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# Writing the British New Wave: David Storey and *This Sporting Life*

David Forrest

## Abstract

This article dislodges the assumptions of authorial cohesiveness and centrality that have defined the scholarly and critical reception of the New Wave and suggests ways of reframing our understanding of British realism and the collaborative labours that underpin it. It does so through consideration of *This Sporting Life*, the adaptation of David Storey's 1960 novel of the same name, which concerns the rise and fall of miner and rugby league player Frank Machin and his doomed relationship with his landlady, Mrs Hammond. Drawing primarily on Storey's archive, held at the University of York, this article considers the role of the writer in shaping the film, and by extension, the hugely significant but often less heralded contribution made by writers to the ethos and aesthetics of the British New Wave.

**Key words:** David Storey; Lindsay Anderson; *This Sporting Life*; British New Wave; realism; screenplay authorship; class; the North.

## Introduction

Despite the British New Wave's literary and theatrical origins – the grounds on which it is criticised by writers such as Peter Wollen (1993) and Raymond Durgnat (1970) – marks of style and lyricism in the films are viewed as signs of what Andrew Higson calls 'a personal vision' which 'foregrounds the work of the director' (1984: 2). Similarly, Lindsay Anderson (1985)

retrospectively positioned himself and his Free Cinema and New Wave acolytes as auteurist firebrands who railed against the staid conventions of post-war British film culture (see Anderson. The British New Wave's thematic preoccupations, its visual traits, and its limitations, are therefore frequently understood through the all too coherent lens of directorial authorship.

New Wave scholarship has gradually moved away from this synoptic view of the films as a connected cycle (Hill 1986; Higson 1984), and towards readings which privilege their particularities and autonomous qualities, such as B.F. Taylor's work (2006), and Peter Hutchings' nuanced critique of earlier scholarly narratives that 'overstress the cohesiveness' of the films (2009: 205). By treating the films individually, works such as Taylor's cast new light on readings that have hitherto defined the New Wave through the lens of the cycle, with V.F. Perkins's pejorative framing of the films' shared spatial characteristics as 'landscape-mongering' particularly salient (quoted in Taylor 2006: 17). However, Taylor's invitation to read the films as single entities inadvertently reinforces the perception that they are the products of single authors, and the auteurist tendency is reproduced – for example, Story is barely mentioned in Taylor's chapter on *This Sporting Life* (1963), just as influential studies of the New Wave by Andrew Higson (1984) and John Hill (1986) make only fleeting references to the films' writers and their literary and theatrical origins.

More recently, however, Melanie Williams has further redefined scholarship on the New Wave. Her work on *A Taste of Honey* (1961) draws on archival research to 'centre' Shelagh Delaney's 'creative contribution' to the film and by extension, to the New Wave itself, in such a way that a writer like Delaney can be understood as a 'pioneer of postwar British cinema', rather than as merely an enabler of a filmic auteur (2023: 11). In the case of Delaney, this repositioning of creative agency is critical to an acknowledgement of the gendered and class dynamics of

authorship in the British New Wave. This allows for a richer and more holistic reading of the film (and films) which takes account of the enmeshed lived experiences of an author whose art was shaped intimately by her environment, subsequently positioning *A Taste of Honey* as a document of a particular rather than a generic working-class life (and lives), told from the inside and not from afar. This produces a necessary complication and blurring of the collaborative layers and hierarchies that define the New Wave and realist cinema in Britain more broadly, wherein such films are viewed as the product of a ‘collective “hive mind”’ (2023: 13), in Williams’s words, rather than as expressions of individual creativity. This has significant implications both for our assessment of the authorial dynamics of British cinema but also for the ways in which we understand the complexities and richness of working-class, regional culture.

This article builds on Williams’s approach by considering *This Sporting Life* as the product of a complicated set of creative energies and processes, by ‘centring’ the artistic contributions of its writer, David Storey. This is not an attempt to dislodge or challenge accounts of Lindsay Anderson’s authorship of the film but rather to augment these so that a fuller and more complex interpretation of authorship emerges, which recognises the *writing* of realism as a critical component of its aesthetic and affective impacts, and which acknowledges and asserts the positionality of the writer both within the creative relationships that govern the film and as a discernible marker of their *personal* experiences.

### Authorial hierarchies

Books by Erik Hedling (1998) and John Izod, Karl Magee, Kathryn Hannan and Isabelle Gourdin-Sangouard (2012) provide rich and convincing accounts and readings of Anderson’s primary role in shaping *This Sporting Life*, but in omitting – because of their structure and focus

– full consideration of Storey’s contributions, they inadvertently close off readings of the film which might complicate Anderson’s authorial centrality.

Hedling seeks to challenge Higson’s reading of the New Wave’s ‘spectacular’ (1984: 7) landscape shots by positioning *This Sporting Life* as a departure from Anderson’s earlier documentary films, because of its integration of theatrical elements derived from Anderson’s experience as a theatre director. For Hedling, the film represents a symbiosis of the ‘theatrical and the cinematic’ in terms of space (the ground on which he challenges Higson), performance, and structure (1998: 54). Yet, Hedling’s reading does not consider that the four-shot sequence towards the end of the film, when an isolated Frank looks down on the cityscape from above, has its origins in Storey’s novel, persists throughout the development of the screenplay, and is almost definitely inspired by Storey’s own experience of displacement, brought about by the complicated split between his roles as a rugby player and an artist. This is what Storey described as ‘[a] battle between the physical, muscular demands of my body, and its internal, spiritual necessities’, that saw him ‘spending hours alone at the tops of hills and slag heaps trying to shake off the feelings of depression’<sup>1</sup> (1960a: n.p.). Revisiting the landscape shot – one of the New Wave’s most criticised traits – from the perspective of the writer acknowledges the possibility that it might be better understood as a consequence of the complicated position of the working-class writer documenting her or his community and their place within it, rather than as a (filmic) authorial signature or a generic cliché (for a fuller account of this argument see Williams and Forrest, forthcoming).

Meanwhile, Izod et al. (2012) draw on archival insights to position the film’s structure as a collaboration between Storey, Anderson, and Richard Harris. They note that Storey’s initial attempts to write a screenplay in a linear manner were refined following feedback from the actor

and director, who both encouraged a return to the novel's structure, quoting Anderson to the effect that 'in the end we managed between us to produce a script that gave us at least a chance of putting onto film the peculiarly intense, complex, and poetic quality of the original' (2012: 67). While this account of the film's development, like Hedling's work, positions it firmly as a collaboration, the book's starting position as a study of filmic auteurism is to read Anderson in and through every layer of the film's formation (a fact that the authors acknowledge). For example, they draw the connection between Anderson's statement in his diaries that he did not want the film simply to be 'a dramatic construction well directed by somebody', but 'a personal allegory', going on to read Anderson's hopeless longing for Richard Harris within the film's atmosphere of despair as evidence of a 'private authorial signature' (2012: 67), such that the film represents a lamentation for a 'savage, unconsummated love' (ibid.: 77). To be clear, it is not my intention to dispute this interpretation, but, rather, to acknowledge the possibility of alternative readings through the lens of writerly authorship. Indeed, Storey himself recalls Anderson confessing that his relationship with Harris mirrored that of 'Machin and Mrs Hammond in the film. And guess who's Mrs Hammond?' (Courtney 2008). That Anderson felt able to insert himself within the fabric of the film in such a way is evidence of the closeness of the collaboration between the director and the writer of those characters, rather than the primacy of a single authorial signature.

If an acknowledgment of Storey's role in shaping the film – and by extension of writers in shaping the New Wave – invites a fragmentation of the perception that the films are a 'cohesive package' (Hutchings 2009: 305), then it is necessary to revisit their literary origins with similarly disruptive intentions. Writing in 1962, Kenneth Pearson heralded a 'second wave' of the New Wave, comprising *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962), *A Kind of*

*Loving* (1962), and *This Sporting Life*, all then in production. Pearson's approach is notable in that he presents the films as collaborations between the directors 'and our younger and tougher novelists' (Alan Sillitoe, Stan Barstow, and David Storey). This approach works against a privileging of auteurism at the expense of literary contributions, including quotes from the writers alongside those of the directors and effectively affording them equal status. The discussion of Storey is particularly noteworthy for its acknowledgement that the writer is a 'manic depressive' who is 'split between the physical sides of man and the artist in him', suggesting that his work seeks 'some sort of accommodation for these warring factors'<sup>2</sup> (Pearson 1962: 5). This again opens the possibility of an alternative interpretation of *This Sporting Life* which acknowledges the film as a reflection on the inner life of its writer, with Storey admitting that in writing *Machin* he had 'isolated' the 'physical' element of his own malaise<sup>3</sup> (Storey 1960a: n.p.).

Despite this rare identification of the collaborative dynamics that underpinned the New Wave, in grouping the authors together, Pearson is still attempting to coherently narrativise and therefore homogenise distinctive strands of working-class writing. In contrast, Storey was adamant that he was not part of a school or collective 'angry generation'. He maintained that had *This Sporting Life* been accepted by publishers when it was originally conceived, rather than 'rejected for four years', it would have 'come out at the same time as *Look Back in Anger* and *Room at the Top*' (Rees 2017). In turn, this would have dislodged the accepted narrative of the cinematic New Wave's programme from its more theatrical, studio-bound origins to something approaching an art cinema, realist aesthetic by the time *This Sporting Life* was released, as Pearson's 'second wave' seems to suggest. Storey's desire to be understood as apart from the

other writers is further evidence of the need not only to consider the films individually but to pay attention to their literary and/or theatrical origins with a similarly dispersed view.

Storey was uncompromising in his own view of his contemporaries' work, with his review of Alan Silitoe's story *The Ragman's Daughter* (1963) marking a clear dividing line between the older author's more didactic approach to his subjects, and Storey's desire to explore the inner life of his protagonists:

If one is increasingly exasperated by Sillitoe's beating at those out there rather than at the thing inside it is because his particular pain – the agony that runs like an underground torrent through *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* – is one that is so important, and yet one that is being rapidly sentimentalised. He has shown us his gesture, and we've heard it; now let us hear the cry within.<sup>4</sup>

His view of John Braine was even more critical, noting in 1960 that *Room at the Top* 'never exceeds journalism' and 'that [Braine] deals with characters, not people', while on the publication of *Life at the Top* (1962) he called on the author to 'stop bellyaching in public'<sup>5</sup>.

Storey was equally dismissive of the New Wave films, noting that while John Schlesinger is 'a very nice man and a fine technician ... *Billy Liar* is about the most vulgar film I've ever seen', while *A Kind of Loving* is 'an empty charade, a façade for feelings, pretending to show something deep and true about people and their emotions, when it's only a display of technical virtuosity'<sup>6</sup>. Storey's criticisms of writers and artists operating in the domain of working-class realism stretched beyond the New Wave. When asked over ten years later about Colin Welland, he angrily responds: 'They're all fucking sentimentalists, these people. They're all part of the *Guardian*-BBC - liberal - progressive - 'left-wing' - bullshit... Tony Garnett and all those bloody people...that's not creativity', later calling them 'cunts' and decrying their politics as 'pure



fucking sentimentalism’<sup>7</sup>. Taken together, these comments speak of a deep resistance to the perceived politics and aesthetic strategies of his contemporaries, and a concomitant desire to be viewed outside any grouping of writers based on shared working-class backgrounds.

While Storey’s strident views may be genuine, they also underline the potential role of the writer in shaping the narrative around the film and the authorial, cross-medium oeuvre of which it was a part. Storey saw *This Sporting Life* (both novel and film) as part of a trilogy which stretched across *Flight into Camden* (1961) – which Ken Loach had intended to film – and *Radcliffe* (1963), also prepared as a screenplay, which was to explore his personal and artistic obsession with the ‘endless conflict’ between ‘man’s inner’ and ‘outer life’ (Hennessy 1969: 5). *This Sporting Life* also connects to his later play *The Changing Room* (1972), for which a screenplay was also written, and the novel *Present Times* (1984), in which a retired rugby player writes a play that resembles *The Changing Room*. If *This Sporting Life* is understood in these terms – as part of Storey’s wider artistic project – the film’s categorisation stretches above and beyond its status as a mere component of the British New Wave. This is not an attempt to divorce the film from this grouping. Rather, I am arguing that by reassessing the film through the lens of the writer, a broader view of the New Wave itself might develop. As Storey’s comments on his contemporaries suggest, he and Anderson were clearly aware that the films’ collective identity was generating a series of perceived cliches, which they were keen to depart from as their own project developed.

Perhaps most obviously, the name of Arthur Machin was changed to Frank to avoid associations with Arthur Seaton, while the actor who had played Seaton, Albert Finney, was originally due to play Machin and – as photographs in Anderson’s archive show – he had joined Anderson and Storey on their early location trips. Finney’s decision to pull out was, according to

Storey, motivated by the desire for a ‘break’ and ‘greater variety in his roles’, suggesting that he, too, was aware of the dangers of being associated for too long with the cycle (2021: 230). Karel Reisz, the director of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, rejected for similar reasons an invitation to direct *This Sporting Life* but was able to trade on the success of the earlier film in order to enjoy, in the new role of producer, ‘discretion in the choice of director, writer and cast.’ (Storey 2021: 228). The presence of the earlier film also looms over the development of the screenplay with Storey’s initial treatment opening in a manner which seemed to evoke directly the opening shots of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*:

A sharp slam of metal.

A fist, hard and clearly defined against a dark background, has pulled down a lever.

The camera holds the hand a second, and the impression of its tightness and muscularity; then cuts to the long-limbed winding engine at the colliery. The huge, highly-polished shaft of the piston, over twenty feet long, is slowly pushed back by steam.

Then it crushes forward.

TITLES.<sup>8</sup> (Storey n.d.: 1)

This introduction to Machin is maintained in the subsequent first draft screenplay but is then omitted from later versions. Had it been included, the film’s stylistic proximity to its forebear would have been conspicuous from the outset. The same treatment shows that Storey experimented with landscape shots which would have also more closely resembled those that had been criticised in earlier New Wave films. One treatment has ‘FRANK ... running alone in his track suit through an evening industrial landscape, silhouetted one moment, reflected the next in a colliery lake. He buries himself in the intensity and rigour of his training’<sup>9</sup> (Storey n.d.: 47). Quite obviously, the suggestion of multiple shots of a solitary figure, along with reflections in

waterways next to industrial buildings, recalls the landscape poetics of *A Taste of Honey*.

Similarly, Storey had planned that a violent confrontation and subsequent embrace between Mrs Hammond and Frank should take place ‘on an open common’, outside the town and in ‘bare countryside’<sup>10</sup> (Storey, n.d.: 50), with the trope of conflicted lovers above and outside their cities stretching from *Room at the Top* (1959) to *Billy Liar* (1963). Storey and Anderson were very likely aware of the emerging criticisms of such ‘landscape mongering’, with the phrase tellingly repeated by Anderson’s friend Gavin Millar as he reflected on *This Sporting Life* in the pages *Movie*, a publication that up until this point had maintained a hostile position on the New Wave (Williams 2023: 53):

First: it would be too tiresome to enumerate instances of Home Counties men discovering the Poetry of Squalor. In some cases it has seemed our loss not to live in the shadow of the gasworks.

The attitude behind this landscapemongering is impertinent in all senses. Social concern should find some more honest response to industrial wildernesses than graphic fascination. *This Sporting Life* is in no sense a landscape picture. There are no establishing shots in it. We see no more of the surroundings than Frank does, and that is precious little. (Millar 1963: 11)

Millar’s argument that the film eschews the focus on environment found elsewhere in the cycle conveniently omits *This Sporting Life*’s own ‘long shot of our town from that hill’ (Krish in Higson 1984: 3), as well as other examples which will be discussed later. For now, though, it is important to note that Millar, acting as a friendly critic, seeks to divorce *This Sporting Life* from its forebears, reflecting an awareness that the tide of critical opinion was turning against the New Wave. The omissions of New Wave tropes from the original screenplays also suggest that

Storey and Anderson were conscious of these risks and sought to mitigate them as the project developed, as shown by the dialogue – reported by Peter Armitage – from an episode of *Monitor* on the making of the film:

On a hill overlooking Wakefield:

Storey: Lindsay, isn't this how you imagine the north might look?

Anderson: Well it's almost too much what people expect a film about the industrial north to have in it – it's tremendously condensed, it's quite exceptional as a northern view this, isn't it? . . . I think it's plugging the background a bit too much, romanticising the whole idea of the industrial north.

Storey: You want something far more impersonal in a landscape?

Anderson: Yes – something which doesn't rub our noses in it quite to this extent. (1963: 16)

This exchange offers an insight into a *partnership* between writer and director that is explicitly concerned with the poetics and politics of location. There is, too, an awareness of the kinds of visual tropes that would be examined in more detail two decades later by John Hill, and Andrew Higson: a consciousness of the danger of transforming the landscape into an object of 'comfortable contemplation' (Hill 1986: 136), a wish for it not to operate as 'something precisely "to-be-looked-at"' (Higson 1984: 16). However, in Anderson's desire to avoid these pitfalls he inadvertently shows that he is susceptible to another of Higson's critiques: that the landscape risks becoming 'empty', and that wilful attempts to deny specificity – the pursuit of the 'impersonal' – tacitly reveal a desire to 'block' a 'historical reading' of this landscape (ibid.: 9). Anderson's essay in *Films and Filming*, 'Sport, Life and Art', expands on this theme: '*This Sporting Life* is not a film about sport. Nor is it to be categorised as a "North Country working-

class story". In fact I wouldn't really call it a story-picture at all' (1963: 16). But Anderson's denial of the film's particularities (sport, class, Yorkshire) sees him inadvertently erasing the authorial imprints of his writer.

### Place and authorship

Although Storey's novel sets the action in the fictional town of Primstone, the world depicted in both book and film emerges directly from the author's personal experience of Wakefield. As mentioned earlier, *This Sporting Life* is a response to the desperation felt by the young Storey as he 'began to write about [his] situation, trying to understand some of those sensations that accompanied [him] on that dark journey' (Storey 1972: 66). The 'journey' to which Storey refers is between London and his home city, between the 'two extremes of this northern, physical world and its southern, spiritual counterpart'. The resulting despair produces the conditions for creativity: '[A] drowning man cries out and begins to swim: I find that, metaphorically in the same darkness and distress, I began to write novels'.<sup>11</sup> As John Stinson puts it, Storey saw the 'English "north country" as a place' where this 'Western dualism' – between mind and body, nature and machine – was 'most clearly in evidence' (1977: 133).

This is felt keenly in an essay written about *This Sporting Life* three years after the film was released, in which Storey reflects on the ways his own background shaped the film:

My father worked down a coalmine: we lived on a housing estate on the fringes of the town. From one window, over the roofs of the other 2 houses, I could see the chimneys of two collieries, a mill and a brickworks: from another I could see the lower, wooded slopes of the Pennines stretching towards Huddersfield. There seemed to be a split here between the intentions of nature and those of man ... I felt this division to be reflected

very much in my own nature. I felt the need to be with other people, yet I was never happier than when I was on my own.<sup>12</sup>

Storey's intractable malaise is bound up within the very specific topography of Wakefield and its surrounding villages, towns, and cities. Taking these personal narratives into account, it becomes harder to justify Anderson's desire for an 'impersonal' reading of the landscape, and this compels us to view the film's treatment of location and class as important: these are the very elements that are at the heart of the writer's concerns and can be traced back to the earliest versions of the novel, which began in the late 1950s, entirely predating the cinematic New Wave as a cultural moment. The film's eventual 'long shot of our town from that hill' (Krish in Higson 1984: 3) is expressed on the page by the novel's narrator in the following terms: 'It seemed as if the debt I had accumulated through my comparatively short life was suddenly thrust upon me with no warning. A sense of desolation obliterated every feeling of sympathy I had for people, for places, for events'.<sup>13</sup> (Storey n.d.: 208). Machin's isolation feels unresolvable, and his recognition of the split between the mind and the body begins to echo that which afflicts his author:

It was a tiring day: the sight of the town working, the steam and smoke rising in the air, the smell of work, combined to make me feel my exclusion more keenly. I wasn't used to being alone, nor idle, and these two sensations above all gave me the feeling of guilt, of badness. There was no pride nor satisfaction in being outlawed. A sense of change overhung everything. Nothing could ever have the same identity again<sup>14</sup>. (Ibid).

That Storey's novel emerges from the pain of his own experiences seems also to be acknowledged by Anderson who felt, along with Karel Reisz, that because the book was 'such a personal piece of work ... no-one but its author could write the script' (Anderson 1963: 15). The

‘personal’ nature of the material was the platform for what Anderson called a ‘collaborative affair’. Both director and writer recognise that the partnership was artistically complementary – with Anderson entrusting Storey on the basis that the script had ‘an artistic authority equal to that of the book’ – and mutually enriching in terms of a lived experience of place (and therefore class), despite Anderson’s post hoc attempts to dislodge the film from its groundings in a specific social context (ibid.: 16). Storey’s description of the ‘symbiotic’ nature of the collaboration emerges primarily from his initial wonder at the ‘very strange’ coincidence that Anderson ‘made his first four films on the housing estate where [Storey] had lived as a boy’ (Rees 2017). When Anderson and Storey began the work of location scouting, the pair did so ‘through the district around Wakefield and Leeds where David had grown up, where he had imagined many of the scenes in the book-and where, incidentally, I had made my first documentaries some twelve years before’ (Anderson 1963: 16). In these terms the collaboration takes on a distinctly spatial quality; not simply an insider (Storey) helping an outsider (Anderson) to navigate a strange land, but a coming together of two authentic, but contrasting, perceptual geographies.

Extensive photographs in Lindsay Anderson’s archives show images of Storey standing alone and isolated in the landscape (**Figure 1**) in almost a rehearsal of the motifs that would appear in the film<sup>15</sup>. The images show ‘urban and rural locations’, as well as ‘visits to Lindsay’s friends from Sutcliffe’s: a Georgian house in town, a manor house at Badsworth, a village to the south’ (Storey 2021: 230). The director’s local networks amongst the middle classes converge with the geography of Storey’s home and working life, as a contractor for a tent-erecting company (depicted in *The Contractor* and *Radcliffe*), a bus conductor in Wakefield, and a postman serving surrounding pit villages such as Kinsley and Fitzwilliam, to produce a picture of the region which is diverse, disjunctive, but shaped by both men’s disparate backgrounds, as

Storey reflected: ‘In making *This Sporting Life*, Wakefield was being opened up in a way I had never known before’ (ibid.).

**Figure 1: David Storey location scouting for *This Sporting Life* (image courtesy of the Lindsay Anderson Archive, University of Stirling)**

Although no locations are named in the film itself or the final screenplay, close observation of the screenplay drafts show that Storey had a variety of specific places in mind when envisaging the novel’s action for the screen. As Frank’s working life at the pit is much more prominent in early iterations of the film, Storey refers to the Sharlston and Walton Collieries as potential locations, both of which were local to him, and names streets such as Dewsbury Road in Wakefield and rugby grounds such as Odsal in Bradford. An early handwritten treatment contains a note about the use of a ‘Huddersfield cityscape’, and it is a view of Huddersfield (rather than Wakefield, as is commonly assumed) that is the object of Frank’s lonely gaze from the hill towards the end of the final film.<sup>16</sup> These details underline the extent to which Storey’s grounded knowledge of place – itself a consequence of his class – was central to his imagining of the film’s spatial poetics.

Storey felt that his direct experience of working-class life and politics enriched Anderson and provided the director with a much-needed grounding in the lived realities of class politics. Storey recalled that Anderson, ‘used to be a socialist’ until he ‘met David Storey’, arguing that ‘like many middle-class progressives’ Anderson had naively viewed the ‘miners as potentially ... revolutionary material’ (Courtney 2008). Storey countered that ‘my experience of the mining communities was that the miners were extremely conservative, and there was no revolutionary



instinct amongst them at all' (ibid.). Storey observed that Anderson's direct engagement with 'working-class life' (through Storey) led him to realise that this 'idealism was misplaced'. For Storey, this clash of politics, between realism and idealism, was not merely a characteristic of his relationship with Anderson but a catalyst for their shared artistic project, helping the director, who had viewed art as a 'political, social platform' to realise that the 'social and political ... could emerge' more subtly from an expression of 'the emotional tenor of materials' (ibid.). Again, Storey confidently defines himself against a didactic, politically explicit mode of realist storytelling, offering another alternative interpretative framework for viewing the New Wave. Its ambiguous politics, previously seen as emerging from the distanced, remote class position of the directors – the 'voyeurism of one class looking at another' (Higson: 17) – are refracted differently when we consider the role of the insider working-class writer.

Identifying location as a key component of the authorial dynamic offers various means of disrupting established scholarly narratives on the poetics of the British New Wave. To return to Hill's and Higson's foundational work on the films, both identify a recurring tendency towards scenes in which as Higson (1984: 13) puts it, '[t]he city-dwelling protagonists ... all go on trips into the countryside', while Hill observes that although 'it is in the country or by the seaside that the characters can most "be themselves", they cannot remain in this "natural state" but must return to the city to face the complications that bedevil their normal lives' (1986: 158). For Higson the scenes are marked by an inevitable 'curtailment of pleasure'; in the case of *This Sporting Life* he notes that 'Frank Machin ... takes Mrs Hammond and her children out to the country in his new Jaguar, but almost as soon as she shows some unexpected happiness, we are returned to the city and the roar of the crowd at the sports stadium' (1984: 13).

At first glance, a reading of the scene through Storey's screenplays and early treatments seems to confirm that it was designed to provide a fleeting spatial contrast to the drudgery of city life. The stage directions in one version of the screenplay written in 1961 have the car moving 'through the deserted Sunday streets of the industrial city' leaving behind 'a huge flattened vista of industry: clear, smokeless. The car mounts quickly into the cutting and disappears between hedges and fields'<sup>17</sup>. Earlier versions have the view of the abbey emerging from the top of the hill, providing further evidence of Storey's initial embrace of this apparent iconographic cliché, as Mrs Hammond 'points to the view below them', and Frank suggests 'Why, I reckon it's er ... an abbey, or summat'<sup>18</sup>. Storey goes on to describe the abbey and its river, while Anderson's handwritten comments on the script suggest an attempt to rein in his writer's visual imagination: 'Is this shot of the abbey in fact possible? Is all the action ... conceived with the location in mind?'<sup>19</sup>. It is likely that at this stage it was, with the intended location being Fountain's Abbey, near Ripon in North Yorkshire, identified by the year given in Frank's explanatory dialogue: 'Monks were sent to this wild and desolate spot in 1132 to establish a monastery, away from the perversities of the world'<sup>20</sup>. The scene was eventually filmed at Bolton Abbey, with photographs in Anderson's archive suggesting that the writer, director, and Richard Harris took a snowy visit to that location later in the development process. The malleable, collage-like nature of the location as the scene develops through multiple iterations invites us to interpret its meanings in line with the sense of spatialised isolation that we have already identified as central to Storey's thematic project, in lieu of more specific geographical moorings. For example, in its early manifestation the location is hauntingly explained by Mrs Hammond to her daughter, Lynda (Bernadette Benson), as a place where 'men used to live, a long time ago'<sup>21</sup>. As Mrs Hammond walks alone while her children play with Frank, 'in silence she stops, and looks round at the

ancient columns of stones. The mood of her figure is that of the place'<sup>22</sup>, and later, while Frank observes her, she is described as a 'brooding figure' who has been 'captured by the worn stones'; her 'melancholy is the mood of the place'<sup>23</sup>. Reading the abbey scene specifically as part of a wider place-specific impulse in Storey's writing, and paying particular attention to the ways in which Storey intended that the mise-en-scène might reflect the dark conflicts of his characters' inner lives, helps us to query the more generalised reading generated by Hill and Higson through which sequence reflects a wider town/country binary within the British New Wave as a whole. Such contrasts are here shown to be all too simplistic: if there is any sense of liberation it is not to be found in the destination but, only fleetingly, in the transitory experience of the journey.

#### Storey as film-maker

A focus on the writing of space and place is one of the ways that we can re-imagine the presence of the writer within the British New Wave. David Storey saw his role as a writer of cinema rather than as simply as a writer of dialogue for the cinema. As John Russell Taylor observed, Storey viewed the writing of the screenplay for *This Sporting Life* as foundational in terms of his wider practice, noting that 'he appreciated fully for the first time the advantages of the dramatic media for directing audience's responses through angling and selection, in a way which is much more difficult in the more expansive medium of the novel' (1970: 23). In 1976 Storey frustratedly reflected that it was no longer possible to 'achieve a universal form in the novel' because of the ubiquity of photographic images: 'Only in film you have the possibility of speaking a universal language, because film is so keyed-in to the literal image ... You can get both an immediate and a deeper level of response into the same work'<sup>24</sup>. These observations underline the extent to which Storey saw writing as itself a cinematic process, in which the pursuit of a universal idiom

was conjoined across media (we might think of this in terms of a cross-medium commitment to realism), with his novels possessing an indexical relationship with the moving image. Storey's adaptation of his own material was therefore not an instrumental or transactional activity but part of an interwoven, generative artistic process.

One means of illustrating this is through recourse to Storey's little-known foray into directing, with his film for the BBC's Monitor series *Death of My Mother* (BBC1, 5 January 1964), filmed a year after *This Sporting Life*. It is a reimagining of the death of D.H. Lawrence's mother through a loose, collage-like adaptation of, most obviously, *Sons and Lovers*, alongside quotations from Lawrence's other novels, recreations of fragments from Lawrence's life, and, as Maurice Richardson in *The Observer* put it, 'animated illustrations'<sup>25</sup>. Storey's stage directions and handwritten notes reveal precise design of mise-en-scène, and location is again crucial, with repeated references to Eastwood sitting alongside instructions to film in Wakefield, and in Hemsworth, a similarly sized mining town to Lawrence's birthplace which would have been very well known to Storey as the locus of the mining industry in Wakefield and also the location of the school at which Storey's wife's father was headmaster. Tellingly, one scene situated in Wakefield has 'Lawrence' walking 'across a rising field' and the 'camera panning with him to reveal the magnificent Old Hall half demolished', before the camera 'pan[s] slowly away to the vast cooling towers below', in an echo of *This Sporting Life*'s textured, poetic representation of landscape<sup>26</sup>. Storey's inscription of his own personal geography with that of Lawrence – a collage of the Nottinghamshire coalfields and those of the West Riding – further underlines the importance of landscape to Storey's wider authorial project and serves as a signature of the writer and – in the case of the *Monitor* film – director.

Storey's brief foray into directing opens another dimension of his filmic authorship, such that we might acknowledge his role in shaping the conspicuously *cinematic* moments of *This Sporting Life*. I have already discussed the ways in which Storey felt that the complementarity of his relationship with Anderson was to be found partly in the contrast of their political perspectives, but the writer also saw this dynamic as manifesting in a productive artistic conflict over the very purpose of cinema:

I saw film as an aesthetic and Lindsay ... was so much more socially oriented towards the cinema as depicting social experience ... in an idealized way, like it was showing the potential there is in life – the transcendence above materialism and everyday mundanity – that there was a more expansive view of society that came from people bonding together.  
(Courtney 2008)

For Storey, this tension manifested itself through debates around the film's style, suggesting that his view of the potential of cinema to fragment and abstract realistic images was influential in shaping the film's most self-conscious elements. Following on from Machin's isolated view from the hill, the film descends into a bleak final sequence, with Roberto Gerhard's haunting score to the fore. Frank is shown covered in mud playing rugby, but unlike the previous scenes, which emphasised his exceptional athleticism, he is now, as Storey's stage directions put it, one of many 'anonymous figures', his wildness 'charged with all the despair of his situation ... his head a black ball of hate and energy'<sup>27</sup>. The claustrophobic low angled shots slow to create a fragmented quality, a technique that is returned to moments later after a distraught Frank has witnessed the death of Mrs Hammond and is back on the pitch, 'a single wild figure, running slowly as the camera pulls away'<sup>28</sup>. Alexander Walker's effusive reading of these scenes describes how 'Anderson's technique of slow motion ... turned the mud-encrusted players into

nearly dehumanized forces whose interlocking limbs jerked with the spasms of martyrdom' (2005: 175). This lyrical interpretation rests upon an assumption that it is Anderson, as director, who authors the sequence, reflecting once more the totalising presence of auteurism. However, Storey remembers Anderson telling him: 'You can't use slow-motion in the feature film, you've killed it. Reality goes out of the window ... It becomes artificial and self-conscious' (Courtney 2008). Storey, empowered as a creative partner, 'argued it's quite the reverse; that you could evoke feeling ... by slowing down the film, and making the movement something else and articulating it in quite a different way'. Storey's aim here was to draw attention to the 'pain and anguish' of the moment, so that these elements 'suddenly intensified' through their conspicuous isolation in slow motion (ibid.). Storey's reflections on this debate further underline the dynamic of the collaboration and his *own* authorial imprint both in terms of theme – the opportunity to emphasise the focus on Machin's inner world – and style: in this case a willingness to generate a more self-aware, abstracted treatment of cinematic realism.

### Conclusion

Tracing the collaboration at the heart of *This Sporting Life* has revealed the limitations of reading the film, and the British New Wave in which it is such a central work, as the product of a singular, directorial vision. The implications of this are significant; many of the assumptions on which wider criticisms of the New Wave rest – around the films' self-consciously poetic use of landscapes, their apparent political conservatism, their fetishising and reductive treatment of their working-class subjects – are underpinned by a pervasive sense of auteurism that is here challenged. In recovering the artistic contribution of the writer, these previous interpretations of the films feel increasingly unstable, such that we might alternatively understand *This Sporting*

*Life* as an expression of a particular class-bound melancholy that defined the writer's career, and life. We might also consider the creative labours and energies that are involved in the work of the working-class screenwriters whose role is in part to draw on and make sense of their own lived experiences. This autobiographical domain must be acknowledged as a significant element of much of the working-class realism of this period, and beyond, and we must subsequently query the easy coherence of auteurist histories of these traditions.

Yet this should not be the sole frame through which we acknowledge writerly agency and contribution. I have shown that in the case of David Storey, the process of screenwriting was part of a wider creative project in which Anderson was a close partner – the 'craft' of the writer is not subservient to the 'art' of the director, rather their distinctive perspectives operate symbiotically. Interpretations of British cinema during this period have often been bound by an all too harmonious and coherent narrative of creative agency, one which obscures complex layers of collaboration. In the case of realism, so often rooted in questions of access, power and agency, this is particularly pertinent – authorship has here been shown to be multidimensional, enmeshed and defined by experiences of class and culture.

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**Sources:** unless otherwise stated, the David Storey Papers at the University of York.

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<sup>2</sup> K. Pearson, 'The second wave', *Sunday Times* (Colour Section), 1962, pp. 4-5, DS/6/4/7/3/1.

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- <sup>9</sup> Ibid..
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- <sup>15</sup> 'Location photographs', Lindsay Anderson Archive, The University of Stirling, LA 1/3/4/12.
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- <sup>17</sup> 'This Sporting Life: A screenplay by David Storey, July 1961', p. 46, DS/3/25/4/9.
- <sup>18</sup> 'This Sporting Life draft screenplay', no date, DS 3/25/4/1.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
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