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"The View Is Nice, but You Can't Eat It"

A Poetics of Precarity in *Bait* (2019, Dir: Mark Jenkin)

DANIEL BROOKES

Introduction

The title of this essay is taken from the advertising material for *Bait*, which, in turn, was appropriated from UK charity Church Action on Poverty in their campaign to create food banks in Cornwall. The phrase sets the metaphysical and the material as related but curiously counterposed. For England's southern- and westernmost county, "still a land apart" (Beacham and Pevsner 2014, 1) owing to its unique admixture of industries and ancestries as much as its geographical composition and extremity, this relationship between person, culture and place was not always so fraught. Across Cornwall, the remnants of ancient populations (in the form of megaliths) and extractive industries are visible, indicating the intertwining of labour and community practice extending from the Stone and Bronze Ages, through the Christian annexation of this corner of the island, and into the era of a place dependent upon fishing and leisure. *Bait*, the first feature by Cornish director Mark Jenkin, suggests that the visitation of rentier capitalism, described by Guy Standing (2016) as the situation in which rentiers "derive income from possession of assets that are scarce or artificially made scarce," is a force which alters this long-standing relationship between place and people. 'The view' is that fetishised and idealised component of a place, separated out by commodity form, obviating the difficulties of the longstanding social order: the need for cultural practice, the need to maintain social formation, and the need to eat.

Local people disenfranchised by an 'affordability gap,' in which median salary falls beneath the requirement for a mortgage, has contributed to rising tensions in conurbations deriving income from rural tourism across England and Wales. According to a November 2022 study by the University of Exeter, only six Cornish postcodes featured 'positive affordability' (Williams and Lawlor 2022) for residents, while a quadrennial study of multiple deprivation in Cornwall pub-

lished in 2019 showed that "primary types of deprivation in Cornwall's worse affected neighbourhoods relates to income, employment, education, skills and training and health and disability" (Cornwall Council 2019).

It is this reality that frames *Bait* (2019) and constitutes its central tension. Martin, a fisherman, has sold the family home to the Leighs, a London-based couple who use much of the property for seasonal leisure and generate passive rental income from a converted loft previously used for storing nets. Now living in social housing on the outskirts of town, Martin commutes by car to the harbour, where the parking space typically reserved for fishermen is given over to tourists. The boat from which Martin and his estranged brother Steven fished with their father (who appears as a ghostly presence throughout the film) has been converted for pleasure cruises, creating a familial schism. Cultural practice (fishing) and the necessities of food are shown to be interrelated, but the alienation from labour and losing traditional footholds in a particular place that Martin experiences further reifies through fractures in the social formation. The village pub, ornamented with remnants of its association with the nautical, closes in winter and is filled with teenagers from out of town in summer. The sociology of the everyday of Henri Lefebrve, be it his analysis of the production of space ("social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves on one another" (1991, 86)) or on the role of modern man and leisure (on the role of the café: "where the regulars can find a certain luxury…where they can speak *freely…where they play*" (2002, 234)), is reflected throughout *Bait* in a way that activates its *mise-en-scène* above the level of mere backdrop, suggesting the vitality of its inhabitants and determining the historical procedure of its social form.

At three crucial layers of culture, place and work, Martin is alienated. British cinematic drama in the post-Thatcher era is not short of these triply alienated and situationally trapped figures; they populate the works of Ken Loach and Mike Leigh. These figures account for dimensions of women's suffering in works such as *Naked* (1993) and *Nil by Mouth* (1997), underline emasculation and rage in *Dead Man's Shoes* (2004) and *This is England* (2006), and are rendered comedic by the unlikely acts undertaken to find a way forward (*Brassed Off* (1996) and *The Full Monty* (1997)). These works are not just thematically and politically bound but are also broadly operative in the mode of social realism that has driven a great deal of British visual narrative drama across television and film since the 1950s. This connection has several implications for its cinema, but the two I shall utilise in order suggest how *Bait* differs are these: (a) British social realism is typically concerned with an "anti-poetic" and "secular" (Williams 1977, 64) aesthetic notionally divested of mythos that attempts to show reality 'as is'; and (b) the understanding of social hierarchies derives, via a complex lineage, from the descriptions of Karl Marx: the aristocracy, the *bourgeoisie* and the proletariat.

As a counterpoint, British cinema has also featured works which show broadly non-realist approaches to the effects of Thatcherite politics and social class (in Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife, and her Lover* (1989), and the bawdy escapism of *Shopping* (1994) and *Trainspotting* (1996)). Though there is intersectionality in Greenaway, these works do not reflect the ways in which class dynamics have shifted in the broad aspects of Conservatism they attack, heightening their polemic quality by invoking mythic and historic structures of class rather than mapping their new contours. Guy Standing's taxonomy of social classes in Western economies attempts to sharpen distinctions. Middle earners are no longer automatically a homogenous *bourgeoisie*, but a combination of the salariat, proficians, technical workers, and a shrunken form of the former working class that has the greatest social utility (e.g. lorry drivers, builders, electricians). Beneath those, but above the underclass or lumpen proletariat, is the precariat:

> The precariat has *class* characteristics. It consists of people who have minimal trust relationships with capital or the state, making it quite unlike the salariat. And it has none of the social contract relationships of the proletariat, whereby labour securities were provided in exchange for subordination and contingent loyalty, the unwritten deal underpinning welfare states. Without a bargain of trust or security in exchange for subordination, the precariat is distinctive in class terms. It also has a peculiar *status* position, in not mapping neatly onto high-status professional or middle-status craft occupations. (2011, 8)

Bait differs from much British class-conscious production in non-trivial ways. It is both experimental in technique, non-linear in narrative, and aware of how the old certainties of class have stratified in the manner outlined by Standing. It is the ways in which these formal categories of narrative and form explicate the dimension of class that I wish to build on, though firstly I shall explore the ways in which precarity makes itself known throughout *Bait* in order to demonstrate how experimental technique and narrative form serve as both poetic and critique of this precarity.

Precarity and the Pastoral

Precarity in *Bait* takes multiple forms. Protagonist Martin is the avatar of a declining trade, the general collapsed into the individual: he does not have enough work beyond subsistence and does not know what tomorrow will bring. Attempts to save for a boat to restore the scale of his labour to a sustaining degree are routinely dashed by happenstance. Standing may disagree with this essay's conception of Martin's position as a precarious one, suggesting that "it is not right

to equate the precariat with the working poor or with just insecure employment […] [T]he precariousness also implies a lack of a secure work-based identity, whereas workers in some low-income jobs may be building a career" (ibid., 9). Martin's work-based identity is clear to the viewer and non-seasonal village residents, but it is clearly disappearing and disrespected within a seasonal community ("you're a fisherman? Then where's your boat?" says rentier Tim to Martin) that includes different class relationships that historically would have been more closely bonded (pub landlord and community member) before the incursions of neoliberal economics. Martin also closely corresponds with Standing's suggestion that the absence of subordination can be bought by job security, with Martin's apprentice and nephew Neil arguably positioned even further down the ladder, lacking the memory of the village as social formation around fisheries that shape (male) labour identity. As viewers we hear freighted discussions of post-Brexit disputes between Britain and the European Union emerging from diegetic radios, giving political reality to these suggestions drawn in character building.

In a 2022 paper given on the relationship between *Bait* and class aesthetics, Andrew Jarvis states that attachment to specific political issues is not what is at stake inasmuch as the film comprises "a hauntological neorealism that unsettles any reference to a punctual political issue, Brexit or otherwise, and instead mediates the sensation of historical crisis." Jarvis, in his examination of Jenkin's use of audio/visual disjuncture, echoes Mark Fisher to underscore a persuasive broader point about the film revealing capitalist realism as political decision. Non-realist aesthetics make such modal readings workable and account for the film's liminal and spectral presences in a satisfying manner. Nonetheless, the intertwining of several ungeneralised aspects of life contemporary to late-2010s rural tourist-afflicted Britain prevents *Bait* from serving as a general model for, for example, post-industrial northern England or the Scottish central belt or indeed western late-stage capitalism writ large.

Nor would these latter regions be well served by the pastoral. The pastoral, even when the social order introduced is rigorous in its mimesis, operates through a closed system of distilled mythic conventions that resists attempts to transpose itself onto other situations. *Bait* may or may not, depending on your view, meet the strictest historical literary view on the pastoral when considering Leo Marx's "no shepherds, no pastoral" (1986, 8) edict. Terry Gifford's views on what constitutes the pastoral are more accommodating; themes of return, the function of idyll, and the exaltation of the rural as "providing an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban" (2020, 2) are apparent in *Bait*, though their execution may be rendered as anti-pastoral because of the way in which Jenkin "attacks the very idealising role inherent in poetry about the English countryside" (in Westling 2014, 22). William Empson's mobilisation of notions of class

in the pastoral, whilst not Marxist in conclusion, acknowledge the relationship between an overtly politicised 'proletarian art' (which he deems "covert pastoral" (1974, 6)) and the focalisation of social address from below which inheres in the pastoral mode. Colin Burrow, whilst worrying about the lack of animals in many of the texts Empson considered pastoral, felt that this structural view of the pastoral had some merit, suggesting that "literary representation necessarily includes a range of entities beyond the particular, and top-down and bottom-up views of the world are structurally as well as generically distinct" (2021, 8).

It is this 'from below' but not necessarily Marxist perspective that may offer more nuance in considering Standing's conception of new social classes and how we might observe connections that operate intersectionally. The social sphere in *Bait* is populated with instantiations of precarity beyond Martin. Neighbour Wenna is reliant on seasonal labour owing to the village pub's closure in the winter months, which she loses. Meanwhile, nephew Neil chooses between forms of precarity, opting to apprentice in the local fishing industry rather than work seasonally on his father's pleasure cruiser. Standing suggests that some members of the precariat have found a "liberating side" (2011, vii) to this economic arrangement and, indeed, not all precariously employed people in *Bait* enter into precarity as a form of social victimhood. The character of the taxi driver, whose sole scene relays in analepsis his previous employment as a fisherman, can survive in precarity owing to his ability to exploit infrastructural and social gaps. His introduction in the narrative comes when he returns Wenna in his taxi from the nearest police station at a cost of £100. In a county whose median wage is approximately £600 per week, with low rail availability and continued bus cuts, precarity equates to entrepreneurial spirit.

Jenkin's inclusion of this character speaks to the ongoing difficulty of traditional solidarity in this new socio-economic arrangement. *Bait* shows several examples of 'looking sideways,' from peer-to-peer, in order to highlight the ongoing separation in labour conditions and how they inscribe emotional states of separateness which increase as the generations become younger. Through ghostly visions of village elders, Martin's generation and the teenagers, *Bait* offers a vision of Cornish village life that has clearly modified in three successive generations, with a constant set of values or feelings shared by all hard to pin down. In its developed form, in *The Long Revolution*, "structure of feeling" (Williams 1992, 48) counters and extends the Gramscian conception of hegemony by suggesting that, alongside the dominant thought forms and cultural practices that exist within a place and people, there must also be room for new feelings, thoughts, practices and ways of life that accounts for the eventual accretion of social change. On these changes, Williams writes "one generation may train its successor […] but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come 'from' anywhere" (ibid., 49).

Jenkin suggests that the first half of Williams' ideas here holds fast, but considers it in order to identify exactly the particular epoch of British capitalism, with its spirit of encouragement toward Big Tech-powered speculative investors and property developers, that accounts for this change. For Jenkin, conceptions of community dynamics in this Williamsian mode, idealised and naturalised through the juxtaposition of village elders, adults and youths in a harmonious and symbiotic relationship, have become rather a quaint and outdated notion. Structures of feeling are imported from elsewhere and, in this case a nebulous idea of the city-dweller's values, take precedence over resident structures and debates. Furthermore, Jenkin highlights the ways in which lessons descended through generations have become distorted and misunderstood in this new paradigm. The presence of tourists in Cornwall, as acknowledged by *Bait*, is not a new phenomenon. Among the traditional residents of the village, particularly the older and ghostlier presences, the phrase 'fleece them for all them's worth' is deployed in a way that defines the historical and present attitude toward the tourist visitors and acts as shibboleth between residents. However, there are scant or no examples of 'fleecing,' of exploitation without recrimination, performed in *Bait* by its residents to the tourists. The lesson, learned less as serious parable and more as performance of self-identity, has begun to inform interactions between the different forms of lower class.

Framing *Bait* as pastoral allows us to critique ways in which the shared feeling of an unnameable change across disparate characters inhabiting approximately the same social status, particular to an idealised rural scene, is presented in text and/or film. Terry Eagleton suggests that the pastoral entails a complex arrangement in which "the rich are poorer as well as richer than the common people, and that even the intellectual [...] shares a common humanity with others, which ultimately overrides whatever demarcates him or her from them" (1985, 160). *Bait*, along with several British works that have suggested an authentic sharedness and vitality to working-class culture that is either sniffed at or appropriated by a wealthier *bourgeoisie*, presents this arrangement in a broken state that is partially repaired by the film's conclusion. The ongoing separateness between dramatic content and descriptions of its display in film means that there must also be an accounting of other dimensions which shape and complicate interpretation.

Sounds / Aesthetics

Within the chapters of *Some Versions of Pastoral*, Empson chiefly bases his thesis on the poetry and the novel prior to the twentieth century. However, there is one remarkable aside that references cinema:

> The Englishman who seems to me nearest to a proletarian artist (of those I know anything about) is Grierson the film producer; *Drifters* gave very vividly the feeling of actually living on a herring trawler and (by the beauty of shapes and water and net and fish, and subtleties of timing and so forth) what I should call a pastoral feeling about the dignity of that form of labour. (1974, 8)

John Grierson's nationality aside (he was Scottish), Empson's recounting of one of *Bait*'s topical and aesthetic forebears articulates a complex positionality within the genre. For Empson, the pastoral is typically employed as a narratological method which focalises social address from the lower parts of its hierarchy in order to tease out alternative senses from textual ambiguities. In this section Empson begins to suggest that a "pastoral feeling" can be evoked by visual but non-narrative means; that an associative flow of images in montage can build a sense-world that connects questions of work and rural environment to suggest abstract subjective states such as 'dignity,' which Empson renders elsewhere as "a sense of glory" (ibid., 282) that may render this interpretation as a veiled piece of theology.

At a secular and material level, the visual references to *Drifters* in *Bait* are those which both requisition from history an ongoing connection between practice and place; that is to say that Jenkin suggests *Bait* is of the same world as *Drifters*, save for the modification of the base–superstructure relationship in the intervening ninety years. Nonetheless, there is a metaphysical aspect to *Bait*, an 'inner layer' or embedded romanticism which attempts to communicate this 'dignity' or 'glory,' or at least how it faces an uncertain future. Jenkin's references to *Drifters* imbue Grierson's pro-filmic actuality with spectral presences implied by film grain, texture, noise, leakage, damage and flickering light levels. Hand-developed, unevenly exposed, and prone to occasionally scratching the acetate, Jenkin is suggested to have "embraced these artefacts in the visual aesthetic of the film" (British Cinematographer, n.d.), resulting in a restless visual field even in the most static of shots.

My contention is that, by foregrounding method and the artefact not as unwanted but as the presence of the human, Jenkin forges several interesting connections between film and exterior discourses. Firstly, Jenkin connects the external and necessarily physical aspects of people and place with the shared internal dimension that accounts for the dominant 'structure of feeling' that presides within it. Secondly, Jenkin connects the actions of these smaller-scale precariat fishermen with his own physical and fragile artistic practice. Two indicative minutes of montage (Jenkin 2019, 17:49) speak to this. Martin and Neil crouch on a stony beach framed against the tide, cutting caught fish from a net. The longer shots of the sequence show Neil working patiently to loosen a fish, with the ending of this sequence being a wordless smile exchanged between uncle and

nephew as the trade continues through the bloodline. The connection between tactility and the production of useful material, and between physical labour and the maintenance of dignity and connectivity, is established.

In the montage at the beginning of the film (Jenkin 2019, 3:38) which announces the arrival of seasonal homeowners and holidaymakers, there is a cutting between two separate spaces: Martin is ritualistically preparing a net to fish whilst the Leighs and their fellow seasonal homeowners exit their bulky cars and complain about the length of the drive before entering their parodically 'nautical' home spaces. The visual clash established in this sequence mobilises several binaries that operate throughout the film: between work and leisure, between poor and rich, between rural and city, and between extractive and derivative labour. Martin is seen with nets, fraying ropes, and digging stony sand to prepare his work, emphasising the texture and connection with objects—whilst Sandra is later seen putting the accoutrements of the globalised middle-class home about the Leigh family's holiday let—prosecco, fresh yogurt—to prepare their work of selling a lifestyle.

What is interesting to note here is not just a visual clash but a sonic clash that operates with a psychological and intertextual component that diverges from the use of objects as signifiers. The images that correspond with shots of Martin working are freighted with machinic noises, bird cries, scrapes and involuntary bodily sounds. The images that correspond with the families arriving are eerily silent and frictionless; they perhaps recall the final triumph of the title characters in *The Birds*, where invaders triumph by numbers, impervious to reason or previous 'ways.' This sonic contrast is not an act of happenstance. Jenkin, who also edited the film, shot the film silently and dubbed on all dialogue and 'diegetic' and 'non-diegetic' sound. These sounds remind us that the social arrangement in this place prior to the invasion of the gentrifiers was tactile, frictional and man-made, and is being replaced by one of internet purchases, modernisations and convenience, characterised by a shared delusion of the rural way of life as organic. The abruptness and foregrounded nature of Jenkin's contrasts underscores the impact that the rapid onset of precarity in the face of rentier capitalism has had within the lifetime of Martin and his generation.

Bait contains a number of ironic visual signs based within local material practices that remind the viewer of a long history of place and economics. Some are flagged up for the viewer to join in the mockery, such as the Leigh family's insertion of a porthole as part of the modernisation of their home. Other such signs do not immediately call attention to themselves: for instance, Martin stores the money for the boat he hopes to buy in a tin while his brother clears up discarded drinks 'tins' from the shell of a former fishing boat. These small and subtle reminders of Cornwall's other major and dying industry, and how its ghostly remnants appear to linger in a mocking and form, stud the *mise-en-scène*

of *Bait*. What makes *Bait* particularly interesting in this regard is that Jenkin's protectionist critiques lie not just within the dramatic content but filter through the striking effects created by artisanal techniques and the consequences of an aleatory approach to handling celluloid. The scratches and flickers render important objects such as fish incredibly present, the image demanding extra levels of attention to itself as material. And yet, the objects become spectral as the focus, blur and artefacts partially obscure and prevent clarity. What life has defamiliarised for Martin, Jenkin's techniques defamiliarise for the viewer.

Double Plotting and Intersectionality

The clearest view of the convergence of aesthetic, narrative form and a new understanding of social class as a means of outlining a 'new poetics' of precarity in *Bait* is afforded in three distinct moments. These three sections foreground montage in such a method so forceful as to deliberately reveal the 'double plot' operating as a system of narrative contrasts. Of double plots as a narrative strategy, Empson writes that "the interaction of the two plots gives a particularly clear setting for, or machine for imposing, the social and metaphysical ideas on which pastoral depends" (1974, 30).

This plot interaction is clear throughout *Bait*. What Martin, as symbol of the resident community, endures is mirrored and refracted across the range of his tourist counterparts. Sometimes this is detailed as comedic inversion (the scene that immediately follows Martin and Neil hauling in their net is tourist son Hugo preparing to snorkel with a harpoon in a dilettantish fashion) and sometimes this device operates with a note of tragic irony.

Empson's descriptor 'machine for imposing,' quite without foresight, is a good description of the intensified cinematic method by which Jenkin makes this double plot apparent through montage. In a sequence (Jenkin 2019, 33:58) that combines two separate places in a unified montage sequence, utterances from parallel conversations that turn into arguments from separate rooms of the village pub are joined together as if they were all part of one conversation. The two conversations are on the topic of a new generation of wealth changing the established conventions of village life; the teenagers argue about pool table etiquette while Martin and the landlady argue about the pub's closure in winter. The shot lengths in the scene gradually reduce as the tensions in the disparate conversations rise, accelerating the tempo. In each conversation, financial rationale is given for the change in procedure, but it is the experimental and comical montage that highlights their connections. Though this scene broadly continues the theme of separation between villagers and visitors, and the precariat and the

secure, it is apparent that this scene is also at the heart of Jenkin's appraisal of new class intersectionality by creating an energetic set piece out of their fusion.

In establishing thematic connection in such a determined method, Jenkin suggests how ideas that seemed more straightforward under a Marxist conception of class, in this case solidarity and class consciousness, may have become more complicated and diffuse in the social reality Standing describes. The two conversations taking place divide themselves on generational lines; middle-aged workers talking to each other and younger people talking to each other. Jenkin's creative montage reveals an all-encompassing dynamic of powerlessness of precarity that has no respect for distinctions previously given to gender, professional experience and age. Martin and Wenna, representing the underemployed and unemployed respectively, are powerless in their conversations with the landlady and the tourists precisely because they cannot assert the supremacy of their needs or factors of tradition over economic reason and the whip-hand of bourgeois domination of the public sphere. The experimental use of montage binds together for the viewer what appears to have been understood extra-textually by the characters inhabiting this social position. I would like to call this an example of a 'precariat consciousness,' a visual representation of the intersectional understanding that asserts itself between cultural similars, in this case those within the economic struggle recognising those who are set to inherit the same problems.

Raymond Williams argues that, in the reconstitution of what comprises social class as positions within economies change, this recognition is increasingly unlikely given that "traditional definitions have broken down, and that the resulting confusion is a serious diminution of consciousness" (1992, 325). This ability to perceive class-based needs in *Bait* only appears to be a skill possessed by other people who share in these specific needs of certainty and self-identity. Martin gives over one of his freshly caught fish to his unnamed elderly neighbour every day, which, given the scale of his operations, amounts to a significant proportion. Jenkin inserts no subtext that positions Martin and Wenna romantically or even as surrogate or alternative family; their sympathies extend beyond their skillsets and traumas and emerge as the real examples of solidarity within the film. The other example is the relationship between Martin and Neil, which represents a narratological attempt to indicate the futility of proletarian labour bonds as a point of resistance against forces which attempt to diminish them. In *Bait,* and in the fisheries of Cornwall and Wales, the traditional working class as locus of solidarity and labour identity is not present. Rather, Jenkin presents master and apprentice as the rural equivalent of Deliveroo cyclists huddling outside of a city-centre McDonalds.

Jenkin's intensified thematic paralleling through montage returns twice more. The next iteration switches between scenes of cookery (Jenkin 2019, 56:28) in a triple contrast. Sandra and Tim prepare and eat the lobster stolen by their son

Hugo from Martin's lobster pot, while Hugo eats lobster on the beach with his teenage tourist friends. These actions are determinedly contrasted with Neil making a cheap meal of pasta and sauce. The montage binds together the authentic, fresh, local and expensive produce given over to gentrifiers while the locals eat meals from a different part of the chain of globalisation.

The worried expression worn by Sandra during this montage appears to communicate an emerging recognition of and guilt about her role in the changing face of the village. *Bait* suggests that the only successful weapon that the precariat have, especially after Wenna's physical violence toward Tim Leigh fails, in provoking the Leigh family is to arouse a dormant guilt within Sandra, the Leigh family mother. Sandra is frequently framed in shots and montage sequences with various signs indicative of success—the car, the prosecco, the modernised home, the Apple laptop which we see her moving invisible money about with—and frequently espouses rhetoric with a finance-focused politics. However, Sandra is also painted as a modern liberal: allowing her daughter to stop out all night with a rueful grin, siding with the villagers as their tenant complains about the noise, and engaging with Britain's own liberal discourse on the radio.

This incremental guilt, seeded throughout the narrative, feeds into the final intensified double plot section that brings *Bait* to coda (Jenkin 2019, 1:04:09). Sandra visits Martin's home when he is away and, after examining the sparse interior space of the home, puts money in his boat tin to assuage her guilt. As Empson remarks, "the 'bourgeois' themselves do not like literature to have too much 'bourgeois ideology'" (1974, 5). The accumulated value of these class-attached signs is realised by Sandra to have a latent political dimension that affects questions of place. Indeed, it is in the very montage that pairs the Leighs eating lobster miserably as Neil happily eats a terrible-looking pasta dish that this becomes fatefully apparent. The cloistering of 'too much' bourgeois ideology and the accumulation of loaded signs have revealed to Sandra a schism that outlines her own predatory position in local economics. The contradictions of her position in new economic realities become impossible to adequately resolve, hence Sandra's guilt.

But this attempt at restitution is only the one part of the film's closure of its double plot. The subplot, adjoined by more traditional means in the montage, shows a final confrontation between Neil, who has been sleeping with Katie, the daughter of the Leigh family, and the Leigh family son, Hugo (Jenkin 2019, 1:11:08). Hugo baits Neil and Katie out of the fishing hut by audibly dragging Martin's lobster pots, again indicating tourist entitlement. After a quarrel, Neil, tracked by Katie, walks toward Hugo and is stopped by Hugo's hand around his throat. Neil attempts to throw a punch but Katie, in attempting to prevent the punch, teams with Hugo to push Neil from the quayside to his death in his father's boat.

The mirroring of the two plots reminds the viewer that reverse 'exploitation' by the precarious of the settled, and that the mantra of 'fleecing them for all them's worth,' is simply not possible. There may, with upwardly applied pressure and internalised guilt, be a simple form of financial restitution that sees the higher orders (Sandra) giving the lower caste (Martin) what they are owed all along. But parity also comes with a price, in this case blood. The death of Neil, which in Jenkin's edit has been foreshadowed from the commencement of the film, is both an actual and a symbolic one: the actual death is the focus on blood dripping from his temple like the life that is draining from these places. Liberal guilt, restitution and philanthropy can mend the small fissures, but the position of precarity for Jenkin is synonymous with death: by hunger, by danger, by being trapped and by being unable to move forward.

The symbolic death returns us, finally, to Empson and the pastoral. In death, Neil is both at one with the environment and its new martyr. In his analysis of Andrew Marvell's *The Garden*, Empson notes the pastoralist fantasy of wishing to be chained by brambles and nailed by thorns as one in which the narrator "becomes Christ" (1974, 123). Here, Jenkin, framing the narrative with the image of Neil's face in the moment of the realisation of his death, imputes the Christ-myth into Neil, which, in the coda which sees Martin return to sea, appears to have restored the moral conditions that allows for the idealised social order to exist.

Conclusion

The coda to *Bait* presents going backward—reverting the pleasure cruiser back to its former state as a fishing vessel, with the remaining precariat returning to sea as a unified proletarian force—as a way forward. For Martin and Steven, coached in the ways of the sea and bound by the memory of a class-consciousness before neoliberalism, this has emotional realism as it represents the repair of their personal separation. It would be remiss to ignore the occasional strategies such as these in *Bait* which lapse into sentimentalism and protectionism as a double measure. Standing writes of "the nostalgics," those forlorn proletarian workers who are "angry and bitter" at inequality but are drawn to "populist neo-fascism" (2011, 156), and find themselves looking into the past for a political programme that addresses the now.

For Wenna, who makes up the third member of the crew, the film's closure appears incongruous. Standing writes that the youth that make up the largest section of the precariat do "not look back fondly to the labourist employment security of the pre-globalisation era" (ibid.). A promise of solidarity that emerges from a brief triumph of the 'precariat consciousness' appears to have gripped

Wenna, whose expression is ambiguous as she goes out to sea. The latter half of 2022 and early part of 2023 has seen increasing industrial action taken across the traditionally employed parts of the sector (salariat, proletariat) but organisation between various precarities has been poor until now: what role does locality play in precariat solidarity, and does Jenkin imbue Cornwall or the rural honeypots with a mythic quality of their own that allows a fantasy of solidarity that obviates gender and generational belonging to flourish?

Though the pastoral allows the critic to approach the structurally and generically distinct aspects of class-focused examinations of the particularities of place, a further Empsonian reading of *Bait* would need to account in a more sustained fashion for the mythic quality contained therein, and for the extent to which it affects the text. I have conveniently ignored, save for the occasional mention, a stratum of older villagers—an elderly neighbour, the ghost of Martin's father—who appear to wink knowingly whenever trouble is afoot as if to give faith in the old ways. A further excavation of *Bait* must account for their inclusion.

In his combination of experimental aesthetics and narrative flow, Jenkin has explored heretofore unexplained emotional tonalities of precariat experience. The shot-to-shot connective transitions of *Bait* chime against established conventions of 'truthful' capture in British depictions of precarious labour and poverty. Even if we narrow our focus to the 2010s and works such as *The Selfish Giant* (2013) and *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), *Bait* does not share the aforementioned works' anti-poetic style and discourse of sobriety. *Bait* contains sequences which refuse smooth narrative transition that neatly organises time and connects space. In spite of these transitions and disruptions that evoke art cinema's essential "ambiguity" (Bordwell 1979, 60), *Bait* is not a work that attempts to transmit the forces of alienation by the creation of viewer alienation within narrative or character construction. Rather, the presence of this ambiguity appears to be the ongoing unfolding of uncertainties and the demands that this places on both the material and the metaphysical.

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