NOVEL INTO FILM: *THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER*

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PREFACE

Criticism of Tony Richardson's film adaptation of Alan Sillitoe's novella The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner is limited to a series of reviews and one in-depth but "misguided" article by Peter Harcourt. My thesis is the first thorough analysis of the cinematic elements and the first sympathetic study of the film.

I would like to thank Professor Gordon Weaver for his interest in my project and for his benefic criticism throughout the revision process. I extend deepest appreciation to Professor Peter C. Rollins, whose encouragement and enthusiasm made my entire master's program a rewarding experience. As a scholar, a teacher, and a person, he has set for me exacting goals.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my father, mother, and my Aunt Florence; their support has made my career possible and my earth a garden.

I

The poetry and prose of Alan Sillitoe are preoccupied with man's struggle to attain personal identity in an increasingly impersonal world. Colin Smith, the protagonist of Sillitoe's The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner, struggles against the stultifying forces of society; however, Sillitoe endows Colin Smith with a humanity which makes the character more than a two-dimensional proletarian figure. He exhibits the "Angry Young Man"[1] attitude toward his world and is of working-class origins, but he is also emblematic of universal aspirations. As screenwriter, Sillitoe collaborated with director Tony Richardson in the production of a film version of Loneliness that manages to capture both the angry mood of the protagonist and his representative quest for fulfillment. As members of the "Angry Young Man" movement, both writer and filmmaker use Colin to condemn the class system, industrial oppression, and the general malaise which seemed to deny young Britons the pursuit of happiness.

Although Alan Sillitoe's novella, Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner, has received critical praise since its publication in 1959, Tony Richardson's film adaptation has been neglected. Criticism of the film is limited to no more than a few reviews that were published when the film was distributed commercially. The only in-depth article was written by Peter Harcourt: he curtly described the film version as a "series of cliches," lacking both "style" and a "pulse of its own."[2]

In elaborating these harsh comments, Harcourt asserted that the film's vision had been narrowed to an examination of a social problem, in particular, that incidents added by Richardson only served to reduce the film to a proletarian harangue.[3] The film has not been well served by this critic.

This article will attempt to supply another view of the film adaptation. While both novella and film condemn the British social situation, they also explore the universal dilemma of a young man's identity crisis. The question arises: does the novella or the film over-emphasize the social predicament and subordinate the identity crisis? It seems to me that the collaborators have effectively balanced social criticism with a touching study of individual inspiration. Only after a close stylistic and contextual examination of film and novella can we gauge the "angry" pulse of the film adaptation.

Alan Sillitoe's novella, Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner, is about Colin Smith, an eighteen year-old product of a Midlands slum who is sent to a Borstal (an English reform school) for his part in a bakery robbery. He shows contempt for the authorities and subtly reveals his antagonism toward the director of the Borstal. Colin, the anti-hero, distinguishes himself as an outstanding long-distance runner and trains to compete for a forthcoming race against Ranleigh Public School. His thoughts during training runs and during the race on the sports day constitute the content of the novella. At the close of the race Colin stops just short of the finish line, thereby permitting his opponent from the public school to win. The deliberate decision to lose the "big race" reflects Colin's antagonism for the director and other Establishment symbols. During the early morning practice runs,

the boy recalls events of his home life, particularly his father's death, and the struggle for survival typical of a lower-class family in Britain. These flashbacks reveal the complex motivation for Colin's decision to lose the race, and--at least for the sympathetic viewer--justify his rebellious behavior.

II

The nonconformist heroes of British fiction in the Fifties were usually drawn from the personal experiences of the young writers.[4] Indeed, class conflict was an inherent part of Alan Sillitoe's childhood. During the 1930's, Sillitoe's family barely survived on his father's wages as a semi-skilled laborer. The future writer was educated on the streets of an industrial town: the life was hard, but the bonds of his loyalty for the laboring class were inextricably tied. As Sillitoe has admitted: "I will always carry around a bit of Nottingham in my boots."[5] Sillitoe's experience was not unlike that of his fictive characters: at age fourteen, he left school to work at a bicycle factory and at other menial positions.[6] As a result, a personal portrait of the impoverished working-class environment of Nottingham is clearly presented in Sillitoe's first novel Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. The protagonist, Arthur Seaton, voices his discontent with that environment:

> . . . the factory small of oil-suds, machinery, and shaved steel that surrounded you with an air in which pimples grew and prospered on your face and shoulders, that would have turned you into one big pimple if you did not spend half an hour over the scullery sink every night getting rid of the biggest bastards.[7]

In Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, Seaton characterized the factory as a disabling environment: breathing the dusty soot-laden air could cause respiratory ailments such as tuberculosis (which Sillitoe later developed); factory sights and noises of creaking conveyer belts, grinding lathes, and stamping presses also deadened the senses. Sillitoe saw the laborer as more than an economic underdog: he performed his tasks in a state of semi-consciousness, and the result was intellectual death.

Sillitoe also expressed his rejection of organized society through poetry. The title poem of his first collection, Rats (1960), clearly aligned the conflicting forces in English society: "They are the government, these marsh-brained rats/Who give protection from outsider cats."[8] In Sillitoe's world, the class system is a framework in which man's predatory instincts operate.

All of Sillitoe's heroes are painfully conscious of the economic stagnation and cultural sterility of British society. They know that reforms within the framework of the existing system cannot provide a way out of the deep human and social crisis. Yet, Sillitoe's heroes cannot be labeled with any particular ideology: they know that the times are out of joint, and they lash out at the nearest representatives of oppression. If they support radical causes, it is usually to stir-up tensions rather than to see anything of importance accomplished. As the protagonist of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning observed: "I ain't a communist, I tell you. I'm like them though because they're different from those fat Tory bastards in Parliament."[9] Colin Smith is equally intense in his antagonism and equally at a loss about how to focus it.

It is impossible to deny that Sillitoe was an "Angry Young Man;" however, it is not sufficiently noted that his work deals with broader issues than class conflict. In the late Sixties, Alan Sillitoe grew tired of being labeled a "working-class novelist," and said that creative writers must "transcend class."[10] Characters in Sillitoe's early novels pursued their lives under impoverished conditions; in the later novels, however, his working-class characters leave their backgrounds to search for a meaning to life in a bigger world. Frank Dowley, protagonist in A Tree on Fire, quits his pedestrian job at a Nottingham factory to find an angry purpose to life as a guerrilla in the Algerian War; his personal aspirations are stifled by England's caste system. Clearly, deeper themes in Sillitoe's work speak to the continuing human quest for identity and individual fulfillment, which are often achieved through resistance and struggle. Indeed, Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner is in this sense a landmark in Sillitoe's literary career: loneliness and alienation are explored on two distinct levels. Colin Smith's difficulties with law and social authority are shown in detail, but both novella and film reach beyond this theme to portray the perennial anguish of youth struggling to define its own identity against the weight of age and tradition. As Colin rejects post-WWII England, he not only comments on the times, he also represents all youth in its attempt to find itself.

III

Tony Richardson came to the Loneliness project well prepared to handle an "Angry Young Man" assignment. Richardson was responsible for "discovering" John Osborne and for bringing Osborne's "Angry" play,

Look Back in Anger, before the public in 1956.[11] Three years later, Richardson directed the cinematic version of Look Back in Anger, a project which caused one journal to label him "Britain's Angry Young Director." Although Richardson was university educated and from a family that was financially secure, he shared with Sillitoe an aversion to the class system; together they hoped to use cinema as a vehicle to express messages Sillitoe had learned in Nottingham. As Richardson said,

> It is absolutely vital to get into British films the same sort of impact and sense of life that, what you can loosely call the Angry Young Man cult, has had in the theatre and literary worlds.[12]

Tony Richardson first became familiar with Alan Sillitoe's social commentary during the production of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1962). The Sillitoe novel allowed Richardson to explore the imagery of industrial Britain as well as the tensions between classes. The central character of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning is a soccer player who is torn between two women, one the rich wife of the club sponsor, the other a widow of his own class. While the film left much to be desired, the theme of class conflict which was to be more fully explored in Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner was considered.

As an adolescent, Colin had not yet "bought into" society; for this reason, his perceptions of the choices offered by the status quo are more absolute and vivid. No less important is the complex tone of adolescent behavior: while Saturday Night and Sunday Morning is a serious film, it often becomes morbid. Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner radiates an adolescent vitality which young people feel even in their worst moments. Richardson's rendition of Loneliness

shows a character under stress, but we never have the sense of tragic finality which pervades Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. Young Smith comes to an optimistic understanding of the class war: he cites the moral contradictions of the present social structure in decay, and he stages a systematic opposition toward those he considers to be enemies of humanity.

IV

Both novella and film explore the dehumanizing effects of the British social situation. The novella opens with Colin's plain and honest statement of hatred for the "Inlaws" who try to reform him, but deny him ordinary human pleasures:

> If only 'them' and 'us' had the same ideas we'd get on like a house on fire, but they don't see eye to eye with us and we don't see eye to eye with them, so that's how it stands and how it will always stand.[13]

In the opening passages of the novella Colin's life in Borstal is described as a prison; making analogies between Borstal and the army, Colin reinforces a reader's sense of his regimental existence.

> They can't kid me, the bastards. I've seen the barracks near where I live, and if there weren't swaddies on guard outside with rifles you wouldn't know the difference between their high walls and the place I'm in now . . . Borstal's Borstal no matter what they do; but anyway I moaned about it being a bit thick sending me out so early to run on an empty stomach, until they talked me round to thinking it wasn't so bad--which I knew all the time--until they called me a good sport and patted me on the back when I said I'd do it and that I'd try to win them the Borstal Blue Ribbon Prize Cup For Long-Distance Cross Country Running (All England). And now the governor talks to me when he comes on his rounds, almost as he'd talk to his prize race horse, if he had one (p. 11).

Smith pictures the fate of his own class as a veritable prison, and he is in the "stable" of aristocratic tradition. Moreover,

Sillitoe uses the race-horse analogy and the reference to the militaristic accommodations of the Borstal to reveal the protagonist's thralldom. To visualize the prison-like surroundings, filmmaker Richardson intercuts the running sequences with shots of the Borstal. Near the beginning of the film, the boys are stripped down, lined up, and put into uniforms. There is also a prolonged close-up of the handcuffs the boys wear en route through the Essex countryside, followed by long shots of the Borstal. The camera is positioned behind the bars, inside the bus; with this special effect, Richardson defines the Borstal as a cage.

Throughout Sillitoe's novella, Colin's disdain for every instrument of social order is consistent: in describing his "Outlaw" life at the Borstal, in relation to the daily lives of the "Inlaw" aristocrats, Colin complains that, "they sit there like spiders in the crumbly manor houses, perched like jumped-up jackdaws on the roof, watching out over the drives and fields like German generals from the tops of tanks" (pp. 7-8). Similarly, he refers to the detective who arrested him as "Old Hitler face." The tension Colin feels as an "outsider" and an "outlaw bloke" is articulated in the novella by his commentary on upper-class society. Colin's panoramic view of Establishment life is evident in his comments about the "pot-bellied governor" and the "lily-white" workless hands of the aristocrats. He condemns the "pig-faced snotty-nosed dukes and ladies--who can't add two and two together and would mess themselves like loonies if they didn't have slavies to beck-and-call" (p. 8).

Colin's decision to lose the cup race against Ranleigh Public School marks the climax of his war against authority. Colin feels the

governor is pressuring him to win in order to realize selfish ambitions:

> Our doddering bastard of a governor, our half-dead grangrened gaffer, is hollow like an empty petrol-drum, and he wants me and my running life to give him glory, to put in him blood and throbbing veins he never had (p. 42).

Outwardly, Colin agrees to do his best to win that cup; but inwardly he laughs at the governor, exulting over his secret rebellion. While Colin does condemn his prison-like surroundings, he more adamently rejects the governor and his ambitions. Supposedly, the task of the reformatory is not to mold the ideal Englishman; rather, it is to motivate a boy's sense of responsibility. Colin feels that the governor's mode of rehabilitation violates a basic tenet of human conduct: "I'm not a racehorse at all. I'm a human being and I've got thoughts and secrets and bloody life inside me that he doesn't know is there" (p. 13). In short, Colin resents being whipped into shape, rather than being internally motivated.

On the other hand, the governor pretends that his actions are altruistic: "We want honest hard work and good athletics . . . And if you give us both these things you can be sure we'll do right by you and send you back into the world an honest man" (p. 10). By losing the race voluntarily, Colin demonstrates his refusal to "buy into" the governor's system of values and thereby remains true to his "outlaw" identity.

The hyprocrisy of the governor's ambition is fully explored in the film adaptation of <u>Loneliness</u>. Colin's resulting rejection is rendered in several ways. Richardson portrays the governor as a disciplinarian, but also as a man who advocates fair play. He appears to

be genuinely concerned with reforming the boys when he says: "By putting pressure on a boy you get to know what he's made of. Once you know that, you can start to make something of him."[14] In the spirit of athletic testing, the governor says to the boys more than once: "If you play ball with us, we'll play ball with you."[15] Supposedly the governor is more concerned with spirit than performance. However, practice falls short of theory: the governor ignores Stacey, although he is always well-behaved. He gives preference to Colin simply because this new boy promises to be a winner. The governor practically ignores Colin's fight with Stacey and he "upgrades" Colin from the workshed to the garden with a single motive in mind: "I want you to promise me you will keep up your running. It is my ambition to see you take that challenge cup from Ranleigh School for us."[16] Obviously, Stacey has lost the governor's favor simply because he is no longer the star runner. The character of Stacey does not exist in the novella; however, his predicament, as visualized in the film adaptation, effectively justifies Smith's rejection of the Borstal system. Stacey attempts to escape because he realizes that good behavior will not outshine Smith's athletic ability. In the novella, Colin speaks of the governor's dishonesty, and from Stacey's escape attempt in the film adaptation, Richardson explains that the Borstal officials are breaking the laws of humanity; this is a far more serious crime than a robbery.

Richardson gives the character of the governor the earmarks of elitism: while he is surveying the grounds or speaking to the Borstal boys, he puffs away on his pipe; his army trench coat and swagger stick stress the power behind his calm exterior. Through the use of _mise-en-scene_, Richardson clearly defines the governor as an

Establishment symbol. In one scene, the governor guides several visitors on a tour of the Borstal. In the workshed, he smudges his hands with grease and Colin offers him a towel. The implication is obvious: he has the "lily-white workless hands" of an aristocrat. At other points in the film, close-up shots of the governor are juxtaposed with low-angle shots of the high fences and of Ruxton Tower; here, Richardson subtly implies that the governor's ambitions are institutional rather than truly related to Colin's rehabilitation.

To emphasize the theme of rebellion, additional scenes were invented for the film version of Loneliness. In the mess hall, the boys complain about the food: knowing that their complaints are futile, they rebel by slamming their fists in unison, wrestling with officials, and heaving plates; with manic glee, two inmates even jitterbug on a table. Here, Richardson compounds the rebellious tone of the imagery with swish pans of the brawl and close-ups of the slamming fists. As the scene comes to a climax, the roar of the slamming fists compliments the visual stimuli. Richardson needed this scene to contrast the obvious rebelliousness of the Borstal boys with Colin's cunning. In his war against the Establishment, Colin is successful precisely because he outwits the officials instead of relying upon confrontation tactics.

In another invented scene, which is set in the Borstal Concert Hall, Richardson amplifies the theme of rebellion. The boys sit attentatively in the auditorium attired in their dress uniforms, awaiting an evening of entertainment. The governor comes on stage and tells the boys that despite their inexcusable conduct at the mess hall, the show will go on. The performance features an eccentric bird imitator and an opera duet that needs a captive audience; the boys rant and rave

with what appears to be a mixture of dread and delight. Professionally, the performances deserve a few rotten eggs, but the next shots show the boys enthusiastically singing a British hymn, "Jerusalem." The hymn is drawn from a lyric poem written by William Blake, which was set to music and assumed the character of a second national anthem.[17] The forms of the literary allusion here enforce a very sharp and complex irony. In their patriotic hymn, the boys celebrate with energetic voices the honor and promise of a free country: "Bring me my fill o' cup of hope/ . . . I will not sleep . . . til we have built Jerusalem in England's sweet and bitter land."[18] Cinematic irony is established by intercuts to the maximum security area where Stacey is brutally beaten for attempting to escape. A high-angle shot of Stacey's wincing face as he is struck by a club is juxtaposed with a low-angle shot of the official bending over him. The idea evoked by the intercutting is as powerful as it is obvious: the traditional British honor and opportunity commemorated in song are in fact denied these youngsters. Additional flashbacks of policemen searching Colin's house for stolen money amplify the theme that personal privacy and integrity are in jeopardy.

Rejection of contemporary Britain is further explored in another invented scene. During a flashback sequence, Colin recalls a trip to the outskirts of Nottingham. Colin and Mike "borrow" a car (the keys have been thoughtfully left in the ignition), and they convince two girls to join them in a joy ride. They stop on a hillside overlooking the smoking factories. Shots of the city alternate with shots of the youths sauntering through windblown grasses: the natural vegetation of the hillside contrasts markedly with the smoke and brick of the

city life below. Shots of the dug out hillsides, grimy slums, and smoking factories, are seen through the frame of the barb-wire fence--a detail of mise-en-scene which visually comments on the confinements of civilization. Meanwhile, Mike's girl imagines the delights of London night life, saying that a trip to Picadilly Circus would be the greatest thrill in life. Cinematic irony is again employed; as the girl describes the delights of city life, the camera views the wasteland created by industrialism. Richardson here effectively evokes the liberation youths find in their flight from responsibility. Visual contrasts between city and youth are reinforced by contrasting musical lines: brass elements suggest the urban blight below; strings and woodwinds convey the momentary playful mood of the outsiders. Later in the film, Colin and his buddy Mike take their girls on a trip to Skegness, where city folk wander the beaches. All too soon, the young people recognize that they are on an unrealistic flight from routines which await them back "home." A trip which begins in delight ends in bickering and frustration over who will pay for the last cups of tea. For these youths, the machine must win out over the garden.

Colin Smith makes derogatory comments about the capitalistic preoccupations of "Inlaw" society. A particularly vivid instance occurs when he and Mike are watching television. The boys turn down the volume and then jeer at the inaudible speakers whose mouths are described as moving like "goldfish." In the novella, Colin says,

> It was the best of all though when we did it to some Tory telling us about how good his government was going to be if we kept on voting for them--their slack chops rolling, opening and bumbling, hands lifting to twitch mustashes and touching their buttonholes to make sure the flower hadn't wilted, so that you could see they didn't mean a word they said, especially with not a murmur coming out because we'd cut off the sound (p. 20).

In Richardson's adaptation of the scene, a conservative politician proclaims the "greater luxury" Britain will experience if the "free spirit of dedication" continues.[19] At this point, Colin turns off the sound on the television; he and Mike go into fits of hysterical laughter. The camera shifts back and forth between the "bumbling chops" of the spokesman and the jeering boys. It would be difficult to find a more puissant visual image for the rejection of artistocratic values. Richardson adapts this portion of the novella brilliantly; his use of experimental lighting ratios in the television scene is particularly effective: high key-lighting illuminates the jeering faces of the boys; in contrast, low key-lighting puts the rest of the flat in a dark shadow. As the Establishment spokesman makes inaudible--and to the boys--vacuous promises about a new age of prosperity for Britain, the camera scans the squalid surroundings. The spokesman looks conspicuously like the Borstal governor. This scene illustrates how effectively Richardson uses both images of external reality and tight control of the camera to mirror the workings of the characters' minds. Here he offers a sensitive vision of Colin's personal collision with the pronouncements of society.

V

Sillitoe's and Richardson's renditions of Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner both focus upon the hero's rejection of aristocratic values and traditions and the essential "loneliness" he feels as an outsider. Sillitoe's novella deals with this theme, then expands the theme to emphasize Colin's constant fight against dehumanization and his quest for individuality. Running is the paramount symbolic action

of the story. It provides a gesture through which Colin asserts defiant humanity against the forces which attempt to make his conform.

Sillitoe's novella evokes the flavor of Colin's defiant individualism in a number of ways. First, the accounts of his early morning practice runs are contrasted with comments on his life at Borstal. These passages explore the background of his unfortunate home life and the details which lead up to the robbery. The prison-like environments of industrial Nottingham and Borstal are markedly unlike the liberating runs in the Essex countryside. Colin verbalizes the exhilaration he experiences on the early morning runs:

> So as soon as I tell myself I'm the first man ever to be dropped into the world, and as soon as I take that first flying leap out into the frosty grass of an early morning when even birds haven't the heart to whistle, I get to thinking, and that's what I like. I go my rounds in a dream, turning at lane or foothpath corners without knowing I'm turning, leaping brooks without knowing they're there, and shouting good morning to the early cow-milker without seeing him. It's a treat, being a long-distance runner, out in the world by yourself with not a soul to make you bad-tempered or tell you what to do or that there's a shop to break and enter a bit back from the next street. Sometimes I think that I've never been so free as during that couple of hours when I'm trotting up the path out of the gates and turning by that bare-faced big-bellied oak tree at the lane end. Everything's dead, but good, because it's dead before coming alive, not dead after being alive (p. 10).

Colin attempts to erase his mind of the social cell-blocks in which he has lived by taking refuge in nature. Jogging at dawn through the frozen fields, he achieves an elated, transcendant view of his dilemma: "I can't feel my hands or feet or flesh at all, like I'm a ghost who wouldn't know the earth was under him if he didn't see it now and again through the mist" (p. 10). These primitive movements affirm a sense of integrity and independence. The sense of freedom he gets from running is far more fulfilling than the escape most often found by

members of his class. Rather than "get out at odd times a week for a pint of ale," he notes, "I come out three mornings a week on my long-distance running, which is fifty times better than boozing" (p. 11). But running for the protagonist is not simply the "biggest lark of all," or merely a physical and mental release: these runs constitute a vehicle for his quest for individuality.

The runs also provide Colin with an opportunity for self-analysis: "it makes me think so good that I learn things even better than when I'm on my bed at night" (p. 10). During his morning meditations, Colin thinks of his peers still asleep back in the confines of the Borstal:

> They sleep so well I think every scruffy head's kicked the bucket in the night and I'm the only one left, and when I look into the bushes and frozen ponds I have the feeling that it's going to get colder until everything I can see, meaning my red arms as well, is going to be covered with a thousand miles of ice, all the earth, right up to the sky and over every bit of land and sea (p. 9).

From the tone of this passage, it seems that Smith senses a universal dilemma. There is no simple solution to the loneliness he feels in isolation from the rest of the world, nor is there a contentment within the confines of the kind of civilization which can be metaphorically described as a reformatory. Colin is an "Outlaw," a bit like Huck Finn as he meditates on shore society--there seems to be no honorable alternative for the isolato.

The tension and urgency of this dilemma are sustained in Sillitoe's work by the quick pace of his prose. At various points in the novella, the narrative style and freshness of language reflect a runner's joy:

> It was hard to understand, and all I knew was that you had to run, run, run, without knowing why you were running, but on you went through fields you didn't understand and into woods that made you afraid, over hills without knowing you'd been up and down, and shooting across streams that would have cut the heart out of you had you fallen into them. And the winning post was no end to it, even though crowds might be cheering you on, because you had to go before you got your breath back, and the only time you stopped was when you tripped over a tree trunk and broke your neck or fell into a disused well and stayed dead in the darkness forever (pp. 37-38).

The sinuous quality of the long sentences provides a subtle metaphor for Colin's morning runs; these breathless sweeps of narration underscore both physical and spiritual determination.

In Richardson's film adaptation, the theme of Colin's struggle for identity is likewise balanced with the theme of his collision with society. The film effectively captures the pastoral mood of the practice runs. The mise-en-scene for these running sequences is a cold and misty dawn in the Essex countryside; a tracking camera follows his rhythmical run in the woods. The stagnant mist evokes the mood Sillitoe establishes in the novella when Colin tells us: "Everything's dead, but good, because it's dead before coming alive, not dead after being alive" (p. 10). The background of the foggy mist evokes the elated feeling Colin experiences as he runs: Colin's sense of exhilaration is revealed almost instantly when he leaves the dormitory and heads into the woods. His running pace quickens as he breaths the air of freedom. Occasionally he breaks from his jog and skips like a child. The camera pans through the trees and we see the sun shining through the branches. Colin leaps up banks; a jazz musical score accents the joy of his release. The dream-like quality is achieved quite precisely at the point where Colin slides playfully down a gulley and allows

himself to settle in a bed of damp leaves. We move to a close-up of Colin's face; the sky swirls above his head and with a sigh of relief, he sinks into reflection. Here begins a series of flashbacks which parallel the meditative reminiscent portions of the novella. Richardson not only accounts for the events which led up to the bakery job, he traces Colin's attempt to come to terms with his own scheme of priorities. One issue weighing heavily on his mind involves the circumstances of his father's "Outlaw" death. While Colin is running, the agonized expression of his dying father flashes to his mind. Throat cancer gradually drained the life and spirit from the once vital body of the old man.

In the novella Colin dedicates his gesture of rebellion to his father's cause, saying: "By God I'll stick this out like my dad stuck out his pain and kicked them doctors down the stairs: if he had the guts for that then I've got the guts for this . . . no matter how bad it feels" (p. 44). Colin knows he is sacrificing a great deal by deliberately losing the race. He will lose all favors from the governor, including the special privilege of free runs. Nevertheless, he denounces the system. His father had the intrepidity to refuse medical treatment: while his death was in no sense heroic, Colin respected his father's courage. Moreover, he inherited the "bloody" vitality which was drained from his father. While Colin is running and assimilating the bloody horror of his father's death, he summons courage and vitality: "and down the drive I went, carrying a heart like Boulder dam across my arteries" (p. 43). John Byars asserts that a "transfusion experience" occurs from the "thick and pink" Outlaw father's blood to the "throbbing veins" of the son.[20]

Though blood symbolism is absent from Richardson's film version of Loneliness, the viewer is given a sense that Colin inherits his father's spirit. Richardson evokes this inner quality in several ways. First, he stresses Colin's attitude about "equal work and equal pay"--reminiscent of his father's union activities. When Colin and his pal Mike rip-off change from a slot machine, Colin tells Mike in a back alley: "Come on with it, hand it over! Share and share alike--one for all, and all for one, united we stand, divided we fall."[21] Similarly, in the novella, Colin reiterates this attitude after the bakery job, when the two boys are chiseling open the money-box: "All shared and shared alike between Mike and me because we believed in equal work and equal pay, just like the comrades my Dad was in until he couldn't do a stride anymore and had no breath left to argue with" (p. 25).

In another scene, "Cole" tells his girlfriend Audrey that he'd find a job, except for the fact that the workers never get paid properly; and "Dad always said the workers should get the profit."[22] Colin clearly rejected the current labor movement: in his mind, unions were simply another lost cause, and this hopeless anger was now expressed only in anti-social activities such as crime. This was a pathetic fall for Colin and his generation, for it did little more than foment angry tirades. As a representative "Angry Young Man," Colin was frustrated precisely because there were no clearcut issues in post-war Britain to elicit united action.

In exploring Colin's identity crisis, Richardson invented scenes that employ a variety of cinematic techniques to penetrate the mind of the protagonist. The film deals with Colin's ideas about money in detail. Through editing, Richardson juxtaposes close-ups of his scornful

facial expressions with medium shots of his family immersed in their frivolous life after the father's death. The family squanders the life insurance money on such luxury items as chocolate bars, sodas, and a television set; the entire patrimony is expanded in a matter of weeks. Although Colin participates in the orgy of spending, he deeply resents that his father had to die to provide the family with gadgets advertised on television as post-war necessities. Richardson emphasizes how quickly the money comes and goes through a time-transition montage of the family shopping sprees. In a blur pan, the camera scans the bustling shoppers as they purchase one luxury item after the other. Music provides a mood of playfulness; speed-up motion accentuates the unreality of it all.

As the family is glued to its new television, Colin's mother offers him some cash. He refuses the large bill at first, and then takes it with reluctance. Colin scoffs at his mother's new boyfriend, Gordon, then goes into his father's room and stares into the mirror. At this point, the camera focuses on a picture of his father. The least observant viewer is impressed by the likeness between the two men. The shot is held for several seconds until Colin takes out the symbolic bill and burns it. As the flickering paper illuminates Colin's face, we become fully aware of the young man's priorities. Though stealing money and spending it is a "lark" and a gesture of his disdain for the Establishment, Colin is not really a materialistic person nor does he have a coherent political orientation. Like most young people, he would rather make sense of life than wallow in material luxury.

The climatic race scene is worth examining both because of its intrinsic interest, and because it shows the different capabilities of

literature and film. Throughout Sillitoe's rendition of the race, the first person narrator is preoccupied with two facets of his homelife. Colin recalls his mother's infidelity to his dying father, and the father's pathetic death scene:

> It's not till now that I know what guts he had, and when I went into the room that morning he was lying on his stomach with the clothes thrown back, looking like a skinned rabbit, his grey head resting on the edge of the bed, and on the floor must have been all the blood he'd had in his body, right from his toe-nails up, for nearly all of the lino and carpet was covered in it, thin and pink (p. 43).

Commentary on the moral content of Colin's loneliness is punctuated by related interpolations concerning the physical strain of racing:

> I choke my phlegm and keep on running anyway and curse the Borstal-builders and their athletics--flappity-flap, slop-slop, crunchslap-crunchslap-crunchslap . . . and now I've thought on this far I know I'll win, in the crunchslap end (p. 42).

In these passages, Sillitoe captures both the protagonist's mental plight and his physical struggle.

Finally, Colin says, "I won't bulge, I won't go for that last hundred yards if I have to sit down cross-legged on the grass and have the governor and his chinless wonders pick me up and carry me there" (p. 44). Doubtless, the reader is able to comprehend Colin's deliberate loss of the race. These passages illustrate that his loneliness is not merely a consummation of anti-social peevishness; rather, Colin has lost his moral bearings. He is alienated from society, and by intentionally losing the race, he is denied the one satisfying experience of an otherwise asphyxiating existence. Colin's denunciation of British society is all the more poignant because it is so misdirected.

The youth's final and decisive rejection of the governor and his values comes during the big race. Although he is well ahead of the other runners, Colin deliberately stops running just short of the finish line. In the film, shots alternate between Colin's triumphant grimace and the governor's expression of impotent rage; the intercutting simulates eye contact between Colin and the governor, as their standards finally collide. Richardson presents the whole concept of athletic challenge with the same ironic tone found in Sillitoe's novella: "They've seen me and they're cheering now and loudspeakers set around the field like elephants' ears are spreading the big news and I'm well in the lead" (pp. 42-43). The circus-like presentation of the race is done effectively in the film with shots of the cheering crowd and waving streamers; the school-band is clammering a victorious tune from the bleachers. The crowd is absorbed in the race and Colin's mind turns to the death of his father. He is detached from the ambitions which preoccupy the governor and the crowd.

Richardson's film version of Loneliness contains a visual and aural montage that evokes the protagonist's inner conflict, while vividly limning the societal forces affecting him. In the visual montage, the primary symbols for the Establishment are gathered in a succession of shots of the Borstal tower, the television spokesman, and the gleaming gold-cup trophy. As shots of the burning money, the shabby Nottingham flat, Stacey's bruised face, the medicine bottle, and the father's death-stricken face flash upon the screen, the audience comprehends Colin's decision to lose the race: the juxtaposition of the images of Colin's dying father with the flashing gold cup vividly contrasts the values of the youth and the governor. The emotional

impact of this scene is sharpened by the ironic tone of the music as the basses in the band holler the pomp and circumstance of an expected triumph which suddenly becomes a voluntary defeat.

While the visual montage educes societal pressures affecting the protagonist, an aural montage further defines the meaning of the climatic confrontation. When the governor says, "I can think of no greater honor than for a man to represent Ruxton Towers at the Olympic Games,"[23] the marching tune "Under the Double Eagle" radiates a "pomp and circumstance" tone; we are part of a momentary elation as the raving crowd chants: "Run, Run, Run!" When Colin stops just short of the finish line, the music stops, but the sounds of the ranting crowd continue. As we move to a close-up of Colin's face, we hear his father say, "I'm no bleedin' guinea pig for anybody."[24] Thus, Richardson's aural montage accents our visual perspective: we see and hear the motivating forces behind Colin's rebellion.

Finding a proper conclusion was one of the more difficult challenges in adapting <u>Loneliness</u>. While maintaining the theme of Sillitoe's novella, Richardson changed the action significantly. In the book, Colin has been released from the Borstal, but he plans to continue a life of crime: "I worked out my systems and hiding places while pushing scrubbing-brushes around them Borstal floors, planned my outward life of innocence and honest work, yet at the same time grew perfect in the razor edges of my craft for what I knew I had to do once free; and what I'll do again if netted by the proaching coppers" (p. 46). Smith never regrets defying the authorities and recalls that the other Borstal boys "never had enough good words to say about me" (p. 46). This youth still has faith in his cunning, but he appears

somewhat naive in assuming that his "craft" has a future. Sillitoe implies that Colin will eventually become a permanent resident somewhere in the English penal system. These passages explore a psychology of a recaltricant mind at the same time they offer a judgment: Smith's manner is simply no solution to society's problems.

In the final scene of the film adaptation, Richardson makes a similar judgment concerning Smith's predicament. Colin is in the Borstal workshed. He chose to sacrifice special favors from the governor and perhaps an early release in order to assert his personal dignity. Richardson clearly implies that Smith is trapped in a social predicament: he can condemn social institutions, but he cannot escape them. In the workshed, the boys are methodically dismantling gasmasks. As the governor inspects the workline, a Borstal official reaproaches the boys for their laziness. As commentative music, the "Jerusalem" hymn accompanies the clatter of metal pipes, and once again we sense the disparity between ideals and reality. The final shot is a close-up freeze frame of a gasmask, which is obviously meant to imply that the boys are being methodically asphyxiated by their environment.

The ending of Richardson's film adaptation both offers a negative vision of postwar Europe and capsulizes Sillitoe's view of working-class life: it is a battle that can be fought but not won. While Colin's staunch individualism is admirable, it is more of an impasse to social dilemmas than a permanent solution. Moreover, both Sillitoe and Richardson are sympathetic to Colin's beliefs; the problem is that the gap between opposing social factions in Britain is simply unbridgable.

VI

Through the use of cinematic devices at his disposal (montage, flashback, and invented scenes), Tony Richardson fully explored Colin Smith's struggle for survival. Nevertheless, Richardson has been berated by critics for overusing the flashback technique in his adaptation of Loneliness. For example, Peter Baker asserts that these flashbacks break the developing tension of the Borstal scenes.[25] This is quibbling. Flashbacks function brilliantly in adapting Sillitoe's first person persona; they are the equivalent of Colin's consciousness. Furthermore, the cross-cutting of flashbacks and running sequences significantly evokes the tension Colin feels as an outsider.

Peter Harcourt also has criticizes Richardson for inventing scenes. He feels that the full exhibition of Borstal scenery only serves to "confine the film in the mud of class resentment," and that Richardson never clearly visualizes our sense of the protagonist's isolation.[26] This criticism is wrong-headed, for the full exhibition of Colin's prison-like surroundings seems to contribute significantly to a proper understanding of the protagonist's alienation. Harcourt's impatience with invented scenes only reveals his misconception of the metamorphosis of fiction into cinema. As Gerald Barrett has observed, "while the short story characteristically treats few sequences of actions, filmmakers tend to expand plot to the point that the feature film adapted from a short story will contain more original material than adapted material."[27]

It seems that Harcourt believes that artful cinema, when based upon novels or stories, is a process of translation or paraphrase; the

adaptation process is however better explained as a transformation. Moreover, Richardson's invented scenes are justified because they both expand the plot and intensify our sense of the boy's isolation. Quick intercutting from the Borstal tower to the scene in the mess-hall to the Borstal concert, gives us the landmarks of Colin's rage and lends credence to his rebellion.

Both Sillitoe's novella and Richardson's film adaptation of Loneliness present a social statement and a timeless comment on the plight of youth in its quest for identity and happiness. Young Colin's confrontations with the authorities chronicle the traumas of working-class life; his free runs are his brief glimpses of the universal search for individual fulfillment. Both author and filmmaker wish to balance an exploration of the pain of working-class life with an insight into a youth's convulsive self-searching. The achievement of Tony Richardson's adaptation of The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner lies in the fact that this balance is both delicate and realistic. While Colin Smith is no paragon of virtue, he is certainly a complex human being who deserves our sympathy. Colin is another of Sillitoe's proletarian heroes who has not bee completely flattened by the exigencies of English working-class life: his combination of naivity, conviction, and adolescent vitality might be considered as representative of humanity rather than of a particular class.

ENDNOTES

[1]For a discussion of Sillitoe's vision of working-class life in post-war England, see James Gindin, "Alan Sillitoe's Jungle," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 4 (Spring 1962-63), 35-48.

[2]Peter Harcourt, "I'd Rather Be Like I Am," Sight and Sound, 32 (Winter 1962-63), 18.

[3]Harcourt, p. 18.

[4]For a short discussion of modern British fiction by Amis, Brain, and Osborne, see Allen Penner, Alan Sillitoe (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), pp. 20-2.

[5]Ramsay Wood, "Alan Sillitoe: The Image Shedding the Author," Four Quarters, 1, 21 (1971), 3.

[6]Penner, pp. 16-7.

[7]Alan Sillitoe, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1959), p. 25.

[8]James Vinson, ed., Contemporary Poets (London: St. James Press, 1975), p. 1401.

[9]Sillitoe, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, p. 32.

[10]Many critics have labeled Sillitoe as a "working-class novelist." The author disclaims such categories, even that of "Angry Young Man." For a discussion of the dialogue between writer and critics, see Wood, pp. 3-6.

[11]David Mollar, "Britain Busiest Young Man," Film Comment, 2, 1 (1964), 5, discusses Richardson's relationship with playwright John Osborne. In 1956 Richardson met Osborne, who was living in a houseboat on the Thames. With characteristic kindness, Richardson found Osborne a series of jobs as a television extra until his career was launched with the production of his play "Look Back in Anger," in 1956.

[12]Richardson, p. 9.

[13]Alan Sillitoe, The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1959), p. 7. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

[14]*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, MacMillan Audio Brandon, 1962.

[15]*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, MacMillan Audio Brandon, 1962.

[16]*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, MacMillan Audio Brandon, 1962.

[17]Joseph Wicksteed, *Blake's Jerusalem: A Commentary* (Boissia, Clairvaux, Jura: Aulard & Cie, 1953), p. 11.

[18]*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, MacMillan Audio Brandon, 1962.

[19]*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, MacMillan Audio Brandon, 1962.

[20]John A. Byars, "The Initiation of Alan Sillitoe's Long-Distance Runner," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 22 (1977), 587.

[21]*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, MacMillan Audio Brandon, 1962.

[22]*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, MacMillan Audio Brandon, 1962.

[23]*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, MacMillan Audio Brandon, 1962.

[24]*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, MacMillan Audio Brandon, 1962.

[25]Peter Baker, "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner," *Films and Filming*, 9, 2 (1962), 32.

[26]Harcourt, p. 18.

[27]Gerald R. Barnett and Thomas L. Erskine, *From Fiction to Film: D. H. Lawrence's "The Rocking-Horse Winner"* (Encino, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), p. 19.

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