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Aspects of Class in British and American TV Crime Fiction

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

While this paper's subject may well be the issue of social class, it is located in the realm of popular television crime fiction. The issue of class undoubtedly has specific treatments in the British and American contexts in general, from which different traditions of the treatment of class related themes in the genre of crime fiction also stems. The reason why this genre is chosen for a closer analysis of the social worlds which are inherent to it lies in the basic structural scheme suited to the treatment of crime – distinctive subjects pitted against one another, i.e. the criminal (under)class and the elements of the legal system which stand against them. The thesis of this paper is that specific historic formative factors have influenced the ways in which class is perceived in both the British and American collective imaginaries, and that these affect the ways in which class and society are perceived in the sphere of public discourse, i.e. popular television. Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore the ways in which two distinct cultural traditions have created their own specific modes of transmitting a social ideology through a popular genre which seems most suitable for confirming the existing positions, and possibly rethinking them.

In order to explore this issue, first of all the sketching of a comprehensive theory of social stratification must but outlined, which will later on serve as a methodological instrument in the practical analysis of selected television crime fiction. Since it has been said that the structural conditions of the genre rely on a social divide in the fictional worlds, the Marxist and Weberian theories of social stratification seem most suitable as their categorical apparatuses take into account the antagonistic relationships between classes. After going through the aforementioned theories, certain amendments of their successors will be mentioned that are necessary to take into account when looking closely at the fictional social formations. Further on, it will be necessary to turn to the specific contexts of the dominant

discourses which follow the dominant ideas of the British and American societies, from which the analyses of selected television crime series will attempt to draw conclusions about the functioning of class discourse in such cultural products.

1 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND CLASS DIVISION

In the contemporary observation of society and social stratification sociologists are still heavily influenced by the works of Marx or Weber, but alter their theories to match the analysis of the modern capitalist society (Haralambos and Holborn 14). Social stratification refers to "the presence of distinct social groups which are ranked one above the other in terms of factors such as prestige and wealth", in which is important to highlight that the very positioning in a specific social group or "stratum" involves a certain degree of "awareness of common interests and a common identity", i.e. the recognition of sharing a lifestyle which helps to differentiate a specific group from other groups in society (Haralambos and Holborn 1 [1]). In every social group which functions in this manner, their members tend to create "their own subculture, [i.e.] certain norms, attitudes and values which are distinctive to them as a social group" (2). It is in fact in this creation of a distinguished subculture and an understanding that the members of a group share the same or similar conditions of life that the development of a group identity lies (2). A common group identity means that the members of the group feel a "kinship with other group members", as well as the need to identify with their "particular stratum and regard themselves" as members of that stratum or class (2). Relying on a Marxist and Weberian approach to class has much to do with the enormous impact of the two social theories, and their influence on other contemporary perspectives on class, but also

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[1] A large part of the first chapter of this paper is derived from *Sociology Perspectives* by Haralambos and Holborn. In order to avoid repeating the authors' names in every citation and breaking the rhythm of the text, only the page numbers will be given for citations, with the authors' names given at the beginnings of paragraphs for comprehension. When another author is being quoted, it will be properly marked by the author's name and the source page number.

with the fact, which can be discerned from what will follow below, that both theories recognize that the main impulse in creating social groups or classes is struggle, whether for power, prestige or – most of all – wealth (1).

1.1 MARX, CLASS AND SOCIETY

When it comes to the Marxist perspective on social stratification, the relationship of social groups to the means of production is the originating point of any analysis of social groups and, in turn, the Marxist definition is that "class is a social group whose members share the same relationship to the means of production" (9). Karl Marx viewed society as strongly divided between a ruling class and a subject class, in which the subject class is in a disadvantaged position, since "the ruling class exploit[ed] and oppresse[d] the subject class" and acquired power from "its ownership and control of the means of production" (9). The means of production consist "of those of the forces of production that can be legally owned", i.e. "land, raw materials, machinery, buildings and tools, but not technical knowledge or the organization of the production process" (Haralambos and Holborn xvi). As a result of the ownership of the means of production being a privilege of the ruling class, there is a "basic conflict of interest between the two classes", which is only deeply furthered by the fact that the ruling class also has control of societal institutions – "such as the legal and political systems", which it uses to predominate and work in its own best interests (9). Therefore, the state of exploitation and oppression can only be ended "when the means of production are communally owned", which would in turn also bring about the disappearance of classes and of social inequality (9). Thus, it is clear that in the Marxist view social inequality has its basis in ownership, i.e. in private property, that along with the "accumulation of surplus wealth", which stems from the surplus value in production that becomes pure profit for capitalists, "form the basis of development of class societies" and enable the forming of two distinct

groups in society; those of non-producers and producers (10). The non-producing class, i.e. the capitalists form a minority in society, but privately own most of the means of production and the capital which derives from them, while a majority of society which forms the producing class, i.e. the working class, are exploited by the capitalists which directly benefit from their labour, which in effect is the only asset the producer class owns (10). In this way, the ruling class holds a great deal of economic power, with the subject class wielding none. And the ruling class gains economic power, i.e. capital, by producing commodities "with the aim of maximizing profit in order to accumulate more capital", where money is transformed into commodities through production, after which the sales of these commodities at a higher price, thus ensuring that the capitalists "end up with more money than they started with" (10). Alongside acquiring economic power or capital, what has to be taken into account when considering a Marxist approach to the analysis of social phenomena is the relationship the classes have with political power, and in this respect, with ideology.

Marx saw society as divided in two, where the basis or infrastructure of society was made up of the forces of production and the social relations of production, i.e. the "relationships which people enter into in order to produce goods" (xvi). The superstructure of society consists of the "political, legal and educational institutions and the belief and value systems", and it is influenced by the infrastructure, reflecting in itself all major changes which occur in the infrastructure (xvi). For Marxists political power comes from economic power, and following this line of reasoning, the power of the ruling class simply comes from its "ownership and control of the means of production" (10). Since changes in the basis reflect in the superstructure, the superior position of the ruling class will also be reflected in the same way when it comes to the relations of production – "the social relationships which people enter into in order to produce goods" (xvi) – or to narrow it down, it means that "the political

and legal systems will reflect ruling-class interests" (10). Marx and Engels believed that this justification and legitimating of ruling-class values created a ruling-class ideology, which they called a "distorted picture of reality", that effectively created a "false class consciousness, [i.e.] a false picture of the nature of the relationship between social classes" (11). This means that both the ruling class and the subject class accept and do not question the existing conditions of exploitation and oppression, thus camouflaging "the conflict of interest between the classes" and in effect producing "a degree of social stability", leaving all social and class issues unresolved (11). While diagnosing this status quo, Marx stated that social change must come from class struggle, as he believed that "the history of all societies up to the present is the history of the class struggle" (qtd. in Haralambos and Holborn 11). In his vision of a decisive class struggle which would affect the fundaments of capitalist society, the fight would lie between the ruling bourgeoisie and the subjected proletariat; a fight which would result in the implementation of communally owned property instead of private property, and an agricultural economy instead of an industrial economy (11). But this final class struggle, i.e. a revolution of the proletariat, cannot be achieved if there is no class consciousness and class solidarity through the abandonment of the false consciousness by becoming "aware of the true situation, by a realization of the nature of exploitation" and by developing a "common identity [and] recogniz[ing] their shared interests" that would lead to an unification of the proletariat, which would then become a "class for itself", not a "class in itself" (11). After visiting these points which are crucial for a functional analysis of social phenomena, it is obvious that retaining a straight-to-the letter orthodox Marxist approach might fall short on some relevant issues. Obviously, the class system schema must be expanded or modified since the division does not correspond to what can be observed in an advanced capitalist society, and some factors other than purely an economic motivation in class formation could prove vital in understanding certain phenomena. Furthermore, the notion of ideology

presented by Marx and Engels needs to be expanded in order to provide a backbone for a more detailed view of ideology that seems crucial for any structured analysis.

1.2. STATUS, CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY

While remaining true to the Marxist understanding of society as being driven by conflict and antagonism between the classes, based on economic power and the basic theoretical framework Marxism introduced in order to understand and explain the early capitalist society, certain "upgrades" must be considered. As it has been mentioned earlier, the Weberian perspective is an influential one, and can be connected to the Marxist perspective, while expanding on some important points. It must be noted that Weber's sociology is a reaction and a critique of Marx's vulgar sociology, especially in the respect that Weber directly attacks the "generalisation that class struggles form the main dynamic process in the development of society" (Giddens 50). This critique pertains to two aspects of Marx's social theory: firstly, it questions the positioning of the "economic relationships within the infrastructure of social organisation" above the political factors; secondly, the failure to observe an aspect which is not entirely influenced by class relationships, i.e. status affiliation (Giddens 50). Weber saw social stratification as being derived from "a struggle for scarce resources in society", but while retaining the belief that this struggle was primarily focused on economic resources, he argued that it can "involve struggles for prestige and for political power" (Haralambos and Holborn 12). While Marx was mostly concerned by the division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, Weber expanded the class schema to include four classes in society: the propertied upper class, the propertyless white-collar workers, the petty bourgeoisie and the manual working class (Haralambos and Holborn 12). With the previously mentioned disagreements with Marx, Weber also took the position that the ownership of resources was not the only factor in class formation, that there was no fool proof evidence that

the polarization of classes is a strong as Marx wanted it to be, which means that Weber also brought into question the inevitable revolution of the proletariat (12). One of the more interesting departures from Marxist class theory which should be well noted is Weber's insistence of the importance of social status. While "class refers to the unequal distribution of economic rewards, status refers to the unequal distribution of social honour" (13). Therefore, a group formed with regards to status allocation "is made up of individuals who are awarded a similar amount of social honour and [consequently] share the same status situation" (13). Weber links class and status situations by stating that "property as such is not always recognized as a status qualification, but in the long run it is, and with extraordinary regularity" (13), thus displaying that he does not ignore the economic aspect in class formation, but making a point that the economic aspects have more implications than it seems. Through the example of the formation of modern political parties and their need for harnessing social power, Weber stated that status acquisition has a particularly important role in such groups "which are specifically concerned with influencing policies and making decisions in the interest of their membership", which he used to exemplify that unlike Marx he saw that social class is not the only important social group in society, and that social stratification is far more complex than orthodox Marxism presumes.

In order to reach a point in which the schema of social stratification matches the appearance of contemporary society, one can look in many directions and choose between the successors of both Marx and Weber. But for the needs of an analysis of fictional worlds, the methodological and theoretical conundrum that surrounds any theoretical exploit may be tacitly ignored. In this respect, it is perhaps pragmatic to take into account how Walter Garrison Runciman blends the Marxist and Weberian traditions. Runciman approaches the class system through the category of social roles, which he defines as positions "embodying

consistently recurring patterns of institutional behaviour informed by mutually shared beliefs about their incumbents' capacity directly or indirectly to influence the behaviour of each other", which would correspond, for example, to various occupational roles or domestic roles, which take up a hierarchical structure (14). When considering social classes specifically, he sees them a "sets of roles whose common location social space is a function of the nature and degree of economic power (or lack of it) attaching to them through their relation to the institutional process of production, distribution and exchange" (15). But, beside his relatively complex definitions, the manner in which he connects the economic and social status aspects is most visible in his idea on the sources of economic power, which is crucial to class formation. For Runciman economic power comes from the ownership of some aspect of the means of production, the control in the process of production, e.g. managers or supervisors, and finally marketability, which he defines as the "the possession of an 'attribute or capacity' which can be sold to employers ... [like] skills, qualifications and the ability to carry out physical labour possessed by individual workers (15). With this final instance it is clear that when he considers the economic aspects of class formation, he also takes into account the specifics of somebody's occupational skills, which stem from an education or a lack of it, thus taking into account the possibility to improve one's status position. Naturally, since Runciman is a contemporary sociologist, he based his class system on an observable contemporary social context, having in mind modern occupational and societal changes which he used to articulate a seven-part class system. Thus he distinguishes an upper class, an upper-middle class, a middle-middle class, a lower-middle class, the skilled working class, the unskilled working class and lastly the underclass. But, for a moment the class schematic can be left alone, since there are still certain aspects of class that need to be tended to.

Where Runciman focuses on the sources of economic capital as an important factor of class societies, the issue of other factors which influence class position remains somewhat unexplored in his perspective, and that can be found in the work of the influential French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Although his study of society and class formation as presented in his seminal work *Distinction* is somewhat complex for the needs of this paper, there are important facets of his work that are not only useful, but necessary in order to grasp the subtleties of class. Bourdieu based his theory of class identities on the idea that they are not so fixed as earlier theoreticians imagined, but that class identity is "actively created through cultural processes" and through the awareness "of difference from other groups rather than simply being based upon a strong sense of belonging to [one's] own groups" (Haralambos and Holborn 65). The focus here will be on Bourdieu's notion that both culture and lifestyle have a great effect in the formation of social groups, which he elaborated by discerning four main sources of capital in society (65). Economic capital is the most straightforward notion, and it concerns the ownership of material goods, land, shares and income, all of which can be either procured by employment or passed down as gifts or inheritance (66). Cultural capital is the most layered of the four and is itself divided into four types. The first type is concerned with purely educational qualifications, but the second type of cultural capital relates more directly to an "artistic sense of culture", as exemplified in various cultural aspects (music, literature, cinematography) (66). This artistic capital is divided into three levels comprised of legitimate culture, middlebrow culture and popular taste. The first level represents "the culture of the dominant classes in society", usually connected to the highest degrees of education, and involves a well developed taste in visual arts and classical music, for instance (66). The second level is connected to works of art which are "seen less serious or worthy than legitimate culture", as enjoyed by the middle classes (66). The third level includes works of art or music, for instance, which have no artistic pretensions or those that have become

extremely popular and thus lost its original cultural value (66). The third type of cultural capital is connected to various "lifestyles and the consumption associated with [them]", e.g. different types of apparel or cuisine practiced by different classes (66). The fourth type of cultural capital is "that which is embodied", which relates to people's bodies and the ways they use them to reflect different tastes, for instance make up, facial hair or posture and gestures (66). What Bourdieu highlights is that cultural capital cannot be passed down in the same fashion as economic capital, but that it is obtainable through socialization (66). The third type of capital is social capital, which consists of various connections and social circles a person moves in, while the fourth type of capital he calls symbolic, which he links with the concept of status and describes as a person's reputation and public image (66). Bourdieu argues that these different types of capital intertwine and form dependant relations to each other, which results in the creation of specific system of group markers and inclinations which he calls the habitus. The habitus consists of "the subjective way in which different classes understand and perceive the world and the sorts of tastes preferences that they have", which in effect corresponds to the creation of particular lifestyles (66). With an established link between class and culture, a more detailed account of the position of ideology in society has to be formulated.

Relying on the basic Marxist outline of ideological influence on society could quite possibly veer off into the realm of economic reductionism, as Stuart Hall noticed in an interview on the subject (26). To give ideology a better chance in a practical analysis, it seems only fitting to follow one of the more influential accounts on the matters of the modern state and ideology, given by Louis Althusser, which he elaborated in his seminal essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)*. By relying on Althusser's theory of the Ideological State Apparatuses, the impact of the State on society

through the dispersion and enforcement of ideology can shed light on the subtle processes which affect specific positions in the social context, both in the empirical world and fictional worlds. His theory relies on the fact that not only do the material means of production and the labour power need to be constantly reproduced (Althusser 130), in its most basic materials and substantial sense, but that there is something that lies beyond it. He states that it is a reproduction "of [the labour power's] submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers" (Althusser 132) is required, as well as "a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression" (Althusser 133). In the same manner in which he establishes the importance of reproduction on these instances, he makes a point that the relations of production must be viewed from the same perspective, while relying on the classic Marxist schematic of societal division on the economic base and the superstructure comprised of the politico-legal and ideological superstructures (Althusser 134). And it is exactly in them that he finds that the relations of production are for the most part reproduced (Althusser 148). In his examination of the politico-legal level, i.e. the State, Althusser envisages it as a repressive apparatus which goes in favour of the ruling class and helps it ensure dominance over the working class/subject classes (137). According to Marxist theory, the State apparatus consists, for instance, of the government, administration, the army, the police, and the judicial system, which Althusser names Repressive State Apparatuses (141). While making a distinction between State power – which must be obtained in order to rule - and the State apparatus(es), Althusser finds it necessary to acknowledge state apparatuses whose primary function is not repression, i.e. the State Ideological Apparatuses (142). The Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) manifest themselves in specialized institutions, e.g. the Church(es) for the religious ISA, the school system for the educational ISA, different political parties for the political ISA, or the mass media for the communications ISA, to name only a

few (Althusser 142). In his interpretation, there is a "plurality of Ideological State Apparatuses", which for the most part belong to the private sphere of society, such as various Churches, families, trade unions etc., while the Repressive State Apparatus completely inhabits the public sphere (Althusser 144). The basic difference between the RSA and the ISAs lies in the fact that one acts through repression or violence, while the other acts through ideology – in such a way that the various ISAs always act "beneath the ruling ideology", i.e. the ideology of the ruling class (Althusser 146). In Althusser's opinion, this has the consequence that "no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses" (146). As thinly sketched as it may be here, Althusser's theory on the RSA and the ISAs will prove useful in shedding an extra light in the analysis of the various class issues in the television series that will follow, but also in drawing a general conclusion about the possible meaning of these fictional worlds and their correspondence to the empirical one, i.e. the one from which all the "trouble" seems to be originating.

2. THE STATUS OF CLASS IN BRITAIN

In order to approach the issue of how various class issues and aspects function in the British televised universe, an account of the class situation in Britain is needed, for which David Cannadine's comprehensive study *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* will be used. Cannadine's book does not investigate the circumstances of class formation, but it gives a historiographic view on how the perspectives on class changed throughout three centuries in Britain. He discerns three dominant ways of considering social stratification in Britain; the hierarchical, the triadic and the dichotomous (Cannadine 19 [2]). The first is tightly connected

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[2] As in the previous instance, a large part of this chapter is derived from a single source and will be quoted only by page number, except in cases when other authors' citations are used, which will be noted by the author's name and the source page number.

to the British monarchical heritage, where social division is based on the unequivocal belief in the privileges of those who by their birthright have a pre-set place on the social ladder (19). As far as royalty, nobility, gentry and a large portion of the general public are concerned, this is the "primordial mode of social structure and perception" (19). The triadic model relates to observing society through a basic division on the upper, middle and lower social groups, which originate from Britain's feudal past and the transition to a bourgeois society, while the dichotomous mode is based on the conflict between the ruling class and all the other elements of society who are directly affected by its decision (19).

Cannadine tracks one of the biggest shifts in societal perspectives to the period after the revolutionary movements of the eighteenth century, which in pair with industrialization and urbanization caused significant changes in the class discourse of the nineteenth century (61). One of those changes was that in the context of the appearance of the bourgeoisie, the class discourse became increasingly politicized (62). The importance of bourgeois values and the role of the new class in industrial manufacturing came to be stressed, which consequently led to the ever-stronger glimpses of the existence of a working class in need of a voice of its own (73). The reforms of the voting system are tightly connected to the emancipating movements because by giving the right to vote to the bourgeoisie and the working class, the two groups became political subjects, which the conservative remnants of the old regime saw as a threat to the hierarchical organization of society. Cannadine points out that these fears never came to be since it seemed that the British imperial tradition was deeply rooted into the foundations of society, which would have made the abolition of monarchy quite a difficult task (103). Thus, in his account of the early industrial age, the old views on society remained unchallenged, but the coming of the twentieth century brought about further changes in the class system of the British Empire.

Cannadine claims that the main class divisions in the modern age – based on economic differences most of all - became entrenched through the work of workers' unions, employers' associations and political parties, with the Tories representing the conservative, upper-class and aristocratic population, and the Liberals representing lower-class interests (114). He reasons that the rhetoric of class functioned relatively well, but still the working class was reluctant to notice a divide between labour and capital (118). That was not helped by the actions of the upper crust of society, i.e. the aristocracy, who gave away titles of nobility in order to secure their positions, and by the constant public ceremonies which aimed directly at confirming the role of the ruler in British society (127). Cannadine indicates that things started to change after the Great War, after which the Lords gradually lost power in Parliament and started to be excluded from higher political functions, e.g. the Prime Minister seat (119), while the new political elites were formed from middle-class industrialists, entrepreneurs and heirs of successful businesses (130). The changes in politics were also reflected by the appearance of the Labour Party and the decline of the Liberals. The Labour Party, at its strongest moment during WWII, pushed forward socialist ideas about the common ownership of the means of production, insisted on the taxation of the upper crust of society and focused most their efforts on industrial manufacturing (136).

The 1970s saw a major change coming, with the occurrence of the economic crisis and the coming to power of the conservative Tories, led by Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher's position was indicative of a shift in the class discourse, since her stance was that of a fighter against both the aristocracy and the working class – it was in tune with the spirit of the age, in a sense, since the fall of the Empire signalled a general shift in perspective, i.e. "the decline of deference" (163). Her neoliberal and neoconservative politics led to the collapse of industry and some major changes in the economic state in Britain. During Thatcher's reign, and after it

ended, the main ideological and rhetorical moment was that of a classless society, which in part illustrated the fondness that the political elites had for big business and the further implementation of neoliberal policies (169). Margaret Thatcher's time in office ran parallel with Ronald Reagan's presidency, and the duo's politics can be seen as branding a specific type of conservative capitalism which left a mark on contemporary capitalism. They both came to power in the 1970s when the political options, including their own parties, couldn't find a functional way to deal with "inflationary economies and rising levels of discontent", which were exemplified by "oil shocks, inflation, high interest rates, and increasing unemployment" (Hoover 258). The British economy, to be specific, was heading towards a recession from the 1960s, when Britain's "industrial and economic weakness" grew out of the post-war boom, "marked by the oscillations between recession and recovery, with a steady underlying deterioration" (Hall *GMRS* 15). Thus, when Thatcher and her American counterpart came to power, they turned away from reformist policies and turned to tax lowering, lowering the budgets for human resources programs and "resuscitated traditionalist prescriptions for personal behaviour, and advanced the apparent substitution of the market for the government as the key institution of the society" (Hoover 245). Of course, a major point is the insisting on individualism and the rejection of any type of government intervention to help improve the individual's position (Hoover 246). But having in mind that some need more help than the other, it is important to note that the conservatives' rejection of social welfare tapped into "middle-class populism as a recourse against the upper-class image of their [party]", while their policies for the most part put more wealth in the hands of the upper-classes (Hoover 259). And lastly, Thatcher's legacy still continued to live on in the period of Tony Blair's New Left, since they continued to ignore class struggle and class consciousness, along with all the other elements of the old labour heritage, which was solidified in their acceptance of Thatcher's privatization (Cannadine 13). Through all that was said here, a conclusion can

be drawn that through various political, economic and ideological factors, a general image of society was created which was bent on denying the complex class landscape in Britain, although the public discourse has clearly always been riddled with class as an indeed important segment of public life. It was an ideological push for which the reasons can be found in the characteristics of the conservative state oriented towards the market and capital, which clearly benefited from the changed class perspectives that helped the implementation of changes in the state functioning, as was dealt with earlier.

2.1. TELEVISION FOR THE CLASSES?

Tackling the issue of class division in popular culture can be a staggering endeavour, especially if one considers the crime genre, as it is done here. It is well known that Britain has a long tradition in televised crime series – mostly broadcast by the BBC and ITV – and it seems hard, not only to choose subjects or analysis from a large body of them, but also to choose the imagery and problems they deal with. In this multitude of possible choices, it seems only fitting to deal with television series which incorporate certain aspects of class discourse in themselves and to make notice of some general themes which appear. It seems fair to begin with one of the most popular crime series on British television, and possibly wider, *The Midsomer Murders* (1997 – Present, ITV). The series has had a long run, and is currently in its sixteenth season, but its themes still manage to be diverse. Although it has the elements of a police procedural, the series retains some elements of the classic "whodunit" puzzle structure that is important for the genre (Scaggs 37). Maybe the best witness of this is the perhaps overlooked "murdering gloves" element with which most episodes are marked – as the (numerous) victims fall dead or dying throughout a single episode, the cliché of the unseen perpetrator is always there. But when it comes to the show's dealings with class issues, some indicative points can be made which will be useful for the other series that will

be touched upon in this paper. To begin with, the show is littered with various references to social classes in Britain, but it does not treat class as a problematic issue. Rather it draws on class division as plot material, creating a tense narrative situation that is crucial for the plot structure. Still, there have been careless lords and ladies, landed gentry, usurping middle-classes, and the devious and/or disaffected workers in the show. But, it is important to note that most of the time the plot relies on a power model, an us-and-them type of relationship, where on the one side there are "the bosses, managers and white-collar workers who have power, and on the other, the relatively powerless manual workers" (Haralambos and Holborn 49). Beside the social element in the show, the second important element is the relationship between the protagonists of the show, i.e. Chief Inspector Barnaby and his numerous sergeants. Tom Barnaby (John Nettles) is portrayed as a diligent a very capable investigator with a passion for solving crime, but very few information is given throughout the series' run about his inclinations and attitudes. For the most part, it is clear that he lives a comfortable middle-class life with a lovely wife and an educated daughter, but as his duties as a police inspector are concerned, he seems dispassionate and objective, albeit sceptical towards class positions. If anything, he enjoys various middle-class activities, as regattas, bicycle races and humanitarian campaigns. John Barnaby (Neil Dudgeon), who replaces Tom in season 14, is not much different from his cousin, except for having a degree in psychology which he uses in his policing duties. Even though some of the sergeants display certain class-markers, such as education or cultural capital, they serve as sidekicks in the full sense of the word, with their position rarely being seen through a class-perspective. On these grounds, it would be more interesting to observe how certain series give more attention to class related issues, and with what goal.

While the fictional Midsomer may give class some kind of treatment, no matter how simplified or caricatured at moments, there are series which dedicate special attention to the class division between the characters, thus making class more structurally important. *Inspector Morse* is a series which portrays a world of classical music and effigies, sprinkled with murder. Set in a fictionalized Oxford, the series utilizes cultural, social and symbolic capital to create a world in which tense social situations and social standing have a great deal of importance. Factors of various type of capital play a major role in character formation in the series, especially on the protagonist duo. On the one side stands DI Morse (John Thaw), a former student at one of the fictional Oxford colleges, an ardent fan of classical music, word puzzles and brain teasers, and very much aware of class divisions in his social world. On the other stands Robbie Lewis (Kevin Whately), his sergeant – a working-class man with a family, he always follows Morse's lead. Morse constantly taps into his substantial cultural capital, concerned with legitimate or high-brow culture, while Lewis only understands the more basic notions concerned with popular taste. This point of difference is commonly used in jokes and jabs through which Morse (albeit benevolently) displays his essentially superior social position, e.g. "Do I know Sophocles, sir? – Only if you loved your mother, Lewis..." ("Dead of Jericho"). Although the cultural capital they wield provides for enough difference, they both posses unsubstantial amounts of social and economic capital, while due to their reputations as competent investigators they retain some symbolic capital. Some further class related issues also have to do with Morse's professional inclinations, as he is held as a DI for a long period of time, since his superior officers find him too unruly and rebellious to achieve greater rank, and such is his bearing when it comes to both the authorities and the social-betters, whom he always sceptically observes. Since everything from his name (Endeavour) and his choice of automobiles indicate a better social standing than his life and career choices provide, it can be noted that he is a character unable to blend in completely both in the upper-

class and middle-class communities. Much of the same social and character dynamics is continued in the series *Lewis*, which went on air several years after the ending of *Morse*. Now a DI, Robbie Lewis is paired up with a young sergeant James Hathaway (Laurence Fox), who on the trail of Morse is also a former student at the prestige university (Cambridge), and their relationship is based on the same type of social and cultural differences as was the case in the previous series. The pilot episode of the series even goes that far as to being an homage to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, while the further episodes deal with the usual intricacies connected to the deaths of college dons, Masters, cheating spouses and abrasive gentry.

A further example can be found in the *The Inspector Lynley Mysteries*, a series which insists on the issues of class, from its protagonists to the world of the series. The relationship of DI Thomas Lynley, 8th Earl of Asherton (Nathaniel Parker) and DS Barbara Havers (Sharon Small) is one wrought with antagonism. From the onset of the series, a great deal of attention is given to the class-related differences between the two. Obviously, the fact that Lynley is a member of the aristocratic elite serves as the main cause of friction between him and the working-class sergeant Havers, who described him as "The fast track Oxford golden boy, arrogant, aristocratic ponce" ("A Great Deliverance"). In the pilot episode their differences are put forward in terms of economic capital, as she lives in a working-class row-house neighbourhood, drives an old beat-up small car, while he lives in a luxury town-house and drives expensive and rare classic cars. While he possesses cultural, social and symbolic capital which he displays in all aspects of his life, she is portrayed as extremely pragmatic in her work and with a proverbial chip on her shoulder on account of her own life-conditions. The antagonism mostly stems from the class prejudice which she holds towards him, by indirectly blaming him/the upper-class for her own existential problems, while Lynley is portrayed as being extremely tolerant and understanding when it comes to these perceptions

of him. The episodes of the show are highly influenced by this theme of his social status, in a way that his position directly benefits the policing, especially when the cases are connected to the higher echelons of society. An example of this is the episode "Well Schooled in Murder", which deals with a death in an elite boarding school. Lynley is shown as knowing the codes of behaviour, an understanding of how various cliques function and the implications of a murder case which involvesa member of the upper-classes. The formula of the whole series can be read out from the position of Havers in this case: most of the time she is ignored on account of being a woman and being a member of the lower-classes, but her status as "hired help" enables her to pick up on information which the upper-class students freely divulge on account of her non-importance. More importantly, the plot of the episode is the death of a working-class student who arrived in the boarding school on merit alone, but the investigation proves – in a regular "whodunit" mode – that he was in fact an illegitimate son of an upper-class genius, which explains his "natural" intelligence. This plot sketching is indicative that the series does little to put forth class relations in any articulated manner, which would enable a constructive perspective on class relations and processes; rather it uses the dominant imagery of the classes and their implicit conflict in order to feed the plot. Thus, it is safe to say that even though the series that were mentioned so far do incorporate class relations into their structure and rely on the antagonistic relationship between the classes, they do not do anything radical with the notion of class or possibly offer a deeper understanding of the position class issues in British television. That is, they do not shed light on issues of class formation, class struggle or shifting class perspectives, they seem to maintain a position in which class is used only as an identity marker which finds its place in the familiar societal understanding in which the series' are produced and the possible audience they target.

A different perspective could be obtained by observing an ongoing series which is set in the context of the 1960s Britain, *Inspector George Gently*. Even though much of what has been mentioned above would apply to this show, it does use class issues with a different purpose. As the series is set in a fictionalized account of a "pre-Thatcherite" period, it deals with themes which correspond to the social and economic changes of the 1970s. The series is set in a fictionalized Northumberland region, through which the very setting of the series plays with the idea of the industrial North of England. The relationship of DI George Gently (Martin Shaw) and his sergeant John Bacchus (Lee Ingleby) is one of stark contrast; Bacchus is portrayed as a young, headstrong and bigoted working-class Geordie police officer, with an unquenchable thirst for the improvement of his position. Gently on the other hand possesses characteristics which make him an almost a classless character, since he possesses evidently more cultural and symbolic capital than other characters of the series, but he seems as a champion of sorts – he is defending the underprivileged and disenfranchised, while remaining critical of the power structures, including the very police apparatus that employs him. The themes of the series regularly deal with class and race related issues, some of which will be mentioned in order to shine some light on the portrayal of society of the fictionalized North, plagued by inequality. In the episode "Gently Upside Down" the series seemingly takes an interest in the world of juvenile pop-culture, but takes a turn to issues of class and gender. It tells the story of the murder of a young working-class girl who excels in her studies and possesses enormous potential for a university education. The episode brushes upon gender issues as the girl was in a romantic relationship with one of her professors, seeing a future with him as a direct way out of the working-class environment which stifles her ambitions. Her family is stereotypical working-class, with a stay-at-home mother and a volatile and drunkard coal-mining father, who did not understand their daughter's upwardly mobile ambitions. What is interesting here is that the episode does not resolve in a class motivated

way, but quite the opposite – the murder turns out to be a crime of passion and has little to do with her working-class background, by which a complex situation a usual staple are circumvented. The series also takes on the problem of race, as in the episode "Gently Northern Soul", set in the context of the 1968 Race Relations Bill in Britain. The death of a young black girl brings about the issue of racism and the integration of immigrants in the British society. The story tackles both racial and class issues, as the girl herself is working a low-end job in a launderette, while her father is a bus conductor, an immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago, who invented his war history as a pilot in order to help his family's situation and social standing. The murder case is set in the backdrop of a televised Enoch Powell speech which all the characters watch in suspense, which was a call for the rejection of the Race Relations Bill, and the reactions of the characters are basically a general call to arms. The victim's brother thus says: "Perhaps it was one of the men who spat at her on the bus last week and told her to get back to the jungle. Or maybe the woman who wouldn't let her touch her washing in the launderette". While one of the nationalist supporters vigorously claims: "My only crime is to want things back the way they were. Before all this immigration. When you knew who your neighbour was. Nowadays, look at us. Just like a nation of strangers". But the situation is appeased by Gently and his inquiry, by proving that the girl was not killed on account of her skin colour, but in a hit-and-run accident. A more direct dealing with class and social issues is presented in the episode "Gently Between the Lines", where a murder investigation in a soon-to-be demolished working-class neighbourhood sparks social unrest. The plot takes us to a Newcastle neighbourhood sparsely inhabited by working-class people where a development project is planned, but is repeatedly thwarted by protest of the locals. In a quite revealing moment, one of the locals comments on the new high-rise project with the following: "They'll need a better class of person to live here, so they'll fit in". In the conflicts with the police, the protesters are invoking their civil rights: "We have the right to protest. We

have the right to assemble. You're trying to take away our right to democracy". While the workers protest, the police are being extremely violent on account one of their own being injured by a protester, thus enacting their repressive function to the full. In fact, the police take their right to enact violence to be a given, since one of them asserts that violence permitted because "This is Newcastle.", which is connected to the idea that the unruly levels of society need policing. Similarly as in the episodes covered above, the ending leaves much to be desired in the class context. Namely, the perpetrator of the murder of a squatter during the protest is not a police officer, as was expected, but an inhabitant of the neighbourhood, a violent and unscrupulous working man. The overall tone that can be found in the series, as was displayed by examples from specific episodes, does indicate that the series takes a more direct approach in regards to class issues, as well as other social phenomena. Namely, the series is, fundamentally, a bleak portrayal of an industrial society which is quietly marching into the post-industrial age, and is focused on a multitude social issues which such a change entails. By taking place at a predominately working-class northern region, the series includes themes connected to class relations, exemplified by non-sympathetic relations between the working class and the upper class/landed gentry ("Gently With Class"), or also commonly race relations, which were dealt with earlier in a practical example. In general, the issue of race in the series functions in pair with class, as the characters in specific episodes who belong to a racial minority are also situated in the working class. But it is their racial identity that trumps the class identity which is inherent to them, e.g. it is less important that the characters are members of the working class, or unqualified workers who lead lives in certain subcultures, but that they are members of the Arab community which is at odds with the British society and themselves in certain respects ("Gently in the Blood"). Of course, with this said it is important to note that such an approach does not issue a value judgement in this paper, but rather that it confirms the revisionist nature of the series. The revisionist aspect of

the series lies in the fact that it deals with socio-political themes of a specific historical period which is important in understanding the nuances of British contemporary society. Not only does it tackle the issue of immigration and assimilation, for which an echo can be found in the audience of the contemporary context of the series' production, it also tackles the issue of sexual minorities, gender, religion and the accompanying themes of sexual freedoms, abortion, divorce and suicide. In each of these examples, there is a strong impulse to grapple with a complex set of phenomena which intersect with basic class issues, as such is the historical context of the fictionalized Britain. In the end, it can be said that *George Gently* is a series which offers revisionist views on important social phenomena, but it is important to note that its revisionism is not one which aims to closely examine the working of the social processes which lead to such societal rifts and issues, but simply that this revisionism aims to fill a gap in the British collective imaginary; a type of "working with", not "working through" tactics.

The series that have been discussed here have shown a definite affection for class issues, but the general position that they take when class is the issue remains to be seen. Some of the series have a very shallow grab when it comes to the themes they cover, and use class in predictable ways: by relying on a dichotomous "us and them" way of looking at class, the class motivation behind crimes at times remains very thin and questionable. Even though the protagonists of the series are displayed as wielding certain cultural, social or symbolic capital, and as being class-conscious, the relations between the classes are not poised in a model which would enable a more in-depth approach. The series which is set in a pre-Thatcherite era deals with topics such as the faltering of the industry towards the end of the 1960s and the worsening position of the working class and other social phenomena, and takes a revisionist approach to the topics. As far as the series which were dealt with earlier in the paper are

concerned, some conclusions can be drawn which would highlight a general idea of how class functions in televised fiction and to which end. These series do validate class enough to be a category which serves as one of the primary structural elements in their plots, but by simply acknowledging class by positioning a range of characters in a sensible class schematics does not yield any viable result. For instance, the class conflict which is depicted in them rarely serves to display some type of significant social upheaval; there is no revolutionary momentum, i.e. campaigning for social change. The range of characters used in the series do belong to specific social classes and there is a palpable establishment of relations of production, as some are portrayed as owners of the means of production, some as producers, some as consumers, and most of them concerned with the acquisition of a better social standing, economic capital, as well as other types of capital which can be connected to the acquisition of prestige and power. And the portrayal of the State and its apparatuses goes as far as displaying a relatively functional system, whose issues are dealt with by the policing aspect, apart from the slight insight in some of the plagues which the corrective potential of the police apparatus has, as seen in *George Gently*. In sum, the series analyzed here can be seen as trying to validate the existing social order and provide a type of recognizable treatment of class. Therefore, a general conclusion can be drawn that they provide a relatively fixed perspective on class, by establishing a class habitus and treating social positions as unchanging. In such a way these narratives perpetuate a class discourse which follows the deeply entrenched view of divided society which is affirmed in the specific historical movements and processes characteristic of the British context in which these narratives belong. Although the class structure is obviously pertinent enough to exist in the public discourse and in the culture industry, the very understanding of class seems still to struggle to achieve an image of a dynamic formative process, but a somewhat static perspective with which it is easy to identify, i.e. a set of identities which are marked with a class position.

3. FROM MYTHS AND SYMBOLS TO AN IMAGE OF SOCIETY

The American relationship to class issues is markedly different than that of the British society. One of the major factors in this is undoubtedly the fact that the United States – post-revolutionary, of course – had no sovereign, an established aristocratic system, nobility and peerage (Cannadine 38), which influenced the lack of a hierarchical approach to society, at least in the same sense as in old European monarchies (Cannadine 49). It is because of this difference that the specificity of the American society can be described in different terms, i.e. through the use of characteristic ideological constructs, which were analyzed by cultural critics commonly referred to as the *Myth and Symbols School*. Using this perspective to come to a conclusion about the portrayal of class in American crime narratives is one possible approach, as it deals with an important facet of the American thinking about society, i.e. a specific way in which the American imaginary was formed which still holds its sway on public discourse. The proponents of this school focused on ideological constructs which helped define the early American society and experience and the need for early expansionism, and by following in their footsteps and by looking closely to certain myths and symbols it is possible to come to certain conclusions which have significance on the contemporary treatment of class and other social issues in the United States. In the following segments, the *Myth and Symbol* paradigm will not be examined in its full scope and, but by relying mostly on Henry Nash Smith's analysis of certain imagery as presented in his seminal book *Virgin Land*.

In general, the myths and symbols which will be mentioned here are all connected to the notion the American experience and society were greatly influenced by the expansion

westwards and the dealings with nature on this path (Nash Smith 4 [3]). The early American communities, which were founded in the westward breach, were founded on agriculture and that helped form the ideal of America as an agricultural community (123). In midst of this, the myth of the *Garden of the World* came to fruition – it became a symbol of a developing and constantly growing agricultural society and the continental push (123), thus becoming a dominant image of American life in the early phases of settlement. The spokesmen of this idea were Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin who, aside the idea of a virgin land which would give the American people all they needed, also put forth the ideal of the *yeoman* (128). The yeoman was an idealized free farmer who by the ownership of land received social status and dignity, and whose continuous contact with nature produced a state of virtuousness and happiness (125). As the myth of the Garden evolved, the American West was starting to take shape in the collective minds as a thoroughly homogenous territory where class distinctions did not seem important (138). Leaning directly on the myth of the Garden is the myth of *Manifest Destiny* of the American people, which was largely focused on the westward push and settlement in the nineteenth century (37). In its core was the belief that the continent had to be subdued as an act of fulfilment of the "untransacted destiny" of the American people, in an attempt to connect Europe and Asia by a pacific railroad, by which the full potential of the American Empire could be achieved (38). This undisguised imperialistic ideal found a supporter in the poet Walt Whitman, who claimed that "America must turn away from the feudal past of Europe to build a new order based upon nature" (44). But the idea of westward expansion and the taming of the land were most fully realized in the *frontier thesis* articulated by the historian Frederick Jackson Turner, in which his main argument was that "the

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[3] As in the previous instances, a large part of this chapter is derived from a single source and will be quoted only by page number, except in cases when other authors' citations are used, which will be noted by the author's name and the source page number.

existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American

settlement westward explain American development" (250). Thus, the frontier became a place

of a conflict between civilization and wilderness, where every farmer had the same life

chances and were economically equal, making the frontier a platform for the spreading of

democracy (252).

These myths and symbols, i.e. ideological constructs, that were sketched above are

obviously rooted in the negation of America's connection to the traditions and culture of the

Old World. It would seem that America had to justify its independence and rewrite its history

in order to free itself of the burden of the then contemporary society, i.e. the social, political

and economic systems inherent to the Old World. Alan Trachtenberg critiques the early

American capitalist society in his book *The Incorporation of America* by confronting the early

American myths with the surge of industrialization, to show the other side of the coin. The

central image that appears at the centre of this critique is the *Machine in the Garden*, which

was postulated by Leo Marx, by which he claims that the idea of an imperial America based

on the agrarian ideal was not sustainable (Trachtenberg 39). The machine in question is, of

course, the railroad system – it did not bring about an imperial America, but actually shattered

that ideal by introducing an industrial society which had different consequences. The railroad

corporations were of extreme importance to the country since the passing of railroad tracks

created market value for towns (Trachtenberg 58), and most of all it enabled the exchange of

goods (Trachtenberg 59). The late nineteenth century witnessed the first economic booms and

slumps, which affected the working classes the most, inevitably leading to first protests and

strikes (Trachtenberg 39). And this work-force of the new industrial America was mostly

composed of immigrants and other disaffected members of the lower-classes (Trachtenberg

88), while the ruling or managing class was composed of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants

(Trachtenberg 79). The mechanization of production was directly responsible for the greater emphasis on social division: the managers and inventors were from higher, more educated classes, while the work-force was uneducated and with very little opportunity for upward mobility (Trachtenberg 54). In response to the growing social divisions, the first unions were formed for a growing mass of working-class people who needed representation, with the first functional organization being The Knights of Labor (Fink 42). The trend of union representation continued with the founding of federal organizations in the 1880s, such as the American Federation of Labour (AFL), whose successor, the AFL-CIO, still operates to this day (Craver 3). This is useful to understand that the unions were at a certain point an important aspect of the workingmen's organizing in America, and that its current negative connotations in the public discourse is in fact a gradual development. As the American myths and symbols might have failed in the long run, the specificity of the American experience connected to the early ideological endeavours is still quite important and present in the public discourse, but what the whole ideology produces is the general notion that American society is very different than the society of the Old World, and that that difference makes it an exceptional social phenomenon. Therefore, it can be noted that the early American ideology employed the actual and objective differences between the New and the Old World in order to create a specific narrative which was used to affirm those differences and successfully build on them an image of a different society. In this notion of American exceptionalism lies the end-result of the imagery which was listed and discussed above, and with this in mind it is interesting to observe the construct in its full potential:

> As a descriptive term, American exceptionalism can be used to denote everything
> from a broad and unshakeable conviction the United States is free from class (a
> conservative notion of exceptionalism) to a belief that the differences in U.S. class

formation can be explained through analyses as such factors as immigration patterns, the electoral process, and the role of the state in aiding the concentration of capital (a liberal or progressive notion of exceptionalism). (Schocket 4)

With the possible interpretations of this term, it is the idea that America is free from class that takes the central point for this paper, especially in the context of the prescriptive mode of the idea. That is, there is a strong urge to keep class – or any other type of social division, in fact – away, while maintaining the stance that "whatever present economic and social conditions, America should be free from inequality" (Schocket 5). It is this prescriptive act of denouncing social differences that Fredric Jameson calls an "ideological act … with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to irresolvable social contradictions" (qtd. in Schocket 5). And these ideological constructs find their origin in the various changes in the prevalent modes of production, which is to say that the way American society perceives society as a whole is indeed affected by capitalism (Shocket 22). As Stipe Grgas reminds us in his paper on the paradigm of American Studies which deals with these issues, American exceptionalism has helped further solidify the position that the differences between social phenomena in American society were less important than the cultural factors which made America different from Europe, e.g. that class, race and religion is less important in understanding America, while the general differences from European culture as a whole matter more. In this respect, the argument that culture has a deep connection with the capitalist mode of production is vital, as this alliance – best seen in mass communication technologies – has become a place of mediation between "culture's producers and consumers" (Schocket 28). And the consequence of this phenomenon is that "culture has come to stand as the sign for the absence of working-class consciousness (though not class itself) and overt struggle (Shocket 29). Therefore, the *Myth and Symbols School* serve to illustrate the potent

frictions in the American imaginary; between what is imagined and what is real, and even if that is possible to discern. In effect, the possible resolving of this schism in and through fictional narratives will be the next point of analysis.

3.1. AWAKENING A CLASS DISCOURSE

When it comes to the American production of crime series, the situation is noticeably different than in the production of its British counterpart, since it will be observed that when speaking of class in British fiction there is a multitude of possible choices, while class in American fiction is not in focus, aside from certain exceptions, as it will be shown here. The very forming of the American society was set in a different context than the British society, as shown earlier, and it does seem to have results in the television crime fiction. A look at the most popular crime shows on American television at this moment would show that most of them rarely reflect on class issues in American society. For instance, the currently most popular series on US prime time television is *NCIS*, a series which overtly revolves around the continuing terrorist threat, but covertly is concerned with the conveying of imperialistic ideas and the importance of the US military apparatus in global politics. Also, the trend of the various forensic series like the ever so popular *CSI* and its spin-offs places more focus on the procedural aspect rather than on the fictionalized America in which it is set. There are also some shows, like the FX *Justified*, which directly tap into the myths and symbols of the American West and connect the western genre with the contemporary crime drama. But as far as police procedurals are concerned, one of the longest running, *Law & Order* (1990 – 2010) has dealt with various issues of the urban social scene, but never in a comprehensive and critical way.

If dealing with the perceptions of social problems in contemporary television production, one has to refer to the HBO produced *The Wire* (2002 – 2008, HBO). The show's

creator David Simon has himself claimed that the series aims at acting "as a vehicle for making statements about the American city and even the American experiment" (qtd. in Kennedy and Shapiro 1). The series distinguishes itself by "the perspective and layers it brings to characterization and plotting, and in the nuanced portrayal of race conflict, city politics, and the moralities of urban criminality and policing" (Kennedy and Shapiro 1). More specifically, the series deals with "urban policy, the war on drugs, the transition from a manufacturing economy to one based in services and speculation, and the failures of public education and public sphere journalism" (Kennedy and Shapiro 4). As far as the conditions of its production are concerned, *The Wire* was greatly benefited by the fact that it was produced by HBO, whose inclination to produce shows with unconventional and controversial content had been well established (Mittel 17). Also, when the form of the series is concerned, it stands out in the multitude of series in the genre which follow "a set of distinct formulas and conventions", by not being restricted to a single case per episode format (Mittel 27). But what is the point of interest here is the unconventional tackling of the social problematic in the series, for which purposes the first two seasons will be viewed more closely, as they deal with the complex social realities of a black criminal underclass, a group of Baltimore stevedores and dock workers, and members of the police force who attempt to put a stop to their criminal activities. This segment of the series that will be closely inspected does not pretend to aspire for anything but a brief insight into certain aspects of *The Wire's* world, therefore only delivering a small portion of the series' possible interpretative potential. As only so much can be covered, it should be noted that aside from a general sketching of the above mentioned three social formations or groups, some group specific characteristics are referenced in an attempt to give insight how they relate to and work with class themes. In addition, when talking about the police, the Barksdale organization and the stevedores, the common denominator in the analysis is upward mobility. Upward or social mobility is the movement

from one social stratum to another, depending on one's own class position, race, sex or familial ties, and on the basis of "merit: talent, ability, ambition and hard work" (Haralambos and Holborn 72). In the context of *The Wire*, as it will be seen, upward mobility is one of the key elements in displaying the importance of class and its processes, often in contrast to the established and relatively fixed class identities, or the habitus of a certain group, from which an upward movement is attempted.

The first season follows the exploits of the Barksdale criminal organization which operates in the projects of the fictionalized West Baltimore. Headed by Avon Barksdale (Wood Harris) and Stringer Bell (Idris Elba), the organization's chief source of income is the drug trade. The comparison between the two characters is one which is indicative of the world in which the series is set. Avon is a reclusive drug-lord who relies on the rules of the old-school gangsters, with little interest outside his "business" and the social reality of the projects – for him there is only "the Game". Stringer Bell on the other hand is a more complex character, and is not content with his social standing. That is seen in his attempts to build a legitimate real-estate business beside the drug-game, for which he enrolled in a community college course in economics. He even goes so far as to use examples he learns at the course on his "employees" for the drug trade, eventually even holding ex-cathedra styled meetings, where he demands of all to be innovative and creative – as a business man would do. Stringer also greets initiative in his "workers" who show initiative, as when Bodie suggest a better strategy of product placement: "There's a thinking man right there"("Undertow") His would-be-capitalist mindset manages to estrange him from Avon, and the once brotherly relationship shatters as Stringer continually tries to implement the rules of market economy in the distribution of their "product", while Avon remains true to the code of the street and his gangster persona. A rift is created between the close friends that will not be amended: "Man,

every market-based business runs in cycles, and we going through a down-cycle right now. - String, this ain't about your motherfucking business class either. ... It's that other thing. The street is the street. Always." ("Port in a Storm") As one goes down the hierarchy of the organization, the ambivalent situation remains. One of the major characters of the first season is Avon's nephew D'Angelo Barksdale (Larry Gilliard Jr.), who – despite being proficient in the drug trade – displays inclinations for a different frame of mind than that of the projects and a more knowing perception of the world. For instance, it can be seen in several situations of his tutoring of the junior "soldiers" under his supervision. When stumbling upon Wallace (Michael B. Jordan) and Bodie (J.D. Williams) playing checkers with a chess board and pieces, he decides to instruct them with the rules. But they only way they can grasp it is if he puts it in streets terms: "The pawns get capped quick. –Unless they some smartass pawns..." ("The Buys"). But he is not all about displaying cultural capital to his underlings; D'Angelo eventually chooses to exit the game and ends up dead. His best intention to repent for his crimes, and those of his uncle, seems not to be destined, as is shown in this interpretation of *The Great Gatsby*: "[Fitzgerald] is saying that the past is always with us. Where we come from... All this shit matters... Like the end of the book ... You can change up... But what came first is what you really are and what happened before is what really happened" ("All Prologue"). His analysis of the book, in effect an analysis of his own life path, goes to show that the type of discourse which surrounds the series' black underclass is that of circular motion – the inability to break free from a life in the proverbial gutter. This type of social mobility problem seems fatal to the characters. Young Wallace himself displayed ill-favour for the killing that is inherent to the trade and considered better options, but his attempt of removing himself from it failed, even after being encouraged by D'Angelo to go back to school. His intention to leave this life behind him led him to the police as an informant, which ultimately led to his death at the hands of his friends. Bodie, on the other hand, is not at all

interested in leaving the game and progressing socially outside the constrictions of his neighbourhood. If anything, the only type of upward mobility that he is interested in is climbing the ladder of the Barksdale organization, in which he succeeds by upholding to the rules of the trade and not stepping on boundaries. It's important to note that the world of the young "hoppers" is not that highly profitable; they achieve little economic capital, but rather social or symbolic capital.

The social world of the police officer involved in the case also is comprised of nuanced hierarchical position; if anything, the police in *The Wire* are greatly troubled by hierarchy. Hierarchy in the police department is something to be respected if the economic and social factors of one's life are to be improved, and if somebody steps out of line one time too many, then their career prospects will be ruined. Therefore, climbing up and down the ladder in the police is not much different in its basic form than that of the Barksdale organization. Jimmy McNulty (Dominic West) is one of the more important characters in the police of the show because he usually sets things in motion in unorthodox ways. Portrayed as a working-class Irish rebel, his disrespect for the hierarchical structure of the police moves him in and out of trouble. A heavy drinker and a womanizer, he seems to be slipping into a stereotype of a working-class Irish-American, but nonetheless he displays an admirable amount of shrewdness and capability. In his leisure time one can find a diagnosis of the collective police stereotype – Jimmy and his colleagues heal their job frustrations at the bar with hard liquor, after which they perform drunken antics. But more on the class-related social practice of consuming alcohol will be said later. Lieutenant Cedric Daniels (Lance Reddick), on the other hand, is shown as being very class determined, and as we follow Daniels through the series, he displays ambition for career and social mobility. Daniels is shown as living in a comfortable upper-middle-class home with his wife Marla (Maria

Broom), who herself is aspiring for a career in public office. His personal life also takes a turn in the stereotypical area like McNulty's, as on account of his career-hindering choices his wife divorces him, because he cannot follow her own ambitious path. But despite all of his cultural, economic or social capital, Daniels is at odds with his existing potential for upward mobility, displaying reluctance as it would hinder his desire to affect change through policing, since his insistence on the job and making a difference creates problems for him, as warned by other experienced climbers like Lester Freamon (Clarke Peters): "I know you're serious climbing the career ladder and i know how slippery it gets the higher you go." ("The Pager") Lester is interesting in the context of mobility in the police hierarchy, as his path is that of an extremely competent investigator who was demoted from Homicide to the Pawnshop unit on account of his unyielding practices, because he angered his superiors by insisting on a case which implicated a son of a powerful media mogul. His worth is proven to his colleagues by his pure investigative work and superior wit, which is commented by his case colleagues: "He looks like a hump, he acts like a hump, sitting there with his toy furniture. -He's natural police." ("Old Cases"). His moving up in the police hierarchy is followed by his adopting a middle-class lifestyle, as he cohabitates with a former exotic dancer Shardene and helping her through nurse training school. Kima Greggs (Sonja Sohn) is another member of the police detail whose personal and social positions are fraught with incongruities. Her position also has to be considered in relation to her gender, since she is the only female police officer permanently in the detail. But the question of her femininity is never brought into discussion, since she is not only a female police officer, but also African-American and gay. It might be expected that these factors would be taken into account to produce a more comprehensible positioning within the dominantly male police force, but it does not fulfil its potential. In all respects Kima is one of the guys and even David Simon commented that "they wrote the character as if she were a man" (Kennedy and Shapiro *TNC* 158). In this way, she participates

in the male culture of policing with the same vigour as her colleagues, as once commented: "She put a hurtin on you like a man" ("The Pager"). In the same vein, her personal life follows a similar story to those of her male counterparts': her girlfriend Cheryl, with whom she is in a committed relationship, wants her to quit the police and become a lawyer and have a child. Kima attends college in her free time to further that goal, but does not actually wish to do so, by which she intentionally averts the privileges of a more stable middle-class life. Thus, the common denominator for some of the police in this respect is a strong dedication to work, which can be seen to stem from an understanding that their work is somehow a vital aspect of a possible bettering of social conditions, even if these efforts yield few results, e.g. Hamsterdam, the personal project of Bunny Colvin in season three.

After looking at some of the characters belonging to the Barksdale/Police social circle and their class characteristics, the portrayal of the dock workers in the suffering Baltimore Patapsco port terminal will directly touch upon the issue of the working-class. *The Wire* portrays the fictionalized Baltimore port as a dreary place, which has seen better days. At the fore of the story of the further decline of the industry in the city is the local 1514 of the International Brotherhood of Stevedores, and its chief secretary Frank Sobotka (Chris Bauer). Sobotka carries the story of the failings of the Baltimore working class on his shoulders, since he is singlehandedly attempting to resurrect a dying port and create jobs for his union "brothers". This mission includes the accumulation of a large amount of money, which he obtains by indulging in smuggling. Not only does he break the law, but he also breaks the promises to his union companions by attempting to run for office one more time, even though it is not his turn but the African-American portion of the union. The dangers to the port are that of mechanization, which would make the dockworkers redundant, as there would be "...no need for unreliable human surveillance", to which Frank sarcastically responds "You

can't get hurt if you ain't working, right?" ("Backwash"). Thus, the general theme is that a booming and expanding capitalist system would put an end to manual labour, reserved for the those positioned on the low end of the social stratum. But despite his illegal ways of funding, Frank rationalizes and calls for action from an entrenched working-class perspective: "Help my union? For 25 years we've been dying slowly down there. Dry docks rusting, piers standing empty. My friends and their kids, like we got the cancer. No lifeline thrown all that time. Nothing from nobody. And now you want to help us?" ("Bad Dreams"). Interestingly enough, the theme of gentrification closely follows the fates of the stevedores, as the alternative to Frank's plans of reviving the grain pier and dredging the canal, the urban planning commission and private investors are pushing forward a condominium housing project. When looking at the rest of the stevedores, there are some cultural aspects which go to show their belonging to the same (social) group and the establishing of a class habitus. They are often shown in a bar which is their local hangout, in which they practice their after-work socializing. It mostly revolves around drinking alcohol and making lascivious jokes, which serves to further one's status in the group, and in a general way helping to establish and maintain a specific class habitus. The age relations are also an integral part of this, since their tomfoolery is often seen in situations where the younger stevedores are pitted against the older ones. But most of all, it is a masculine culture in which one must position himself with a guard in order to be respected – something in which Ziggy Sobotka (James Ransone) never succeeds. Ziggy's desire for easy money puts him at odds with the rest of the stevedores, and his eccentric behaviour makes him the clown of the group. Which only furthers his need to openly flaunt his ill-gotten wealth – his need to fit in with the group is less important than his desire for symbolic (and economic) capital which would enable him to rise above it. With all the group frictions and sometimes even open hostility, the solidarity of the stevedores is something that is above all strife. That is shown numerous times in the season, for instance

when a stevedore's leg was crushed by a container and his possibility to carry on working in the port is brought into question, his colleagues reassure him in the only way they know how: "Don't worry kid, you're still on the clock."("Backwash"). Another example of the solidarity amongst the stevedores is played out in a dialogue for the police to hear: "What do you say to any question? –I take the fifth commandment. –And if they offer you immunity to testify against your union brothers? –I don't remember. –Don't remember what? – Nothing.("Undertow"). Nick Sobotka (Pablo Schreiber) is a character whose unattainable chances for a better life lead him away from the docks into the crime world, as he is disillusioned by his possibilities: "Another goddamn day we put our cards up and get nothing ... I don't know why I fucking bother" ("Hot Shots"). As he is initially torn between the honest, but non-paying work, he chooses to enter the drug trade with his cousin Ziggy, which proves to be a lucrative but hazardous option. His frustration with the working life lies mostly on the basic problem of providing for his family and the opportunity to move out of his parents' basement. That proves to be difficult, even with all the money, since his plans for buying a row-house in a nearby working-class neighbourhood is hindered by the gentrification of the neighbourhood. But despite his entering into the criminal life, Nick still holds to his working-class identity, which can best be seen in a monologue he delivers to a white street dealer named Frog:

> First of all, you happen to be white. I'm talking raised-on-Rapolla-Street white, where
> your mamma used to drag you down to St.Casimir's just like all the other pisspants on
> the block. Second, I'm also white. Not hang-on-the-corner-don't-give-a-fuck white, but
> Locust-Point-IBS-Local-47 white. I don't work without no fucking contract, and I
> don't stand around listening to horseshit excuses like my cousin Ziggy, who, by the

way, is still owed money by you and all your down, street-wise whiggers.

("Backwash")

With this brief sketching of the specific social groups and their class distinctions there is also the general world of *The Wire* that needs to be addressed. The one aspect of the series which distinguishes it from other television crime fiction is that it portrays an urban African-American underclass in more detail than has probably been seen before. In this respect, we can rely on W. G. Runciman's definition of the underclass as "those members of … society whose roles place them more or less permanently on the economic level where benefits are paid by the state to those unable to participate in the labor market at all" (qtd. in Haralambos and Holborn 64). Perhaps it would be important to note that the underclass depicted in the series has very few expectations from the state in terms of assistance, and seem more incline to turn to alternative activities to fund their basic existence. The streets of West Baltimore, which the first season covers in detail, portray a way of life which differs largely from that of the other groups present in the series. It shows how an underclass can exist on its own, in an enclosed system and function with its own sets of rules, all the while having a strong sense of their collectivism while gaining various types of capital which is quite different than that of the higher classes. In the context of the problematic of an urban war on drugs, the police apparatus is shown as being inefficient and plagued by corruption, and through a focus on individual stories of police officers directly affected by this issue a complex net of relations is established between individuals, social groups to which they belong and the world they inhabit. As it was shown on the example of the stevedore subculture, the series considers the disenfranchised working class amidst a city under threat of gentrification and similar urban processes and the possible wiping-out of a whole class of people dependent on the industrial way of production. On a more general note, *The Wire* does strive for a certain totality of

representation, not only of various social groups inhabiting a fictionalized beleaguered city, but also it seems to "symbolize desires and anxieties around the meanings of nationhood, citizenship, urbanity and justice in the United States" (Kennedy and Shapiro *TNC* 148). When taken as a whole, it is clear that the series covers the issue of dysfunctional state apparatuses. Not only does it cover the (repressive) police apparatus, but also ideological apparatuses of the State as in later seasons; the political, the educational and the communications ISA. In this context, it is possible to consider that the series tries to pinpoint the problems of the modern, urban city in the field of neoliberal economics. As Sven Cvek remarks, "the ability to 'cognitively map' US social reality in *The Wire* must be related to the fact that the organizing logic of its narrative structure is the creation and distribution of wealth". Because it is exactly that aspect which underlies as the overarching theme of the series: through the dissolution of modern institutions under the pressure of capitalism which corresponds to what happens in the fictionalized Baltimore. For instance, the consequences are show to be "the reestablishment of social inequality, the privatization of public resources, the deregulation of markets by disabling the State's protective oversight, the financialization of everything into movements of fictitious (or speculative) capital, but especially that of labour" (Kennedy and Shapiro *TNC* 150). Therein lies the innovative approach of *The Wire*: it works with subjects which have been touched upon even in the genre since it reached a popular status, but in such ways that it leaves much space for discussion and possible interpretations of a problematic state of affairs on a much higher level than that of fiction. Or as Sven Cvek suggest, "[b]y thus putting on display the formative force of capital, the series enables its viewers to begin to 'cognitively map' not only the world of The Wire but also their own, to the extent that they too inhabit a social reality structured by the processes of capital."

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to address the issue of class in popular television crime fiction, with the premise that the treatment of class in the British and American production tradition follows unique staples which then influence the portrayal of class in popular discourse. The thesis that these differences originate from specific historic formative factors of social structures of each society was explored by first addressing a comprehensive theory of social stratification, which in effect served as a basis for the methodological approach used in the analyses of the television series.

Upon inspecting of the possible interpretations on how the two distinct traditions in the treatment of class came to be, certain points were made: the British social context has consistently revolved around class issues since they have been present in the public sphere from early on, and through all the changes that were brought about by the advancement of modern society, the issue of class remained important in the observation of how the British society perceives itself. When considering the American context, specific ideological constructs were inspected that formed an important part of how the American society perceived itself in its very beginnings, and how those notions ultimately failed by the advancement of the modern capitalist society, but still retaining a notion that the American social image remains different than that of its progenitor, i.e. the British society.

After observing a set of British crime series, through the analysis of most commonly used class-stereotypes and the attempts of dealing with class issues, a conclusion was drawn that even though class categories play an important role in the composition of these fictional worlds, for the most part they do not manage to swerve around certain pitfalls of class and in the final result manage only to confirm the existing social order. Thus, it would not be amiss to state that what these series transmit is a type of ideology, i.e. they confirm and reiterate

well established class perceptions, or even challenge them. The analysis of the American

production of crime series was based on the distinction of a unique series, which at its core

has inscribed a highly critical approach to the treatment of various aspects of class in

American society. What the analysis ultimately showed was that the series is unique in the

way that it pinpoints certain problems and through its ambitious project diagnoses that the

aches of modern American society lie in its vital part, the capitalist mode of production.

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore how certain aspects of class function in British and American television crime fiction, while being aware that it is from the start a fundamentally different position which directly influences the analysis of these fictional narratives. The thesis of this paper is that specific historic formative factors have influenced the ways in which class is perceived in both the British and American collective imaginaries, and that these affect the ways in which class and society are perceived in the sphere of public discourse, i.e. popular television. Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore the ways in which two distinct cultural traditions have created their own specific modes of transmitting a social ideology through a popular genre which seems most suitable for confirming the existing positions, and possibly rethinking them. The theoretical part of this paper is concerned firstly with an overview of the social theory that can be derived from Karl Marx's economic theoretical exploits and Max Weber's sociology, which are suited for a practical analysis of class in crime fiction since both rely on the notions that economic factors greatly influence one's social position. The context for the different treatment of class in crime fiction is given by examining certain historical and social circumstances in Britain and America which have led to different ways in which class and other social issues are perceived. A practical analysis of selected British crime series showed that class functions as an important aspect of this type of fiction, by affirming the importance of various class identities and social issues. The analysis of American crime series was concerned with an exception, i.e. a series which deals with social issues in detail and rather successfully, which is a precedent in the American tradition. Thus, through practical analyses of several television crime series from both traditions, the idea that class functions in very specific ways in the collective imaginaries of Britain and America is confirmed.