How useful has an ideological critical approach been in understanding the narrative resolution of the films you have studied?

The narrative resolution is the point in a film which occurs after the falling action and the plot concludes. In *This is England*, this is the point when Shaun heads to the beach and takes out his flag of St George and throws it into the sea. The narrative resolution in *Trainspotting* is when Renton steals the group’s money and escapes, saying that he was going to be ‘just like you’ and commits himself to an empty list of mainstream objects and pursuits.

*Ideology* involves “the main messages and values conveyed by a film which are often revealed by the behaviour or beliefs of the main character” (*P 137, Film Studies for A Level and AS*), and *ideological* is defined as “based on or relating to a particular set of ideas or beliefs” (*Cambridge dictionary*).

A key ideological theme in *This is England* is nationalism and its shortcomings. The film begins with a montage in which the Union Jack appears in footage from the Falklands War, in the Royal Wedding and displayed by marching skinheads - which hints at the different ways that national pride can be used as a rationale for different actions. At the narrative resolution, Shaun rejects his experience of extreme nationalism, since it led in part to Combo’s attack on Milky, so he discards the St George’s flag that had symbolised nationalism and his bond with Combo.

This also occurs in *Trainspotting*, where Renton rejects Tommy’s attempts to ‘straighten out’ the addicts by a healthy ramble in the country and Renton rants about the shortcomings of Scotland. The ending footage of Renton walking off against the London skyline shows the rejection of his friends, heroin and Scotland – he is walking away from his old life and values. Nationalism is seen as over-glorified and ridiculous.

At the resolution of *This is England*, Shaun has come to reject Combo’s racism. The attack on Milky has traumatised him and he no longer wants racism in his life. The ideology of racist violence is a dead-end, and Shaun’s discarding of the flag symbolises this. Shaun’s final glance at the camera breaks the fourth wall and takes the issue *beyond* the film – he is asking the audience, “what do you draw from this?”. In a similar way, Renton’s closing monologue engages the spectator by addressing them in the second person as if to say: “you might condemn heroin addiction but look at how empty your life is”.

The ideology of toxic masculinity lies at the heart of key characters in both films: Combo, and Begbie are untouched by the developments that occur in other characters. Renton says he feels no remorse at stealing from Begbie because of his irrational violence. At the resolution of each film – Begbie and Combo are not shown to have changed. Spectators may feel unsympathetic to the fates of these characters because they fail to see the effects of their aggression.

Another ideological theme which occurs at the narrative resolution in the films is the young people seeking independence away from situations and individuals that oppress them. Shaun’s rejection of Combo, violence and racism is a call-back to an earlier scene in the film.
where we first see Shaun at the beach on his own – content for the first time. By the narrative resolution, he has considered his options, and he has decided to move on. The plaintive, non-diegetic song emphasises that this is Shaun’s own decision.

Renton rejects his previous country, life, drug habit and friends to move on. Even so, his acceptance of his new life and ideology is not complete – his monologue (echoing the voiceover at the start of the film) condemns materialism and mainstream goals and activities. His insincere grin and closing monologue states: “I’m cleaning up and I’m moving on, going straight and choosing life. I'm looking forward to it already”. In both films, we see a change in the lead character and so can envisage the main characters moving on into a different life beyond the narrative resolution.

Both films set their action against a backdrop of poverty and unemployment. *This is England* provides a sympathetic portrayal of young people making the most of their situation to generate enjoyment and belonging. Our first meeting with the gang shows them unemployed sitting in a tunnel of an underpass. They are bored and seem to be waiting for a passers-by to provide them with entertainment. The backdrop of “the aftermath of the Falklands War to the shattering of working-class communities; the erosion of heavy industries and the crushing of the trade unions” (*Fitzgerald, P132*) lets us see young people’s actions as resulting from forces beyond their control.

In *Trainspotting*, the hyper-realism of the group’s flat and downbeat pubs and clubs emphasise the characters’ struggles in contrast to the comfort of the suburban homes of Diane’s and Renton’s parents. The characters’ poverty is both a cause and a consequence of their drug addictions.

Young people are shown as acting under the influence of unforgiving capitalism, which makes their every move difficult. The characters’ actions and ideas are intelligible given these circumstances, but at the end of both films, the key character has found a new accommodation with their reality.

In conclusion, an ideological critical approach is useful in understanding the narrative resolutions in the two films studied. It explains the restrictions on the actions of characters and why they arrive at their position at the end of each film. It shows how characters are carriers for ideologies – Combo’s failures represent the danger of racism and Begbie’s rage, destruction of the hotel room and arrest debunks aggressive masculinity. The characters’ situations at the resolution show how they succeed or fail to move past limitations of the ideologies they represent.