Poverty, Shame and Social Exclusion

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Portrayals of Poverty and Shame in British literature and contemporary film

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Introduction

An examination of a sample of literature and film was undertaken as the preliminary phase of work of a larger international comparative study: *Poverty, Shame and Social Exclusion in Seven Countries.* The aim was to use a selected corpus of British films and novels to explore dominant cultural values surrounding poverty and shame and their expression within the UK. Findings from the analysis also provide the basis for a comparative exploration of popular expressions of poverty and shame across different cultures.

The analysis of thirty British novels was conducted between August and December 2010. Novels were selected from the A-level course material in English literature, supplemented with texts suggested by academics in English literature at the University of Oxford. The final corpus contains an almost equal number of novels from the Victorian (1837–1901), modern (1902–1960) and contemporary (1960 onwards) eras.

The film corpus comprised some 30 social realist films spanning a number of decades (from the 1960s through to 2009). The genre is characterised by its handling of complex social and political issues in contemporary British society and its engagement with the working class and/or unemployed sections of the population (usually living in areas of socio-economic deprivation). It is also notable for drawing on actors who are relatively unknown and who typically include teenagers or young adults[1]. Similar to the literature, an expert in film analysis was consulted in the drawing up of the final list of films analysed.

A number of points are worth bearing in mind with respect to the body of work reviewed as we present our analysis. In both cases, the selection of material was logical yet pragmatic, recognising the inevitable resource constraints of this component of the overall research project. Social realist films are commonly made to challenge the status quo and prompt political, social and cultural change. While many of the authors within the selected literature also offer social commentary on important contemporary trends or phenomena, the collection of novels is not part of any unifying genre in the same way as the film corpus. The inclusion of a sample of literature over some 170 years however, offers some important insights into historical trends in British society overtime. For the purposes of the analysis of these bodies of work, we have adopted the lens of poverty and shame, irrespective of the original intent of the author or director. Thus the extent to which manifestations of shame and/or poverty are fore grounded varies widely between the different source materials. This said, films within the social realist genre tend to share a global mise

[1] However, certain directors tend to work with the same actors repeatedly and hence become well know within the genre.

en scène which is symbolic of potential poverty and hardship, an observation which can not necessarily be made for all of the novels included in the analysis.

The following paper considers the manifestations, perceived causes and consequences of poverty as portrayed through literature and film; the manifestations and causes of shame and the ways in which the links between shame and poverty are drawn across the different media.

Manifestations of poverty

As the directors and authors variably engage with the lives of their protagonists, indicators of poverty emerge in a number of ways. In the opening scenes of many of the films, for example, the symbolism of potential hardship is variously presented through a backcloth of industrial smoke, high-rise tenement blocks with graffiti-daubed walls, back to back houses or overcrowded cottages.

Similar and fairly constant images are conjured up through the prose of a number of the selected novels, well illustrated by Dickens's description of Coketown in Hard Times (1854):

> 'It was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves forever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye..'

And in Walter Greenwood's description of Hankey Park (*Love on the Dole*, 1930), almost 80 years later:

> 'Jungles of tiny houses cramped and huddled together. The cradles of generations of the future. Places where men and women are born, live, love, die and pay preposterous rents for the privilege of calling the grimy houses 'home'.

Thus in both screen and certain texts a backdrop is created which heightens our expectations to encounter people living in adversity. While the novelist can perhaps more purposefully steer our attention to the foci of poverty and want through the use of rich descriptions, the film director uses the camera to cut from the macro to the micro circumstances of the film's protagonists, offering perhaps sometimes more subtle indicators of hardship; the sharing of beds – Jamie with his grandma in *My Childhood* (Douglas, 1972); Jo, aged 15, with her mother in *A Taste of Honey* (Richardson, 1961)-; the presence of large numbers of children in overcrowded conditions, the penury of the homes interiors; the sparseness of the fare on the table and the characters' clothes and appearances.

Evident in both corpuses is a gradual shift in portrayals of poverty over time - from the abject to the relative. Bill Douglas' work on the life of Jamie growing up in a poor working class mining village in Scotland after the Second World War - (*My Childhood*, 1972) captures the depth of poverty –meal times reduced to porridge or bread soaked in milk and eaten by hand. Similarly, Dickens, along with other authors such as Gaskell and Hardy narrate the temporal and spatial aspects of poverty from the English industrial era. These novels typically highlight the suffering, distress and hardship of absolute poverty. John Barton in *Mary Barton* (Gaskell, 1848) reflects on the destitution endured over time by his family, '*his mother had died from absolute want of the necessaries of life'.* Through the eyes of Tess approaching her home (Tess of the *D'Urbervilles*, 1891), Hardy creates the image of scarcity with a simple sentence, *'the yellow melancholy of this one-candled spectacle'.* Similarly, Wellingborough in *Redburn (*Melville, 1849) conjures up the abject poverty he witnesses on Liverpool's Victorian docks:

> *'Every variety of want and suffering here met the eye, and every vice showed here its victims... old women, rather mummies, drying up with slow starving and age; young girls, incurably sick, who ought to have been in the hospital; sturdy men, with the gallows in their eyes, and a whining lie in their mouths; young boys, hollow-eyed and decrepit; and puny mothers, holding up puny babes in the glare of the sun, formed the main features of the scene'*

By the time we meet Stevie in the film Riff Raff (Loach, 1991), the temporary homelessness, living in a squat and the ill-fitting suit for his mother's funeral are the clearest signs of hardship. And while Phil and his family in *All or Nothing* (Leigh, 2002) appear to live relatively comfortably in their high-rise tenement flat, the precariousness of their financial situation is brought to our attention when we see Phil scrabbling down the back of the sofa for loose change, in order to pay the monthly rental on his taxi cab, his only source of income.

The earliest reflections on the importance of relative poverty emerge through Owen in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (Tressell, 1914) who comments,

> '*poverty consists not merely in being without money, but in being short of the necessaries and comforts of life – or in other words in being short of the benefits of civilization ... the necessaries, comforts, pleasures and refinements of life, leisure, books, theatres, pictures, music, holidays, travel, good and beautiful homes, good clothes, good and pleasant food. We do not enjoy a full share of the benefits of civilisation – we are all in a state of more or less abject poverty'.*

This same theme continues through to contemporary literature and is evident almost 80 years later in Paula Spencer's thoughts about her inability to buy new shoes for her daughter, in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (Doyle, 1991),

> *'Poor Leanne had to go through one whole winter in runners and she never whinged once. She got them drenched one day and I took them off her when she got home from school. I stuffed them with paper and put them up to the fire and hoped to God they'd be properly dry in the morning because I didn't have the money to get her another pair.'*

Several of the more contemporary novels, such as *The Final Passage* (Phillips, 1985) deal with poverty as a push factor for migration and the cyclical nature of poverty-related migration. Michael's grandfather comments on the inevitability of economic migration, '*West Indian man always have to leave his islands for there don't be nothing here for him';* While the reality of migration is depicted through the eyes of Leila who, arriving in the UK, faces poverty similar to that she has left behind but accentuated by a sense of social alienation and detachment. In *Small Island* (Levy, 1996), it is poverty that forces Gilbert to take the loan from Hortense to pay his passage to England. Later, Hortense expresses her shock when she arrives from Jamaica to join him and sees the room that they are expected to share:

> 'All I saw were dark brown walls. A broken chair that rested one uneven leg on the Holy Bible. A window with a torn curtain and Gilbert's suit... hanging from a rail on the wall'...' There was a sink in the corner, a rusty tap stuck out from the wall above it. There was a table with two chairs – one with its back broken – pushed up against the bed'.

Linked to this theme of migration is the notion that poverty, rather than being a state of permanency, can be transient. Meena in *Anita and Me* (Syal, 1996) considers deprivation as a temporal but routine experience for immigrant families in the move to economic security, '*all my mother's friends made the transition from relatives' spare rooms and furnished lodgings to homes of their own'.* Similarly in *Brick Lane* (Ali, 2003), Mrs Azad talks to Nazneeen and Chanu about her transient experience of poverty on arriving in the UK, '*When we first came...we lived in a one room hovel. We dined on rice and dal. For lunch we drank water to bloat our stomachs. This is how he finished his medical school'.*

The interconnection between penury and mobility is a subject picked up in the film corpus too, although it tends to have more permanency about it. In *Cathy Come Home,* Loach (1960), follows Cathy and Reg as they move their family from place to place in search of shelter and security, and re-visits the theme in *Riff Raff* (Loach, 1991), as Larry, the proverbial social reformer, comments on the extent of forced migration of manual workers in search of the few labouring jobs available:

> He's from Glasgow, we're from Liverpool, he's from Bristol. These fellas are from all over the place and we're chasing the same few jobs. And while we're chasing the same few jobs, they've got no problem… 'cos we're fighting amongst ourselves and we're leaving them alone.

Childhood and poverty

The material and social deprivation affecting children frequently becomes the subject matter of film and literature. As well as having to compete for scarce resources, caring or work responsibilities impede access to school and are similarly experienced by child protagonists across both corpuses. Children such as Bert in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* (Tressell, 1914) are bound by desperate parents into exploitative apprenticeships through which they can either offer a stipend to the family income or become one less mouth to feed.

Un-pampered, non-idyllic childhoods thus provide important subtexts to deprivation and its consequences. The opening scenes of *My Childhood* (Douglas, 1972) sees Jamie scrabbling around outside the coal mine to find scraps for the fire of the small cottage he shares with his brother and elderly grandmother. *My Ain Folk* (Douglas, 1972) follows Jamie, after the death of his grandmother, as he is shunted between 'home' and care home, the result of a neglectful father and his mother being confined to a mental hospital where she later dies. Billy in *Billy Elliot* (Daldry, 2000) deals with the death of his mother, the fall out of his father and brother being on strike and the responsibility for looking after his 'nana' who, living with Alzheimer's, frequently absconds from his care. Joanna, homeless and living on the streets at the age of 11 in *London to Brighton*, (Williams, 2006) is groomed by Derick, a pimp who offers her £100 to '*spend time with a man'* – money she needs to pay for the train journey to her grandma's home in Devon. The vulnerability of children is epitomised in *Cathy Come Home* (Loach, 1966) when, with no home and having exhausted all emergency accommodation options, Cathy's children are taken away from her and placed in the care of the local authority.

The harshness of childhood is correspondingly illustrated in various novels. Jane Eyre (Bronte, 1847) relates her suffering as a child at Lowood charity school, '*the scanty supply of food was distressing; with the keen appetites of growing children, we had scarcely sufficient to keep alive a delicate invalid'*. The shocking scene in Jude the Obscure (Hardy, 1895) when Jude's eldest son kills his younger step siblings and then hangs himself because, as he writes in the note he leaves behind, '*we are too menny*', in one line captures the desperation of childhood poverty. More generally, children are repeatedly depicted throughout literature as ragged, hungry and deprived of basic needs.

The films and texts too frequently focus on the relationships between young people and their environments, and the intergenerational impact of low status employment and unemployment over many years. Portrayals of disenfranchised youth from families living in varying degrees of hardship are common and reflect important discourses about relative poverty, life chances and opportunities. While texts such as *Love on the Dole* (Greenwood, 1933) deal with the desperation of youth without work, the film corpus appears to portray an increasing dissatisfaction with what life has to offer, typified by the 'angry young man' in films such as *Saturday Night Sunday Morning* (Reisz, 1960). Not content with the low status, low-paid work of their parents' generation, young men and women are reflected in even the most contemporary socialist films as being frustrated, aimless, without ambition and lacking in any work ethic.

Causes and consequences of poverty

Individual versus structural causes

Both corpuses engage with a range of perspectives and debates concerning poverty; from individual or collective inadequacies on the part of those experiencing hardship, to poverty as the consequence of structural economic and political processes, such as industrialisation, capitalism and modernisation. In *News from Nowhere*, William Morris (1890) creates a utopian futuristic society in which the characters offer reflections on contemporary C19th poverty and its causes as though it were in the contermporary past. One such character, the old man, implicates the prime cause of poverty as *'the systematised robbery on which it* (society) *was founded'.* Despite turning to suicide as a result of total deprivation, the worker's valedictory note in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* (Tressell, 1914) makes a declamatory statement about the injustices leading up to his own death, '*This is not my crime, but society's'.*

Authors sometimes provide commentary on shifting values and dominant discourses surrounding poverty. In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886), for example, the narrator describes how while in the 1870s there had been a revival in '*early Victorian platitudes, suggesting that the poor had only themselves to blame',* these assertions were being gradually replaced by an emerging '*collective class consciousness'* of the structural accounts of poverty and '*a conviction that the industrial organisation, which had yielded rent, interest and profits on a stupendous scale had failed to provide a decent livelihood and tolerable condition for the majority of the inhabitants of Great Britain'.*

The structural causes of hardship are often suggested in film and literature through

the protestations of certain characters that assume the role of social reformer, even though they are often ignored. In *Howard's End* (Forster, 1910), Helen's assertion that the rich are partly responsible for the plight of those in poverty is quickly dismissed by Mr Wilcox who later also argues with Margaret over the distribution of wealth, *'You do admit that, if wealth was divided up equally, in a few years there would be rich and poor again just the same. The hard-working man would come to the top, the wastrel sink to the bottom.'* Likewise, from his office, the foreman in Riff Raff (Loach, 1991) observes the workers having a break and comments, '*Look at those lazy bastards…the working class don't want work you know. Ask 'em to sit on their arses all day and they're as happy as pigs in shit'.*

Equally in both film and literature, there is a widespread mistrust of politicians and policy makers who, rather than alleviating hardship, are seen as interfering with people's lives and formulating economic and welfare policies which serve to maintain the status quo. Hammond in *News from Nowhere* (Morris, 1890) comments '*for what other purpose than the protection of the rich from the poor, the strong from the weak, did this Government exist?'*. In *Love on the Dole,* Mrs Dorbell is particularly aggrieved about the introduction of restrictive pub licensing laws brought in under Lloyd George. She views this as proof that once in power, politicians spare no thought for those in poverty and that *'Its poor as 'elps poor aall world over'.*

Family and social networks

Hardship is mediated in a number of the films through collective action, mutual support and shared resources and knowledge. In *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997), the sense of solidarity of the characters is best illustrated by them collectively resisting the bailiffs who come to collect Gerald's possessions after he has failed to keep up the higher purchase repayments. Having family and social networks for support appears to draw the line between whether or not people are able to cope, and family resources provide opportunities which would otherwise be unavailable. In *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Frears, 1985), for example, Omar's success is highly contingent on his access to wider family resources, despite his own father's poverty.

A number of novels suggest that there is an element of solidarity and humanity among the poor in times of need. In fact there are several references to the notion that only those facing similar hardship can really know how best to help alleviate it, such as the observation by John to Mr Wilson in *Mary Barton* (Gaskell, 1848) about his sister that, '*she's a poor woman, and can feel for the poor, Wilson'*. Literature and film alike also suggest that the harshness of poverty intensifies due to the breakdown of family and other social networks. Indeed in *Cathy Come Home* (Loach, 1996), it is the point when Cathy's mother throws the family out of her flat that the full impact of their circumstances really takes hold.

However, there are also examples where those who are relatively better off exploit the circumstances of the worse off within the immediate social environment, well illustrated by the neighbour offering to *'store your stuff for a pound a week' to* Cathy and Reg as they are forcibly evicted from their house and all their possessions are loaded onto the pavement (*Cathy Come Home,* Loach, 1960). In *Vera Drake* (Leigh, 2005), Lilly pockets two guineas from every woman she puts in contact with Vera who continues to '*help them out when they can't manage',* through providing illegal abortions, unaware of the price that the women are paying.

The loan shark, often living on the doorstep, features prominently as a social predator within novels and films. Spiralling debt intertwine with violence in Loach's *Raining Stones* (1993) when Bob fails to repay the loan taken out to pay for his first Holy Communion dress. The narrator in *Love on the Dole* (Greenwood, 1933) captures the cyclical nature of debt and the stranglehold that pawnbrokers have over people in poverty:

> *'Next Friday or Saturday they would hand over their wages to Mr Price in return for whatever they had pawned today. And next Monday they would pawn again whatever they had pawned today, paying Mr Price interest on interest until they were so deep in the mire of debts that not only did Mr Price own their and their children's clothes, but also the family income as well'.*

Various novels too illustrate the hierarchical social structures that become visible among those living in poverty, epitomised by the '*miserable, toothless old woman, with a tattered strip of coarse baling stuff round her body',* described by Wellingborough in *Redburn* (Melville, 1849) who would not help him with his enquiry about another poor woman and her daughters because '*she had no time to attend to beggars and their brats'.*

Unemployment and low paid employment

Across the genres, there is an important distinction made between those in low-status employment and the unemployed. The factory and the mine typify the settings for numerous films and books where the repetitive, mind-numbing and sometimes filthy work for a low wage is the mainstay of livelihoods. Theresa in the film *Letter to Brezhnev*, (Bernard, 1985) comically describes her job in the chicken factory to her friend Elaine,

> (I) take the innards out of chickens, put them into little plastic bags and stuff them back up again... then they play this classical music shite. But the only thing is, they speed it up bit by bit throughout the day and you find yourself stuffing chickens in time to the music (laughs).

The opening scene of Saturday Night, Sunday Morning (Reisz, 1960) sees Arthur working in a factory making machinery parts. He comments on the thankless, lowly paid and unrewarding work:

> Fourteen pounds, three and tuppence for a thousand of these a day. No wonder I've always got a bad back. I could get through in half the time if I went like a bull, but they'd only slash me wages, so they can get stuffed.

There is a common suggestion in film and literature that with work comes pride. In Middlemarch (Eliot, 1869), for example, the narrator's description of Caleb Garth's work ethic typifies the view that the dignity gleamed from work was fair compensation for its poor remuneration;

> '*He gave himself up entirely to the many kinds of work which he could do without handling capital, and was one of those precious men within his own district whom everybody would choose to work for them, because he did his work well, charged very little, and often declined to charge at all. It is no wonder, then, that the Garths were poor, and "lived in a small way." However, they did not mind it'.*

Maureen in *All or Nothing* (Leigh, 2002) has a manifest pride in ironing for the neighbours on her day off in order to supplement her income from Safeway (the supermarket). Bob, in *Raining Stones* (Loach, 1993) borrows some rods from his father in law and goes from door to door in a neighbouring affluent suberb looking for work clearing drains. Chantal, Liam's sister in *Sweet Sixteen* (Loach, 2002) copes with looking after her young son on her own and going to night school in order to train to work in a call centre.

Yet it is uncertain whether the association between work and pride is real or fabricated by those more advantaged, and it is certainly an idea contested by the narrator in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* who claims, '*Extraordinary as it may appear, none of them* (the workers) *took any pride in their work: they did not 'love' it. They had no conception of that lofty ideal of 'work for work's sake' which is so popular with the people who do nothing'.*

However while work, whatever its form is shown to offer some money and social status, lack of employment is linked to accentuated hardship. Accessing social assistance in whatever form frequently becomes the locus of social commentary across both genres, unemployment and its association with failure being a well-rehearsed theme. It is depicted as particularly devastating for men and tied up with hegemonic notions of masculinity. In *Raining Stones* (Loach, 1993), Father Barry comments, '*Every man has a right to work Bob and he should not be subjected to utter criticism when he fails to find it through no fault of his own'.*

In *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997) the benefits office (frequented as a result of the demise of Sheffield's steel industry) provides the pivot for most of the film's action. Similarly, in *Love on the Dole* (1933), Greenwood evokes the growing mass of desultory and tattered jobless men of the 1930s, as they queue for social security provisions,

> '*Harry Hardcastle, white mercerized cotton scarf wrapped loosely about his neck, a tuft of fair hair protruding from beneath the neb of his oily cap, patches on the knees and back-side of his overalls, stood in a long queue of shabby men, hands in pockets, staring fixedly and unseeing at the ground. At street corners, leaning against house walls or squatting on the kerbstones were more men, clothes stinking of age, waiting until the queue opposite went into the building when they would take their places in forming another'.*

A distinction thus begins to emerge between the notion of 'decent' or 'respectable' poverty (often associated with work however lowly paid) and that which is uncivilised or hopeless. In *Mary Barton* (Gaskell, 1874), Mr Carton compares the '*squalid misery*' of John Barton to his own childhood poverty, which, he says was quite '*decent*'. And the squalidness or disintegration becomes a collective association for certain places or groups of people. In the contemporary war novel *Regeneration* (Barker, 1991), for example, Prior is described as *'sitting in the shadowy corner of a pub in some sleazy district of Edinburgh'*.

The impact of poverty and the emergence of shame

Shame can be said to encapsulate a wide range of emotions and feelings that arise from seeing the self negatively, or anticipating that one will be perceived negatively by others. According to Goffman (1963), the potential for shame is inherent in all social interaction. The signs of shame are thus variably portrayed through embarrassment, lack of agency, lack of self confidence, self deprecation, social withdrawal, anxiety, depression and anger. The literary descriptions of shame throughout the novels are particularly rich; 'coloured', 'flamed', 'sullen', the 'flow' of humiliation are all used to represent the emotion. Tressell, in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* (1914) describes the collective '*shame-faced mannerisms*' of those without work, just as Greenwood in *Love on the Dole* (1933) mentions Helen and Harry staring at each other outside the workhouse, with expressions of '*shame-faced self-consciousness'.*

Cinematographic presentations of shame are more visual and sometimes more understated, brought to life by the demeanour, mannerisms and body language of the characters. These subtle signals of shame can be, at times, profoundly moving. In *Cathy Come Home* (Loach, 1966), Cathy's mother- in-law talks to a social worker

about Reg's grandfather and how his incontinence coupled with the overcrowding in the flat mean that she wants him taken into a home. At this point the camera cuts to granddad who is silently listening to their discussion with tears welling up in his eyes. Other characters can manage to capture a profound sense of loneliness, rejection and isolation. Phil in *All or Nothing* (Leigh, 2002), through his general demeanour, epitomises the male devoid of happiness and affection for most of the film, while Rachel, Phil and Penny's daughter, although she hardly speaks, manages to exude a sense of diffidence and isolation. In *Scum* (Clarke, 1979), the young Davis is shown as becoming increasingly withdrawn and silent as his plight within the borstal is intensified and he is subjected to increasing forms of bullying and abuse.

Manifestations of shame

Shame is shown to have multiple causes and be experienced across classes. It is tied up with transgressing social and cultural mores or failing to live up to personal, familial or societal expectations. It can also emanate from a sudden awareness of reality to which a character was previously ignorant. In *Vera Drake* (Leigh, 2002), for example, Vera's devastating shame stems from the realisation that she had not been '*helping'* girls at all and had, in fact, put the life of at least one of them in grave danger.

There are also examples where shame is generated by institutions which judge the characters to determine whether or not they meet certain standards. Such processes are clearly manifest in a number of films through the institution of the borstal (*Scum,* 1979 and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner,* 1962*). Cathy Come Home* (Loach, 1966) where Cathy's and Reg's children are taken into care because they have had '*their chance' and 'can't find a place for them' ,* is a prime example of the institutional shaming of homeless people who are blamed for their circumstances.

There are numerous examples throughout the corpuses where shame and poverty coincide. Unemployment and its associated lack of status is a particularly prevalent theme. For some, especially the male characters, this can have a shattering effect. In *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997) the shame of unemployment is acutely felt by Gaz, who fears losing access to his son, Nathan. Mandy, Gaz's ex partner derides him after he is arrested while practising for the strip tease: '*unemployed, maintenance arrears of £700 and now you've been arrested for indecent exposure ...still think you're a suitable father do you?'*

The scene in *Billy Elliot* (Daldry, 2000) where Billy's dad, Jacky, smashes up the piano for firewood, even though he knows that Billy loves the piano and that it reminds him of his dead mother, is particularly poignant. His sense of shame is

subtly portrayed in his response to Billy's question – j*ust shut up Billy!'* – as to whether he thinks his mum would have minded about the piano.

In *'All or Nothing'* (Leigh, 2002), after fairly futile attempts at looking for coins down side of the sofa and emptying trinket pots on the mantelpiece to find the money to pay the rental on his taxi cab, Phil, goes first to his daughter's room to ask to borrow some money and then to his wife. His demeanour when asking his daughter Rachel for money shows his discomfort at having to ask, '*got any spare change? It's me watsaname tomorrow* (time to pay taxi rental) *I gotta pay it... I don't wanna leave you short'.* But his shame is mitigated to some extent by Rachel's unhesitating, '*Yeh.. of course, it's alright',* compared to Penny's retort which accentuates his sense of inadequacy, '*Why don't you get up earlier in the morning.. drive people to work, take' em to the airport*'. As we watch Cathy and Reg, in *Cathy Come Home,* move from place to place, ending up in a makeshift shelter of tarpaulin and bricks, before moving into hostel accommodation, Loach (1960) powerfully captures their sense of shame at having to succumb to the indignity of pauperism. At this point, Reg comments to Cathy*,' we're right at the bottom, we seem to get lower don't we?'.*

And the disintegrating effects of poverty-related shame is magnificently captured by Greenwood's (*Love on the Dole,* 1933) description of those facing long-term employment and consequent hardship;

> *'It got you slowly, with the slippered stealth of an unsuspected malignant disease ... You fell into the habit of slouching, of putting your hands into your pockets and keeping them there; of glancing at people furtively, ashamed of your secret, until you fancied that everybody eyed you with suspicion. You know that your shabbiness betrayed you: it was apparent for all to see. You prayed for the winter evenings and the kindly darkness. Darkness, poverty's cloak. Breeches backside patched and repatched: patches on knees, on elbows. Jesus! All bloody patches'* .

The role of class, gender and ethnicity

Commentary on social stratification and hierarchy is intricately woven into both prose and film and transcends time. Characters with relative wealth and status typically find ways to assert power and control over others considered socially inferior, while maintaining a social distance from them. Mrs Fairfax, in *Jane Eyre* (Bronté, 1847), for instance, speaks of the importance of keeping servants at '*due distance, for fear of losing one's authority';* the narrator in *The strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) comments on the impact of the housing crisis and its role in blurring the line

between different social classes; '*the focus of middle-class anxiety was less over-crowding than the way in which the housing crisis was forcing the respectable working classes into proximity with the casual poor or 'residuum'.* The same theme emerges many years later in *Small Island* (Levy, 2003) in which Queenie describes the reactions of the relatively well off during the second world war,- *This is a respectable street. Those kind of people do not belong here'*-when, as a result of the London bombings, they are forced to be housed alongside those from poor neighbourhoods.

Those of higher social class are commonly shown to hold a low opinion of people of lower status, often finding them repulsive and associating them with negative attributes such as want, squalor, bad manners and a lack of credibility. The wealthy characters of *A Room with a View* (Forster, 1908) epitomise these views with statements like '*They don't understand our ways. They must find their level'* and '*It is dreadful to be entangled with low-class people*.' Similarly family lineage becomes a focus of concern, even those who are relatively wealthy shown as reticent about making claims to ancestors from less desirable social echelons. Leonard in *Howards End* (Forster, 1908) when asked by Helen about his grandparents reveals his '*shameful'* secret that they were '*nothing at all... agricultural labourers and that sort'.*

There are numerous other references to the evident shame of associating with people of lower social status. Angel, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (Hardy, 1891) is chastised by his brothers for dancing '*in public with a group of country hoydens'.* The social elites in Victorian times are characterised by their contempt of the lower classes, values which they are prone to instil in their offspring. Pip in *Great Expectations* (Dickens, 1861) comments on how the rich girl Estella '*denounced me for a stupid, clumsy labouring-boy'.* The young John Reed in *Jane Eyre,* although of a similar age*,* accuses Jane of deigning to consider herself his equal when she is a *'dependent'* (having been orphaned with no money) and should, he thinks, '*not live here with gentleman's children like us'.* Indeed, Jane herself chooses not to seek out her '*poor relatives',* even though they are more likely to treat her better, since she considers herself, '*not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste'.*

Class consciousness is shown to play an important role in maintaining the status quo and becoming self regulating as those assigned a low social status impose the same stratification on others worse off than themselves. Maid Bessie, for example, convinces Jane Eyre not to forget her rightful place in the household of her benefactor and warns her against any pretention of equality, stressing that she should '*be humble, and to try to make yourself agreeable to them.'*

Within the film corpus, social class is similarly portrayed through the visual positioning and circumstances of characters in relation to each other. The contrast

between Billy's cramped back-to-back house in the Durham mining town and the suburban bungalow where Mrs Wilkinson, his dancing teacher lives (Billy Elliot, Daldry, 2000); the close confines of Vera and her family's living quarters in the east end of London and the abject poverty of many of the women she 'helps', compared to the large town houses of the middle classes which she cleans for a living. And the same contrasts emerge in the relationships between the characters, the deferential way in which Vera is on her knees cleaning the hearth of her wealthy employer; the apprehension of Billy's dad as he approaches Mrs Wilkinson's house, the way in which Phil in *All or Nothing* (Leigh, 2002) apologises to the nurse in the hospital for overcrowding his son Rory's bedside.

There are multiple associations between certain communities and inevitable degradation or inadequacies which emerge in literature and film alike. In Anita and Me (Syall, 1996), Meena is warned by her friend Anita to avoid the caravan park which is full of *'gypos'* and *'tinkers',* from whom she is likely to *'catch summat'.* Similarly, 'y*outh from the council estate'* are alluded to as the converse of '*respectable families'.* In the film *A Taste of Honey* (Richardson,1966) Peter, Helen's '*fancy man'* refuses to let Jo (her daughter) live with them. He warns, '*Now I drag you out of the gutter once – if you want to go back, it's all the same to me – it's your own bloody level'.*

Hence, assigning certain attributes, usually those which are deprecating, to people in poverty or of lower class becomes the linguistic mechanism by which they are systematically shamed. Being chastised for calling his nanny a '*silly old tart'*, John Last's father in *A Handful of Dust* (Waugh, 1934), explains that he should not use such language because, '*Poor people use certain expressions which gentle men do not. You are a gentle man'.* Similarly, in *Jude the Obscure* (Hardy, 1895) Jude's application to Christminster is turned down on the grounds that he is a '*working man',* who should *'stick to your trade'; and* Hortense in *Small Island* (Levy, 2004) is told that she has inadequate '*breeding'* to teach at the Church of England School.

Conversely, respect and social status are inextricably linked with having money, a theme repeatedly explored through literature and film. Hence, irrespective of the era, both genres work with the parameters of respect and respectability set by material well-being alongside social position. Just as money gives the power to attract, assert authority and own commodities, it is also repeatedly shown to give power to cause harm and humiliate.

Money as a reflection of self is a theme repeatedly addressed in films. Bob in *Raining Stones* (Loach, 1993) is racked with anxiety about how he is going to pay for a brand new dress for his daughter Colleen's first Holy Communion. Despite his wife Anne's protestations, he refuses the idea of a second hand dress commenting,

'*Fine... she walks up the isle looking like a pauper and all her mates are clobbered up to the hilt....She's gonna have a dress no matter how long it takes*..

Access to money is also seen to influence matters of the heart and there are numerous instances where the aspirations of a life partner are moulded by the consideration of wealth and social status.

There are exceptions however, where respect is commanded by good deeds and behaviour rather than solely by economic wherewithal. Steven, the protagonist in *Remains of the Day* (Ishiguro, 1989), for example, considers respectability to derive from mirroring the behaviour of the respectable. Equally, the mores governing respectability evolve and change with time. While the widow for example was, in the early C20th, *'a figure of desolation'* (The Go-Between, Hartley, 1953), this was no longer the case by the end of the century.

Gender

Gender, shame and poverty interact in complex ways throughout film and literature with women and men equally struggling to fulfil social obligations and expectations, aspirations which are frequently thwarted by their circumstances. A recurrent theme equally pertinent in contemporary British film as it is in Victorian literature, is the dishonour of pregnancy outside of marriage. Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (Hardy, 1891) after being raped (largely as a result of her disadvantaged circumstances), is subjected to the excruciating public shame for herself and her family of having a child outside of marriage. Her response is to hide herself away, walking out only at night.

The film *Vera Drake* (Leigh, 2005), set in the 1950s, follows Susan, from an upper middle class background sharing a mortification at admitting to being unmarried and pregnant (as a result of rape) with the majority of young women from the poor working classes helped by Vera. Such shame is powerfully depicted through the demeanours of the silent young women that Vera goes to 'help'; heads down, diverted eyes, quiet sobbing and evident fear. Yet while Susan can access the resources for a safe abortion in a sanitised private hospital, the poorer girls depend on the lay knowledge and basic equipment (a hand pump and soapy water) used by Vera. The moral stance of others and the imposition of shame surrounding the 'illegitimacy' of motherhood outside marriage are unequivocally voiced. Tess's father refuses to allow a priest to baptise the dying baby, thus condemning him to a corner of the churchyard where *'all unbaptised infants, notorious drunkards, suicides and others of the conjecturally damned are laid'*. In *A Taste of Honey* (Richardson, 1966), Jo's mother, on learning that Jo is pregnant comments, '*you know what they call you round 'ere... a silly little whore'.* Donna in *All or Nothing* (Leigh, 2002) faces the wrath

and violence of her boyfriend who beats and humiliates her when she tells him about the pregnancy.

Male attitudes towards women, the social constructs and institutions that govern their experiences and women's own responses to their 'lot' are all variably explored across both media. Class undoubtedly intersects in the typical portrayal of women who tend to have a limited education, few employment options and a high degree of dependency on men, all of which limit their choices and potentially make them more vulnerable to exploitation, violence and abuse.

Collectively women's experiences vary over time, sometimes for the better – greater access to education, money, choices and freedom for some – at other times for the worse – the extent of gender-based violence involving verbal, emotional and physical abuse, particularly in film, appearing increasingly extreme over time. The film, *Nil by Mouth* (Oldman,1997) in which Valerie ends up in hospital dealing with the repercussions of a miscarriage, brought on by a brutal attack by her husband, Ray, exemplifies the extent of gratuitous violence meted out to some women. *Raining Stones* (Loach, 1992) sees Bob's wife and daughter subjected to terror and threats of sexual violence by the loan sharks from whom Bob has borrowed the money for the first Holy Communion.

Throughout the literature, men appear to enjoy greater socio-economic privileges than women, and take priority in family matters. Women are frequently shown to bear the brunt of public exposure to the shame of poverty; the ones queuing at the pawn shops or for social assistance. Easton's wife Ruth, in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist,* lists the debts that they need to repay while airing her embarrassment at still owing money to the butcher, '*Two and seven for the butcher, we must pay that. I'm ashamed to pass the shop, because when I got the meat, I promised to pay him the next week, and it's nearly three weeks ago now.'* Women, however, are also frequently depicted as adept at working their way through poverty and unfavourable circumstances to earn a respectable livelihood for themselves and their families even when, as in the case of Jornia, in *Brick Lane* (Ali, 2003), going out to work becomes a source of shame for her husband who is viewed by the community as being unable to feed her.

Both genres engage with hegemonic masculinities and the difficulties men have in living up to the expectations placed on them. Horse and Dave in *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997) have a mutual dread of stripping in public due to their feelings of male inadequacy. For Dave, such inadequacy stems from a poor sense of self, joblessness and poor prospects of employment, all of which combine to have a profound impact on his relationship with his wife Jean.

Likewise in *All or Nothing* (Leigh, 2002) Phil breaks down in tears in front of Penny and vents his feelings of inadequacy and sense of failure as a provider and partner:

> **'**I might as well go... if I am making you unhappy. I ain't got no skills, I don't earn enough money... I know I am a disappointment to you, I know I get on your nerves.. it's like something's died... I feel like an old tree that ain't got no water'

Ethnicity

The underlying concern with racism, and with its fascist extreme, dominates a number of films such as *This is England* (Meadows, 2006); *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Frears, 1985) and *Scum* (Clarke, A, 1979). Racism is highly prominent in some films, illustrated via the deprecating language such as 'jungle bunny', 'coon', 'nig-nog', in *Scum* (Clarke, 1979); phrases such as 'piss off back to the jungle, wog boy' in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Frears, 1985); and more subtle in others such as attribution of the difficulties of social housing to the arrival of immigrants in *Cathy Come Home* (Loach, 1960).

Experiences of racism are likewise described in a number of novels, particularly those from the contemporary era, although touched on as early as 1886 by Stevenson in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll* in which the link between poor housing and ethnicity is drawn through expressions such as, '*sink street, a dingy place inhabited for most of the parts by Asiatic'.* In their search for accommodation, Leila and her husband in *The Final Passage* (Phillips, 1985) repeatedly meet the signs and signals of an emerging xenophobia, targeted at black people – '*If you want a nigger neighbour, vote labour'* (chalked on the wall); '*No vacancies for coloured'. 'No Blacks'*. '*No coloureds'*. In *Brick Lane* (Ali, 2003), Chanu dismisses the pervasive attitude of White people that *'we are all the same: dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan',* as proof of the fact that such people are ' *Uneducated. Illiterate. Close-minded. Without ambition'.* And in *Small Island* (Levy, 2004), Queenie listens patiently to the protestations of her neighbour Mr Todd that the reason why so many '*coloured people'* were entering the country was the availability of free '*teeth and glasses' via the* NHS.

The intersection of racism with class and disadvantage is examined by various directors and authors. Set in 1980's Britain, the racism in *This is England* (Meadows, 2006), emanates from a backdrop of widespread unemployment and a resultant disenfranchised and disgruntled youth who look to project their frustrations on to minority communities through violent racist attacks. These same themes are prominent In *My Beautiful Laundrette (*Frears, 1985), in which Jonny, an ex member of a local fascist gang, befriends and falls in love with Omar, the young Pakistani

man managing the laundrette. Jonny expresses his concern that Omar's uncle, Nasser, is likely to fuel racism by his actions in evicting one of his tenants, ' a poor poet'. Nasser's response, *'I am a professional business man, not a professional Pakistani',* nicely illustrates the complex interplay between ethnicity and class. And there are other examples too of how ethnicity appears to become less relevant as people from minority communities gain in economic status. Meena in *Anita and Me* (Syal, 2003), for example, describes her mother passing on her father's newspaper to Mrs Worrell, their poor elderly neighbour. And global confusions and associations of poverty are brought to the fore in *Small Island* (Levy, 2004) when Gilbert and his other RAF colleagues experience English people living in poverty for the first time,

> *'Small islanders gaped like simpletons at white women who worked hard on the railway swinging their hammers and picks like the strongest man. .. While even smaller islanders – boys unused to polite association with white people – lowered their eyes, bit their lips and looked round them for confirmation when first confronted with a white woman service them'.*

Thus, social class, profession, family lineage and ethnicity are frequently shown to intertwine with poverty and disadvantage to burden people with their associated stigma. And this potential for shame is as acutely felt by charity school children and low paid clerks of the Victorian era as it is by the unemployed of the 1930s or people living on council estates or servicing menial, low paid jobs in contemporary Britain.

Responses to shame

Social exclusion, withdrawal and disintegration

Writers and directors alike address the multi-dimensionality of poverty and how its impact transcends material hardship and affects the core self. Ladislaw in *Middlemarch* (Eliot, 1869) equates the exclusionary impact of poverty with that of disease, '*poverty may be as bad as leprosy, if it divides us from what we most care for'*. As poverty strikes, so social circles tend to contract, something which is acutely felt by one of the characters in *Hard Times* (Dickens, 1854), '*Thus easily did Stephen Blackpool fall into the loneliest of lives, the life of solitude among a familiar crowd ... that were once the countenances of friends.'*

Without the necessary wherewithal to keep up appearances, those experiencing poverty are often prone to self exclusion and withdrawal, strategies which protect them from exposure to feelings of inferiority but which may impose a sense of unwanted solitude. Oscar Wilde in *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (Ackroyd, 1983) remarks, for example, '*Society frightens me but solitude disturbs me more'.*

The narrator in *The Go Between* recalls his sense of inadequacy as a child when staying in a relatively rich family, *'for the first time, I was acutely aware of social inferiority... I felt utterly out of place among these smart rich people, and a misfit everywhere'.* Collectively, the fiction presents many instances where people from poor socio-economic backgrounds exclude themselves as a result of similar feelings. Jude in *Jude the Obscure* (Hardy,1895), avoids his cousin because, '*she seemed so dainty beside himself in his rough working-jacket and dusty trousers';* Pooter in *The Diary of a Nobody* (Grossmith, 1892), Leonard in *Howards End* (Forster, 1910), Joseph in *Nineteen Twenty-One* (Thorpe, 2001) and Gilbert in *Small Island* (Levy, 2004) all similarly choose to avoid social situations likely to expose their material and class inadequacies.

The psychological and emotional effects of poverty are prominent themes in both film and literature, and there is an evident link made between economic hardship and a diminution of the core self. Common feelings and expressions of inferiority, lack of confidence and negative self-appraisal are implicated in depression, apathy and, in the extreme, attempts at suicide. In the film *Vera Drake* (Leigh, 2005), Vera visits her friend Ivy who has taken to her bed through depression, indicative of a state of total withdrawal.

An early scene in the Full Monty (Cattaneo, 1997) sees one of the characters, Lomper, trying to commit suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning, a consequence of depression caused by his recent job loss and the pressures of being the sole carer for his elderly, disabled mother. In his account of why he felt that his father had committed suicide, William Price in *Anna of Five Towns* (Bennett, 1902) states ' *I believe it was the failure of a firm in London that owed us money that caused father to hang himself'.*

In several novels, the authors engage with the protracted experience of poverty and the consequent disintegration of the characters over time. Typically beginning with a fall in their socio-economic circumstances, a gradual decline in lifestyle and social status ensues, culminating in a physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual deterioration which is frequently combined with a loss of identity. Jane Eyre's mother and father died of the Typhus, caught while her father, a poor clergy man, was visiting people in his parish. In *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist,* poverty is linked to *'insanity',* being too '*physically unfit'* to be recruited into the army and *'the shameful condition of the children'.* In *Jude the Obscure* (Hardy, 1895), Jude's final days are narrated as follows:

> *'He had done a few days work during the two or three months since the event, but his health had been indifferent, and it was now precarious ... He felt that his physical weakness had taken away all his dignity.'*

And hardship is shown to impact negatively on personal relationships too, causing rifts and antagonism between husbands and wives and wider family members. In the *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Richardson, 1962) Colin talks to his girlfriend Audrey about the effect of hardship on his family life while he was growing up, '*there was always rows in our house, mostly they were about money'.*

Keeping up appearances

In order to avoid shame, it is important for the characters to create a respectable gap between their impoverished reality and their public image. Not having the necessities of life to keep up appearances can cause significant disconcertion. For instance, Leila in *The Final Passage* (Phillips, 1985) appears as ashamed of not having decent enough cups for tea as Harry in *Love on the Dole* (Greenwood, 1933) not wanting to be seen in his schoolboy clothes at the choir practice.

And keeping up appearances to the cost of other necessities appears as important for characters in contemporary fiction as it is for those of Victorian times. While Wellingborough in *Redburn* (Melville, 1849) describes an embarrassing meeting with the ship's captain where he tries, in vain, to hide his patched trousers with his jacket, Paula in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (Doyle, 1991) talks of raising her son Jack and of how she has '*gone without food to make him look good'.* In a similar vein, Harry's father in *Love on the Dole* (Greenwood, 1933) is finally shamed into buying Harry a suit even though it means further debt and greater poverty for the whole family. In *Anita and Me* (Syall, 1996) the strategy of avoiding the double stigma of poverty and its association with ethnicity is neatly hinted at by Meena, *'whenever we went out, 'out' means wherever English people were, as opposed to Indian friends... my parents always wore their smartest clothes'.*

A further strategy employed to avoid exposure to shame, is pretence, and novels in particular are peppered with references to characters feigning greater wealth or status than they in fact have. When asked by Brenda if he will take her to Polly's party, Beaver in *A Handful of Dust* (Waugh, 1934), feigns a prior engagement rather than admit that he cannot afford to take her out. Later, he talks to his mother about how difficult it is for him to participate socially when *'I simply haven't the money'.*

Wellingborough in Redburn (Melville, 1849) gulps down glass after glass of water, and tries to put on a bold look, as if he has *'just been eating a hearty meal'; while* Virginia and Alice in *The Odd Women* (Gisling, 1893) appear to enter a shared world of pretence in order to avoid engaging with the reality of penury.

> *'If both of them had avowed their faintness as often as they felt it, the complaint would have been perpetual. But they generally made a point of deceiving each other, and tried to delude themselves; professing that no diet could be better for their particular needs than this which poverty imposed.'*

The *Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997) sees Gerald manage to maintain the illusion of going to work each day (taking his lunch box prepared by his wife, leaving home at the same time in his suit and with his briefcase, returning to answer routine questions about his day) for a full six months before it is discovered by his wife Linda that he has in fact lost his job. Stevie in *Riff Raff* (Loach, 1993) disguises the fact that he is living on the street by pretending to his workmates that he is living temporarily with a friend. In *Rita, Sue and Bob Too!* (Clarke, 1986), Sue's mum refuses to give her money for her cookery lesson but also indicates that, despite her overt annoyance at the request for money, there is an embarrassment about not being able to afford the cookery fee, claiming*' I don't want everyone to know what I can and cannot afford'.*

Anger, powerlessness and fatalism

Anger in a variety of forms is highly prominent across the films arguably resulting either from a sense of inadequacy and an inability to articulate feelings; or a demonstration of resistance against the circumstances and situations faced by the characters. Those in poverty generally blame the rich for their misery, and often develop emotions of anger and resentment against them, even if such feelings are not vocalised. Owen in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist,* on witnessing Hunter humiliate Jack Linden, speaks of how he wants to '*take him by the throat with one hand and smash his face with the other'* but knows that the consequence would be the loss of his job and food for his family. John Barton in *Mary Barton* (Gaskell, 1848) speaks openly about the inhumanity of the rich towards those in poverty, '*we pile up their fortunes by the sweat of our brows, and yet we are to live as separate as if we were in two worlds'.* The rich being cruel, exploitative or indifferent and the notion that it is only people who similarly live in poverty that can truly empathise with hardship, are recurrent themes throughout the novels, yet most prominent in Victorian literature.

People in poverty are portrayed for the most part as voiceless, powerless and resigned to their lot, a view typified by Nora's comments about the workers in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* (Tressell, 1914),

> *'they think it is quite right that they should work very hard all their lives, and quite right that most of the things they help to make should be taken away from them by the people who do nothing. The workers think that their children are not as good as the children of the idlers, and they teach their children as soon as ever they are old enough that they must be satisfied to work very hard and to have only very bad goods and clothes and homes' .*

Fatalism, and lack of agency, commonly expressed by the various protagonists such as Phil, in *All or Nothing* (Leigh, 2002) who regularly philosophises on life, referring to '*the fickle finger of fate'*, '*fait accompli'*, and the monotony of life – '*tide comes in, tide goes out, that's all there is to it'* . Fate is also implicit in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* when Tess speaks to her brother Abraham of how they have '*pitched up*' on a '*blighted*' star rather than a '*splendid*' one. Thus the acceptance of one's lot and the inability to do anything about it emerges repeatedly.

Similar to the isolated philanthropists and social reformers among the upper classes, the militant and rebellious protagonists of the lower classes are usually depicted as lone voices in a sea of listless inertia. In *Hard Times* (Dickens, 1854) the leader of the worker's union calls on his '*fellow-countrymen'* of Coketown, *'the slaves of an iron-handed and a grinding despotism',* to *'rally round one another as One united power, and crumble into dust the oppressors that too long have battened upon the plunder of our families, upon the sweat of our brows, upon the labour of our hands....'.* Yet both literature and film suggest that on the whole, those in poverty fail to effectively engage in collective action to resist the exploitation they are subjected to. Owen in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* (Tressell, 1914) is exacerbated by his co-workers who continue to accept their lot – '*poverty and degradation'* and '*subjected to every possible indignity*' - and are willing to pass it on to their own children-, '*too proud'*, he says, '*to parade their misery before each other and the world'*. Larry in *Love on the Dole* (Greenwood, 1933) strives, with limited success, to instil a sense of consciousness of the exploitation of his fellow workers; while his namesake in *Riff Raff* (Loach, 1991) attempts, with little success, to unionise the men on the building site to improve their pay and conditions.

Alcohol, drugs and crime

Whether their use is a cause or consequence of hardship, alcohol and drugs are prominent in literary and film portrayals of the economically disadvantaged. They are typically used to accentuate squalor and to generate stereotypes of people who are out of control or of dubious moral character. Alcohol use has a persistence over time, variously presented as one of the few luxuries enjoyed by those with scarce resources, or a means of coping with hardship, alcoholism being synonymous perhaps with 'giving up' or resignation. In *Secrets and Lies* (Leigh, 1996), Cynthia copes with her socially isolated life outside work in the paper box factory by drinking alone. Sue's dad in *Rita, Sue and Bob Too!* (Clarke, 1986) typifies the dysfunctional alcoholic - not working, out of control, abusive and pathetic - while Hussein, Omar's father in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Frears, 1985), retains a degree of public dignity and respect despite his inability to get out of bed on most days or to hold down a job as a result of his drinking. Such depictions are mirrored in literature through the

archetypal drunk in the *Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* - '*a shabbily dressed, bleary-eyed, degraded, beer sodden, trembling wretch, who spent the greater part of every day, and all his money, in this bar'*- and the notion of alcohol as a social panacea -'*public houses by the score where forgetfulness lurks in a mug' – in Love on the Dole* (Greenwood, 1933). Similarly, the use of drugs as a coping mechanism is neatly described by Renton in the film T*rainspotting* (Boyle, 1996), '*When you're on junk you've only one worry, scoring. And when you're off it, you're suddenly obliged to worry about all sorts of other shite'.*

There is often a palpable shame felt by relatives or friends of those who overuse or are dependent on alcohol, manifested through verbal and non verbal expressions of disgust. In *Secrets and Lies* (Leigh, 2002) Roxanne's revulsion of her mother's drinking is shown by her angry outbursts and her total avoidance of her. In *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*! (Clarke, 1986) Sue and her mother show a loathing towards Sue's alcoholic father. And similarly, Sam in *All or Nothing* (Leigh, 2002) despises her mother for allowing herself to be rendered so dysfunctional through alcohol use. Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* (Hardy, 1891) is moved to tears by her anger at her father and his attempts **'***to get up his strength'* through alcohol and the fact that his regular visits to the public house are condoned by her mother.

Equally drugs, a theme addressed specifically within the film corpus, are presented as generating control over whole communities and rendering the characters powerless to resist them. In *Sweet Sixteen* (Loach, 2002), the story line follows Liam's futile attempts to distance his mother from her drug-dealing boyfriend. Ironically, his only way of doing this is through dealing in drugs himself. Similarly, *Nil By Mouth* (Oldman, 1997); *Trainspotting* (Boyle, 1996), *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Frears, 1985); and *Kidulthood* (Clarke, 2006) are all examples of where drug dealing becomes the mainstay of social and economic activity arguably as a result of a lack of alternatives. Renton, the central character of Trainspotting comments on the unrelenting link between crime and drug addiction, '*no matter how much you stash and how much you steal, you never have enough... no matter how often you go out and fuck people over, you always need to get up and do it all over again'.*

In Great Expectations (Dickens, 1861) Abel Magwitch, the convict, sums up how he survived and his path into crime,

> *'Tramping, begging, thieving, working sometimes when I could,—though that warn't as often as you may think, till you put the question whether you would ha' been over-ready to give me work yourselves,—a bit of a poacher, a bit of a laborer, a bit of a wagoner, a bit of a haymaker, a bit of a hawker, a bit of most things that don't pay and lead to trouble'*

Various similar crimes are central to the action in the films, many of them petty and the majority committed in order to alleviate hardship or mitigate feelings of shame or inadequacy. The opening scene of the Full Monty (Cattaneo, 1997) sees unemployed Gaz, his friend Dave and Gaz's son Nathan filching a steel girder from a disused warehouse. During their escape, they drop the girder into the canal and Gaz comments, '*Fucking hell Nath, they're twenty quid each them – that were your bloody maintenance that* '. It transpires that Gaz needs to get hold of £700 to cover maintenance arrears if he is to have a chance of gaining joint access to his son.

Dignity, aspirations and resistance

Yet responses to hardship are not routinely negative or fatalistic, neither are characters routinely rendered powerless through the adversity they face. The most uplifting scenes in the films are where the characters demonstrate resistance against the oppression they feel. In *Riff Raff* (Loach, 1991), the realisation that Stevie has nowhere to live sees his workmates rallying round to organise a squat for him, a storyline used to accentuate the impact of the contemporary Thatcher government on the poorest in society; '*Every day people are getting their leckky (electricity) cut off, getting gas cut off'.* The main story line of *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997) is of unemployed, downtrodden men like Gaz, Dave, Lomper and Gerald organising themselves to make some money and prove their worth – to the full admiration of their packed audience when they pull off a strip-tease show.

Pride and dignity are employed in measured amounts across the genres to counter the notions of powerlessness and disintegration. Phil and Rachel, in *All or Nothing* (Leigh, 2002), share a mutual understanding of the importance of dignity during a discussion over dinner when Phil recounts how during the day he picked up an old man in his taxi cab who only needed to be driven a short distance, but still insisted on paying the full minimum fare.

The selected literature too, engages with examples of maintaining dignity, pride and self-respect among those facing adversity, offering important antidotes to emotions of mortification and humiliation. Certain characters are shown to strive to retain dignity despite their meagre resources. In *Love on the Dole* (Greenwood, 1933), Harry and Helen resist asking for help from the poor house until it is absolutely unavoidable. Similarly, Linden in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* is described as swallowing '*all that remained of his pride and went like a beaten dog to see the relieving officer, who took him before the board'.* The contemporary novel *Remains of the Day* (Ishiguro, 1989) engages firmly with the idea of dignity as an essential freedom, the ability *'to express your opinion freely and vote in your member of parliament or vote him out,* freedoms which are as valid for all free citizens, *'no matter if you're rich or poor'.*

There are examples, too, of the maintenance of dignity being closely associated with family as well as personal honour. For example, while contemplating his departure for London, Redburn (Melville, 1849) considers the scarcity of his funds alongside the moral values that he has set for himself,

> *'But then, thought I again, with my hands wildly groping in my two vacuums of pockets—who's to pay the bill?—You can't beg your way, Wellingborough; that would never do; for you are your father's son, Wellingborough; and you must not disgrace your family in a foreign land; you must not turn pauper'.*

However, some novels also show that the poor are likely to pay a high price for preserving their dignity and find themselves having to strike an intelligent balance between their dignity and the reality of their circumstances. For instance, while begging is out of the question for some, they might accept charitable gifts from their family or wealthy acquaintances. Hence Joseph the poor writer in *Nineteen Twenty One* (Thorpe, 2001) accepts the use of a dilapidated cottage offered to him by a friend where he ekes out a basic existence while finishing his book.

The literature equally suggests that many of the characters have aspirations to change their impoverished condition and low social status, some having vivid ambitions for social mobility. Aspirations for the future also offer temporary relief from the tough reality of their current lives. In most cases, however, the comprehension that actuality is incompatible with their dreams soon sets in, creating a paradox of ideals and reality. This said, some characters such as Pip in *Great Expectations* (Dickens,1861), Harry in *Love on the Dole* (Greenwood, 1933) among others, do manage through the twists of fate to turn their circumstances around and enjoy relative prosperity and social standing. Other characters, such as Paula Spencer in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (Doyle, 1991) prefer to set their standards lower for fear that their aspirations will be thwarted.

Similarly in the film corpus, aspirations and the desire for change and social mobility for some characters counter the sense of fatalism of others. Joyce, Frank's wife and Vera's sister in law in *Vera Drake* (Leigh, 2005) typifies the constant desire for a new house, nice clothing and the newly-available modern commodities of the 1950s. Within the same era, Helen, Jo's mother in *A Taste of Honey* (Richardson, 1966), is ecstatic at the prospect of her '*bungalow with bay windows and crazy paving',* acquired through marriage to her well-off but, in Jo's opinion, loathsome '*fancy man'*. In *Sweet Sixteen* (Loach, 2002) Liam makes plans to secure a caravan for his mother before she returns from prison, with the hope that it will distance her from her drug dealing boyfriend. In *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Frears, 1985), Omar has a vision for the renovated laundrette to become '*the jewel in the Jacksy of South London'*.

Shamelessness

Shamelessness, whether emanating from an ignorance of the expectation to feel shame, or from a resistance to the idea that it should ever be experienced, also emerges in both literature and film. Contrary to the withdrawal which is typical of a sense of shame, shamelessness is manifested by characters actively pursuing actions that could become a source of shame. The narrator of *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* sounds anything but ashamed in the following extract:

- *'Alfred,' I said in a perfectly friendly manner, 'I need your help.'*
- *'When you call me Alfred, I know you want money.'*
- *'Quite frankly Bosie I need the money. I need it desperately. I have left my clothes at the Hotel Marsollier and the proprietor threatens to sell them if I do not pay what is owing to him.'*
- *'Oscar you used that excuse last month.'*
- *'Oh did I? I had forgotten. I am sorry. It shows the utter collapse of my imagination under the influence of penury. Nevertheless my situation never changes. Bosie I am depending on your goodwill.'*

There are examples where poverty is shown to lead to behaviour that can be regarded as shameless or dishonourable and variably associated with brazenness, petty crime, working the system or deceitfulness. The desperation of hunger in particular is shown at times to reduce human behaviour to that of animals; Pip in *Great Expectations* (Dickens, 1861) for example likens the eating habits of the convict to those of a dog, '*I now noticed a decided similarity between the dog's way of eating, and the man's. The man took strong sharp sudden bites, just like the dog. He swallowed, or rather snapped up, every mouthful, too soon and too fast'.* Some people facing hardship are also shown to devise apparently shameless strategies to extract money from those who are relatively well off. Yet the association of shamelessness is not confined to those living in poverty; and there are protestations in literature and film alike of the blatant exploitation and degradation by the rich of those in poverty or with lower social status.

Conclusions

Although often secondary to the central foci of their subject matter, poverty and shame provide important structures on which the plots of novels and social realist films are built. The association between the two, however, is interwoven within a complex relationship with other social dimensions such as class, gender, ethnicity, wealth and power.

Collectively, the media portray hardship, however acutely felt, as a social phenomenon which engages with the relativity of differing social and economic statuses, thus creating the potential for shame. When experienced, shame is shown to demonstrate different responses. A common story line is a resultant proneness to a poor self-image, an intrinsic sense of inferiority, or, where a sense of shame is prolonged, the disintegration of the core self over time. This is typically shown to play out in various forms of imposed or self-inflicted social exclusion, processes which may in turn exacerbate and perpetuate poverty.

The findings further suggest that there are some key elements that initiate the process of shame. These include the established social and class structures and societal parameters of respect governed by material wealth and the perception of the rich being superior to the poor. Hence wealth and higher class are commonly portrayed as the tools of shaming. People subjected to hardship can be humiliated by others in numerous ways, some subtle, others blatant. Yet this external shaming is shown to often coincide with a process of self deprecation, producing a sense of unworthiness and loss of pride. This leads to self exclusion, manifested in different ways across the genres through pretence, avoiding social situations, temporary or total withdrawal or a negative impact on the physical and emotional self.

Many of the texts suggest that those with further reduced social status such as women, children and people from minority ethnic communities bear the brunt of poverty-related shame. While gender inequality is a theme engaged with by both male and female authors as far back as the Victorian era, the ethnicity dimensions of othering and shaming tend to emerge through contemporary novels and films.

While films within the social realist genre up to around the 1970s and Victorian and modern literature provide stark unambiguous examples of poverty, contemporary works across both corpuses engage more with the relativity of poverty and provide a more nuanced depiction of hardship, closely associated with class differences. Throughout the films in particular, there is an important, somewhat uncertain subtext of poverty to the representations on the screen such as drug use, homelessness, violence and prostitution, and as such these social phenomena provide important commentary on the complexities surrounding social disadvantage and exclusion more broadly.

Across both corpuses, the close association made between the ‘under class’ and the dysfunctional is at times unnerving, leaving an uncomfortable sense of collusion with the idea of the inevitable drift from hardship to harshness and depravity. The ubiquitous presence of alcohol, drugs and related crime, particularly within films, also generate dominant images of microcosms of society which are dysfunctional, have low moral standards and if anything are devoid of shame. Thankfully, this suggested inevitability is countered to some extent by the use of key characters that offer

alternatives to such stereotypes and bring into play the importance of personal characteristics and attributes.

Overall, there is a good degree of symmetry across film and literature of how poverty and manifestations of its related shame are portrayed. The examination of the literature has enabled us to consider the themes over a substantial period of time and to demonstrate their endurance. While class distinctions may in some ways appear less pronounced in contemporary rather than Victorian or modern literature, the importance of money and material wellbeing and its role in generating shame is more sustained, a conjecture supported by the contemporary film corpus. In some respects at least, the novels and films combined do appear to offer important barometers against which we have been able to critique dominant discourses surrounding people's fictional experiences of poverty and related shame overtime. Emerging themes that we take forward to our next phase of work include the relative importance of money over class; the notion of *dignified* compared to *squalid* poverty; the common associations between hardship and dysfunction; the increasing importance of ethnicity and the need to examine further the gendered dimensions of poverty.

More broadly, the analysis of the two corpuses raises important questions for the remainder of the research: Are people facing hardship inevitably ashamed of their situation? If so, how is such shame constructed? Is shame, for example, an inherent part of the collective consciousness of those living in poverty or an invention of those with relative wealth imposed on those with fewer resources and perpetuated through dominant discourses?

Appendix 1: Literature and film corpus

Literature Corpus

Title of the novel	Author	Date Published
Anita and Me	Meera Syal	1996
Anna of Five Towns	Arnold Bennett	1902
Brick Lane	Monica Ali	2003
Diary of a Nobody (The)	George Grossmith	1892
Final Passage (The)	Caryl Phillips	1985
Go Between (The)	L. P. Hartley	1953
Great Expectations	Charles Dickens	1861
Howards End	E. M. Forster	1910
A Handful of Dust	Evelyn Waugh	1934
Hard Times	Charles Dickens	1854
Jane Eyre	Charlotte Brontë	1847
Jude the Obscure	Thomas Hardy	1895
Love on the Dole	Walter Greenwood	1933
Last testament of Oscar Wilde (The)	Peter Ackroyd	1983
Mary Barton	Elizabeth Gaskell	1848
Middlemarch	George Eliot	1869
News from Nowhere	William Morris	1890
Nineteen Twenty One	Adam Thorpe	2001
Odd Women (The)	George Gissing	1893
Redburn	Herman Melville	1849
Remains of the Day (The)	Kazuo Ishiguro	1989
Regeneration	Pat Barker	1991
Return of the Soldier	Rebecca West	1918
Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (The)	Robert Tressell	1914
Room with a View	E. M. Forster	1908
Strange Case of Dr Jackyll	Robert Stevenson	1886
Small Island (The)	Andrea Levy	2004
Shooting Party (The)	Isabel Colegate	1980
Tess *of the d'Urbervilles*	Thomas Hardy	1891
Woman who walked into doors (The)	Roddy Doyle	1991

Film Corpus

Fish Tank (Arnold, A. 2009)
Kidulthood (Clarke, N, 2006)
London to Brighton (Williams, P. 2006)
This is England (Meadows, S. 2006)
Vera Drake (Leigh, M. 2005)
All or Nothing (Leigh, M. 2002)
Sweet Sixteen (Loach, K. 2002)
Billy Elliot (Daldry, S. 2000)
Rat Catcher (Ramsay, L. 1999)
East is East (O'Donnell, D. 1999)
The Full Monty (Cattaneo, P. 1997)
Nil By Mouth (Oldman, G. 1997)
Secrets and Lies (Leigh, M. 1996)
Trainspotting (Boyle, D. 1996)
Raining Stone (Loach, K. 1993)
Riff Raff (Loach, K, 1991)
Rita, Sue and Bob Too (Clarke, A. 1986)
My Beautiful Laundrette (Frears, S. 1985)
Letter to Brezhnev (Bernard, C. 1985)
Made in Britain (Clarke, A. 1983)
Scum (Clarke, A. 1979)
My way Home (Douglas, B. 1978)
My Ain Folk (Douglas, B. 1973)
My Childhood (Douglas, B. 1972)
Kes (Loach, K. 1969)
Cathy Come Home (Loach, K. 1966)
The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner (Richardson, T. 1962)
A Taste of Honey (Richardson, T. 1961)
Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Reisz, K. 1960)