

In a Manner of Speaking: Class, Voice, and Change in Three Post-War British Films

Graham Law

Abstract David Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1945), Alexander Mackendrick's *The Ladykillers* (1955), and Karel Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) are the three films referred to in the title. The paper proceeds principally by close analysis of the interaction between the variety of class dialects represented and the instability of narrative genres employed in each. It is argued that the three works have a representative value in the way that, consciously or unconsciously, they enact crises in, respectively, the upper-middle-class, lower-middle-class, and working-class socio-cultural formations in post-war Britain.

Three assumptions, here stated rather than justified, underlie what follows: first, that elements of an archaic system of social stratification have persisted for an unusually long period in Britain compared to other industrialised societies developing through forms of feudalism;*¹ second, that consciousness of class and rank in Britain has been manifested to an unusual extent through linguistic difference, specifically of dialect and accent;*² and

third, that the twenty years or so following the end of the second world war were a period of unusual instability and change in British class structures.*³ Such changes must be related, in the last analysis, to the rapid developments in mass production, consumption, and communication taking place during that period (production lines and automation, supermarkets and convenience goods, telephones and televisions). However, it is the prior aim of this paper to reflect on the representation of class in certain influential fictional narratives of the period as they work both to reproduce and to produce the dominant images and languages of class society and culture. The narratives chosen are from the cinema, rather than from literature, theatre, or broadcasting. Unlike literature, film operates most characteristically with a direct representation of the human subject and the human voice, yet is permanent rather than transitory like theatre, and has been much better preserved quantitatively and qualitatively than broadcasting output. In the period in question, cinema largely maintains its pre-war dominance as an entertainment medium, while maintaining an interactive relationship with literature, theatre, and broadcasting.

The three works on which this paper will focus are Brief Encounter (1945), The Ladykillers (1955), and Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1960), all of which have been both commercially successful and critically acclaimed, and, it is argued, have a representative value. The narratives derive in turn from a stage play, an original film script, and a novel, and belong, somewhat uneasily it is true, to the genres of romance, comedy, and naturalism, respectively. The dominant values are those of the upper middle class (bourgeoisie) in Brief Encounter, of the lower middle class (petty bourgeoisie) in The Ladykillers, and of the working class (proletariat) in Saturday

Night and Sunday Morning.^{*4} Yet, if the sequence of the three narratives helps to trace a significant historical development, it is precisely because of those conflicts and instabilities in the process of representation which serve to mark the process of change. The following brief analyses seek to reveal these slippages by focusing on the operation of class accents within the economy of the narrative.

(1) Brief Encounter

Brief Encounter derives from Noël Coward's Still Life, one of a series of one-act stage vehicles for the author and Gertrude Lawrence, presented and published as Tonight at 8.30 in 1936. Coward produced the film and wrote the screenplay, while David Lean directed. It was the fourth film on which the two had worked together in as many years. Although Coward and Lawrence are replaced in the leading roles by Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson, a number of performers remain in minor roles and the production as a whole retains something of its pre-war theatrical air.

The film's title refers to the abortive romance between Dr Alec Harvey and Mrs Laura Jesson, who fall in love after a casual meeting in the refreshment room of a suburban railway junction. However, they finally refuse the weight of guilt and the risk of shame concomitant with an illicit affair in their bourgeois world, while never entertaining the possibility of escaping from their roles as spouses and parents in their respective happy families. The romance proceeds largely as a series of delays and interruptions. The lovers' meetings are restricted to Thursday afternoons (since they live at opposite ends of the railway line and meet at the junction only when their respective weekly hospital visits and shopping

expeditions coincide) and to public places (so that their intimacies are repeatedly forestalled by the unexpected appearance of acquaintances). And just as important an inhibitor is the fact that the romance must be conducted constantly under the eyes of the lower classes in the shape of waitresses, usherettes, and, most pervasively, railway employees. The dominant setting and symbolic centre of the film is thus the station refreshment room. The refreshment-room scenes also present a fragmentary subplot in the form of a subsidiary romance between the tealady, Mrs Baggot (Joyce Carey), and the ticket collector, Mr Godby (Stanley Holloway). The relation of the two plots depends on a clear sense of social hierarchy articulated principally through dialect and accent. Nevertheless, the parallelism is curiously unstable, and helps to create a disturbing possibility of a link between the sense of failure which pervades the central romance and indeed the drama as a whole and the class structure of the represented society. It is this inconsistency which I wish to go on to investigate in a little more detail.

The main-plot characters, Laura and Alec and their families and friends, are marked by their employment of the clipped, constricted sounds of Received Pronunciation, the standard (prestige) accent of modern British English, while the sub-plot characters exhibit the omitted aspirates, relaxed vowels, glotalisations and elisions of disparaged regional and social dialects ('Cockney' in the case of Mrs Baggot, and general 'Northern' in that of Mr Godby). Accent extends to include the contents and genres of discourse. While the bourgeois romance moves tonally between lyricism and pathos, the proletarian romance is conducted largely stychomythically in quips and clichés, the characters the stereotypes familiar from low-life

comedy. This comic distancing is reinforced by the fact that, as was general in the mainstream theatre of the time, lower-class roles are performed either by middle-class 'character' actors (such as Joyce Carey), or by working-class comedians from the music hall tradition (like Stanley Holloway). Such social hierarchicalisation of the characters, languages, and plots in the film inevitably recalls the structures of Elizabethan drama; it is then doubly disturbing when the thematic paralleling between the main and subordinate plot strands often seems to work counter to this value scheme. This emerges most clearly if we compare the narrative structure of Brief Encounter with that of an earlier collaboration between Coward and Lean, In Which We Serve (1942), and further with Still Life itself.

In Which We Serve is based not on a pre-war theatre piece but on an original screenplay by Coward and functions primarily as war-time propaganda, asserting, in the face of the evidence of the 1930s depression, the unity of purpose of English people despite the disparity of social class. The dominant setting is the British destroyer HMS Torrin, which is sunk in the opening sequence. The body of the film is a series of flashbacks telling the war-time story of the ship itself and of three members of its crew, who represent the naval and social hierarchy: the upper-middle-class captain (Coward himself), the lower-middle-class petty officer (Bernard Miles) and the working-class able seaman (John Mills). The social dimension is evoked as much by language (the accents are respectively RP, westcountry, and Cockney) as by manners (during the evacuation of Dunkirk, cocoa is doled out to the men, while the officers sip bovril laced with sherry). Again the lower orders are generally presented in a comic light, while the bourgeois family

(the captain's wife is again played by Celia Johnson) is a carbon copy of that in Brief Encounter. The captain's tone towards those under him is invariably patronising. Yet, although the social hierarchy is asserted in this stylistic way, the narrative paralleling attempts to assert the fundamental human and national unity of the disparate ranks. Each of the three men is shown at home among loved ones, and is allowed an equal dignity in love and death. The theme of unfaithfulness again occurs, this time metaphorically, so that for all three wives, the ship, a surrogate for Britannia, is a romantic rival. Three consecutive scenes, each presenting Christmas dinner in the three families in ascending order by rank, explicitly raise this theme and exemplify the stable narrative structure of the film. The similarity in regard to the handling of social and dramatic hierarchies between In Which We Serve and Olivier's war-time film production of Shakespeare's Henry V is striking, and indeed their ideological function is identical, the justification of the existing social order.

Returning to Still Life, we can see there a similar stability in the parallel plotting which is subverted in Brief Encounter. The play's action unfolds in five scenes covering a period of one year, each set in the station refreshment room, and each moving fluidly between the socially superior and inferior characters. (Here there is a second subordinate romance between Stanley and Beryl, two young assistants in the refreshment room, which remains only vestigially in the film version.) The subordinate action throughout remains in parallel with the main action, though often parodically. For example, the ticket-collector finally strikes up a physical intimacy with the tealady by slapping her on the behind while she is refueling the stove, on the same occasion that the doctor and the

lady arrange to miss their trains and consummate their passion in the service flat of a fellow doctor, though both the women show an initial resistance. The ticket collector and the doctor separately assert that 'a bit of [a little] relaxation never did anyone any harm'.*⁵ The final scene, however, allows the note of pathos to extend to the lower-class drama. On the occasion of the final parting of the bourgeois lovers, the ardour of the other couples is doused by the news that Beryl's mother is dying. Again, the narrative structure finally asserts, however patronizingly, a shared human dignity in the face of love and death whatever the disparities of social status. The title of the play, unlike that of the film, clearly refers to the social pattern as a whole rather than a single stratum.

Brief Encounter compresses the action into seven weeks, but varies the setting, following Laura and Alec to their meetings and Laura alone to her home, and in the process presenting a sympathetic portrait of Laura's husband Fred. In addition, the film opts to tell the story predominantly in flashback, from the point-of-view of Laura, with her narration in voiceover, as, following her final parting from Alec and return home, she sinks into a reverie and begins to run the events of the past weeks over in her mind. The result of all this is not only to alter considerably the balance of sympathies in the conflict between domestic and passionate love, but also to disturb the status of the subplot. If, as a proportion of the action as a whole, its weight is reduced, the general disruption of the plot-paralleling renders the presence of these scenes rather more disturbing. (For example, the slap on the behind is retained but the love between Laura and Alec is never consummated in the film story, while Beryl's romance is suppressed and her mother's illness

eliminated, so that the subordinate romances are denied even symbolic terminations.)

Yet the film opens with the lower-class characters in the foreground and the lovers in the background. The credits finish rolling over high contrast shots of the station as an express train roars between the platforms, and the camera pans to the ticket collector who, checking the time on his pocket watch, smiles almost satanically before jauntily crossing the line and entering the refreshment room. The camera follows him to the counter and provides a close up as he becomes engaged in a mild flirtation with the tealady. Though the camera pans briefly to acknowledge the presence of Laura and Alec at a table in the rear (their final farewell as we learn later), the soundtrack stays at the counter. It is only later, when Laura and Alec are interrupted by the intrusion of Laura's gossiping acquaintance, that the centre of attention shifts and the true hierarchy of action is established. When the scene is re-run at the end of the film, this time in flashback, narrated by Laura, with the centres of attention reversed, this only serves to remind us of the rather puzzling presences who command our attention so absolutely at the beginning.

To proceed further with the analysis of the function of the lower-class characters in Brief Encounter, we must return briefly to the question of class and accent. If the world of the film is divided into those with and without the RP accents, it is also apparent that there is further discrimination among the bourgeois characters themselves according to the degree to which their vowels are clipped and constricted, if you like, according to how stiff their upper lip is. Such a distinction, between forms of RP that are 'unmarked' (associated with the upper middle class) and 'marked' (associated

with the most elite and privileged social groups, the residual aristocracy),*⁶ can be seen most characteristically in the following vowel transformations:

sat → set; off → awf[ul]; wine → wane; fire → far.

Within the economy of the film narrative, markedness of RP accent is associated with the inhibition or interruption of desire, while relaxation of vowels is associated with other refusals of constriction. Those bourgeois characters who consciously or unconsciously interrupt the progress of the affair between Laura and Alec invariably speak in highly marked forms. Female characters, who are shown to resist desire more strongly, tend to exhibit a great degree of RP markedness. While this is clearly true of Laura vis-à-vis Alec, it is noticeable that a combination of social pretention and resistance to intimacy with Mr Godby often lead Mrs Baggot to ape the vowels of marked RP, to comic effect. It is also noticeable that Laura's voice exhibits a greater degree of markedness when she speaks as narrator (when she has renounced desire) than when she speaks as a participant in the action (while she is still pursuing desire, albeit hesitantly).

What is even more remarkable is that the repression of desire is also linked in the film with the quality of Englishness itself. 'Flames of Passion', the adventure romance which Laura and Alec watch in the cinema, associates passion with the heat of the tropics, but is followed by the bathos of a local advertisement for a hooded perambulator. Laura remarks on leaving the cinema: 'Do you know, I believe we should all behave quite differently if we lived in a warm sunny climate all the time. We shouldn't be so withdrawn and shy and difficult.' Laura's own fantasies of romance with Alec, projected like a movie onto the window of the train

taking her back to her suburban home, are set on the continent, by the mediterranean, or in the tropics. Even the express trains periodically plunging through the station, and depicted with such obviously erotic excitement, are boat trains, we are told, taking people away from frigid England to the warmth of the continent. And it is these trains which mark the beginning and end of the romance between Alec and Laura. Grit in Laura's eye from the passing express introduces her to Alec; it is another express beneath which Laura nearly throws herself when the romance ends; and the only moments of physical passion Laura and Alec experience are the kisses snatched as the express roars through the station.

In this light, the proletarian railway employees, and in particular the ticket collector Mr Godby, can be seen to have an affinity with the heat and energy of passion which the bourgeois characters resist. In this subtext of the film, consciousness of social superiority seems to be linked to the refusal of the body. If the hierarchical social structure imposed so clearly on the narrative initially seems to insist aggressively on a return to the social and dramatic patterns of the 1930s, the instability of the plot paralleling, in conjunction with the workings of the symbolic code, suggests an alternative reading, where the failure of the romance between Alec and Laura is intimately linked to the problems of the structure of the society as a whole. Thus, while Brief Encounter remains outwardly oblivious of the first election of a majority Labour government in July 1945, on the basis of what appeared a programme of radical social reform, it unconsciously acknowledges that a return to the establishmentarian Toryism of the inter-war years is unviable.*⁷

(2) The Ladykillers

The Ladykillers is one of the last of the series of small-scale local comedies produced at Ealing Studios in the ten years or so after the war. These function specifically to provide reassuring or compensatory fantasies to the individualistic lower middle class in the face of the war-time and post-war growth of corporatism in labour, business, and government, and more generally to replace the aggressive but fast-eroding imperial myth of 'Great Britishness', with the defensive parochial one of 'Little Englishness'. The genre thus clearly could not survive the fiasco of the Suez crisis and the encroachments of 'mass society' in the late fifties. Indeed, the Ealing operation as a whole, with its 'family' of contracted directors, script writers, editors and so on, under the paternal eye of executive producer Michael Balcon, with its back turned resolutely on alien themes and alien markets, mimics this ideology and suffers a similar fate.

Ealing comedy most characteristically presents a small or rather minituarised community of peculiar individualists attacked by or attacking the representatives of corporate bureaucracy. The balance of sympathies in this conflict is unambiguously weighted and the final outcome is rarely in doubt. The most characteristic productions are perhaps Passport to Pimlico (1949), where the local inhabitants escape the strictures of food rationing when it is discovered that part of South London belongs to the duchy of Burgundy, and The Lavender Hill Mob (1951), where a timid bank clerk (Alec Guinness) finds himself masterminding a bullion robbery. The two are both from original stories scripted by TEB Clarke, both feature Stanley Holloway in major comic roles, and are directed respectively by Henry Cornelius and Charles Crichton.

If this is Ealing comedy in its ideologically pure form, the versions of directors Robert Hamer and Alexander Mackendrick are often less stable and reassuring. In particular they mix comedy sometimes disconcertingly with suspense and Gothic melodrama, and tend to allow the balance of sympathy between the individualists and the corporatists to swing alarmingly so that it occasionally becomes doubtful which is which. The Ladykillers fits this description. It was directed by Mackendrick, an expatriate American of Scottish descent, from an original story and script by compatriot William Rose, both of whom obviously found the embrace of Balcon's English 'family' constricting as well as comforting.*⁸

Here the conflict is between a frail and diminutive old lady in reduced circumstances (Mrs Wilberforce, played by the seventy-seven-year-old Katie Johnson) and a gang of thieves whose leader insinuates himself into her house as a lodger, and abuses her hospitality by turning her home into the centre of operations and the lady herself into an unwitting accomplice. After the planned robbery is precariously accomplished, the lady discovers how she has been abused, but the villains, dishonourable even to each other, in trying to eliminate her succeed only in eliminating themselves, while she is left blamelessly to enjoy the proceeds of the crime. However, the balance of sympathies is far less simply weighted than this account allows.

The story is once again emphatically small-scale, both anachronistic and minutarised. The unities of space and time are obeyed, but while the story-line insists that the setting is postwar central London, the community is presented symbolically as an Edwardian village. The ambiguous narrative and symbolic centre of the film is Mrs Wilberforce's house, from the front a cul-de-sac

maisonette in sight of King's Cross Station, but from the rear a Gothic pile perched in precarious isolation over a railway cutting, periodically shrouded in smoke and pierced by the shrieks of passing trains. The subsidence resulting from war-time bombing has rendered much of the house structurally unsound, we are told. Mrs Wilberforce is also physically and symbolically 'lopsided'. She verges on the shabby genteel: we hear of an affluent Victorian childhood and a husband lost before the war in the service of the merchant navy, but the only visible remnants of this bourgeois and imperial splendour are a series of sepia photographs and three parrots named, General Gordon, Admiral Beattie and Mildred. But like the house, Mrs Wilberforce partakes of the uncanny. Her imperturbable childlike naivety is unconsciously Puckish, and tends to wreck havoc among those around her. In the opening shots, as she strolls through the 'village' acknowledging the greetings of neighbours and tradesmen, her smile induces a baby virtually to jump out of its pram and set up an anguished wailing. In the face of this satanic gentility, there is a clear sense in which the criminal gang are the underdogs in the conflict.

The gang members, balding, seedy, and inept, respond by turns with ingratiating servility and manically impotent rage. There are five, each an easily recognisable comic stereotype: the leader and mastermind, Professor Marcus (Alec Guinness), is the mad professor; Major Courtney is the irresolute and cowardly military man; Messrs. Lawson, Robinson, and Harvey are respectively the bonehead muscleman, the street-wise ted, and the Italianate gangster. The designations are those created for the benefit of Mrs Wilberforce; they are Doc, the Major, Oneround, Harry, and Louis to each other. The social comedy of the film derives largely from such differences

of perspective marked by linguistic incongruity.

Like Mrs Wiberforce, the professor and the major speak RP. The major's is generally marked, the lady's only so in particular accesses of gentility, and the bohemian professor's generally unmarked, and perhaps betraying a regional or foreign residue. Harvey's accent is clearly marked as foreign and thus outside the English hierarchy, while Lawson and Robinson exhibit slow low-pitched and fast high-pitched inflexions of Cockney respectively. Mrs Wilberforce's discourse is most notable for its almost pedantic old-fashioned politeness. Before the true nature of the gang's activities is revealed, with the exception of Louis, they all attempt to conform to her social codes of verbal and non-verbal behaviour, with varying degrees of success but always to comic effect. (Their criminal activities are hidden by the improbable façade that they are a string quintet at practice; Louis carries his violin case like a machine-gun.) Mrs Wilberforce is outraged less by the crime in itself than because it betrays the fact that the professor and his companions are not gentlemen. After this revelation, though the major and the professor sporadically attempt to maintain the illusion of gentility, in particular trying to justify themselves by suggesting that they belong to that fraction of the middle class whose circumstance have been reduced even more acutely than those of Mrs Wilberforce, the roles are largely reversed. The tendency then is for the lady to be drawn gradually into her guests' own codes (criminal slang: 'lolly' for money; 'pick up' for arrest; 'buttoned up' for silent etc), and allegiances (she tells a prying 'bogey' to 'buzz off', after ascertaining that he doesn't carry a search warrant). The effect of this code-switching is to generate a degree of doubt concerning whether the

embattled lower middle classes might not be better be represented by the 'gentlemen of the night' than by the lady.

This suspicion is further encouraged by the way in which the presentation of other character groups, specifically policemen and tradesmen, enters the balance of sympathies. In the course of the robbery, Mrs Wilberforce's uncanny innocence destroys not only the best-laid plans of Professor Marcus but also the livelihoods of three humble tradesmen who happen to cross her path: a taxi-driver, a barrow-boy, and a junkman, 'all out of business in ten minutes', as Robinson recalls sympathetically. In the fracas which accompanies this destruction the representatives of the law unquestioningly blame the tradesmen and exonerate Mrs Wilberforce. Indeed, the film as a whole is framed by and centred around the lady's visits to the police station which leave no doubt that she is under the special protection of the police superintendent.*⁹ In the closing scenes, as Providence in the form of the police sergeant allows her to keep the stolen money, and the lady celebrates her restoration to affluence by dropping one of the high-denomination bank notes patronisingly into the cap of a disabled street painter, the suspicion arises that the Ealing comedy pattern has been overturned and the underdogs have lost.

Charles Barr suggests a further complexity in noting that the film in part reenacts the upper-middle-class nightmare of the unexpected election of the Labour government in 1945.*¹⁰ The gang invading the lady's house then would represent the newly-elected socialist members, a mixed group from coal miners to turn-coat members of the upper middle class, swarming across the government benches of the House of Commons.*¹¹ In this reading, Marcus could stand for Marx, plotting for central planning, and theft for nationalisation and the

redistribution of wealth. The point is emphatically not that the narrative functions as a conscious and consistent political allegory, or that it finally espouses the cause of the reactionary upper-middle-class establishment. Rather the instability of the film's linguistic, generic, and symbolic codes, and the concomitant uncertainties of its allegiances, are symptoms of the final perplexities of traditional lower-middle-class individualism, faced with absorption into the newly-emerging formations of 'mass' society and culture.*¹²

(3) Saturday Night and Sunday Morning

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning is not the first British feature film to offer representations of the lives of the contemporary industrial proletariat, yet its mode of representation is strikingly new. As we have seen, Brief Encounter and The Ladykillers, and their like, tend to figure the lower classes as those relatively independent tradesmen and service workers on the boundaries of the upper working and lower middle classes, and paternalistically, comically and fragmentarily. Though other film types created around the war years, particularly documentary and semi-documentary styles, manage to combine a rather broader social canvas with a less-distanced perspective, the effect is still limited and limiting. However, as Stuart Laing especially has demonstrated, in the late 1950s and early 60s, there emerges a general preoccupation among cultural producers with working-class life and its authentic portrayal.*¹³ This gradually penetrates most modes of narrative discourse: sociology (most famously, works by Young and Wilmot, Raymond Williams, and Richard Hoggart), the novel (Alan Sillitoe, David Storey, Stan Barstow), theatre (Arnold Wesker, Shelagh

Delaney), film (Lyndsey Anderson, Tony Richardson, Karel Reisz) and television drama (Tony Garnett, Ken Loach). The concept of authenticity, as both content and form, is, of course, itself always already politically and socially contested. Is working-class culture healthy or unhealthy? Is the class struggle over? Can working-class life be portrayed truthfully from the outside? What is social realism? These questions draw some of the lines of rival interpretations.*¹⁴ And in film, as in literature, these developments emerge in the shadow of, and often blurred, by the images and voices of lower-middle-class alienation (characteristically, provincial, youthful and male), of the 'Angry Young Men' of contemporary journalistic cliché.*¹⁵ Nevertheless, films such as Saturday Night and Sunday Morning do represent a step forward in showing working-class people at home, at work, and at leisure, as members of a coherent but changing community and culture, without irony or condescension. The sociological urgency of this task comes in large part from the conscious or unconscious recognition that the 'traditional' British working-class community is breaking up, under the pressure of, generally, burgeoning mass production, consumption and communication systems, and specifically government housing policy.*¹⁶

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning was directed by Karel Reisz, a Czechoslovakian Jew brought up in Britain. It was based on a screenplay by Alan Sillitoe adapted significantly from his own first novel of the same title. Reisz was one of a group of public school and Oxbridge film lovers, who in the fifteen years after the war progressed from amateur to professional film criticism, and from making documentary films for industry to setting up a semi-independent production company allowing them to direct feature films

deriving largely from the newly-emerging working-class literature. These works were quickly dubbed as Britain's own 'New Wave' cinema, though their literary origins were hardly disguised; perhaps partly because, unlike those of Richardson and Anderson, his directorial style was not influenced by work in the live theatre, and because his family background did not encourage a condescending attitude towards his subject or his script writer, Reisz created in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning the most radical work of what turned out to be a disappointingly brief and limited revolution.*¹⁷

The film tells the story of Arthur Seaton, a rebellious young worker in a bicycle factory, set in the East Midlands industrial city of Nottingham, Alan Sillitoe's background of origin. The narrative generates two rhythms in counterpoint: the mechanical turning of the working day and the working week, and the gradual rise and fall of Arthur's singular rebellion. The first gives the film its sociological and documentary impetus. Long before the credits begin to roll over the factory workers making their way home on a Friday evening, indeed before the visual narrative begins at all, while the production company logo is still on the screen, the soundtrack abruptly assaults the audience with the deafening staccato of the factory floor, the lathes, drills, and presses given an added urgency by the demands of piece work. It is the requirements of the machine and its owners that largely determine the restricted patterns of family life and leisure use revealed. Outside and in, in streets and houses, at pubs and the club, at the fairground and the canal, the material fabric of urban life is carefully documented, but it is the factory chimney which dominates the skyline, and its hooter which dominates life. Most of the filming was done on location in Nottingham, and the performers are

almost without exception of working-class origins and play working-class roles with appropriate regional and class accents. To an audience accustomed to the bourgeois norms of British cinema of the post-war decade, the world of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning remains irreducibly alien. The second rhythm, that of Arthur's aggressively personal response to this restrictive cycle, though clear in its thematic outline (one of increasingly open revolt, climaxing in violent confrontation, and followed by muted reconciliation), is complex and ambiguous in its detail, for Arthur is a rebel with almost too many causes.

The most prominent revolt, which animates the plot, is sexual. Arthur (Albert Finney) betrays an older workmate, Jack (Bryan Pringle), by sleeping regularly with his wife, Brenda (Rachel Roberts), and making her pregnant, and in turn betraying her by simultaneously attempting the seduction of a young factory girl, Doreen (Shirley Ann Field). The climax is reached when Arthur is set upon by friends of Jack and severely beaten up, after which Brenda and Jack are reconciled, and Arthur agrees to marry Doreen, who, in refusing sexual favours until they are engaged, has proved 'sharper' than Arthur himself. The verbal texture of the narrative, represented most prominently by the film's title, allows this process to be read as one of education and maturation either psychological (the accommodation of the pleasure and reality principles) or moral (crime, punishment, and rehabilitation). Yet there are so many threads untied at the end of the narrative that such readings must remain partial. The revolt has a political dimension as part of the class struggle: Arthur rails against the 'gaffers' who try to grind him and his fellow workers down, sides with a deprived petty criminal against the police, and is accused of

being a 'red' by the factory foreman. It also has something of contemporary American-style anarchic youthful revolt against any symbol of seniority or authority: Arthur gleefully torments an older female worker in the factory with a dead rat, shoots a nosey neighbour with an air-gun, and shies a stone at a signboard on a new housing estate. And even something of fashionable European-style existential individualism: Arthur finally refuses any solidarity with fellow members of his class, his community, or even his family, and insists, on the two key occasions that he acts as narrator, that he is author of, and accountable only to, himself. The conscious revolt, then, is deeply confused.

To go beyond this confusion we need to turn to the historical dimension of the narrative, which is accessible through attending to the conflicting voices and allegiances within the represented working-class community. If this is a language world dominated by Arthur's guttural tones, where RP only enters only in snatches on the BBC, the Nottingham working-class dialect is by no means shown as uniform, revealing considerable variation in 'breadth' of accent and 'roughness' of discourse (use of non-standard lexis and structures, and obscenity). The members of the four households in the film reveal significant variations along these lines, differences which correspond to differences of outlook and dwelling-place. Arthur's Aunt Ada and cousin Bert represent the broadest and roughest position among the four; they inhabit a Victorian city centre slum; they are allied with the 'rough' working class of the past, on the borders of criminality, but exude an immense vitality and pleasure in life. Arthur's parents are less broad and rough; they live in one among rows of cramped box terraces off yards surrounding the bicycle factory; they represent the 'respectable'

working class, but are shown as 'ground down' by the depression and blinded to contemporary reality by television. Jack (but not his wife Brenda) avoids obscenity, broad accent and dialect forms; his desire to 'get on' and avoidance of conflict reveal certain lower-middle-class traits and ally him to the 'aristocracy of labour'; he occupies a superior and more spacious bay-fronted terrace house facing the street. Doreen's mother, Mrs Gretton, has the least broad accent, revealing tendencies towards refinement in the direction of RP; she allies herself with the individualistic, privatised values of the lower middle class, and is presented as a killjoy; she has moved on to an estate of new terraced council houses in the suburbs. Arthur himself exhibits the roughest and broadest of speech, and his anarchic behaviour means that initially his sympathies lie most obviously with Aunt Ada; but at the end of the film, we see him threatened by embourgeoisement, on the verge of moving with Doreen into a semi-detached house on a new estate.

Perhaps then the inconsistencies of Arthur's gestures and allegiances, like the wavering of the film's narrative mode between naturalism and Bildungsroman, are symptoms of the engagement (perhaps to an extent unconscious) with the most significant cultural shift in post-war Britain, the gradual and uneven breakdown of the coherent working-class community. It is sad that the British cinema left it so late to treat the working-class community seriously; however, it is at least appropriate that one of the first and last working-class film heroes should be portrayed by Albert Finney with such satanic vitality (even in the final scenes) that any suggestion of proletarian quiescence in the face of change and its confusions is firmly rejected.*¹⁸

Perhaps the principal questions remaining is, why stop there? There are two related developments in the 1960s, concerning cinema both as industry and as system of representations, which tend to render the type of analysis used in the preceding sections inappropriate and ineffective. On the one hand, the influx of American film production companies and capital, and film makers and performers, is so overwhelming that the concepts of 'the British cinema' or 'a British film' becomes increasingly problematic.*¹⁹ This is for reasons both economic (the relatively low cost of film-production in Britain) and cultural (the fabricated image of 'swinging London'). And on the other, the social hierarchy of dialect itself becomes dramatically complicated and therefore unamenable to being used as a simple code for class as it often is in films of earlier decades. Accents previously among those most disparaged can become prestigious, at least briefly and in limited spheres (most notably Scouse [working-class Liverpool], largely on account of the Beatles phenomenon), while the previously most prestigious form (marked RP) itself rapidly becomes a source of comedy and stigma.*²⁰ At the same time the system is subject to increased external pressure. Developments in mass communications mean that American accents are increasingly available as images of power and prestige, while increasing 'new Commonwealth' immigration means that various 'Black' Englishes become candidates for the most disparaged positions. This undermining of the representations of language-and-class is real, and functions both to reproduce and to produce complex shifts in the underlying systems of social stratification, which are beyond the scope of this paper. It does not, however, necessarily imply the disappearance of stratification itself, or the advent of classlessness in British society.*²¹

Notes

*¹ See Graham Law 'Social Class in Britain' in Susumu Kawanishi & Hisaaki Yamanouchi Igirisu no Gengobunka 2 [An Introduction to British Studies] (Tokyo: University of the Air Foundation, 1990) pp. 83-95.

*² See John Honey Does Accent Matter? (London: Faber & Faber, 1991; 2nd edn.) pp. 1-11.

*³ See A.H. Halsey Change in British Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; 3rd edn.).

*⁴ For discussions concerning appropriate terms to describe modern British class formations, see: G. Marshall et al. Social Class in Modern Britain (London: Hutchinson, 1988); Arthur Marwick British Society Since 1945 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982) pp. 38-48; and Law pp. 83-86.

*⁵ Noël Coward Plays: Three (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979) p. 342 & p. 347.

*⁶ For a more detailed linguistic description of this distinction and its social significance, see: John Wells Accents of English (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) vol 1, pp. 212-241 & vol 2 pp. 279-300; and Honey pp. 38-50.

*⁷ For a general discussion of the British cinema during the 1940s in its social context, see R. Murphy Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1939-48 (London: Routledge, 1989).

*⁸ For discussions of the general operation of Ealing studios under Michael Balcon, and of the position of Hamer and Mackendrick, see: Charles Barr Ealing Studios (London: Cameron & Tayleur/David & Charles, 1977); and Roy Armes A Critical History of British Cinema (London: Secker & Warburg, 1978). pp. 180-197.

*⁹ The superintendent is played by Jack Warner, following his success as the hero of the seminal conservative Dearden/Clark Ealing police drama of 1950, The Blue Lamp.

*¹⁰ Cited in Gilbert Adair & Nick Roddick A Night at the Pictures: Ten Decades of British Film (London: Columbus, 1985) p. 59.

*¹¹ Compare the description of upper-middle-class reactions to the Labour victory in Marwick p. 102.

*¹² See the discussion of middle-class values and representations in the British cinema of the period in Raymond Durnat A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence (London: Faber & Faber, 1970) pp. 35-46. His observation, 'Ealing's fortune waned

as its spritual centre of gravity shifted from lower-middle to upper-middle-class' (p. 39), is of particular interest in this context.

*¹³ Stuart Laing Representations of Working Class Life, 1957-64 (London: Macmillan, 1986).

*¹⁴ For a fuller disucssion see Alan Sinfield Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) pp. 253-276.

*¹⁵ See, in particular: Tom Maschler (ed) Declaration (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1957); and Blake Morrison The Movement (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

*¹⁶ The classic contemporary expressions of these recognitions are: with respect to communications, Richard Hoggart The Uses of Literacy (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957); and, with respect to housing, Michael Young & Peter Wilmott Family and Kinship in East London (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957).

*¹⁷ For more detailed descriptions of the origins and destinations of the 'New Wave' group, see: John Hill Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-63 (London: BFI Publishing, 1986); and Armes pp. 263-79.

*¹⁸ The contrast here is with the seminal representations of working-class people in the work of George Orwell in the 1930s and 1940s.

*¹⁹ See Alexander Walker Hollywood, England: The British Film Industry in the Sixties (London: Michael Joseph, 1974).

*²⁰ See Honey pp. 79-96.

*²¹ See Law pp. 92-93.