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Faculty of Arts and Philosophy**

**Working Class, Underclass and Their Representation  
in the Contemporary British Literature**

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

In her bachelor thesis, Markéta Pavlišová will first provide a concise characteristic of the development and importance of the concept of identity, particularly class identity in the context of Great Britain. She will then proceed to the analysis of the two target groups, i.e. the working class and the underclass, which will contain general features, historical development as well as the cultural activity of both social groups. These theoretical findings will be then contrasted with the literary portrayal of both classes in selected works of fiction. The practical part of Markéta's paper will thus combine cultural and literary analysis. The author is expected to create a fully academic text with a strong argument, which will be supported by an appropriate range of primary as well as secondary sources.

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## **Declaration of authorship**

I, Markéta Pavlišová, declare that the present bachelor paper and the work presented in it are my own.

I further declare that where I have consulted work of others, this is always clearly attributed. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the quotation is always marked and the source given. With the exception of such quotations, this essay is entirely my own work.

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to analyze the reflection of main issues concerning social groups in contemporary British literature, namely from the perspective of the working class and a new phenomenon within society termed underclass. The theoretical part deals with the notion of working class in general and subsequently focuses on historical and social development of this division in the context of British society with stress on living standards and cultural values. A particular subchapter outlines social mobility conditions and possibilities of this class regarding the educational opportunities within the system. Similarly, the second chapter outlines a basic concept and characteristics of a new underclass in a contemporary sense of meaning and deals with the reasons of its emergence. Last two chapters analyze the selected works of fiction in order to find particular issues pertained to these social groups. Namely, the analysis of the book *Room at the Top* by John Braine deals primarily with the theme of social mobility and social identity from the perspective of the working class. The second analysis of the novel *Kestrel for a Knave* by Bary Hennes is concentrated on economic inequality and social changes within this society as on structural causes of the inefficient educational system. In the conclusion, particular issues regarding both classes are compared and summarized.

## **Key Words**

Working Class; Underclass; Great Britain; social mobility; *Kestrel for a Knave*; *Room at the Top*

## **Anotace**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza současné britské beletrie z hlediska její reflexe problematiky sociálních skupin, konkrétně třídy pracujících a nového fenoménu současnosti takzvané underclass. Úvodní teoretická část je věnována pojmu pracující třída obecně, dále pak historickému a sociálnímu vývoji této skupiny s důrazem na životní podmínky a kulturní hodnoty. Zvláštní podkapitola se pak zabývá možnostmi a podmínkami sociální mobility této třídy v rámci britské společnosti spojenými se vzdělávacími možnostmi. Podobně druhá kapitola nastiňuje základní koncept a charakteristiku nové třídy underclass v současném pojetí a zabývá se důvody jejího zrodu ve Velké Británii. Následující dvě kapitoly analyzují díla současných britských autorů z několika hledisek spojených s výše uvedenými vrstvami společnosti. Jmenovitě rozbor knihy *Room at the Top*, autora Johna Braina, je zaměřen především na téma sociální mobility a třídní identity z pohledu pracující třídy. Rozbor druhého díla autora Barryho Hinese *Kestrel for a Knave* se soustředí jak na ekonomickou nerovnost a sociální změny uvnitř již zmíněného společenství tak i na strukturální důsledky neefektivnosti vzdělávacího systému. V závěru práce jsou shrnuty a porovnávány jednotlivé problémy týkající se obou vrstev.

## **Klíčová slova**

Pracující třída; underclass; Velká Británie; sociální mobilita; Pošťolka pro pacholka; Místo nahoře

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## **Introduction**

Social class diversity still remains one of the most distinctive features of British Society. In contrast to other European countries, the British are still conscious of class differences and awareness of class frames their own identity. According to the wide-ranging survey of public opinion, done in the 1990s, ninety percent of people assign themselves a particular class and seventy-two per cent took a view that class was still an integral part of British society (Storry and Childs, 2002, p. 178).

Although the term - social class is widely understood by the general public, the concept is commonly seen to be problematic to define. The number of criteria on which social stratification could be based upon is theoretically infinite. Sorting according to the occupational structure is one of the most common techniques of various sociological surveys. The counter-argument is that this structure does not deal effectively with the long-term unemployed, domestic housekeepers, the homeless or pensioners (Marshall, 1997, p. 86). In addition, considering the Marxist theory, the class should be seen more in economic terms, respectively, "it is a matter of money and power" (Harvey, 2007).

Yet people who have a particular social position often adopt a distinctive lifestyle as well. This adoption of collectively shared culture may be the same key factor as the wealth in determining a class rank. To give a supportive argument, O'Driscoll notices that people regard it as difficult to become friends with somebody from a different class. At the same time they add that it has little to do with "conscious loyalty". It is rather connected to the fact that different classes have different sets of attitudes and daily habits (1995, p. 48). Lastly, most of characterizations of social class are based on the hypothesis that class identity is inherited from generation to generation, so the family background plays a considerable role as well.

Apart from these theories, the general public recognizes social class according to factors such as income, education but also parentage, accent and social graces. It has appeared, however, that occupational position is seen as the backbone of social grading and social class judgements (Reid, 1977, p. 27).

To sum up all these attributes, social class is defined with some borders, whether based on the occupational basis, collective culture, height of income or family background, that separate it from its surroundings. This social closure, though, is not as strict as it seems. For instance, it is not such a sporadic case that high paying jobs can be attained by people of traditional lower social standing. Particularly in Britain, this

upward social mobility trend has gained its support from a state policy of a meritocratic system, i.e. the system that enables success through one's own abilities and efforts rather than due to their background.

To concentrate on social hierarchy, British society had been divided into three main classes, the upper class, the middle class and the working class, occasionally called lower class. This basic stratification had been further subdivided within each group. After the transformation of British economy during the Thatcher era, the class system has considerably altered. On one hand, massive growth of white-collar job opportunities in the service sector has demanded recruitment from "a much wider pool than just middle class offspring" (Morris, 1996, p. 165) in favour of working class. On the other hand, unemployment in the early 1980s rose to unprecedented heights. There was also an increase of those in full time employment but on low wages and forced to apply for supplementary benefits. Although this unemployment rate was falling at the end of the 1980s, a new sector of society came to existence – a semi-permanent group of "have nots living at a lower level than the rest of society", a kind of underclass with a different way of life, "lived within severely restricted parameters" (Hopkins, 1991, p. 221).

This phenomenon of Underclass has become one of the popular issues of contemporary debate, as in the past was the theme of improving working class status in the post-war period. Undoubtedly, these two social groups were initially inter-connected through class related attributes, such as long-term unemployment, education as a matter of social exclusion and change of pattern of nuclear family. Strictly speaking, the historical, political and also social circumstances within working class society in the past fifty years have spawned the existence of the nowadays underclass division. For instance, the majority of first generation of underclass members has been of working class background. Therefore, this resemblance can not be overlooked.

Beside this, a substantial range of literature engaged in the life of these social classes exists, among others fictional books as well. On the one hand, fiction is supposed to be the product of subjective writing and therefore a trustworthy portrait is a matter of discussion. On the other hand, lots of topics of these books come from current issues of society as their reflection.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to confront these two spheres through the analysis of selected work of fiction in order to answer the main question, namely in what way does the prose reflect the theoretical works and which issues are dealt with. The first

chapter provides a brief account of working class historical development with the stress on its position within society, on living standards and conditions, on cultural values and activities ,and finally, on educational possibilities in post-war period. The political and economical situation is mentioned as well as an agent that influenced most of these factors mentioned before. Lastly, the changes within this group during the 1960s of the twentieth century that indicated the rise of the underclass are examined.

Similarly, the next chapter deals with the notion of underclass in contemporary conception. Subsequently, it describes the historical, social and political circumstances as other factors which led to the formation of this “new” element within social class categorization and its phenomena. Then the main characteristics of this part of society will be provided.

Finally, the last two chapters attempt to confront the theoretical part via practical analysis of literature in selected works of fiction: *A Kestrel for a Knave* written by Barry Hines, and *Room at the Top* by John Braine. Specifically, the main ravenous issues, reflected in these pieces of work, as portraits of both classes are searched for.

## **1. Working Class**

The origin of the term working class is closely connected with the age of industrialization that considerably altered the social structure in Great Britain. Nevertheless, there are the same disputes over the definition of the working class as there are over the determinants of social class in general.

This group of society is either believed to be distinguished on an occupational and income basis (Marxist approach) or in terms of shared values, culture, education, attitudes, relationship with others and living standards. Perhaps the most distinctive definition is that the members of this class are those who need to work on the grounds of economic purposes and are mainly dependent on physical or waged labour. Moreover, this notion covers quite wide mosaic of ranks of occupation, respectively divisions of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers and thus it is better, Thompson suggests, to use the term “working classes” rather than class (1965, p.17). Accordingly, it is the social grade classification (C2 – skilled working class, D – semi and unskilled working class) created by the National Readership Survey and widely used during the twentieth century that validates this diversity of the group (“NRS\_Social\_Grade”).

Nowadays a profile of skilled working class people in Great Britain is closely connected to skilled blue collars jobs, traditionally in industry but also self-employed contractors arisen during the 1980s (“White Van Man”). But to display the blur of the boarder between classes, it is worth mentioning that 50 per cent of clerical workers, the “white collar workers” consider themselves as a part of working class, according to a survey conducted in 1990s (Storry and Childs, 2002, p. 185).

## **1.1 Stereotypical Picture and Social Changes**

The contemporary form and identity of the working class, shaped since the end of the eighteenth century, has been affected by particular political and socioeconomic factors. These major issues which determined social and cultural aspects of working class life are currently under discussion.

While the traditional image of the working class family since the Victorian age till the first half of the twentieth century is linked to the poorly educated male workers (organized in trade unions and conservative voters of the Labour party), seen as “breadwinners” of their families, and women regarded mainly as mothers and wives; the social patterns and roles, such as the social position, have altered. The experience of the First World War may be considered as “powerful catalysts in the confusion of gender identities” (Brooke, 2001, p. 3). The increasing replacement of male labour by female during this war and subsequently post-war unemployment undermined associations between skilled work and masculinity, especially in new, light industries (Brooke, 2001, p.4).

Also changes in working hours and considerably higher wages of the employed influenced their living standards and consequently their culture and values. For instance, for the first time the working class families had more disposable income to spend on leisure activities, sport and recreation.

Nevertheless, substantial shifts, including gender roles, were most remarkable after the Second World War in the 1950s. This era is very often viewed as “Golden Age” not only in British history. It was a period of high growth rates, almost full employment and low inflation due to industrial expansion and excessive degree of export acceleration. For illustration, industrial employment as a share of total employment reached forty-eight per cent in 1955 (Johnson, 1994, p. 337). This macro-economic performance was matched by improvements in living standards, rise of wages and the conception of welfare state, designed as a response to the mass unemployment in the 1930s.

The most obvious signs of this growing affluence were in the ownership of durable goods. As an example, only about one household in every fifty had a television in 1950 but by 1973 more than ninety per cent had one (Johnson, 1994, p. 323). It consequently led to transformation of the society towards consumerism and greater individualism.

As Brooke refers, Ferdynand Zweig, a sociologist, noted that “Working-class life finds

itself on the move towards new middle-class values” and described these changes “as a deep transformation of values, as the development of new ways of thinking and feeling [...] new aspirations and cravings” (Brooke, 2001, p. 1).

Partially because of these shifts, there appeared to be some nostalgic evocations for old times in the 1950s. In the words of sociologists Chris Waters, “Nostalgia became embedded in the conception of being working class” (Brooke, 2001, p. 2). *The Uses of Literacy*; piece by Richard Hoggart, a distinguished scholar; may be seen as expressing such nostalgia for old times and working class identity before the war. He emphasises the notorious attitude “Them” (the middle class and upper class) and self identity as “Us”, the neighbourhood sense, and lastly, private sphere in sense of family life and the role of maternity. He reports on the working class group sense that overrides any feeling being of individuals:

You are bound to be close to people with whom, for example you share a lavatory in a common yard..... Good neighbourliness consist not just in ‘doing fair by each other’ but in being ‘obliging’ or always ready to oblige’. (1966, pp. 81 - 82)

Furthermore, while describing the lives of particular members of family, he highlights mothers’ self-sacrifice for family and children and also their strict role of work in households (1966, p. 46). They are depicted as the central point of the house that holds the family together. On the other hand, the working class fathers are “the masters of their own houses” and breadwinners, as mentioned above, responsible for family incomes (1966, p. 54). Even nowadays some of these stereotypes of the traditional working class life are used, especially in the film industry and the media.

Notwithstanding, these images did not reflect the reality. It was not that women had never worked in the previous period, but the reasons changed. While women usually had worked perforce, after the Second World War they began to join the work force to increase the living standards of their families with the result that long established patterns of family life had changed (Brooke, 2001, p. 5). Moreover, the average family size has not remained the same as in the pre-war period. Despite an immediate baby boom after the Second War (from 14.6 births per thousand in 1940 to 16.2 in 1950 and 17.5 in 1960), the use of contraceptive method increased within working class families in the 1950s, as Brooke comments (2001, p. 6). He also introduces a “brand new” picture of working class life based on a 1954 study of Sheffield housing estate:

It is interesting to note that some of the best kept homes are those of young

housewives who have themselves come from large families, but intend to keep their own family small. Their children are lavishly cared for and are the focus of the home, and their husbands are much more domesticated and home-centred than those of the previous generation. A couple aged about thirty, were, for instance, living in a house of this kind at the bottom of the state. Both were working and ploughing their earnings back into the home and into comforts for their only child. In the front room there was a television set on which stood a cocktail shaker and glasses (apparently never used), a new dining room suite and new armchairs. The standard range had been replaced by a tiled fireplace. Neither husband nor wife drank, and they never went to the pictures as they did not want to leave their son in anyone else's charge. (2001, p. 6)

The possible reasons why people did not want to start large families were their association of such families with poverty and lowering of standards. These gradual changes meant for Hoggart the loss of the balance of traditional roles within the working class life (1966, p. 89).

It is also important to mention the change of housing within working class communities. Owing to continuous rise of population and deterioration of older housing stock, there was still a lack of additional living for working classes in 1951, as Hopkins states (1991, p. 138). The British governments supplied local authorities with money to provide council housing as part of the welfare state and supported private building in the post-war decade. After the clearance of slums and "rehousing", which transformed the physical environment, the housing standards improved for many working class people. Moreover, the 1957 Rent Act was introduced to encourage tenants in private. This act has succeeded in terms of numbers. Nearly 65 per cent of working class workers owned their own house in 1988 (Hopkins, 1991, p. 142). On the other hand, it changed the former "community spirit" and life style. More working class men spent time making their homes more attractive. Thus, the old style working families were replaced by a new pattern of companionship type of family on the new estates. The already mentioned individualism started to prevail together with the consumer style of life.

An extensive reverse came in the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s. After economic growth and expansion, a new era came and many of these certainties have disappeared. The economic changes during last few decades of the twentieth century such as collapse of heavy industry, transformation to the service oriented economy, launching of new technologies and following restructuring of employment opportunities, which demanded higher qualification, caused high rate of unemployment

,especially in local economies “dominated by male-employing heavy industrial work” (McDowell, 2005, p. 347). But it was not only older population of men in industrial areas who faced the service dominated economy demand for particular set of skills and higher education, but also many younger men from working class background with minimal education. They have been usually labelled as victims of economic and occupational reordering as well as inflexible educational system.

In contrast, the economic transformation has led to greater employment opportunities in service sector for working class women and the following feminization of the labour market. For illustration, nearly fifty percent of the current workforce is women or ethnic minorities (Storry and Childs, 2002, p. 189). However, it is necessary to mention that these types of occupation are poorly paid and not on a continuous basis.

Of course, these circumstances have influenced the social patterns and evoked the rise of lone parent families, as McDowell implies:

Problems in the labour market, school failure ...have been represented as a key part of growing ‘crisis of masculinity’ among young men. Failures at schools and loutish in their social interactions elsewhere, it has been suggested that these young men are an increasingly unattractive prospect as lifetime partners for women. (2002, p. 41)

The Nomad plus webpage, a shared intelligence and policy resource, observes that this image of a single unmarried working class mother living on the council estate has become common practise nowadays, in contrast to the 1950s (“Sharing a Staircase”).



## 1.2 Educational Opportunities and Social Mobility

Since work is closely linked to qualification and education that is supposed to be a vital determiner of prospective job, the extent of access to the education should be mentioned as well. Concerning state policy, during the twentieth century a considerable number of educational reforms have had many goals to reach. Primarily an increase of economic efficiency (not only of individuals but consequently of the whole state); introducing of a more meritocratic system, whereby children from working class background could, through educational success, experience upward social mobility; and lastly reduction of inequalities between the social classes were brought into focus.

At the beginning of the century, the access to secondary schools became the main issue of such reforms. The tripartite educational system (secondary modern, grammar and technical schools) was seen as really selective in terms of social class. The majority of working class children still attended the secondary modern but there was quite considerable growth of those who had the possibility to graduate from grammar schools. The significant proof of it was the Nuffield College Oxford Survey, done in 1972, that showed rapidly changing class structure and higher rates of social mobility of the generation which graduated before 1945 (Heath and Clifford, 1990, p. 7) – the possible angry young men generation. They had real opportunity to be absorbed “upward” among “professionals, managerial and clerical classes” in the post-war years due to their higher education. Nevertheless, Hoggart refers to their “sense of loss” which afflicts some of them. These ex-working class boys may have felt emotionally “uprooted” from their class and hence dissatisfied, uncertain and self-doubting (1966, pp. 292 - 293).

In the second half of twentieth century other education reforms were implemented within the welfare ambitious programmes in order to bring equality of opportunity. Particularly, paying for fees was removed and the minimal school leaving age was lifted to fifteen by the Education Act of 1944. Thanks to this, the availability of education has undoubtedly expanded. However, in spite of these attempts to enlarge the social mobility opportunities number of surveys demonstrated contrasts. As Johnson quotes, the work of Floud, Halsey and Martin *Social Class and Educational Opportunity*, published in 1956, refers to the minimal impact of 1944 Education Act on the level of working class chances of being accepted in a grammar school. The probability that a working class boy will reach a grammar school was not notably

greater in 1950s despite the changes. They support their claims by the survey results:

Rather less than 10 per cent of working class boys reaching the age of 11 in the years 1931-1941 entered selective secondary schools. In 1953 in South West Hertfordshire the proportion was 15.5 per cent and in Middlesbrough 12 per cent. The class differential remained wide. In Hertfordshire 59 per cent of the children of professional, business and managerial fathers went to grammar school and in Middlesbrough 69 per cent. In both places only 9 per cent of children of unskilled manual workers enjoyed such success. (1994, p. 387)

More reasons might have led to this unevenness. Firstly, the tripartite system, based on selection, has created unfair and improvident environment concerning ability as explains Douglas in his research, *J.W.B. The Home and the School*:

Whether a child achieved a grammar school depended too much on the lottery of the regional provisions of grammar schools. In 1959 a child living in south west England stood a 35 per cent chance of going to a grammar school...If on the other hand the child lived in the central South, the chances were reduced to 19 per cent and in the North East to 22 per cent. (Johnson, 1994, p. 387)

Secondly, the family background, more precisely the membership in the social class influences performance in the 11+ test. This exam was taken at the end of primary schooling. The successful children who passed were accepted to grammar schools to be prepared for higher studies while the “failures” were supposed to go to secondary modern schools to be trained more practically. This exam system was widely criticised for deciding about children’s future at so early age. Moreover it was noticed that the “eleven plus winners” came almost all from middle class background (O’Driscoll, 1995, p. 134). Regarding family support, Johnson quotes Douglas’ reports once again:

Whilst 41 per cent of upper middle class mothers were highly interested in the school progress of their children, merely 5 per cent of lower working class mothers were the same. Moreover, three quarters of the former wanted their children to attend a grammar school, only a half of the latter had this aspiration. (1994, p. 387)

Thirdly, the post-war reforms did not take into account the instant baby boom after the Second World War and did not optimize the number of places at selective schools. Thus the proportion of pupils of all social class groups declined at these schools.

Furthermore, the expansion of secondary education had obvious effects for higher education. After war new institutions were granted as independent universities such as Nottingham in 1948 or Exeter in 1955 and considerable number of new universities was founded in 1960s among them also technologically aimed. Despite these expansive trends there was quite a low increase in working class participation. A

survey of A.H. Halsey, a prominent sociologist, has shown that the proportion of students from the manual working class has barely changed from 1961 to 1970 when it was 3.1 per cent of the whole number that have quadrupled since 1963 to over million (Johnson, 1994, pp. 381 - 383). One of the reasons was that there was unease about social exclusiveness of the universities. Johnson gives the statistics that a third of middle class children, respectively those with higher professional parents, born in 1940 continued with higher education in 1950s in contrast to only 1 per cent of children born to semi and unskilled workers (1994, p. 381).

Based on these research studies, it is agreed that there was an increase in working class children participation in the whole, but not in direct proportion to the increase in population numbers. Johnson even insists that the English system has been “too much designed to select and reward high achievements rather than encourage the broad majority” (1994, p. 390).

The current situation of the education system results from the reforms started in the 1960s with a new system of comprehensive schools that should replace the selection scheme by class and income with selection by ability, i.e. pupils of different abilities and social backgrounds who share the same school. This comprehensive reorganization was supposed to change the terms of competition between the classes. Nevertheless, O’Driscoll points out that the children of middle class background visit “middle class comprehensive”, while working class children are forced to attend the inner city comprehensive since their parents can not afford to move away (1995, p. 137). Afterwards, the school leaving age was raised to sixteen in 1973. Lastly, the Thatcher era brought new values to education, namely stress on technology and wealth creation rather than arts which had dominated the educational conception before. The chief modification has been the institution of a National Curriculum to ensure uniformity and improve educational standards. The main stimulation for this measure was a literacy rate of British that was significantly lower (second-to-bottom place in adult literacy), as Storry and Childs state, than in the rest of Europe and hence the economic competitiveness with the rest of the industrial economies was deficient (2002, p. 77).

In spite of this educational reorganization, the government still faces a great number of those leaving school at the age of sixteen who do not consider taking higher education. It is still true that this trend is quite widespread among working class children where nearly fifty per cent of those with parents with low income ended in this category, as *The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England* shows (2008).

Of course, their poor prospects on the labour market due to their unsatisfactory educational qualifications lead to their high rate of unemployment and dependency on welfare benefits in the present.

In general, the social conditions of these deprived among working class have become one of the main debate themes at the end of the 1980s. Many have discussed about the emergence of a new underclass consisting of those who regard themselves to be at the margin of society.

## 2. Phenomenon of the Underclass

The number of those forced to face great economic difficulties and unable to “get by” in affluent societies is still alarming. The reasons for their poverty, reliance on welfare benefits and possible solutions are discussed across the political, social and economical spheres nowadays. This phenomenon of poverty is the main feature of social exclusion and underclass debate as already mentioned in the previous chapter.

Nevertheless, the notion “underclass” has a very wide and, as Nick Buck claims, “disorganized and chaotic range of meaning” with regard to the reasons for economic and social exclusion (1996, p. 278). The term was first used at the beginning of the twentieth century but the analogous phenomenon, the so-called dangerous class, has been known since the nineteenth century to refer to a population at the margin of society who were not just poor but especially poor. As Charles Murray, a distinguished scholar, notes; they were portrayed by Henry Mayhew in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1850, as

...the dishonest poor distinguished from the civilized man by his repugnance to regular and continuous labour- by his want of providence in laying up a store for the future – by his inability to perceive consequences ever so slightly removed from immediate apprehension – by his passion for stupefying herbs and roots and, when possible for intoxicating fermented liquors. (1990, p. 24)

Other popular labels in pejorative terms usually given to this group were: undeserving, unrespectable, lumpenproletariat, depraved, debased, disreputable or feckless poor (Murray, 1990, p. 24). The prevailing attitude was that poverty was the failure of individuals and hence they were seen as “unworthy to any support from the state” (Morris, 1996, p. 163). In fact, there was always anxiety throughout British history that financial support could be abused by the “undeserved”. Moreover, the common assumption was (and it still exists) that state provision would create a culture of dependency which would undermine the work ethic and the stability of the nuclear family and consequently these patterns would be adopted by the future generations (Morris, 1996, p. 162). According to Murray, the difference between honest and dishonest poor people had softened during the 1960s. The later type of poverty was seen as “the product of a culture of poverty” rather than undeserving kind of a poor person (1990, p. 24).

The term in contemporary interpretation was firstly introduced by a sociologist Gunnar Myrdal in 1964 to refer to those people who, in the context of post-war period in Western economies, were excluded from the increasing affluence of post-war societies. As their skills were declining in value, these groups were allocated to the bottom of economic hierarchy and simultaneously to the social hierarchy as well.

## **2.1 Formation reasons and related social problems**

An intense debate on causes of this marginality and separation from the rest of the society has arisen. As a result, quite a wide range of approaches to the substantiality of the underclass concept exist. For example, Charles Murray's explanation suggests that not only income is low an undisputed factor for membership in this group, but it is behaviour and attitudes of the underclass that secludes them from the rest of the society (1990, p. 19). He does not apply the term underclass to all the poor but to those with distinctive behaviour, such as illegitimacy, drug-abuse, crime, failure to retain a job, truancy from school and casual violence. The characteristic features, in other words undesirable features, of this behaviour are, according to him, products of a countercultural attitude made by welfare dependency. Furthermore, he highlights the implicit relationship between illegitimacy, violent crime and "drop-out from the labour force" and social class (1990, p. 26). He gives the proof that above mentioned social problems are interconnected:

Everything interacts. When one leaves school without any job skills, barely literate, the job alternatives to crime or having a baby or the dole are not attractive. Young men who are subsisting on crime or the dole are not likely to be trustworthy providers, which makes having a baby without a husband a more practical alternative. If a young man's girlfriend doesn't need him to help to support the baby, it makes less sense for him to plug away at a menial job and more sense to have some fun- which in turn makes hustling and crime more attractive, marriages less attractive. Without a job or family to give life meaning, drugs become that much more valuable as means of distraction. The cost of drugs makes crime the only feasible way to make enough money to pay for them. (1990, p. 26)

In general, this theory implies that the explanation for the problems lies with the pathological behaviour of those who experienced them (Buck, 1996, p. 278), but the main guilt lies on the welfare state for creating this subculture of an unproductive community of social benefit dependants. This theory again opens the debate about

division of the poor into the deserving individuals who are particularly unfortunate but still preserve the morality held by the major of society, and the undeserving who lost their moral link with the majority and thus should not be helped.

Due to publication in the Sunday Times, Murray's work has gained in popularity and support especially among politicians. On the other hand, his ideas have evoked strong polemics among theorists of social inequality. While the pathological explanation is, as Morris calls it, "blaming the victims" (1996, p. 278), the second approach, structural determinism, is blaming the mechanism. For Myrdal, "the underclass resulted from changing economic structures", as Morris explains (1996, p. 163). This focus on structural causes, such as labour market position, low income, class divisions, and other social forces, including agencies and institutions, belongs to the other of leading approaches. These structural forces may limit the opportunities which the disadvantaged group needs. For instance, according to the analysis of income distribution, in Britain the underclass is mainly composed of three specific groups: elderly pensioners, the single parents and the long term unemployed (Mingione, 1996, p. 283). The elderly pensioners without a private pension belong to the poorest group that has been "particularly hit by the Government's decision to break the link between state pensions and the rise in earnings or prices", as Frank Field notes in a commentary published with Murray's work. He continues that this government act "to tie" the well-being of those on welfare is responsible for economic separation of this group from others and subsequently for "recruiting them into the underclass" (1990, p. 58).

Concerning the behaviour attitudes, Elen Kempson observes in her research studies, mentioned in a foreword to Murray's work, that people who live on low incomes still have desires similar to the rest of the society: secure job, a decent home and enough earnings for a living "with a little to spare" irrespective of their current situation, which contradicts with pathological behaviour theories (1990, p. 8). It only supports the results of the British Social Attitudes Survey that those dependent on social benefits do not show any evidence of disaffection to work or traditional family patterns (Mingione, 1996, p. 279). In addition, Lorenzo Mingione contradicts the conception of the line between the deserved and those undeserved:

It is true that in order to face up to particularly difficult life conditions, when poverty obviously is not just transitory misfortune, all the poor have to adopt strategies and behaviours that are very unlike those of the majority, then it must also be the case that all the 'truly' poor are characterized by a moral cultural and behavioural divergence from the rest of the population. The deserving poor do not exist since they either die off due to privation or quickly

escape from poverty. (1996, p. 372)

Consequently, an alternative view has arisen that both approaches are considered relevant. In other words, the central features in Murray's account could be seen as the consequences of the structural approach causes.

Notwithstanding the differences among these underclass theories, there are certain consistent factors and common issues to deal with. Most of the academics would agree that a potential member of underclass is the person with no stable legitimate employment, dependent on state benefits, living in life-long poverty, with specific distinctive culture that tends to be inherited by their children. Moreover, this group is usually spatially concentrated or geographically separated from the mainstream of society due to the local unemployment. The association with housing tenure also implies some considerable level of local spatial concentration.

On the other hand, this division can not be supposed as a homogenous group easily defined since this social exclusion is not the issue of one country but the whole contemporary world, and the circumstances influencing the structure of the underclass differ. For example, regarding the structure of the underclass in the United States, the issue of race, especially the black population, must be taken into account in contrast to the situation in the UK. Here many of these individuals are members of ethnic minorities as well, but it is their long-term unemployment and therefore the welfare dependency rather than ethnicity that defines their membership of the underclass.



## 2.2 Underclass Boom in the UK

The British underclass, according to the current meaning of the term, started to form in the second half of the twentieth century. In the period since the mid 1970s not only have other western European economies but also Great Britain has experienced profound changes. The common factors were instability in the financial system, growth in service activities, transformations of the patterns of labour demand and labour market as a whole. All these changes have an indisputable impact on the social structures within society as well.

The process of economic restructuring mainly connected with the Conservative programme of Margaret Thatcher's government was perhaps more severe than in the rest of Europe for its program in social policy as Johnson points out: "to liberalize the operation of Labour market and reduce the role of the welfare state to that of a minimal safety net" (1994, p. 348). Paradoxically, despite of this "curative" economic transformation the costs of unemployment benefits increased at the end of 1980s due to the high increase of the unemployment rate. Thatcher had gradually enforced the reform of the British trade union law that has weakened their influence; the privatization programme of national industry, which had shown a very low level of profitability and competitiveness so far. Furthermore, she aimed to control inflation; to decrease the national debt, to transform heavy industry and lastly to focus on the country's conversion into a service-sector economy.

Although her policy did not originate the British underclass, a small fraction had become a sizeable and worrisome population during her administration. The above mentioned transformations in industries have had a marked impact on the structure of labour market and have made some occupational groups within regions redundant with a limited prospect of re-employment. Moreover, as already outlined in the previous chapter, the demand on skills and educational qualifications for a service economy purposes have changed rapidly, leaving some groups with a very weak labour market position, for unskilled men especially, as Linda McDowell states in her research *Transition to Work: masculine identities, youth inequality and labour market change*:

Many younger men are also facing more difficult circumstances than their fathers did as the transition into service-dominated economy has been accompanied by an expansion in a range of occupations and jobs that demand a set of skills and/or credentials that seems to be out of reach for some young men,

especially men from working-class backgrounds with few conventional educational credentials. (2002, p. 40)

In some localities such as old industrial areas in the North of England, it led to an acute problem of long-term unemployment. Especially working class male school leavers were not educationally prepared for the “new expanding industries in the service” (Mc Dowell, 2002, p. 40).

Both this economic restructuring and changes in social policy altered the proportion of the population in poverty and enabled the growth of a gap between the employed and unemployed, respectively between the economically self-sustained and the disadvantaged from the labour market. This new division within the British society sometimes colloquially referred to as a ‘Chav class’ has suffered worst from these processes.

Nowadays the underclass issue is used as “a powerful tool of political rhetoric for both left and right (Murray, 1990, p. 60). On the other hand, it enables to stress key problems in contemporary society such as increasing social polarisation and widening of the gap in incomes, marginalization of the poorest, a lack of means for social mobility in an upward direction and lastly the concentration, respectively the separation, of the most disadvantaged in vestigial rented housing sectors.

### 3. Representation of the Working Class in the Novel *Room at the Top*

John Braine, the author of the book *Room at the Top*, is usually associated with a generation of post-war writers known as the Angry young men, who were primarily connected by a similar style of writing and themes, such as social inequality, criticism of consumerism, conservative social rules and conventions. His first novel *Room at the Top* deals with the issue of class mobility, and offers realistic description of life from the perspective of young working class generation in post-war Britain. The Second World War was still very current and was supposed to be one of the causes of social changes afterwards. This shift of social climate is one of the main themes of the book. The traditional structure of society was gradually changing and thus there were opportunities for young “outsiders” to “penetrate”. This new reordering idea was based on the concept of the meritocratic system, i.e. the system in which the talented are chosen and moved ahead on the basis of their achievement not of their social background. Furthermore, the book is also valuable for its documentary description of typical life style of working classes in contrast to the life of a middle class town.

The main character is an educated young man Joe Lampton, coming from lower class background, who struggles to rise in the social hierarchy. He moved from his home town Dufton, an exclusively working class area, to Warley to work as a Town Hall clerk. He finds lodgings with a middle class family, the Thompsons, and makes contact with the upper rank of Warley society, among others with the Brown family. Regarding his ambitions, he is not concerned about social justice but he sees differences between classes purely in economic terms. In other words, material values are the only reason why he tries to climb “upward”. He has learned that money and power are everything and it is the thing he wants, as shown in this passage when Joe is admiring an Aston-Martin car and decides to gain a higher position:

... a young man and a girl came out of the solicitor's office [...] The ownership of the Aston-Martin automatically placed the young man in social class above mine; but that ownership was simply a question of money. [...] For a moment I hated him. I saw myself, compared with him, as the Town Hall clerk, the subordinate pen-pusher [...] and I tasted the sourness of envy. [...] I wanted an Aston-Martin, I wanted a three-guinea linen shirt, I wanted a girl with a Rivier a suntan – these were my rights, I felt, a signed and sealed legacy. [...] I made my choice then and there: I was going to enjoy all the luxuries which that young man enjoyed. I was going to collect that legacy. (1961, p. 40)

Occasionally, he has an opportunity to enjoy this feeling and it confirms his decision: “I

enjoyed the meat all the more. It was like driving Alice's car; for a moment I was living on the level I wanted to occupy permanently" (1961, p. 83).

Since he is aware of his restricted potential, he calculates achieving his goal through the only possibility he sees: to get married to upper middle class girl Susan Brown, as referenced in the passage when Joe is thinking of Susan: "I'll marry her [...] I'll make her daddy give me a damned good job. I'll never count pennies again" (1961, p. 154).

Richard Hoggart suggests that the problem of this low self esteem is mainly difficult for those working class boys who are only partially gifted. They have talent sufficient to separate them from the majority of the working class contemporaries; they moved from their lower origins and may move farther. On the other hand, the kind of job which they get evokes only the sense "still being on the ladder" unhappy about it and feeling anxious. They are still entrapped in some type of insecurity concerning their status. Hence, they are uncertain, dissatisfied and "gnawed by self doubt" (1964, pp. 293 - 300).

These views of self-appreciation are confirmed in the following extract when Joe is matching himself to the shop assistant in the chemist's:

He was obviously the unqualified general mug who did all the rough work and worked the most awkward hours. [...] How on earth did the assistant stand it? He'd sold himself, and what price had he got? Perhaps seven pounds a week, and not even any assurance of security; he was dependent for his daily bread on one man, and that man was ignorant, ill-mannered, and mean. Then I remembered my interview with Hoylake, and wondered how much difference there was between me and the assistant. True. I had more money, better working conditions, and security; but essentially our positions were the same. [...] My price was a shade higher, that was all. (1961, p. 164)

On the other hand, the Warley society shows him his own price. Firstly, the Browns family try to prevent the relationship and to demonstrate Joe's position within this society. Therefore, Joe's superior, as a mediator, explains to him "the mechanisms of the world" and, in a "friendly" manner, advises him to accept his place in Warley:

You are sensible young man. [...] I'm going to tell you what is wrong. [...] For your own benefit. [...] Councillor Brown, since you mentioned his name, is a very wealthy man. He has a great deal of influence. If anyone got in his way he'd be utterly ruthless. (1961, p. 161)

Just to "sketch" the situation, Joe's reaction is following:

I felt small and frightened then suddenly refreshingly angry. [...] I was

remembering the supercilious look on Mrs Brown's face, the big house on Polar Avenue blazing with and music, [...] I was on the outside again, my grubby little face pressed against the window. I'd lost the where-withal to buy what I hankered for and the shopkeeper was chasing me away. (1961, pp. 161 – 162)

Furthermore, Joe's aunt tries to remind him where he belongs as well: "Get one of your own class, lad, go to your own people" (1961, p. 105).

In addition, Joe has begun to be dubious about himself, as already mentioned above, and in his paranoid thoughts coming from the reaction of his surroundings he looks at himself from the perspective of "Them" in this way:

We shall begin by examining Joseph Lampton. Born. [...] Education Dufton Grammar School. Junior Clerk, Treasurer's Department, Dufton U.D.C, 1937. Sergeant Observer, 1940. 1943 – 1945, Stalag 1000, Bavaria. Present post, Senior Audit Clerk, Warley U.D.C. Salary, A.P.T. Two. Resources, £800, from accumulated R.A.F. pay, gratuity, and insurance on parents.

Prospects: he might be the Treasurer of Warley one day. Shall we say a thousand a year at the age of forty if he is very fortunate? Lampton has arisen very high, considering his humble beginnings, but, in our sense of the word. He lacks the necessary background, the poise, the breeding: in short, he is essentially vulgar, and possesses no talents which might compensate for this drawback. We learn to our astonishment and horror that Lampton has entered upon a clandestine relationship with a young Grade Two woman. [...] 'You fool,' I said to myself, 'you bloody fool. Why didn't you see it before? The whole Warley's ganged up against you.' (1961, pp. 167 – 169)

Lastly, Susan's mother is the person who classifies people according to their social status due to her highly distinguished family background: "Mama Brown [...] The last of the St Clairs and stinking with money. She's an old tough too; a place for everyone and everyone in their place" (1961, pp. 143 – 144). Another significant feature of the class conflict is shown after her conversation with Joe at the Civil Ball. Her reaction is rather contemptuous:

As I spoke she admitted an expression of faint disgust to her face; she wasn't, the expression said, a friend of this vulgar person with the bulging shirt-front and the chromium cufflinks, nor did she wish to be after being a witness of the crude and ill-balanced way in which he had answered a perfectly civil remark. (1961, p. 182)

However, Joe himself is aware of the class differences between him and Susan as referred in this excerpt: "Susan was a princess and I was the equivalent of a swineherd" (1961, p. 71). But sometimes he looks at it from the opposite point of view. For instance, when trying to explain her why it is almost impossible for him to be rebuffed, he realizes that for her it is an almost unimaginable situation:

I felt angry. She was lucky, she'd always been lucky, she'd never known

the reality of the cold bedroom and the stuffy living-room with the blaring radio, she'd never had to worry about exams or a job or the price of new clothes, even her way of speaking with its touchingly childish affectations was a luxury no one of the working classes could afford. [...] She had, I felt instinctively, a conception of Joe Lampton which I'd never to depart from in the smallest detail. Self-pity and class-consciousness weren't included in that conception. (1961, pp. 155 – 156)

As mentioned before, Joe Lampton decided to use Susan as his “ticket” to a better social status as he declares: “I was taking Susan not as Susan, but as a Grade A lovely, as the daughter of a factory owner, as the means of obtaining the key to the Aladdin’s cave of my ambitions”(1961, p. 156). Nevertheless, he admits:”Even apart of her money, she was worth marrying” (1961, p. 70). But nothing is so easy. Susan is not the only woman in his life. In fact, he has an older mistress Alice. The difference between them is that Joe’s feelings to Susan are rather inconsistent. Although she is a part of his plan and that is the way in which he regards her, he is not emotionless:

I’ve never loved her more than I did then. I forgot the Jaguar and the Bentley and the Ford V8. She loved and she wanted to be loved, she was transparent with affection; I could no more deny that correct response in my heart than refuse a child a piece of bread. In the back of my mind a calculating machine rang up success [...] but that part of me that mattered, the instinctive, honest part of me, went out to meet her with open hands. (1961, p. 145)

Yet, it is in contrast with a situation in which Susan reveals her love to him:

That was what I wanted; I applauded my own skill impersonally. The strange thing was that I meant every word what I said, and it was easy enough to speak them with her firm young body touching mine. But the words were meant for somebody else, [...] Susan was welcome to all of it, but I had reserved it for someone else a long time ago. (1961, p. 177)

It is Alice to whom Joe had reserved his true love, as shown in this passage:

When I looked at her I knew that her was all the love I’d ever get; I’d drawn my ration. [...] It would have been better if she’d been ten years younger and had money of her own, just as life would be more agreeable if the rivers ran beer and the trees grew ham sandwiches. (1961, p. 202)

But it is also Alice who is abandoned for the money and the position that he had longed for: “I wanted to be in Warley. Alice didn’t belong to Warley. I couldn’t have both her and Warley” (1961, p. 235). While Joe is quitting their relationship with words “I love Susan”, her response “That’s very sensible of you” implies that she is under no illusion why he decided in that way (1961, p. 233).

As a consequence, his sense of ethics has changed. He is strongly consciousness

about his calculating immorality as recorded in his words:

I feel what is correct for me to feel; I go through the necessary motions. But I cannot delude myself that I care. I wouldn't say that I was dead; simply that I had begun to die. I have realized, you might say, that I have, at the most only another sixty years to live. I'm not actively unhappy and I'm not afraid of death, but I'm not alive in the way that I was. [...] I look back at that raw young man sitting miserable in the pub with a feeling of a genuine regret; I wouldn't, even if I could, change places with him, but he was indisputably a better person than the smooth character I am now, after ten years of getting almost everything that I ever wanted. (1961, pp. 140-141)

His valuation of his moral degradation was even harsher after being told about Alice's suicide. He even thinks of himself as a foreigner in his own body:

I didn't like Joe Lampton. He was a sensible young accountant with a neatly-pressed Blue suit and a stiff blue collar. He always said and did the correct thing [...] why, he even made a roll in the hay with a pretty little teenager pay dividends. I hated Joe Lampton, but he looked and sounded very sure of himself sitting at my desk in my skin; he'd come to stay, this was no flying visit. [...] Joe Lampton Export Model Mark IA warranted free of dust, flaws, cracks, dust or pity. (1961, pp. 240-241)

At that point he realises that his ambition to get to the top was bought at the price of his happiness and fulfilment:

I know the name he'd give me: the successful Zombie. [...] He was of a higher quality; he could feel more, he could take more strains. I suppose I had my chance to be a real person. (1961, p. 141).

Moreover, he gradually changes his attitude to his own class; his own roots as shown in the following excerpts. Firstly, he considers his dissimilarity with his relatives:

I was very fond of Aunt Emily and Uncle Dick and even their two sons, Tom and Sydney, thirteen and fourteen respectively, [...] heading straight for the mills and apparently perfectly happy about it. I even had a slight feeling of guilt about leaving Dufton, because I knew that the monthly eight pounds which I gave her had been a great help to her. But I couldn't stay in her world any longer [...] I had a footing in a very different world. (1961, p. 25)

The main distinction he sees in their fatalistic approach, no ambitions compared to him, which only proves Hoggart's claims that working class people do not usually think of their lives "as leading to improvement in status or to some financial goals" (1966, p. 105). As time passes Lampton's view differs considerably more. He does not feel like a member of working class at all:

[...] it wasn't that I didn't care for Aunt Emily and her family, but I was too much at T'Top now, and half hating myself for it, I found myself seeing them as foreigners. They were kind and good and generous; but they weren't my sort of person any longer. (1961, p. 160)

On the contrary, his working class nature remains in some aspects the same: "I was wearing my shirt for the second day. I had the working-class mentality; anything was good enough for work" (1961, p. 169).

Although he feels rooted up from the world of the working class, he is still aware of his uncertain position, as shown in the following excerpt. Going to the party he happens to meet a working class woman who he knows by sight:

... two worlds were meeting. The world of worry about rent and rates and groceries, of the smell of soda and black-lead and No Smoking and No Spitting and Please Have the Correct Change Ready and the world of the Rolls and the Black Market clothes and the Coty perfume and the career ahead of one running on well-oiled grooves to a knighthood; and the party in the big house at the end of the pine-lined drive at which, I felt in a sudden accession of my pessimism, I would very quickly be shown that my place was in the world of the poor with its narrow present like a stony hen-run. (1961, p. 143)

Concerning depiction of a physical environment, Joe Lampton undergoes not only symbolic journey to get away from the world he was born but also the real one. As said before, he left Dufton, an entirely working class town, to move to middle class quarter in Warley. Since he sees most class differences in material values, a lot of space is dedicated to descriptions of material surroundings. Hence, the book contains a lot of the typical life style images of working classes in contrast to the life of the middle class. For instance, he very often compares the environment of Warley with Dufton as reflected in two following passages.

In the first one Joe is delighted by Warley after his arrival:

... my lodgings might easily have been one of those scruffy little houses by the station- from one Dufton to another. Instead I was going to the Top, into a world that even from my first brief glimpses filled me with excitement: big houses with drives and orchards and manicured hedges, a preparatory schools [...] expensive cars – Bentleys, Lagondas, Daimlers, Jaguars – parked everywhere in a kind of ostentatious litter as the district dropped them at random as evidences of its wealth [...] What impressed me most was Cyprus Avenue. It was broad and straight, and lined with cypresses. The street where I lived in Dufton was called Oak Crescent; it didn't curve one inch and there wasn't even a bush along it. Cyprus Avenue became at that instant a symbol of Warley - it was as if all my life I'd been eating sawdust and thinking it was bread. (1961. p. 20)

The second excerpt refers to his first walk in the new quarter in which he lives:



I went out to Eagle Road. [...] No doubt it would all have been a nightmare to anyone with any understanding of architecture; but I didn't look at it aesthetically. I saw it against the background of Dufton, the back-to-back houses, the outside privies, the smoke which caught the throat and dirtied clean linen in a couple of hours, the sense of being always involved in a charade upon Hard Times. [...] anyone who lives in a place like Dufton will understand the sensation of release of lightness, of having more than one's fair share oxygen. (1961, p. 35)

Joe later admits he dislikes his home town for its ugliness in contrast to Warley: "I hate my own hometown [...] But that's different. Look, Dufton's awful. It stinks. Literally. It's dead as mutton. Warley's alive. I felt that from the first moment I set foot in the place" (1961, p. 126). Furthermore, after getting familiarized with Warley he points out: "In the three months I'd been there I was already more a part of the town, more involved in its life, than ever I had been in my birthplace" (1961, p. 112).

Similarly, the interiors of tenements and clothes are confronted as significant signs of particular classes. In some cases, even the signs of class identity are proposed. Such case is Joe's contemplation about his dressing gown:

I'd never had one before; Aunt Emily thought not only that they were an extravagance (an overcoat would serve their purpose) but that they were the livery of idleness and decadence. As I looked at it I seemed to hear her voice. 'I'd sooner see someone naked,' she'd say. 'Working people look daft in dressing-gowns, like street-women lounging about the house too idle to wash their faces [...] Spend your money for something sensible, lad. (1961, p. 24)

As implied in this passage, there is a significant difference in thinking of Joe and his Aunt Emily. While Joe, in general, is rather radical in his ideas and ideals, his Aunt is entirely dissimilar. Except for the Joe's disunion from the working class, the generation gap must be taken into account as well. Another good example is the dialogue between these protagonists when they are talking about past times. This narration also gives documentary information about the conditions in the pre-war period:

'Your grandma had all t'heart knocked out of her when your grandpa wor killed at t'mill. During t'first war, that war, and them coning money then, but not a penny-piece of compensation did your grandma get. T'same people went bankrupt in 1930. T'owd meister shot himself.' 'Good', I said. 'It wasn't good for those that wor thrown out of work.' She looked at me sternly. 'Think on how lucky you are Joe. T'Town Hall can't go bankrupt. Tha'll never go hungry. Or have to scrat and scrape saving for thi old age.' 'It's not so bad in the mills now,' I said. 'No one's out of work. Dammit, some

of the millhands are better off than me.’(1961, p. 104)

Later, Joe’s attitude to the boy dressed in a manner which he would no longer see fit confirms his gradual change of mental identity from “Us” to “Them”, in a transferred meaning: ”He was following the odd working-class fashion which seemed to me now, after Alice’s tuition, as queer as going out without trousers” (1961, p. 171).

Going back to the living standards, there are numbers of contrastive descriptions in the book. To illustrate, the standard equipment of a middle class bathroom is compared with the similar lower class facilities. While the bathroom of Lampton’s landlord is “the sort you’d expected to find in any middle-class home”, i.e. designed as a bathroom, equipped with chromium towel-rails, a big mirror with toothmug and toothbrush holders, a steel cabinet and “immaculately clean, smelling faintly of scented soap and freshly laundered towels”; the bathroom of his own family had been adapted from a bedroom, as Joe explains:

At the time the houses were built it wasn’t considered that the working-classes needed baths. It was a small room with pitch-pine flooring (if you weren’t careful you could pick up a nasty splinter) and brown wallpaper blotchy with splashes. Towels were kept in the cistern cupboard which was generally full of drying undergarments. On the window-sill were a razor, a stick of shaving-soap, a tube of toothpaste, and a dingy mess of toothbrushes, used razor-blades, face-cloths and no less than three cups with broken handles which were supposed to be used as shaving-mugs but, obviously, from their encrusting of dust, never had been.(1961, p. 24)

Another contrast in living standards and also in the culture values is demonstrated when Mrs Thompson, Joe’s landlady, shows him the Medici reproduction in his room:

...it was simply that in Dufton pictures were pieces of furniture, they weren’t *meant* to look at. The Medicis quite definitely were. They belonged to a pattern of gracious living; to my surprise the worn phrase straight from the women’s magazines accurately conveyed the atmosphere. (1961, p. 23)

The contrast is displayed not only in furniture and other home equipment but also in the heights of income. For instance, the novel documents the income differences between low paid blue-collar jobs in contrast to skilled labour. Joe revealed that his subordinate Ray had manipulated the accounts in order to embezzle fifteen shillings. He gives the reason for which Ray did it: “His elementary school pals would be earning

five or six pounds a week whilst he had only two. He'd been trying to keep up with the Joneses, the poor little devil" (1961, p. 221). That only proves presumption that division of class only on income basis can not be seen valid.

The last feature of those times to be mentioned is the growth of the first council estates, as the welfare policy of the state. Joe notices one of these estates in this way:

I saw roads and houses which I'd never seen before – big square houses, broad straight roads, not black and grey, but all white and clean. I realized afterwards I'd been looking at the new Council estate. (1961, p. 172)

Later, he expresses his own view on these new quarters when talking about Warley giving reasons why he betrayed Alice:

...I loved it all. [...] I couldn't leave it. And if I married Alice I'd be forced to leave it. You can only love a town if it loves you, and Warley would never love co-respondent. I had to love Warley properly too, I had to take all she could give me; it was too late to enjoy merely her warm friendship, a life with a Grade Six girl perhaps, a life spent in, if I were lucky, one of the concrete boxes of houses on the new Council estate. People could be happy in those little houses with their tiny gardens and one bathroom and no garage. They could be happy on my present income, even on a lot less. But it wasn't for me; if the worst came to the worst, I would accept it sooner than not live in Warley at all, but I had to force the town into granting me the ultimate intimacy, the power and privilege and luxury which emanated from T'Top. (1961, pp. 216 - 217)

To conclude, the difficulties of upward mobility are shown on the Joe Lampton situation. As a member of the working class, he is faced not only with social obstacles and prejudice but also with the loss of his own identity. His situation embodies the typical features characteristic for the educated lower class generation in the post-war period. Hoggart points out about them:

I have in mind those who, for numbers of years, perhaps for a very long time, have a sense of no longer really belonging of any group [...] They are 'declassed' experts and specialists who go into their own spheres after the long scholarship climb as led them to Ph.D. (1966, p. 292)

In addition, Storry and Childs claim that this portrait of Lampton as a "ruthless opportunist" created an image of working class people "selling out and acquiring the moral scruples of vipers". It handicapped talented members of the lower classes to find any "room at the top" (2002, 185).

#### **4. Reflection of the Issues in Barry Hines' *Kestrel for a Knave***

The main themes of the novels written by Barry Hines, born in South Yorkshire to the family of a miner, deal with the life of working class, particularly with a community of his native West Riding of Yorkshire. He concludes: "They are about people who live on council estates or in small terraced houses. The men work in mines and steelworks, the women in underpaid menial jobs—or, increasingly, are on the dole," as stated on the Brief Biographies webpage ("Barry Hines Biography - Barry Hines comments").

His most celebrated novel 'A Kestrel for a Knave' (Kes), published in 1968, is a partial autobiography, as the author claims. It is a story of a boy named Billy Casper who is troubled at home and at school as well. He lives with his mother and step-brother Jud, who works as a miner, in a new council estate in Barnsley (coal mining area – South Yorkshire). He dislikes school, has no idea what to do next and does not seem to be overly concerned with the situation. The only thing he is interested in is his kestrel that he had found and trained. The bird shows him the way to be his own man and he is committed to falconry in a way he would never be to anything at school. All the social issues regarding working class society mentioned in the book are observed through the eyes of this main character without any overt judgment.

Firstly, despite of the rising living standards of the working class in the post-war period, the number of people living in poverty, especially the low-paid and one-parent families, considerably increased during the 1960s (Hopkins, 1991, p. 148). This is the case of the main character's family. The poverty of Billy's background is made significant by the first sentence of the book: "There were no curtains up," (1986, p. 7). In addition, Billy's home is not equipped with central heating (1986, p. 9) and the lack of carpets is stressed by mentioning the lino (1986, p. 9) in contrast to the stone house to where he delivers newspapers:

At the side of the house, a grey Bentley was parked before an open garage [...] The hall and stairs were carpeted. A radiator with a glass shelf ran along one wall, and on the shelf stood a vase of fresh daffodils. (1986, p. 16)

Furthermore, other hints such as the broken zip of his windcheater (1986, p. 10), the pilferage of juice and cartoon of eggs brought about by the protagonist's hunger (1986, 13) just indicate the conditions in which he is forced to live.

Concerning houses in a new council estate, they are depicted as neglected and dusky: It is quite apparent when described on Billy's journey to a betting shop,

The whole area was patched with scruffy grass, knotted with dead dock and sorrel, and spiked with old rose-bay spears. The skeleton of an elderberry bush had been bombarded and broken with half bricks, and all round it lay papers and cans, a saucepan, a bike frame, and a wheel-less pram. (1986, pp. 121 - 122)

These outskirts of the cities were designed, as mentioned in the first chapter, to meet the need of houses after the Second World War. Nevertheless, there was shortage of money for their maintenance and inherent faults in the structures were revealed very often ("Education in the 60's", p. 6). Moreover, the damaging of council estates by their own inhabitants is described by Hopkins as another aspect of living in these outskirts (1991, p. 142). Also Billy, before he found Kes, had spent his time vandalizing the estate with his friends. Linda McDowell supposes these criminal activities as "the search for self-respect" (2005, p. 350) and Murray concludes that this youth criminality is significant for the males in their teens and belongs to one of the main features of underclass behaviour (Murray, 1990, pp. 34 – 35). He also stresses that number of these troublesome male teenagers grew during the 1970s.

Secondly, the stereotypical picture of working class women as wives who hardly have time for anything else than taking care of children and the household, as stated in the first chapter, is being dismissed here. Billy's father had left the family and his mother is a fully-employed, self-centred woman who prefers entertainment, going to the pub and looking for a would-be new father rather than being interested in her own son. As illustrated in the situation in which she is hurrying to the pub and Billy begins to present to her his plan of having a kestrel. She gives him money saying, "ten to eight! Ee, I'm going to be late as usual [...] here, there's two bob for you. Go and buy yourself some pop an' some crisps or summat" (1986, p. 39). And furthermore, when Billy tries to find shelter in her arms she holds him off rather embarrassingly telling

him, “gi’o’er then, Billy, don’t be so daft” (1986, p. 149). He neither can find support in his brother whose behaviour is mainly cruel to him. As a result Billy himself never shows his real feelings overtly aside from talking about Kes at school when called upon by Mr. Farthing, his teacher.

Nevertheless, the school is just a place in which Billy is regarded as an outsider without any effort to be involved. Only Mr. Farthing shows any interest in Billy's extramural activities and knows that this drifter is actually intelligent and dedicated. Billy's bearing on the school illustrates the situation of the changing educational system in the post-war period that was supposed to enable gain of higher education for people from lower classes. In fact, this already mentioned three-tier system based on division of schools into grammar, secondary modern and technical schools disallowed the students of secondary schools to gain a broad curriculum. As Storry and Childs claim, it led to an unequal system that discriminated against some children in contrast with the children from welfare families (2002, p. 80). Without any chance to get better qualifications for the future, many students in ‘secondary moderns’ wanted to leave the school as soon as possible, find a job and start to earn money. Billy Casper is the same. His poor education does not give him any other opportunity for going further. On the other hand, he disliked school and wanted to leave but had no idea what he wanted to do aside from the fact that he did not want to end up in the mine like his brother and others.

As pointed out in the internet article *Education in the 60's*, also the quality of the staff in schools was significantly decreasing. Many teachers accepted the posts in the secondary schools only because they were unable to find anything better although the payment was the same for all three divisions of schools.(p. 6). It was openly suggested that too many teachers were simply lazy and incompetent (Hopkins, 1991, p. 247).

Thus, only a few of them were really dedicated to their occupation. An exact illustration is the conversation between Billy and Mr. Farthing about other teachers,

...you do at least try to learn us summat, most o’ t’others don’t. They’re not bothered about us, just because we’re in 4C, you can tell, they talk to us like muck. They’re allus callin’ us idiots, an’ numbskulls, an’ cretins, an’ looking at their watches to see how long it is to t’end o’ t’lesson. (1986, p. 82)

Not only the teachers but also an employment officer do not intend to deal with Billy's interview too long and, without any deeper analysis of Billy's skills and abilities, writes in the form "manual" (1986, p. 139). To compare it with the reality, the Social

class and Higher Education Survey done by Institute for Employment studies reports on little stimulation from teachers and careers advisers in the earlier stages of education (2001, p. 107). Thus, this circumstance directs his future – to stay and work, at best, as an unskilled labourer.

In addition, among his own people he is not expected to achieve anything better. It is displayed when Billy is speaking with his brother about the next year. Jud assumes Billy will become a miner:” Ar, just think; an’ next year tha’ll be coming down with me”. (1986, p. 22) These no ambitions, already referred in the previous chapter in connection to the Hoggart’s view, were the characteristic feature of the working class members.

To sum up, the whole story mirrors the beginning of new trends in working class society concerning poverty, the future phenomena of one-parent families and the changing role of women within the working class. The living conditions are not idealized but shown in a real light and it destroys the stereotypical image of the life of the working classes. Lastly, the importance of the book lays in its documentation of the impact of the educational system on youth and their access to education in reality.

Billy himself and his family can be seen also as representatives of the underclass rather than working class due to their living standards and education level opportunities. Furthermore the symbolism of a kestrel is a hint. This bird was in the past considered as useless for falconry due to its savagery and bad ability to learn hunting. Therefore, these birds were not used by the nobility in the medieval times but the “knaves” were allowed to possess them as the only bird predators. Hines used the quotation selected from The Boke of St Albans as the motto:

An eagle for an Emperor, a gyrfalcon for a King; a Peregrine for a Prince,  
a Saker for a Knight, a Merlin for a Lady; a Goshawk for a Yeoman, a  
Sparrowhawk for a Priest, a Musket for a Holy water Clerk, a Kestrel for a  
Knave. (1986, p. 6)

It might be seen as a symbol of Billy’s position in the society as a member of the underclass.

## Conclusion

Based on the assumption that a lot of topics of fictional books come from the reflection of current issues of society, an analysis of two titles was done in order to answer the primary question of this paper, namely which particular issues, were dealt with. Both selected books, *Room at the Top* by John Braine and *Kestrel for a Knave* by Barry Hines, showed a portrait of life of the working class in the post-war period of the twentieth century and dealt with changing values within this society.

In particular the main theme of the novel *Room at the Top* is the traditional forms of social organization and social mobility seen, by the main character, rather in material values and behaviour than in the system itself. Furthermore, the loss of class identity and feelings of no longer really belonging of any group are crucial elements as well. It corresponds with the real situation of the post-war generation of young educated people absorbed upward as “declassed experts” who have “sense of no longer really belonging of any group” (Hoggart, 1966, p. 292). The book also depicts a typical lifestyle of the working class society in the immediate post-war times including living standards compared to middle class values.

In contrast, the second novel, set in the late sixties, focuses on structural inequality, especially poverty within the working class. Of course, there is no doubt that economic conditions improved during the post-war period. Nevertheless, the book shows that despite the prosperous times of material progress such as the rise of living standards and the improving height of real wages, unequal education options and existence of poverty could not be denied.

Further, a considerable number of the social shifts portrayed in the volume; such as change of nuclear family units, transformation of gender role and the related profound change of labour market opportunities and consequently the loss of older class identity; is of equal importance. It collides with a stereotypical picture about working class traditional life and values.

Regarding social mobility the book is rather concerned with the structural causes, namely the education scheme that causes social exclusion in spite of the 1944 Act meritocratic reforms. While Joe Lampton, the main character of Braine’s *Room on the Top*, sees his possibility to study as a continuous trend taken for granted, his counterpart in the second book, Billy Casper, is not so fortunate due to the educational inefficiency of the system. Thus, it decreases his employability or even it leads to



unemployment. To validate this still current issue, “It is working-class boys who are experiencing a relative decline in educational achievement, workplace exclusion and who are consequently facing growing polarisation and social exclusion,” as Linda McDowell states (2000). This marginality gradually evokes different patterns of culture and behaviour that become more distinct from the working classes.

Going back to changes of family patterns, life in working class families continued to evolve, as book illustrates. More marriages broke up than before, more children were brought up by a single parent and more children were born illegitimate (Hopkins, 1991, p. 254). This trend continued to grow. As Hopkins observes, the number of one-person households increased from about an eighth of all households in 1961 to a quarter in 1987 as divorce rates accelerated (1991, p. 252). Many of these individuals were women, particularly single or divorced mothers. They also had to cope with difficult situations such as long term unemployment or poorly paid jobs and subsequently heavy reliance on welfare support that defined their membership in the underclass.

To find similar features, both books share the same theme of class identity and both illustrate cultural values typical for each class. Moreover, *Room at the Top* witnesses the great gap between the middle class and lower class lifestyle.

Nevertheless, it should be also noted that the progress of the consumer society destroyed the relationships of the particular classes and their culture as a significant element associated with these groups. As A.D. Harvey implies: “cheap air travel, cheap electronic goods and even cheaper mass-produced furniture, together with the increasing irresponsibility of white-collar professionals, have blurred former distinctions in cultural behaviour and shared cultural values” (2007). Thus, some believe in the “embourgeoisment” of the affluent workers, i.e. their adoption of middle class values and lifestyle which ruin class boundaries (Brooke, 2001, p. 1). In spite of the fact that the lines are not so strict, class identity still has its significant place in the lives of the British, and moreover, the inequality, particularly economic unevenness, still exists.

Due to the downsizing in the economy during the late 1970s and the Thatcher era in the 1980s British society has become more polarized than ever before. Deindustrialization of the country and its transformation to the service sector economy greatly reduced the manufacturing employment opportunities for working class labour. Of course, that led to high levels of unemployment and consequently to uneven

distribution of work. This job insecurity contributes to new phenomenon - "presenteeism" characterized by long working hours (McDowell, 2005, p. 350). Whereas many people work very long, others have only low paid part time employment or no work at all. It had its consequences for both the employed and the unemployed. For the latter quite sizeable minority, it is the social benefits that they are depended on to make both ends meet. Owing to the growing number of working class households without waged work, the living standards have fallen, with the result that Britain is now a more unequal society than it was half century ago (McDowell, 2005, p. 357). This gap is wider than in most European countries and it is seen as the force that still divides British society and hence Class still counts.

## Resumé

Tato práce se zabývá tématem třídní identity a sociálních změn v druhé polovině 20. století týkajících se pracující třídy a takzvané novodobé underclass ve Velké Británii a jejich zobrazením v současné britské literatuře. Důraz je kladen především na přiblížení hlavních témat spojených s oběma třídami, ale i na socioekonomické a politické okolnosti zapříčiňující dané změny.

Mezi hlavní charakteristické rysy současné Británie stále patří zachování systému třídní společnosti a s tím spojené třídní identity. Každá sociální skupina v této hierarchii se vyznačuje určitým stylem života a chováním, zastává své vlastní hodnoty a sdílí společnou kulturu. Částečně lze dané skupiny určit i dle druhu povolání, které jednotliví členové vykonávají. To vše dává jedinci v dané struktuře určitou roli, neboli společenský status, který je pro Brity stále důležitým atributem. Nejedná se však o striktně dané a neměnné pozice a uzavřená společenství. Postupem doby se systém uvolnil natolik, že míra sociální mobility je větší nežli v minulosti i díky politickým změnám, hlavně v poválečném období, založených na myšlence meritokratické koncepce státu.

Historicky se britská společnost skládala ze tří tříd, a to vyšší třídy, střední a nižší třídy, dnes spíše nazývané pracující. Nicméně tento systém se podstatně změnil díky ekonomické transformaci země koncem sedmdesátých a během osmdesátých let 20. století. Následkem stoupající nezaměstnanosti a vzrůstajících rozdílů v příjmech se britská společnost rozštěpila a dala vzniknout novému fenoménu dnešní doby, jakési „podtřídy“ těch, jež se nachází na okraji, ať již ekonomickém či společenském. Největší procento těchto „outsiderů“ se hlásí svým původem k pracující třídě. To jen dokazuje určitý stupeň provázanosti obou vrstev.

Původ pojmu pracující třída je úzce spojen s nástupem industrializace. Avšak dnešní podoba této skupiny byla ovlivněna řadou politických a socioekonomických faktorů. Tradiční obraz dělnické rodiny v první polovině 20. století byl stále spojován s dělníkem bez dostatečného vzdělání, jako živitelem rodiny a jeho ženou považovanou především za matku a manželku. Tento model se ale začal měnit již během první světové války, ať už z důvodů potřeby nahradit mužskou pracovní sílu nebo kvůli pozdější vysoké nezaměstnanosti, změně pracovní doby či nárůstu mezd. K podstatné přeměně nicméně dochází v padesátých letech minulého století. Tato zlatá éra, jak je jí někdy přezdíváno, znamenala pro pracující především jistotu zaměstnání, díky plné

zaměstnanosti v poválečném období. Další makroekonomické ukazatele jako například, nízká inflace, nárůst exportu a expanze průmyslových odvětví společně s koncepcí sociálního státu napomohly růstu příjmů a následně životní úrovně a s tím spojené úrovně bydlení této skupiny. S tím je spojován i narůstající trend konzumerizmu a většího individualizmu. Nejlepším ukazatelem v tomto případě byl nárůst vlastnictví spotřebního zboží trvalejší hodnoty. Částečně i díky těmto změnám lze pozorovat nárůst nostalgie po starých časech, kdy pocit semknutí s vlastní třídou a rozdělení společnosti na „Oni“ a „My“ patřilo k hlavním atributům tohoto společenství jako i tradiční rozdělení pozic v rámci rodiny, to jest striktně vymezená role matky - opatrovatelky rodinného krbu a dětí, a na druhé straně otce - živitele rodiny. Tento stereotypní portrét přežívá i v dnešním období.

Realita však byla rozdílná. Ženy začaly více pracovat, aby tak zvýšily standard svých rodin a to samozřejmě vedlo ke změně zažitých rodinných modelů ať už se týkaly velikosti či změny sociálních rolí. Po tomto období blahobytné společnosti došlo ke změně britského hospodářství v šedesátých a sedmdesátých letech 20. století. Deindustrializace a následný přechod k ekonomice orientované na sektor služeb, zavedení nových technologií a restrukturalizace pracovního trhu s podstatně většími požadavky na úroveň dosaženého vzdělání zapříčinily velký úbytek pracovních míst zvláště pro dělnické profese a tím vysokou míru nezaměstnanosti, obzvláště v průmyslových oblastech. Tato situace se však nedotkla jen starší populace dělníků ale také mnoha mladých mužů s minimálním vzděláním. Jejich nedostatečná kvalifikace vedla, de facto, k jejich nezaměstnatelnosti a postupné závislosti na sociálních dávkách, a to i přes značné snahy státu poskytnout vzdělání širokým vrstvám a zvýšit tak možnosti sociální mobility v rámci společnosti. Od čtyřicátých let 20. století prošel britský vzdělávací systém řadou reforem v rámci ambiciózního programu sociálního státu, který měl poskytnout stejnou příležitost všem bez rozdílu. Mezi nejmarkantnější patřilo zrušení školného, navýšení věkové hranice pro ukončení povinné docházky a reorganizace struktury školství. Tyto změny nepochybně přispěly k rozšířenému přístupu ke vzdělání, ale co se týče nižší třídy měly na její členy minimální dopad. Samozřejmě se navýšil i počet středoškolských a vysokoškolských studentů pocházejících z řad pracujících vrstvy ale ne v přímé úměrnosti k celkovému počtu všech žáků. Za jednu z příčin se považuje i rodinné zázemí a náhled rodičů na vzdělání a dále pak nedostatečná kapacita míst na školách středoškolského typu, která byla zapříčiněna vysokou porodností ihned po druhé světové válce. Všechny tyto faktory vedly k tomu,

že stále vysoké procento studentů, respektive chlapců, pocházejících z nižších vrstev opouští školu ve věku šestnácti let bez zájmu o další kvalifikaci. Tento trend zapříčiňuje jejich nízkou konkurenceschopnost na pracovním trhu, jak již bylo výše zmíněno, a též nižší konkurenceschopnost celé země z ekonomického hlediska. Naopak nárůst pracovních příležitostí pro ženy z této sociální skupiny vedl k převážné feminizaci pracovního trhu. Jedná se však převážně o práci s nižším finančním ohodnocením a ne trvalého charakteru.

Všechny tyto okolnosti ovlivnily tradiční sociální vzorce uvnitř této společenské třídy. Narůstá například počet rodin s jedním rodičem, převážně rozvedených či svobodných matek, které se díky nízkým příjmům stávají závislými na podpoře státu stejně jako nezaměstnaní. Počet těch, kteří čelí těmto ekonomickým těžkostem stále stoupá a začíná být alarmující. Právě tato jejich chudoba a závislost na státu, které je vylučují ze zbytku společnosti, patří k hlavním rysům takzvané underclass vrstvy. Podle některých se však nejedná jen o jejich chudobu, která způsobuje jejich „odtržení“ ale i o jejich odlišné chování a hodnoty, jako například občasné násilí, záškoláctví, neochota hledat si práci, vyšší podíl kriminality a podobně, zapříčiněné právě politikou sociálních příspěvků. Na druhou stranu se objevuje i názor, že již zmíněné strukturální příčiny, to jest nízký příjem, ekonomická situace, situace pracovního trhu, politika státu ale i „třídnost“ společnosti, jsou výlučnými činiteli zodpovědnými za tuto situaci. V dnešní době se právě problematika nárůstu tohoto společenství stává velice populárním tématem diskuze nejen v politických ale i vědeckých kruzích.

Nejinak tomu je i v současném britském umění. V tomto ohledu má práce za cíl analyzovat zobrazení těchto vrstev a témat jich se dotýkajících v současné britské literatuře. První zvolená kniha *Room at the Top* autora Johna Braina, v českém překladu *Místo nahoře*, ilustruje probíhající změny ve společnosti spojené s otázkou třídní identity a sociální mobility v období po druhé světové válce. Román dále reflektuje i téma sociální nerovnosti, spíše však z pohledu materiálního. Snahou hlavního hrdiny knihy, který je dělnického původu, je postoupit na pomyslném sociálním žebříčku. Důvodem jeho úsilí jsou ale peníze a moc, které považuje za hlavní atributy vyšších vrstev. Co se týče třídní identity, uvědomuje si svou vlastní odlišnost v porovnání se střední vrstvou ale i postupné „vykořenění“ ze svých vlastních řad, až přestává považovat sama sebe za jednoho z nich. Jedná se o určitou symbolickou cestu, na níž se stává členem odlišného společenství a přijímá jeho normy ať již kulturní či společenské. Nicméně stále v něm převládají některé povahové rysy příznačné jen pro člena třídy

pracujících a stále si je vědom své nejisté pozice, obzvláště když reakce členů střední třídy nejsou tak vstřícné k jeho snahám. Stejná pozornost je věnována i generačním rozdílům v rámci pracující třídy a s tím spojených náhledů na život. Tyto všechny okolnosti byly v reálu příznačné pro poválečnou mladou generaci, která dosáhla vyššího stupně vzdělání a následně vyššího společenského statutu za cenu ztráty své vlastní třídní identity. Hodnota tohoto románu spočívá i v téměř dokumentárním popisu prostředí a života pracující třídy v kontrastu se střední vrstvou obyvatelstva. Obzvláště rozsáhlé pasáže pak zachycují srovnání standardů bydlení a okolí obou skupin.

V pořadí druhá publikace *Kestrel for a Knave* (v českém překladu *Poštołka pro pacholka*) soudobého britského autora Barryho Hinesa, odehrávající se v pozdějším období šedesátých let 20. století, pojednává spíše o strukturální nerovnosti uvnitř pracující třídy samé, zejména o pak chudobě. Prostřednictvím ilustrace okolí a obydlí chlapce Billyho, hlavního postavy, je čtenář seznámen s relativně nuznými poměry života obecního sídliště v hornické oblasti jižního Yorkshiru. To nabourává až doposud proklamovaný obraz blahobytné společnosti. Stejně důležité je i zachycení sociálních změn týkajících se této skupiny, zejména pak plné zaměstnanosti žen, z toho vyplývající změny ženské role v rámci rodiny, nastupující trend rozvedených matek samoživitelek a změn týkajících se požadavků pracovního trhu. I otázka sociální mobility je spíše nahlížena prostřednictvím strukturálních příčin, nežli z pohledu třídní identity. Pozornost je namířena na možnosti vzdělávacího systému, který i přes reformační meritokratické snahy spíše přispívá k sociální exkluzi dětí pocházejících z těchto průmyslových oblastí. Selhání tohoto systému je jedním z faktorů vedoucích k vyšší nezaměstnanosti. Další charakteristický rys spojovaný s fenoménem *underclass* je drobná kriminalita mladistvých, jež je v románu okrajově též zmíněna.

U Billa se proto již dají určité znaky vnímat jako profil člena *underclass* společnosti nežli pracující třídy.

Souhrnně lze tedy konstatovat, že na základě teoretických poznatků a následné analýzy vybraných beletristických děl lze vypočítat řadu zásadních okolností ovlivňujících strukturu britské společnosti ale i náhled na třídní identitu, která je pro Brity stále důležitou součástí jejich života.

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