is the greatest honour'. Representing a more mature and better prepared opposition, their inclusion into the disciplined body of the armed forces indicates both a local and national identity, which incorporates the particularity of the Staffordshire regiment and the general corp(u)s of the British army. The lads' defeat is thus both a personal and a local shame, inflicted upon the bodies of the young men and psychically upon the collective identity and memory of the community. The decline, resurrection, and decline dynamic illustrates the generational trajectory of rise and fall of ambition, which follows both the narrative model of the boxing genre as discussed by Leger Grindon, the attempts at local improvement made futile and the history of the working-class itself.³⁷⁵ The loss of control of Fagash and Knighty in the ring proves the failure of Darcy's pedagogical endeavor. His teaching of pugilistic skills, psychological and physical discipline is undone via the very bodies of those he attempted to initiate into manhood. They remain steadfastly liminal, choosing to remain unreconstructed despite Darcy's attempts to initiate them into a new body of masculinity.

As stated previously, the Meadowsian working-class male body is unfit for purpose. This unhealthy state is figured through Knighty who tellingly disorders the 'knightly' codes of conduct of the boxing ring, ignoring the Queensbury rules symbolized by the eighteenth century gentleman boxer and reverting to atavistic uncontrolled violence. It is also represented through Fagash's drug-filled body which plays at being a boxer. He performs

³⁷⁵ Leger Grindon, 'Body and Soul: The Structure of Meaning in the Boxing Film Genre', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 35, no. 4 (Summer 1996), pp. 54-69; Leger Grindon, 'The Boxing Film and Genre Theory', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 24, no. 5 (September 2007), pp. 403-410.

the role of the boxer while concurrently playing the fool, shown through the costume he wears upon his arrival at the Club prior to the fight; the Hawaiian shirt and comically large marijuana joint.

Darcy's attempt to divest Fagash of his foolishness through the device of a bucket of cold water proves as ineffectual as the 'short, sharp, shock' privileged by some politicians and sections of the media as the solution to the problems of anti-social behaviour and criminal youth. Despite Darcy's previous care, his dedicated nursing of Fagash through a drug overdose, Fagash (unlike Knighty) stays true to his moniker, preferring to figuratively burn out rather than transform into the healthy young man Darcy wishes. The events during the boxing match precipitate Darcy's own loss of control, which breaks out of the confines of the ring and his battering of Geoff, an event which reveals the beast in man or the "centaur not fabulous". While the final scene of the films represents the lads grown up with families, and Tim reconciling with his father Geoff, the preceding events overwhelm the final suggestion of positive change, signaling instead a 'mature' version of the homosocial, where men accept the violence of other men as 'natural', inevitable and therefore, forgivable.

Just as hunting in Meadows' work is switched from a purposeful activity which results in sustenance to one which involves mere homosocial play, so too is boxing problematized in Meadows work. Joyce Carol Oates suggests that "boxing belongs to that species of mysterious masculine activity for which anthropologists use such terms as "deep play": activity that is wholly without utilitarian value, in fact contrary to utilitarian value, so dangerous that no amount of money can justify it".³⁷⁶

According to Oates' description, boxing could be described as the inverse of traditional hunting in that it is devoid of any utility, producing only pain and suffering. Meadows' boxing matches in *TwentyFourSeven* are stripped of those aspects of boxing which form its attraction. The fighters are not superlative examples of physical perfection; fights are

³⁷⁶ Joyce Carol Oates, 'Mike Tyson: Rape and the Boxing Ring', *Newsweek*, February 24, 1992. Available at www.usfca.edu/jco/miketyson4; accessed 11 September 2012.

scuffles rather than the balletic aesthetics of *Raging Bull* and there is no triumphant success of the underdog as in *Rocky*. While Stallone's character does not win the fight in the first film of the franchise, his performance in the ring proved him as "a contender", that unlike Brando's Terry Malloy in *On the Waterfront* (1954) he was "somebody" and thus sustained the fairytale structure of the film.

The ambition to figuratively win ownership of a contested space that forms part of the sport of boxing is grotesquely magnified in *This is England*. Here Combo's tutelage of Shaun extends to extreme nationalist ideology and racist violence. His overseeing of Shaun's initiation into the National Front is pre-figured by a more positive initiation scene populated by both genders. Here Shaun is welcomed into the fold of the skinhead group, populated by Woody et al via a physical transformation. His head is shorn (the play on his name is not lost here, not only is Shaun Fields a replacement for Shane Meadows, but the Christian name playfully indicates his destiny) by the female members of the group. Here, the participation of the female members of the group in a gentle initiation that is completed by the donning of the Ben Sherman shirt that is given to him by Woody. That Shaun does not shave his own head in isolation - a scene common to such texts as *Taxi Driver* - is important. He does not change himself in order to reject society; he is changed by the very society he wants to join. He is an initiate in a homosocial ritual, where Woody and Milky, as 'ritual elders', alongside the other lads who have previously been initiated into the group, oversee the transformation, directing the actions of Lol and the other young women who serve as hand-maidens of the *rite-de-passage*. He is though, rejecting the dated hair and clothes that marked him as a poor, lonely and grieving boy. Thus, in this ordinary, working-class bedroom, Shaun is included both into the immediate gang and into the larger skinhead society. Here then, the very local realm synecdochically represents the greater.

This scene, tender in its execution, comic and touching in its denouement (where Woody teases Shaun, saying he cannot join the gang until he has a 'Sherman' then giving him one as a gift) is contrasted with a later scene that reverses the maternal inclusiveness; that of the National Front meeting. Here, the action takes place away from the housing estate,

remote from the community in a country pub. The speakers and audience are all male and unsurprisingly, all white (in appearance, remember that Combo has a secret black heritage). The flag of St George is hung around the grubby walls of the pub function room, abstract symbols of Englishness that contrast with the human images of musicians that adorn the domestic bedroom. The meeting occurs in a public place, yet it is secret, exclusive. Shaun's initiation takes place in a private space, yet is inclusive.

Key moments of pedagogic gesture are often signaled in the films through their *mise-en-scène*. Important instances of the homosocially-inflected transfer of knowledge are indicated through the tightly framed twin head shot. While these moments may also be filmed with the traditional shot-reverse-shot configuration of a filmed conversation, the use of the twin head shot reduces the focal length, flattens the image and thus increases the intimacy between the two characters, often to an uncomfortable degree. In Fig.13, Darcy instructs Tim how to catch trout; In Fig.14, Geoff tells Tim how to be a man; in Fig.15, Morell threatens Gavin, that he will "teach him a lesson"; in Fig.16, Sonny instigates Anthony's sexual instruction; in Figs.17 and 18, Combo teaches Shaun how to shake hands like a man.

The compressed image of the two heads evokes the supposed split in the 'nature of man' suggested by Hazlitt, where "man is composed of two natures".³⁷⁷ The younger man is brought to knowledge by the older man, and this knowledge may be harmful, even if the effect of that harm is not yet felt. While Meadows' work does not explicitly concern pedophilia, the tactics used by the older men, especially Morell and Combo resemble the grooming techniques employed by sexual predators of children, such as the secretive befriending of vulnerable children who, struggling with issues of self-esteem are exploited by others.

Such exploitation is made explicit in *Dead Man's Shoes*. Although no longer a child in physical terms, Anthony's learning difficulties means that he should be considered as such. He is exploited by the members of the group, running errands for them and an

³⁷⁷ Waller and Glover (eds), *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, p. 228.

object of their cruel humour. This exploitation extends to sexual exploitation when Sonny orders Anthony to fellate him, a scene which is shown during an episode of *The South Bank Show* dedicated to Shane Meadows.³⁷⁸ During the showing of the clip, Meadows states his understanding of the likely trajectory of an all-male milieu, where in the absence of a regulating female presence, a competitive escalation of masculine traits is engendered, resulting in a pedagogy of abuse, where “the problems with gangs of men is that thing of leading and egging and creating your own laws as you go along. In its worst form it’s like the most disturbing form of abuse. Some of it’s homoerotic as well”.³⁷⁹

The scene in *Dead Man’s Shoes* employs flashback and monochrome cinematography that are book-ended with close-ups of Sonny indicating him as originator of the memory. Here, Sonny orders Anthony to fellate him, punching the boy when he refuses. Meadows poses the question of whether Sonny actually wishes the act to be consummated, but this question is revealed as redundant as the remainder of the scene illustrates Anthony’s ‘rape’ by proxy, where Patti is used as a vessel for Anthony’s sexual initiation. Patti does not desire Anthony, nor Anthony her; it is Sonny’s desire for Anthony, both sexually and sadistically motivated, which orchestrates and controls the action. Patti thus forms the apex of the triangulated desire described by Sedgwick, becoming a conduit through which Sonny expresses his sublimated desire for Anthony. Indeed, the positioning of Patti as a transferable commodity of exchange within the homosocial economy of Sonny’s gang is underscored in shots of her sitting on Big Al’s lap before being reluctantly coerced by Sonny into ‘servicing’ Anthony.

Anthony’s sexual initiation is subsequently witnessed by the other men in the gang who voyeuristically celebrate his attainment of manhood - an achievement an initially reluctant Anthony eventually shares in rejoicing. Patti flees the bed humiliated, but uncomplaining and silent. Her quiet acquiescence to Sonny’s commands is shown to continue into the present day, when she is warned by Sonny and Big Al not to speak to Richard about the physical violation of Anthony. Thus, despite being the physical means

³⁷⁸ *The South Bank Show: Shane Meadows*, ITV1, Broadcast 29 April 2007.

³⁷⁹ Shane Meadows, *The South Bank Show: Shane Meadows*.

through which Anthony is first humiliated, then raised up by the men of the group, Patti is denied any voice, remaining mute within the controlling male agencies. Anthony is thus initiated into masculine adulthood via both his and Patti's sexual exploitation in a move which enacts and reproduces homosocial traditions of the sexual exploitation of women and the debasement of the men who enforce it. The men watch Anthony's performance, his struggle with the physical sexual act with his opponent Patti in an arrangement which replicates the other physical and psychological struggle discussed in this section: boxing.

Parallels between rape and boxing have been foregrounded by Joyce Carol Oates; in her response to the conviction of the boxer Mike Tyson for rape, Oates suggests that,

Perhaps rape itself is a gesture, a violent repudiation of the female, in the assertion of maleness that would seem to require nothing beyond physical gratification of the crudest kind. The supreme macho gesture-like knocking out an opponent and standing over his fallen body, gloves raised in triumph.³⁸⁰

Following Oates, Anthony's 'triumph' can be seen to be signalled through his recognition that it is via this particular initiation, which begins with his humiliation and ends with his acceptance as a fellow man, that facilitates his inclusion into the homosocial group. His first potential sexual encounter involved acquiescing to Sonny's demand to "suck it", to feed from the phallus which represents his power as chief gangster, a scene common to the gangster genre as discussed earlier. However, his refusal results in a sublimated encounter with a woman who serves as the female object of exchange within the homosocial economy. It is this lesson which is repeated within the Meadowsian corpus: that men exchange women or their images as a means to get closer to other men. Women are functionary figures in the homosocial tradition, often, like Patti, serving as tools of instruction, yet never the end goal. In this sense, women are liminal constructs who like the architectural structures of liminality such as the tunnel or the bridge stand between the male novice and his desired destination; the homosocial embrace. Such instances illustrate that the liminal realism of Meadows' work is overtly gendered, with young men

³⁸⁰ Oates, 'Rape and the Boxing Ring'.

and/or boys being initiated into manhood through rituals and practices which utilize women as facilitators into a club they can never truly belong. This club is subject to hierarchical positions and complex relationships based upon power. R.W. Connell stresses this when he states:

We must ... recognize the relations between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate and exploit, and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity.³⁸¹

³⁸¹ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 37.

IV. The Tramp and the Ghost: Loss, Memory and Biography

I have just argued how some of the mechanics of homosociality work; however, in the work of Meadows, achievement of the male goal of joining the homosocial group is not guaranteed. Even if it is achieved it is not necessarily permanently enjoyed. The following section discusses those men who fall outside of the homosocial embrace, arguing how the tramp and the ghost operate as reminders of rejection and loss within the homosocial economy.

The last two sections have concerned entities which consist of two separate parts, a physicality which immediately signals liminal status. Now the study turns to entities which are relationally liminal, rather than liminal through their heteromorphism. Where the figures of the Minotaur and the centaur indicated the beast-in-man and man-in-beast dialectic, the figures of the tramp and the ghost offer instead memory-as-man and man-as-memory through their material or non-material qualities. These occur in the work of Meadows in various ways, always signalling some kind of schism. The following section looks at the ways in which schisms in the homosocial society of Meadows' work are worked through via the figure of the tramp and how such material figures become symbolic indicators of societal breakdown and rejection. The supernatural figure of the ghost becomes an inverse of the tramp, reversing the trajectory of expulsion. The tramp leaves, or is forced from the group as a symbol of shame. He returns as the ghost to visit guilt upon those who expelled him.

In addition to this, figures of the tramp and the ghost are intimately related to memory and loss via memories of what one person once was and what they once had. These losses and memories may be felt by the figures themselves or by those who knew them. Both also function as reminders of one's own fragile existence: the tramp represents a manifestation made flesh of the fear of loss, the erosion of ownership and power over one's wealth, health or relationships. The ghost is a *memento mori*, a reminder of one's own impending death as well as a manifestation of guilt or supernatural terror. As discussed in Chapter Three, themes of loss and memory are central to Meadows' work

and intimately linked to the modes of biography and autobiography with which the filmmaker engages. Biography involves both a remembering and a re-imagining of things past, the collation of subjective memories which are stitched together with organizing sutures. This Frankensteinian metaphor evokes the monstrous through its violent rendering of that which is figuratively dead and therefore no longer attainable - the past - into the new body of the present. However, the new body of the reconfigured memory is a liminal construct, posed between the past and the future when new changes will take place. The latter parts of this section will discuss how and why the figures of the tramp and the ghost are mobilized in Meadows' work in order to examine the presentation of biography and its implications.

The Tramp

The opening scene of *TwentyFourSeven* shows Tim walking his dog along a disused railway line, before stumbling across a figure, hunkered down in a burnt-out railway carriage. The unkempt appearance of the man, his ragged clothes, long hair and beard, the dirt upon his skin and his untrimmed nails signal a down-and-out, a tramp, someone who is outside of the norms of society without access to the comforts of a home. Tim recognizes the figure as a tramp, as must the audience through the signifying factors of appearance, before he re-recognizes the anonymous tramp as Darcy whom he had once known. This moment indicates a double recognition, where rather than just a man, Darcy is first recognized as a tramp, a figure, whom if we pass in the street we recognize as more than a stranger – we 'know' him as a tramp – and yet this recognition reduces the individuality afforded to a stranger. The tramp is an emotive figure, generating often conflicting feelings of disgust, empathy, guilt, or scorn. His liminality is overt; he resides within communities yet is not part of them. He is the blot which signals failure, both of the individual and of the society which produced him. He is the abject made flesh. This construct problematizes the positive reading of the abject argued by Fradley's paper discussed earlier. Where the scatologically abject is argued by Fradley to be a moment of homosocial celebration, the abject qualities of the tramp can only serve as a symbol of regret and societal division. The tramp may engender sympathy alongside disgust, but he can never be seen as a festive figure. He is the logical extension of the fool run to seed,

the trickster devoid of jokes. He is a liminal figure who inhabits liminal spaces which are outside of the familial domestic and the homosocial public realms.

Darcy's exile from the community was, we learn, self-imposed. Following his beating of Geoff, his shame precipitated the abuse of alcohol and a fleeing away from home. Yet, he returns home, it seems, to die. This 'elephant graveyard' conceit allows the narrative to unfold via a flashback structure which presents 'Darcy the man', before he was subsumed within the archetype of the tramp. The imposition of Darcy's narration over the image of Darcy as tramp sutures together the failure of society and the personal failure of the man. He describes the abandonment of the working-class in the post-industrial world in an elegy which worries for the present-day youth who have little prospect. Yet it is he who becomes the ultimate victim, rejecting and rejected by the community. If Meadows' work concerns the under-class created in a post-Thatcherite economy, Darcy stands as a reminder of the ever-permanent existence of those individuals who do not fit into the imposed structures, the permanently liminal beings who inhabit the space between civilization and chaos. Romanticized notions of a working-class past are undermined through the tramp figure; he is failure realized. How can one mourn the loss of an ideal that was never realized; if tramps exist (as they have since industrialization) then the model of the robust working-class which Darcy mourns can only be a myth. As argued earlier, Darcy may be a fool, but he is also a teacher, ambitious for the new generation of men. If a man such as he fails, then logically any man could fail if the conditions in which he finds himself precipitate such a fall.

However, Darcy's tutelage of the younger generation of men may be read as successful in terms of his teaching them the horrors of violence. Darcy's exile implies an acknowledgement of guilt for his actions, the eruption of violent rage which manifests in his pounding Geoff to unconsciousness. In his role of tramp, Darcy represents not only a societal failure, but also the failure of a man to hold in check those impulses which threaten to erupt into actuality. Darcy's beating of Geoff suggests a latent rage, unleashing the 'beast-in-man', an event which is doubly shocking because of the former gentility of the man, demonstrated in his care of others. The observing lads, like the

audience, do not expect Darcy to be the most violent of all the violent men presented in the film. The final scene of the film shows Darcy's funeral, attended by mourners made up of the lads, now grown and with their own families, alongside others, such as Aunt Iris and the lads' parents. Such a coda suggests that the one-time partisan young men have grown into a harmonized homosociality, illustrating that it was Darcy's final lesson which proved most effective: that to fully give vent to violent impulses and to rely upon intoxicating substances may result in expulsion from the homosocial community, figuratively demonstrating to Knightly the need to hold in check his violence which erupted in the boxing ring and showing Fagash the horrors of a drug dependent life.

From being the pedagogue Chiron, Darcy reveals the 'centaur not fabulous', detailing the beast within. From this he moves as the Minotaur, tramping through the labyrinth of exile. Darcy's teaching therefore does not stop; he continues to teach corporally the younger generation of men, using his body as the example. Darcy's movement from a man interested in physical fitness, his own and others, to a broken man, whose body displays the abject signs of neglect is another illustration of the Meadowsian unfit body. According to the folk tradition sensibility of Meadows' work discussed in the first section of this chapter, Darcy can be read as a sacrificial figure, much like Anthony of *Dead Man's Shoes*, who is sacrificed by the community in order to secure a good future for the common group. That Darcy's sacrifice seems to be personally determined hides the societal drivers behind his act; however the configuration of the individual Darcy as the 'everyman' tramp signals the social context of the sacrifice.

The man who rejects and/or is rejected by the community through his violence and later returns is repeated in *This is England 88*. In one scene Combo bursts into Shaun's sitting room, his status as a down-and-out signalled through his appearance which is as similarly filthy and dishevelled as Darcy's. Combo's return, motivated by his desire to see his dying mother (which signals another failure as she dies before he sees her) is also an act of contrition. This is concretized though his taking the blame for Lol's killing of her father. This move indicates the how redemption is mobilized in Meadows' work, suggesting a catholic sensibility. Similarly, Richard's contrition at the denouement of

Dead Man's Shoes, suggests repentance of his 'sins' through a confession to Mark in an epiphanic realization which seems to reverse his rejection of 'God's will' at the beginning of the film when he asserted "God will forgive them, I can't live with that." However, the Catholic sensibility suggested in this scene is undone by competing elements which reject such a reading, elements which are discussed further in the final section of this chapter. Such equivocation indicates a liminal positioning of Meadows' work situated between the spiritual and the secular. Contrary to the secular material body of the tramp is the spiritual incarnation of the ghost.

The Ghost

One of the ways in which Meadows' work can be said to resist the social realist category is through its recourse to the supernatural, manifested through the figure of the haunting ghost. The ghost figure may be metaphoric, such as the return of a character from the past which enacts a traumatic haunting; Darcy, Richard and Combo are examples of such ghost-like beings. They are also likened to the figure of the tramp, a construct discussed above, reminding those who knew the figure of their complicity in the figure's downfall. Alternatively, there are examples of the ghost proper: the manifestation of the dead witnessed by a living person. Anthony is revealed as a ghost in *Dead Man's Shoes*, while in *This is England '88*, Lol is haunted by her father following his murder at her hands. While these ghost figures may be explained rationally as expressions of psychological trauma, mere apparitions of psychically-scarred minds, there are leakages away from the purely material into the fantastic which question a rationalist reading of the texts. Following each of his appearances, the ghost of Lol's dead father remains in the scene in which he appears to 'haunt' Lol, even when she leaves. If his ghost is a pure psychological manifestation of her mind, why does he linger in the bathroom, the sitting room, the church and the hospital even after the means of his manifestation has left?

One of the key questions for this section is - what function does this suggestion of the supernatural perform? It will examine the ways in which the ghost figure is mobilized in conjunction with an examination of the tramp figure. These characters are linked to the dead through their shared experiences of the ending or erosion of the ties to identity,

whether the loss of one's home and property or the breaking-off of relationships. In this way the tramp figure provides a link between the dead and the living, through their being a material living entity that has lost that which makes them visibly individual within a community, becoming instead an abject outsider who moves around the margins of society without fully taking part. In this sense, the tramp is a liminal being who metaphorically occupies the gap between the participative live subject and the non-participative dead subject. The figure of the ghost becomes the participative dead subject who impinges on the living world.

A scene omitted from *TwentyFourSeven* but included in the published script crosses the line between suggestion and actuality of the supernatural, through the figure of who visits a dying Darcy:

At the end of his bed sits an Old Man; he appears to be a cross between God and Jesse from *The Dukes of Hazzard*. Darcy and the stranger are discussing Jake La Motta. The dog is nowhere to be seen. The Old Man is wearing a pair of old jeans, white plimsolls and a T-shirt. The sense of time and reality within the scene is detached from real time. There is absolute dead silence. Moments of Tim moving in slow motion. Tim's eyes are transfixed as we cut between Darcy sitting up in bed talking to the stranger, then back to Darcy's body at rest. The Old Man is no longer there; it is not revealed whether Tim or only Darcy saw him. Still in silence, but back into real time, we see that Darcy has passed away.³⁸²

While the scene was not included in the film, it is an important example of the deliberate employment of ambiguity in Meadows' work, where decisions to 'not reveal' decisive details are made. The reference to the discussion between Darcy and the ghost figure of the boxer Jake La Motta is illustrative of the segmenting of the homosocial tradition through reference to figures of ideal masculinity (in terms of sporting prowess). It also alludes to Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, the biographical film of La Motta, which is intertextually referenced in Meadows' film through the shared subject matter of boxing, the use of black and white photography and the disintegration of the male working-class body.

³⁸² Fraser and Meadows, *TwentyFourSeven*, pp, 112-3.

The notion of biography is suggested in *TwentyFourSeven* through the use of Super8 style film during the title sequence. The inter-cutting of Super8 style film stock, which represents Darcy as a child serves to display the potential of the man, happy and energetic in childhood, a potential which is later shown to be unfulfilled. It also presents the idea of memory as mediated through the recorded image. *Dead Man's Shoes* uses the same conceit, with its employment of Super8 film of two brothers, in actuality the film's producer Mark Herbert and his brother in its title sequence. Like the montage beginning of *This is England* with its bricolage of television images from the 1980s, the use of a different film aesthetic, whether film stock or editing, alerts the viewer to the idea that a particular section of the text is different from that which follows it and that such separateness is predicated upon memory. Film itself is a type of memory, a recording of what has happened. Therefore, in order to signal a memory, whether from a character or a collective memory, such as the 1980s imagery, within a medium which is itself a 'memory' the use of alerting aesthetic techniques become necessary. Such a manoeuvre emphasizes the memorial function of one technique while understating such a function in the medium itself.

This play with avowal and disavowal replicates Meadows' own relationship with memory through auto/biography discussed in Chapter Three, which sustains an authorial position, controlling the biographies of those he knew through their re-presentation in his films. Just as Darcy's diary is a concretization of his subjectivity, a textual rendering of his memory, so too can Meadows' films be described as film diaries inasmuch as they involve memories of his past. However, the memories are not replicated, they inform the work, which is as influenced by the other writers and performers who, as previously discussed, bring their own ideas to the work developed through improvisation. The use of auto/biography in Meadows' work is, as suggested in *TwentyFourSeven*, a complex sequence of voices and positions mediated through different subjectivities. Such a complexity can be described as liminal in that each position is arrived at from separate points, such as Darcy's written words read by Tim, which involves the visual, yet heard as a voice-over, which involves the aural. Such intricacy suggests another mobilization of liminality.

Conclusion

The figures of the tramp and the ghost perform functions of memory, reminding the homosocial communities of certain failures or inadequacies inherent to their structure. They are liminal symbols of folk memory, tying members of a community to their collective past, reminding them of their culpabilities and shame. They affect a type of haunting through their revisiting those who remain. Such troubling materializations signal the numinous, the manifestation of supernatural entities. The following section examines how such manifestations occur in the work of Meadows, relating the figures of the *Doppelgänger* and the monster to the previously discussed archetypes.

V. The *Doppelgänger* and the Monster: Doubling, Horror and Numinosity

Misery has come home, and men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood.³⁸³

I'm the monster now.
Richard *Dead Man's Shoes*

The numinous qualities of the haunting ghost are extended in Meadows' work via the manifestation of monstrosity as exhibited through male violence. Rather than being introduced as a monster at their initial presentation, the characters who can be described as Meadowsian monsters reveal their monstrosity gradually, developing or exhibiting their monstrous traits as the narrative progresses. Whether such a move is developmental, where traits are adopted by the character according to circumstances, or revelatory, where innate traits are slowly revealed, is one of the questions posed in the following section. Similarly, numinous or material rationalist explanations of events will also be considered, mindful of the liminal equivocations which resist an either/or decision. The primary aim of this section is to discuss the specific way in which monstrosity is presented in the work of Meadows and how it functions as another expression of Meadowsian liminality, an expression which is intimately related to questions of masculinity and class.

Liminal Monsters

In the first of his seven theses of *Monster Culture*: 'Thesis 1: The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body', Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that "the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, *always inhabits the gap between* the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again".³⁸⁴

While Cohen aligns this quality with Derrida's notion of *différance* it could also be considered as an acknowledgement of the monster's liminal quality in that it resides in "the gap" born of crisis. Cohen's thesis suggests that the emergence of the monster figure

³⁸³ Mary Shelly, *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin, 1992.), p. 89.

³⁸⁴ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 1996), p. 4. Emphasis added.

is historically contingent. The monster and what it represents is conceived at a time of flux, born into the aftermath and thus matured it goes on to propagate its own monstrous clone children into a new socio-historic context. This being the case, it is important to consider how and why Meadows invokes the monstrous in his texts and ask from what crises are the monsters born and what function do they play in addressing such crises? Certainly the economic deprivations of the working-class, the erosion of working-class identity through labour, and the contemporary phenomenon of the under-class are the monstrous context into which the narratives play out.

The figure of Margaret Thatcher is used in the title sequence of *This is England* and later in the montages of the television series which followed on from it, *This is England 86* and *This is England 88*, as a figure of imperialist power. Cohen's fourth thesis 'The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference', explains how cultural/political figures can be metamorphosed into monsters following a fall from popularity, where "a political figure suddenly out of favor is transformed like an unwilling participant in a science experiment by the appointed historians of the replacement regime."³⁸⁵ During her time in office, Thatcher's unpopularity with the political left brought this move forward somewhat; an example being the caricature puppet of the Prime Minister in *Spitting Image*. Some of the ways through which monstrosity was suggested in this 'experiment' was through the representation of gender which was inverted via the cultural codes of dress and the performative aspects of speech, movement and affect. Presenting Thatcher as a woman in male drag, with a deep voice, engendering fear in the male members of her Cabinet suggested the monstrous via its disruption of the delineating borders which control gender, an activity which disorganizes the culturally organized. As Cohen suggests in his third thesis 'The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis', due to its ontological slipperiness, the monster becomes liminal and dangerous as it is "a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions".³⁸⁶ Such demolition corresponds to issues around taxonomies already raised in this chapter, where archetypes such as the

³⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 8.

³⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 6.

trickster evade concrete description and hybrid and adapted forms, such as genre, disrupt existing classifications.

The presence of Thatcher and the devastating effects of the Conservative government's policies on the working-class are articulated most explicitly in *TwentyFourSeven* and *This is England*, and more generally through the repeated presentation of unemployment, especially that suffered by the male characters. However, it is through characterization that the monstrous is most fully evoked, especially via the outsider characters, such as Darcy of *TwentyFourSeven*, Morell of *Romeo Brass*, Richard of *Dead Man's Shoes*, and Combo of *This is England*, men who are outside of or expelled from the homosocial group. These men are often twinned with a double which echoes and/or reverses some of their traits, with both men often at enmity with each other. However, such enmity does not preclude desire, indeed, as Sedgwick attests desire is "the effective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotionally charged that shapes an important relationship".³⁸⁷

Thus the outsider character and his double form two points of the homosocial triangle of desire as described by Sedgwick. This section will discuss the manifestations of hostility and hatred through the figure of the monster in the work of Meadows. It does this in order to interrogate the ways in which the monster figure functions in the texts, most especially its mobilization as a means of segmenting the bonds of homosociality.

Freud's notion of the double is contained within his discussion of the *unheimlich* (unhomely) or the uncanny, "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long".³⁸⁸ The idea of leading back is physically manifested in *Dead Man's Shoes* via Richard's return to the scene of his brother's suicide, a trauma which repeats the initial trauma of the primal scene. Doubling of trauma is numerically replicated in the physical being of the *Doppelgänger*, described by John Herman as "a second self, or alter ego, which appears as a distinct and separate being apprehensible by

³⁸⁷ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 2.

³⁸⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in, James Strachey and Anna Freud (eds), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919)* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 220.

the physical senses (or at least, by some of them), but exists in a dependent relation to the original”.³⁸⁹

This description expresses the figure in material terms, although the double can be manifested via supernatural or fantastic means, a dynamic explored earlier in this study (The Tramp and the Ghost). In his discussion of the doubling motif in nineteenth century literature, Manuel Aguirre makes clear its liminal implications:

In a liminalist perspective they are not to be thought of as a hero plus his evil impersonator, but as two manifestations of one single entity: they merely embody the double nature of the traditional hero with this difference, that the 19th century character rejects this second manifestation of himself, thereby creating his own enemy.³⁹⁰

This approach, the act of disavowal which gives birth to the very thing which the hero fears, is most explicitly expressed in *Dead Man's Shoes*, where the characters of Richard and Sonny are seemingly both twinned and opposed in the film, yet are effectively aligned as two manifestations of the same psychic energy. They correspond to Freud's notion of the uncanny as concerned with repetition where “there is a doubling, dwindling and interchanging of the self”.³⁹¹ The reversal in the action dynamic happens through Sonny achieving that which Richard secretly desires; the punishment and death of Anthony. One flashback sequence, portrayed from Sonny's perspective, shows him taunting Anthony with the statement “my brother Anthony's a fucking retard and that's why I'm leaving for the army”. This imagined taunt is supported at the film's denouement when Richard utters an almost identical statement to Mark. Sonny then, is unwittingly the agent of Richard's hidden desire, the removal of the embarrassment of a disabled brother, a desire which Richard has to address through the annihilation of both his double and ultimately himself. Desire here is manifested as the will to be rid of that part of oneself which shames, to divest oneself of an unwanted double. Anthony is

³⁸⁹ John Herdman, *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 14.

³⁹⁰ Aguirre, ‘Nabokov's Pale Fire and the Question of Liminality’, p. 124.

³⁹¹ Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, p. 234.

separate from Richard, yet his fraternal relationship genetically links the two inextricably; they share the same blood, derived from the same parentage.

Richard's shame of the 'imperfect' brother grows into fratricidal desire. Sonny provides the means to the removal of the embarrassment and thus functions as helpmate to his double Richard. However, the relationship between the three, Richard, Sonny and Anthony is complicated through the underlying aggressive homoeroticism discussed in section three where Sonny figuratively 'rapes' Anthony through a sexual initiation into the homosocial group. The doubling of Sonny with Richard therefore poses questions about Richard's own desires towards his brother, whether he too wished to dominate him sexually. Certainly Richard's encounter with Mark presents a homoerotically inflected violence. Their conversation reveals a conflation of phallic desire signaled through the knife, an object which takes the place of the third point of the homosocial triangle:

Richard: Take this from me.

Mark: No, I don't want to.

Richard: You. You were supposed to be a monster. Now I'm a fucking beast. Now there's blood on my hands. Look what you made me do.

Mark: I've got kids. I've got children.

Richard: I just want to lie with my brother. I want you to help me. Stick it in me. [Mark shakes his head] It's ok, yes, yes.

The doubling of the enemies Richard and Sonny is echoed in *Romeo Brass* where there is a distinct mirroring of the characters of Gavin and Morell. Both are shown to have powers of creativity: Morell tells tales, such as his story of his encounter with a spirit or the 'romantic' "weetabeat" poem he reads to Ladine while Gavin writes imaginative stories, which are appreciated by his visiting tutor Mr. Laws (Bob Hoskins). However, while Gavin's efforts display talent, Morell's attempts are comically poor. There are then inverted similarities between the two, with Gavin possessing authentic talent and Morell merely a comic facsimile of them.

The doubling motif is extended to physical representation; for example one key montage scene juxtaposes images of Gavin lying bare-chested on his bed with images of Morell in the same state of dress reclining on his late father's bed. While there is only a suggestion

of the difficulty Morell had with his late father in the film, this is materially realized, albeit very differently in the uncomfortable relationship between Gavin and his father. The emotional gulf between the father and son, the inability for the father to converse with his son for any length of time, his seeing it as a chore to be endured rather than a pleasure to be enjoyed, points not only to the masculine stereotype of silent, emotionally distant men, but also of the discomfort around Gavin's disability. While lying in the hospital bed following his operation, Gavin is subject to his father's inattentiveness caused by the lure of a television comedy (*The Golden Girls*). That his father wants to escape the realities of his son's pain through engaging with an American sitcom concerned with the machinations of a group of elderly women rather than comfort his son illustrate not only his selfishness, but also his inability to cope with the messiness of bodily dysfunction. It also marks an important breakdown in the homosocial economy based upon the exchange of women. Where Gavin's father was the source of pornography at the beginning of the film, supplying the material which allowed the homosocial triangle to be replicated via Gavin, Romeo and the shared pornographic images of women, his solitary consumption of *The Golden Girls* indicates a breakdown of that dynamic. The women who play the central characters of the programme are representative of aged femininity, being post-menopausal women who are physiologically and metaphorically 'dry'. They no longer produce the vaginal excretions so central to the Meadowsian homosocial economic exchange and therefore cannot serve as the means through which that economy operates: they are a well run dry. They are seen to have no value as women as prescribed by the dictates of the homosocial economy and are therefore seen as abject, in that they accord with what Kristeva describes as that which "disturbs identity, system order".³⁹²

Such seeming resemblances between Gavin and Morell enact the monstrous via the concept of affinity. Manuel Aguirre describes it as such when he states:

Notions of kinship, bond, nearness, similarity, a sense that not only the individual's faculties but his very identity are to some extent bound up with the Numinous, a relationship partaking of attraction and repulsion, empathy,

³⁹² Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4. Emphasis added.

correspondence as between mirror-images – all of these are contained in the concept of *affinity*.³⁹³

Affinity between the two seems to be initially halted when considering the two characters' physicality. Morell appears to have physical mastery of his own body demonstrated through his intervention in the fight between Romeo and the local boys; his dancing; his seeming knowledge of SAS grappling techniques and his domination of Gavin's father Bill. Gavin, meanwhile is initially physically 'deficient': he walks slowly and with a limp, requires hydrotherapy and following surgery, is bed-ridden, contained within a body-cast. However, this affinitive break is effectively re-sutured, but in reverse. Morell's physicality is comically rendered, he dances badly and moves awkwardly; it is clear that he does not have the physical mastery he claims. While these claims are finally halted through Frank's delivery of a swift punch to the head, Gavin's physical deficiencies are eventually 'cured' by surgery and recuperation. Like Richard and Sonny of *Dead Man's Shoes*, Gavin and Morell are rivals and doubles, two points of the triangle of desire with Romeo at the apex, but with a line of affinity running between their two points.

An earlier section concerned with the Trickster discussed the comic function of costume in Meadows' work. This comic function is augmented by another, the frightening, a combination which engenders the uncanny through the incongruity of the two. This is illustrated in a scene from *Romeo Brass* which sees Morell terrorizing Romeo in the guise of a test of his previous 'military style' training. Morell's costume of bare chest, tracksuit bottoms and a pair of women's tights over his head (not a stocking, there is a distinct second leg which dangles from the back of his head which would be comic but for the horror of the scene) signifies that the strike is pre-emptive, that he has dressed in readiness for Romeo's arrival. It is also another example of cross-dressing, but one which further complicates the gender inversion through clothes. The use of tights rather than a balaclava or ski-mask involves the appropriation of female clothing which invokes

³⁹³ Manuel Aguirre, *The Closed Space: Horror Literature and Western Literature* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 124. Emphasis added.

humour through the errant leg which dangles over Morell's shoulder like a figurative flaccid penis, in much the same way as previously discussed.

However, the comedic is eroded by the horrific, through the distortion of Morell's features by the restrictive hosiery. It also raises the question of why Morell should cover his face in such a manner when it would be clear to Romeo who he was. If the intent was not one of disguise then it must point to his desire to increase his ability to frighten the boy and more importantly, his attempt to create a new self, complete with a distorted and menacing visage.

This monstrous adoption of a mask echoes *Dead Man's Shoes*, where Richard obscures his own face with a gas mask. This military-issue item is a residual signifier of his previous existence as an SAS soldier, yet its new deployment in the civilian world emphasizes the strangeness of the object outside of its practical function. Its peculiarity outside a legitimate military situation symbolically underscores that for Richard, this *is* a combat situation, with Sonny and his gang his adversaries. The primary function of the mask here is not one of protection, but as a means to generate fear through its incongruity in a civilian setting. The mask makes Richard strange and frightening; it unsettles those he seeks and manipulates their responses to him. It is more than a mere covering of his face to avoid recognition; it is an evocation of the Freudian uncanny through its particular form and altered function. Indeed, Freud's classification of the uncanny as a return is constituted through Richard's physical return to his home town. Like Morell, Richard does not adopt a mask in order to disguise himself; rather it can be read as a symbolic endeavor to conceal that which he wishes to remain hidden.

In her discussion of Henry James's short story, *The Beast in the Closet*, Sedgwick discusses the trope of the "closeted person", wherein the closet does not function as the hiding place of the man, but of a secret – in this case, the homosexuality of the story's

main character, John Marcher.³⁹⁴ In the story, James describes the invisible social mask donned by his protagonist: “what it had come to was that he wore a mask painted with the social simper, out of the eye holes of which there looked eyes of an expression not in the least matching the other features”.³⁹⁵

The invisible in James’s story is made visible in Meadows’ film. In this sense, Richard too is a closeted man. Whether that closeting refers to his sexuality or other parts of his personality is equivocal. We do not know Richard in any real sense, just as his brother did not know him, and until his *anagnorisis* and the recognition of his own monstrosity vocalized through the statement “I’m the monster now”, Richard does not know himself. It is equivocal whether Richard is made a monster through the torment of his brother by Sonny and his gang; a consequence implied through his accusation to Mark “you were supposed to be a monster. Now I’m a fucking beast. Now there’s blood on my hands. *Look what you made me do.*”

Alternatively, the beast within, a conceit discussed earlier, may have been ever present, a presence suggested through Richard’s silent resentment of his brother. Male violence is often explained in Meadows’ work through conditioning rather than biological factors, such as Morell’s ill treatment by his father. However, if men are ‘absolved’ of their actions because of poor nurturing, they are also accountable, if not fully responsible, for their perpetuation of violence via their role in teaching the next generation in how to perform such violence. This may involve the creation of a figurative double, such as Combo’s grooming of Shaun in *This is England* as a new version of himself, a “little man” who can join him in his monstrous violence.

At the dénouement of *Romeo Brass*, the triangle of desire is remodeled into the reformed duo of Gavin and Romeo, but with a noticeable shift in the balance of power. Now Gavin, not Romeo is in the central role; as magician he utilizes his imaginative powers to

³⁹⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ‘The Beast in the Closet: James and the Writing of Homosexual Panic’, in Rachel Adams and David Savran (eds), *The Masculinities Studies Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 157-174.

³⁹⁵ Henry James, ‘The Beast in the Closet’, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, (ed.) Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1964), pp. 367-378, quoted in Sedgwick, ‘The Beast in the Closet’, p. 167.

render the audience spellbound. In addition, it is his command of language and humour which creates the unity felt at the end of the film, where the two families are united. It is therefore Gavin's dominant personality trait which ends victoriously.

Gavin effectively introduces Morrell into their relationship, thus instigating the triangulated schema of desire as described by Sedgwick. His insistence on making a joke out of situations brings about the initial meeting with Morell, a meeting which sets up the strong/weak dynamic of their troubled relationship. Refusing to kick the ball back to the older boys, while saying he is going to do so provokes an attack, first verbal (they call him a 'cripple'), then physical. This attack is fielded by Romeo who, unlike the verbose Gavin, demonstrates his lack of verbal fluency before sustaining physical blows. Gavin's calls for help directed to the nearby Morell, thus introduce the man into their lives at a time of physical threat. His intervention marks him as a hero to Romeo and as a rival to Gavin. Morell can do what Gavin cannot: save Romeo. That Morell vocalizes his disapproval at Gavin's inability to assist his friend as he sarcastically states 'you were a lot of help weren't ya!' sets up their relationship in terms dependant upon degrees of physical prowess and the disapproving and the disapproved.

However, while Gavin and Morell are figured as rivals for Romeo's attentions, with Gavin as the victim of Morell's threats, who suffers the withdrawal of Romeo's friendship; it is in fact Gavin who ultimately triumphs. Utilizing his imaginative powers he conjures up (in his role of trickster) a monster (Morell) in order to re-dress the balance of power between him and Romeo. Morell then functions as the threatening monster who rebalances the relationship, elevating Gavin to the central role of magician, with Romeo 'debased' as a feminized helpmate. The role of rival is effectively transmuted into one of facilitator, where the monstrosity of Morell's performance of excessive masculinity; his violence, control and sexual predation, warns Romeo of the dangers of such excess, figuratively driving him back to 'the arms' of his true love Gavin.

The *Doppelgänger* is not the only monster which haunts Meadowsian texts. There is a high degree of gender marked economic vampirism, with boys and men subsisting from

the economic products of women: in *Romeo Brass*, Ladine gives her unemployed father money; in *Smalltime*, Jumbo pesters Ruby for money; in *This is England*, only Lol is seen to work. This gender-based vampirism relates to the class-based cannibalism discussed in the first section, where the geographically localized criminal activities of Jumbo in *Smalltime* represent the phenomenon of a class feeding off of itself, choosing to exploit the exploited.

Men also utilize women or their images as means of social exchange. Gavin lends pornography to Romeo, purloining the material from his father Bill, in a move which illustrates the patriarchal lineage of male-to-male inheritance of women, their bodies and their images. As the 'legitimate' owner of the pornography, Bill is implicated in this tension between the look and sexual violence. He secretly owns the material, a secret only uncovered to his wife through Gavin's furnishing of Romeo with the material. While the situation of this discovery is rendered comic, the idea of a secret sexual activity outside of his marriage (albeit onanistic rather than adulterous) is a precursor to Romeo's father who did leave the family for another woman. Sexuality in the film is shown, in the case of the boys or men as secretive or aggressive, or in the case of women as invisible or peripatetic. The kiss Ladine bestows upon Morell is not engendered from passion but from sympathy. Like the other female characters in the film, the two mothers, the nurse and the headmistress, it is sympathy and self-sacrifice which drive the actions, whether that is Romeo's mother sacrificing her meal for Romeo or the charitable concerns of the school Head Mistress.

That Romeo treats the magazines in a possessive way - 'you've got to give me *my* girls' - is an important precursor to the way in which Morell declares his ownership of Ladine. There is no legitimate reason for Romeo to be possessive of the magazines, as there is no reason for Morell to question Ladine's virginity or to become so agitated at the idea of 'other hands upon her'; the two states of assumed ownership illustrate the general presumption of masculine propriety over female bodies. Morell's disgust at Ladine's imagined sexual promiscuity and his order for Romeo to 'look' completes the circle of scopophilic pleasure that Romeo has indulged in his enjoyment of the pornography and

the subsequent misogynistic rage that is internally generated by the male subject, a rage completely divorced from the actuality of the female subject, whether photographed or in the flesh. The absence of female agency (the woman is absent, only her image or the scopophilic stare is present) and the surfeit of male subjectivity (the irrational sense of ownership and anger at that ownership being transgressed by another man) illustrates the monstrous imbalance of this phallogentric exchange system. Moreover, the pornographic images of women can be described as a kind of enforced doubling, with the image becoming a fetishized *Doppelgänger* of the material woman. Here though, the *Doppelgänger* invokes numinous horror via the male emotional relationship to such material; the fear engendered by the thought of it being stolen by another.

In his fifth thesis of monster culture ‘The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible’, Cohen describes the monster’s functional role within culture, controlling behaviour and preventing transgressions, where:

the monster of prohibition exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together the system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot – must not – be crossed. Primarily these borders are in place to control the traffic in women, or more generally to establish strictly homosocial bonds, the ties between men which keep a patriarchal society functional.³⁹⁶

In Meadows’ work, the traffic in women is enabled through the homosocial economy of exchange facilitated through the sharing of female secretions as discussed in section one, or more commonly through homosocially shared looking and seeing. This is sustained as a central theme which secures an intimacy between the male characters whose sexuality is often predicated upon shared experiences of looking at women and their images. In *Romeo Brass*, Morell’s direction to Romeo to look at his sister while describing “hands all over her” is echoed in *Dead Man’s Shoes* through Herbie’s ruse of using shared knowledge of a woman to ingratiate him with Sonny, Big Al and Gypsy John. His statement of “I saw that Julie”, is followed by a boastful fantasy of his sexual intentions towards her, a fantasy which does not involve Julie at all, other than an imaginary object,

³⁹⁶ Cohen, ‘Monster Culture’, p. 13.

but does involve all of the men through a shared experience of hearing, and possibly imagining, Herbie's fantasy.

The absence of the female object of desire within the homosocial triangle is important to consider in relation to the uncanny. Freud concluded that perceptions of the uncanny are born from the fear of castration, a fear which results from Oedipal desires. Some extrapolation can be done from Freud's Oedipal triangle of the father, son and mother, with the son fearing the father and desiring the mother when it is compared to Sedgwick's configuration of the homosocial triangle. In Meadows' work, the triangle persists, yet the dynamic of desire changes, redirected from the paternal figure to the notional son. Desire by the son for the mother is replaced with desire for the son by the nominal father, with the mother moving from the desired to the non-desired, a position which effects a non-position of the irrelevant and the ignored. The paternal figure remains one of fear for the son, yet this fear is not engendered through the punishing father as castrator. In Meadowsian texts, it is the penetrative potential of the paternal figures which evokes fear and explains the manifestation of the uncanny. This may be explicitly physical, as discussed in an earlier section where the paternal figure is predatorily sexual, or more symbolic, where the older man, to paraphrase Larkin, 'fucks up' his metaphorical son.

One of the ways through which one generation 'fucks' another is through the continuation of violence through the generations. This is clearly demonstrated in *Dead Man's Shoes* through Richard's seeking out Mark's sons and gifting them a knife. Such an action replicates the themes of initiation and pedagogy discussed earlier, in a ritualized relay of generational violence. Later, Mark becomes complicit in Richard's plan for his sons to continue the cycle of violence and retribution when he uses them as bargaining chips, emphasizing his paternal credentials when he states "I've got kids. I've got children". Such a statement could be simply read as a plea to Richard's humanity; however in the Meadowsian economy of homosocial exchange, the introduction of the boys into the discourse figuratively positions them as objects of substitution, releasing Mark from the immediate threat of death, displacing it onto his sons, effectively

condoning Richard's continuation of violence. In effect, Mark's sons are the doubles of the brothers Anthony and Richard and conform to Freud's construct of the uncanny in that they represent "the constant reoccurrence of the same thing – the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations".³⁹⁷ Thus, following the deaths of their older doubles, the boys as the consecutive generation fill the shoes of the dead men.

Conclusion

The emergence of the monstrous in Meadows' work intimately relates to the other liminal constructs discussed in this chapter. The monster's mask alludes to the carnivalesque activities of the Trickster and the Fool. The bestial and human hybridity of the centaur, Proteus or the Minotaur could be seen as a monstrous transgression of the norms of biological classification. The tramp evokes the monster in two ways: the first is figurative, presented through his aberrant relationship to the community and his disassociation with the social; the second is material, manifested through his body, a body which induces repulsion, and in accordance with the Meadowsian model of the unhealthy male body, is unfit for any purpose other than the evocation of the abject. The ghost engenders the monstrous through its qualities of numinosity, producing horror in those its haunts. Elements of the monster inform Meadows' work even when the text is not generically representative of the horror film, suggesting the presence of the horror in the everyday, a quotidian misery which may be experienced in the most seemingly ordinary of circumstances. Thus in Meadows' work, men steal, threaten children, beat their wives, beat each other, turn to alcoholism, entice another to suicide, incite racial hatred, rape daughters or other women, while women allow themselves to be beaten or their daughters to be abused by their husbands in narratives which intermingle such horrors with moments of comedy. These horrors take place within communities which are controlled through such horrors, whereby violence, struggles of hierarchical power, masculine privilege and the need to be part of a group regulate and thus override the desire to flee such an environment.

³⁹⁷ Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 234.

In 'Thesis V1: Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire', Cohen notes that "the co-optation of the monster into a symbol of the desirable is often accomplished through the neutralization of potentially threatening aspects with a liberal dose of comedy".³⁹⁸ The co-option of the monster in Meadows' work involves the representation of homosocial desire which becomes monstrous through the concomitant violence engendered through its disavowal. While not completely neutralized, the monstrous violence of Meadows' work is indeed tempered through the repeated doses of comedy which intersect violent episodes. Violence and comedy may even be contemporaneous, such as the fight between Woody and Milky in *This is England '88*, a feeble scuffle which represents their mutual love more than it does their enmity. This is one of the reasons why the description of Meadows' work as social realist is not adequate; the repeated undercutting of the horrors of social dysfunction with comedy moves the films away from the original project of social realist filmmaking towards a more diffuse sense of commentary, emptied of a sense of being able to change things. Rather than presenting progressive texts which suggest social improvement, Meadows' work offers comedy as the coping mechanism through which we can wrestle with the persistent horrors of humanity. Are men comedic monsters or monstrous comics? The answer it seems is in the liminal space between the two.

Textual Liminality: Conclusion

The proceeding discussion of liminal themes in the work of Meadows reveals a number of elements. Archetypal traits are detectable in characters and these traits are derived from the liminal archetypes of the trickster and the fool. Their relationship to folk culture is also highly relevant to Meadows' employment of folk performances such as carnivalesque play, charivari or rough music, and mock-king coronations. Folk culture is augmented by allusions to the heteromorphically liminal entities of the Minotaur, Proteus and the Centaur Chiron. Such allusions facilitate an understanding of the traditions of homosocial interaction, its continuations and renewals. The figures of the tramp and the ghost offer material and allegorical sites of failure and guilt, engendered in the individual and in the community. The allegorical is augmented by the metaphorical through the use

³⁹⁸ Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 18.

of the doubling entities of the *Doppelgänger* and the monster, beings which problematize homosocial relationships. Spatial liminality is evoked via characters such as the Minotaur and through the use of space within the *mise en scène*. The sonic landscape is studded with elements which evoke other places and times, engendering a liminal psychic imagining.

Rather than signaling an excess of signifiers that a single character or text could not feasibly support, the volume of archetypes, mythological allusion and psychological metaphors identified in the proceeding discussions indicate the plurality of Meadows' texts and the liminal relationship between each of these factors. Thus Darcy can be a foolish teacher; Morell a monstrous fool and Richard a monster moving within the labyrinthine space of the Minotaur. The hybridity of archetypes relates to the hybridity of genre employed within the texts, without any one thing dominating. Rather each element stands between another in a liminal matrix.

It is this complex employment of competing elements which resists categorization of social realism, just as the texts resist categorization of a single genre. Meadows' films make allusions to other films but in a uniquely Meadowsian way, which is immediately recognizable as such. Just as the characters stand as liminal bridges between archetypes, so too are Meadows' films positioned between social realism and genre in an elusive and mobile liminality. As neither category is taxonomically satisfactory, I propose that Meadows' work could be more properly described as liminal realism.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The research process that was ultimately transformed into this thesis began with what is now the apparently naïve intention of defining a filmmaker and his work. As the thesis demonstrates, Meadows and his work resists any clear cut definitions, and equally, his work tests the limits of simple categorization. Meadows' work does not fit comfortably into clear delineations of British filmmaking traditions and generic classifications. This is not to say that his work is indefinable, rather that the defining characteristic of Meadows, and his body of work, can be best explained through the instabilities and fluidities of liminality - in terms of generic, spatial and social framings. It is liminality, rather than centrality or even marginality, which most accurately describes Meadows as a cultural figure and as a director. His work has a relationship to social realism, but cannot be wholly defined by it in the manner suggested by most theorists of his work. He works with genre conventions drawn from British and Hollywood traditions, but does not adhere to the ostensible dictates of either, and instead, his films provide pleasure from hybridization and inconsistency. In the Meadows oeuvre, there is no particular influence of budget size since his films cost between almost nothing to several millions (of whatever denomination), yet budget has no bearing on the success of the films. Nor, does the influence of budget map onto career chronology and reputation since some of Meadows' earlier films have much higher production costs than later examples. Thus whilst Meadows has accrued the status of 'auteur' in the circuits of international acclaim, his working practices continue to be that of a parochial, local maker of smalltime, cult films.

As I argue, much of Meadows' 'auteurist' reputation is reliant on the construction of authenticity as a consequence of his films' reliance on claims to semi-auto/biographical narratives that stitch the figure of the director into the story and which link the past and present of both director and characters in constructions that are neither pure 'truth' nor pure 'fabrication', nor do they purely represent the past or contemporary concerns. In this mesh of auto/biographical claims authenticity *and* creativity are linked with the ensuing play between the two and thus opening up a liminal space of narrative possibility.

If Meadows' films can be defined through a reliance on auto/biographical conceits they are equally delineated by three versions of liminal location: region, class and gender. Because of the films' auto/biographical tropes and surrounding discourses, Meadows' films are closely connected to the East Midlands region of the UK: a region that is itself liminal in a 'neither here nor there' location that is neither north nor south, neither urban nor rural. Whilst this region is firmly delineated by the architecture of the 'council' estate the ubiquity of this architectural style in British town planning paradoxically effaces the specificity of place. Ironically, for a director renowned for the highly specific regionality of his locations, the sense of place engendered in the narratives can be read as being almost anywhere.

The 'liminalising' play between regional specificity and ubiquitous working-class place is rearticulated through the East Midlands accents of Meadowsian actors. It would be reductive and insulting to suggest that the East Midlands accent is indistinctive, but its unfamiliarity within British film and television output which draws on a well rehearsed repertoire of accents drawn from major cities such as London or Liverpool, or generalised 'north' and 'south' regions, renders Meadowsian accents as unrecognizable outside the diegesis of his films. Thus, the Meadowsian accent is not culturally placed; rather it floats in the cultural imagination of those not attuned to its specific nuances.

No such unrecognisability attends representations of the working, or the non-working under-class, of Meadows' characters because of a familiarity derived from a host of British social realist and television narratives such as *Trainspotting* and *Nil by Mouth*. Such characterizations exemplify people living between states of being, being neither employed or unemployed (i.e. seeking work) but living in a no man's land of unfulfilled or even unacknowledged ambition. Most importantly, Meadows' films and Meadows' characters are best understood through the intellectual framings of anthropology where liminality has been extensively theorised as a mode of folk narrative that provides archetypal characters that usefully illuminate social exclusions – in this instance those of non-working-class masculinity. However, with Meadows' films, archetypal illumination

and subversions of social exclusion can not be straightforwardly linked. Throughout Meadows' films archetypal figures such as the trickster, the fool and the Minotaur act out the restrictions and tensions that emerge from the deprivations of so-called under-class masculinity. This 'acting out' takes on the scatological tropes of the 'carnavalesque', But, whilst the inversions of carnival throw a spotlight on the restrictions and limitations of masculine, working-class experiences, the 'carnavalesque' is only ever a temporary reprieve; a liminal moment of escape before the status quo is restored.

The liminality that characterizes Meadows' position in the taxonomies of film criticism also extends into the themes of the films, especially his representations of masculinity. Meadows' male characters are typically positioned between two states of being. This may be due to age such as the adolescent boys of *Romeo Brass* who oscillate between the behaviours of childhood and youth in ways that mark the former through the fantasy of magical performance and the latter through problematic sexuality and violent knowledge. Equally the young men represented in *TwentyFourSeven* waver in the indefinite zone between school and the world of employment, which in turn is rendered unattainable through socio-economic factors. Similarly, Shaun of *This is England* hovers on the cusp of separation from the confining security of a mothered boyhood into the insecurities of a new (to him) male adult world. Moreover his experience of that transition as dangerous serves to replace one liminal place with another in which a prior innocence is desired yet irretrievable, whilst at the same time, the emotional sophistication of adult maturity remains unachieved. Typically, this politicized limbo based on lack of opportunity threatens to perpetually secure the Meadows catalogue of characters in the liminality of 'ladism'.

Frequently, such liminal stasis is represented as a consequence of a deep grief which locks characters into an emotional limbo between loss and acceptance. Such grief has a range of causes: a character's loss of a loved one, or a lost ideal eroded by contemporary political and economic changes, or regret at previous actions, or the grief born of disappointment. The transcendence of, or failure to transcend, this emotional limbo is pivotal to narrative cause and effect. Through characters such as Richard in *Dead Man's*

Shoes, or Shaun in *This is England*, or Morrell in *A Room for Romeo Brass* their grief and mourning provides the rationale for problematic behaviour that in turn, becomes the mechanism that enables emotional growth and change to be realized. In other narratives, such as *TwentyFourSeven*, liminal stasis is configured through alcoholism and exile. Here, in a pre-figuring of his ultimate death, alcoholism causes Darcy to disappear from the represented community even as the narrative secures his absence as a palpable presence of a problematized liminal stasis. Unlike Richard or Shaun, Darcy does not change; he is unable to transcend his emotional limbo and the logic of cause and effect equates this to death.

In Meadowsian narratives, a further liminality of masculinity is subtly registered in representations of young working-class men's unacknowledged homoerotic desires. Crucially, Meadows' narratives suggest a persistent homoerotophobia that haunts aspects of male working-class culture through characters that are caught between the mutually supportive pulls of desire and loathing. This dual state of desiring and loathing lurches from repressed desire to aggressive and violent expression that produces an orgasmic release and exhausted satiation, with an in-between, simmering liminal state of 'something about to happen'.

Significantly, in Meadows' work, liminality is clearly a property of masculinity. Whilst female characters are figured as *marginal*, in that they occupy less on-screen time and space, and have minor roles, they are, in short, 'physically' less present. However, they are not rendered as liminal, either as archetypes in the anthropological sense or as fluid identities that slide between states of being. Indeed, in Meadows' films, female characters are frequently represented as stable points against which the liminal provisions of masculinity can be read.

For Meadowsian masculinity, it is only when 'traditionally' feminine' traits are appropriated by masculine characters, such as Tim in *TwentyFourSeven* when he nurses Darcy, does any semblance of caring, honourable masculinity develop. In contrast, traditionally male acts of honour, such as Richard's quest for vengeance are shown to be

reductive, destructive and unworthy of validation. Paradoxically, in representing the liminality of masculinity, Meadows' films throw into relief the absolute marginality of feminine experience. In this way, the 'common sense' or hegemonic patriarchy that underpins Meadows' world view is sharply illuminated.

One of the potential dangers of discussing a filmmaker and their work is the potential to conflate the historical person, the mediated persona and the work they produce. This is particularly pertinent for the study of a filmmaker whose methodology is dominated by personal reflexivity, claims to auto/biographical truths, and a contextual positioning of himself as an authentic authority on the subjects he represents, most especially white, working-class masculinity. In exploring Meadows as through the anthropological figure of the trickster clear separations can be sustained between the film texts and the contextual material. Because this thesis has approached all material as texts to be read, including the physical body of the filmmaker, it has been able to identify the performative aspects of the historical person that produce the auteurist persona of the white, working-class lad who made good as "Nottingham's premier director", whilst also recognizing the value of film texts that are able to sympathetically and compassionately represent even the most monstrous masculinity.

In disentangling Meadows from the critical stranglehold of social realist framings through an approach that considers Meadowsian films as folk narratives that recycle traditional archetypes commenting on contemporary issues, this thesis offers a methodology that opens up possibilities for other film scholars. This thesis offers the concept of 'liminal realism' as a term that is itself liminal since it bridges critical investments in social realism and a growing awareness of the reductive and limiting framing produced from an all too easy elision of social realism and working-class experience. Whilst the term 'liminal realism' speaks to the marginal position of working-class experience, it also addresses the key idea that such experiences are always liminal in their potential for concepts of growth and transformation that can not be reduced to the economic. Undoubtedly, liminality in Meadows' work is decidedly patriarchal and women are both narratively marginal, and fixed as the stable points against which homo-

social economies are secured whilst the fluid transformations of masculinity can be negotiated and recognized in ways that perpetuate the ongoing exploitation of women. Whilst that patently places severe qualifications on Meadows' ability to compassionately represent working-class experience, this does not nullify recognition that has films offer an individually sympathetic representation of a homosocial under-class. From this position, it would be similarly compassionate for this thesis, and other critics, to acquiesce to Meadows' tricksterish injunction, "please don't harm me."

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Filmography

Work by Shane Meadows

Feature Films

Dead Man's Shoes (2004) UK
Le Donk and Scor-Zay-Zee (2009) UK
Once Upon a Time in the Midlands (2002) UK/Germany
A Room for Romeo Brass (1999) UK/Canada
Smalltime (1996) UK
Somers Town (2008) UK
This is England (2006) UK
TwentyFourSeven (1997) UK

Short Films

All the Way Through (5 min) (1998)
The Allotment Show (2 mins) (1995)
Autumn in the Heart (7 min) (1998)
Billy Gumbo (10 min) (1999)
Black Wiggow (10 mins) (1995)
The Church of Alan Darcy (8 mins) (1996)
The Cleaner (2 mins) (1994)
Come Back Dominic Dillon (12 mins) (1997)
Daihatsu Domino (9 mins) (1998)
The Datsun Connection (13 mins) (1994)
Eric D'ya Get the Jisto (5 min) (1999)
Gary Golfer (8 min) (1999)
A Glyde in the Park (5 mins) (1995)
Hospital Stanway (9 min) (1998)
In the Meantime Afternoon (20 mins, Documentary) (1997)
It was just a little Chimp, about six inches tall and he wore a little red sweater (5 min) (1998)
Jock and John are Neighbours (7 mins) (1995)
Karate Youth (3 mins) (1995)
Kill Me Now, Mummy (7 mins) (1995)
King of the Gypsies (6 mins, Documentary) (1995)
Le Donk Episodic One Slap (19 min) (1999)
Le Donk Episodic Two Slap (15 min) (1999)
Le Donk Rat Attack (15 min) (1999)
Little Man (10 mins, Documentary) (1994)
The Living Room (2009)
- Documentary about musician Gavin Clarke
The Murderer (5 mins) (1994)

Northern Soul (30mins) (2004)
The Pasta Twist (11 mins) (1995)
Paul, Simon, Dominic and Snowy Cabrerra (14 mins) (1998)
The Rise and Fall of a Protection Agency (20 mins) (1996)
A Room For Romeo Brass (13 mins) (1997)
A Room for Romeo Brass rehearsals (11 min) (1998)
Serious (music video) (2007)
- from the album *Lady's Bridge* by Richard Hawley.
Shane's World (70 mins) (2000)
- *Macca's Men*
- *The Man With No Name*
- *The Poppa Squeeze Affair*
- *Three Tears for Jimmy Prophet*
- *Tank's Top Tips*

Simon Stanway is Not Dead (18 mins) (1996)
Simon Stanway 3 (5 min) (1999)
Size Sixteen Feet (6 min) (1998)
Sneinton Junction (6 mins) (1995)
The Stairwell (15 seconds) (2005)
- Produced for the Nokia Shorts competition 2005.

Stars of Track and Field (30 min) (1999)
The Stretch (16 mins) (1995)
There was a Wolf in the Room Mum, and it was Dying (2 min) (1998)
Torino Torino (15 mins, Documentary) (1996)
Valentine (music video) (2007)
- from the album *Lady's Bridge* by Richard Hawley.
Waiting For the Winter (16 mins) (1997)
Where's the Money Ronnie? (12 mins) (1996)
Where's The Money, Ronnie? 2 (15 mins) (1994)
Where's The Money, Ronnie? 3 (14 mins) (1995)
Willy Gumbo (20 min) (1999)
The Zombie Squad (11 mins) (1995)

Television

King of the Gypsies (1995) (10 mins, Documentary) Channel 4, UK

This is England '86 (2010) Channel 4, UK
Broadcast 7, 14, 21, 28 September 2010.
Written by Shane Meadows and Jack Thorne
Episodes 1 and 2: Directed by Tom Harper
Episodes 3 and 4: Directed by Shane Meadows

This is England '88 (2011) Channel 4, UK
Broadcast 13, 14, 15 December 2011.
Written by Shane Meadows and Jack Thorne
Directed by Shane Meadows

General Filmography:

Films

Akenfield (1974) UK
Director: Peter Hall

Atonement (2007) UK
Director: Joe Wright

Badlands (1973) USA
Director: Terence Mallick

Batman Begins (2005) USA/UK
Director: Christopher Nolan

Best in Show (2000) USA
Director: Christopher Guest

Bhaja on the Beach (1993) UK
Director: Gurinder Chada

Billy Elliot (2000) UK/France
Director: Stephen Daldry

The Bitch (1979) UK
Director: Gerry O'Hara

Blonde Fist (1991) UK
Director: Frank Clarke

The Bourne Ultimatum (2005) USA
Director: Paul Greengrass

Boston Kickout (1995) UK
Director : Paul Hills

The Boys Next Door (1985), USA

Director: Penelope Spheeris

Brassed Off (1996) UK

Director: Mark Herman

Brighton Rock (1947) UK

Director: John Boulting

Bronco Bullfrog (1969) UK

Director: Barney Platts-Mills

Children (1976) UK

Director: Terence Davies

Cinderella Man (2005) USA

Director: Ron Howard

Circus (2000) UK/USA

Director: Rob Walker

A Clockwork Orange (1972) UK/USA

Director: Stanley Kubrik

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover (1989) France/UK

Director: Peter Greenaway

Cop Land (1997) USA

Director: James Mangold

The Dark Knight (2008) USA/UK

Director: Christopher Nolan

The Dark Knight Rises (2012) USA/UK

Director: Christopher Nolan

Death and Transfiguration (1983) UK

Director: Terence Davies

Death Wish (1974) USA

Director: Michael Winner

Death Wish II (1982) USA

Director: Michael Winner

Death Wish III (1985) USA

Director: Michael Winner

Death Wish IV: The Crackdown (1987) USA
Director: J. Lee. Thompson

Death Wish V: The Face of Death (1994) USA
Director: Allan A. Goldstein

Deliverance (1972) USA
Director: John Boorman

Distant Voices, Still Lives (1988) UK
Director: Terence Davies

Dog Altogether (short-16mins) (2007) UK
Director: Paddy Considine

Doodlebug (short-3 mins) (1997) UK
Director: Christopher Nolan

Drifters (1929) UK
Director: John Grierson

The Elephant Man (1980) USA
Director: David Lynch

Enter the Dragon (1973) Hong Kong/USA
Director: Robert Clouse

Face (1997) UK
Director: Antonia Bird

Fish Tank (2009) UK/Netherlands
Director: Andrea Arnold

Following (1998) UK
Director: Christopher Nolan

Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994) UK
Director: Mike Newell

The Full Monty (1997) UK/USA
Director: Peter Cattaneo
Gangster No. 1 (2000) UK/Germany/Ireland
Director: Paul McGuigan

Gasman (1998) UK

Director: Lynne Ramsay

Get Carter (1971) UK

Director: Mike Hodges

Heading South (2005) France/Canada

Director: Laurent Cantet

Henry; Portrait of a Serial Killer (1986) USA

Director: John McNaughton

High Hopes (1988) UK

Director: Mike Leigh

The Honeymoon Killers (1970) USA

Director: Leonard Kastle

Housing Problems (1936) UK

Directors: Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton

Howards End (1992) UK

Director: James Ivory

I want You (1998) UK

Director: Michael Winterbottom

In America (2002) Ireland/UK

Director: Jim Sheridan

Inception (2010) USA/UK

Director: Christopher Nolan

Insomnia (2002) USA/Canada

Director: Christopher Nolan

It's a Free World (2007) UK/Italy/Germany/Spain/Poland

Dir Ken Loach

I'll Sleep When I'm Dead (2003) UK

Director: Mike Hodges

Kes (1969) UK

Director: Ken Loach

Kill the Day (1996) UK

Director: Lynne Ramsay

A Kind of Loving (1962) UK
Director: John Schlesinger.

Ladybird, Ladybird (1994) UK
Director: Ken Loach

Land and Freedom (1995) UK/Spain/Germany/Italy
Director: Ken Loach

Last Resort (2000) UK
Director: Pawel Pawlikowski

Les quatre cents coups (1959) France
Director: François Truffaut

Letter to Brezhnev (1985) UK
Director: Frank Clarke

Letztes aus der DaDaer (1990) Germany
Director: Jörg Foth

Life is Sweet (199) UK
Director: Mike Leigh

Little Voice (1998) UK
Director: Mark Herman

Layer Cake (2004) UK
Director: Matthew Vaughn

Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels (1998) UK
Director: Guy Ritchie

London to Brighton (2006) UK
Director: Paul Andrew Williams

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1962) UK
Director: Tony Richardson

The Long Good Friday (1980) UK
Director: John Mackenzie

Look Back in Anger (1959) UK
Director: Tony Richardson

Madonna and Child (1980) UK
Director: Terence Davies

Manhunter (1986) USA
Director: Michael Mann

Mean Streets (1973) USA
Director: Martin Scorsese

Memento (2000) USA
Director: Christopher Nolan

A Mighty Wind (2003) USA
Director: Christopher Guest

Millions Like Us (1943) UK
Directors: Sidney Gilliat and Frank Launder

Mr In-Between (2001) UK
Director: Paul Sarossy

Momma Don't Allow (1956) UK
Director: Karel Reisz

My Ain Folk (1973) UK
Director: Bill Douglas

Murder One (1988) USA/Canada
Director: Graeme Campbell

My Beautiful Laundrette (1985) UK
Director: Stephen Frears

My Name is Joe (1998) UK
Director: Ken Loach

My Summer of Love (2004) UK
Director: Pawel Pawlikowski

My Wrongs 8245-8249 and 117 (2003) UK
Director: Chris Morris

My Zinc Bed (2008) USA/UK
Director: Anthony Page

Naked (1993) UK

Director: Mike Leigh

Neds (2010) UK/France/Italy

Director: Peter Mullen

New York, New York (1977) USA

Director: Martin Scorsese

Night of the Hunter (1955) USA

Director: Charles Laughton

O Dreamland (1953) UK

Director: Lindsay Anderson

On the Waterfront (1954) USA

Director: Elia Kazan

Once Upon a Time in the West (1968) Italy/USA

Director: Sergio Leone

Pale Rider (1985) USA

Director: Clint Eastwood

Performance (1970) UK

Directors: Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg

Point Blank (1967) USA

Director: John Boorman

Poor Cow (1967) UK

Director: Ken Loach

The Prestige (2006) USA/UK

Director: Christopher Nolan

Psycho (1960) USA

Director: Alfred Hitchcock

Pulp Fiction (1994) USA

Director: Quentin Tarantino

Quadrophenia (1979) UK

Director: Franc Roddam

The Raggedy Rawney (1988)

Director: Bob Hoskins

Raging Bull (1980) USA
Director: Martin Scorsese

Raining Stones (1993) UK
Director: Ken Loach

Rambo: First Blood (1982) USA
Director: Ted Kotcheff

Ratcatcher (1999) UK/France
Director: Lynne Ramsay

Rashomon (1950) Japan
Director: Akira Kurosawa

The Reckoning (1970) UK
Director: Jack Gold

Red Riding: In the Year of Our Lord 1880 (2009) Channel Four Film, UK
Director: James Marsh

Red Road (2006) UK/Denmark
Director Andrea Arnold

Refuge England (1959) UK
Director: Robert Vas

Reservoir Dogs (1992) USA
Director: Quentin Tarantino

Riff Raff (1991) UK
Director: Ken Loach

Rocky (1976) USA
Director: John G. Avildsen

Rocky II (1979) USA
Director: Sylvester Stallone

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)
Director: Jim Sharman

Romper Stomper (1992) Australia
Director: Geoffrey Wright

Room at the Top (1959) UK

Director: Jack Clayton

Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (1987) UK

Director: Stephen Frears

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1960) UK

Director: Karel Reisz

The Searchers (1956) USA

Director: John Ford

Scum (1979) UK

Director: Alan Clarke

Small Faces (1996) UK

Director: Gilles MacKinnon

Son of Rambow (2007) UK

Director: Garth Jennings

Southern Comfort (1981) USA/Switzerland/UK

Director: Walter Hill

Spring and Port Wine (1970) UK

Director: Peter Hammond

Stein (1991) Germany

Director: Egon Gunther

Sweet Sixteen (2002) UK/Germany/Spain

Director: Ken Loach

A Taste of Honey (1961) UK

Director: Tony Richardson

Taxi Driver (1976) USA

Director: Martin Scorsese

That'll be the Day (1973) UK

Director: Claude Whatham

This is Spinal Tap (1984) USA

Director: Rob Reiner

This Sporting Life (1963) UK

Director: Lindsay Anderson

Tyrannosaur (2011) UK
Director: Paddy Considine

Up 'n' Under (1998) UK
Director: John Godber

The Usual Suspects (1995) USA/Germany
Director: Bryan Singer

The War Zone (1999) Italy/UK
Director: Tim Roth

We Need to Talk About Kevin (2011) UK/USA
Director: Lynne Ramsay

The Wicker Man (1973) UK
Director: Robin Hardy

Wish You Were Here (1987) UK
Director: David Leland

Yentl (1983) UK/USA
Director: Barbra Streisand

Television

Boys from the Black Stuff (1982) 5 Episodes, BBC, UK
Writer: Alan Bleasdale, Director: Philip Saville

Brookside (1982-2003) Channel 4, UK
Creator: Phil Redmond

Cathy Come Home (1966) BBC, UK
Director: Ken Loach

The Golden Girls (1985-1992) Touchstone Television, USA
Creator: Susan Harris

The Good Life (1975-1978) BBC 1, UK
Creators: John Esmonde and Bob Larby

I'm Alan Partridge: Watership Alan (1997) BBC 2, UK

Creators: Peter Baynam, Steve Coogan and Armando Iannucci

Line of Duty (2012) 5 Episodes, BBC 1, UK

Creator: Jed Mercurio

Made in Britain (1982) Central Independent Television, UK

Director: Alan Clarke

Mark Lawson Talks to: Imelda Staunton (2004) BBC 4, UK

Minder (1979-1994) Euston Films, UK

Creator: Leon Griffiths

Rough Skin (2011) Touchstone Television, UK

Director: Cathy Brady

The South Bank Show: The Scorsese of the North, Shane Meadows (2007) ITV, UK

Director: Roz Edwards

The Suspicions of Mr Whicher (2011) Hatrick Productions, UK

Director: James Hawes

The Taming of the Shrew (2005) BBC 1, UK

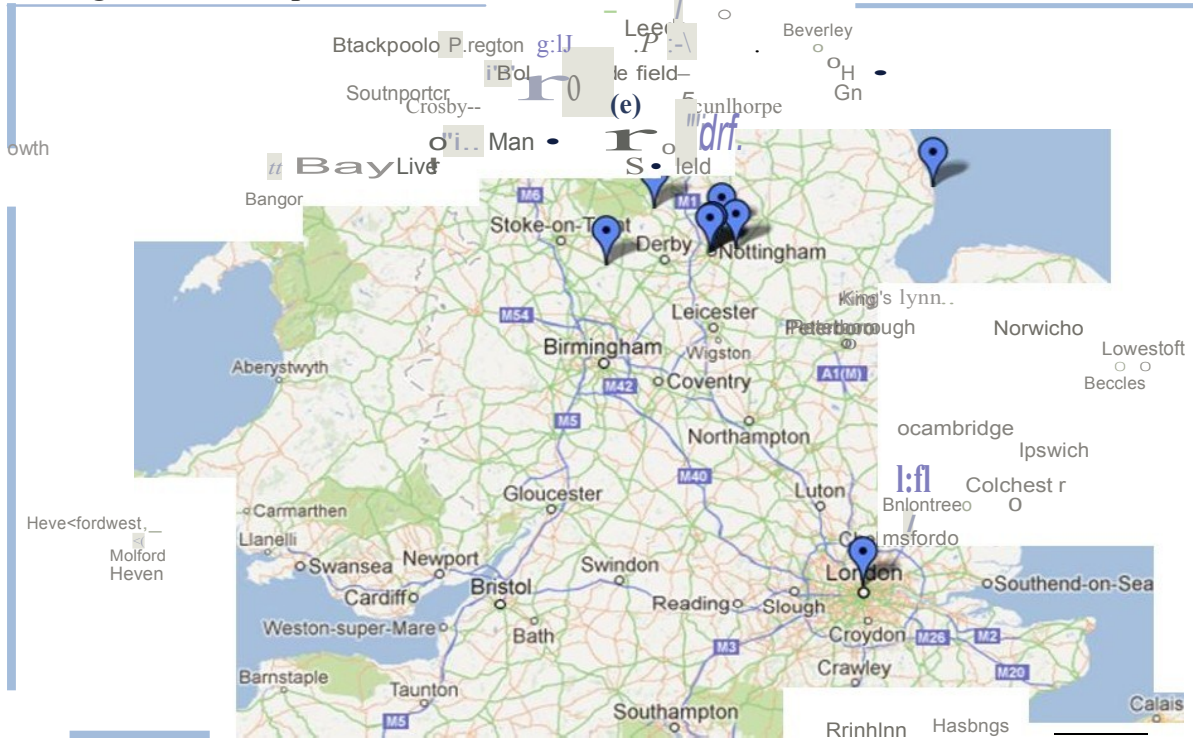
Director: David Richards

True Love (2012) 5 Episodes, Working Title Television, UK

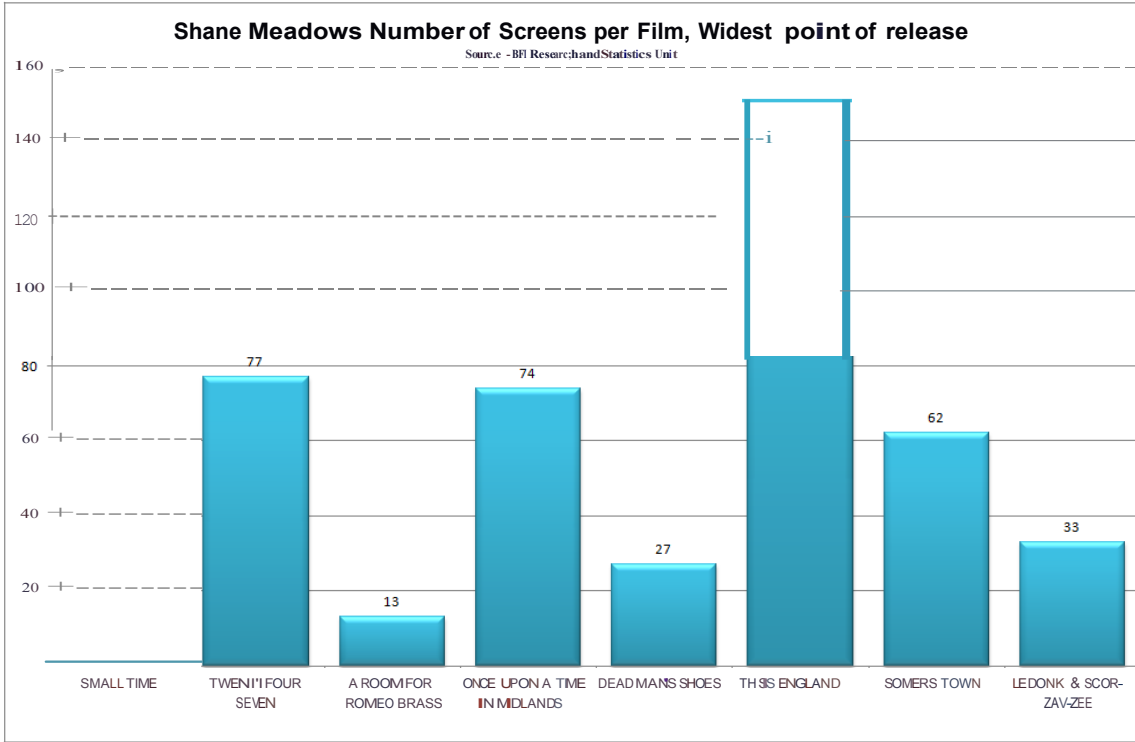
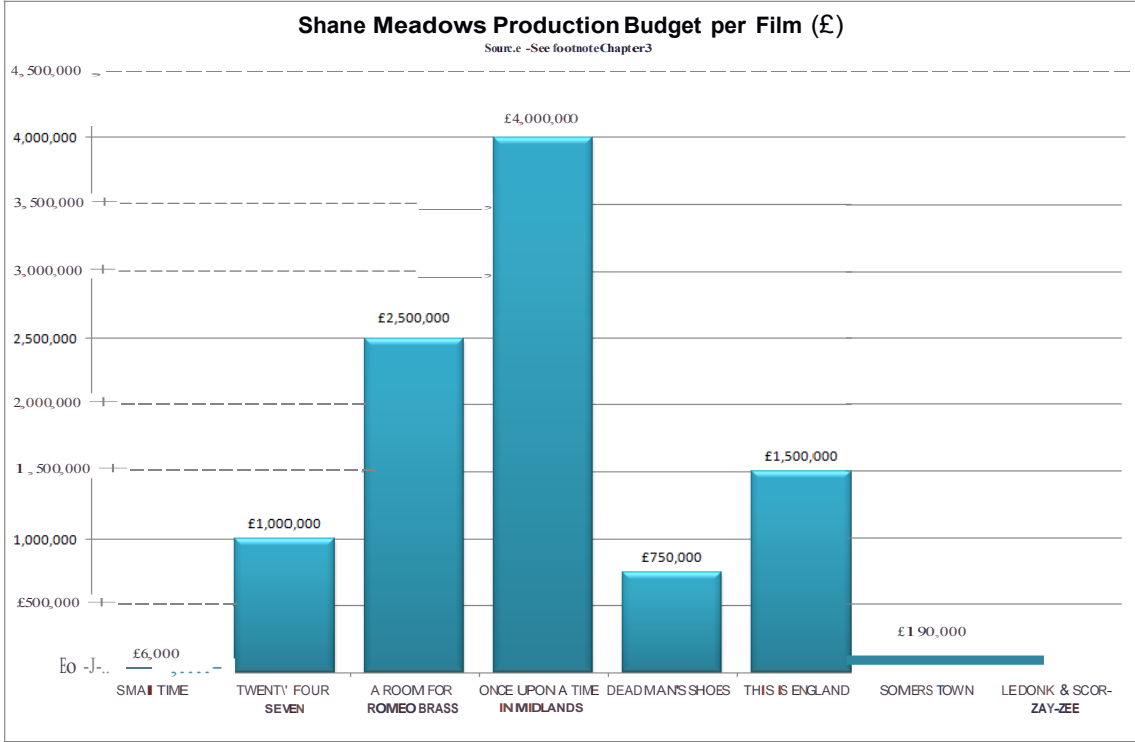
Director: Dominic Savage

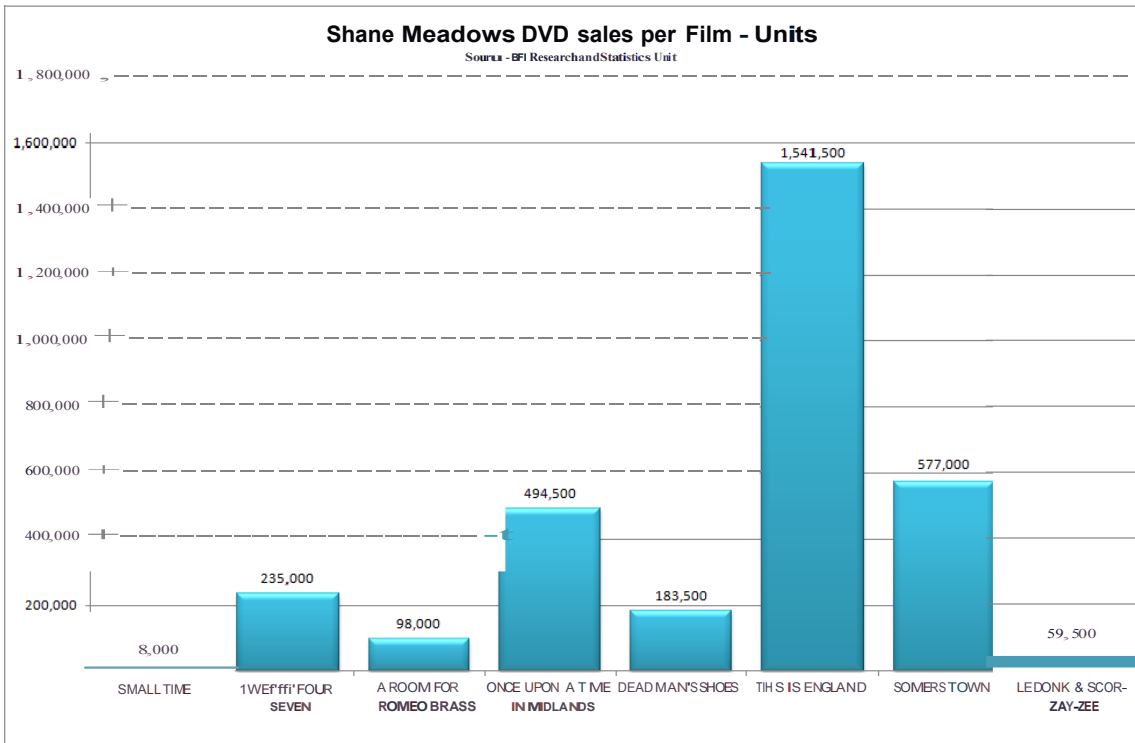
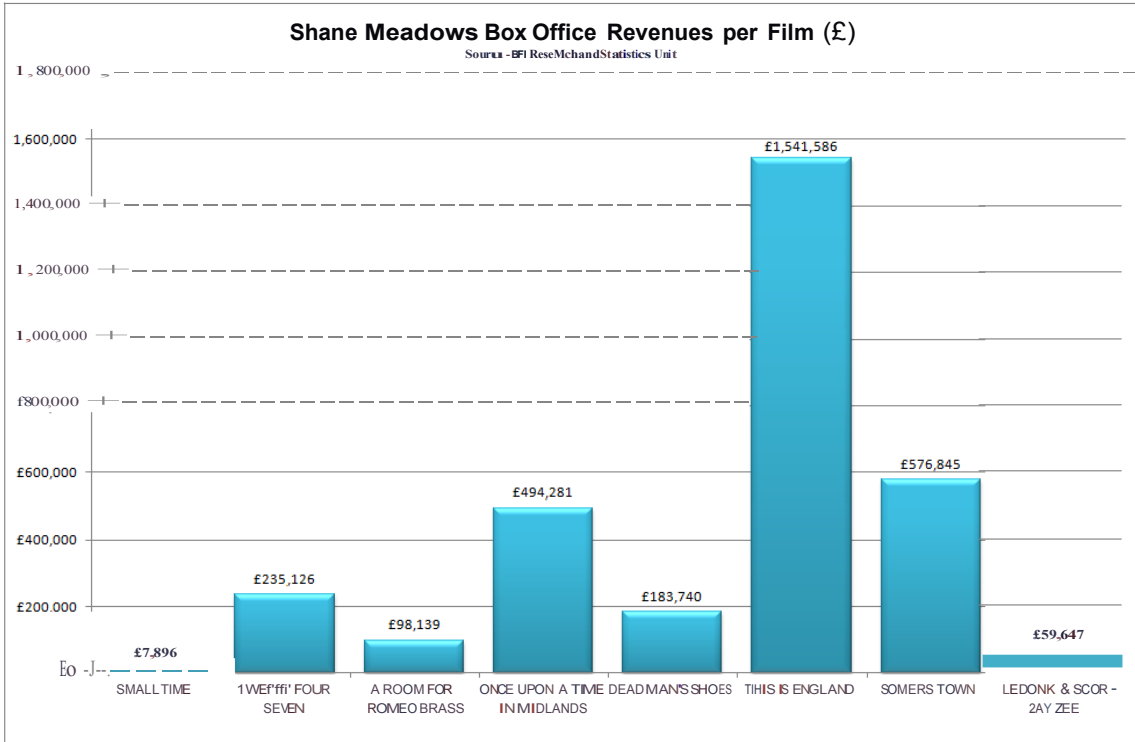
Index 1: Graphs

Filming Location Map



Film	TwentyFourSeven	A Room for Romeo Blass	Once Upon a Time in the Midlands	Dead Mans Shoes	Somers Town	Le Donk and Scor-Say-Zee
Source:IMDB	Macclesfield,Cheshire, England,UK	Calverton,Notting-am, Notting-amshire, England, UK	Nottingl:am, Nottinghamshire,En@and, UK	Bonsall,Matlock Bath, Deruyshire,En@and,UK	Ctamp de Mars, Paris 7, Paris,Foance	Old Trafford, Manchester, Greater Manchester, En@and,UK
	Nottingl:am, Nottinghamshire,England, UK	Chapel St Leomrds, Lincolnshire, En@and,UK	Porchester Junior SchooL, Nottingl:am, Nottinghamshire,En@and, UK	Matlock,Deruyshire, En@and, UK	Jardin duLuxembourg, Paris 6,Paris,Foance	
	Peak District Nationa! Paok,Deruyshire,En@and, UK	Oldfields Ividdle SchooL, Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, En@and, UK		Riber Castle,Matlock, Deruyshire,En@and,UK	Place du Tertre, Montrrartre,Paris 18, Paris,Foance	
				Tansley,Matlock, Deruvshire,En!)and,UK	Rue de Rennes,Paris 6, Paris,Foance	
					Somers Town, London, E.rgand,UK	
					St Pancoas Station,St. Pancras,London,En@and, UK	





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Ross King, 'In Need of Modernization?', *The Daily Telegraph*, 14.3.2005 accessed online www.telegraph.co.uk/property/ 13/09/2009.

Geoffrey Macnab, 'Dead Man's Shoes', *Screen Daily.Com*. Available at www.screendaily.com/dead-mans-shoes. Accessed 12/09/2009.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'The Beast in the Closet: James and the Writing of Homosexual Panic', in Rachel Adams and David Savran (eds.), *The Masculinities Studies Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002): 157-174.

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Jacinda Read, *The New Avengers: Feminism, Femininity and the Rape-Revenge Cycle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin, [1818] 1992)

Sharon Willis, *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

ⁱ *The South Bank Show: Shane Meadows* (ITV1, first broadcast 29.4.2007).

ⁱⁱ *Brief Encounters Film Festival*; event transcript (2004) available at www.shanemeadows.co.uk, accessed 1.08.2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Quotation about Riber Castle (constructed in 1862) attributed to the poet Sir John Summerson, who stated “Had Smedley (who commissioned the building) employed a professional he would have got a house unmistakably, however crudely, shaped with style – Italian Gothic or baronial. As it was, he produced an object of indecipherable bastardry – a true monster.” Ross King, ‘In Need of Modernization?’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 14.3.2005 accessed online www.telegraph.co.uk/property/ 13/09/2009.

^{iv} As several contributors to this collection also note, Vicky McClure’s award-winning performance in *TiE ’86* arguably signals a deliberate shift in Meadows’s formerly homosocial worldview.

^v My thanks here to Martin Fradley for his suggestion of *The Shawshank Redemption* and his assessment of Robbins's character.

^{vi} While there is not space here to discuss the auteurist credentials of Meadows, it is important to note the similarities (and dissimilarities, such as Meadows' 'anti-cool' stance which stands in contrast to Tarantino's hyper-cool) of the two filmmakers and by extension, key examples of homosociality, such as the absent female sexual object, with the subjects of the smutty joke (Madonna, Pam Grier and Elois in *Pulp Fiction*) functioning in the same way as "that Jane", or the sharing of pornographic material between groups of men.

^{vii} Sillitoe's representation of Nottingham was informed by the work of writers such as Victor Hugo and Daniel Defoe whose stories of vengeance utilized the spaces and places of their locations to create maze-like topographies, which supported and informed the spiralling plotlines.

^{viii} This particular dynamic evokes the dream logic of John Boorman's *Point Blank* whose protagonist, the knowingly named 'Walker', moves among the locations in a similarly uncanny way.

^{ix} My thanks to Martin Fradley for this point.

^x In this respect *Dead Man's Shoes* differs from the traditional Loachian model of social realism - consistent from *Cathy Come Home* (1966) to *It's a Free World* (2007) - which grant sustained attention to the local socio-political context of the narrative in order to raise questions about the over-arching structures which encourage such conditions.

^{xi} 'Batchelor band' is a zoological term for young male animals that, having been turned out of herding groups upon reaching puberty, form all-male subgroups and often display violent and destructive behaviour.

^{xii} This impasse is most fully realized in the closing freeze-frame of *This is England*, which refuses the partial resolution offered through the family unit portrayed in Meadows's previous films.

^{xiii} *Brief Encounters Film Festival* Event Transcript (2004), *ibid.*