

## *Different Faces of Parody in Billy Liar*

Parody in John Schlesinger's *Billy Liar* functions on a number of levels. Parody's main aim is to imitate and mock others in order to achieve a comic effect, and the film's protagonist, Billy Fisher (Tom Courtenay), can easily be described as a master of this art. However, the parodic dimension of Schlesinger's film is expressed not only in the construction of its main character (Billy's aversion to the set patterns of middle-class life; his simultaneous fascination and disdain for mass culture); the director did not hesitate to parody the Angry Young Men cinema, as well. In doing so, he exposed the weaknesses of this world-renowned movement in British cinema.

Billy communicates with the world by parodying others. This is parody in the popular sense of this word, that is, laughing at someone else's weaknesses. The hero ridicules and parodies the behaviour of those he despises. Billy functions in two different spaces: the everyday space of dull English suburbia, and an imaginary Ambrosia, ruled by him. In Ambrosia, he can be whoever he wants to be; here his imagination is limitless. Once he is a soldier, another time a charismatic leader, and finally, an agent being interrogated in prison. It is interesting to note that the element connecting his two worlds (one real, one imaginary) is his facial expressions, gestures, and the way in which he moves. A brave official strut or, conversely, a lame gait are features that Billy perfectly matches to the characters he plays in Ambrosia. Transferring these features into the reality in which he lives becomes an element connecting the two realms, but it also produces a parodic effect. An additional asset of the latter is the interesting appearance and extraordinary comic skills of Tom Courtenay. Critic Danny Powell says:

This variety of characters that Billy invents shows that he has the capacity to take on whichever role he wishes in his dreams and to control every part of the world he inhabits—telling a republic a metaphor for his own independence – while the crazy stories he invents are indicative of the growth in surreal comedy that was to be a feature of Sixties cinema.[1]

Billy, a manipulator and a habitual liar, dreams of going to London, but for the time being he is making life unbearable for his *petit bourgeois* parents, leading on naive girls (he is engaged to two at the

### The Hero

[1] D. Powell, *Studying British Cinema: The 1960s*, Auteur, Leighton Buzzard, 2009, p. 62.

same time) and slacking on his job in a funeral parlour. When he meets Liz, a modern girl, a real chance to leave emerges. Encouraged by Liz, Billy packs his suitcase and, in spite of a dramatic situation in his family (his grandmother dies), he boards a train with her. At a decisive moment, he becomes discouraged and returns home. Only in Ambrosia is he brave and imaginative. Viewers quickly realize that although Billy derides others, he too can be the subject of derision. They see that Billy's brave deeds are only a figment of his wild imagination and inflated ego. Through this light comedy about the adventures of a young mythomaniac, we discover the truth about a man who is unable to live a real life. The sad and dull life of the film's hero becomes more colourful only when he journeys into the world of his imagination. One memorable image is a scene in which through a sharp editing cut an electric razor held by Billy is transformed into a machine gun firing shots at Billy's family. A lack of understanding and alienation find their expression in constant mockery and parody of behaviour that Billy loathes.

When a chance arises in the real life there to break away from his mundane reality, Billy withdraws and runs away. The film's finale may be understood in two ways. On the one hand, Billy is a coward, incapable of breaking free from the fixed patterns according to which he lives. However, taking into consideration Billy's brave march homeward in the final scene to the tune of jazz music associated with Ambrosia, his decision can be interpreted in a different way: Billy realizes that his imagination is his safe haven. The funny strut and jazz music that accompany him throughout the film become for him a means of improvisation, a blunt answer to the middle-class corset that pinches him so tightly. Is a different escape unnecessary?:

Although the character of Billy Fisher yearns to escape what he feels to be the drabness of his home town, the film itself leaves open the suggestion that maybe life here isn't so bad, and is ultimately more rewarding than living a virtual one in ones head (or in the newer method of the internet). Perhaps what the film teaches is that it is relating to other people that really counts – which Billy never really manages to do.[2]

### *Billy Liar* – Angry Young Men

The object that Billy parodies most is his family and their typical middle-class behaviour. We clearly see here a family that is vulnerable, just as we do in the Angry Young Men films. Their double morality and living according to fixed patterns are ridiculed. This is the kind of family that the characters in *Look Back In Anger* (dir. Tony Richardson) or *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (dir. Karel Reisz) so utterly despised. In the final scene of the latter, the main character, Arthur Seaton (Albert Finney) throws stones at a row of identical houses as an expression of his rebellion against middle-class society. The opening shot of *Billy Liar* shows such houses, as well. Radio soap, immensely

[2] <http://www.yorkshirefilmarchive.com/film/billy-liar-location-leeds-bradford> [accessed: September 10, 2013].

popular among housewives, provides the background to scenes in which typical English 1950s houses can be seen. In one of these terraced houses, live Billy, his parents and his grandmother.

The angry young men function in an alien world, and the unusual character of their attitudes becomes a reaction to the omnipresent artificiality and uniformity of reality. Hence, Billy's escapes into the world of his imagination is a way of detaching himself from the everyday patterns of family life that so annoyed the young post-war generation. This is how Powell describes Billy's family:

We see his father, Geoffrey, (Wilfried Pickles) emerging from a Radio Rentals van before going inside. Ironically his father is distributing the very devices by which his son's generation is now having their imaginations sparked. No longer is the television being portrayed as a sedative; instead it becomes the inspiration for a generation as mass culture spreads. Inside his wife, Alice, (Mona Washbourne) waits for her record to be played on the radio like the many other housewives seen in the opening sequence. This is one family like many others whose entertainment is filtered out from London which is a long way away.<sup>[3]</sup>

The rebellion of the Angry Young Men occurred on many planes and concerned various aspects of life; however, their rebellion was mainly directed against being kept in check and enslaved. The Angry Young Men did not want to let anyone decide for them. Jimmy Porter (Richard Burton), the main character in *Look Back In Anger*, never acquiesced to living in health and comfort, like his in-laws. Similarly, the hero of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* will hurt everyone around him in the name of freedom, which becomes for him an absolute value. The hated sound of factory machines will be replaced by light jazz melodies that accompany his wild escapades, full of good fun and egoistically taking advantage of any occasion that arises. Similarly to Billy, who is bored working in a funeral parlour, he escapes into his fantasy world whenever he can.

What limited personal freedom in Angry Young Men cinema was not always a social situation or being forced to live in accordance with the norms accepted by the middle-class. Another person, even a deeply loved one, could also become a prison. Each step taken by Jimmy in *Look Back In Anger*, Frank Machin in *This Sporting Life* (dir. Lindsay Anderson) or Jo (Rita Tushingham) in *Taste of Honey* (dir. Tony Richardson) is an attempt to free themselves from the trap that another person has become. For Jimmy and Frank, like Billy, this trap is a relationship with a woman. Billy lies to girls and leads them on in order not to lose the feeling of his imaginary freedom. He resorts to lies, mockery and parody – all in the name of a misconceived independence.

However, it is not the family itself or relationships with women that become the source of the hero's deepest frustrations and the object of his ridicule, but the social class he comes from. Powell sees in Billy's

[3] D. Powell, op. cit., p. 61.

behaviour a clear parody of the behaviour of the upper middle class, to which, as Billy believes, his family aspires:

Billy enters the breakfast room reading the paper in the manner of a stereotypical gentleman of leisure, sporting a coin substituting as a monocle in one eye. 'Cabinet changes are imminent I see,' he says mimicking an upper-middle-class attitude. 'You'll be bloody imminent if you don't start getting up in the morning,' his father replies, absurdly and, obviously habitually. Continuing in character, Billy greets his mother as 'mater' while his grandmother criticises her for letting him 'do as he likes'.<sup>[4]</sup>

One should remember that although Billy's father comes from the working class, his successful business allows his family to lead a middle class life. Like the main character from *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Billy is not a blue-collar worker, and he does not resign from the privilege of acquiring an education, unlike the main character from *Look Back In Anger*. Instead, he enjoys the life of the middle class that he despises so much:

He has received the benefits of grammar school education and he is far more aware of the opportunities that are available in a Britain beginning to change. He does work in a job that he resents but it is not the manual labour of Arthur Seaton. Billy's work is white collar and although he is unable to grasp the nettle, the opportunities are there for those brave enough to take a risk.<sup>[5]</sup>

Contrary to a popular view, the rebellion of the Angry Young Men was not directed against the whole world. The characters of the films, although angry and rebellious, tried to find a safe haven and their own place on earth. They received comfort from the wish to live a simple, even primitive life. The hero of *Look Back In Anger* values most the lifestyle of his old nanny, who is simple and poor. Following her example, he decides, in spite of his education, to become a vendor at a stall. He wants a simple life that would not be routine and schematic. Billy, however, does not escape to the countryside or to a more basic life. A lazy and good-for-nothing lifestyle is easier to lead when working in a white collar job than when doing hard physical labour.

### *Billy Liar* – John Schlesinger

*Billy Liar* was made in 1963, a period when Angry Young Men cinema was losing its impact. Its director, although deemed one of the leading representatives of Angry Young Men cinema, remained somewhat on its peripheries. First and foremost, the relations between characters that characterised his cinema differed from those of the movement in general:

Schlesinger had his debut as a filmmaker as one of the Angry Young Men, who sought to bring to screen minority and working class issues in a Social Realist way and in a Free Cinema style. What *A Kind of Loving* and, for example, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karl Reisz, 1960) have in common is a distinctive middle-class outlook, that is, a certain lack of

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

working-class authenticity; what distinguishes Schlesinger's work is his sensitive, complex, open, and unprejudiced depiction of gender relations.[6]

Although *A Kind of Loving* was still highly reminiscent of Angry Young Men cinema, *Darling* presents a vision that is far removed from this current. This is essentially due to its main female character. In Angry Young Men cinema, women were, as a rule, treated as accessories to a rebellious male world. Julie Christie (who played Liz in *Billy Liar* and the main character in *Darling*) emphasized that in Angry Young Men cinema women played certain roles, and were often objectified. The actress sees such patterns in *Billy Liar*. However, as it turns out, they vanish without a trace in another of Schlesinger's films:

'I can't say this film is great on women. At this point it's still a man's world. You've got the bitch, the virgin and the real woman, who's a fantasy. But I think that's fairly representative of the time. Of course, in his next film, *Darling* John (Schlesinger) went on to deal with women's role in this changing world' (Julie Christie, *Billy Liar*, Criterion Collection DVD).[7]

Indeed, in the case of *Darling*, the situation looks completely different. The film is the story of an emancipated woman who is determined and willing to succeed and become financially independent. However, she falls into the trap of her emotional swings, which are the result of her life choices. The film was shot in the style of a reportage interview. Diana's comments about consecutive stages in her life provide a narrative thread that connects the plot into a single whole. The film shares two features in common with *Billy Liar*, made two years earlier. Firstly, the young model from *Darling* is just as immersed in mass and popular culture as Billy. Secondly, Julie Christie, who played both characters, created female characters whose soul is more rebellious and who are self-reliant than those of the male characters from Angry Young Men cinema:

Like other films made by 'New Wave' directors, *Billy Liar*, with its stereotyped female characters, can be accused of a certain misogyny – although the male characters are equally stereotyped and Liz represents someone new and different.[8]

Liz is a herald of female characters whose image will become an important element of British culture in the 1960s (as in the case of *Darling*). While in Angry Young Men cinema, women were a mere addition to men, the portrait of female-male relationships in *Billy Liar* presages the impending sexual revolution: Billy goes out with two girls at the same time and becomes engaged to both of them. He meets another girl who declares that she has been with many men, which she considered a reason for pride, not embarrassment.

Schlesinger portrays Billy in a way that makes him a caricature of Angry Young Men characters. Although he rebels, he is incapable

[6] <http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/great-directors/schlesinger/> [accessed: September 7, 2013].

[7] D. Powell, op. cit., pp. 68–69.

[8] <http://www.yorkshirefilmarchive.com/film/billy-liar-location-leeds-bradford> [accessed: September 7, 2013].

of accomplishing anything. He is not interested in real rebellion or a change in his life. It is far easier for him to imitate and parody his close ones, ridicule their feelings, and when he loses motivation, escape into a fantasy world. The attitude of the hero is reminiscent of the mood of Swinging London in the 1960s; the film is thus caught between the tenets of Angry Young Men cinema and the 1960s:

... in 1963 cinema audiences were clearly beginning to lose interest in working-class realism ... *Billy Liar* ... took care to market itself very differently, with the emphasis on fantasy and the zany optimism which signaled the arrival of the singing Sixties (Richard Lester, Hollywood UK BBC 4).[9]

*Billy Liar* is a reflection of a situation in which a country starts to breathe again after the tough years of a post-war crisis. The times of austerity and economic crisis are over. What begins is shopping, miniskirts and the music of The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. The trends related to Mod subculture perfectly describe the situation of Swinging London. Its elements are found both in Billy's jackets and in Julie Christie's dresses. Although the film is black and white, Liz's clothes are a prediction of more modern fashion trends. We meet her when she is admiring shop windows (C&A among others). Billy's hairstyle also heralds the trend for a head of hair, often cut "student-style" (like The Beatles). It is worth remembering that in Swinging London, there was a change in the stereotypical view of masculinity and femininity. Men with longer hair and more colourful clothes become more feminine than anytime before. Billy is a sign of such changes. His father perceives him as being more feminine because he remains passive. According to Powell:

Geoffrey's derision of Billy as being like a girl signifies a shift in gender roles, which is enhanced later in the film, as well as later in the decade. To his father, femininity is associated with weakness, but the age of The Beatles, with their long hair and non-macho masculinity, is close at hand.[10]

Parody in *Billy Liar* is closely related to the construction of the main character (his behaviour, way of speaking, facial expression). Billy constantly plays a game with the world in which he can only live when he pretends to be someone else. Ironically, Billy's parodic, artificial behaviour allows the viewer to see truths about him, his environment, and even the conventions used by the director to talk about Billy's life.

## Popular Culture – Consumption

The moods of the Angry Young Men, their aversion to "the horrible middle class" in *Billy Liar* also relate to criticism of post-war consumerism. The example of the scene where a supermarket is opened and is treated like a temple or a pilgrimage site show the subtle changes taking place in the mood of the British. In the background, houses demolished after the war can be seen. What is old is going away, and what is new is now arriving. After times of poverty and the economic drama of the war, the time has come to be fascinated by the availability

[9] D. Powell, op. cit., p. 60.

[10] Ibid., p. 63.

of products and the richness of choice offered by the free market. The opening of a supermarket seems a perfect metaphor for the situation of the British in the 1960s. Mass culture has started to capture everybody's imagination: from the working class to the upper classes, from youngsters to housewives standing in a queue to get a shopping basket. The event itself seems to be a parody; the invited celebrity (comedian Danny Boon) and the women playing the pipes between the neat supermarket shelves both highlight the absurdity of the situation. Powell cites Julie Christie's words:

This film is full of evidence of all those changing things. The supermarket which was ordinary was fantastic like opening a cathedral. The beginning of that kind of consumerism, all the working-class ladies shouting and screaming because they were so excited by this idea there was going to be this emporium of goods where they could consume.[11]

The consumer lifestyle is perfectly showed in a fascination with the media. Billy's character is built as something in between admiration for and parody of mass culture. On the one hand, it is greatly influenced by the media; on the other, it sees their false and manipulative style. His words are a mixture of both fascination and derision:

Billy's fantasies draw on a variety of sources throughout the film. His characterisations come from both British and American film, TV and news, demonstrating the influence of popular culture on the way he understands the world. Hoggart's 'shiny barbarism' is certainly alluring to Billy.[12]

According to Powell, the way in which Billy's character is built relates to Richard Hoggart's concept in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), where the scholar describes the way in which the working class had been seduced by American mass culture. He bases his concept of 'a shiny barbarism' on an analysis of Hollywood films and cheap and brutal crime novels. He tries to catch the moment in which the working class became enchanted with foreign culture and experienced the phenomenon of 'massification'. In his research, Hoggart deals with the same areas that fascinate the hero of *Billy Liar* – pulp fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and movies. Hoggart does not criticise pop culture, but rather mass culture, which is thrust upon society by means of standard patterns.<sup>13</sup> A similar approach is adopted by Schlesinger, who expresses through his characters a loathing for mass culture and its patterns, and derides consumerism; Powell notes, for example, that he often uses Billy's parodic behaviour to address mass culture and its representation:

His dream of becoming a scriptwriter and moving to London show the impact that the new media industries are having on the age but Billy's location and upbringing are a limit to his opportunities.[14]

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[13] Cf. R. Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life*, Penguin Classics, 2009.

[14] D. Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

For Billy's parents, moving to London, like the new media, is a puzzle that is difficult to solve. Billy, on the other hand, feels more and more comfortable imitating, paraphrasing, and parodying the language of the new media. Popular culture, like Ambrosia, provides him with a haven where he can escape from the world of "the horrible middle class":

The language of the media, however, is one in which Billy is fluent: 'Look, do you wanna know or don't ya?' he asks in the manner of an Italian-American gangster. Billy is a product of the modern age and the new media, aware that the changing world is affording new opportunities to some and if he can free himself, he will be able to take advantage of these.[15]

Through Billy's journeys to Ambrosia, the film mocks characteristic film genres. In his imagination, Billy becomes a brave hero from a war film, a noir film, and even a newsreel. "Twisterella", a song he writes, seems to have been taken straight from a musical. It turns out that, in fact, the world of Billy's imagination is based on his stereotypical view of mass culture. It is a doubly artificial world because it not only functions in the hero's imagination, but it is also composed of a blend of components and patterns from popular culture works.

### Instead of the Ending: Parody of the Parody, or Monty Python

In Great Britain, language is an element that differentiates people. Having heard just a few sentences, one can say where a person belongs both geographically and socially. This is perfectly presented in *Billy Liar*, where language becomes a sphere for derision and ridicule of Billy himself (it is easy to mock one's language). In the film, as well, speech "gives away" the characters and their social background. The word "bloody" repeated by the hero's father several times is a proof that he comes from the working class.

Keith Waterhouse's play, adapted for a film by John Schlesinger, became a source of parody and inspiration for Monty Python's sketches (*Four Yorkshiremen*,<sup>16</sup> and *Working Class Playwright*<sup>[17]</sup>). In the case of both sketches, a lot of common points with the language of art can be found. Most importantly, Billy comes from Yorkshire, so he speaks with a characteristic accent, aptly parodied by the comedians from Monty Python. It is not all: a real game with conventions is played on the level of words. Given that the aim of parody is to imitate the characteristic style of an author or a work for comic effect or ridicule, in the described sketches it is executed perfectly.

In *Billy Liar*, the father blames his son for not appreciating the well-being that is provided to him by the efforts of the whole family. The motif of the old times that are over and the new times that, although they offer a lot of material goods, bring emptiness, re-appears throughout the film. Wit can be seen in Billy's conversation with the councillor:

[15] Ibid., p. 64.

[16] Sketch source: [http://www.phespirit.info/montypython/four\\_yorkshiremen.htm](http://www.phespirit.info/montypython/four_yorkshiremen.htm) [accessed: September 10, 2013].

[17] Sketch source: [http://montypython.50webs.com/scripts/Series\\_1/14.htm](http://montypython.50webs.com/scripts/Series_1/14.htm) [accessed: September 10, 2013].



**Billy:** Afternoon, Councillor.

**Councillor:** Well, it's a grand day for it

**Billy:** Aye.

**Councillor:** Been watching football, eh?

**Billy:** I'm just bound for a walk over the moor.

**Councillor:** What've you got there? The Crown Jewels?

**Billy:** No, gramophone records, LPs.

**Councillor:** There were naught like that when I were a lad. No record players. We had to make our own music if we wanted it. Male voice choir we used to have. Then there was Chapel Choir. There were two Chapel Choirs because there was another chapel down Moor Cross Road. Ah, but they're all comin' down, all the old buildings.

Trams, they've gone. City centre, that's all new.

**Billy:** Aye, but you could get a glass of beer, meat pie, cigarettes, matches and change out of four pence. Aye

**Councillor:** Aye.[18]

This motif is even clearer in Billy's conversation with a friend. The young men aptly parody the style in which elderly people accuse them lacking an understanding of the experiences of the older generation.

**Arthur:** I was a young councillor.

**Billy:** This was all fields when I was a lad.

**Arthur:** I only had but one clog to me feet in those days. All right. Well, I'll tell you what. The workers nowadays-you give them tuppence a week, they're not content.

**Billy:** They don't know they're born. They're not contented.

**Arthur:** They don't know when they're well off.

**Billy:** They couldn't come it with me. There's always been an Olroyd at Olroyd Mill, and there always will be.

**Arthur:** Nowadays, young lads come down with their college ways, and they want none of it.

The same motif was used by Monty Python. Typically for the sketches of the group, the imitation of language and the absurdity of the expressions are mainly what give the joke its value:

**First Yorkshireman:** Oh, we used to dream of livin' in a corridor! Would ha' been a palace to us. We used to live in an old water tank on a rubbish tip. We got woke up every morning by having a load of rotting fish dumped all over us! House? Huh.

**Fourth Yorkshireman:** Well, when I say 'house' it was only a hole in the ground covered by a sheet of tarpaulin, but it was a house to us.

**Second Yorkshireman:** We were evicted from our 'ole in the ground; we 'ad to go and live in a lake.

**Third Yorkshireman:** You were lucky to have a lake! There were a hundred and fifty of us living in t' shoebox in t' middle o' road.

**First Yorkshireman:** Cardboard box?

**Third Yorkshireman:** Aye.

**First Yorkshireman:** You were lucky. We lived for three months in a paper bag in a septic tank. We used to have to get up at six in the morning, clean

[18] All the dialogues from *Billy Liar* come from the film and were transcribed by the author of the article.

the paper bag, eat a crust of stale bread, go to work down t' mill, fourteen hours a day, week-in week-out, for sixpence a week, and when we got home our Dad would thrash us to sleep wi' his belt.

**Second Yorkshireman:** Luxury. We used to have to get out of the lake at six o'clock in the morning, clean the lake, eat a handful of 'ot gravel, work twenty hour day at mill for tuppence a month, come home, and Dad would thrash us to sleep with a broken bottle, if we were lucky!

**Third Yorkshireman:** Well, of course, we had it tough. We used to 'ave to get up out of shoebox at twelve o'clock at night and lick road clean wit' tongue. We had two bits of cold gravel, worked twenty-four hours a day at mill for sixpence every four years, and when we got home our Dad would slice us in two wit' bread knife.

**Fourth Yorkshireman:** Right. I had to get up in the morning at ten o'clock at night half an hour before I went to bed, drink a cup of sulphuric acid, work twenty-nine hours a day down mill, and pay mill owner for permission to come to work, and when we got home, our Dad and our mother would kill us and dance about on our graves singing Hallelujah.

**First Yorkshireman:** And you try and tell the young people of today that . . . they won't believe you.

**ALL:** They won't!

In many of their sketches, Monty Python present a father-son relationship and the mutual resentment and animosity between them. In *Billy Liar*, domestic conflicts are mainly between Billy and his father. This is well illustrated by a fragment in which the father accuses the son of not being dedicated to his work and of lacking understanding for his father's actions, aimed at improving the family's standard of living:

**Geoffrey:** You're like a bloody Mary Ann. You ought to be grateful you've got a job in an office.

**Billy:** Grateful, grateful! Grateful for this, for that! That's all I've ever heard! Grateful you let me go to the grammar school since the first day I went there!

**Geoffrey:** It's a chance we never had!

**Billy:** And don't we bloody well know it? I've got to be grateful for winning my own scholarship! And what did you say when I came running home to tell you I'd won it? That you'd have to pay for the uniform, and I ought to be grateful! And I'm supposed to be grateful to Shadrack and Duxbury for letting me sit in one of their rotten, stinking desks all day!

**Geoffrey:** Well, you took the job on, and you'll stop it when all that money's paid back.

**Billy:** I'm not. I'm leaving.

**Geoffrey:** What do you mean, you're leaving?

**Billy:** I'm going to London.

**Geoffrey:** What the hell do you think you can do in London?

**Billy:** Write scripts.

**Geoffrey:** Don't talk so bloody wet. You ought to do a proper day's work. Who's gonna run this business?

**Billy:** You once told me you didn't want me in the business!

**Geoffrey:** Only because you were too bloody idle, that's all. Somebody's got to carry it on! Who's gonna keep your mother?

**Billy:** You're not retiring, are you?

**Geoffrey:** I'll give you a kick up your backside.

**Billy:** I'm not arguing about it. I'm going.

**Geoffrey:** Go, then. I'm finished with you. And don't think you're gonna take my suitcase with you, either.

The sketch *The Working-Class Playwright* is a perfect parody of a father-son relationship that can be found in *Billy Liar*. In Monty Python's sketch the situation is different. There is a father-son relationship *a rebours*. The traditional pattern of a working class father, speaking and dressed in a particular way, has been reversed: a dandy son, in a suit, Mod-hairstyle and speaking perfect RP English is the one who works in a coal mine. And the father is a playwright. Yet another time, like in *Billy Liar* and *Four Yorkshiremen* the language is the area of parody and a real essence of the joke.

**Dad:** All right, woman, all right I've got a tongue in my head - I'll do 'talkin'. (looks at Ken distastefully) Aye ... I like yer fancy suit. Is that what they're wearing up in Yorkshire now?

**Ken:** It's just an ordinary suit, father... it's all I've got apart from the overalls.

**Mum:** How are you liking it down the mine, Ken?

**Ken:** Oh, it's not too bad, mum... we're using some new tungsten carbide drills for the preliminary coal-face scouring operations.

**Mum:** Oh, that sounds nice, dear...

**Dad:** Tungsten carbide drills! What the bloody hell's tungsten carbide drills?

**Ken:** It's something they use in coal-mining, father.

**Dad:** (mimicking) 'It's something they use in coal-mining, father'. You're all bloody fancy talk since you left London.

**Ken:** Oh, not that again.

**Mum:** He's had a hard day dear... his new play opens at the National Theatre tomorrow.

**Ken:** Oh that's good.

**Dad:** Good! Good! What do you know about it? What do you know about getting up at five o'clock in t'morning to fly to Paris...back at the Old Vic for drinks at twelve, sweating the day through press interviews, television interviews and getting back here at ten to wrestle with the problem of a homosexual nymphomaniac drug-addict involved in the ritual murder of a well known Scottish footballer. That's a full working day, lad, and don't you forget it!

**Mum:** Oh, don't shout at the boy, father.

**Dad:** Aye, 'ampstead wasn't good enough for you, was it? ... you had to go poncing off to Barnsley, you and yer coal-mining friends. (spits)

**Ken:** Coal-mining is a wonderful thing father, but it's something you'll never understand. Just look at you!