

Twentieth-Century  
Literary Criticism

TCLC 327

Volume 327

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,  
Short-Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers  
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,  
from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**

**Lawrence J. Trudeau**  
*Editor*

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# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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## Preface

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Volumes 1 through 87 of TCLC featured authors who died between 1900 and 1959; beginning with Volume 88, the series expanded to include authors who died between 1900 and 1999. Beginning with Volume 26, every fourth volume of TCLC was devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers. With TCLC 285, the series returned to a standard author approach, with some entries devoted to a single important work of world literature and others devoted to literary topics.

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# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

<b>Derek Jarman 1942-1994</b> .....	1
<i>English screenwriter and filmmaker</i>	
<b>Naomi Mitchison 1897-1999</b> .....	99
<i>Scottish novelist, short-story and novella writer, poet, children's writer, playwright, nonfiction writer, biographer, and memoirist</i>	
<b>Henry Handel Richardson 1870-1946</b> .....	219
<i>Australian novelist, short-story writer, and essayist</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 325

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 447

TCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 471

TCLC-327 Title Index 479

# Derek Jarman

## 1942-1994

(Full name Michael Derek Elworthy Jarman) English screenwriter and filmmaker.

### INTRODUCTION

Derek Jarman was an avant-garde filmmaker active in the 1970s and 1980s whose influential visual style and low-budget, experimental films contrasted with the polished and staid mainstream studio films of his day. Jarman's background in painting and literature informed the poetic sensibility of his films, presenting imagery for its own sake rather than creating linear narratives with traditional character development. While his works are often personal, incorporating snippets of his family's home movies and details drawn from his diaries, they are also political, addressing issues of gay rights, criticizing governmental policies, and promoting causes related to AIDS activism.

Jarman often collaborated with his performers and crew, frequently conceiving and developing ideas during the course of filming. His uncompromising dedication to his personal vision and his modern, unconventional approach to filmmaking—as well as his compulsive recording of everyday life with his Super 8 camera—led some to call him the “Andy Warhol of London.” As biographer Tony Peake (1999; see Further Reading) observed, Carl Jung's writings about dreams and the unconscious greatly influenced Jarman, and critics have described much of his work as dream- and trancelike.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jarman was born on 31 January 1942 in Northwood, England, the son of a Royal Air Force officer from New Zealand. From the age of eight, he was educated at boarding school, where, in the company of other boys, he began to explore his sexuality. When he was nine years old, he climbed into the bed of another boy. When they were discovered, Jarman and the boy were beaten and publicly shamed. This episode had a lasting influence on his views of male eroticism and its relation to shame. At the age of thirteen, he entered Canford School where, under the tutelage of a sympathetic teacher, he developed an aptitude for painting. Jarman's interest in art led him to apply to the

Slade School of Art in 1960, but, due to his father's insistence, he first enrolled at King's College, London, to study literature and history. In addition to medieval authors, his favorite writers during this time included William Shakespeare, John Donne, Andrew Marvell, William Blake, and Matthew Arnold.

Jarman graduated from King's College in 1963, and that year, he began to pursue his art education at Slade, where he experienced a creative transformation. According to Rowland Wymer (2005; see Further Reading), his association with painter David Hockney and fashion designer Ossie Clarke, among others, placed him “at the centre of a revolutionary art scene” in 1960s Britain. After graduating from Slade in 1967, he worked as a set designer for ballet and theater productions, and in 1970, he was given the opportunity to devise the sets for Ken Russell's film *The Devils* (1971). His bold, stark creations were well received, and he collaborated with Russell again on *Savage Messiah* (1972). Working on these sets sparked Jarman's love of film, but, having seen the creative and financial pressures inherent in making studio-financed, big-budget movies, he decided to take his own filmmaking in the opposite direction. With a handheld Super 8 movie camera, he began making a series of short, personal films in the early 1970s. His first major feature film, *Sebastiane* (1976), was shot on 16mm film at a cost of \$45,000. A historical drama in Vulgate Latin about the life of a martyred Christian saint, the movie “was the first openly homoerotic film to be publicly screened in the UK,” as William Fowler (2014) observed. *Sebastiane's* straightforward portrayal of homosexuality depicted without shame or contrivance resonated with gay audiences. Jarman's next few films continued to delve into historical themes, often undercut by the use of anachronistic props or juxtapositions with the present day.

On 22 December 1986, Jarman was diagnosed as HIV positive. The films he made afterward took on heightened personal meaning and espoused an increasingly political viewpoint, expressing in particular his antipathy to the policies of the Conservative Party led by Margaret Thatcher. The messages in his films grew both more intimate and angry as he struggled to understand what it meant to be a gay man suffering from the disease in the 1980s. He began to agitate in favor of gay rights and HIV/AIDS awareness in the hopes of destigmatizing what was thought of as a

gay-male disease. In 1986, he bought a small fishing cottage in Dungeness, where he could write and garden in seclusion. One of his late films, *The Garden* (1990), is partially set in and around the cottage. Jarman died from complications of AIDS on 19 February 1994 at the age of fifty-two.

## MAJOR WORKS

Jarman's early 1970s Super 8 films attracted only a small audience beyond his limited group of friends and collaborators, although many were later edited into larger compilations, most notably the posthumous *Glitterbug* (1994). *Sebastiane* established many of his signature themes and visual hallmarks, including forthright depictions of unself-conscious male sexuality and homoerotic desire, skewed visions of Christian mythology and iconography, and juxtapositions of dreamlike imagery with realistic, gritty scenes. His interest in historical narratives and Renaissance literature continued in many of his subsequent films. In *Jubilee* (1978), Queen Elizabeth I and her court alchemist, John Dee, are transported four hundred years into the future, where they survey a lawlessly dystopian London. *The Tempest* (1979) is Jarman's take on Shakespeare's 1611 play, and *The Angelic Conversation* (1985) uses Shakespeare's sonnets as a backdrop for a gay-male romance, which he presents mostly in nonlinear images without dialog. The trend culminated in what many critics have considered his most accessible film, *Caravaggio* (1986), an exploration of the Italian Baroque painter's life that became the first feature film to be nominated for the Turner Prize.

Jarman's later films include *The Last of England* (1987), which expresses his anger and sorrow about the state of Britain, especially in relation to the treatment of homosexuals and PWAs (people with AIDS). Shot on Super 8 with tiny, handheld cameras and mainly using friends as actors, *The Last of England* combines symbolic set pieces with footage from home movies shot by Jarman's father. It is an expressionistic narrative of a postapocalyptic world in which people attempt to survive under the watchful eye of an oppressive state.

*Edward II* (1991), based on Christopher Marlowe's 1592-93 play of the same name, is considered a defining work in the New Queer Cinema, a genre identified in the early 1990s, and is often grouped with Todd Haynes's *Poison* (1991) and Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991). Shot on a sparsely constructed set of high stone walls and claustrophobic, mazelike corridors, the story is updated with modern-era costuming mixed with period props. Jarman focuses on and exaggerates the erotic, passionate, and doomed relationship between Edward and Piers Gaveston,

Earl of Cromwell. The film compares the homophobia of contemporary Britain and that of the Middle Ages, implying that little has changed.

Jarman's last film, *Blue* (1993)—which he made while undergoing advanced treatments for HIV that were causing him to go blind—is his most experimental and his simplest. For the duration of the film, the screen is filled with a static, monochromatic blue hue. The audio track consists of Jarman talking about a wide range of subjects, with elements of sound collage and a sparse musical score in the background. As Paul Attinello (2013) observed, *Blue* "is imbued with the problems of his final illness, and this blue blankness is an obvious reference to Jarman's cytomegalovirus-based blindness, as well as to his metaphorical expectations of death."

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Fowler noted that Jarman's films, especially *Sebastiane*, were well received by contemporary gay audiences but observed that movie reviewers were often critical. Sympathetic commentators have generally found that, for Jarman, making queer films—in which homoeroticism is placed at the center, though more frequently as subtext than subject—was both normative and political. Kirsten Waechter (1998) suggested that he used his films to create new versions of history in which homosexuality is a free and natural state of being. Daniel O'Quinn (1999) explained how the groups of outcasts Jarman chose as his subjects "demonstrate their strength and their resilience in the face of the personal, cultural, and social crisis of Thatcherite Britain." Other critics have discovered threads of traditionalism woven through Jarman's overtly experimental work. Fowler observed that despite his avant-garde tactics and angry polemics against the status quo, Jarman had respect and often reverence for certain aspects of British cultural tradition, concluding that "for all his bite, he was no traditional left-winger."

Some critics have focused on Jarman's frequent use of anachronistic elements and mixing of historical periods with the present day, such as when modern electronic devices turn up in the seventeenth-century world of *Caravaggio*, or the Scottish singer Annie Lennox appears as herself in the medieval setting of *Edward II*. The use of such incongruous objects and characters, Fowler argued, serves "to embody and carry potent meanings from both within and without the immediate context." Chris Lippard and Guy Johnson (1993) described how in *War Requiem* (1988), an adaptation of Benjamin Britten's 1962 oratorio commemorating those lost in World War I and World War II, Jarman "revives a historical narrative ...

and contaminates it with current political and social dimensions."

Because of the intimate nature of his films, critics have tended to read Jarman's main characters as stand-ins for himself. In *The Garden*, he appears as himself, and Attinello described how during the filming of *Edward II*, the filmmaker made on-the-spot alterations to the shooting script that symbolically transform "the king and his murderer into Jarman and his lover/rescuer." Lippard and Johnson argued that Jarman purposefully conflates his "private life and his public text" in his films.

Jonathan Kolstad

Academic Advisor: Brian Hoyle,  
The University of Dundee

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

*Sebastiane*. With Paul Humfress and James Whaley. Dir. Humfress and Derek Jarman. Cinegate, 1976. Film. (Screenplay)

*Jubilee*. Dir. Jarman. Cinegate, 1978. Film. (Screenplay)

*The Tempest*. Adapt. from *The Tempest*, by William Shakespeare. Dir. Jarman. Mainline, 1979. Film. (Screenplay)

*Dancing Ledge*. Ed. Shaun Allen. London: Quartet, 1984. Print. (Autobiography)

*The Angelic Conversation*. Adapt. from *Sonnets*, by Shakespeare. Dir. Jarman. British Film Inst./Channel Four, 1985. Film. (Screenplay)

*Caravaggio*. Dir. Jarman. Zeitgeist, 1986. Film. (Screenplay)

*Derek Jarman's Caravaggio: The Complete Film Script and Commentaries*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1986. Print. (Commentary and screenplay)

*The Last of England*. Dir. Jarman. Blue Dolphin, 1987. Film. (Screenplay)

*The Last of England*. Ed. David L. Hirst. London: Constable, 1987. Pub. as *Kicking the Pricks*. London: Vintage, 1996. Print. (Diary)

*War Requiem*. Adapt. from *War Requiem*, by Benjamin Britten. Dir. Jarman. Anglo Intl./BBC, 1988. Film. London: Faber and Faber, 1989. Print. (Screenplay)

*The Garden*. Dir. Jarman. Basilisk Communications, 1990. Film. (Screenplay)

*Edward II*. With Stephen McBride and Ken Butler. Adapt. from *Edward II*, by Christopher Marlowe. Dir. Jarman. Fine Line, 1991. Film. (Screenplay)

*Modern Nature: The Journals of Derek Jarman*. London: Century, 1991. Print. (Diaries)

*Queer Edward II*. London: British Film Inst., 1991. Print. (Nonfiction)

*At Your Own Risk: A Saint's Testament*. London: Hutchinson, 1992. Print. (Memoir)

*Blue*. Dir. Jarman. Zeitgeist, 1993. Film. (Screenplay)

*Wittgenstein*. With Terry Eagleton and Butler. Dir. Jarman. Zeitgeist, 1993. Film. Pub. as *Wittgenstein: The Terry Eagleton Script, the Derek Jarman Film*. London: British Film Inst., 1993. Print. (Screenplay)

*Glitterbug*. Dir. Jarman. BBC2. 5 Mar. 1994. Television. (Teleplay)

*Chroma: A Book of Colour*. Woodstock: Overlook, 1995. Print. (Nonfiction)

*Derek Jarman's Garden*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1995. Print. (Poetry and prose)

*Up in the Air: Collected Film Scripts*. London: Vintage, 1996. Print. (Screenplays)

*Smiling in Slow Motion*. Ed. Keith Collins. London: Century, 2000. Print. (Diaries)

*Derek Jarman's Sketchbooks*. Ed. Stephen Farthing and Ed Webb-Ingall. London: Thames and Hudson, 2013. Print. (Poetry, screenplays, and sketches)

## CRITICISM

**Chris Lippard and Guy Johnson (essay date 1993)**

SOURCE: Lippard, Chris, and Guy Johnson. "Private Practice, Public Health: The Politics of Sickness and the Films of Derek Jarman." *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*. Ed. Lester Friedman. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993. 278-93. Print.

[In the following essay, Lippard and Johnson examine Jarman's depiction of the suffering male body in his work. They pay particular attention to Jarman's decision to make his own suffering and illness well known to the public.]

There's no place like the HOME-movie.

Derek Jarman

Health for me is more than being not-yet-dead. It's not something you patrol; it's something you must forget to patrol or it's not any sort of health at all.

Adam Mars-Jones, "Remission"

It is vital to underline yet again that art is the spark between private lives and the public.

Derek Jarman

The "private function" that provides both the title and the narrative climax of Malcolm Mowbray's 1984 film set in postwar Yorkshire is ostensibly the pork dinner that Dr. Swaby (Denholm Eliot) and his allies in the town's privileged classes will throw to honor Britain's newly married royal couple.<sup>1</sup> The title, however, refers not only to this single event but also to a social practice and an institution just then being converted from a private to a public function. In November 1946 the newly elected Labour government passed an act of Parliament creating Britain's National Health Service (NHS)—a response to, perhaps a reward for, the trauma of the just-won war. It established that medical consultation and treatment should be free to all and that health was a public issue. *A Private Function* sets up an opposition between Swaby, the upper-class medical man, and the town chiropodist, Gilbert Chilvers (Michael Palin). We first see Swaby blithely engaged in crossing names off the list of invitees to the private function; in the adjoining room, Chilvers works diagnosing chilblains and scraping at hard skin. His work with feet—and women's feet at that—puts Chilvers on the lowest rung of the medical ladder and makes him the focus of Swaby's contemptuous annoyance: "Why we need chiropodists, I don't know: something wrong with their feet, people can come to me. They'd always find a sympathetic hearing," he declares petulantly.

But in fact this is just what Swaby does not want to happen. The threat of a new public health system that allows free access to doctors and attempts to abolish the exclusive right of the privileged class to be "well treated" clearly challenges his prestigious social position. Vexed by the theft of the pig he had been fattening for consumption at the private function, Swaby lets fly at postwar British society: "Of course, practical socialism, that's what it's going to be like now . . . what's mine is yours. What a nasty piss-stained country this is. . . . It's like this new health service. Do you realize that any little poorly pillock is now going to be able to knock on my door and say I'm ill, treat me. Anybody! Me!"

Arrogant and patronizing, Dr. Swaby is the villain of the piece, a medical man who boasts of having no feelings and ridicules Chilvers for his qualms about butchering the pig. But such sentiments are not the common British perception of the medical profession. Indeed, what Swaby here predicts developed under the NHS into a system whereby general practitioners (G.P.'s) typically became family doctors dispensing prescriptions and a reliable "bedside man-

ner." These doctors were the point at which an ill public first encountered the human face of a state system that gave the poor(ly) an equal chance at the best attention available in the land. Thus in Britain, for a whole generation, the idea of health became firmly linked to a conception of the state as a caring institution that provided for its people's physical well-being.

In the 1980s, however, the notion of private, rather than public, functions took on renewed pertinence, so it remains possible to read the analysis of social class and medical practice found in *A Private Function* as commentary on Margaret Thatcher's radically free market policies and gradual reprivatization of many of the industries taken into public ownership at the end of the war. In due course, the National Health Service, too, came up for review. Unlike other postwar nationalizations, however, the Health Service had developed the status of a consensus issue, so when the government published its white paper, "Working for Patients," at the end of January 1989, both the British Medical Association (BMA) and most of the British population—the consumers, the prospective patients—reacted adversely.<sup>2</sup> The queen's speech to Parliament in November 1989 announced that "a bill will be brought forward to improve the National Health Service and the management of community care."<sup>3</sup> At the end of June 1990, the NHS and Community Care Bill became law, offering G.P.'s the chance to manage their own budgets and hospitals the opportunity to abandon the NHS in favor of a self-governing status where they might compete for custom by offering patient services more attractive than those of rival institutions. In line with its advocacy of self-reliance, the Thatcher government also sought to put "the utmost importance on caring for people in their own home" (*Politics Today*, May 19, 1990, 179). At the time of writing, the post-Thatcher Tory government's major problem with the electorate seems to be that its policies are perceived to offer a diminution, not an extension of care.

\* \* \*

Issues of health and illness have long preoccupied British filmmakers. In the fifties and sixties, for example, the hospital setting, with its potential for undressing, disturbed bodily functions, and hierarchies ripe for toppling offered the long-running series of *Carry On* films the ideal setting for their sexual innuendo and puncturing of pomposity (Johnson). Jack Gold's film version of Peter Nicholls's *The National Health* plowed the same furrow in 1973. In the Thatcher era, Lindsay Anderson, who previously dissected the British institution of the public school in *If . . .* (1968),<sup>4</sup> focused his attention on the hospital as an ideal microcosm of a class-riddled, self-serving society.

Anderson's *Brittania Hospital* (1982) tells the story of a day in the life of a hospital on the occasion of a royal visit, a series of strikes by the support staff, and the megalomaniac head surgeon's attempted completion of a new Frankenstein-style composite man. Anderson's hospital functions as a clear allegory for a sick, deluded country, one strangled by a useless monarchy, a cruel and insensitive prime minister, and a work-shy labor force. His film uses the hospital to attach itself to the same stereotypical class markers as, say, the *Carry On* series. But though it may be as vicious a critique of Thatcherism as any in British film, *Brittania Hospital* offers little alternative space for either social progress or cinematic practice.<sup>5</sup>

The eighties, which began with Colin Welland's cry, as he picked up the Oscar for *Chariots of Fire* (1981), that the "British are coming,"<sup>6</sup> were marked by alternating declamations of the British cinema's health or sickness, and in 1985 Alexander Walker applied Anderson's title to his assessment of the state of the film industry in Britain. Walker concludes his survey of the current practices of British film production, *National Heroes*, with a section "Renaissance or Remission?" in which he speculates about whether signs of healthy life in the quality of domestic features in the first half of the decade will sufficiently outweigh the difficulties of production in the United Kingdom. His final words tend toward the pessimistic: in these years "Brittania Hospital was still open for business: but that perpetual patient, the British film industry, needed to have a lot of faith in the doctors treating it" (Walker, 272).

At the beginning of 1988 the metaphor of contagion resurfaced in the national press when Oxford historian and regular Thatcher adviser Norman Stone took Britain's sick cinema to task in the review section of the archly conservative *Sunday Times*. Stone contrasts the "sick scenes from English life" that he finds in the work of a "worthless and insulting . . . farrago of films" (*Sunday Times*, Jan. 10, 1988, pp. C1-2) with the work of Britain's cinema of quality, past (Lean, Powell, Reed, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*) and present (*Hope and Glory*, *A Passage to India*). Stone accuses the "sick," pessimistic films of a "two-dimensional ideology," lack of plot and no sense of tradition. In passing, he betrays a streak of homophobia, as, surveying the contents of his chosen few, he writes that "there is much explicit sex, a surprising amount of it homosexual and sadistic." At the head of the first page of Stone's article rests a still from Derek Jarman's *The Last of England* (1987): a hooded figure points a machine gun at a few huddled figures gathered on the side of one of London's abandoned docks. Jarman's film exemplifies all the sickness Stone finds in the cinema, and he concludes his section by acknowledging that "I do not really know what

[t]his film is about and fear that its director is all dressed up with nowhere to go."

In the following week's paper, Jarman responded to Stone, arguing that, as a forty-six-year-old director, his films were, in fact, a part of British film history and tradition. He points out that two of his six films (*The Tempest* [1979] and *The Angelic Conversation* [1985] have been inspired by Shakespeare;<sup>7</sup> but more important, perhaps, he argues against Stone's view of Britishness—"all beefeaters and hollyhocks"—in order to defend the decay that permeates *The Last of England* as an accurate reflection of Thatcher's Britain.<sup>8</sup> In this essay, we choose to retain and reclaim Stone's term for Jarman's cinema: its "sickness" is a crucial part of its practice. Refusing Stone's and Thatcher's sense of a healthy Britain and a healthy film practice, Jarman attempts to "re-fuse" an active, critical, contaminated cinema of formal experimentation and social critique, one which is both intensely private and willfully public.

As Thatcher came to power in 1979, another filmic experimenter, Peter Greenaway, was completing *The Falls*, his three-hour "medical survey" of a cross section of the nineteen million people in Britain suffering from the Violent Unknown Event (VUE). His film details, in ninety-two segments, the various infections and strangely disturbed bodies of all those in the VUE directory whose names begin with the letters "F-A-L-L." Greenaway's project was an elaborate fiction, a postmodern creation of an alternate, parallel world of humans become birds, water, speakers of exotic languages, and, indeed, immortals. At the same time in New York and Los Angeles, doctors were noticing the oddity of a series of deaths in the gay population from a skin cancer, Kaposi's sarcoma—the first step toward the identification of a previously unknown and terribly violent disease: the AIDS virus. By the time *The Last of England* was released Jarman had been diagnosed as HIV-positive. The greatest threat to public health in the Thatcher decade had arrived in the body of the anti-Thatcher cinema.<sup>9</sup>

\* \* \*

In 1975 Derek Jarman filmed the killing of a pig in a different setting from that of Michael Palin's. In *Sebastiane*, a group of naked Roman soldiers banished to a remote Mediterranean island spear a boar in counterpoint to the delirious ravings of one of their number, Sebastiane. He is pegged out on the sand to suffer the heat of the murderous sun, having refused the seduction of the centurion. In this film the impalement and laceration undergone by the pig points out a larger pattern of meaning, as the film's climax displays Sebastiane half flayed, tied to a pole and shot through with arrows that crucify him. The ecstasy

etched onto the facial close-up evokes innumerable classical renditions of Christ's agony, and Jarman's slow-motion effects foreground both the static, pictorial nature of the composition and the filmic medium that depicts it.

Jarman's earliest and least-shown film bears some important motifs and ideas to be reconfigured in his later work. At its heart is the idea of the suffering (male) body, which we see here impaled against a pole, cut and sliced, imagining another, better place. In Jarman's films the recurrence of the body seen in various degrees of suffering is richly significant, and it may be explored in two ways: first, to understand how the suffering body grounds the narratives of the films, such that the stories told in them are never far from bodies in pain; and second, to examine how a filmmaking practice of stories shaped by suffering offers an opportunity to see the larger issues at work in the interplay of health, sexuality, and storytelling. It is across these three areas that the condition of AIDS is stretched, and within which Jarman's films articulate a personal understanding of dis-ease.

Suffering male bodies recur in Jarman's work: in *Caravaggio* (1986), the painter (Nigel Terry) is dying and stabs and is stabbed by his lover, Ranuccio (Sean Bean); *The Last of England* echoes with gunfire and shows us the execution of a young man; *War Requiem* (1989) mourns and re-images the slaughter of an entire generation of young men; in *The Garden* (1991), the male lovers are flayed and the filmmaker appears in a hospital bed. Derek Jarman carries the AIDS virus, suffers from its effects, and came close to death during the production of his films. Rather than respect a distance between the filmmaker's private life and his public text, Jarman encourages us to compare the two. This is especially clear in *Caravaggio*, the biography of the Renaissance painter celebrated for his use of a "cinematic" lighting scheme, the life story of a gay artist negotiating the patronage of the powerful while always pressed to the margins.

"I feel I have to write this book, coughing and spitting with bloody bronchitis," Jarman writes later of the notes that accompany *The Last of England* (Jarman 1987, 66). The idea of production under pressure saturates *Caravaggio*, shot on a strictly controlled budget within the confines of an old London docklands warehouse. The film begins and ends in a hospital at Porto Ercole where the painter lies dying; the sickness that seizes him involves the fetching up of his body's fluids, hawked up in spasms that rip the fabric of his otherwise delirious, still life. From the deathbed, the film builds a biography as a collection of flashbacks diluted from the paintings of Caravaggio's career, and the story flows between these reconstituted scenes as they restage the familiar paintings. Incoherence is built into the text, and it is Jarman's accompanying book that

provides much-needed "plot" information. But while the film is a delirious one, driven by the ebbing life-force of the painter, a definite logic governs the narrative that can be traced back to the suffering body at its center.

Caravaggio is dying, and he endures pain of many colors. Feverish through much of the film, stabbed, afforded no other embrace than those of the people whose deaths he causes, the painter of "wounded paintings" fades out, dissolving to nothing, fighting the draining of his vital spirit with the ejaculations of remembered desire for his adolescent lover, Pasqualone. The film is pressed out from the concentrate of the paintings, mixed up from the paste of scenes, governed and grounded by a continual and regular return to the deathbed of the master painter. The film appears as a system of hallucinations geared to his desire for love and his resistance to death. It stutters between still lives, bleeding all the while the meaning that we drain off from the body of the text.

The film is a set of dissolves between paintings but is also about cuts, or slashes. Thus a particular importance is attached to Caravaggio's knife and to the stabbings in the film, the wounding and daubing of blood on flesh that match the painter's smearing paint onto canvases. This fusion of images occurs particularly at the moments when Ranuccio delivers Caravaggio a stigmata-like wound in a brawl, and in Caravaggio's betrayal of Ranuccio. In the second incident, Caravaggio looks squarely into the face of the one he has painted and loved, and delivers a final, slashing stroke.

Under the sign of suffering, the film text stands in a relation to both realism and to the visual style of Caravaggio's paintings. In reproducing the scenes from the painter's canon the film, rather than simply duplicating the originals, gives the sense of an entirely painted world that at certain moments nudges up against the configurations of people and props familiar from the artist's compositions. Yet the visual style is not entirely coherent: regular disturbances destabilize consistency throughout the film. Rather than disrupting a stylistic convention, Ranuccio tending his motorcycle, the Vatican financier tapping a golden calculator, and the critic seen at his typewriter become part of a visual pattern marked by instability. The effect is at the core of Jarman's work, promoting a positive sense of incoherence in which the dis-ease of the text becomes linked to the disease (and suffering) of the artist.

This sense of pleasing jarring occurs similarly on the sound track in the film, when the hubbub of an antiquated PA system and the distant sound of a steam train do not dissolve the realism of Renaissance Italy but assert a filmic region less tethered in time and space. "A-sad-reflection-of-