Beyond flurries of current affairs sound and fury, the regressive scale of the UK coalition government’s austerity programme is clear. Massive cuts in state social spending posed as a balance to the banking sector bailout may marginally inconvenience the relatively well-off, but significantly accelerate the attack on the conditions of the working-class begun with Thatcherism and refined under New Labour. Withdrawal of welfare and support infrastructure risk destitution for millions facing punitive sanctions for avoiding starvation wages and quasi-slavery conditions in neoliberal workplace society. Meanwhile social cleansing in housing and education will leave the respectable poor nowhere to go, their precarious positions propping up the service economy usurped by children of the new middle-classes trading in cultural capital accumulated during Blair’s debt-fuelled consumer growth. And as intensifying proletarianisation and downgrading of insecure professions erodes petty-bourgeois security, status distinctions congenial to flexible affective labour represent one remaining bulwark against ruin.

Structural adjustment’s pitiless downward pressure on the majority’s living standards could conceivably threaten the prevailing commonsense of competitive individualism as preferable and inevitable. Yet the various strata targeted for increasingly intimate disciplining and value extraction remain segmented by market imperatives – ‘good citizenship’ demanding hysterical self-commodification and the infinite infantile acquisition of material trivia. But this collaborative process can only masquerade as tolerable lifestyle if its corrosive existential consequences are mystified – accomplished most readily by externalising anxiety about the sustainability of the self and personal relations via the denigration of others. So the recalcitrant underclasses retain residual mass-cultural utility as cautionary tales – their projected vulgarity and irresponsible comportment exemplify an inability to properly adapt to whatever shifts in the prioritised status quo promise quick profits for someone this year.

Mainstream moral fascism, forensically dissecting and punishing failure to thrive, is mirrored by reality TV’s gratuitous sadism. Humiliation heaped on willing supplicants subjected to shaming exhortation and judgement echoes the miserable dishonesty of alienating employment and institutional relationships. Trailblazing Cameron’s ‘Big Society’, the sub-Darwinian lottery logic peaks in Channel 4’s Trailblazing Cameron’s ‘Big Society’, the sub-Darwinian lottery logic peaks in Channel 4’s Antichrist rite of passage. Parallelwise, in Lars Von Trier’s (Greece 2009) then balefully revives paternalistic their own handiwork. Yorgos Lanthimos’ (2009) shatters a static rural idyll as a motorway breezeblock the cottage into a fortress repellingration and aestheticisation. Haneke’s irrationality leaves their benevolent authority in autonomy leaves their benevolent authority in tatters. Expanding manic protectiveness to surreal proportions, Ursula Meier’s (Switzerland 2009) shatters a static rural idyll as a motorway opens on its doorstep. The adolescent daughter sensibly hits the road as mum, dad and her siblings breetzlock the cottage into a fortress repelling the outside world, whereupon they immediately start suffocating and sheepishly deconstruct their own handiwork. Yorgos Lanthimos’ Dogtooth (Greece 2009) then balefully revives paternalistic omnipotence in a grotesque tragicomedy of ad hoc home miseducation, including nonsence language and forced incest, with self-harm the only sanctum of passage. Parallelwise, in Lars Von Trier’s Antichrist (Denmark 2009) a liberal marriage literally self-destructs after an infant’s accidental death, in a physical and emotional bloodbath of mutual recrimination and disgust.

I. Family Values
In Loco Parentis
Pungent purgatives for romantic fantasies of family integrity feature isolated couples and offspring whose complacent coherence, based on carefully cultivated codes of conduct, crumbles in the face of sundy real or imagined threats to self-sufficiency. Michael Haneke’s typically vicious Funny Games (Austria 1997; remake in America in 2008) twists home invasion horror motifs in an escalating ballet of bland pleasantries between teenage interlopers and victims unable to adjust to the psychopathic translation of civilised manners. Elsewhere, contradictions of internal motivation, explicit rationalisation and external ramification are less simplistically Manichean. Lucía Puenzo’s XXY (Argentina 2007) postulates a teenager’s polysexuality as an abomination her guardians must exorcise, for her/his own good given society’s intolerance, but the child’s insistence on uncertain freedom makes them uneasy leaves their benevolent authority in tatters. Expanding manic protectiveness to surreal proportions, Ursula Meier’s (Switzerland 2009) shatters a static rural idyll as a motorway opens on its doorstep. The adolescent daughter sensibly hits the road as mum, dad and her siblings breetzlock the cottage into a fortress repelling the outside world, whereupon they immediately start suffocating and sheepishly deconstruct their own handiwork. Yorgos Lanthimos’ Dogtooth (Greece 2009) then balefully revives paternalistic omnipotence in a grotesque tragicomedy of ad hoc home miseducation, including nonsence language and forced incest, with self-harm the only sanctum of passage. Parallelwise, in Lars Von Trier’s Antichrist (Denmark 2009) a liberal marriage literally self-destructs after an infant’s accidental death, in a physical and emotional bloodbath of mutual recrimination and disgust.

Nuclear Family Fallout
If pretensions of kinship wellbeing readily implode in hermetically-sealed quarantine, neither do surrounding communities escape contamination from its malfunctioning idealisation. In Michael Haneke’s Hidden (France 2005), videotapes of their stylish Paris home are delivered to affluent intellectuals and their twelve-year-old son. The partnership unravels as they wrestle with memory, guilt and denial once the anonymous ‘stalker’ also shoots the husband’s childhood home and a grimy high-rise flat – the current address of the son of his parents’ domestic servants, banished to an orphanage when they were among hundreds of Algerian protestors killed by police. Exploring how history dovetails individual biography and social hierarchy, the film punctures the self-serving vanity of elite Western superiority – the mystery thriller structure matching audience pummel with the couple’s efforts to conceal from themselves their psychic preponderance of evasion and hypocrisy. Infantile envy wrecking subaltern lives may seem a heavy-handed allegory, even with class and race hatred still fundamental to Eurocentric society. But emotional and cognitive patterns conducive to oppression are nurtured early in the egos and cultures of the established middle-classes, operating precisely through misrecognition and displacement cemented by rationalisation and aestheticisation. Haneke’s nailing of the discreet karma of the bourgeois is, nevertheless, tangentially optimistic here. Though surreptitiously embedded in the narrative, the present younger generations’ directly solidaristic rebellion exposes dissembling moral dispositions among elders whose comfort presupposes ignoring the appalling social roots of its constitution. The White Ribbon (Germany 2009) finds the same writer-director resuming normal service, hubristically delving into the founding fallacies of twentieth-century barbarism but offering no redemption for benighted fruit of rotten ancestry. A feudal Prussian village’s festering network of baronial condensation and cruelly austere burgundermuths a malevolent 1914 cohort of diversely resentful youngsters countering perpetuous patriarchal corruption with murderous delinquency – with blame displaced by default onto long-suffering, if ineptly bossy, local serfs. Immaculate black and white cinematography enhances a metaphorical condensation of conditions facilitating the rise of Nazism and its apparently seamless acceptance, but too much real historical texture is obliterated to convince. Conversely, Babel (USA 2006) overreaches the postmodern pudding, cherry-picking multiple international issues from the progressive zeitgeist. This third collaboration with writer Guillermo Arriaga concludes Alejandro González Iñárritu’s...
depiction of contemporary collusions of fate, from class divisions in *Mexico City* (Amores Perros, 2000) and suburban US ruminations on the meaning of existence (*21 Grams*, 2003) to a worldwide web of violent correlation. *Babel*’s Berber herders are framed as terrorists when an American tourist is accidentally wounded, derailing her husband’s attempt to save her unhappiness, while back home their kids and illegal nanny fall foul of border police after attending a Mexican wedding. Elsewhere a well-off Tokyo teenage dead-mute junkie finds sexual violence, grief at her mother’s suicide, and the neglectfulness of a father whose generosity, it transpires, originally set the story in motion.

*Babel*’s deft manipulation of narrative fragments and jumbled timelines weaves love and family melodramas across the planet with the pointed MacGuffin of power from the barrel of a gun. Disparities of wealth and mobility determine both the scale of fulfillment realistically sought and the consequences of mistakes and misfortunes. So when subsistence lifestyle encounters Third World realpolitik, embryonic imaginings of a safer future are set aside, the neo-colonial service economy exhausts its bondservants in callous class apartheid, with the relatively affluent blind to the human costs of what they take for granted. Their self-obsession insulated by consumerism allows them neither to connect meaningfully with each other nor avoid trampling over the less fortunate they depend on. The miscommunication hinted in the title flows not from faulty cultural or linguistic translation, but the contradictions of underlying sociopolitical conceptual frameworks shaming comprehasion and action. The characters’ negotiations of corresponding institutional discourses which regulate lives and constrain potent pressure-points devolve the onus onto poor alike – with outcomes far starker for those whose interests are marginalised most. *Babel* may scarcely capture deep structures of domination radiating globally through social fabrics, but it does underscore that, beyond men’s self-important posturing and decidedly unfunny games, the most decisive narrative impetus lies in the human costs of what they take for granted.

**II. The Welfare of Queens**

**Fertility Rites and Wrongs**

If breeding is a fundamental biosocial function of femininity, its primal moments occasions febrile conjoined fructs between resistance, control, cultivation and acculturation. Transcending elite bloodlines, nervousness around reproduction percolates down hierarchies of privilege, now prompting proliferating technical and discursive regulatory apparatuses. With the affluent increasingly experiencing the practical obstacle of difficulty conceiving, so viable biomass must be harvested elsewhere – accomplished electively in Lisa Cholodenko’s *The Kids Are Alright* (USA 2010), whose enlightened lesbian moms share sperm donation. Their curious kids inconveniently reintroduce the originally anonymous passive men into the household, destabilising its sedimentation into patriarchal order and unruly earthmotherhood – with resolution partly hingeing on the offhand dismissal of faithful subordinates whose distress isn’t even noticed. Gótz Spielmann’s *Revanche* (Austria 2009), on the other hand, admirably balances a hapless lumpenprole’s dangerous virility against the upright, upright sterility generally strangling fulfilment all round. However, vexatious lower-class surpluses of fecundity but fatal shortfalls in other forms of capital almost invariably precipitate unequal exchange – most evidently in Laurent Cantet’s *Heading South* (France 2006), whose middle-aged female sex tourists mercilessly vampire young Haitian masculinity in a self-defeating addiction to ephemeral satisfaction. John Sayles’ *Casas de los Babys* (USA 2003) similarly flays a bunch of middle-income Americans prospecting south of the border among those with no socio-economic option but to cash in the fruit of their wombs. The perpetually accumulating adapters neither acknowledge the trade’s obscene ethics nor empathise with their benefactresses, so consumed are they by the magical promise of infantile procreation. Ben Affleck’s *Gone, Baby, Gone* (USA 2007) then poses even more baldly the dilemmas arising from differently classified valuations of need and care, when borderline insecurity mothers are clandestinely robbed by rogue public servants seeking their own domestic salvation.

**Servicing the Domestic Economy**

Even given material and cultural wherewithal securely in place, though, holding home and hearth productively together takes its toll. Treating mature order as mere veneer, Lucrecia Martel’s depictions of the Argentinian provincial bourgeoisie see adults as essentially arrogant children, characterising in form and content their aimless anomic and compulsive moral confusion combined with unhinking diffidence and contempt towards the lower classes. *The Headless Woman* (2008) further explores conservative pretensions of propriety, excavating fetid depths of family dynamics whose contradictions radiate outwards to overdetermine domination, with distraction and disavowal simultaneously facilitating class stratification’s real violence and concealing its beneficiaries’ responsibility. The titular middle-aged dentist anchors an extended tribe busy with the trivial trials and tribulations befitting their station, barely registering the army of indigenous minions doing the donkeywork. One day she fears she may have accidentally run over one of their youngsters in the rain. Horrified, she daren’t go back to check, sinking into almost catatonic detachment about the damage possibly done – primarily to her flattering self-image. Still, the genteel everyday sheen scarcely suffers apart from her nearest and dearest closing ranks in assurance that the problem has gone away, despite not even existing in the first place – collusive reconciliation eventually being signalled by minor cosmetic renewal, and lo and behold, history is rewritten. Bold technical disjunctions layer allusion and metaphor, with deliberately awkward framing, focus and camera movement obscuring crucial details to powerfully evoke fractured memory and perception. Flirtation with generic thriller conventions dissolves into pervasive dreamlike anxiety as visual non-sequiturs highlight the dialogic banality and dissembling of milieu devotedly avoiding awareness. The ambient noise and incongruous pop soundtrack jar any seamless simulation of experience, forcing viewers to see through the eyes of an anti-heroine in abject disarray. Paradoxically, Martel’s surgical precision stems from deep love for her family but hatred of its institutional prototype for societal structure, whereas vagaries of desire ruin individual and collective integrity and cohesion while promising liberation from the dead hand of civilisation as we know it. These dialectics resonate strongly with Argentina’s trajectory – the murderous military Junta years whose horrors resist attention, through to current economic and social crises which once seemed liable to prompt revolution. Yet beyond parochial detail, light is undoubtably shed on universal concerns – not least, the perenially fashionable refusal among middle-classes everywhere to acknowledge the profound political implications of their identity.

Two more South American tales purportedly prioritise insubordinate female perspectives in specifying their parasitisation. Sebastián Silva’s *The Maid* (Chile 2009) intimately portrays a misanthropic housekeeper whose lifefood drains in drudgery sustaining petulant employers. Meanwhile Claudia Llosa’s *The Milk of Sorrow* (Peru 2008) pits indigenous endurance against civilised savagery – first neoconservatively in sexual atrocity during 1980s guerilla insurrections, then neoliberal in the plunder of cultural inheritance. But the latter’s capricious perpetrator is surely the director’s alter-superego projecting a rapacious other. Moreover, both films’ cheerful lower-class life, along with Silva’s infinitely patient mistress, represent classic ruses displacing bad faith – the weight of the world’s phantasmatically rosy glow mitigating guilt while validating objectifying sentiment. No such palliative pathos punctuates Claire Denis’ mordant *White Material* (France 2009), whose European plantation owner desperately rushes to extract a last harvest of West African coffee before civil war overruns her. Indentured locals give up the collaborative ghost en masse, her husband has jumped ship, and the son sinks into psychotic stupor – before fitfully rousing to join drug-addled child rebels routinely bolstered by government forces whose leaders vie for remaining crumbs. Her imperial majesty thus left barren to face the karmic storm, the end-title dedication – “To all the fearless young rascals”– nonetheless plants seeds of hope among catastrophe’s progeny even if no nourishable grounds are intellectually identifiable on its biopolitical terrain.
III. A Poverty of Aspiration

Downwardly Mobile Makeovers

Fortunately for them, however, Western matriarchs need no longer persevere with patriarchal overdetermination, thanks to feminisms’ erosion of male supremacist hegemony. With faultlines prised open in the combined and uneven differential denigration is compounded by anachronistic male innocence, unerringly reinforcing righteously inequitable battles of sex and station where the emotive force of shame cements respectability’s rule.

Disregard Agendas

Though the bourgeois edifice can survive mothers tettering over the abyssal abyss, if somewhat deflating its haughty cachet, disillusionment with the alienating repercussions of recuperation can’t be quashed indefinitely. Anne Fontaine’s Natale (France 2003) naughtily mocks the two-faced mythos of fidelity to the nuclear family’s arm’s race when a high-powered matron turns private eye, hiring a precocious escort to prove suspected spousal philandering. But the mishap-tensep truth of the tricks of her trade that disgust disperses desire. So she transgresses job descriptions and fabricates evidence for her employer’s deception, seducing her with erotic embroideries of her own prurient wishes. Fontaine wisely holds back from healing the resulting open wounds of class and sexuality — whereas Atom Egoyan’s bloated remake, Chloe (USA 2009), slams the penthouse door shut before the whore can bolt. With pompous angst humourlessly misconstruing the source’s subversive refusal of a traditionally sticky end for a femme fatale’s attraction, he transforms the women’s crossborder ambivalence into equalised frustrated yearnings for what the other is mistakenly assumed to safely possess. But this enlightened evenhandedness wishes away vastly unbalanced forces mustered in support — a repressed reality which returns in thoroughly reactionary restoration. Dangerous instability is doubly annihilated — quite simply, when the upstart arriviste turns her heady eye on the children — sacrificing both the stirring soul of the wife and its inspector, the love and her degraded lower feminine faculties.

Denis Dercourt’s The Page Turner (France 2006) is another noble aspirant sabotaging marriage’s sanctity — born now of envious hatred rather than need, let alone playful gender-baiting. Her audition ruined by a visiting star’s casual dismissiveness, she豆浆 prodigy turns the tables years years later inansinuating herself as indispensable factor. Sham adorning devotion fools the self-obessed diva so successfully that she falls in love, whereupon her erstwhile paramour vanishes — in vitro inventing the already ruined hopes of her humble family’s investment in the future. That any class-conscious, promissory promise of socioeconomic intercourse can never be trusted, given the alien incomprensibility of the harbinger is, thereby brought home once more. Nevertheless, its heroine occasionally genuinely burn sundry bridges of accured familial, material and embodied distinction, irrespective of cost-benefit calculation. Catherine Corsini’s Leaving (France 2008) slyly foregrounds the modern moneyminded overconfidence that there is no alternative, contriving a bereft husband’s cost-cutting coming back to haunt him as his wife escapes with the source’s subversive refusal of a traditionally sociocultural tradition — whereas a sex addict in Clarke Gregg’s Disrespect Agendas (USA 2009), slams the penthouse door shut before the whore can bolt. With pompous angst humourlessly misconstruing the source’s subversive refusal of a traditionally sticky end for a femme fatale’s attraction, he transforms the women’s crossborder ambivalence into equalised frustrated yearnings for what the other is mistakenly assumed to safely possess. But this enlightened evenhandedness wishes away vastly unbalanced forces mustered in support — a repressed reality which returns in thoroughly reactionary restoration. Dangerous instability is doubly annihilated — quite simply, when the upstart arriviste turns her heady eye on the children — sacrificing both the stirring soul of the wife and its reflection in the broking of the lover and her degraded lower feminine faculties.

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IV. The Socio-Economic Crisis

Failures of Psycho-Social Cohesion

Unsurprisingly, children rearcd amidst such destructive patterns of intimate passion deeply internalise their elders’ disassociation. Supposedly secure emotional boundaries and channels for catharsis deliver, at best, anxious dissatisfaction, bequeathing confused flegding egos guided by neither coherent models for interpersonal fantasy nor intelligible templates organising desire into agency. However, reliably banal economic flows nourishing viciousities of bodies and souls are more readily intuited — with a plethora of personal and political deviations from Bush and blood adornment as manageable social capital, encouraged by media commodifications of callow youthful sexuality. So, reversing American Psycho’s (Sam Mendes, USA 2000) parental regression to adolescence when the suburban family fractures, David Ross’ (dis)reputable The BabySitters (USA 2007) pursues its incestuous adolescent pangs but no longer pretending to appreciate the positions of those who never harboured such vain hopes to be punctured.
of disturbance, hysterical efforts to square its circular intrapsychic arguments eventually exhaust modern manners of escape; then to rid itself of unbearable attachment—whether in isolated communion with idealised narrated versions of escape—Varian’s upper-class junkie’s refusal of parental regeneration in François Ozon’s The Traffic (France 2009) en, in Becca Miller’s The Private Lives of Pippa Lee (USA 2009), the wholesale suppression of individuality as trophy wife. Sadly the dynamics of hollow characters seeking impossible completion prevent them stewing in their own solipsistic juices, fanning out into threadbare fabrics of sociality with markedly more warp than weft. But the radical vulnerability of others’ lights fuses of furtive frustration whose tantrums explode childish romance—in crenitous designer paranoia in Doug Liman’s Mr and Mrs Smith (USA 2005) or more realistically restrained European cosmopolitanism in Maren Ade’s Everyone Else (Germany 2009). Alternatively, friendship networks bear brunts of shallow self-satisfied snobbery, from drearily otherwise:

Rendering explicit neoliberal narcissism’s inexorable projection of self-hatred, a rich kid-house party in Gael Garcia Bernal’s Deficit (Mexico 2007) degenerates into venal discord countering the corrupt downfall of financier parents. Olly Blackburn’s Donkey Punch (UK 2007) then twists teen horror tropes, with sexual venture capital coming unstuck when stockbroker-belt scions lure onto daddy’s yacht package-tour last stand. And if it’s symptomatic how the hard-won spoils of class war are risked for whimsical cheap thrills, Sidney Lumet’s A Walk on the Wild Side (USA 2007) turned the hatchet-job terminally inward—its botched smalltime heist a rancid family collapse whose offspring hyenas pick emotional, economically bloodyly hapless petit-bourgeois forebears. But despite tentatively prophesying late-capitalist nihilism’s universal disaster, such theatrical experiments rarely generalise circumscribed circumstances to entire dysfunctional communities—as hard-boiled down in Michael Winterbottom’s The Insider Inside Me (USA 2010).

This adaptation of Jim Thompson’s 1952 novel trades dark literary interior monologue for vivid visualisation. Concealing raw hatred, Deputy Sheriff Lou Ford’s affably dim Deep-South demeanour discursively bludgeons everyone he encounters—thinly veiling narcissistic self-pity which evades clearly what imagined slights mean to the grandiose paranoia typical of borderline syndromes. So, professional and personal entanglement with prostitute Joyce punctures his character armour, unleashing suppressed hostility and undermining fragile bourgeois façade to childlike sweetheart Amy. Ford’s pathology stems from sadistic fathering in a miserable middle-class background, contextualising his sexual proclivities and moods operating, but in masking cod-Freudian concrete for moral core Winterbottom expounds the character’s withering cultural commentary. For example, here’s the anti-hero’s rejoinder to a doomed patsy who’dcrap too much. We’d have inflation in the toilet paper industry — that’s about the size of some of the arguments I’ve heard” (Orion Books edition, 2002, p.105).

Adding that most avoid awareness of how screwed up things are by internalising rules of respectability and scapegoating non-conformists, Thompson plausibly accounts for particular horrors and hypocrisies entirely from serially homicidal sociopathic attitudes, yet ascribing equal culpability to biography and social institution in numerous outcomes. The film’s glossy 1950s West Texas supplants Ford’s alienated understanding with transparent reality—spectacularising extreme trangression to ignore the inherently collective nature of mainstream morality and continuity between exploitative societal hierarchy and individual monstrosity. Here, Ford’s masquerade among comforting norms, parroting the psychotic logic of detached compulsion which drives ‘freaks like Ford as well as other exemplary embodiments of capitalism’s congenital antisociality. The deaths of twinned fetishes are thus anatomised with morbid fascination but merit mere workmanlike paragraphs in the book, illustrating macabre prejudice — Joyce seeking power’s covert endorsement, risk of polite society which widens, Amy demanding overt affirmation to avoid the former’s fate. Their killer’s conduct stands for patriarchal relations generally, where the sadomasochistic perversity of domination is reinforced through denial — desire being fatal because it must be repressed and displaced into partial, rigid pathways destined to frustrate and escalate. But with women’s passive complicity now explained as complementary personality defects, masculine control materialises as natural order — repeating the fetish’s psychological purpose and rewarding feminist complaints of simple misogyny. But Ford also models the constitutive camouflage of false class stratification in the book, illustrating perversity which jeopardise the interests of the powerful. Closing the gap between his distorted apprehensions of his lovers and their own potential adventures leads to artifice of perversity which supposedly changed everything, but his pessimism subtly pinpointed bourgeois society’s incapacity to reliably apprehend, care about, or benefit those at the bottom of its heap.

V. The Big Bad Society

Abstracting small-scale doldrums to wider world disorder, Robert Altman’s Gosford Park (USA 2000) indelibly offers an English stately pastoral standing for the universe of Western incivility — like younger ensemble exponents Paul Thomas Anderson and Iñárritu, only patchily overcoming ideological and naturalistic fixation. At least Red Riding (Tony Grisoni, UK 2009) intradically residually resists the obvious underbelly of mainstream morality facilitating Thatcherism’s malice — perhaps glimpsing the ex-Soviet Bloc shock doctrine’s cannibalistic sexual slavery whose criminal inhumanity David Cronenberg’s Eastern Promises (UK 2007) magnifies. But obsessive negative nostalgia and defunct defences of the heroic individuality present in cinema’s other way is possible.

Juan José Campanella’s The Secret In Their Eyes (Argentina 2009) first flirts with derivative cop capers, as retired prosecutor’s assistant Benjamin reminisces about his mid-1970s drunken sidekick Pablo, wisecracking like Latin Stasys and Hutches battling the corrupt Buenos Aires justice system prior to dictatorship. Cheap and cheerful kitsh then darkens, cross-fertilising crime procedural, romance and political thriller to meditate on love and hate, guilt and regret — melodramatically contrasting passions and obsessions and their intimate effects where, despite awkward shifts of tone, the structural narrative leaves many questions unanswered. Stressing the partners’ emotional and investigative synergy reflecting shared humble origins, flashbacks revisit a traumatic case where his bereaved husband trusted their premature assurance of closure. They eventually identify the psychopath’s emotional and ideological connection with our hero’s shy infatuation with aristocratic high-flyer boss Irene, who equally hesitantly rejects neither his romantic advances nor Irene’s extended family’s efforts to act. Benjamin’s departmental nemesis spends the killer from life sentence to death squad operations, whereon his protests precipitate Pablo’s assassination. He escapes thanks to Irene’s contacts, and back in the present the couple wedlockely shuck up.

Social and official constraints on perception and comprehension here influence immediate action and retrospective assimilation in individual and collective biography, so this brief encounter with vicious, pernicious history might resonate with anyone’s shared suffering. But whose attitudes, situations and potentials count? The lower-class victims had no protection against brutal reality to allow guilty distance from the distress of others — whereas, like his quarry, Benjamin ‘got out of jail free’. Representing social democracy’s uneasy monopoly of professional morality above upper-classes, our paramours’ personal truth and reconciliation helps them imagine that everyone’s satisfactorily moved on. But liberal hawks secured no justice — their entire shamboolic careers as well as private lives, implicitly, wastes of time — stranding the grieving widower to deal alone with the repercussions, in a direct, robust, unmediated manner their worldviews cannot accommodate. Furthermore, specific historical circumstances expose another secret in this story’s eyes. Its brave new world of affronted national partnership, settling unfinished business from a painful past, embarks in 1995. Yet within two years Argentina’s casino capitalism catastrophically crashed, much earlier than elsewhere, leaving millions of lives again in ruins. Wishing away the material foundations of social crisis thus simply increases the likelihood that projected solutions remain flimsy fantasies, destined to precipitate away and fade — as well as, misleading the flabby denouement’s red-herring as redemptive resolution. Unless, that is, ordinary folk forgiving the inability of their ‘bettors’ to safeguard their lifeworlds, and taking themselves together to hold the future to account. www.tvtomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk http://libcom.org/blog/4271