

## **Villainous Victims: The Paradox of the ‘Damaged’ Man in *Naked* and *Nil By Mouth***

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The ‘damaged’ man so characteristic of the nineties is an established trope in British cinema; his lineage stretches back to the post war era where traumatized veterans in films such as *The Small Back Room* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1949) were physically and emotionally damaged. It was not only returning veterans who could be thought of as being ‘damaged’ in some way; violent and brutal men such as Pinkie Brown (Richard Attenborough) in *Brighton Rock* (John Boulting, 1947) are clearly predecessors to the images of ‘damaged’ men that proliferated in nineties British cinema. There are also clear similarities between more recent narratives such as *Naked* (Mike Leigh, 1993) and *Nil By Mouth* (Gary Oldman, 1997) and those of numerous ‘angry young men’ of the British New Wave films which presented characters like Arthur Seaton (Albert Finney) railing against the constrictions of society in social realist films like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960). While the historical and cultural context for the problems caused by and facing these male characters clearly changes there remains an established lineage of the ‘damaged’ man in British cinema. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the social and cultural reasons as to why it should be that during the 1990s these forms of masculinity came to prominence once more, and to grapple with some of the more complex and contentious problems that such apparently misogynistic and violent characters raise.<sup>1</sup>

My goal is to begin negotiating some of the problems posed by these violent and dysfunctional ‘damaged’ men working towards an understanding

<sup>1</sup> Glen Creeber argues that these representations come after a period in which British cinema had ‘tended to increasingly foreground the presence and role of women. (Creeber, 2000, p.198). Films including *Educating Rita* (Lewis Gilbert, 1983), *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* (Alan Clarke, 1986), *High Hopes* (Mike Leigh, 1988) and *Letter To Brezhnev* (Chris Bernard, 1986) all centralise female characters. In contrast *Nil By Mouth* is about domestic abuse but the story that is foregrounded is that of Raymond (Ray Winstone) and not his wife Val (Kathy Burke).

that does not condone their behaviour but accomplishes more than a straightforward dismissal of these characters as evidence of narrative, directorial or even cultural misogyny as some critics, including Claire Monk (2000), claim. *Naked* and *Nil By Mouth* are just two films produced during the nineties that feature representations of ‘damaged’ men as central to their narratives. Focusing upon these particular examples and providing a culturally informed textual analysis of their damaged men draws out the narrative complexities and contradictions that they embody and explores the ways in which the tension between victim and perpetrator of violence is constantly foregrounded in such a way that makes a straightforward understanding of these representations unfeasible. Both films are more appropriately thought of as ‘art house’ cinema and they draw on a tradition of social realist film making within British film which is reflected in the style, form and content and is one of the distinguishing factors that mark their modes of representation out.

In this article I am addressing those issues of representation that exist at the micro-textual level of individual film narratives; my analysis presents critical readings of the films that are informed by cultural context and scholarly literature from gender, film and cultural studies perspectives. My methodological approach presents a reading of both *Naked* and *Nil By Mouth* with a view to highlighting the complexities and contradictions that are inherent in narrative representations of ‘damaged’ men. Presenting these readings does not, however, assume either to privilege one interpretation at the expense of others or suggest a direct or straightforward correlation between cultural texts and social shifts. In fact I would argue that the paradoxes of these ‘damaged’ men actually serve to highlight the multiple sites and layers involved in interpretation and meaning making. The narratives of the ‘damaged’ men that I explore here could be described as relying on and manipulating the instabilities of representation and processes

of meaning making by virtue of the fact that the characters frequently occupy opposing narrative positions of both victim and perpetrator.

### **Contextualising 1990s ‘Damaged’ Men**

During the nineties British films predominantly returned to focus upon the seemingly overwhelming challenges that were facing working class men and those men who had been left unemployed and disenfranchised by the decline of traditional industries. At this time it seemed that men were coming to terms with the fact that their gender no longer entitled them to the social, economic or familial power that they had once been able to take for granted, moreover, some claimed, it was men, not women, who were the disadvantaged ‘victims’ of their gender (Faludi, 1999; Phillips, 1999). Traditional notions of masculinity, which had been predicated upon the power structures of patriarchal society, were being called into question on many counts.<sup>2</sup> Changing economic and industrial requirements and the apparent ascendancy of women in the work place had eroded the role of male breadwinner and impacted upon the financial privilege that men once held. With social and domestic power being increasingly undermined there was a continual uncertainty surrounding the social, cultural and domestic roles of men in the post-industrial Britain and it is within this context that the nineties incarnation of ‘damaged’ men must be understood.

Film historian Andrew Spicer claims that, despite the proliferation of multiple, heterogeneous forms of masculinity in nineties British cinema, the figure of the violent and destructive damaged man is so frequent that ‘he has become its most representative image’ (2001, p.195).<sup>3</sup> Although the notion

<sup>2</sup> Masculinity is itself not a straightforward concept and the definitions of what the term actually means is subject to ongoing debate. In employing the term here I am using it to describe a form of gendered identity, which is socially constructed and individually performed, and not in a biologically determined or essential way. Given that masculinity is a matter of both culture and the individual it is inevitably bound to issues of power, politics and ideology. See R.W. Connell (2005) and J. Butler (1990), which are key texts in the area.

<sup>3</sup> Spicer describes the ‘heterogeneity and hybridity’ of male types in more recent British cinema as being one of its most ‘striking features.’ Certainly configurations of masculinity in nineties British cinema appear to respond to wider changes in gender and identity

of damage is one that is undoubtedly useful for thinking through the complexities of some of the male characters in nineties British films, Spicer invokes the term in an overarching way which requires some clarification. Arguably the notion of ‘damage’ is most usefully employed as a way of discussing some of the more extreme representations of male crisis that were manifest in nineties British film. While Spicer would include examples such as *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) or *Heart* (Charles MacDougall, 1999) the men in these films do not share the same violent, misogynistic and brutal characteristics that are present in the male characters of films such as *Naked* (Mike Leigh, 1993) and *Nil By Mouth* (Gary Oldman, 1997) that this article takes as its focus.

While the concept of ‘damage’ clearly has many similarities with the more familiar idea that, during the nineties, men were in the throes of ‘crisis’, damage implies a greater severity; the term ‘damage’ in the context of this paper refers to a very specific grouping of masculinities that are represented widely in some of the less mainstream films of the decade. ‘Damaged’ men are those who seem to be least able to cope with the apparent reduction in their patriarchal power and who subsequently respond with a combination of self destructive behaviour (including drug and alcohol abuse) and physical violence. The problems of anti-social behaviour, sexual and domestic violence, substance abuse and disempowerment that are central to the cinematic ‘damaged’ man have no easy or quick answers – either in diegetic space of the film narrative or within the wider cultural environment. The representation of ‘damaged’ men is often bleaker and certainly more graphic than representations of ‘crisis’ masculinities, the likes of which are evident in *The Full Monty* for example, and as a result these films demand a more complex response.

The cinematic ‘damaged’ man is inevitably contentious. His violence and brutality are frequently juxtaposed alongside dispossession and

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politics.

disempowerment; the characters are often framed in such a way that their behaviour is offset against their claims to disenfranchisement and victimization. The cultural and economic problems that were both posed by and afflicting men seemed to become increasingly pressing in the nineties (Clare, 2000). The consequences of post-industrialisation occurred in parallel with a perceived rise in the empowerment of women and thus contributed to a cultural environment in which the idea that men were suffering garnered considerable credibility (Modleski, 1991, pp.3-23). The effect of this 'damage' was arguably rendered more devastatingly powerful in nineties British cinema than at any time previously, with graphic portrayals of physical violence, substance abuse, addiction and uncontrollable rage. Yet at the same time these narratives invoke an appropriation of victim status and predicate a dynamic of blame within which the behaviour of these male characters is represented and understood. Many of the damaged men that feature in nineties British cinema have either been subject to abuse and violence or they have found themselves in a situation where they can no longer lay claim to the forms of power that they had once taken for granted.

### **Johnny and Raymond: Victims or Villains?**

*Naked* is one of Mike Leigh's better-known films. It won two awards at Cannes and was pivotal in establishing his credentials as an internationally acclaimed director. The film's protagonist, Johnny (David Thewlis) flees his native Manchester after sexually assaulting a woman; finding himself in London he visits his ex-girlfriend, Louise (Lesley Sharp). Johnny is a social outsider, a drifter whom the film follows over a two-day period. His first encounter is with Louise's flatmate Sophie (Katrin Cartlidge), a discombobulated Goth whom he seduces. Her increasing clinginess and declarations of love provide the impetus for Johnny to disappear once more into the London night where his wanderings bring him into contact with a

whole range of characters including homeless couple Archie (Ewen Bremner) and Maggie (Susan Vidler), and security guard Brian (Peter Wright). Johnny is an isolated and frustrated intellectual, scornful and bitter but also ‘threatening and broken’ (Carney and Quart, 2000, p.229). Critics, including Monk, have condemned the film for failing to bring Johnny to account. She argues that the film’s attempt ‘to show, but not comment on misogyny and sexual violence is hugely problematic’ (Monk, 2000, p.163). Yet this criticism fails to acknowledge the complexities of Johnny’s character and underlines the problematic interchange between perpetrator and victim that is central to the construction of many damaged men in British films of this time. Johnny is situated as simultaneously abhorrent and pitiful, producing a paradoxical configuration of masculinity that seems to require a response that will always be negotiated by contradiction.

*Nil By Mouth* is the semi-autobiographical directorial debut of actor Gary Oldman and features Ray Winstone as the abusive, violent, alcoholic Raymond. Winstone’s heavy-set body and his reputation for ‘hard man’ characters brings an overbearing and imposing physicality to the character – his physique fills the frame, dominating the cinematic space and indicating his power (physical and psychological) over his family. Set against the deprivation of a post-industrial Deptford the film focuses upon a dysfunctional family all of whom live under constant threat of Raymond’s explosive temper. Raymond, like Johnny, is at the margins of society; involved in petty crime, he is quick to resort to physical violence against both men and women. Raymond’s size, his physical strength and sexual prowess are constantly paraded as performative ‘evidence’ of his macho masculinity, but as the narrative unfolds and his control unravels, the very markers of this masculinity become ‘little more than a dubious compensation for a real lack of economic and social power’ (Hill, 2004, p.106). The trauma of cultural and economic disempowerment leads Raymond to assert his physical power over Val (Kathy Burke) and his

family because that is the only form of control he seems to have left. In battering Val, Raymond is attempting to re-assert the power he feels that he has lost, but paradoxically his actions affirm a loss of control rather than serving to validate his authority.

Both *Naked* and *Nil By Mouth* frame domestic and sexual violence as symptomatic of working-class frustration at a lack of cultural, economic and familial power. Johnny and Raymond remain dangerously close to losing control at any moment, their simmering emotions constantly on the verge of erupting. The smallest incident or perceived affront to their authority results in caustic verbal admonishment or physical violence respectively (Westlund, 1999, p.1048). The misogynistic attitudes of these men are clearly problematic yet they are also fundamental to understanding the perpetual paradox of nineties damaged men. These films raise the question of the extent to which this staging of misogyny within a cinematic space colludes with or somehow condones the violence, abuse and abjection that they subject the various female characters to in the course of the narrative. Neither film offers any narrative redemption for their damaged men nor do they punish or otherwise appear to hold Johnny and Raymond culpable for their actions, but at the same time the conclusions of both films refuse any straightforward identification or sympathy with the men. The final scene in *Naked* sees Johnny limping away, a lone and detached figure unable or unwilling to form anything more than transient relationships.

Conversely the concluding scene in *Nil By Mouth* attempts to offer something more positive showing the apparently reformed Raymond re-forging his broken family ties. However, as Creeber explains, 'from what the audience already knows of Ray it would certainly be naïve to think that he is a completely reformed character abandoning his violent and alcoholic past' (2001, p.203). While neither film openly offers any form of narrative chastisement for the brutal behaviour of their 'damaged' men, the fact that their endings are marked with ambivalence and ambiguity means that either

critiquing or justifying them in terms of their misogyny is somewhat reductive. Indeed this seems to negate a rather more positive (but no less critical) analysis which aims to understand how vicious cycles of destructive, damaged or damaging masculinities remain tied to economic, social and personal circumstance.

### **Violence and ‘Damaged’ Men**

Both *Naked* and *Nil By Mouth* are unflinching in their representations of ‘damaged’ men. The destructive effects of ‘damaged’ masculinity are represented in graphic minutiae in *Nil By Mouth* particularly, but neither film encourages a celebratory or uncritical engagement with their subjects. Rather, in allowing space for the articulation of male alienation through physical violence to develop in uncomfortable detail, the films are not necessarily an expression of sadistic misogyny at work. The issue is, as Watts explains, whether the graphic depiction of such violence necessarily colludes with misogyny or indeed whether the ‘staging’ of such behaviour can work to facilitate politicized discussion about the actuality of domestic and sexual violence in Britain (1996. p.275). Instead these films foreground serious social issues including sexual and domestic violence, situating them within a wider cultural context which positions these men as both cause and symptom of the destructive cycles in which they are trapped. The fact that neither film is capable of offering a redemptive, dismissive or even tenable conclusion appears to be more a critique of social and cultural problems, not least among which is the seemingly inescapable nature of the vicious cycles of damage and destruction brought about by economic disempowerment and familial circumstance. However, this is not to excuse the more reprehensive actions of Raymond and Johnny - Raymond causes his wife, Val, to miscarry after a particularly violent beating and Johnny appears to rape a woman in the opening scene of *Naked*. Although Monk’s contention that both films are open to multiple, retrogressive, masculinist readings is valid,

it is equally possible that these films present an interesting opportunity to address serious issues – opening up debates about rape (particularly within the context of marriage or relationships) or the manipulative relationships forged through domestic violence for example. The director of *Naked*, Mike Leigh, goes as far as to defend the representation of Johnny as being deliberately contentious; it was his intention to create a character that impelled both pity and repulsion in order to produce complex, contradictory responses (Coveny, 1997, p.10).

*Nil By Mouth* relies on similar contradictions; the film mobilizes the idea of damage as a central thematic concern on at least two levels. Firstly, framing the narrative as semi-autobiographical draws attention to the ‘authenticity’ of the kinds of problems and circumstances depicted (not least of which is the violent melt-down of a damaged, unreconstructed masculinity); but secondly, and perhaps more importantly, in positioning Raymond as a paradoxical victim/perpetrator the film compels a negotiated reading of his actions. Raymond’s character is portrayed both as a violent, abusive tyrant but also as a pitiful, almost child-like victim – thus there are multiple ways in which the film requires viewers to negotiate their readings – not only through the contradictions that Raymond himself represents but also by virtue of the fact that ‘there is no single undifferentiated [male viewing] audience with a singular view of the representations of violence presented to them. (Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1998, pp.4-5), and that the relationship between representation, interpretation and effects are themselves complex, varied and often contradictory. The film sets Raymond up as alienated, isolated and heading for self-induced, yet seemingly inescapable, destruction. He is trapped in cycles of deprivation, addiction and abuse. The film shows how these cycles of violence and anger are partially inherited and also self-perpetuating. Raymond was starved of love and affection by his alcoholic father and yet finds himself replicating his behaviour –it is his own alcoholism and drug abuse that lead him to lose

control. The film then, is surely not an endorsement of male violence rather than a self-conscious intervention into debates and discourses about the complex problems caused by marginality, immobility and damage. What makes a film such as *Nil By Mouth* or indeed *Naked* distinct from the likes of *The Full Monty* or *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (Guy Ritchie, 1998) is that the problems faced by these men are not played for comedy nor are they framed by ironic, retro cool. *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* for example, offers a very different fantasy of masculine violence, one which is exaggerated and seemingly without consequence. *Nil By Mouth*, by contrast, represents the horrific consequences of violence and presents them in a way that demands the audience engage with the causes and consequences of Raymond's violence as opposed to utilizing narratives of violence as an entertaining, escapist and inconsequential spectacle of violent masculinity which is above and beyond political critique.

One of the most controversial scenes in *Naked* is the opening sequence; our first glimpse of Johnny is of him pinning a woman against a wall, whether this scene is actually a rape or not remains ambiguous, but the possibility that it could be read either as such or as rough, but consensual, sex once more demonstrates the problematic politics of representing damaged men. Carney and Quart concede that much of Johnny's behaviour is 'aggressively sexist' (2000, p.230) but argue that the film does not condone or endorse his actions. David Thewlis defends the scene, arguing what we see is not a rape. He acknowledges, albeit somewhat lamely, that "It's sex that gets out of hand, that's not to condone it. Obviously he is out of order" (Coveny, 1997, p.5). Although a discussion of the politics of representing rape or aggressive sex in film is not the main issue in this article, the various contentions proffered by Carney, Quart, Thewlis and Monk are indicative of the problems caused by the ambiguity and ambivalence of the film with respect to both male and female characters. This opening scene and the media discussions that it provoked play off the

tension produced by the paradox of these characters (see for example Burchill, 1993 and Birch, 1993) Further, they point to the central issues regarding the politics at stake in representing these forms of ‘damaged’ masculinity in terms of physical and sexual aggression. It is not only this initial scene which represents Johnny as a manipulative and cruel sexual predator; his sexual encounter with Louise’s housemate Sophie is also rough, albeit more obviously consensual, and his treatment of the middle-aged ‘woman in the window’ is also callous and cruel – after feigning sexual interest in her Johnny proceeds to turn on her, humiliating her and stealing her books. This demonstrates the paradox at the heart of these problematic representations; while these men seem to be marginalized, frustrated and ‘damaged’ at the same time they are violent, brutal and damaging to other people. Too often it is women who remain on the receiving end of the damage and the violence it creates.

In *Nil By Mouth* Raymond also elicits contradictory responses of pity and disgust; during one of his most vicious outbursts (which comes about when he mistakenly thinks Val is having an affair) he repeatedly kicks Val in the stomach causing her to lose their baby. The cinematography in this scene is chillingly effective, the camera placing us in close proximity. We are among the characters and yet not; we can see the rage etched on Raymond’s face as he screams obscenities at his wife, but this is filtered by the use of obscure camera angles and unexpected camera movements which work to defy identification and create a sense of detachment and distance from the horrific consequences of such domestic violence. There are, for instance, objects obstructing the line of the camera. The camera cuts further out still, looking down from the stairs to catch a glimpse of Raymond standing over Val’s still body ‘fiddling with the waistband on his boxer shorts in a kind of defiant uncertainty’ (R. Williams, 1997).

This distancing, however, is not to ease the discomfort of watching; in fact, it has quite the opposite effect. Sitting at the top of the stairs, just in

view is Michelle, the six-year-old daughter of Raymond and Val who has witnessed everything; indeed the moment when Raymond catches sight of Michelle is among the most poignant and powerful moments in the film. He changes from tyrant to caring father in a split second, reassuring her and urging her to return to bed despite the fact that he has just beaten her mother unconscious. The film thus uses the tension between damaged and damaging to establish critical distance and makes easy identification with Raymond difficult. The fact that Raymond is able to be both vicious abuser and caring father simultaneously forces this contradiction to the fore and also highlights the inherited cycle of abuse of which Raymond seems to be part.

The representation of domestic violence in *Nil By Mouth* does not encourage voyeuristic complicity. This is not to say that it is not possible to make a 'masculinist' reading of the film as Monk suggests (2000, p.163), rather it renders the spectre of this damaged, unreconstructed masculinity out of control, a pitiful, abhorrent and often hysterical spectacle. At times Raymond's primal rage is more reminiscent of a caged animal than a man (he paces restlessly around rooms for example). From his behaviour in the strip club to the beatings of Val and Billy (Charlie Creed-Mills), Raymond becomes increasingly hostile and violent, raging wildly out of control. The rage that has been constantly simmering just below the surface since the outset of the film explodes when Raymond discovers that his heroin addict brother-in-law, Billy has stolen drugs from him. Raymond beats Billy, biting him on the nose and when Val implores him to stop 'behaving like an animal' his response is to scream 'Get him out or I'll kill him! Then I'll kill you and your slag, shit, cunt family.' However, the film does not allow a straightforward reading of Raymond as a violent misogynist and wife-beater; at times he is remorseful, isolated and even pitiful, drinking alone in a pub in the middle of the day and crying into an unplugged phone, too drunk to realize that he is talking to himself. In these scenes Raymond becomes a tragic victim of inherited self-destructive behaviour, lacking the

ability or the awareness to break the cycles in which he is trapped. It is, once again, this paradox that proves the most problematic aspect of the damaged man; the film pulls the viewer in contradictory ways. Whilst it is problematic (and perhaps inappropriate) to feel sympathy for such a character the film compels a negotiated reading when contextualized in a cultural environment shaped by the seemingly inescapable entrapment of working class unemployment, deprivation and marginalization.

Unlike Johnny, Raymond is not a loner. The opening of the film finds him in a bar surrounded by an all male group of friends while Val sits with her own mixed group of friends and family. Raymond, it seems, is more comfortable in a social life which revolves around an exclusively homosocial cohort where he can boast and brag, displaying his macho, hetero masculinity to an appreciative audience. The group around which Raymond organizes his life is perhaps where the film's most apparently misogynistic undertones can be seen. The group of men are almost unable to communicate anything more than sexual banter or childish bragging about their status as 'hard men' and their criminal activities. Their conversations seem to convey a state of arrested development – the language and tone of the conversations particularly in the bar and club scenes are, as Monk contends, problematic, 'their language is ripely male, yet full of childish diminutives' (2000, p.163). Whereas Monk again sees this as indicative of a generally misogynistic subtext, it is also possible that the dialogue in these scenes points to the lack of education and opportunity that contribute to the marginalization and disempowerment felt by these men. Representing Raymond almost as a 'child man' suggests his neediness but it also intimates his basic lack of control over (and arguably diminished culpability for) his actions, although the film does not use this to absolve or dismiss the damage that the character has caused it serves to reinforce the paradox that the character is caught in.

Raymond is often isolated, drinking himself to oblivion in an empty pub and demolishing the family flat in a drunken rage after Val leaves him. A volatile mixture of self-loathing combined with the inability to articulate emotions and frustrations in a non-physical way is represented as a legacy passed from father to son and it is a legacy that Raymond seems incapable of breaking free from. Raymond is disgusting and ferocious but also pathetic and pitiful. Scenes such as Raymond's drunken monologue work to defy attempts at a straightforward or certain reading. Another key moment is where Raymond talks to his friend Mark (Jamie Foreman) about his own alcoholic father, describing how he used to get so drunk he would fall asleep in his chair and have to wake up to go to bed or how his mother once took dinner over to the pub telling her errant husband that as he lived there he should eat there too. The cycles of damage perpetuated between father and son become more apparent when, a short while later, Val describes Raymond in exactly the same terms that he had previously used to describe his own father.

Significantly 'damage' appears to be something that happens between men. While Val is able to articulate the situation for Raymond she has no real agency beyond that of facilitator, she is unable to change anything or indeed repair the damage that has already been wrought. The penultimate scene is pivotal for Raymond; Val facilitates Raymond's apparent growing awareness by making him see his faults - "Jesus, you must really hate me, I don't feel loved, I mean, that ain't love!" However, she also acknowledges that this does not necessarily make him irredeemable; he is not a 'bad' man. He loves his son (by another woman) and daughter but he 'doesn't do himself any favours' in the ways in which he continually (physically and emotionally) hurts other people. The ambiguous ending offers little in the way of long term or plausible resolution, appearing intentionally to leave Raymond situated in his eternal paradox. He is apparently a loving father (we see him hugging daughter Michelle and

playing with her as she sits on his knee) with a violent temper (that we have witnessed on numerous occasions), a contradiction that defies easy conclusions. Invoking an image of domesticated fatherhood juxtaposed in opposition to the pathologized brutality seen earlier in the film hints at the complexity of Raymond's character but without providing any evidence that indicates any real redemption has taken place and as such the suggestion of hope that the film ends on feels contrived and untenable. The family may have a new kitchen and the flat has been renovated but none of the problems facing the family or Raymond have been resolved or dealt with. While nineties cultural discourse valorized fatherhood (Chambers, 2001; Tincknell, 2005) investing it with redemptive, therapeutic qualities, *Nil By Mouth* is not quite so straightforward. The final scene suggests that fathering can facilitate a process of socialization and healing but without allowing for sentimentality or straightforward acceptance of Raymond as a changed man.

### **The Eternal Paradox of 'Damaged' Men**

These complex configurations of white, damaged masculinity signal a particular kind of disenfranchisement and raise issues that have no quick or easy answers. Their claims to crisis and damage are legitimized by virtue of their disempowerment and marginalization within post-industrial Britain. Neither Johnny nor Raymond appear to have any productive means of engagement with the world around them, but their articulation of this alienation and damage through domestic and sexual violence is both problematic and paradoxical. While it is impossible to ignore the frequency and intensity of Raymond and Johnny's misogynistic behaviour, it is problematic to reduce their representation solely to this issue. Although both *Naked* and *Nil By Mouth* fail to offer evidence of chastisement or redemption within their narratives, neither film explicitly (or even implicitly) condones the behaviour of its central male characters. The figure of the 'damaged' man is complex and, as I have shown, frequently

contradictory. The causes of damage are inevitably diverse but in *Naked* and *Nil By Mouth* the main causes are: poor prospects and communication; social marginality; and broken or abusive families. Both films demonstrate the cycles of damage that seem to be at the centre of the paradox of the 'damaged' man, showing how the damage done unto them has in turn brutalized them. For Johnny this is manifest in a verbalized pathology while Raymond's inarticulacy leads, almost inevitably, to more physically brutal consequences.

The figure of the 'damaged' man has thus far proven to be among the most contentious representations of masculinity in recent British cinema. In this piece I have demonstrated how the diversity and contradictions inherent in narratives of damaged men is in fact an important part of understanding their continued representation in recent British culture. Such representations inevitably raise further questions about fatherhood, male bonding and performances of 'damage', all of which remain imperative aspects of understanding of our recent cultural, discursive and cinematic histories. Johnny and Raymond are presented as victims in so far that they have been shaped by traumas that have left them feeling powerless, yet they are also violent and misogynistic. The fact that neither film offers any tenable resolution suggests that the problems portrayed have no easy solutions.

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