The Representations of Working-Class Struggles in Post-Industrial Scottish Fiction

Jurčević, Božena

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Sveučilišni diplomski studij

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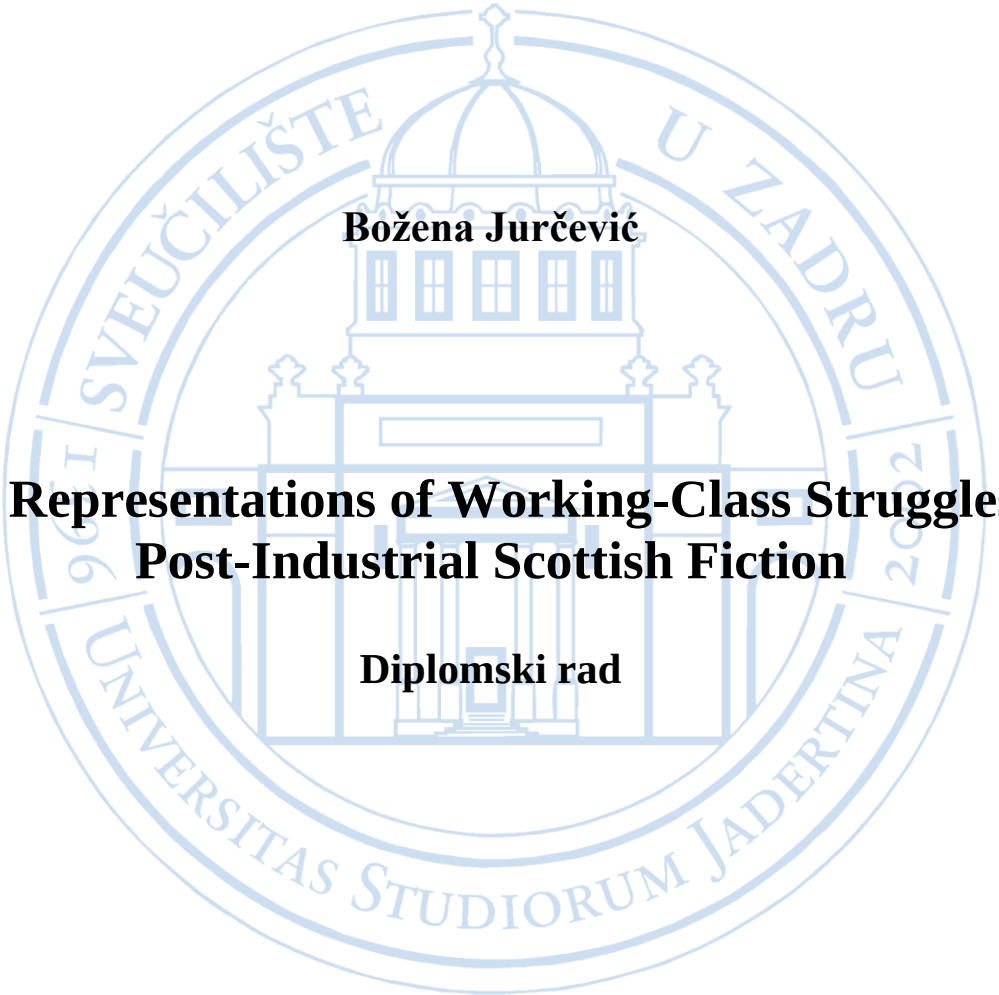

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Diplomski rad

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Zadar, 2024.

Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

Ja, **Božena Jurčević,** ovime izjavljujem da je moj **diplomski** rad pod naslovom **The Representations of Working-Class Struggles in Post-Industrial Scottish Fiction** rezultat mojega vlastitog rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima te da se oslanja na izvore i radove navedene u bilješkama i popisu literature. Ni jedan dio mojega rada nije napisan na nedopušten način, odnosno nije prepisan iz necitiranih radova i ne krši bilo čija autorska prava.

Izjavljujem da ni jedan dio ovoga rada nije iskorišten u kojem drugom radu pri bilo kojoj drugoj visokoškolskoj, znanstvenoj, obrazovnoj ili inoj ustanovi.

Sadržaj mojega rada u potpunosti odgovara sadržaju obranjenoga i nakon obrane uređenoga rada.

Zadar, 23. rujna 2024.

Za moju mamu – primjer ustrajnosti, upornosti i snage. Hvala ti što si me uvijek podržavala i vjerovala u mene. Bez tvoje ljubavi i vodstva, ovaj trenutak ne bi bio moguć.

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Introduction

A quote by George Orwell in a 1941 pamphlet describes England as "the most class-ridden country under the sun. It is a land of snobbery and privilege, ruled largely by the old and silly" (Wood). The idea expressed in this pamphlet is often cited in popular critical analysis of the class system in the United Kingdom. England is used as a stand-in for the entire country, whereas other regions are frequently overlooked. However, these popular observations regarding the prevalence of class in the British context are also grounded in scientific research. By critically analysing changes in the British class structure, Roberts proved that class is indeed an important topic and a powerful explanatory concept It is often used as an Archimedean point to critically evaluate British society, particularly during tumultuous times.

In the 1980s, the UK underwent significant socio-economic changes, with every region affected by the sweeping reforms implemented by Margaret Thatcher's conservative government. Scotland, an often-overlooked region, experienced significant economic upheaval, predominantly marked by the closure of heavy industries. These changes particularly affected the Scottish working class. With the dawn of Thatcherism, Scotland became a post-industrial society. According to Daniel Bell, post-industrial society is characterised by a shift from manufacturing to service-oriented sectors, a change that affects the principles of stratification (qtd. in Wan Zakaria and Buaben 143). In other words, the economy transitions from producing goods to producing services. This inevitably influences traditional class systems. Class assignations must be restructured and redefined to fit the context of post-industrial society. The class most affected by this shift in the Scottish context was the working class, as they were heavily involved in the production of goods. The move to the service-oriented economy brought economic insecurity to the working class since their skillset did not align with the restructured labour market. Culture, often a mirror of societal and economic

shifts, serves as a potent tool for analysing these changes. In particular, Scottish working-class literature provides important insights into working-class communities during the onset of post-industrial society.

This thesis aims to explore how the working class is represented in post-industrial Scottish fiction, particularly in the selected novels of Irvine Welsh, Douglas Stuart, Janice Galloway, and James Kelman. First, the importance of working-class literature is analysed, and the inclusion of Scottish authors in British working-class narratives is critically examined. Then, the historical context crucial for a deep understanding of the novels is presented. This thesis culminates in the analysis of the following novels: *Trainspotting* (1996), *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* (2015), *Shuggie Bain* (2020), and *How Late It Was, How Late* (2019), offering unique insights into working-class life in post-industrial Scotland.

Significance of British Working-Class Literature

Literature has the power to shape perceptions, challenge dominant narratives, and give voice to the experiences of marginalized social groups. It is effective in synthesizing, evaluating, and critiquing cultural changes. Given its ability to absorb and reflect societal norms, it plays an important role in illuminating the class dynamics that have shaped and continue to influence British society. Class is a powerful explanatory concept for understanding societies that exhibit a pronounced preoccupation with identifying and classifying "perceived social differences," such as British society (Lawrence 307). Working-class literature reveals how class identity within such societies is negotiated. By drawing insights from the robust class experience, labour literature offers unique perspectives that are often overlooked by dominant societal representations (Lee 159).

According to Lee, there is an inherent paradox within British working-class literature that mirrors real-life class struggles (159). This genre is in a constant state of tension between

the artistry of literature and the desire to comment on and shape the sociopolitical landscape. Reflecting the author's priorities, the balance may tilt towards artistic expressions or political messages. However, this tension protects working-class literature by safeguarding it from schematization and disengagement from social issues (Lee 159). Such a protective barrier keeps the genre aesthetically dynamic and vibrant without sacrificing literature's ability to serve as a platform for challenging dominant representations and narratives.

Working-class literature reflects the nuanced and variable nature of working-class life; therefore, it is challenging to place it within traditional genre confines (Lee 159). Benjamin Balthaser concludes that this genre represents a "dialectical vision of art and reality," reflecting and reshaping the social landscape through narrative (42). Such literature and the real world are engaged in a mutually transformative social dialogue in which both modify and influence one another. As this genre continually evolves with external situations, it reflects working-class experiences and reactions to sociopolitical changes (Di Stefano 128). Therefore, working-class literature should be seen as continually evolving because it is influenced by a myriad of external factors. It is a cultural product of the ongoing interplay between artistic endeavours and political messages.

Given the dialectical relationship between working-class literature and reality, it is justified to claim that British working-class literature serves a dual purpose: it is not only an artistic tool but also a powerful voice that articulates the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Authors who write about the working class strive to convey political messages using innovative literary methods. Thus, their writing embodies Lee's paradox. Diverse class portrayals are crucial for challenging dominant narratives, which often suppress alternative representations. Additionally, labour literature is important for the evolution of interclass perception, as it teaches other social classes about the working-class experience.

Inclusion of Scottish Literature into British Working-Class Narratives

The connection between Scottish and British literature is influenced by their layered political union. Despite numerous attempts at Scottish independence, it continues to be a part of the United Kingdom. The effective devolution process in 1999, which transferred specific powers from Westminster to the Scottish Parliament, illustrates Scotland's unique position (Dekavalla 639). Scotland is continuously seeking to renegotiate its political status, aiming to achieve complete independence. This renegotiation and pursuit of independence are mirrored within the cultural sphere, particularly in literature.

The cultural relationship between Scotland and Britain is complex. Symbolically representing Britain, England has a dominant presence in the cultural sphere due to its role as the political centre of the UK. London is the seat of political, financial, and cultural power. However, Scotland's contributions are significant, particularly in the cultural context. Scottish working-class literature simultaneously aligns with and diverges from broader British narratives. It showcases a unique regional voice that reflects its distinct experience while being part of British working-class literature. This genre captures, reflects, and critiques the lived experiences of the working class and the factors affecting them. Scottish working-class experiences are distinct within the UK context, and this is especially pronounced during politically tumultuous times such as the shift from one political doctrine to another. For instance, the implementation of neoliberalism under Margaret Thatcher had a profound impact on the working class in the UK. However, that impact was not uniform. Industrial regions, such as Scotland and Wales, were severely affected, while service-oriented economies in London and southern England reaped the benefits of neoliberalism (Jessop 25). This uneven impact of neoliberalism within a single political entity highlights the importance of understanding

regional experiences. Scotland's response to these policies was shaped by its specific historical context and socioeconomic landscape as one of the regions within the UK.

Scotland's unique position not only shaped its response to neoliberal policies but also influenced the evolution of its working-class literature. Scottish literature plays a crucial role in enhancing British working-class narratives. It highlights the importance of bringing unique regional experiences to the forefront of research. British working-class literature represents a "mosaic of experience" in which specific tesserae get overlooked in favour of broader narratives (Lee 159). These distinct themes and stories found in Scottish literature diversify the dominant representations of the working class in the British context. Therefore, they merit additional attention and analysis, as there is much to learn about the working class from their contributions. Political changes during the 1980s fundamentally altered the labour structure and organization. Consequently, everyday working-class life was profoundly impacted, shaping the genre.

Politics and Deindustrialization: Scotland during Thatcher

The 1980s were a pivotal decade in Scottish history, setting the stage for contemporary Scotland. The defining feature of this decade was Margaret Thatcher's Premiership. Her influence on the Scottish sociopolitical landscape is comparable to that of the Industrial Revolution. Both have irrevocably altered the fabric of labour and society; therefore, it is justified to state that recent Scottish history can be divided into pre-Thatcherism and post-Thatcherism periods.

Thatcherism emerged as an opposition to post-war consensus politics and a collectivist mindset that were the *modi operandi* of UK politics for decades after the Second World War (Jessop 19). Following the global conflict, governments seeking to rebuild war-torn societies

and minimize internal and international conflicts prioritized consensus on fundamental issues while championing communities over individual needs. For decades, the Labour and Conservative parties supported the implementation of social policies and the welfare state, making government-sponsored programmes and interventions the societal norm. In the 1970s, Scotland was heavily reliant on the government for economic security, with McCrone and Kendrick reporting that 34.3% of its population was employed in the public sector (qtd. in Stewart 68). Traditional industries in decline or facing bankruptcy were quickly aided by the government. Companies such as Rolls-Royce and Upper Clyde Shipbuilders are examples of government interventionist policies (Stewart 117). Relying on the government for economic and social protection was the norm.

With the election of Margaret Thatcher, a new political doctrine was introduced. Thatcher, along with President Ronald Reagan in the US, championed neoliberalism as a solution to inflation and economic decline. She did not waste time in implementing neoliberal laws and policies, such as privatization, deregulation, and the reduction of tax rates and government spending, alongside diminishing union power (Matthews et al. 65). The government's shift towards a market-driven economy, coupled with a step-by-step retraction from directly supporting heavy industries, has resulted in a reduction in manufacturing establishments (MacInnes 5). Previously protected industries were now at the market's mercy. Traditional industries, which had been the pillars of the Scottish economy, such as shipbuilding on the Clyde, steelwork in Motherwell, lorry production in Bathgate, and mining in Fife, were dismantled. This economic shift from manufacturing not only stripped Scotland of key industries but also eroded the economic base of communities dependent on the secondary sector for their livelihood.

Transformation of the Scottish Working Class

The social ramifications of neoliberal economic policies were extensive. Unemployment soared, casting a long shadow over Scottish society (Fraser and Sinfield 143). The closure of factories and mines not only denoted the loss of livelihood for a significant part of the population but also caused a profound identity crisis for working-class communities that had built their lives around traditional industries. This identity crisis has been well-documented in the literature. The social cohesion of the affected communities was further tested by the implementation of tight fiscal policies. Fiscal conservatism implemented strict control over public spending (Matthews et al. 60). This approach to public spending limited access to public services such as healthcare, reducing their availability for many citizens (Scott-Samuel et al. 60). The sense of alienation fuelled by unemployment and the collective identity crisis was evident, contributing to a growing disenchantment and sense of injustice among the Scottish population.

The government's anti-inflation measures, which included significant cuts to public services, disproportionately affected the most vulnerable members of working-class communities. Reduced access to welfare services compounded the difficulties faced by working-class members struggling with the restructured labour market. The erosion of the social safety net meant that the impact of the new policies placed vulnerable communities under significant strain. Working-class communities faced mounting issues at both the individual and collective levels, such as substance abuse and health disparities (Parkinson et al. 2). Moreover, the 1980s marked the emergence of the "Scottish Effect," referring to the rise in mortality connected with the economic upheaval (Collins and McCartney 520). Thatcher's cabinet tried to suppress the reports about the growing health inequality based on occupation (Scott-Samuel et al. 60). Such profound transformation and its consequences are not only well documented in historical sources but are vividly portrayed in post-industrial Scottish literature, where authors

such as Irvine Welsh and Douglas Stuart capture the impact of these policies on individual and community lives. Their novels are critical archives of working-class lived experiences; therefore, they are a legitimate source for learning about working-class realities in neoliberal society. Through their narratives, these authors illuminate the intersection between personal narratives and the broader history that affects them.

The 1980s were deeply transformative for the Scottish working class. The simultaneous implementation of neoliberal economic and social policies caused a series of profound changes. Deindustrialization and unemployment undermined the identity and livelihood of working-class communities, while the erosion of the welfare state left them alienated and vulnerable. The cumulative effect was a mounting sense of marginalization and desperation among the population that once formed the backbone of the Scottish economy. This tectonic shift in the way society was organized left scars on the members of working-class communities, which were assimilated into the cultural fabric.

Clash of Values: Individualism and Collectivism

Scotland, perceived as a working-class hub in the 1980s, was characterized by socialist leanings and a collectivist mindset, traits that Thatcher found inefficient and disconcerting. In one interview, she famously promoted efficiency, individualism, and self-reliance:

> What is wrong with the deterioration? I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand "I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!" or "I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!" "I am homeless, the Government must house me!" and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing!... But it went too far. If children have a problem, it is society that is at fault. There is no such thing as society.

> There is living tapestry of men and women and people and the beauty of that tapestry and the quality of our lives will depend upon how much each of us is prepared to take responsibility for ourselves and each of us prepared to turn round and help by our own efforts those who are unfortunate. ("Interview for Woman's Own")

Thatcher was vehemently against the overreliance on government and the provision of what she deemed as never-ending social benefits. Self-reliance and entrepreneurship were regarded as desirable and positive, while turning to the government for help was erroneous, objectionable, and contravened the newly established norms of model citizenship in neoliberal Britain. She implied that individuals who requested help from the government were incapable and determined to burden society with their problems. Such individualist beliefs clashed with the collectivist mindset prevalent in working-class communities, resulting in significant social unrest and political mobilization.

The Miners' Strike was a pivotal event emblematic of a wider resistance against neoliberal policies. It made apparent a pronounced division between Downing Street and working-class communities, particularly in Scottish areas heavily reliant on traditional industries. The coal industry had been in decline since the 1940s and, as such, was a steady beneficiary of government subsidies (Thatcher 340). Having won the premiership for the second time in 1983, Thatcher was ready to dismantle the coal industry and its affiliated trade unions.

In March 1984, as a response to planned pit closures, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) proclaimed a strike (Thatcher 344). What ensued was one of the most polarizing and acrimonious industry strikes in UK history. Strikers were determined to preserve the traditional industry, while the government was adamant about closing the mines. The Miners' Strike was marked by widespread picketing, social unrest, and violent clashes with the

police (“Independent Review” 27–28). Strikers were convinced that the entire government apparatus was determined to emerge victorious, regardless of the means of achieving victory. The rapid growth of the strike transcended its initial objective. It became “All about class war – not industrial dispute” (“Independent Review” 28). The strike morphed into a social and cultural resistance movement. Working-class communities desperately attempted to preserve their past, ensure their present, and fight for the future.

The Miners’ Strike ended with Thatcher prevailing over the miners. Working-class communities bore the burden of subsequent repercussions. An expression coined by miners: “Death of the pit. Death of the village” (“Independent Review” 63) encapsulates the belief that mines symbolize a source of purpose for numerous working-class communities. The pit closure represents the erasure of the meaning for the mining communities. Their livelihood and identities were intertwined with their employment. The defeat of the strike came to embody the defeat of the working class.

After the strike, mining communities and neighbourhoods were completely devoid of life, leaving behind once-bustling working-class hubs as desolate and empty. Thatcher’s victory symbolized the dominance and prevalence of neoliberal tenets and values. Being employed in blue-collar work and relying on trade unions were no longer viable or encouraged options. It became evident that working-class social standing and the perception of the broader public underwent significant change. This dichotomy in perception is summarized by the observation from a working-class member that “One minute you’re salt of the earth the next you’re criminals” (“Independent Review” 61). This statement captures the volatile social standing of the working class in the 1980s. The public perception of the working class shifted. Once hailed as the backbone of the industrial economy, the working class was vilified. It was labelled as deviant in post-industrial society. The restructured societal paradigm championed individualism and middle-class membership.

Cultural Trends in the 1980s Scotland

In response to the significant changes that occurred during the 1980s, there was a lively cultural revival that aimed to express and critique the socioeconomic realities of the time. Culture served as a reflection of the changes that took place at the political, economic, and social levels. Neoliberalism brought into question the very purpose and identity of the working class. It challenged the collectivist ethos of the working class, ushering in a period of confusion, anger, purposelessness, and introspection. The transitory phase highlighted the need for a redefined working-class identity in Scotland. Having lost politically, all subsequent energy was channelled into culture. Culture became the voice of a society in transition.

Amidst the decline of industry and numerous social unrests, music emerged as an expression of identity and a voice of dissent for Scotland's working class. "Punk rock came from the streets. It came from angry kids who lived in the city deserts—the wastelands of huge, decaying council estates and soulless high-rise blocks that cut them off from life on the ground.... The punks were angry because they were unemployed, hated school, found the world of their parents meaningless" (Tobler 6). Punk and post-punk movements were artistic expressions of a generation caught between the industrial and post-industrial societies, desperate to express their grievances, and assert their identities in a world determined to pretend that they do not exist. Their distinctive style and anti-establishment attitude were a means of expressing their identities and announcing their presence.

Rock bands, such as Runrig and the The Proclaimers, expressed a negative view of the prevalent conditions in Scotland. They openly declared their Scottishness along with expressing dissatisfaction with the political and economic situation. Runrig's song *Alba* expresses a deep connection between Scotland's past and present, lamenting deindustrialization and widespread unemployment: "I see the wheels of industry at a standstill /And the northern

lands laid bare" (lines 17-18). The lack of Scottish parliament and powerlessness are articulated: "And the big empty house in Edinburgh / Without authority or voice" (lines 19-20). While sung in Gaelic, *Alba* addresses the Scottish audience by referencing solidarity in suffering. Additionally, it adds a national dimension of shared heritage to the lyrics and places Scottishness in opposition to Englishness. To be Scottish is to be independent and proud of the working-class heritage. The Proclaimers end their *Letter from America,* highlighting the importance of industry for collective identity by listing towns impacted by deindustrialization: "Methil no more /Irvine no more /Bathgate no more / Linwood no more" (lines 50-53). Industry is deeply intertwined with working-class communities. As industries cease operations, working-class towns are fading away and communities are eroded by a lack of purpose and employment.

Music gave voice to the profound individual and collective identity crises that gripped Scottish society. The underlying conundrum revolved around defining Scottishness and working-class membership in the neoliberal social order. The lack of political and economic power was a leitmotif, reflecting the prevalent sense of being wronged. Scotland was perceived as being stripped bare of its proud industrial heritage and political power, while Scots viewed themselves as marginalized within the UK context. What remained was nostalgia for the bygone days, societal trauma, and economic hardships.

The widespread transformation of the 1980s in Scotland provided fertile ground for a Scottish literature revival that grappled with the complexities of class, identity, and change. Common themes in Scottish literature at the time were the portrayal of an identity crisis, poverty, and a sense of purposelessness among the working class. Authors like Irvine Welsh, Douglas Stuart, Janice Galloway, James Kelman, and Agnes Owens present unflinching portrayals of working-class life in post-industrial Scotland. They explore the themes of identity crises, gender equality, and trauma, offering a voice to those on the margins of society. They

capture the zeitgeist of a tumultuous time that fundamentally altered working-class identity. In this dissertation, four novels will be analysed: *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh, *How Late It Was, How Late* by James Kelman, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* by Janice Galloway, and *Shuggie Bain* by Douglas Stuart.

Exploring Paradox and Grittiness as Genre Motifs in Selected Novels

Literature is a powerful medium for societal influence. It has the potential to shape political and cultural discourses. Using certain techniques, such as characterization, authors promote specific political messages. Once published, those messages become part of the public discourse. According to Crewe, they have the power to reach across social boundaries and affect class consciousness and interclass perception (1). By opting for typified representations of the working class, authors are perpetuating broader social narratives that aim to codify working-class membership as derogatory and undesirable. Stereotypes about the working class are largely negative and are used as mechanisms of societal control to reinforce existing class assignations (Crewe 2). Stereotypical representations not only impact the self-perception of the working class but also influence the way other social classes perceive it.

Authorial perception and bias are important factors in investigating typified representations. According to Tew, middle-class authors reinforce their status by portraying the working class in a negative light (qtd. in Crewe 2). By othering the working class, middle-class membership and experience are standardized. A raw and unfiltered portrayal of a harsh life has become a genre motif so much that working-class literature that does not highlight the "jagged surface of reality often feels incomplete" (Lee 160). Working-class literature must comply with the aesthetic of grittiness to feel authentic. It is important to note that middle-class authors are not the only ones to contribute to the aesthetics of grittiness. Authors from various socioeconomic backgrounds have used the literature as a medium to express their views on

social classes. Numerous authors with working-class backgrounds have highlighted the stark realities of working-class lives. This raises a critical question: Why would they also choose to highlight the harsh aspects of the working class?

Along with complying with the imposed aesthetics of grittiness, another compelling reason why working-class authors emphasize the harsher aspects of their communities is to convey a political message. This paradox Lee raises to the level of a genre motif in British working-class literature (159). Labour literature is in a constant state of tension between literary artistry and political commentary. By analysing novels from authors with working-class backgrounds, such as Janice Galloway, Irvine Welsh, Douglas Stuart, and James Kelman, it becomes evident that Scottish working-class literature shares the same paradox as a genre motif. Their works employ the aesthetic of grittiness in an activist manner to critically comment on the sociopolitical landscape of post-industrial Scotland. These poignant representations of specific microcosms serve as critical explorations of larger societal changes sweeping across Scotland and impacting the working class. They showcase a community after policies have been implemented, illustrating the profound intersection between personal narratives and national history. Their work serves as a lens through which readers can observe a society in transition between political ideologies.

Despite their focus on harsh realities, these authors do not sacrifice literary mastery for the sake of political activism. They experiment, explore, and expand the boundaries of literature, thereby embodying the paradox advocated by Lee. The interplay between artistic creativity and political messages has resulted in dynamic, vibrant, and relevant literary products. Janice Galloway in *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* pushes the envelope on how stories are told. The use of fragmented narrative mirrors the fragmented and chaotic mental state of the protagonist. Unconventional typography, such as words falling off the paper and bleeding into the margins, highlights the protagonist's mental disintegration and turbulent

emotional state. Irvine Welsh in *Trainspotting* weaves together nonlinear narratives and multiple viewpoints with complex societal issues, such as addiction and poverty. His unapologetic use of Scottish dialect authenticates the novel while providing the reader with an immersive experience. Similarly, James Kelman, through his use of Scottish dialect in *How Late It Was, How Late*, challenges the reader to engage with the text while exploring working-class conditions in the face of systemic social change. His use of the stream-of-consciousness technique pulls the reader into the narrative to explore and navigate the bleak and disoriented world along with the protagonist. In *Shuggie Bain*, Douglas Stuart blends stark realism with beautiful use of language. The beauty of his prose blurs the jagged edges of working-class reality. His ability to portray the brutality of the characters' lives while highlighting their humanity is masterful. Stuart's characters are portrayed as raw and vulnerable, showcasing their authenticity to readers.

Each of these authors has masterfully balanced artistic expression with political commentary. The tension between the two has enriched their work, making it a testament to the creative potential that can be unleashed when the desire to comment on real-world events meets the need for artistic expression. Their novels wield the aesthetic of grittiness to send a political message while balancing the artistry of literature and activism. The selected demonstrate what Lee classifies as dialectical affiliation because they simultaneously mirror and reshape the working-class experience in post-industrial Scotland (159).

Defining Key Concept: Social Class

In this dissertation, class is the key concept, while identity and trauma are related concepts evaluated through the application of the key concept. Class functions as a critical lens through which society in transition can be observed, as reflected in the literature. It is a conceptual and analytical magnifying glass employed to observe and document the reality

represented in post-industrial Scottish fiction. The selected novels inherently depict the struggles and lives of the working class. Understanding how social class is conceptualised in this dissertation is crucial, as it functions as an analytical medium through which identity and trauma can be explored.

Class as a Critical Lense

Class has always been an important concept for understanding British society. Ever since the early medieval period, British society has been based on a hierarchical structure. This implies the existence of class assignations that provide a backdrop for the social organization. The Norman Conquest during the eleventh century introduced the feudal system, which reorganized land ownership, implementing strict societal structure based on hierarchy (Vasiliu 7). This hierarchical social organization prescribed an individual's position in life, determining their life trajectory. The monarch was at the top of the social ladder, a position that many claim mirrors contemporary social stratification. Over the centuries, social organizations have changed, but class stratification has remained an important part of British society. The Industrial Revolution in Scotland, akin to other parts of Britain, made apparent the vulnerable position of the working class, highlighting the chasm between the struggling and affluent members of society (Blum and McLaughlin 3). This class divide was once again brought to the historical forefront during deindustrialization in the 1980s, when the working class experienced marginalization because of occupation-determined class membership. These historical examples illustrate that class is important for analysing and understanding British society.

Although an influential concept, class is not easily defined. Numerous scholars have suggested definitions of varying complexities. According to Harvey, class is a "shadowy (some would even say dubious) concept…without stable social configuration" (31). This observation highlights the notion that social class is a multilayered concept that often eludes the confines

of a single, strict, and measurable definition. While Harvey's initial observation about the elusiveness of class is valid, the latter statement that class does not have a stable social configuration requires more scrutiny. Although concepts like class, society, and culture are difficult to define and perhaps will never be fully understood by applying only one paradigm, empirically validated definitions that capture aspects of these concepts have been proposed by various scholars.

Thompsonian Understanding of Class

Throughout history, scholars from different fields have grappled with the concept of class and its impact on society. Numerous definitions have depicted class as a rigid structure based on wealth or occupation. While these definitions have empirical merit, additional elaboration is needed to capture the important aspects of class that are not easily quantified. E. P. Thompson, a prominent social historian, challenges static views of class by offering a unique conceptualisation. He states:

> When we speak of a class, we are thinking of a very loosely defined body of people who share the same categories of interests, social experiences, traditions and value-system, who have a disposition to behave as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways. But class itself is not a thing, it is a happening. ("The Peculiarities" 357)

In this quote, Thompson emphasises the dynamic nature of social class. It is not a static and fixed category, but a fluid social construct. Class formation is a constantly evolving process, while class itself consists of individuals who, due to their shared interests, experiences, traditions, and values, act as a social group. However, "class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily" (Thompson, "The Making" 9). For instance, the Industrial Revolution, a historical event that Thompson analysed,

reshaped class dynamics by altering labour conditions. Under the influence of imposed productive relations, members of different classes were socialized into reproducing certain class relationships. Long hours, low wages, and poor housing became the hallmarks of the working class. Socioeconomic and political markers are important in class formation, as they shape the living conditions and perceptions of a certain class. The rise of the working class during the Industrial Revolution and deindustrialization in the 1980s are excellent examples of how macro events shape class experiences. The way society is organized influences the lived experience of a certain class. Different social classes are the product of historical events and processes (Thompson, "The Making" 9), meaning that class cannot be understood in isolation from the historical context, as it influences the real-life conditions of different classes and shapes their identity.

This understanding of class as a constantly evolving social construct shaped by external historical and sociopolitical factors echoes Lee's understanding of labour literature. Both definitions emphasise the connection between the working class and external factors. The literature absorbs, reflects, and shapes the real-life working-class experience, while the working class is influenced by external conditions. The Thompsonian understanding of class provides theoretical justification for the analysis of post-industrial Scottish fiction. His conceptualization of class does not negate measurable material markers such as occupation, wealth, housing, etc., but instead places an emphasis on the relational aspect and historical context. In this dissertation, class is used as an analytical tool to critically evaluate Scottish literature that grapples with the aftermath of forced deindustrialization.

In conclusion, Thompson's understanding of class offers a theoretical framework for analysing the portrayal of the working class in literature. This approach is particularly applicable in the context of social struggles where external factors are rapidly changing. The Thompsonian perspective on class highlights the influence of historical context on lived

experience. External factors influence the real-life conditions of the working class, which are assimilated into the literature. Therefore, it is possible to analyse selected novels through the class they portray to learn about working-class identity and the ensuing trauma. The selected novels were written by working-class authors about the working-class experience in Scotland, after neoliberal policies were implemented. They illustrate the consequences of significant historical events that have forever altered the trajectory of Scottish society.

Trainspotting – A Tale of Alienation and Identity Crisis

Trainspotting elicited a significant degree of controversy and polarized opinions immediately upon publication. It had vociferous advocates and equally opinionated critics. *Rebel Inc.,* a prominent counter-culture publishing company, labelled *Trainspotting* as "The best book ever written by man or woman...deserves to sell more copies than the Bible" (qtd. in Paddock), while a few of the Booker Prize judges had different opinions. According to the reports, *Trainspotting* was not shortlisted for the prestigious prize because of two judges who took offence with the novel (Paddock). It was initially published as a series of connected episodes in counterculture magazines such as *Rebel Inc.* and *New Writing Scotland* (Paddock). The novel was an immediate commercial success, shaping the cultural discourse in the United Kingdom. *Trainspotting* marked a watershed moment in Scottish fiction because "it created a new bestseller that was distinctly Scottish as well as distinctly working-class; it dealt with a subject and with an underclass that both society and fiction had largely chosen to ignore" (Childs 241).

The novel documents the misadventures of a loosely defined group of friends from the fringes of society who traverse through Edinburgh, addicted to drugs. They try to manipulate, exploit, and retaliate against the system by committing a series of crimes, thereby embodying

the label “neurotic pícaros of the post-industrial society” (Russo abstract). Mark Renton and his companions reflect the anxieties and instabilities of post-industrial Scotland. Their deviant actions are driven by survival instinct, sense of powerlessness, and psychological turmoil. These vagabond characters from Leith, one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Edinburgh, serve as a mirror to the wider public, reflecting the challenges faced by the working class after deindustrialization.

Welsh’s portrayal of the working class is rooted in his autobiographical experience of post-industrial Edinburgh. Unemployment, addiction, and social disintegration plagued the working class. In Thatcherite Britain, an entire social class was sidelined, which significantly influenced the collective working-class identity. *Trainspotting* criticizes the consumerist post-industrial society prevalent in Scotland (Senekal 25). By placing the critique of consumerism at its core, *Trainspotting* portrays the tensions that exist within the working class as they grapple with consumerist values. Characters experience a discrepancy between desire for individual satisfaction and working-class roots that emphasize collectivism. They address this gap between the conflicting value sets by rejecting consumerism and embracing collectivism. This rejection is clearly expressed by Renton:

> Choose us. Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind–numbing and spirit–crushing game shows, stuffing fuckin junk food intae yir mooth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yersel in a home, a total fuckin embarrassment tae the selfish, fucked–up brats ye've produced. Choose life. Well, ah choose no tae choose life. (Welsh 76)

This quote perfectly illustrates the relationship between the working class and consumerist values. The working class rejects the *washing machine culture*. They reject participating in what they perceive as a mind-numbing consumption of goods that are

ultimately void of meaning and fulfilment. Paradoxically, they choose to twist the consumerist culture and engage in substance consumption to satiate personal needs. As Childs suggests, this vehement rejection stems from economic inability to participate in the consumerist culture rather than from ideological opposition to it (244). Renton and his friends are keenly aware of their own economic subordinate status. After deindustrialization, their employment options dwindled. No longer being able to work as miners, shipyard welders, or textile mill workers, they found themselves as *schemies on the dole*, relying on benefits to survive while constantly plotting to trick the government for additional support. Since they are unable to buy goods, the only option is to diminish their value by labelling them as undesirable and meaningless. Renton and his social class mask their exclusion from the benefits consumerism offers by rejecting it (Senekal 26).

Alienation is an important concept for understanding the position of the working class in post-industrial Scotland. Senekal argues that alienation is necessarily relational. For alienation from society to happen, characters need to have an established connection to that society. Building on the working-class rejection of consumerist values, it is evident that such connection exists. Economic inability to obtain consumer goods inhibits full participation in the consumer culture. This is indicative, as Senekal argues, of alienation through the partial rejection of consumerism (26). The working class agrees ideologically with satiating personal needs; however, it is not able to support this belief financially. Their ideological agreement with consumerism stems from the fact that characters in the novel consume substances in copious amounts, as it is the only thing financially available to them. Furthermore, Renton's decision to betray his friends and take the money at the end of the novel corroborates this notion, revealing the masked individualism behind the surface-level collectivism that the characters espouse. Consumer values are slowly eroding the working-class ethos and uncovering their latent individualism. Even Leith Central Station, a symbol of the working-

class neighbourhood, “is soon tae be demolished and replaced by a supermarket and swimming centre” (Welsh 125), reflecting a broader trend where cultural sites were commodified and repurposed to fit consumer needs.

Melvin Seeman’s framework of alienation includes powerlessness as an important aspect. Powerlessness refers to “the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements sought in relation to society” (Seeman 784). A sense of helplessness permeates the definition of powerlessness. It can be applicable to individuals and social groups. When discussing groups, powerlessness is observed through a “lack of autonomy and participation” (Ashforth 207). Mark Renton, in his vehement monologue about identity, reveals that there is a particular vulnerability at the intersection of being Scottish and working class:

> Fuckin failures in a country ay failures. It's nae good blamin it oan the English fir colonising us. ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers.We are colonised by wankers. We can't even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by. No. We're ruled by effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation. Ah don't hate the English. They just git oan wi the shite thuv goat. Ah hate the Scots. (Welsh 33)

Renton bitterly proclaims that to be working class in Scotland is to be helpless at the bottom of the social hierarchy. He expresses anger towards the perceived lack of agency. There is a clear power imbalance between being Scottish and English. To be a Scottish working-class member means to be unable to influence the socio-political environment, while to be English means to possess political power. This sense of national powerlessness compounds the working-class economic marginalization. Scottish working-class members are colonized by

English middle-class values, and they do not enjoy equal participation and representation in socio-political and cultural spheres. Additionally, powerlessness is observed through substance abuse and personal failures. Characters are helpless in escaping their reliance on drugs, describing themselves as powerless in the face of addiction:

> Ah went tae take a shot. It took us ages tae find a good vein. Ma boys don't live as close tae the surface as maist people's. When it came, ah savoured the hit. Ali wis right. Take yir best orgasm, multiply the feeling by twenty, and you're still fuckin miles off the pace. Ma dry, cracking bones are soothed and liquefied by ma beautiful heroine's tender caresses. The earth moved, and it's still moving. (Welsh 6)

Scottish working class is alienated from the rest of the society due to their inability to fully participate in the political outcomes. They have tried to resist political changes; however, their resistance was futile as deindustrialization was successfully implemented. In post-industrial Scotland, Renton sees his class and nationality as completely politically impotent with servile attitude. They are part of the society but are clearly marked as outliers.

Building on Seeman's understanding of social isolation as an important concept of alienation, De Jong Gierveld et al. suggest that social isolation refers to people "with very small number of meaningful ties" (486). The working class, plagued by addiction, has reduced all interpersonal relationships to transactional exchange. In the world of drug addiction, there are "nae friends in this game. Jist associates" (Welsh 4). Friendships and romantic relationships are primarily focused on the exchange of desired goods, such as heroin and sexual favours. In *Trainspotting,* characters are depicted as atomised individuals without a proper sense of belonging. Their bonds are loose and void of deeper emotional connections, existing only while there is transactional gain. Characters have created "a community of dependency" (Craig 97), where individuals rely on each other for support in a dysfunctional manner. Relationships are

based on mutual exploitation, where drugs, money, and sex become the central connecting points. Even central characters like Renton, Spud, Sick Boy, and Franco Begbie are in "the highly forced and coercive" friendship (Kelly 59–60), where they all benefit from Begbie's violent tendencies and intimidating power. Being associated with a known "hard-man" like Begbie, elevates their social standing in an environment where respect is linked to intimidation and aggression. Instead of genuinely wanting to establish emotional connection and brotherhood, characters recognize the prudence of being perceived as his friends. As Renton elaborates Begbie's friends really "fear him" (Welsh 36).

Depicting everyday life in Leith, *Trainspotting* portrays the identity crisis of the working class. Public perception of the working class has shifted under the influence of deindustrialization policies, making the gap between social classes even more pronounced. Renton exhibits working-class sensitivity to being stared at by middle-class members: "Ah half expected tae see Beggars at the freshers ball, beating tae a pulp some four-eyed, middle-class wanker he imagined wis starin at um" (Welsh 36). The working class perceives the middle-class gaze as more than mere observation. They see it as a judgmental tool used to label and marginalize them. The middle-class gaze categorises the working class as deviant and amplifies the perception of distinctiveness. Furthermore, it places the working-class identity crisis under scrutiny, heightening their sense of being exposed and alienated.

Although avoiding the middle-class gaze, the working class is observing, judging, and assessing the middle class to establish distinction points. These points are used to ascertain their own identity in the new context. Devoid of heavy industry employment as their primary identity marker and lacking social affirmation as the *salt of the earth*, the working class is looking to establish new identity markers. By comparing and contrasting themselves with the middle class, working-class members have established markers of distinction:

> Ah can tell by their accents, dress and bearin that they are middle to upper–middle–class English. The city's full Of Such white–settler types, says she, who's just back from London! You used to get Geordies and Scousers and Brummies and Cockneys at the Uni, now it's a playground for failled Oxbridge home-counties types, with a few Edinburgh merchant school punters representing Scotland. (Welsh 123)

Old class practices and values have disintegrated, while new ones have not yet fully formed. One distinction that the working-class employs is that they are not "boring middle–class cunts" (Welsh 74). They are not university-educated individuals wearing expensive ensembles and speaking BBC English. This distinction from the middle class has resulted in them assuming almost the opposite identity. To belong to the Scottish working class means to have little to no higher education, wear affordable clothing and speak in a Scottish dialect. Furthermore, the working class has internalized the deviant label that proclaimed them as violent criminals addicted to drugs. Tommy's character exemplifies the assumption of the deviant label. Everyone, including Renton's mother, uses one form of substance or another, ranging from prescribed drugs such as Valium to heroin. Tommy eventually succumbed to drugs, showcasing the power of internalized labels. Ultimately, he ended up embodying the self-destructive behaviours that society has come to expect from his class.

Society swiftly deals with individuals and social groups who deviate from the mainstream norms and expectations. It creates and enforces mechanism of social control to ensure compliance and obedience. Renton is heavily critical of these practices claiming that dominant social groups sacrifice informed-decision making and autonomy in the name of order and society-wide control:

> Society invents a spurious convoluted logic tae absorb and change people whae's behaviour is outside its mainstream. Suppose that ah ken aw the pros and cons, know

> that ah'm gaunnae huv a short life, am ay sound mind etcetera, etcetera, but still want tae use smack? They won't let ye dae it. They won't let ye dae it, because it's seen as a sign ay thir am failure. (Welsh 76)

Substance abuse in *Trainspotting* becomes both rebellion and a form of escapism. Characters like Spud, Sick Boy, Renton, and Begbie navigate the world where their deviance is a response to systemic changes and failures. Their interactions capture the essence of a community desperate to redefine itself and find its social footing amid rapid and dramatic social, economic, cultural, and political changes.

Shuggie Bain **- Navigating Urban Space, Trauma, and Masculinity**

Shuggie Bain is an award-winning, authentic, and intimate portrayal of working-class upbringing in post-industrial Glasgow. By channelling his childhood into the poignant exploration of family disintegration, gender roles, trauma, poverty, and addiction, Douglas Stuart has weaved together an intimate and raw narrative. In an interview for the *Guardian,* Stuart admits that the novel contains semi-autobiographical elements, stating, “Shuggie is about loss and grief…I wouldn’t have needed to have written it if my mum had still been alive” (Hattenstone). Although this bildungsroman is about a young boy’s maturation into adulthood, at the heart of the novel is a maternal-filial bond. This connection is a critical component for Shuggie’s developmental trajectory. His relationship with Agnes is a blend of love, dependency, and desperation that forms a critical aspect of his identity.

As the youngest of three children, Shuggie is continuously exposed to the Bain family dysfunction exacerbated by financial strain. Subject to the economic stress, families are disintegrating while “wondering how to make a pittance stretch around” (Stuart 164). This ,according to McCartney, is an accurate portrayal of the social and economic realities of

Glasgow in the Thatcherite era (1). Big Shug notes the prevailing effect of deindustrialization on Glasgow:

> The city was changing; you could see it in people's faces. Glasgow was losing its purpose, and he could see it all clearly from behind the glass. He could feel it in his takings. He had heard them say that Thatcher didn't want honest workers any more; her future was technology and nuclear power and private health. Industrial days were over, and the bones of the Clyde Shipworks and the Springburn Railworks lay about the city like rotted dinosaurs. (Stuart 43)

With its closed factories and neglected infrastructure, Glasgow became an example of post-industrial decline. The once proud working-class city, dubbed the *Second City of the Empire*, was reduced to closed factories and dilapidated communities. In the context of environmental psychology, the built and natural worlds have an influence on human affairs and quality of life (Steg and de Groot 2). The characters' reactions to Glasgow's urban decay confirm this connection between the external surroundings and internal experience. Over time, the characters feel a sense of loss and aimlessness, as well as a mounting sense of despair. The importance of location for characters' emotions and behaviours is clearly seen as the Bain family relocates to a new council house in Pithead for a fresh start, expecting "very own home. A garden for the weans. Peace and quiet for the sake of their marriage" (Stuart 90). Instead, they are met with a devastated miners' community with "plainest, unhappiest-looking homes Agnes had ever seen" (Stuart 95). As the negativity of the pit seeps in, the Bain family relationships disintegrate. Agnes, soaking up the feel of the environment, bitterly remarked, "What a shithole…And to think I dressed up nice for *this*?" (Stuart 95).

Relocation to Pithead, with its pervasive sense of despair, initiates the family unravelling, starting with Big Shug's immediate abandonment upon witnessing the community

and ending with Agnes' tragic death. Similarly, in *Trainspotting,* characters are haunted by the dilapidated locations they are forced to inhabit. Renton's desperate search for opium suppositories in a filthy public toilet showcases how the grim conditions of the location drive characters into dehumanizing situations. Furthermore, *trainspotting* occurs only in dilapidated flats or grimy public toilets, reflecting how addiction is intertwined with a bleak environment. There is a pervasive need to escape the environment using any means necessary, as explained by Renton: "The wallpaper is horrific in this shite–pit ay a room. It terrorises me… but it's all here, all within ma sweaty grasp. Syringe, needle, spoon, candle, lighter, packet ay powder. It's all okay, it's all beautiful" (Welsh 8).

Trauma in *Shuggie Bain* is a central theme that shapes the lives of the characters. Through Shuggie's eyes, Stuart captures psychological scars left on the Bain family and the wider community. Differentiating individual from collective trauma, Kai Erikson, in his work *Notes on Trauma and Community*, uses the analogy of a "damaged social body*"* to refer to the collective trauma experienced by a community (460). This analogy suggests that just as physical trauma causes harm to the body's tissues, collective trauma disrupts the fabric of the community, ultimately eradicating the communal "we" (Erikson, "Notes on Trauma" 460). In essence, collective trauma is understood as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (Erikson, "Everything in Its Path" 154). This is profoundly represented in the novel. Switch to neoliberalism, soaring unemployment, deindustrialization, and subsequent marginalization of the working class have severed as a political blow to the working-class communities, resulting in collective trauma. As Big Shug navigates Glasgow in his taxi, he sees what can only be described as an archetypical working-class male Glaswegian in Thatcherite Scotland:

> Ye fur hire, pal?" said a man's voice. "No!" shouted Shug, pointing in the direction of the wrecked girls. "Right, then," said the old man, not paying any heed. He opened

> the door before Shug could hit the automatic lock and pulled his small frame and voluminous coats inside…The hackney filled with the smell of old milk. The old man sat in a yellowed shirt and a crumpled grey suit, over which he had piled a thin wool coat and on top of this had added an oversize topcoat. It gave him the look of a refugee, his tiny frame drowning in yards of Shetland wool and gabardine…The auld Glasgow jakey was a dying breed-a traditionally benign soul that was devolving into something younger and far more sinister with the spread of drugs across the city. Shug looked in the mirror and watched the man continue his drunken solo, the conversation so low and incoherent that he could pick out only certain words like Thatcher and union and bastard. (Stuart 40-41)

The typical Glaswegian is portrayed as a derelict relic of a bygone area. He is distant from his family, spending all his money on alcohol to numb the existential void. Traditional solidarity and communality in suffering within the working class have diminished, as Shug does everything in his power to avoid providing his service to the archetypal man. However, the man is trying to connect with Big Shug by referencing their "common culture," which is one way that communities bond in the wake of collective trauma (Erikson, "Notes on Trauma" 461). This shared culture has undergone significant change. Instead of referencing his industry employment, wages, or the boss, he is trying to speak in the new working-class code, one that condemns Thatcher and laments union decline. Although they share in the collective trauma, characters are unable to truly connect to each other. Furthermore, this sense of working-class alienation and traumatic effect is exacerbated by the "degree of indifference that bordered on contempt" from members of other communities (Erikson, "Notes on Trauma" 462). This lack of commiseration and acknowledgement of working-class pain only adds to the adverse effects that alienate and marginalize the working class.

The intergenerational transmission of trauma is powerfully portrayed through the Bain family in the novel. The characters are trapped in a persistent cycle of socio-economic hardship, with no prospect of escape. All the locations in the novel where Bain family members reside are working-class housing estates, ranging from tolerable to deplorable living conditions. Despite this, they are all characterized by segregation and isolation of the working class, and the community they inhabit is stigmatized by a host of social issues such as unemployment and crime. The family lacks the financial means to move out of these housing estates. Moreover, their family culture reinforces low expectations. Everything outside housing schemes and trade employment is seen as wishful thinking. Shuggie's brother Leek embodies this internalization of low expectations due to economic hardships. He passes on an opportunity to attend art school on a scholarship to support his family. The only thing standing between his family and abject poverty is Leek; therefore, he must find immediate employment and forego his dream.

This prevailing poverty creates an environment where all forms of abuse are normalized. Moreover, they are seen as a fact of life. This is particularly evident when discussing sexual abuse. Shuggie witnesses the repeated abuse of his mother by his father and various other men. As a result, he internalizes these traumatic experiences. Unfortunately, Shuggie becomes a victim himself, leading to a situation where he offers a taxi driver sexual favour as a form of payment. Meanwhile, his sister, Catherine, marries Donald Jr., a man with a similar profile to her abusive stepfather, while Leek prefers to disassociate from his surroundings. The Bain family is an example of intergenerational trauma transmission, where recurring patterns have significant emotional and psychological impacts on all its members. Shuggie has “always intended to move on” with his education and go to the hairdressing college (Stuart 5). When seeing his potential middle-class classmates, Shuggie concluded that he “walked half as fast as they did” (Stuart 5). Due to poverty and abuse, it took him twice as much effort to match what his classmates already had. There is no traditional epilogue to the

novel. The ending is open, which leaves the reader with the hope that a better future awaits Shuggie.

As much as it is a narrative about survival and resilience amid collective and family trauma, Shuggie Bain is a story about a young man's maturations into adulthood while questioning traditional construction of masculinity. As exhibited in *Trainspotting* and *Shuggie Bain*, there is a normative masculinity within the working class. Franco Begbie and Shug Bain are examples of a "hard man," which is a prototype of working-class masculinity. Hard man is a product of the interplay between societal expectations, personal survival, and socio-economic marginalization, manifested in macho personality. A typical hard man is quick to anger, explosive, and unpredictable. He uses physical presence to intimidate and assert control over others. While projecting an image of a tough exterior, a hard man can be charismatic and persuasive when it suits him. Additionally, he is sexually promiscuous and dominant. Society accepts and explains their behaviour that is often abusive by labelling them as hard man, meaning that such behaviour is expected from men like them.

Shug Bain explains the importance of industry employment for traditional masculinity: "Whole housing estates of young men who were promised the working trades of their fathers had no future now. Men were losing their very masculinity" (Stuart 43). Deindustrialization heavily impacted employment and, to some extent, gender identity. Men were losing the very essence of what made them masculine in the traditional sense. The novel implies that in post-industrial Scotland, working-class men were void of their traditional masculinity and were compensating through various forms of destructive behaviour, such as substance abuse. Amid traditional masculinity, there is coming-of-age Shuggie Bain, who grew up with a "hard man" father. However, it is immediately stated that "Something about the boy was no right, and this was at least something they could pity" (Stuart 6). Shuggie Bain is different, and society immediately pinpoints the displayed variance and labels it as "no right". In the working class,

gender identity variance is not publicly recognized. Frank concludes that society only acknowledges “particular forms of masculinity while discouraging others” (qtd. in Maynard 167). Moreover, alternative types of masculinity are punished. Shuggie is bullied relentlessly by his peers and sexually exploited by adults. This significantly impacted Shuggie’s self-perception:

> In the mirror his wet hair was black as coal. As he brushed it down over his face he was surprised to find it nearly to his chin. He stared and tried to find something masculine to admire in himself: the black curls, the milky skin, the high bones in his cheeks. He caught the reflection of his own eyes in the mirror. It wasn’t right. It wasn’t how real boys were built to be. He scrubbed at himself again. “Gers won 22, drew 14, lost 8, 58 points total. Aberdeen won 17, drew 21, lost 6, 55 points total. Motherwell won 14, drew 12, lost 10. (Stuart 11)

This quote illustrates Shuggie's gender identity confusion. By comparing himself with other men in his vicinity, he concludes that he is not a “real boy” because his appearance is not traditionally masculine. To assimilate and find common ground with those he deems proper men, he tries to memorize football scores and even adjusts his walk in an attempt to avoid appearing effeminate or "too swishy" (Stuart 152). Shuggie does not accept his own gender identity until he meets someone with a similar experience. Leanne’s story parallels Shuggie’s in many ways. Both are working-class teenagers with alcoholic mothers, and both are grappling with their own sexuality. This kinship helps Shuggie accept his sexual orientation and recognise that masculinity can be defined outside hard man confines. This is shown at the end of the novel when Shuggie performs a dance move for Leanne in the middle of the street to prove to her that “Shuggie Bain can dance” (430). Stuart does not describe the physicality of his dance move in detail but focused on conveying the emotion and symbolic meaning. Although in the past Shuggie’s dancing was a frowned upon marker of difference from traditional men, now it

is a symbol of self-acceptance. The dance represents self-expression and liberation from traditional masculinity, while conveying a sense of hope for the future.

The Trick Is to Keep Breathing - Mental Health and Womanhood

Published in 1989 as Janice Galloway's debut novel, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* drew significant critical acclaim. The novel was shortlisted for numerous awards and won the Mind Book of the Year Award (Lavrijsen 8). Galloway's working-class upbringing in Saltcoats, Ayrshire, has significantly shaped her narrative voice and thematic focus, leading Margery Metzstein to proclaim her as a writer who was "nurtured in Scotland" (qtd. in Lavrijesen 8). Although Scottishness is clearly legible in her work, Galloway refuses to be defined by categories, insisting that "she simply gets on with it– if critics find schools and patterns that is their affair" (McMillan 2). *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* is her first literary foray into the exploration of mental health and femininity, themes that have become staples of her work.

By centring the novel around Joy Stone's mental unravelling after the tragic death of her married lover at a hotel pool, Galloway is exploring different manifestations of female trauma. Collective pain after deindustrialisation has morphed into the collective trauma of the working class; as such, it was assimilated into culture and became a dominant theme during the Second Scottish Renaissance. Its pervasiveness and potency in working-class literature can overpower individual voices, particularly ones expressed by marginalised members of the social group. Lavrijsen labels this as a "pecking order of suffering," where the dominance of collective trauma often relegates female trauma to the hierarchical bottom (3). To counter that, Galloway is providing the reader with an intimate portrayal of a female protagonist desperately struggling to hold onto sanity amidst loss, grief, and despair.

In her seminal work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth explains that "the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will" (2). Trauma has a repetitive nature, as it brings past events to intrude on the present without the survivors' intention. It places control outside of the survivor's conscious domain. Allen lists distortion of space and time, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, and feelings of helplessness as trauma symptoms (4). All of these are experienced by Joy Stone. To convey mental disintegration and external pressures faced by the protagonist, Galloway experiments with literary techniques. She writes using a first-person perspective employing the stream-of-consciousness technique, making readers keenly aware of Joy's mental state. Every so often, italicised fragments reenacting Michael's death interrupt the narrative, exemplifying the repetitive and haunting nature of the trauma. Similarly, the technique of non-linear narration is used in *Trainspotting* and *Shuggie Bain* to convey the sense of disruption that trauma has on everyday life. This interruption conveys the impression that trauma is gradually unfolding and ultimately comes to dominate the narrative. Additionally, techniques such as varying font sizes and styles, text alignment, extensive use of white space, and inclusion of diverse textual forms interrupt the conventional narrative and point to the complexity and disorganisation of protagonists' internal lives. Words scattered across the page or tumbling down to the margins illustrate the downfall of Joy's psyche.

The disintegration of Joy's identity begins when society denies her the right to mourn Michael: "1. The Rev Dogsbody had chosen this service to perform a miracle. 2. He'd run time backwards, cleansed, absolved and got rid of the ground-in stain. 3. And the stain was me. I didn't exist. The miracle had wiped me out" (Galloway 72). This denial is based on social and cultural norms that guide the mourning process. Even though everyone knew of Michael's and Joy's relationship, it was not socially sanctioned. As a result, Joy was denied the public

recognition and validation of her grief. This type of socially unsupported grief is defined as disenfranchised grief (Doka 4). Joy is desperately trying to redefine herself "since the society has rejected her in her role of illegitimate widow" (Lavrijsen 10).

The concept of disenfranchised grief can be broadly applied to the trauma experienced by working-class women. These women are often told to "Smile then. I want you to look happy. We all do. Give us a smile" (Galloway 69), which unveils the importance of prioritising appearance and pretence over acknowledging underlying issues that caused their mental anguish. Women were discouraged from openly talking about their issues and struggles. Instead, they were expected to maintain a cheerful façade. Even when their issues were spilling out of their internal world and manifesting as self-harm, society still expected them to appear agreeable and proper, choosing only to focus on the appeal of their appearance. Agnes from *Shuggie Bain* and Joy embody this social silencing of their anguish. Moreover, their trauma and vulnerability were often maliciously exploited by the men in their lives. Joy remembering her female family members provides the readers with a list of deeply unhappy women disillusioned with life and who had suicidal ideations:

> My maternal grandmother died in a house fire. She laid out her marriage certificate, her teeth and glass eye in a row before she went to bed and left an electric fire burning in the corner of the room…Aunt Connie took an overdose of painkillers…My aunt Iris jumped over an iron parapet onto a railway track…One of the cousins (I forget which) drove into a wall at fifty miles an hour…My mother walked into the sea. (Galloway 177)

Alongside depictions of trauma, working-class literature also highlights female resilience. Despite the overwhelming number of challenges they experienced daily, women like Joy persevered, showing remarkable strength and endurance. As demonstrated by Joy's actions

at the end of the novel, she learns to forgive herself and those who have wronged her. She imparts to the reader her strategy for coping, stating "the trick is to keep breathing" (Galloway 208). When dealing with trauma, women often found solace in female friendships. At her lowest points, Joy mentally reaches out to her best friend Marianne, drawing strength from her support. Similarly, women in *Shuggie Bain* also developed their own coping mechanisms. They would gather at regular intervals to play cards and commiserate about financial struggles, husbands who drank away their wages, and numerous other issues that were weighing them down. This all-female communal activity gave them a much-needed opportunity to feel seen and share their struggles openly. In the face of social neglect and personal despair, these women were actively fighting for survival, displaying “strength and power that surely ran through [them]” (Stuart 42).

Amidst identity disintegration, Joy is desperate to establish her sense of self in relation to the men in her life. In this process, she takes on a passive role, focusing on reacting rather than initiating. Her conduct reflects societal expectations of female behaviour. All men with whom Joy has had a relationship have exploited her for their benefit, illuminating the gender dynamics and transactional nature of intimate relationships in post-industrial Scottish literature. Working-class women are assessed by their attractiveness and perceived availability for sexual relationships. Tony, after pressuring Joy into a sexual relationship despite knowing her vulnerability, exemplifies the predatory male gaze that constantly scrutinises the female body. His comment, “Still too skiny…sliding a hand out and onto my hip” (Galloway 182), embodies the belief that working-class femininity only exists in relation to their perceived sexual value. By focusing on the reductionist view of gender dynamics, Galloway is criticising the commodification of women’s bodies and showcasing the nuance and complexity that are lost when female voices are marginalised.

How Late It Was, How Late- Exploring Working-Class Disorientation

James Kelman is one of the most controversial Booker Prize winners. Ever since his victory in 1994, *How Late It Was, How Late* became the subject of academic and general scrutiny, where prominent critics laud the book for its daring exploration of working-class life or vilify it as empty ramblings, arguing that it is provocative for the sake of being provocative. Some critics, like Blake Morrison in a book review for *The Independent,* counted the number of times word "fuck" was used, while Janette Turner Hospital, writing for the same newspaper, called it an "brilliant song of a book" (qtd. in Lyall). Despite the polarized critical reception, Kelman's novel withstood the test of time, cementing its cult status and inspiring new generations of Scottish authors like Irvine Welsh and Douglas Stuart.

The opening of the novel conveys an atmosphere of disorientation. The protagonist exclaims, "there's something wrong; there's something far far wrong" (Kelman 8), immediately conveying the sense of disturbance that is hard to pinpoint but noticeably present. This sense of alienation is pervasive throughout the novel. Sammy's disorientation symbolises the working-class dislocation in post-industrial Scotland. As a collective, the working class has undergone restructuring on a fundamental level. This sudden change is echoed in Sammy's blindness. His reflection, "Even in practical terms, once the nonsense passed, he started thinking about it; this was a new stage in life, a development. A new epoch… A fucking new beginning, that was what it was" (Kelman 15), not only captures his adjustment to a new reality but parallels the position of the working class as they navigate the new socio-economic landscape. Sammy finds himself forced to relearn Glasgow after blindness, much like the working class is forced to learn how to navigate through the new system. Everything feels foreign, as if each new element is an obstacle, barrier, or challenge to overcome, and the question remains, "where the hell was he where the hell was he" (Kelman 44). Just as Sammy

faces scepticism about his blindness, the working class encounters disorientation amid systemic obstacles. Their voices are heard but not acknowledged in a labyrinth of bureaucratic indifference.

Kelman's experimentation with literary techniques perpetuates the sense of disorientation. The novel is written using the stream of consciousness technique, which pulls the reader into Sammy's world. Instead of employing a first-person point of view, Kelman uses a second-person point of view. By opting to employ the pronoun "ye" instead of "I", Kelman produces the effect of directly addressing the reader, contributing to the immersive feeling. The stream of consciousness results in dense observations that rapidly shift from one sense to another, giving off the impression that the reader is exploring Glasgow and bureaucratic system right alongside Sammy. Kelman argued that the use of Scottish vernacular is essential for the novel. Language is an important part of the working-class culture, and "If the language is taboo, the people are taboo" (Hames 504). The sentiment is echoed in Welsh's *Trainspotting,* where characters unapologetically use Scottish unless they are in government buildings where English is employed. Language is used as a marker of difference and as a membership card to a specific social class.

The novel abounds with bureaucratic challenges facing the working class. After losing his sight, Sammy is forced to engage with numerous administrative bodies, such as the police, medical consultants, and the Department of Social Services (DSS). These interactions are characterized by adversarial, procedural, and dehumanizing undertones. As Sammy ventures into the DSS, police station, or doctor's office, he is immediately distrustful. This scepticism appears to be inherent to the working class, as Sammy's father was deeply anti-government:

> Fucking auld man again for christ sake how come he was thinking about him all of a sudden? these moves to watch the dough, which included no putting cold water into

> hot because ye had paid for the heat. It used to drive Sammy's maw crackers. Ye spent half an hour waiting for the fucking water to cool down. It didnay even save money! It was just how the auld man hated giving cunts anything, especially the fucking capitalists. Ye pay for hot water, he said, so ye've got hot water, so ye dont fucking turn it into cold. Dont give them the satisfaction, fucking fat bastards. (Kelman 127)

Frugal practices, such as waiting for the water to reach ambient temperature, were far from practical. However, they represent a form of resistance against the perceived oppressive and exploitative system. The working class feels powerless against the government and the capitalist system; therefore, they exercise the only form of rebellion available to them. Even though these anti-capitalist activities are not visible to the broader community, they illuminate a principled stance and colour the working-class sentiment towards the bureaucracy. Sammy carries with him this deep-seated resentment and mistrust towards government bodies, particularly the police.

The police have a paradoxical role within the British class system. Although economically part of the working class, the police force contributes to the domination of the capitalist class (Reiner 169). Simultaneously, they are working-class members and enforcers of the system. In the novel, this duality is not shown. Rather, the sentiment expressed by Day and McBean, which defines policing as "a response to the organised, collective power of the working class," is echoed through Sammy's interactions with the "sodjers". The police officers are shown as merciless and with an aggressive drive. Sammy sees them as "trained to kill; so much so they have to get reined back in—all their fucking manuals and all their guidelines and procedures, page after page of when-no-to's" (Kelman 56). In a bureaucratic jungle, Sammy sees the police as predators, while the working class is prey. Although resentful of the police, Sammy is desperate to stay off their radar. He is uneasy about disclosing the truth—that he lost

his eyesight after a violent altercation with the police—knowing that it will be documented and used against him.

Sammy's confusion with the protocolisation and administrative process is particularly poignant during his time at the DSS. His alienation from the administrative bodies and the lawful process is clearly expressed as he is trying to learn about applying for the disability benefit. The detached and formal tone of the officers is disempowering and frustrating for Sammy. The working class is removed from the rule-bound nature of the bureaucratic process and confused in the wake of administrative language. As soon as Sammy somewhat relaxes and bonds with the administrative officers over football, he is immediately betrayed as the conversation is logged:

> The boy had started hitting the keyboard again.
>
> What're ye writing that down? said Sammy.
>
> Yeh.
>
> Well I'd prefer ye no to.
>
> I've got to but Mister Samuels.
>
> How?
>
> Cause it's material.
>
> …
>
> We're required to do it.
>
> Sammy sniffed. Ye no got a delete button?" (Kelman 84)

The administrative officer, using the collective "we" and invoking administrative code through the usage of protocol and material evidence, draws a clear boundary between the

working class and the system. Using the administrative language, the officer identifies himself with the larger bureaucratic body, highlighting Sammy's outsider status. Having left the office, Sammy feels exposed, helpless, vulnerable, and regretful. As instances of Sammy's disorientation accumulate, his mental health deteriorates. He starts having anxiety attacks:

> The guy was talking now but Sammy couldnay listen man he couldnay fucking hear him, what he was saying like a fucking a jumble man a jumble it was a jumble happening to him it was happening to him, oh christ man it was happening to him and he started breathing deep and his shoulders rocking, he couldnay stop them, now scratching at his chin and neck, clawing, like there was wee creepy-crawlies under the surface, clawing at his face round the cheekbones pulling the flesh down below the eye sockets, okay, okay, the breathing, just the breathing just the breathing, unscrew yer eyes and get rid of it, rid of it. (Kelman 163-164)

This passage conveys an intense anxiety attack. The repetition of "it was happening to him" illuminates the mounting panic as Sammy starts to realise that he is on the edge of losing control. Much like Joy Stone, Sammy reminds himself that the trick is to keep breathing. His vulnerable position due to disability is exacerbated by the financial strain and systemic duress, symbolising the working-class position in the neoliberal order. After deindustrialisation, the working class was marginalised and left at the outskirts of society to battle the systemic changes alone. Sammy's doctor implies that his blindness is a symptom of anxiety instead of physical trauma, signalling that working-class disorientation may result from severe collective anxiety amid systemic upheaval.

Kelman's novel is as much about working-class struggles amid deindustrialisation as it is about their resilience. The novel is an ode to working-class perseverance and determination. Sammy exhibits remarkable willpower to persevere and rise above daily challenges. His motto

is to “try to work things out. When ye go wrong; ye get yourself the gether; ye give it another go; ye hope it works out. But if it doesnay it fucking doesnay. What can ye do. Same auld fucking process” (Kelman 28). This sentiment is echoed through all four novels. Characters try their best to persevere despite the difficult and dehumanizing situations they find themselves in. This grit and tenacity are what propel them from one day to another as they hope to carve out a better future.

Conclusion

Each of the four novels analysed in the thesis reflects the authors' intimate understanding of the subject matter. They are all Scottish authors with working-class backgrounds writing about the Scottish working class after deindustrialisation. With Margaret Thatcher’s premiership, neoliberalism was implemented as the governing political doctrine. In consumerist and service-orientated Britain, there was no room for a working-class reliant on heavy industries. Overnight, an entire social class was marginalized and vilified. They were left alone to grapple with the new political and socioeconomic landscape, as exemplified in all four novels. Each novel embodies Lee’s paradox, subscribing to an aesthetic of grittiness to showcase a raw and unapologetic portrayal of the working class, balancing literary exploration with a political message. The authors' beliefs about Thatcher and her policies are often implied through descriptions of infrastructure, working-class housing, employment, and characters' positions in life. Often, their blatant disregard for Thatcher is explicitly stated, as in *Trainspotting.* In Thatcherite Britain, the working class was left behind while the rest of society moved on.

This sense of disorientation and disenfranchised grief permeates all the novels. The working class is not allowed to grieve and process the changes—changes they neither desired nor welcomed—that ushered them into a new era where they were left to their own devices.

Kelman's Sammy particularly echoes this disorientation amid imposed circumstances. While trying to prove his blindness and receive governmental aid, he encounters a bureaucratic labyrinth for which he is not equipped. The working class is completely alienated in the new system; they are the abject other. As they traverse outside their claimed spaces like Leith and council houses, they are constantly subjected to the middle-class gaze, which has a normative effect and seeks to remind the working class of their place in the new social order. Powerless and isolated, the working class experiences a profound identity crisis.

Unable to participate financially in the new consumerist society, while ideologically inclined to indulge, the working class is left caught between identities. This space was quickly claimed by the internalized social label that they are all deviant and social outliers, behaviours that quickly turned into self-fulfilling prophecies. The cumulative effect of these hardships had a detrimental impact on gender dynamics. Relationships became transactional. Women were appraised only through their perceived sexual availability and physical attractiveness, while men were expected to be sexually dominant and violent. Destitute and reduced to survival, communities turned to substance abuse. In all the novels, trainspotting proliferated. The characters are all either engaging in alcohol or drug misuse, using substances as escape and coping mechanisms.

Trauma abounds, both on collective and individual levels. The novels are fraught with a sense of atomization. The characters in these narratives are not only separated from the rest of society, but they are also largely isolated from one another within their own social class. They interact, but cannot form genuine relationships based on acceptance, trust, and understanding. Individual trauma is manifested through recollections and memories that disrupt the narrative and come to haunt the characters. As the novels unfold, the sense of trauma gradually starts to dominate until it reaches its apex and ushers in a bittersweet resolution with a dash of hope for the future.

These novels echo the claim that working-class literature and real life are in a dialectical relationship, constantly influencing and shaping one another. While diversifying the British labour literature narratives, these novels serve as reminders of post-industrial Scotland. They are important archives that contain the collective memory of the working class's transformation under neoliberal policies, illustrating the profound impact of macroeconomic events on community and individual narratives. Working-class literature is crucial, as it gives voice to the marginalised and challenges stereotypical representations. It illustrates the crossroads between significant political events and the daily lives of ordinary people. These novels, through their poignant exploration and challenging representations, underscore the importance of working-class narratives in broader cultural discourses. Ultimately, they emphasise the enduring relevance of working-class narratives in understanding the complexities of social transformations in Scotland.

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The Representations of Working-Class Struggles in Post-Industrial Scottish Fiction

Abstract

This diploma paper explores the representation of the working class in post-industrial Scotland through a critical evaluation of four novels: Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, Douglas Stuart's *Shuggie Bain*, Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing*, and James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late.* The analysis situates these narratives within the context of post-industrial Scotland. Margaret Thatcher's premiership has introduced neoliberal policies that have profoundly changed the political and social fabric, ushering in a post-industrial society. Written by Scottish authors with working-class backgrounds, these novels reflect the impact of neoliberal policies on the Scottish working class. To convey the realities of the time, authors use the aesthetic of grittiness, balancing between political activism and literary exploration. Through the close analysis of these novels, this diploma paper reveals prevalent themes of alienation, identity crisis, trauma, gender roles, and disorientation. Scottish labour literature diversifies British working-class narratives by challenging dominant representations and bringing regional experiences to the cultural forefront. Ultimately, the paper underscores the dialectical relationship between labour literature and real life.

Key words: post-industrial society, the working-class narratives, Scottish fiction, neoliberalism, deindustrialization

Prikazi radničke klase u postindustrijskoj škotskoj književnosti

Sažetak

Ovaj diplomski rad istražuje prikaz radničke klase u postindustrijskoj Škotskoj kroz kritičku analizu četiri romana: *Trainspotting* Irvinea Welsha, *Shuggie Bain* Douglasa Stuarta, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* Janice Galloway i *How Late It Was, How Late* Jamesa Kelmana. Analiza smješta ove romane u kontekst postindustrijske Škotske. Za vrijeme mandata Margaret Thatcher uvedene su neoliberalne politike koje su dubinski promijenile političko i društveno tkivo, uvodeći razdoblje postindustrijskog društva. Pisani od strane škotskih autora koji potječu iz radničke klase, ovi romani zorno prikazuju utjecaj neoliberalizma na škotsku radničku klasu. Kako bi dočarali duh vremena, autori koriste estetiku surovosti, balansirajući između književnosti kao umjetnosti i političkog aktivizma. Kroz detaljnu analizu romana, ovaj diplomski rad otkriva dominantne teme otuđenja, krize identiteta, traume, rodnih uloga i dezorijentacije. Škotska radnička literatura obogaćuje britanske narative o radničkoj klasi osporavajući dominantne prikaze i stavljajući regionalna iskustva u kulturni fokus. Rad naglašava i dijalektični odnos između radničke književnosti i stvarnog života.

Ključne riječi: postindustrijsko društvo, narativi radničke klase, škotska književnost, neoliberalizam, deindustrijalizacija