

# KITCHEN SINK CREEPS

## WEEK 8.

### Shane Meadows

- Meadows failed his O-levels and entered into a short-lived and somewhat comical life of crime, which apparently incorporated custard tart theft and the handling of a stolen John Lowe dart set.
- His criminal adventures petered out when his misdemeanors were met with public derision at an embarrassing court Volunteering his services for free at Nottingham company Intermedia Film and Video Ltd, in exchange for use of their equipment, Meadows was able to experiment with filmmaking, quickly learning the technicalities and at the same time developing his own style.
- His early films were short, often quirky piss-takes of fly-on-the-wall documentaries or television commercials, usually involving friends and family in lieu of professional actors.
- case hearing.
- His early experiments led to the twelve-minute black and white *Where's the Money, Ronnie?* (1995)
- *Where's the Money, Ronnie?* led to Meadows being commissioned by Channel 4, for whom he made the bare-knuckle boxing documentary *King of the Gypsies*.
- The pay-out from this work enabled him to fund *Small Time*.
- With a runtime of just under an hour, it was his first venture into a more feature-like production.
- The film, written during his lunch breaks, was similar to *Where's the Money, Ronnie?*, in that it again centred around the lives of a tight-knit band of small-time crooks in a working-class locale, this time shot in and around Sneinton, Nottingham.
- Though *Small Time* is an amusing well-made micro-budget feature, an effective East Midlands-based companion piece to Forsythe's much earlier *That Sinking Feeling*, it was Meadows' next film, his first proper feature-length production, that began to open the doors to wider public recognition.
- After directing *Twenty-Four-Seven* and *A Room for Romeo Brass* he directed a much less typical 'Meadows' feature *Once Upon a Time in the East Midlands*, a more generic movie that didn't necessarily reflect his more individual approach. His next feature would see him return to form.

### *Dead Man's Shoes* (2004)

#### Shane Meadows

- Co-written by Meadows and Considine, who also stars as Richard in a career-defining performance, it melds together influences like *Get Carter* and Fincher's *Seven* and plonks the action firmly at the heart of a run-down working-class town.
- It's an entertaining, if sickeningly realised serial killer picture which raises questions about morality, right and wrong and explores issues like mental health and PTSD and the worryingly easy nature of mob rule and its catastrophic consequences.
- Richard, a returning soldier comes back to his home town to reunite with his mentally disabled brother, Anthony
- Richard immediately begins a campaign of intimidation, aimed at the gang
- The 'threats' become more severe until the actual murders start to take place

#### Conclusion and 'message'

- Richard takes his revenge.
- But at what cost?
- He becomes the monster.
- The reappearance of the dead Anthony is revealed to be merely an aspect of Richard's damaged psyche

***Kill List* (2011)****Ben Wheatley**

- The first part of the film portrays the private life of a hitman for hire
- Avoiding Hollywood style clichés, it's a very British character study
- Though we are left with no doubt that Jay and his associates are part of an extremely violent and systematic world of sanctioned murder, we are also invited into his ordinary home life.
- Assassins are human too.
- An incredibly violent film
- It merges together folk horror, kitchen sink drama and gangster style productions effortlessly
- Its conclusion is grisly and unrestrained
- In *Kill List*, Neil Maskell plays a small time hit man, who when dragged on to a new mission finds himself terrifyingly out of his depth as dark and unknown forces conspire to turn his life into a tragic and diabolical Hell.
- Nasty, violent yet undoubtedly human, *Kill List* gives an authentic burst of Wheatley at his best and *worst*.
- Brilliant in its ability to bring us slowly to the boil, the film is both a mix of kitchen sink realities and out of this world atrocity.

**Social Commentary**

- Maskell is perfect as Jay, his impotency is highlighted not only in his inability to keep his delicate family set-up going but also in how he fails to escape the mercenary lifestyle he is embroiled in.
- Fascinatingly, Wheatley throws us into a world which is both terrifyingly believable and utterly imagined.
- Child pornographers, perverted priests and clandestine blood rituals are all on offer.
- It's horror but it's also a bit Mike Leigh, as with *Sightseers* Wheatley places the exotic alongside the ordinary and it is all the more frightening for it.
- In some respects, we can also see this as a reflection of 'Broken Britain' – the UK's neglect is presented for us on screen
- The insecurities of a country and its prevalent selfishness is presented to us writ large
- It also presents us with a neat/messy morality tale, the incredibly cruel denouement seems to highlight the dangers of violent actions begetting more violence
- Despite its bloody violent nature, it could be argued that the film is anti-violent in its intent.
- Once we have chosen the path of violence then that same (or worse) violence will be visited on ourselves

**Conclusion**

- This is an excellent 21<sup>st</sup> Century take on the horror film
- Though not overtly 'supernatural' it's horror lies within the unknown and the unsaid
- Though the film alludes to witchcraft or cult devil worship we are given no clear answers
- The questions the film leaves us with create an unsettling atmosphere, it's a film which certainly crawls under the skin.

***Sightseers* (2012)****Ben Wheatley**

- *Sightseers* began life as a stage act concocted by Alice Lowe and Steve Oram.
- Essentially, the two characters would discuss their mundane camping holiday adventures before slowly revealing to the audience that they were in fact serial killers.
- Seeing that the idea perhaps had legs and might be make a solid basis for a feature film, the pair decided to make a short of the two characters which basically acted as a pitch that they would use in order to try and attract the attention of various production companies.

## *Sightseers* (2012) CONT...

- Though the clip began to create a buzz among industry types the idea was generally rejected for being too dark. Unperturbed, Lowe sent the clip to Edgar Wright whom she had worked with on *Hot Fuzz* (2007).
- Wright immediately saw potential for the project and passed it on to production company Big Talk, making himself executive producer and greenlighting the project.
- Though the creation of Oram and Lowe, it was clear that *Sightseers* would inhabit the same universe which Wheatley had already begun to construct with his earlier films, as he states:

*“I liked it because it kind of fit into my world view and it fit with Down Terrace and Kill List and I liked that they were thrill killers but didn’t take a lot of thrill out of it and it was quite ordinary but they were extraordinary people and you got to see a lot of England which you don’t usually get to see and I like the idea of the caravanning cos I like the camping, I like caravanning, all that kind of stuff so I wanted to do it in a way that wasn’t taking the piss too much out of that.”*

**Ben Wheatley**

- In fact, it fit so perfectly into Wheatley’s vision that initially there was talk of including a brief cameo from Jay (Neil Maskell) and Gal (Michael Smiley) from *Kill List* into the finished production.
- It is clear though that the creative push and pull between Wheatley, Oram and Lowe was able to produce a disturbing, funny and original film incorporating love, death and English campsites.
- Perhaps partly channelling earlier American cult classics like *Badlands* (1973) or *The Honeymoon Killers* (1970), the film certainly plays around with the idea of the killer road trip, yet it’s presentation could not be more British and its most obvious influence would be Mike Leigh’s TV play *Nuts in May* (1976).

## Comparisons to *Nuts in May*

- But what its interesting is how *Sightseers* takes some of those concepts from Leigh’s play only to push them to their most violent and unhealthy extremes.
- In *Nuts in May*, the character of Keith (Roger Sloman) only appears to dance around the edges of actual GBH or worse, in one scene he threatens a fellow camper with a tree branch but he goes no further.
- *Sightseers* character Chris though, becomes a full-blown ‘ginger-faced psychopath’ using his own sense of righteousness as an excuse to mercilessly execute anyone who comes across his path.
- The film also subverts some of the issues presented in *Nuts in May*, in Leigh’s production the tension is mostly drawn from Keith and Candice-Marie’s inability to communicate with anyone who doesn’t fit within their barmy middle-class sub-structure.
- Keith in particular appears to go into melt down when presented with the challenge of working class revellers.
- In *Sightseers* though the inverse is often true, Chris, very working class, feels most threatened by those of who are deemed to be of a higher class.
- In one scene, he batters in the head of a snarky ex-public school type. *“He’s not a person, he’s a Daily Mail reader”*
- But essentially, *Sightseers* is a love story, the relationship which builds between Chris and Tina is palpable and feels real if a little odd.
- Again, it is Lowe’s ability to emote both the absurdly horrific and the achingly humdrum in such a laughably believable manner that truly draws us in.
- This mundane form of weirdness can be seen in the ‘Big Scribbler’ giant pencil she uses to write home to her mother, or in the hand-knitted crotch-less pants, or the baggy ill-fitting jeans she slumps around in.
- In one scene, she attempts to seduce Chris in a restaurant by announcing she is wearing no knickers.
- When he not so subtly goes to have a look, and emerges from under the table declaring that he can’t see anything, Tina then informs him that she is still wearing tights.
- It is her inability to grasp the un-sexiness of her cack-handed seduction which makes her all the more charming and strangely dangerous.

**Sightseers (2012) CONT...**

- She is both frumpy and fascinating, a cagoule wearing Rose West with a passion for murder, her man, and Dolmio sauce.

**Script and Improvisation**

- Though the script was in place before filming began much of the dialogue we see on screen was born out of improvisation techniques.
- It was clearly a way of working that suited Oram, and particularly Lowe.

*“Ben works in this really, really interesting way and its one of the things which enables him to work really, really fast is that he dresses the whole set and lights it and then goes now we can play the scene and so actually we can go anywhere we want. So, it means as an actor it’s much more like a piece of theatre, you can just walk in do what you feel like you want to do rather than worrying whether you’re hitting you’re mark or hitting your light or whatever.”*

**Alice Lowe**

- Another unpredictably important character in *Sightseers* was the British weather. Filming everything on location and treating the shooting schedule as an actual caravanning tour of the English countryside; taking in places like Matlock, Mother Shipton’s Cave, Holster slate mines and Lake Windermere, rain, sleet and howling winds all fed into the unfolding story.

**Tina and Chris**

- Tina’s character arc is possibly the most interesting and revealing aspect of the film. Chris, initially appears to be in charge of the relationship – he writes their holiday itinerary, decides the kind of break they will take and casually expects Tina to go along with his criminal activity when his homicidal tendencies have been exposed.
- Tina by comparison, at least at the beginning of the film, is mousy, quiet and hampered by her arrested development and a domineering mother.
- Tina’s acquiescence with Chris’s lifestyle is cemented in the aftermath of the first murder.
- She can easily back out of the whole sorry mess but instead decides to assert her willing collusion in his psychotic mission by echoing his earlier ‘mint me’ – it’s a recognition that their geeky relationship runs darker and deeper than a mere a holiday romance.
- But whereas Chris seems drawn to his activities by a kind of madness, Tina becomes a slightly more dangerous prospect, taking to serial killing as easily as her other day to day activities.
- Like crocheting or knitting, killing becomes her unexpected new hobby –
- *“I’ve never thought about murdering innocent people before”*
- In *Sightseers*, though Chris is ostensibly the one in charge, once Tina has uncovered his dark little hobby, she is able to exploit his madness to her own ends.
- It’s a film about love and jealousy and like many of Ben Wheatley’s projects it focuses on the bonds that develop between desperate and lonely people.
- Tina’s final defiance and hostile takeover of the relationship becomes clear at the climax of the story.
- After it is evident that the authorities are closing in on their activities - *“The police are perusing a ginger-face man and an angry woman”* - the couple decide to commit a double suicide by throwing themselves from the top of the Ribbleshead Viaduct.
- Yet when they count down to take their last leap into oblivion, Tina lets go of Chris’s hand and she watches him plummet to his end while she looks down.