Chapter Twenty Eight

Music Maketh Man: Meritocracy in *Kingsman: The Secret Service*

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This chapter considers ways in which the use of music in narrative film can emphasize, reinforce, and problematize aspects of social class. It explores the function of film music in relation to a range of class theories and perspectives, but particularly focuses on meritocracy. The possibility of upward social mobility based on talent, effort, and achievement is fundamental to mythic narrative structures and is continually reinforced in films. While some aspects of identity politics have consistently been explored in screen music studies—with particular attention given to nationalism, gender, and some of the institutions of screen music creation and dissemination—very little scholarly work specifically explores film music and social class.[1] This is partially due to the challenge of connecting individual narratives and collective social issues, but it is also because music has too often been used, unimaginatively, as a flat representational mirror (e.g. classical music = posh). Furthermore, it is often difficult to disentangle aspects of social class, social mobility, or inequality from other more obvious and instrumental narrative drivers such as race or gender. Finally, concrete parallels between social theory and audiovisual practices are hard to pin down because class is a deeply contested and notoriously elusive term. Here I put forward several ways to think about music, film, class, and meritocracy in order to look beyond the question of music as a simple cultural marker of taste and towards an understanding of how film's spaces are fundamental in replicating, shaping, and testing conceptions of social class.

This chapter focuses on Britain, primarily because the UK class system is the one I know best, but also because it is clearly defined in the public imagination and is equally perceived to be relatively open inasmuch as it, theoretically, allows movement and interaction between strata under certain situations (in comparison to, say, the Indian Caste system). If class definitions are no longer simply vertical rankings linked to economic capital and a system of production, it is theoretically possible to hold multiple class identities, or to be able to move fluidly on the basis of talent and effort. To what extent is the supposed conceptual fluidity of social mobility supported or constrained by the use of music in film? What can film music contribute to discussions about meritocracy?

I will use *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015) as a case study because it helpfully centralizes aspects of contemporary class culture and social mobility, and it is also acutely aware of its generic heritage in relation to the British gentleman-spy movie. A young and aimless Gary Unwin (Eggsy) lives in a south-London housing estate and seems to be on a downwards trajectory, but his potential is spotted by the stylish Harry Hart (codename Galahad) who recruits him as a trainee for a secret, independent spy agency. According to Hart a gentleman transcends class. There is no need to be superior to others, rather, nobility arises from being superior to your former self, an idea exemplified by the recurrent phrase "manners maketh man." *Kingsman* espouses pure meritocracy but it also flaunts upper-class superiority while playing with filmic tropes of the gentleman spy. The central character must discard his underclass past by adopting upper-class aesthetics and performativity in order to become part of an "old boy network" and find his true self. This journey from "chav" to chap and the attendant establishment of capital is supported by the use of popular music. In this chapter I will focus on two songs that are used as narrative scaffolding for Eggsy's climb up the meritocractic ladder. Dizzee Rascal's "Bonkers" is used in early scenes of joyriding, but

later when Eggsy has learned the trappings of gentlemanly sophistication his transformation is marked by Bryan Ferry's "Slave to Love". On the one hand, this use of music represents social mobility, pure and simple, a reflection of development through effort, achievement, and ability, but I argue that the film is also more alert to contemporary class issues and the problems of meritocracy than this. The use of this music in *Kingsman* functions as a self-aware liberal-elite fantasy of meritocracy whilst also synchronously undermining that same conceptualisation. Part of its success lies in the way that it skilfully mobilizes historical and contemporary British conceptions of class to simultaneously uphold and undercut them in a manner that reflects many of the inherent contradictions and complexities of meritocracy theory and class identity in the UK. An analysis of the use of music, therefore, can animate more subtle readings of the class issues in this film and shows how concepts of meritocracy, inequality, and social status can be useful guiding tools in screen music analysis.

Conceptualizations of Class and Meritocracy

Class is always, to a certain extent, a subjective categorization that attempts to define groups of people within a society who possess similar socioeconomic status. There is no single agreed definition of the class concept nor a clear way to measure it, but research has broadly been pursued within two main traditions, the neo-Marxist and Neo-Weberian schools, which Rosemary Crompton defines as the "classical inheritance" (1995: 43). The Marxist tradition combined political practice with social theory in order to explain "how the dynamics of capitalism, based on class inequality, led to a practical politics of class struggle" (Savage 2000: 9). The Weberian tradition has developed a theory of class that reflects the interplay between wealth, prestige, and power in order to define social layers. Eric Wright has argued that there are, in fact, numerous commonalities between the attitudes of the

two “founding fathers,” but the main difference between them is a concept of class based on “the problem of life chances in Weber and a concept rooted in the problem of exploitation in Marx” (Wright 2002: 832). There are, of course, many other strands of research relating to these two underpinning traditions (for a useful summary see Crompton *et al.* 2000; Wright 2005).

A significant terminological preoccupation has related to the use of the term *stratification*. Although *class* and *stratification* are often used interchangeably, stratification is the more general term that identifies hierarchical positioning in social relationships and describes structures of inequality that could be influenced by a range of interweaving factors, such as age, gender, ethnicity, income, religion, and so on. Indeed, many scholars argue that their stratification schemes are relational not gradational, so that unequal social positions are connected through relations of exploitation and domination. The term *class*, at least within the social sciences literature, is more frequently reserved for descriptions of material inequalities. Indeed, classes are typically and primarily defined on the basis that members of a class earn a living in a similar way. The significance of this semantic distinction will become clear when we come to explore a variety of stratification schemas in due course. A recurrent argument in stratification analysis is that inequalities persist because “those groupings who enjoy positions of superior advantage and disadvantage cannot be expected to yield them up without a struggle, but will rather typically seek to exploit the resources they can command in order to preserve their superiority” (Goldthorpe *et al*. 1980: 28). Stratification, then, is about systematic inequalities based on groups and not about individual inequalities. It is shaped and supported by society as a whole where inequalities are repeated because some people can exploit their advantages more effectively than those with fewer resources. In other words, stratification is a function of interactions within the

relations of power and distribution. However, there are divergent opinions as to whether this is primarily an economic or a sociocultural process.

One highly influential approach was developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984). As a means of examining power relationships he identified three main types of capital: (1) economic capital (income, property, and assets), (2) cultural capital (appreciation of and engagement with cultural outputs and the authority afforded through educational achievement), and (3) social capital (it's not what you know, but who you know: networks, contacts, and connections). Bourdieu suggested that people possess and use different amounts of resources within these three forms of overlapping capital. He used the idea of a *field*, a social area where people compete for resources, to define how social position is based on the structures in power relationships. He also coined the term *habitus* to describe socialized impulses that guide thinking and behaviour, which are concentrated in deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions. His main point was that stratification should not be understood purely through economic categories but also through the complex interrelationships between social and cultural distinction. Indeed, to further explain this, Bourdieu added a fourth, more abstract, type of capital which he called symbolic capital. This identified honor or prestige, a reputation for competence and respectability, as a fundamental source of power (a commonly used example is the symbolic capital of the war hero running for political office). Like money or status symbolic capital reifies social difference but performs the trick of seeming like a natural or an intrinsic quality, rather than something that a person has inherited from their family, acquired through competition, or learned through education. Symbolic capital, then, coexists with social, cultural, and economic capital, but provides frameworks of exclusion and selection that are not perceived to be oppressive. Bourdieu argued that it acts like a quasi-magical force that contributes to

the reproduction of the social order, it is “the form assumed by these different kinds of capital when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (1989: 17; see also Bourdieu 1986).

In recent decades there have been recurrent challenges to the relevance of class analysis as a means of explaining lived reality. Pakulski, for example, describes how the stratification of Marxist and Weberian models has been disrupted by postmodernization which “constitutes an earthquake destroying the formerly well-articulated, clustered, and layered class and status formations” (2005: 176). In this way of thinking, patterns of inequality have become so fluid and complicated that it is increasingly challenging to identify consistent economic processes of exploitation. Identities and collective action are no longer primarily structured according to class, and we are, therefore, heading towards a classless society (Kingston 2000). However, in the UK economic inequality remains high relative to many other developed countries. Recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) figures, for example, suggest that the UK has among the highest levels of income inequality in the European Union (2015). The wealth held by the top ten percent of households is around nine times greater than the wealth of the bottom half of all households combined. The 2008 financial crash appears to have slowed rates of income inequality, yet, total wealth inequality remained stable between 2006 and 2016. There is, consequently, evidence of a polarized British society with systematically different amounts of capital. Savage argues that the British class system is fracturing horizontally, at the same time as social divisions are becoming more deeply embedded, “which demonstrates that class divisions remain very powerful—even if they have changed in their nature” (Savage 2013). It is unsurprising, then, that within this context notions of social mobility are

prevalent and have been a particular preoccupation in the UK, such that the concept of meritocracy is an especially charged one.

The term meritocracy was coined by Michael Young in 1958. His book, *The Rise of the Meritocracy 1870–2033*, was a dystopian satire on the education system in the UK at the time. State-funded secondary education was organized into a tripartite system: grammar schools (a highly academic curriculum for the most intellectually able twenty-five percent of the school population), secondary technical schools (designed to instruct children in mechanical and scientific subjects), and secondary modern schools (designed to provide practical training for less-skilled jobs). The "appropriate" type of school for each student was determined by their performance in the 11-plus, an examination taken in the final year of primary school. The prevailing perception was that this system would provide an excellent merit-based education for any capable child regardless of their background. It would, therefore, encourage social mobility and dissolve class barriers. Opposing this view, Young argued that, contrary to its stated aims, a pure meritocracy would simply perpetuate inequalities. He predicted a gradual restructuring and subsequent strengthening of classes based increasingly on merit rather than succession, which would eventually bring about a tightly stratified society, divided according to intelligence.

Interestingly, Young's pejorative use of the term meritocracy was, in subsequent generations, transformed into an entirely positive archetype, frequently invoked by political leaders in the UK. As Jo Littler argued "the language of meritocracy has become an alibi for plutocracy and a key ideological term in the reproduction of neoliberal culture" (Littler 2018: 2). Indeed, Littler argued that the gradual mobilization of the term into a positive ideal found its apotheosis in the New Labour policy discourse of The Third Way in the late 1990s, and that Tony Blair used the term meritocracy "more than any other prime minister"

and in a “wholly favourable way” (Littler 2018: 86). Its main features are an endorsement of competitive social mobility, equality of opportunity versus equality of outcome, and a post-class conceptualization that underplays the role of inequality in perpetuating inequality. As Littler argued, it functions as an “ideological myth to obscure inequalities, including the role this discourse of meritocracy itself plays in actually curtailing social mobility.” She concluded that the myth of mobility is used to “create the idea of a level playing field that does not exist” (2018: 50).

The power inherent in this myth is frequently invoked by scholars of meritocracy (Bloodworth 2016; McNamee 2018). This suggests that meritocracy is a widely held symbolic and comforting narrative that presents itself as authoritative even if it is at variance with lived experience. As Thomas Piketty argued, the numerous versions of this kind of thinking are what he called “meritocratic extremism” (2013: 344), a societal need to lavishly reward individuals if they are perceived as “winners” and seem to have been chosen on the basis of hard work rather than background (think of the numerous species of reality television, for example). The important point to note here is that through the meritocratic myth social disadvantage is refocused on the individual rather than on any problems of structural mobility. Within this kind of framework, individual inequality can simply be overcome through aspiration, will power, and effort. As James Bloodworth observed: “By attributing poverty to personal failure, meritocracy is invariably useful in attempting to justify excessive rewards” (2016: 133).

Returning to Bourdieu, then, we can see how the very idea of meritocracy can be deployed as a form of symbolic capital acting as an expression of what he described as *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu 1990: 122–134). This is where a dominant group accepts the legitimacy of its domination (in this case, the equal right to compete for unequal status)

and, without employing physical violence or intimidation, imposes a legitimate vision of the social world that ensures the reproduction of oppression, but which is not seen as such. Individual social positions are misrecognized as the direct results of individual achievement through meritocracy. Indeed, the subjected groups promote the relations of domination over each other confirming the mythic status of this vision and guaranteeing its continued existence. Every reproduction strategy, argued Bourdieu, is "at the same time a legitimacy strategy aimed at consecrating both an exclusive appropriation and its reproduction" (1986: 254). If we accept that there are powerful societal myths of meritocracy at work, then how do these function in relation to the actual measured and reported stratification schemas in the UK?

British Stratification

The British popular imagination has it that there are three classes: upper, middle, and lower. This three-strata model is deftly illustrated by a well-known satirical sketch from *The Frost Report* that was first broadcast on the 7th April 1966 (Fig. 28.1). This enduring perception is a simplification that is apparent in a range of social situations but differs significantly from historic and official UK methods of calculating and defining class. The Registrar General's Class Scheme was first used in the 1911 census but remained the UK Government's official schema until 1998 (Table 28.1). It was established so that mortality rates could be mapped against different types of job and appropriate protective measures could be taken to support vulnerable sections of the population. From 1921 onwards five social classes were listed, but in 1970 this was slightly amended by splitting social class III into manual (IIIM) and non-manual (IIINM) fractions, resulting in six social class categories.

Fig. 28.1. *Frost on Sunday*, "The Class Sketch" with John Cleese (Upper), Ronnie Barker (Middle) and Ronnie Corbett (Lower). c. 1970. Used under license from Shutterstock.com.

Barker: I look up to him [Cleese] because he is upper class, but I look down on him [Corbett] because he is lower class. I am middle class.
Corbett: I know my place.

Table. 28.1. Registrar General's Class Schema, c. 1970

I	Professional etc. Occupations
II	Intermediate Occupations
IIINM	Skilled Non-manual Occupations
IIIM	Skilled Manual Occupations
IV	Partly-skilled Occupations
V	Unskilled Occupations

The schema attempted to model a society that comprised upper-middle, a middle, and a working class, where the middle included both non-manual workers and skilled workers. It was an ordinal measure of prestige, although claims that the model reflected popular perceptions of status were never substantiated. The Office of Population Censuses

and Surveys described the classification of groups as “homogeneous in relation to the basic criterion of the general standing within the community,” (OPCS 1970: x) but after 1981 the categorization was justified in terms of levels of “skill”. Both of these are, of course, methodologically problematic (see Bland 1979; Brewer 1986).

The National Statistics, Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) class schema was adopted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 1998 based on research undertaken by John Goldthorpe in the early-1970s. In contrast to the RGCS, it classified simultaneously according to the type of work, different labor market situations, and location in systems of authority at work (Office of National Statistics 2016). One criticism of the schema was that it did not recognize an upper or capitalist class, which it justified because its classification was by type of work not inherited wealth. It did, however, add a kind-of self-employed “petit bourgeoisie” as well as an underclass to identify the long-term unemployed. It also distinguished between a middle class of managers/professionals and the working class (Table 28.2).

Table 28.2. NS-SEC Class Schema

1	Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations 1.1 Large employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations 1.2 Higher professional occupations
2	Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations
3	Intermediate occupations
4	Small employers and own account workers
5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations
6	Semi-routine occupations
7	Routine occupations
8	Never worked and long-term unemployed

Conceptions of class in the popular imagination, were provocatively challenged by the Great British Class Survey, a web survey hosted by the BBC, which ran from January

2011 until July 2013. 161,400 people responded making it the largest data set in the world that specifically focused on social class (Savage *et al.* 2014). However, there was also a significant sample composition bias, with the respondents primarily drawn from well-educated, professional, and managerial groupings. For many critics this invalidated the schema. It defined seven classes, but importantly, also considered economic, cultural, and social capital (after Bourdieu) in order to define its categorizations (Table 28.3). This included gathering information on income, property ownership, and social connections, as well as cultural questions identifying whether participants went to the theatre, museums or galleries, listened to jazz or opera, used Facebook/Twitter, played video games, and so on (Savage *et al.* 2014).

Table 28.3. The Great British Class Survey, Seven-class Schema and Definitions (BBC Science 2013)

Elite	The most privileged class in Great Britain who have high levels of all three capitals. Their high amount of economic capital sets them apart from everyone else.
Established Middle Class	Members of this class have high levels of all three capitals although not as high as the Elite. They are a gregarious and culturally engaged class.
Technical Middle Class	This is a new, small class with high economic capital but seem less culturally engaged. They have relatively few social contacts and so are less socially engaged.
New Affluent Workers	This class has medium levels of economic capital and higher levels of cultural and social capital. They are a young and active group.
Traditional Working Class	This class scores low on all forms of the three capitals although they are not the poorest group. The average age of this class is older than the others.
Emergent Service Workers	This new class has low economic capital but has high levels of 'emerging' cultural capital and high social capital. This group are young and often found in urban areas.
Precariat	This is the most deprived class of all with low levels of economic, cultural and social capital. The everyday lives of members of this class are precarious.

Reflecting on some of the class schemas used both officially and unofficially in the UK, it is interesting to observe how class consciousness differs from class awareness or class

identification (See Devine *et al.* 2005). According to Savage, class-consciousness is not especially developed nor are class identities particularly strong in British society. He admits that class is certainly widely used to make sense of some aspects of British society, but "Britain is not a deeply class-conscious society, where class is seen as embodying membership of collective groups" (Savage 2000: 40). Class identification, for Savage, is contextual and of limited significance rather than acting as a major source of group belonging or group action.

It is fascinating, then, to consider what was revealed by the 33rd British Social Attitudes Survey (Curtice, Phillips, and Clery 2015). This annual survey typically explores a range of issues, but in light of the 2008 financial crash, increasing inequality, and the impact of austerity, it reconsidered the question of class and found that in British society there is a "working class of the mind" (Evans and Mellon 2015: 2). When prompted, 60% of the public identified as working class, compared with 40% who identified as middle class, but this proportion had not changed since 1983, despite a very clear decrease in the size of the British working class. Astonishingly, 47% of those classified in managerial and professional jobs considered themselves working class. People who identified themselves as working class were also more likely than those who identified themselves as middle class to believe in a significant divide between social classes, 82% compared with 70% (2015: 1). According to Evans and Mellon this differs from the United States where the proportion of people identifying as working class has more closely followed the decline in working-class jobs (2015: 4). The desire for some aspects of working-class identity, therefore, appears to remain widespread in Britain. This is highly relevant for our purposes, because there are clear differences in the actual measurement and identification of class and the prevailing popular perception. Meritocracy as narrative is fundamentally driven by this kind of popular

perception. The three-tiered social structure of upper, middle, and working-class is technically outmoded as it no longer reflects contemporary occupations or lifestyles. And yet, these perceptions endure. I would argue that they do so as cultural-narrative super-schemas, that are amplified at certain moments in history (such as in periods of financial austerity, or in moments of national insecurity following political crises). Popular British attitudes towards class and an attendant meritocratic sensitivity enable films such as *Kingsman* to resonate with its audience and, indeed, they are fundamental to the conceptual formation of such movies in the first place. As we shall see, however, music can play an important role in both reinforcing and undermining these attitudes.

***Kingsman*: From "Chav" to Chap?**

The gentleman spy, according to David Stafford, has its roots in the Edwardian novel and was developed in the Victorian era where the paradigm of the British secret agent emerged and became established as a stereotype in response to perceptions of Britain's place within the international order as well as concerns that the working class, excited by foreign political ideologies, could no longer be relied upon to defend the nation against external threats. Stafford argued that: "The fictional British agent, in direct contrast with his foreign opponent, was and remained despite his activities, quintessentially a gentleman" (1981: 491). This idea finds its apotheosis in the James Bond novels and film series where the "anti-hero" protagonist is, according to Chapman, "differentiated from other action movies through the character of James Bond himself" (2000: 22). Bond is superficially sophisticated with an upper-class appreciation of fine pleasures, but he is also capable of persistent cruel violence. The traditional hero only kills when absolutely necessary, but Bond has absolutely no reservations about killing in cold blood. Bond's masculinity, then, is a potent combination

of traditional aspects of the gentleman (style, sophistication, duty) with swashbuckling violence and hedonistic sexuality. *Kingsman*: *The Secret Service* is acutely aware of this cultural and cinematic heritage, so much so that Moffat and Bond argue that it "alternates between pastiche and homage" (2017: 357).

The film is also fully aware of the class stereotypes it portrays and if the gentleman spy is its ultimate meritocratic goal then the starting point is its stratigraphic opposite. The central character, Eggsy, is initially portrayed as a "chav." This insulting term, used to categorize a type of loutish British youth, was popularized in the early-2000s by the British media to identify a lawless youth subculture whose way of speaking, dressing, and behaving was believed to show a lack of education and to confirm low social class. Keith Hayward (2006) and Owen Jones (2012) have highlighted the prejudices at the heart of this caricature and have argued that the term represented a socially acceptable form of class hatred. On the surface, Eggsy's transformation in *Kingsman* is, therefore, a familiar meritocratic tale (Figure 28.2). He must discard his previous "bad" outlook, clothes, and behavior and must learn "good" manners, skills (based on his inherent natural talent), and demonstrate a clear set of principled moral values (honesty, integrity, loyalty). At face value the music also supports this transformation. However, both film and music play with these tropes in a way that reveals a more subtle reading of the British class system.

First and foremost, it is important to note that Eggsy's father was a former Kingsman. The attributes of the gentleman spy, therefore, are inherently (genetically) within him and it is merely his social circumstance that has prevented him from succeeding. The score tells us this from the outset. The main *Kingsman* thematic material is associated with Eggsy early on and reaches epic orchestrated status when he first enters the organisation's UK headquarters. His Pygmalion-like mentor Harry Hart says, "your father had the same

look on his face." Eggsy is, therefore, already Kingsman material. He simply needs to search for his true self, which the music suggests has been present all along. Hart also challenges Eggsy in relation to his heritage stating that his father would be disappointed in the life choices he has made which have prevented him from overcoming social barriers. Thus, the meritocratic myth is focused on individual determination rather than structural inequality.

> **Harry Hart:** Huge IQ. Great Performance at primary school. Then it all went tits up. Drugs. Petty crime and never had a job.
> **Eggsy:** Oh, you think there's a lot of jobs going around here do you?
> **Harry Hart:** Doesn't explain why you gave up your hobbies? First prize regional under-tens gymnastics two years in a row. Your coach had you pegged as Olympic team material.
> **Eggsy:** Yeah, well, when you grow up around someone like my step dad you pick up new hobbies pretty quick.
> **Harry Hart:** Of course, always someone else's fault. Who's to blame for you quitting the Marines? You were half way through training, doing brilliantly but you gave up.
> **Eggsy:** Because my mum went mental. Banging on about losing me as well as my dad. Didn't want me being cannon fodder for snobs like you. Judging people like me from your ivory towers with no thought about why we do what we do. We ain't got much choice. You get me? And if we were born with the same silver spoon up our arses we'd do just as well as you, if not better.

Figure 28.2. Eggy's Transformation from "Chav" to Chap.
Screen captures from *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014), 20th Century Fox.

Initially, then, Eggsy does not believe in the meritocratic level playing field and sees his life chances hampered by circumstance. Yet, he quickly subscribes to the idea of self-improvement through effort as he embarks on the Kingsman training rituals. He identifies with the underclass, or the Precariat in the terms of the British Class Survey, and his narrative journey is from the lowest strata of society to the highest Elite. The head of the Kingsman agency (codename Arthur) is unequivocally opposed to the recruitment of anyone other than aristocrats, but we later learn that he has, in fact, been cultivating a persona that denies his own true roots. Eggsy is constantly reminded of his lower-class standing by several other recruits, but he is also aware of the cultural charm of his "barrow boy" status. In one of the final training missions, the recruits are tasked with seducing socialite Lady Sophie Montague-Herring which Eggsy thinks will be easy because "posh girls love a bit of rough." Eggsy is simultaneously proud of his roots and aware of how his background has been restrictive, and he is so sensitive to the resultant inequalities that Merlin (who is overseeing the training of the candidates) tells him at one point to "take that chip off your shoulder." The film presents clear class-based stereotypes, but also consistently highlights, questions, and destabilizes them.

An important foundational scene serves to establish Eggsy's background in petty crime. He gets into an altercation in a local pub with a thug named Rottweiler, but manages to pickpocket Rottweiler's keys and steal his car. The music that accompanies the joyride and ensuing high-speed police chase is an edited version of Dizzee Rascal's song "Bonkers", which was produced by Armand Van Helden and was the first single released from Rascal's fourth album *Tongue 'n' Cheek* (2009). Stuart Jeffries describes this music as an "urban underclass groove importunately puffing and blowing in the audience's collective earhole" (2015). Jeffries objection is that the music is used as a simplistic marker of class and that it is

contrasted with music at the end of the film to demarcate the class transition, which is "politically conservative cobblers, since it suggests that kids like Eggsy aspire to be posh" (Jeffries 2015). Although there is a good deal of truth in this analysis, it also misses some of the song's fundamental features and its purpose in the narrative. I suggest that it presents a more nuanced narrative reading than might initially be considered.

The song is heavily edited in order to fit the scene (Figure 28.3), which is to be expected as the scene is one-minute shorter than the original song. However, particularly striking is the use of repetition, especially the central chorus, which has a more rhythmically dynamic accompaniment than the outer two choruses and repeats the phrase: "Some people pay for thrills, but I get mine for free." We first hear this chorus with an attendant decrease and increase in volume when Eggsy drives away from the pub (at around 40 seconds) and returns driving in reverse chased by the police. This volume shift follows the direction of the car and suggests that the music might be located on the radio and experienced diegetically. The use of repetition through the process of editing echoes the original song's own cyclical processes. The three verses and three choruses are lyrically identical, although there are minor differences in some aspects of the accompaniment and production. There is also a characteristic relentless and repetitive vocal warping at the end of the chorus that emphasizes every quarter-note beat, which is used at the outset of the chase sequence: "there nothing crazy about me-e-e-e-e-e-e…" And there is the structural use of plosive repetition from the word "bonkers"—"bo-bo-bo-bo-bo"—as digitally-spliced eighth-notes, that are used to connect one chorus-repetition to another and to build towards the final car crash. A song with extremely repetitive and restricted core material has been made even more repetitive through the editing process, and its "craziness" is emphasised by digital disruption of the voice through rhythmic reiteration.

Figure 28.3. “Bonkers” Edited for Car Chase Sequence.

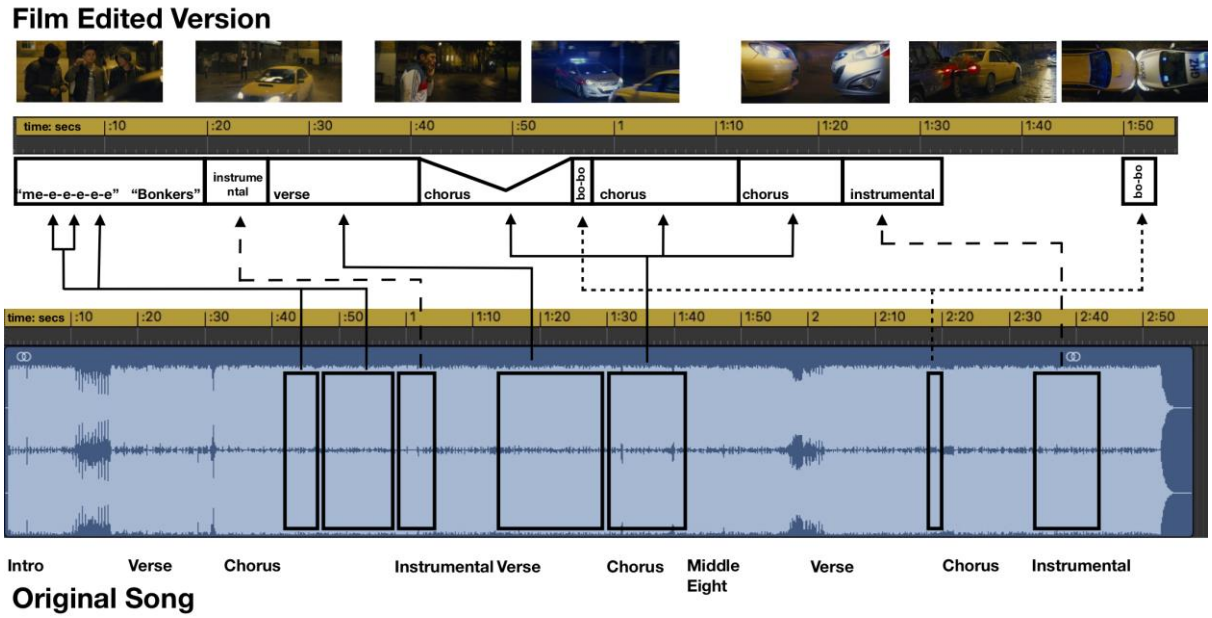
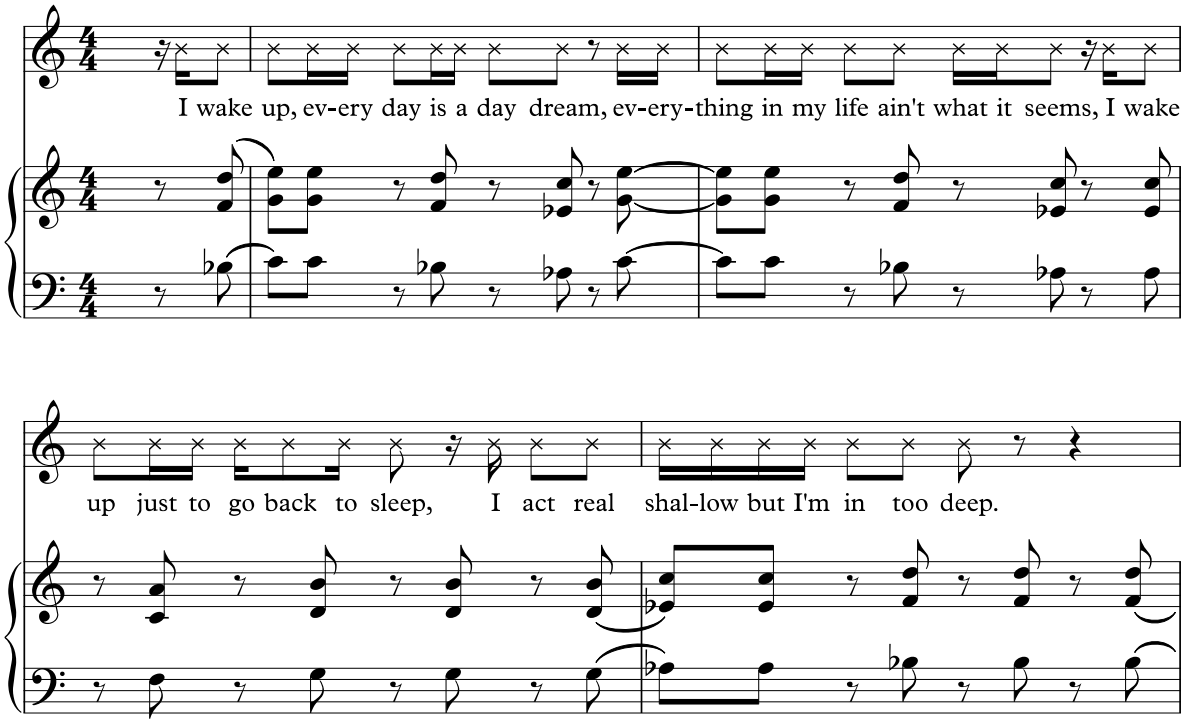


Figure 28.4. “Bonkers” Syncopated Bass Line.



On the one hand the edited version of “Bonkers” in this scene simply emphasizes ludicrous hedonistic impertinence. It is not, however, an “underclass groove” as outlined by

Jeffries. In fact, this song marks the essential moment where Dizzee Rascal consciously abandoned his roots as one of the pioneering figures in the UK grime scene in search of a much more widespread appeal. It is a crossover dance track that has very little in common with the grime music with which Dizzee Rascal is most clearly associated and which was, initially at least, a genuine urban underclass genre. Indeed, the uniformly accented 4/4 time, where the bass drum is hit on every beat, is generically characteristic of the four-to-the-floor in mainstream House music. The same is true of the recurrent syncopated, grungy, descending bass line (Figure 28.4), which adds forward momentum. The extensive use of repetition, catchy hook, and slower tempo are not common attributes of the harder-edged grime, which is typically much more lyrically sophisticated, much more rhythmically intricate, and frequently plays with the structural flow between verse and chorus. The song, therefore, marks a move away from the "feral underclass" of tabloid nightmares (Clarke 2011) towards Rascal's status as a national treasure (Wolfson 2009; Carwath 2009). "Bonkers" was even featured in the 2012 Opening Olympic ceremony where much was made, in the same breath, of the artist's connection to East London and the urban regeneration that would be brought about by the Olympic Park.[2] It is significant that Rascal's meteoric rise only materialized through a cleaner version of the grime music that he established in *Boy in da Corner* (2003).

It is interesting to note that the press consistently highlighted the stratigraphic class journey that this song and its album represented: "Dizzee Rascal has surely made it now. Leaving the concrete jungle of the Crossways estate in east London's Bow to live in a house in the leafy comfort of suburban Kent, Britain's most successful rapper has not so much got out of the woods as escaped to them" (Burrell 2009). Dan Hancox also identifies "Bonkers"

as an important evolutionary milestone in the development of grime: “They had finally made stars out of grime MCs; but with music that barely resembled grime” (2018: 200).

Although Dizzee Rascal was accused of “selling out”, he considered this a comical character assassination: “People said that, having not been through a quarter of what I have. Obviously you’d get the fuck out, innit” (qtd in Hattenstone 2010). So, there are a number of interweaving narratives and meanings embedded in this song. “Bonkers” is not the music of an urban underclass, but rather an anthem of upwards social mobility. It gives us an early signal of Eggsy’s trajectory, but its starting point is not in the Precariat. It reveals a road that has already been travelled and, thus, pre-empts Eggsy’s success and justifies his ultimate reward. As a result, we do not witness criminal joyriding as much as a demonstration of the attributes that are necessary to become a true Kingsman: latent technical skills (fast reaction times, situational awareness, control) and honorable acceptance of responsibility when confronting the police. The extraordinary mainstream success of the song and its subsequent use in the Olympic opening ceremony also marks it out as a particularly British icon. Its boisterous and playful style exemplifies British maverick spirit—the breaking of rules and nonconformist creative ingenuity—that is recurrent in representations of the British gentleman spy. It is music that suggests Eggsy must abandon his roots or, perhaps, that he never belonged in the first place.

If “Bonkers” highlights the danger of a surface reading of musical stratification, so does the song that is used at the end of the film to signal Eggsy’s ‘arrival’. This is Bryan Ferry’s ballad “Slave to Love” from the album *Boys and Girls* (1985). Again, it is an edited version of the song (conflating the introduction, third verse, and chorus) that leads from a controversial final scene, over the end credits, to a post-credits sequence where Eggsy returns to the Black Prince pub to rescue his mother and reiterate the aphorism “manners

maketh man". The set-up for the use of the song and the film's final punchline occurs just before Eggsy battles the villain Richmond Valentine and his henchwoman Gazelle. Eggsy encounters an imprisoned Princess Tilde and, more than a little creepily, asks her for a kiss. She promises him: "If you save the world, we can do it in the asshole". Eggsy does indeed defeat the villains and returns to claim his "reward", which is captured as a point-of-view shot on his spy glasses. This is clearly a vulgar nod to 1970s Bond movie innuendos—"I think he's attempting re-entry, sir" (*Moonraker,* 1979), or "Keeping the British end up, sir" (*The Spy Who Loved Me*, 1977) —and demonstrates the problem of walking the not-so-thin line between a satire of crude entertainment and creating crude entertainment. It is out-of-character for Eggsy who has been presented up to this point as an unpolished but decent bloke whose relationships with women are mutually respectful. Clearly, however, performing the role of a womanizer is part of the ritual of finally becoming a proper Kingsman.

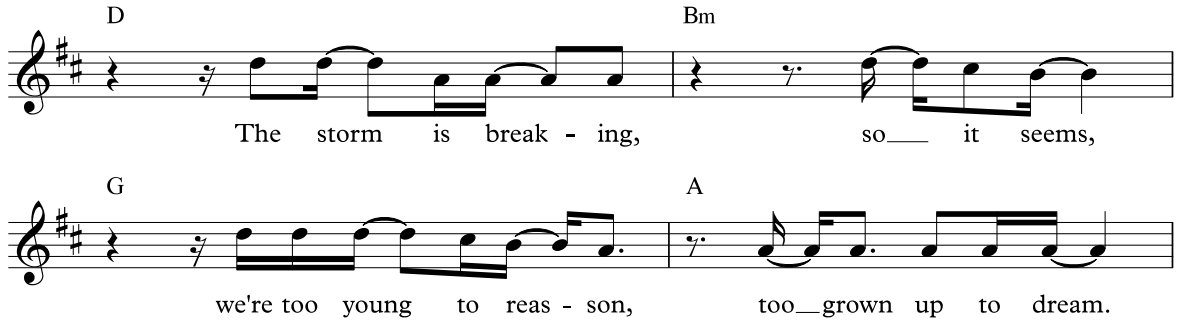
On one level the music here represents suave sophistication. Its slow, controlled, and sensual groove takes its time before providing harmonic resolution (partly through added 2^{nds} and sustained 4^{ths}), but also through an introduction that alternates harmonically between F#m and A which could be heard initially as i / III and subsequently as iii / V once the tonic key of D Major has been established in the verse. It then becomes a much more secure traditional ballad with one chord per bar and a repeating structure that continues into the chorus: I – vi – IV – V. Ferry's introspective voice intones short wavering passages that are mostly sequestered between the second and fourth beats of each bar. Is this music simply a parody of Bond-like sexuality (Bond-age?), or does it have more to say about class and Eggsy's trajectory in the film?

This *Kingsman* scene partially references the use of "Slave to Love" in a montage sequence in the erotic drama *9 ½ Weeks* (1986). It was long considered one of the most scandalous movies of the 1980s and was cut in order to secure an R-rating, although by modern standards it is tame. The film follows two strangers who engage in a brief but intense affair. What begins as a romantic relationship soon becomes sexual with the controlling John seeking more daring experiences. Initially excited by his attention, Elizabeth slowly realizes that he refuses to share anything about his life with her and she is just an instrument for his pleasure. The music's sensuous qualities may have led to its initial usage in *9 ½ Weeks*, but it is interesting to note that Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young highlight the role of this kind of music in framing strategies that seem "to be designed to provide men with acceptable incarnations of the chick flick" (2008: 88). Here we have a suggestion of perspectival artifice that mirrors much of the discussion about the idea of the "new-man" of the 1980s. The new man was supposedly in touch with their feminine side, rejected sexist attitudes and traditional male roles, cared about their appearance, was emotionally skilled, and was more nurturing. The new man related to women as human beings not sex objects. According to John Beynon, however, there were two different strands to this type of masculinity: "new man as nurturer" and "new man as narcissist" (Beynon 2002: 115–121). For Rowena Chapman the new man was more or less the same as the old man but with better manners, a result of the 1980s commercialisation of masculinity (1996: 225–48). More insidious versions of the narcissistic strand suggested that the new man was merely masquerading as a caring individual in order to exert the same kind of power as the old man. This is best exemplified by the monochrome poster *L'Enfant* (1986) which reputedly sold over five million copies in the late-1980s and featured handsome hunk, Adam Perry,

with his top off cradling a tiny baby. Perry, the ultimate wolf in no clothing, boasted that he had slept with three thousand women as a result of the success of the poster.

In his survey of popular music and British masculinity, Stan Hawkins identified Bryan Ferry as a dandy who employs a range of strategies "that symbolize the New Man of the 1980s" (2016: 59; see also Auslander 2006: 152–172). The traditional definition of a dandy is of a man excessively focused on being fashionable, but Hawkins argued that its British incarnation goes beyond style and is more about "temperament" (a term he used after Baudelaire) where vulnerability and eccentricity are performed in order to satirize "socio-political context through the extravagance of his display" (2016: 189). Specifically focusing on the music video and the song "Slave to Love", Hawkins argued that there is "little doubt that Ferry's elegance and nonchalance falls under the rubric of dandyism *á la* Brummell" (2016: 58). Hawkins argued that the song's "textures are porous, accommodating contrasting timbres in the form of guitar fills and synth swirls, while Ferry's voice is highly reverbed and dominated" (Hawkins 2016: 58). Indeed, it is interesting that Hawkins focused on the voice because Ferry's "timbral resonance mirrors his masculine, debonair appearance as a clear instance of vocal costuming" (2016: 58). Vocal costuming might be likened to the costuming that goes into album covers, videos, and photo shoots. It is an artificial intensification of represented identity. Ferry's voice in "Slave to Love" exemplifies a type of smooth-crooning that softens all consonants, delimits a supple and diaphonous tessitura that is forward in the throat, and selectively uses a fluttering vibrato as part of its emotional register. Its morphology is one of discriminating vacillation within clear pitched boundaries. The song can be read, therefore, as a vocal masquerade of introspection and emotional vulnerability.

Fig. 28.5. “Slave to Love” Vocal Costuming.



At the core of this formulation, “Slave to Love” is a song about lust that pretends to be about love, but it is also a song about class where we learn that: “To need a woman you’ve got to know how the strong get weak and the rich get poor.” Ferry, in his dandyish temperament, has long been known for his awareness and mobilization of various types of capital, for cultivating clear class pretensions, and his desire for upwards social mobility. His father was a coal miner but Ferry rejected his working-class roots and went to university to study art. Andrew Branch highlights Ferry’s particular awareness of educational capital as a means of reshaping his habitus through more socially diverse circles. Ferry himself stated:

> I think I have always probably been interested in elites. I remember when I left school very much wanting to go to university rather than art college — and at that time there was quite a difference. There were only about three universities you could go to, to study fine art, and you felt you were going to be with people who were more interested in the thought and theory of it. Whereas if you went to art school you’d be with people who were good at drawing rather than good at thinking. That’s how it seemed to be. It was more difficult to get into university, but I suppose that you’d meet ‘a better class of person’. I guess I had a fairly elitist view of what I was interested in. So I suppose I’ve always been a bit stuck up. (qtd in Bracewell 2007: 165)

The awareness of class difference and the active pursuit of social capital is clearly core to Ferry's disposition and ethos. He represented an aspirant male working-class who expressed their difference through a performative feminized masculinity (Branch 2012). In a striking 1976 essay originally published in *Harpers & Queen* cultural commentator Peter York identified "Art school people and quasi art school people" (1983: 116) who were at the forefront of a stylistic merging of revivalism, camp, and pop as "Thems." Thems were an elite grouping and York identified Ferry as its exquisite leader who was "the best possible example of the ultimate art-directed existence" and "the most important pasticheur in Britain today" (1983: 116). York ultimately concluded that Ferry was, himself, an art object and "should hang in the Tate, with David Bowie" (1983: 116). Later reflecting on these ideas, York noted, "if you trace the stylistic embourgeoisement that followed the sixties … all that blanding out was what 'Them' set Themselves against (qtd in Bracewell 2012). Caroline Coon further highlighted the liminal position she felt that Ferry occupied allowing him to find a home within the "Thems." For her, Ferry was neither a working-class musician who exploited those expressive origins nor was he middle-class with the freedom to enhance his music with references from a highly articulate heritage, but somewhere between the two:

> His music speaks to that sensitive raw nerve of insecurity in anyone, who is trying to move out of one class, which is a betrayal, and into another, which is to risk being an outcast. A new generation of upwardly mobile, educated working-class fans can easily identify with his torments and aspirations. (Coon 1975)

As Simon Price stated, Ferry has "always wanted to be a toff" (Price 2004). His background did not matter because Ferry realized that popular music is "the world's biggest

game of Let's Pretend" (Price 2004). Ferry regularly admitted to upper-class aspirations and actively cultivated his gentlemanly persona: "I went through a period of resenting my parents because I wasn't born rich and I felt deprived and that my lot wasn't all that it should be" (qtd in Coon 1975). Time and again press interviews simultaneously refer to Ferry's working-class roots and his effortless refinement in a way that reveals how he has consciously developed and subsequently acquired the symbolic capital of the über-gent.[3]

"Slave to Love," then, is a song that is beautifully available for a range of potential meanings in its use in the problematic final sequence of *Kingsman*, exploring questions of masculinity, eliteness, and hegemonic sexuality. Its use in a form of ironic detachment is both a kind of class reclamation and class rejection. The costumed layers in the song's performance and artist biography problematize aspects of the film's central character who is, likewise, becoming and performing the becoming of a Kingsman. The song suggests that Eggsy inhabits a liminal space, but performs class, style, and elegance, in a way that may result in the acquisition of class, style, and elegance.

The music that flanks and defines Eggsy's journey in *Kingsman*, then, does not underline as simplistic journey as might initially be insinuated. These two songs challenge both the working-class of the mind and upper-class of the mind, with meritocractic perspectives embedded in their sound and in the biographies of their artists. Their use as narrative scaffolding initially suggests a journey from the bottom to the top of a meritocractic ladder, but "Bonkers" insinuates that this journey does not start in the Precariat and "Slave to Love" insinuates that the journey does not end in the Elite. If "manners maketh man" then music mistrusts meritocracy.

Conclusion

By examining just two songs, this chapter has attempted to show some of the ways in which concepts of social mobility can be articulated and nuanced through the use of popular music in film. The British desire for working-class success stories is embodied in Eggsy's journey. The meritocratic myth and its symbolic power is negotiated through the use of music which both supports and undermines its mythic quality and reveals a complex relationship with its cultural framework. While there are generic and narrative aspects that drive an understanding of the function of music in relation to social class, I hope to have demonstrated some ways of thinking about class, stratification, and meritocracy that open up further possibilities for their exploration in screen music studies. We should not only consider social class in relation to obvious stratified one-way approaches, but as whole ecosystems of power relations and inequality structures within the representational practices of film and film music. Music can play an important role in shaping these narrative journeys.

Of course, there is also other music in *Kingsman* that further nuances this discussion and would be worthy of investigation, in particular in the relationships between class and violence. The film toys with representational politics in a climactic scene that features a mashup of Edward Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1" and KC and the Sunshine Band's "Give it Up." Here disco hedonism is conflated with an anthem of British Imperialism, while a self-appointed elite group are massacred. In an earlier controversial scene Eggsy's mentor, Harry Hart, graphically engages in a mass-killing of "redneck" churchgoers accompanied by Lynyrd Skynyrd's Southern-rock song "Free Bird." The film uses these pieces of music, problematically, to both justify and to sanitize the extreme class-based violence it perpetrates. And in this way, the film moves from symbolic violence to ultra-

graphic violence in a manner that might have troubled Bourdieu and reaffirmed his notions of the power inherent in various kinds of capital.

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[1] Some notable exceptions to the rule include: Ben Winters’ (2016) exploration of the use of operatic music in the film *Trading Places* (1983) where he identified satirical processes that evade issues of injustice to highlight the exaggerated oppositions in Reaganite social policy; Nicholas Reyland’s film score handbook (2011), where he undertakes a brief Bourdieusian analysis of the central character in *Three Colors: White* (1994); and Mike Wayne’s (2006) exploration of musical nostalgia in a range of late-nineties and early-noughties working-class Northern British films.

[2] Dizzee Rascal later critiqued this type of gentrification on his album *Raskit* (2017), particularly on the tracks “Slow Your Roll” and “Everything Music Go”.

[3] Ferry was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2005 from *GQ* (*Gentleman’s Quarterly*) Magazine which described him as “the world’s best-dressed and most languidly mannered deluxe chanteur” (Mills 2005).