



Shame starring Michael Fassbender

Screened at [Cornerhouse, Manchester](#)

Reviewed by [Anne Ryan](#) January 2012

How do you make a film about sex that is not sexy? Some of us might wonder how you make a film starring **Michael Fassbender** that is not sexy. But following their collaboration on **Hunger**, the story of the IRA hunger-striker Bobby Sands, Fassbender and artist/director Steve McQueen, have produced another harrowing experience.

Brandon, the film's protagonist is a sex addict, like Sands he is a prisoner and as in **Hunger** his story takes us to some very dark places. Unlike Sands he is his own jailer and we the audience are in the position of the psychologist observing Brandon and his sister as they pursue their troubled lives.



McQueen and writer Abi Morgan never lets us into the reasons behind their behaviour – both siblings are profoundly damaged and we can only speculate as to the causes. Both are addicted to sex, and as all addicts they are looking for answers. Brandon spends his day in various sexual encounters, never connecting with another human being. He drifts from one joyless episode to another, sex has never looked so unappealing – he is physically naked, but emotionally reveals nothing. In his only attempt to form a real relationship, with a colleague Marianne (Nicole Beharie), he is impotent. Brandon cannot let anyone challenge the almost

mechanical world of sex that he has created.

But Carey Mulligan, cast against type as a Monroe-esque singer, is highly strung, crashes back into his life, destroying his carefully constructed world. Unlike Brandon, with his blank lack of affect, Sissy makes her emotional neediness painfully clear. Their behaviour hints at a disturbed shared childhood and their relationship is one of almost incestuous dependency. And only when she sings do we see the human beneath Brandon's mask. "We're not bad people," Sissy assures her sibling, "We just come from a bad place".

The film reminded me of Carol Morley's drama documentary 'Dreams of a Life' which highlighted our essential solitude in a world where we collide with many hundreds of people while never making a meaningful connection.

