

Contemporary British Working-Class Literature:

Precarity and Transcendent Solidarity

By

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Abstract in Norwegian

I denne masteroppgaven analyserer jeg graden av usikkerhet i samtidens britiske arbeiderklasselitteratur. Det nyliberale prosjektet, og den politiske ekskluderingen av arbeiderklassen har ført til en økende grad av usikkerhet for dem. Tekstene jeg har valgt for å vise dette er «No Lay, No Pay» av Paul Allen, «The Wedding and the Funeral» av Jodie Russian-Red og debutromanene til Kit de Waal: *My Name is Leon* og Guy Gunaratnes: *In Our Mad and Furious City*. Den historiske linjen mellom tekstene følger fra tiden før Thatcher, til rett etter hennes død. Gjennom et bredt utvalg av tekster skrevet av folk med arbeiderklasseidentitet med ulike kjønn, bakgrunner, og etnisiteter, viser handlingen i tekstene at usikkerheten har økt fra 70-tallet til 2013.

For å forstå samtidens arbeiderklasselitteratur, krever det en samtidsforståelse av både klassebegrepet og usikkerhet. For å få til dette har jeg bygget min forståelse av klasse gjennom samtidsanalysen fra Geoffrey Evans og James Tilleys bok fra 2017: *The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the Working-Class*, og Guy Standings teori om *The Precariat*. Fra denne teorien har jeg utviklet et rammeverk for litterær analyse, som omhandler de 4Aene, Anxiety (Angst), Anomie (Anomi), Alienation (Fremmedgjøring), og Anger (Sinne). Dette er fire følelser som blir forsterket under usikkerhet. Gjennom analysen tolker jeg en økende grad av disse fire emosjonelle uttrykkene i karakterene i tekstene. Videre ser jeg på *prekariat-klassen*, og hvordan den uttrykker seg gjennom litteraturen. Problemene til prekariatet har sine røtter i usikkerhet, men likevel gjennom interseksjonalitet ser vi at konfliktlinjer som rase og religion spiller inn på undertrykkelsen arbeiderklassefolk føler. I oppgaven konkluderer jeg med at håpet om en bedre, mer sikker framtid for den britiske arbeiderklassen finnes i en transcenderende solidaritet som overgår identitet.

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Table of contents

Abstract in Norwegian	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Working-Class literature and the Framework for Analysis	6
Chapter 2: No Lay, No Pay.....	23
Chapter 3: The Funeral and the Wedding.....	35
Chapter 4: My Name is Leon	48
Chapter 5: In Our Mad and Furious city.....	74
Conclusion	99
Reference list.....	102

Introduction

There has been little recent scholarly attention paid to Contemporary Working-class literature. For this thesis, I would like to explore this currently living and breathing field of literature, which so often is not associated as being by proficient writers. The authenticity and sheer bluntness in its deliberations on class, solidarity, and community that working-class literature holds are too great to not be further analysed. As I am attempting to understand a contemporary field of literature, the theories that I will use for the framework will also be of a contemporary nature, bringing the class analysis of Evans and Tilley, together with Guy Standings theories of the precariat. Through this, I would like to analyse contemporary working-class literature through the lens of precarity, to see the instability it creates for communities and individuals, and to show the degree of agency they in overcoming this force of unstableness. Even though the life of working-class people has always been precarious, I would argue that from the 70's to 2013, the precarity has increased for working-class Brits, and as such, the Working-class literature created today looking back at the recent past should reflect such a trend. This increase of precarity is tied to the austerity politics of neoliberal Britain, spearheaded by Margaret Thatcher. Furthermore, I would also argue that the literature reflects a sense of oppression and feelings of despair. The infighting between groups within the precariat based on identity, would benefit from class-cooperation. These conflicts further continue the oppression and subsequent feelings of despair within working-class people. It is through a transcendent working-class solidarity that there is a figment of hope for the future of the working class.

Stories told from a working-class perspective has always been a part of my life. In my family, there has always been people working hard physical labour, and my admiration for the pride they held in their work, led me towards this topic for my thesis. I wanted to explore how

these stories often told in the most informal, bawdy, and beautiful way was expressed by working-class people themselves, when given a voice through literature. It is a matter of perspective, one which has been historically infantilized and ridiculed by middle- and upper-class depictions of them. In this thesis, I want to not just analyse, but also listen to the reflections that working-class people make about their own material and emotional conditions.

The Texts and my Intentions

I will look at four texts in this thesis. Firstly, I will look at Paul Allen's "No Lay, No Pay", and secondly, I will look at "The Funeral and the Wedding" by Jodie Russian-Red. Both texts are short stories published in *Common People: An Anthology of Working-Class Writers* edited by Kit de Waal. Next, I will have a look at the novel *My Name is Leon* by Kit de Waal, and lastly, I will analyse *In Our Mad and Furious City* by Guy Gunaratne. Having the texts in this order, I can follow the historical changes of the working class from the seventies until today, letting us see how working-class life has gradually become more precarious, at least according to the fictions portraying it. I will try to identify tropes within these texts, to find out how it portrays or handles the precarity it faces. Through the tropes, I will try to identify different expressions of the strife that the working-class faces, but also the beautiful and proud sides of it as well. Following the history and timeline of these texts, I believe that they can show how the post-Thatcher politics of Britain upended the living and work-safety of the lives of working-class Brits, sending them into precarity. An exercise in critiquing post-Thatcherism and neoliberalism if you will. Furthermore, through looking at the texts in this order, we can understand how the working-class identity has changed with the demographics of modern-day Britain. Family and gender are also interesting for the analysis, as it shapes the way we view and interact with the world around us. The working-class experiences of different gendered people are all in their own ways different, and to include as many strong

voices as I can, I have chosen two female, one male, and one non-binary author. It is important for as many different voices to be heard, to get a proper picture of the authentic lived experiences that are expressed through working-class literature. I could for instance use Douglas Stewart's acclaimed *Shuggie Bain* instead of *No Lay, No Pay* and *The Wedding and The Funeral*, as they cover some of the same topics. For this thesis however, I find it to be more productive to use these two literary memoirs instead, as they allow me to explore the topic of gender in a more nuanced way through more diverse representation. Through these three points of analysis, that being precarity, the changing working-class identity and family and gender, one theme will go through them all, and that is *community and solidarity*. Community and the solidarity it creates is the be-all and end-all for working class culture: how the community adapts to new challenges, how the community acts as a social safety net, when society denies you the right to one, and the opportunities for growth and learning community offers for disadvantaged groups in the face of precarity. In this thesis, I will be looking at literary expressions of this.

The Authors

In this thesis I will use four texts from four different authors. Two of them have been shortlisted for or have won literary prizes. I have chosen two men and two women to have diversity within the authors, to give a more accurate representation of the working-class. Interestingly, the order of the authors also sends us through the north south divide, starting with Paul Allen in the south-east in Ipswich, going north along the coast to Hull with Jodie Russian-Red, then west to Kit de Waal in Birmingham, and at last, ending up in London with Guy Gunaratne. This will avoid a London centric focus and get a comprehensive view of the working-class in Britain.

Paul Allen is a great example of the latent potential of the working-class writers. He grew up in relative poverty on a council estate, and at the age of 15 he left school to learn bricklaying from his father. He has worked construction throughout his life, while also playing in bands and testing motorcycles for a magazine, starting his writing career there. He used this experience as a springboard into a journalism degree at the University of the West of England, which he subsequently changed to a degree in writing. The inspiration for the writing he did for the anthology *Common People* is from the people of the past and present in his life and the council estate he grew up in. The people of the past, his parents and his friends, and the people of the present, the ones who opened the doors of writing for him at the University. As it was later in his life he started his writing, Allen offers authenticity and a unique perspective when meditating on his life in the working class. He portrays the classic British working-class family in a way in which only one from within the group could (Literatureworks, 2019).

Hull native Jodie Russian-Red also contributes to *Common People*, with “The Wedding and the Funeral”. As of 2022, she has changed her moniker to Jodie Russi-Red, most likely due to the now ongoing conflict in Ukraine. As her literary memoir is referenced to as “Russian-Red”, I will be using this for the remainder of the thesis. She is a multifaceted artist, having worked more on art installations as well as short films. She celebrates working-class life through most of her work, stating herself that she “writes between the working-classes and the bohemian, being the proud owner of both a biodynamic allotment and a massive TV”. Jodie has worked in university administration, as well as an artist-in-residence at the University of Durham. She is currently working as a creative producer at “Wooler Arts” in Northumberland. She recently published a piece on working from home during Covid, commissioned by the Humber Mouth literature festival which could be an interesting piece of working-class literature to have a look at another time (Jodierussired.co.uk, 2022).

Kit de Waal is a working-class writer from Birmingham, born to an Irish mother working in foster care and a Caribbean father. She has worked for over a decade in criminal and family law, as a magistrate for several years, and sits on adoption panels. She has advised Social Services on care of foster children. This offer her a unique and authentic perspective when writing the novel *My Name is Leon* who portrays the perspective of a 9-year-old in the foster system. Like Paul Allen, de Waal started her venture into literature at a later age, as she read her first novel at the age of 23. She is one of the more decorated working-class writers in the contemporary literary field, winning multiple literary prizes for her work. Her first novel *My Name is Leon* was shortlisted for the Costa First Novel award and won the Kerry Group Irish Novel of the Year 2017 award and is now in 2022 getting a BBC adaptation of it (penguin, 2017).

Guy Gunaratne is a journalist, film maker and novelist, who hails from Neasden in London. He has a background in film, having a degree in it, and their father emigrated to Britain from Sri Lanka, they are born out of the same multicultural diverse world in which *In Our Mad and Furious City* is situated. They go by they/he pronouns, so when referenced in this thesis, it will be through the pronoun they. To attain the authenticity of the many characters in the book, they conducted interviews with people from the backgrounds he gives a voice in his novel. It is through Guy Gunaratne that we will get a proper understanding of the diverse voices of the contemporary working class. Literary representations of authentic experiences are the lifeblood of this thesis, as it is through these representations, we will discover the multifaceted life of working-class people from all backgrounds facing precarity.

Chapter 1: Working-Class literature and the Framework for Analysis

Every political vanguard benefits greatly by leading in cultural production, through the field of arts and literature. As the field of literature that this thesis is focused on is contemporary working-class literature, I believe that Evans and Tilley's understanding of the contemporary working-class as politically excluded, understood considering Guy Standing's theory of the precariat, is great framework for analysis of working-class literature. To do this however, I would have to make clear how I would use the sociological theories of Standing in the context of literary analysis. I would like to look at precarity as a trope that I suspect will be permeated throughout working-class literature. Lastly in this chapter I would like to comment on the historical and contemporary struggle for working-class writers to get published, and the recent recognition they have received through a Bakhtinian understanding of the field of literature.

Defining Working Class in a Contemporary Sense

Defining the term working class definitively has been attempted before and will be attempted after this MA thesis as well. I will try however to define the term for this specific thesis, relying on a contemporary analysis of class. Therefore, I will base my understanding of class and the working class on Geoffrey Evans' and James Tilley's book, *The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the Working Class*. Evans and Tilley both work at the University of Oxford. Evans is a professor of the sociology of politics, with his special interest of research being political representation, the examination of social inequalities, social divisions in politics and the relationship between perceptions, values, and voting (Evans, Nuffield College, 2021). Tilley is a professor of politics, with a special research interest in trying to explain the social cleavage of class and religion when choosing political parties (Tilley, 2021). Together they pool their knowledge in 2017's *The New Politics of Class*.

As my thesis is focused on contemporary working-class writers, I find it to be the most fitting to use a contemporary analysis and definition of class, rather than using historical analysis. I could of course include Marx and Engels' definitions and analyse and define from their theories, but the landscape of class politics has changed drastically in the last 30 years, which makes a contemporary angle a lot more pertinent for this thesis. The reason why it is important to define the phrase working class, and identify their class position, is to prove that class structures are still present in modern day Britain, even though some sociologists would have us believe otherwise. I will use this information later to back up the claim that working class writers are excluded in "the literary canon". Before defining the term however, it is imperative to understand the recent history of class relations in the UK and how the past has formed the present, as this supports my argument for a more contemporary understanding of class, rather than a historical one.

The Recent History of Class in Britain

To fully understand the different class positions of contemporary Britain today, it is important to understand the recent economic developments that the country, and large parts of the world, have gone through in the last thirty years. To fully understand this change, we must look even further back in history, around the end of the great depression. After the great depression in the 1930s, it was clear that the political parties in Britain had to appeal to one group to win elections, namely the working class. The middle class at this point in history was dubbed "the class with no party", as their interests were not the concern of the Labour or the Conservative party (Evans, Tilley, 2017 p. 1). In the 1930s the working class were estimated to make up over 60% of the population (Evans, Tilley, 2017 p. 7). It is important to keep in mind that at the time, only men over the age of 21 who owned property could vote, which excluded almost all working-class women. The working-class voice was being heard despite this, as they were the largest interest group in the elections. Over time however, the working

class declined, as the middle class rose to prominence. One reason for this could be that education levels were rising, and more and more students stayed longer in school. This is because more and more skilled or semi-skilled jobs required qualifications and degrees to get them. Britain moved from a production-based economy, towards a knowledge-based economy (Evans, Tilley, 2017 p. 6). This switch, and the decline of the working class coalesced in the 1990s, where the Labour party now shifted their focus away from appealing to the working class, and on to the middle class, as they could no longer secure enough votes to win elections solely on working class policies. In 2017 the working class made up about 25% of the population of Britain, which should be a good sign of social mobility, but that does not tell the whole story here. If we look at these statistics in a more limited scope, we can see that in 2000, the working class was at an all-time low, with only 20% of the population. Going forward with the census study that Evans and Tilley present, we can see that there is at least stagnation in the social mobility for this group in society (Evans, Tilley, 2017 p. 7). This could be explained with the policymakers and politicians not championing the rights of the working class any longer after the shift towards the middle in the 1990s. This shift has had a prominent effect on voter turnout for the working class in Britain. As the policies of the major parties started to converge, and as the Labour party no longer represented the working class, voter turnout in this group has declined (Evans, Tilley, 2017 p. 14). When the working class are absent from the ballot office, the parties does not appeal to that group with policies any longer, as it does not win any elections (Evans, Tilley, 2017 p. 15).

Working class life in Britain has not gotten any better for them during the ongoing pandemic as well. Precariousness is on the rise due to the lack of jobs for unskilled labourers due to lockdowns and the hit the pandemic has had on the economy. The government increased the universal credit by £20 as relief for covid. This extra £20 made the difference for many, and there have been reactions from working-class people to its removal. At the time

of writing this in 2022, the relief has ended, but the pandemic is still ongoing. Through the removal of the 20£ covid relief, and the consequences that this has had on families on benefits, we can see that there is a substantial group of Brits living on a knife edge today (Jones, Long, 2021).¹

Class and the Working Class

So how do I define the term working class for my thesis? As stated previously, I will rely on Evans and Tilley's definitions of class. As they admit that class is an essentially contested term, they are not interested in forming and arguing the "best" definition of the word. They focus on people's identity, occupation and, to a lesser extent education as the measurements for people's class positions. Especially important is the notion of identity to get a comprehensive understanding of who the working-class is today. Evans and Tilley divide the classes further to create an accurate picture of the class positions of the different labourers today. They divide the middle class into three different classes, the old middle class, the new middle class, and the junior middle class. The way they define class is primarily based on occupation, security, and education. As these variables have changed so much over the last century, it is productive to divide the middle class further, to achieve a more nuanced view of the different class positions. Working class occupations have historically been skilled or semi-skilled manual labour jobs such as miner, seamstress and farm labourer, however, in recent times as the economy has shifted, there have arrived new types of jobs for the working class, with the decline of the historical jobs. The decline of these historical jobs is due to Thatcher's neoliberal policies of austerity, destroying the manufacturing, mining and heavy industries in Britain during her time in office. This is a wound which still has not mended in the hearts of

¹ Looking over the pond, we can see that through the instalments of the stimulus checks that were given to American citizens, they lifted 11 million Americans out of poverty (Reinicle, 2021). The pandemic has in many ways shown that through public spending, going the opposite way of austerity politics, it is possible to alleviate precariousness. Of course, precariousness is a multifaceted problem, but putting this fact in relation to the historical background of precariousness with Thatcher's policies, we can get a good idea what the state can do to help their citizens in dire need which is increase public spending.

working-class people today. When Thatcher died in 2013, the song “Ding Dong the witch is dead” from the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz* climbed the UK singles chart to second place (Myers, 2013). It is safe to say that the economic turmoil that she made the working class go through has had generational harm that has made a whole generation hold her in contempt. In the vacuum of these historical jobs that were lost due to the change in the economy, new ones took their place. These jobs are, for example, packer, gardener, and waste treatment officer. These jobs have for the most part low security due to part time work and zero hours contracts, and no clear path of progression and promotion or benefits like sick or maternity leave (Evans, Tilley, 2017 p. 4). These labourers are also the ones to be the most likely to leave school the earliest. Leaving school early, in a world where qualifications and degrees get more and more common as a requirement for entry level jobs, forces these labourers into low security labour, with uncertain hours and low pay. The working class are the labourers with low pay, uncertain hours, and low job security, who left school the earliest.

What Does This Mean for the Working Class Today?

The working class finds itself to be in an evil circle of lack of representation and lack of opportunities. As the group also finds itself to be smaller than at any point in the last century, they lack the numbers to impact policy positively for the working-class. This has made substantial numbers of the group stop voting, as the parties do not represent their interests. The economy changed from an industrial one to a knowledge based one and left the working class behind. The class position of the working class today leads me not to focus on them as the traditional harbingers of revolution, as Evans and Tilley put it, but rather as a marginalized group (Evans, Tilley, 2017 p. 2). This angle is not meant to infantilize the group, but rather to take the strife of the class seriously and prove that class still plays a large role in the British self-consciousness, even though the political parties’ policies do not reflect this. When we understand the working class as a marginalized group, we must consider that a lot of the

problems that they face are intersectional in nature, with gender, ethnicity, and religion in mind. This is because the working-class is made up of people from many backgrounds, and as such, working-class people are oppressed disproportionately. They all find themselves in precarious circumstances, however.

Class and Identity

Class is not just about the material conditions of the different groups of people in society.

Class is not just about what work you do, and whether you went to school or not. It is also closely tied to identity on an individual level. Understanding how people see class as a part of their identity is pertinent for this thesis, as it can help us understand how these social boundaries are perpetuated today. Evans and Tilley argue that as 60% of Brits self-identify as working-class, and as such that there are still class divisions in Britain. Evans and Tilley reject many arguments from other sociologists through in their contemporary analysis of class, as they do not take the subjective self-identification into account. These arguments are for example: “People don’t identify with class”, “class and identity are divorced”, and that “everyone is middle class now” (Evans, Tilley, 2017. p. 41-42). They refute this through the fact that people actively are still identifying as working-class, at the same rate as in the 60s.

When we look at how people self-identify when it comes to class, the group becomes a lot larger than when we only look at occupation. Using surveys from the 1960s to 2015, Evans and Tilley have mapped out if people were willing to say which class they belonged to. The answers presented in these studies show that class self-identification has been very stable from the 1960s, when class politics supposedly was at its peak, to 2015. The data shows that around 60% of Brits self-identify as working class. Looking at only occupational class when discussing who is working class therefore is not productive for this thesis. Working class identities have remained strong with people with working class jobs from the 1960s to 2015. Interestingly, what would historically be regarded as middle-class people are increasingly

identifying as working-class, contradicting the notion that we are all middle-class (Evans, Tilley, 2017 p. 44). The working-class of Neoliberal Britain transcends occupational class to include those who identify as working-class. The thesis focuses on the representation of this identity within the literature. I would also propose that the theory on precarity and the precariat, presented by Guy Standing can give a great explanation as to why so many self-identify as working-class people.

The Precariat

If Evans and Tilley are right in their assessment that 60% of Brits identify themselves as working class, and an increasing amount of middle-class people identify as working class, then the sociologists who stated that “we are all middle class now”, got it all wrong. It seems like there is a force in society, which is pushing people to feel as if they are in a more precarious group, rather than this proposed universal middle class. I would argue that Guy Standing’s theory on precariousness and the precariat is a great addition to analyse the condition of the contemporary working class and its recent history. Standing agrees with Evans and Tilley that, since the 1980s, the economy has undergone a drastic change, not only on a national scale, but on a global scale, creating a class structure unlike what has been seen in the centuries prior. Wealth inequality is at an all-time high, and as such, he rescopes the idea of the proletariat to include more than just physical labourers. There is no longer a common situation among workers, and as the male dominated historical white British working class is diminishing, we have a need for a new term to describe what has happened to the group since the 1980s. The new group in question, which will be particularly important for the purposes of this thesis is the precariat (Standing, 2014, p. 10). It is this larger new form of proletariat, which I would argue could be linked to the 60% of Brits who self-identify as working-class. This more inclusive definition would include the working-class writers who get a published and can have a career within the field.

Who Is the Precariat?

One of the precariat's main characteristics is the immense uncertainty of their living situation, especially applying to their working conditions and their relation to their labour. They work "flexible" labour contracts, which in other, less alluring words mean part-time, temporary jobs, or employment agencies. The people in this group lack occupational identity, as they are constantly applying for new jobs, having to constantly retrain. They are exploited outside and inside of the workplace (Standing, 2014, p. 10). The precariat is expected to have an education exceeding what is required for their labour, for first time in history, as a university degree has become a requirement for entry level positions. The workers cannot use their education to their fullest extent (Standing, 2014, p. 10). They rely on their wages, as they do not have access to non-wage benefits like severance pay, paid vacation and adequate medical coverage. As the safety net of state benefits, such as unemployment benefits, as well as private benefits like investments has eroded, the precariat find themselves in a position of unsustainable debt and chronic economic uncertainty (Standing, 2014, p. 11). It is this uncertainty that might be a leading factor for so many Brits today to identify as working class. The precariat is also losing rights from the state that full citizens take for granted. They must beg and ask for benefits from politicians and bureaucrats who often lay their own moralistic judgments onto them (Standing, 2014, p. 11). There is a perpetual middle- and upper-class belief that the working class is simply just lazy and helpless, which then influence policies around them. Even the largest media house in Britain, The BBC, has themselves admitted to pushing these values in their shows, portraying working-class people negatively, fuelled by stereotypes, and as objects of ridicule. (Richardson, 2022). These factors coalesce into the condition of the precariat, which Standing expresses very well. Their situation produces a consciousness of relative deprivation, and a combination of anxiety, anomie, alienation, and anger (Standing, 2014, p. 11). I will throughout the theses refer to these emotions under the

umbrella term “the 4As”. These emotions are products of their situation. Anxiety might manifest itself around their precarious economic situation. Do I have enough money to pay rent, the electrical bills and have enough food for the family? Anomie manifests itself in desperation and the desire to leave the dire situation and move to something better. Do I need to take another job so that I can make enough money for my child to go to a good school, to get away from these material conditions? Alienation creates a sense of not belonging in the same country as everyone else. Working these two jobs that I absolutely hate, leaving no time for me to nurture what I love, and leaving no time for myself. Lastly anger, which is a reasonable response when faced with such a precarious situation. Living in precarity is hell. These emotions manifest themselves differently in the different characters in the literature chosen, however, it is the precarity that they face which is the catalyst for them.

Guy Standing continues to elaborate on the precariat as a class in the making, as it isn't yet a class of its own. The class is divided into three factions, which are to some degree hostile to each other. The first of these factions is the group of old working-class families and communities. They lack higher education, and they tend to reference to a lost past. The people coming before them had employment security, pensions, and the like, which they themselves obviously would like to have. As their parents or grandparents had these rights, they have an atavist attitude to the past, often wanting to revert to it, making them prone to populist rhetoric and sometimes neo-fascism, explaining the precarious nature of their lives with the arrival of immigrants, voting for policies which are of a nationalistic, xenophobic, and racist nature (Standing, 2014 p. 11). This group is not monolithic however, as some do not fall for these populist messages. The precariat's next faction are the ethnic minorities, who feel as they are being denied a home. They tend to focus on survival and put up with the precariousness of their situation, but when policy is endangering them, they riot. Very few joins fundamentalist causes to recover their lost sense of identity (Standing, 2014 p. 11).

Standing has a third group within his theory, the young educated, which will not be pertinent for the purposes of this thesis.

Even though the precariat is a class which is divided, there is a common recognition of the daily risk of joining the precariat. Standing agrees with Evans and Tilley stating that establishment politics do not represent the interest of the working class, encompassing it further with the precariat. The precariat is not a politically empathetic group, their needs and aspirations are simply not recognized by most of the parties. As the precariat is not an empathetic group in the eyes of the middle and upper class, they have a hard time getting their literary works published. This will be elaborated later in this chapter. For change to happen, Standing presents three areas of overlapping struggles that the precariat must triumph in, these being recognition, representation, and redistribution. Recognition in which it is gaining currently and representation, which is needed in all institutions and agencies. The struggle of redistribution that is needed for the precariat, is different than the socialist project of the past century. It seeks to redistribute key assets and resources such as economic security, control over time, quality space, liberating education, financial knowledge, and financial capital. These assets are currently even more unequally distributed in society than monetary income (Standing, 2014, p. 12). Through literature, the working-class writers can achieve recognition, and within that authentic representation within the cultural landscape.

Näsström and Kalm further discusses precarity in their article *A democratic critique of precarity*. Here they identify the inherent corruption in the neoliberal democracy, spearheaded through the precarity its policies create. They accentuate the institutionalized individualism that they argue has corrupted democracy. These policies have pushed people into further precarious conditions, where they compete for security and status, through placing responsibilities that has historically been regarded as a shared one onto individuals. (Näsström, Kalm, 2015, p. 556). Through neoliberalism, responsibility has become privatized.

This leads to situations which often would have been solved through the community, to overwhelm the individual, as society views it as a personal failing on their account. Through the privatization of responsibility, individuals in the precariat are further ostracized and shamed for the failings in their lives. These failings may have roots in the precarious nature of the system they are living under. They also argue that neoliberal precarity pushes for institutionalized individualization, dividing historical classes, deteriorating communities in favour of the individual's right for self-expression. This right turns in on itself, further amplifying the precarity in their lives (Näsström, Kalm, 2015, p. 566). Looking at working-class literature through this theory, we can start to understand the agency working-class people have in their attempt to traverse precarity, and the moral judgments that are made on the basis of their choices.

Guy Standing fears that the division between the groups of the precariat hinders any chance of organisation and cooperation, to achieve any of its goals. He especially fears the conflict between the politically excluded native working-class people and ethnic minorities. Näsström and Kalm also share Standings fears of non-cooperation. The anger which the different groups feel due to their precarious situation, as well as their political exclusion of traditional class politics make the two first groups of the precariat prone to radicalization from populist charlatans. If radicalization festers, such as white nationalism for the old working class, or radical religious fundamentalism, the hate between the groups makes them blind to the real oppressive force, which is the precarious system they are living under. We will further discuss this conflict when discussing Kit de Waal's novel *My Name is Leon*, and Guy Gunaratne's novel, *In Our Mad and Furious City*.

How Is This Important for The Working-Class Literature? – Framework

Standing's hope for the precariat class is that they could be the vanguard of a new progressive era. Following the theory presented above, the way precariousness works itself as a trope in literature is through the 4A's that Standing mentioned when talking about the consciousness of general deprivation, that being anxiety, anomie, alienation, and anger. These are all emotions that I suspect often show within the characters in working-class literature. Recognizing these emotions in the texts as products of precariousness, might help us understand and inform why characters act as they do and their political agency, under the material conditions that they are in. Furthermore, the three groups that make up the precariat are also interesting to keep in mind when reading working-class literature, which are the old working class, ethnic minorities and the young educated, especially the tensions between them. The conflict created through these tensions is something that shows itself in two of the novels this thesis. The increased privatization of responsibility is also a liability, as individuals who live under precarity have a smaller and smaller safety net around them to deal with their strife. (Näsström, Kalm, 2015, p. 566) This also leads people to take choices which are more focused on the individual rather than their community. This further amplifies the feelings of the 4As in the individual in question, which we will see later with the mother Carol in *My Name is Leon*.

Through making this framework, I am in no way trying to paint working-class existence as something horrible, but the systems that they are living under as that. It is important that I stay mindful of my own position when analysing the texts as an outsider of the culture, as the inside and outside experience of precarity lends different perspectives on the subject. I personally am a younger, educated, product of a skilled working-class background from Norway, one that would naturally differ from the British working-class experience. When I am to analyse working-class literature, my intentions are to be respectful

and aware of my own position, related to the different works. As Middle-class portrayals of the working-class experience often lean towards negative or sympathetic, it is also important to highlight the authentic working-class perspective that the ones on the inside can offer. Here one can find more than just a pity party: instead, there's laughter, pride, desire, and wisdom.

Therefore, this thesis will not only be looking at the trope of precariousness that is shown in working-class literature, but also different expressions of working-class culture. These expressions can be tied back to precarity however, as humour for example could be a defence against the 4As that precarity can manifest itself as in working-class people. Precarity demands of you to live an A4 life, living up to societies norms, to conform, and to be content with your standing in societies hierarchy. It wants you to be content with neoliberal individualization, which seeks to pacify any workers, or in this case, precariat movement to collectivize power to change existing power structures. These tropes that counteract the 4As, as well as the 4As might be considered as meliorations, or as self defence against the "A4ification", pacifying the working class, reducing their political agency. Using precarity and the framework presented as an umbrella term for the 4As, I believe we can achieve a greater understanding of the working-class condition from the 70s to today. Understanding these emotions in relation to each other, rather than individually in a vacuum, we can start to see the general consciousness of deprivation which the immense pressure the origin of these emotions creates on working-class individuals. By identifying the trope of precarity, we can see and understand how individuals and groups react, act and deal with the precarious conditions that they are facing. And within this, we must keep in mind intersectionality, as precariousness can arise from oppressions in tandem with class.

As the history of the precariat is ongoing, using contemporary texts covering time from right before the start of neoliberalism to today, I believe we will see an increasing degree of precarity in the lives of the characters. The contemporary texts, written from 2016 – 2019,

explore working-class life in different manners, from the 1970's, before neoliberalism, to 2013 with the death of Margaret Thatcher. I would argue that the texts chosen shows an increasing degree of precariousness following the time the texts taking place, making *In Our Mad and Furious City* exert the most precariousness.

Working-Class Literature: Historically Excluded – Now in the Limelight?

Working-class writers have been historically excluded by the publishing industry. Kit de Waal's *Common People* is a collection of short stories and essays written by working class writers. The book portrays authentic experiences from the lives of working-class people in Britain, from an inside perspective. For this part of my thesis, the most important essay in this collection to prove the point of the exclusion of working-class writers, is "Class and publishing: who is missing from the numbers" by Dave O'Brien. O'Brien works at the University of Edinburgh as the Chancellor Fellow in Cultural and Creative Studies. His field is the sociology and politics of culture, which he has been published extensively in (O'Brien, 2019, p. 291). His background is working class, and he himself identifies as being working class. O'Brien shares Evan's and Tilley's understanding of class as an essentially contested term, stating in his essay that it is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language (O'Brien, 2019, p. 275). In his essay, O'Brien relies on the data from the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classifications, or NS-SEC for short. This dataset is useful to understand the way the different classes are organized in society, dividing different occupations into eight groups (O'Brien, 2019, p. 276). The highest, which is professional or managerial jobs, such as doctors, CEOs and Lawyers, and the bottom group, which are the long term unemployed or those who have never worked. O'Brien also agrees with Evans and Tilley that identity is a large part of understanding class, and people often self-identify with a

group in which does not correlate with the one the NS-SEC would place them in (O'Brien, 2019, p. 277).

O'Brien points out that the publishing field is a middle-class occupation, as most of the jobs in this sector are managerial and professional jobs (O'Brien, 2019, p. 277). As O'Brien makes clear, the publishing industry is heavily skewed towards the upper and middle classes, riddled with nepotism. Through the nepotism and subsequent exclusion of working-class people, O'Brien states that the industry has a class problem (O'Brien, 2019, p. 278). Another point of interest in the essay from O'Brien is the focus on intersectionality and how it is represented in the publishing industry. There seems to not be as big of a disparity in gender when looking at the statistics, with women making up 54% of the people working in the industry (O'Brien, 2019, p. 279). O'Brien importantly makes note however, that these statistics do not consider which individuals have power and control over the industry. The industry does not only have a class and gender problem, but also a problem regarding the lack of representation of People of colour. The publishing industry is 93% white, even though most of the publishing industry is based in London, where the local population is only 61% white. The publishing industry is not reflecting the people it publishes to (O'Brien, 2019, p. 279).

It is apparent that a lot of marginalized groups struggle to have their voice be taken seriously or heard in the publishing industry. This leads to them not having a say in which voices and stories should be published. As the positions at the top are not given to marginalized groups at the same rate as middle- and upper-class people, we end up with a narrowness in the workforce, with no lived experience outside of the white middle class male origins (O'Brien, 2019, p. 280). Permitting marginalized groups such as working-class people, women, and people of colour to raise their voice and share their experiences, would make what is being published more diverse, and come from real and authentic lived

experiences. It is about giving a chance to what a commissioner finds to be “not important”, as they themselves are removed from those real-life experiences. It is about looking at the overlooked and finding the value in stories that would not have been given a chance. Kit de Waal’s *Common People* as a crowdsourced book is a perfect example of what could be achieved when marginalized groups are allowed to share their lived experiences, as well as their artistic expressions. In total, including, and publishing works from all walks of life can hopefully lead to positive change, acceptance of others, and solidarity.

Bakhtinian Context – Is the Working-Class in the Industry’s Favour Now?

When discussing working-class literature, I believe we need to take a step back, and shortly analyse where it is at, and where it is going as a literary movement to understand why it is pertinent do analyse the literature at this point. For understanding this, I will work within Bakhtin’s framework of the centripetal and centrifugal forces on literature. Like all history, literary history can be seen as a Hegelian cycle, a constant push and pull of forces which swing like a pendulum. Here the centripetal force is pushing inwards, into a unitary language, standardization, and linguistic hegemony. It is a conservative, authoritarian force, which drive towards order, control, and repression. The centrifugal forces are pushing outwards towards heteroglossia, stratification and decentralization. It is a force of disorder, freedom of expression, democracy, and anarchy. The centripetal force favours the elite, while the centrifugal force benefits the people. If we understand the motions of the literary landscape as a pendulum, swinging between centripetal and centrifugal forces, I believe we can place the position of the pendulum are swinging towards the centrifugal forces of freedom of expression (Bakhtin, 1987, p. xxii). This is due to the recognition authentic working-class writers have achieved in the past few years, being shortlisted, and even winning literary awards. There has been a recent recognition of the working-class writer. A perfect example in showing this recognition is Guy Gunaratne’s debut novel, *In Our Mad and Furious City*,

which with its heteroglossia of different accents, won the Jhalak prize, and was longlisted for the Booker prize. Kit de Waal won the Costa First Novel Award for *My Name is Leon*. More recently, Douglas Stewart's debut novel *Shuggie Bain* won the Booker prize in 2020. The pattern here shows debut novels from previously unknown working-class writers winning prestigious prizes for their distinctly different, yet authentic portrayals of working-class life. I would argue that the position of the "literary pendulum" allows these kinds of texts to be recognized by the industry. The fact that the examples given here all show debut novels being praised from previously unknown authors gives me an impression of us being at the cusp of the centrifugal force, laying the groundwork for which the literary movement can be built further upon. The time to analyse contemporary working-class literature is *now*. I see it fit to further analyse these works not just due to the praise that they are receiving from the literary prize world, or their historical difficulties of getting their works published, but because these are well-written works of literature.

Chapter 2: No Lay, No Pay

“You fanny tested, it boy?”

Sharker Harlock’s face bore his usual arrogant smirk, mixed perhaps with just a dash of superciliousness and a smattering of outright bastardness. (Allen, 2019, p. 121)

The first piece of working-class literature that I will be analysing is Paul Allen’s contribution to *Common People*, named “No Lay, No Pay”. *Common People* describes the texts it contains as being a celebration and not apology of working-class life, and “No Lay, No Pay” fits this bill fabulously. In this literary memoir, Allen recollects, deliberates, and honours the memories of his late father and friends, who were all bricklayers. The text reads almost like listening to a story told by one of your mates in a pub. It is witty, honest, and it provides a glimpse into the working class of old, before the time of Thatcher. This chapter of the thesis aims to understand the classic working class of old, and how that is portrayed by a working-class writer. This will be helpful when looking at later texts, as it gives us a baseline of comparison when analysing the working-class experiences in the literature. Firstly, in this chapter, I will give a summary of the text, to give context to further analysis. Secondly, I will try to understand in what ways the text is a piece of working-class literature. Then I want to identify which tropes the text uses as a working-class text, especially in relation to humour. In this part I will also look at how the trope of precarity works itself within the text. To understand the heightened precarity under neoliberal economics, we must firstly understand the underlying precarity the working class has at all times faced. As the theory of the precariat has its roots from the 1980s and onwards, it will be interesting to get a baseline example of how the working class was before Thatcher’s austerity politics were in place (Guardian, 2013).

Summary

The memoir starts in 1972 a young Paul Allen is asked by Sharker, one of his father's friends, if he knows what a "fanny test" is when mixing the muck for the bricks at a construction site. Paul does not, and after some banter between both, Sharker bestows upon him the great knowledge of the "fanny test". A fanny test is a test in which one draws a crude fanny in the muck used for laying bricks, and if the fanny "opens properly", the muck is perfect to use for bricklaying. When Sharker has shown it to him, he says "And make the most of seeing that fanny; that's about as close to one as a fuckin useless string of piss like you will ever get" (Allen, 2019, p. 124). It is worth noting that Sharker gets his nickname from him sharking around the pub after women. Later, we are with an older Paul seeing the first fanny of his life, keeping schtum when it was not the exact same as the one made in the muck. Paul continues to reminisce about his father's friends, who all happen to be his co-workers as well, describing who they all were and their nicknames. Paul's father did not have a nickname however, as they called him by his second name, Roy. He continues explaining their relationship through their mutual teasing of each other, often revolving around their appearances and most importantly, their sex life, or rather their lack of it, or their inadequate performance during it, all in good fun of course. Paul would join them on the construction site and later at the pub, when his father took him out of school so that he could learn the bricklaying trade. Through his acquaintance with his father's friend, he learned many basic and important life lessons. Paul reflects on the lessons he learns, adding his own reflections on the matter. He adds that everything at work, and outside of it often is related to sex, through banter. This comparison of labour and sex is reversed by the last piece of advice that is given by Paul's father, comparing working girls and bricklayers, as they all live by the idea of "no lay, no pay". The equivalence done about the working girls is rooted in the precariousness of their profession. Paul's father acknowledges and compares his own security, and subsequent

precariousness through this comparison. The text is written as a literary memoir, blending the real-life experiences of Allen with fiction, creating an authentic view of working-class life in the 70s. Throughout the text, there are motifs of sex, masculinity, and directness that I will discuss further in this chapter.

The Strength of the Literary Memoir

This next part of the chapter aims to understand how this text is a piece of working-class literature, in relation to its structure, as well as its author. One of the mission statements of this thesis is to highlight literature which represents the working class in an authentic way, and this text does not fall short in this area. As the text is a memoir, as well as a literary narrative construction, we get an authentic, raw image of the working class of old. It being a literary memoir, and not just a memoir, lends the text to fictionalize the memories, organizing and restructuring them to create a bigger picture, all while keeping its authenticity. And it is this strong sense of authenticity which allows Allen so unabashedly to discuss the hardships that the working-class face based on their class, and the subsequent precariousness that follows the class position of a labourer. The text avoids falling into the pitfalls of middle-class portrayals of the working class, that being of absolute misery, or in a “pick-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps capitalist wonderland”. Through themes some would deem immature, it manages to have a very mature conversation on class relations in the UK in the 70s. I attribute this to the authenticity that the author lends to the use of the literary memoir.

Community and Precarity

Through exploring how the text is working class literature, we can start pinpointing some tropes that are used by the author in the text. The first one that I will discuss is the use of banter in the memoir, which is closely tied to working-class culture. Following the jokes, it is also important to see how bodies and sex are talked about in the text, and how that relates to

the working-class experience. Furthermore, I will analyse the text through the trope of precarity that I have constructed through the theories of Guy Standing. The text takes place in the latter days of the old working class and can work as a starting point for the precarity that will be present in other works that this thesis will discuss. Lastly, I will look at how the men and women as well as the family structure are presented through the literary memoir.

Banter

Banter as a trope can serve many different functions throughout a text, and in “No, Lay, No Pay”, it is used in various ways. The humour is inherently working class in its delivery, its contents, its purpose, and its targets. The first thing one notices when finding the banter in the text is the overt directness of it. It does not beat around the bush at all, as it is direct, yet often clever and witty. The themes of the jokes, as mentioned before, are often of a sexual nature, or attacking someone’s appearance. In the text, when Paul is introducing his father’s co-workers and their nicknames, we get a taste of the jokes they tell at each other’s expense. “Christ whippet, you’re short... what’s it like to be the last one to realise it’s raining... and to have your hair smell of feet”. “I see on the telly the other night that we spring of apes, young Wongy. Shame your poor fucking mum didn’t spring far enough”. “Old Wongy, you fat fucker, I was shagging your missus last night and she told me being fucked by you was like having a big wardrobe fall on you with the key sticking out”. Now these three examples might to some look like personal attacks, which could leave the realm of healthy debate, into fisticuffs territory if uttered in a pub. This is however a show of banter, which is a staple of working-class humour. This is all done in camaraderie, and as is evident from the examples, is quite direct, yet clever, done in a stereotypically male fashion.

One of the clever parts of the form of the text is the use of listing, when the narrator is problem solving. The application of this listing is done in a quintessentially male and

masculine fashion, working through the preconceived schematics of the brain in a process-oriented matter. When using the word “Schema” I am meaning it in the sense of Piaget’s theory on the assimilation of new information. I am in no way saying that women do not do this as well, but the application of this in the text is done through stereotypically masculine contents and deliberations. The listing takes place three times in the text, the first one at the construction site, when pondering what a fanny is, where it is either 1: A useless tradesman, i.e one that “farted and fannied about.” Or 2: “Something to do with a ladies front bottom” The second time, it is Paul’s first intimate moment with a woman, trying to wrap his head around how a fanny looks based on the schematics that he has made with the knowledge he has from the fanny in the wheelbarrow. A: “A real one was bound to be a lot more realistic than a sand-and-cement-based one in a wheelbarrow; and B: That sorta Talk beforehand both spoils the moment and, more importantly, would result in an immediate cessation of proceedings”. The last time is his father who is listing how bricklaying is only four things, Paul adding the last one, being sex. The two first instances are confrontations of new concepts that a young man is not very familiar with and the last one is a moment of paternal advice. All of them are coming of age moments for a young working-class man.

Through the two first listings in the text, we can get an understanding of working-class socialisation, in relation to humour and the directness that is present in working-class culture. Here we can see Paul manoeuvring the directness, and the thoughts that follow these motions in real time through his own thoughts and reflections. Looking at the first example, Paul manages to encapsulate the obliviousness and quick temper of youth cleverly. The subsequent trade of lines between Sharker and Paul further states the direct banter that is so typically working-class. Paul is thought that he needs to be quick on his delivery to bite back against the banter of his mates, fighting directness with directness. The second example show how Paul must manoeuvre around the directness he so bluntly bites back at with his mates, when

engaged with the female. This will be further elaborated later in the part on men and women in the text.

Precarity

I chose this text to get a baseline understanding of the precariousness working-class people felt before the time of neoliberal precarity. Out of the 4As, that being anxiety, anomie, alienation, or anger, we can only really see signs of anxiety in the novel. We do get a look at one of the three groups, the old working-class. Using this text at this point of the thesis, we can understand where the working class was, and through analysing the other texts up through Gunaratne, where it is at this moment. As I progress the thesis, the precarity will show itself more gradually, coalescing with the state of things in Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City*. In understanding the notion of precarity throughout the thesis, I believe we can understand the precariat as a growing class with the roots of its problems at the start of the austerity politics of the Thatcher era.

Working-class life has always been anxiety ridden, and the text shows this. The anxiety is grounded in economic, as well as physical precariousness. The working-class only have labour to sell, like the working-girls who Paul's father compares workers to, which only have their bodies to sell. The anxiety is tied to whether the worker will be able to pay rent that month. This economic anxiety is also amplified by a physical sense of precariousness, which stems from the lack of onsite work safety.

Obviously, health and safety was pretty poor, and every now and then someone would get hurt badly, or even die (I've witnessed three deaths on-site in my time, and been standing next to a bloke who got electrocuted so bad he wished he had died), (...), (Allen, 2019, p. 128)

The physical labour that is so typical of the working class, and the risks that entail with it can jeopardize not just the economic safety, but their own life. This is a source for anxiety, as one accident can deteriorate any figment of safety a worker has in their life.

‘You know what a working girl is, right’? They have been plying their trade as long as we have. You’ll find builders got a certain respect for them. We got more in common than you might think. We call ourselves “self-employed”, but we’re not really, we’re all somebody’s whores dancing for wages. Brickies and working girls got summat else in common too. The common rule we live and work by, regardless of everything happening around us: “No lay, no pay”.’

Whether it’s scorching hot, freezing cold, whether you’re ill, hung-over, or just plain dog-tired, you got to be on site at seven every morning, that mixer’s got to be fired up and loaded and you got to be putting bricks down by half past. You stop twice a day for dokky (farmers in our region used to dock workers’ money when they stopped for food, hence the widespread local term for a break), but you don’t stop for long; you get back on the string line and you keep getting bricks down till fifteen minutes before the site shuts. Have the crack with your mates by all means, but keep that trowel working.

‘No lay no pay. It’s that simple’ (Allen, 2019, p. 129).

Here the father is teaching Paul a trade from the age of 15, which in one way is a form of safety that is only offered to him because of his relationship with his father. This is a special sign of nepotism, a passing on of survival mechanism in a society which does not cater to him. “Working-class” nepotism if you will. There is a possibility to alleviate some of the precariousness of working-class life through work. For this essay, it is important to keep in mind that Britain has not yet changed into a knowledge-based economy, and in an environment like the one in 1972, bricklaying is a safe option for the worker. There is of course a precarious nature to the work, heightened later in Paul’s life which is also stated by his father. The “no lay, no pay” perspective, shows the innate precariousness of the work, as he compares working girls and bricklayers. We call ourselves “self-employed”, but were not really, we’re all somebody’s whores and dance to the tune of the man paying the wages”. He continues to explain that the common rule between the two groups is no lay, no pay, which states that “whether its scorching hot or freezing cold, whether your ill, if you are hungover,

or if you are dog tired, you've got to be on site at seven every morning, (...) (Allen, 2019, p. 129). Its arduous work, with no proper safety nets like sick leave or vacation days. There is precariousness at work that create an anxiety over the fact that the wages need to come home to the family. There is a potential alleviation of the precarity through the teaching of these skills to Paul.

The Men and Women

When looking at this text, it is hard to miss the masculinity that is presented through it. The text is written by a man and is revolving around the lessons learned from the important men around his life growing up. The interpersonal relationship between the workers is drenched in masculinity, realizing itself in the banter between them. The text motions a view on labour through gender. The masculinity shown through the text is that of the old working-class group, when looking at it through the lens of precarity.

The text is written in a masculine angle which can be attributed to the author of the text being male. Keeping this in mind, it is interesting to look at the text through the lens of gender and understand authentically how the male working-class experience was, and to some extent is today. Especially in relation to itself, as well as to women and the feminine. The text offers us an inside perspective on the precarious nature of working-class life for the old working class. Even though the characters are aware of the uncertain and bad situation they are in, there is still a sense of pride in their hard work. There is an archetypal masculine pride in making something out of the hand that they have been dealt and making it for your family. This pride is also paired with working-class stoicism, is something that the precarious nature of the labour and the precariousness of his situation demands. The stoicism bleeds into his relationship with his labour, as well as the relationship he has with his son. The stoicism leads to the cryptic way he gives advice to Paul about women. This stoicism amplifies his authority

in a sense, creating a sense of security within the confusion for the young man. Furthermore, the stoicism is also Paul's father can take pride in the bricks he lays, and at the same time be critical of the circumstances that he must lay them under. He is painstakingly aware of his situation, criticizing it through his deliberations on the idea of "no lay, no pay".

Now that we have had a look at the men and the masculine parts of the story, it is interesting to look at the brief inclusion of women in the literary memoir. There are three references to women in the text. The first one is Paul's mother, the second is Paul's wife, and lastly, the reference to the working girls that I have discussed prior in the thesis. Paul's mother is mentioned when he reminisces about a time where his mother caught him swearing like a sailor. He received a spanking which burned both on the inside and the outside. Paul's mother is an authority figure to him and is a known quantity in relation to him. His wife is mentioned after an argument between them about having kids. After getting some cryptic advice from his dad, whether "he understood colour telly or what?", him and his wife had a child together. The presentation of the women in the memoir is through the eyes of a man. The mother is seen as a maternal authority figure, demanding respect. She is a known quantity but is to be defied in as a young child and teen, to grow and learn. The wife is stereotypically portrayed as an enigma, to confuse their better half. It seems truly that the directness that is instilled in young working-class boys and men must be manoeuvred when interacting with women. Paul's failure in manoeuvring the cursing, which he most likely learned from his dad's friends, around his mother thought him at an early age that the directness will not fly in their vicinity. In his first meeting with women, he steers away from his first direct reaction to the sight of a fanny, resorting in an answer which would let the act proceed. The subsequent confusion Paul feels over his wife, could be an indication of women being something alien for these hardy masculine working-class men. They are an alien part of Paul's life, but far from a negative part. We could further understand the relationship between the women through the

trope: The mother, the lover, and the whore. In “No Lay, No Pay”, The mother is obviously the mother, his wife is the lover, but in this literary memoir, Paul himself is the whore, and this nugget of truth is told to him by his father.

Masculinity is already important from the first sentence of the text “You fanny tested it boy?” (Allen, 2019 p. 121). Here, a role model of Paul asserts himself as the knowledgeable one of the two, holding a secret passed down from generations of labourers, all men. Intertwined between the banter, there is a paternal moment of learning to be found. The moment sticks with Paul through his other deliberations as well. It is a profound coming-of-age moment through both pride and mostly awkwardness. Here the labour is for the first time related to sex. When Paul’s father took him out of school at fifteen, his last deliberation on sex is presented. In this last comparison of sex and labour, he compares bricklayers and working girls, stating that both live under the idea of “no lay, no pay”. It presents a role reversal from the previous mentions of sex at the workplace, or through the lives of these men. In most of the banter and comparisons on sex, the men are the ones performing it on someone else, albeit not necessarily successfully. In this last comparison, there is no esoteric woman, whose fanny can be found in every wheelbarrow in the UK. The worker is not the one doing the fucking, but rather the boss. Like working women selling their bodies, working-class men sell their labour to their bosses. The role reversal is interesting as it puts the men working these jobs in a ‘feminine position’, opposed to the very strong masculine one that they usually find themselves. To become the masculine breadwinners for their families, they must become “Somebody’s whores, dancing for wages” (Allen, p. 121). The theme of the fanny and sex are flipped on them at the end through Paul’s father’s direct comments on the inequality and the precarious nature of their work, which requires them to be exploited by their bosses. Here, stereotypical gender roles are reversed to make a young Paul class

conscious. At an early age, Paul is taught the kernel truth of the working-class under a hierarchical system, which is that they are being exploited.

Chapter Conclusion

The quote that ends the memoir is a strong signifier of community and solidarity that Paul felt between his father and his friend Sharker.

And sometimes when I'm on the trowel, just for the fuck of it I'll draw Sharker's crude Vulva into the muck, open it up and smile as I see his stupid, leering mush grinning and peering through it at me across the sands of time. He's been dead along with my dad, for many years now. Hard Labour and building wore them both out, along with the drink and fags. But to me, he will always be immortalized, albeit in a barrow-load of mortar

“Every encounter is a moment of another's becoming”.

- Dr Tim Gibson – friend, mentor

And one of the most human of human beings I ever met (Allen, 2019, p. 129-130)

This quote underlies the importance of community for the individual's personal growth. The lessons Paul is reminiscing about from his father and his friends has stuck with him, as he fondly remembers the solidarity his father and friends thought him. The crude vulva that he made at an early age, and the entailments that had for his own journey through banter, life, and sex show truly that “every encounter is a moment of another's becoming”. This quotation of a friend and mentor show that not only has the solidarity shown in the text been an important piece of the Paul Allen as a character, but also as an author. Community and solidarity are incredibly important for the working-class.

Through Allen's story we get an authentic understanding of the working-class prior to the period of neoliberal precarity. It is this solidarity which is the key word that will not just be present in this literary memoir, but throughout this thesis. The incredible solidarity Paul and his friends so bawdily express to each other through banter, and which is passed down to

him through the community. The text throws the patriarchal family structure out the window in favour for two strong parental support structures. The structure is further extended out from his family all the way to his father's friend group, which with Allen's father provides him enough "working-class nepotism" to traverse precarity, making him less prone to feeling the 4As. Even though the feelings are not cemented within Paul, his father accurately describes the relationship he and his son have to the system they are living under, showing a large degree of class-consciousness. "No Lay, No Pay" shows perseverance in the face of precarity, and the undeniable positive effect a great support system has for working-class people of all ages. In the next literary memoir, the thesis will look at, we will continue to build upon our understanding of the traditional working-class experience through the work of Jodie Russian-Red.

Chapter 3: The Funeral and the Wedding

I'd been trying to convince myself that it was all completely normal, an everyday thing, just going to a funeral. (Russian-Red, 2019, p. 33)

This chapter will be looking at Jodie Russian-Red's contribution to *Common People*, "The Funeral and the wedding". The aim of this chapter is to further expand our understanding of the classic working-class experience, this time seen through the lens of a woman, focusing more on the family and community aspect. Like "No Lay, No Pay" this text is a literary memoir, However, rather than work, it is focused on social ceremony. Russian-Red takes us with her on the day of her grandmother's funeral, and her cousin's wedding, as well as the day after both events through the eyes of Jodie. Through this chapter, I will try to identify more tropes in the text that are typically working class, how precarity festers in social life, as well as trying to broaden the scope of what and who the working class is.

Normalization Through Perception: the 4As Numbing the Senses

Before we start our analysis of this text, we must understand that everything that is shown to the reader in this text is seen and filtered through the narrator, Jodie. For the purposes of this, I will be distinguishing between the narrator and the author by referring to the former as "Jodie" and the latter as Russian-Red. The filtering of perception in the text through the character Jodie, allows us to understand her thoughts and emotions on her own situation, as well as her family's.

As Russian-Red puts herself as a character in the story, she can assert herself comfortably as the intermediary, as well as the translator between her world and the reader. Russian-Red uses Jodie as a translator of concepts between the working-class and the middle-class. This is striking when she explains the "communal bacca tin",

Which as far I'm aware, only my mum has ever topped up and only my brother ever uses and often makes me wonder how many other families have communal tobacco tins in repurposed cream-cracker tubs (Russian-Red P. 33).

Here Russian-Red is aware that this concept might be lost in translation to the middle-class reader, and therefore deliberates briefly over the overall usage of communal tobacco tins. The awareness is significant, as it is a signifier of class consciousness. She understands that some concepts are foreign to readers from the outside of her class position. As the experience of the working-class is different from that of the middle-class, missing cultural context can lead to an uncomplete understanding of the text. This importance of cultural context again argues for working-class literature to be written by working-class authors, to be as authentic as possible.

Jodie acts as a mediator between the reader and her world through her choices of perception. She doesn't tell us most of the time, she shows us through her descriptions. In way to understand Jodie as a mediator, we have to understand that the 4As showed to us by Jodie can be found through her selective perception. A way anxiety is expressed in the text is through Jodie's brother.

My brother was standing on the edge of the back step, arm outstretched as far outside as possible, with a cigarette at the end of his nail bitten fingers. (Russian-Red, 2019, p. 33)

Russian-Red never expresses his anxiety directly, but it is inferred in the physical description of him, as well as in the way he acts before both the events of the text. Her brother is constantly smoking cigarettes, taken from "the communal bacca tin", which his mother only ever fills up. His cigarette is described to be at the end of his nail-bitten finger, and he is always questioning and worrying what to wear, leading to him wearing the wrong thing to the funeral and the wedding. Russian-Red never calls her brother something directly tied to anxiety, but the picture she paints with the description of him helps us to understand the

character's feelings. From the description, he is feeling a strong sense of anxiety daily, which is inferred by his nail bitten fingers. Nail biting is a common stress or anxiety reaction. On the day of the funeral, it is of course reasonable to have a reaction, but the manner which it is mentioned suggests that it is a common occurrence. Jodie's brother worries in both the funeral as well as the wedding which clothes to wear and ultimately picks wrong each time. This leads to some "Muttering and fretting" over it, and a sense of uncomfortableness and anxiety over his choice of clothes. Through the descriptions of her brother, Russian-Red manages to create a powerful picture of general anxiety through his continual questioning, his nail-bitten fingers, and his reaction in picking the wrong clothes.

To continue to understand the expressions of the 4As presented by Jodie, we must analyse what she looks at, and more importantly, what she avoids. In these passages, we can start to see both her anomie, and alienation become more expressed in a working-class stoic fashion. By choosing what she perceives, she attempts traversing gaping changes in her life, with various success. Through avoidance she attempts to normalize the situation, which she openly states in the first paragraph of the whole text:

I'd convinced myself that it was all completely normal, an everyday thing, just going to a funeral. It's one of only two reasons the entire family gets together. Everybody said, 'Wear something bright and sparkly – that's what she loved to see you in.' When I say 'everybody said', my mum texted me saying 'everybody said', so I had no idea if that's true or if it was just my aunt Jackie. It was probably just my aunt Jackie. To play it safe, I wore a black glittery dress. she would have liked to see me in something bright and sparkly, but you never know who's going to try and moan for the sake of moaning. (Russian-Red, 2019, p. 33)

Here, Russian-Red shows how painstakingly self-aware and honest she is through this text. She has in a sense managed to alienate herself from the situation, through the same force of working-class stoicism that Paul Allen's father showed. It is important to note here that this then shows that it is not just men who front this stoicism, rather that it is universally used across gender for the working-class.

The first instance of diverted perception happens outside of the crematorium, where she is surrounded with her family in a haze of smoke and cherry vapour.

My Brother kept muttering and fretting about everyone wearing a shirt and do you think he should have worn one? I tried to listen, but I was just staring up at the big, long brick chimney. (Russian-Red, 2019, p. 35)

Her brother is muttering on about whether he should have worn a shirt, and as Jodie tries to listen to her brother, she starts diverting her attention away from him and onto the long brick chimney, staring at it. In this moment, like the smoke and haze around her, she is unable to escape the underlying facts of the funeral. Her brother muttering on about his shirt is the least of her worries, yet it is still a reminder on what is to come, the funeral service. Through the plume of smoke from the vapes and cigarettes, she diverts from her brother onto the brick chimney, soon to host the ashes of one of her loved ones. Looking at the chimney, it is as if she wants it to plume, to get on with it. Luckily for her, Uncle Paul's ex-wife comes in and takes her sight from the chimney in the sky back into the smoke and haze of the family spinning on the same tired wheels, letting her hold her stoic mask for now. "When the hearse arrived, everyone dotted their cigarettes, put their vapes in their handbags and I pretended to not notice the coffin" (Russian-Red, 2019, p. 35).

The next diverted perception I would like to analyse is during the funeral service, when Jodie walks up to hold her speech. When they arrive, Jodie is already "(...) pretending not to notice the coffin". She continually alienates herself during the funeral, when she is to read a poem, she takes the safe route which everyone would make everyone happy.

I wanted so desperately to say all the true things that were interesting and funny and sad. I wanted to mention all the unique and complicated and inimitable things that everyone would recognize, and do justice to this event the whole family had anticipated our lives. Instead, I read out the greeting-card soothing platitudes I'd written that morning and knew it was the right thing to do because everyone smiled and was happy as they contentedly imagined a different, probably less interesting

person. I finished and walked back to my seat and pretended to not notice the coffin. (Russian-Red, 2019, p. 36).

In alienating her own presence in the funeral, she is in a sense interrupting herself from coping with the loss of her grandmother, by doing “what’s right”, which is not what she wants. What is right in this instance, is to keep the status quo – to keep it normal. And exactly what did Jodie and her close family gain from her keeping it normal? She was not the one talking to the priest about Nana, she is not sitting on the benches in the front like her other cousin. Her expectations to the funeral are challenged, and it leads to a sense of alienation from the funeral. Through the text, and her diverted perception, she tries to cling to a sense of normalcy through harrowing experiences. This leads us to Jodie big conundrum in this text. Is she to continue doing the same “right” thing over and over, or is she to break out of the cycle and challenge normality? This will be discussed further in the last passage of this chapter.

Through the next passage, we can see how Russian-Red explores the themes of the 4As through form. Like in Paul Allen’s text, she plays with the use of brackets, resulting in an expression of the frustrating alienation the working-class feels.

I kept thinking about the announcement in the newspaper the week before: *Service at 2p.m., Chanterlands Ave Crematorium (small chapel)*. I couldn’t stop thinking about the brackets: (Small Chapel). I felt like doing one great, big sigh (Russian-Red, 2019, p. 35).

This obituary continues the trend of depersonalization that Jodie faces during the day of her Nana’s funeral. The obituary in the newspaper reads as personal as google maps road instructions. There is no sense of who this person was, or whom her presence may have touched in her life. They could not even afford her Nana a complete sentence in the obituary. The information we are given, is “*Service at 2p.m., Chanterlands Ave Crematorium (small chapel)*”. One of the signs of coldness from this announcement is the complete lack of binding words. Jodie’s Nana is not even afforded a complete sentence for the announcement

of her last official gathering. The most striking sign of alienation, depersonalisation, and minimization of Jodie's Nana comes through in the last two words, (*small chapel*). Here, the use of brackets creates a sense of claustrophobia, strangling the already further alienating and minimizing words "*(small chapel)*". Furthermore, the small chapel being in italics highlights the importance of the service being in the tiny chapel. It is as if Jodie is told to not interrupt whatever more important is happening in the large chapel, as the funeral there is more important than the one for her Nana. Jodie contrasts the small chapel with her big sigh, expressing her disappointment, and frustration over the obituary. The frustration and disappointment over the whole obituary derive from the depersonalization and diminution it subjects her Nana to.

The Use of Repetition Seen Through Precarity

The daily grind for the working-class under precarity is mind numbing repetition. This repetition takes place at the workplace, as we saw in the last chapter in "No Lay, No Pay", where Allen's father understands his labour and his relation to it as a motion, repeating endlessly. In Russian-Red's text, we can start to understand that this repetition bleeds over into life outside of work. As Paul's father says to "keep the trowel moving", so does the social interactions between the extended working-class family. We see this repetition in the actions at these two social gatherings which is inverse in relation to each other. This the inverse nature of a funeral and a wedding should grant an avenue for a break from the repetition, but this is not the case. I would argue that precarity creates the same repetitious effect in the personal, as well as the professional lives of the people in the working class. I would also argue that the repetition propels the feelings of the working class into some of the 4As, more notably alienation, anomie, and anxiety.

The first passage that I would like to point out when discussing repetition as a product of precarity is “It’s one of the only two reasons the entire family gets together” (Russian-Red, 2019, p. 33). This sentence is the second sentence in the funeral part, and the first sentence in the wedding part. Here, Jodie is thinking about the funeral, and the family gathering that will result from it. When the family gets together, there is a sense of repetition of the proceedings of the day. From the morning, day, evening, and the morning after, there is a repeating pattern of the same considerations and small talk taking place during these inverse events. The whole family only gets together for either weddings or funerals, and these two events which are quite different, go through the same mundane motions, repeating, leading to a strong presence of one of the 4As, that being alienation. Funerals and weddings can be understood as paradigm shifts for a family to go through. The funeral in an ending: a wedding is a beginning. These two grand events for Jodie’s family, are in essence happening in the exact same way. The morning before the event, the meeting with the family, the after party, and the morning after are to a degree copies of each other. It is as if these great sweeping changes come into their lives with no “real” effect on them, as they continue doing what they have always done.²

Jodie’s focus on the repetition of the small talk banter made between her cousins interests me, as it can help us understand further the relationship of labour, ambition, and social life under precarity for the working class. Here one of the cousins is asked whether he is still doing car mapping. “Nah, mate I packed it in. I’m at the Briggston’s Pork abattoir now”, “Oh, are you? What’s that like then?”, “Well I’ll tell you something, I’m pig sick of

² The lack of finality is relevant to the second part on the wedding, which deal with the second part that ca 50% of marriages go through, namely divorce. Unfortunately for Jodie, it is not like 50% of funerals end in resurrections. And as a wedding and marriage can crumble, the remnants may linger, for example as ex-wives still attending family events. The remnants of a funeral are only the memories one has of that person, which continually distort over each time one replays them, leading to an incomplete view of who that person was. And as this deterioration of someone’s memory happens at different paces, one can find oneself in frustrating situations, with varying ideas over who that person was.

it!”. This is also repeated in the wedding, as the cousins do the same small talk at every gathering. The cousin’s relation to his job, is interesting to look at in light of Paul Allen’s bricklaying. Here, it is apparent that the cousin does not really like his job, and that he views it just as a job and not a career. It is viewed in a strictly utilitarian way. Precarity makes it normal for working class people to jump from job to job. The cousin went from car mapping to a pig abattoir. There is no relation between these professions, and he chose this job out of need, not out of choice. He is sick of his job, but between the funeral and the wedding, he has not found any other occupation. Through the banter, we can understand that because of his precarious position, he has had to give up car mapping, in favour of working at a pig abattoir. In a sense though, he has taken up a job that is more essential for society, but which probably leaves his ambition unfulfilled as a worker. The need for certainty, of being able to take care of oneself, outweighs the drive for pursuing more fulfilling, yet precarious work. He repeats the joke both in the funeral and the wedding, showing that it is an underlying problem for him, that does not change. Through the banter, he expresses his frustration with the situation, but as surviving is the top priority for the working class, certainty in some circumstances trumps ambition.

Strong Women and Solidarity

Through this text, we can start to understand the female working class experience as something different from the male one. Through Jodie’s own female working class experience, we can further understand the different gender dynamics in the old working class. Continuing the comparison to Paul Allen text, this text has a strong sense of matriarchy, compared to the patriarchy in “No Lay, No Pay”. The father’s role in Allen’s text is that of a strong role model, gifting his set of skills to him through “working class nepotism”, in a direct, yet vague, sage like fashion. Looking at the father “The Funeral and the Wedding”, one

could describe him as whimsical, in the way he comes in boasting about the absolute steal of a deal he got on his suit, and waistcoat, “not bad for thirty quid is it!”. When Jodie is thinking back on her father telling her about his stag do, she questions his decision making, as he was okay with his mates almost setting fire to him, but not okay with shaving his eyebrows. The father almost has a boyish charm to him, even though he is her father. The men in this text, are not the main source of security the women are. It’s the mother on the other hand who is doing the commanding, around the house before the social gatherings, the one providing to the communal bacca tin, and ordering the drinks. And even though it is the women who are the ones ordering the drinks, they are the ones for the most part, who seem less intoxicated. Interesting enough, as the men get more intoxicated, there is an absence of scolding. “What a night! Your dad passed out and Steve ripped his jacket falling off the stool – did you know he’d already done four lines of coke by the time we went into the service?”. The idea of “boys will be boys” is very prevalent in here. There is an infantilization of the men, with there being a strong sense of matriarchy in the text. The men can be a source of precarity for the women, and it is through solidarity between them that they can alleviate the emotions the force permeates through them.

In a sense, one individual’s actions can be a driving factor for the experiences of uncertainty in the lives of others. Looking at precarity derived from the actions of others can be a tool to better understand how the precarity created by society affects working class people. It can be hard to grasp “society” as one moving agent propelling working-class people into precarity, as it consists of so many moving pieces. By attributing and understanding its “qualities”, and subsequent consequences to an individual, we can better picture the force that is precarity, through family relations. The example I will use here in Russian-Red’s text is Uncle Paul. He is the source of a strong sense of alienation in two of the women in the text. Even though Paul is divorced, his ex-wife Trish comes to the family gatherings, both the

wedding and the funeral. When Trish comes to the funeral, Paul is standing with his new wife Coleen, avoiding her. Trish quickly finds Jodie and her mother and starts the same old small talk with them. Jodie's cousin Louise is also affected by Uncle Paul, as he is not recognizing her as his own daughter. She seeks respite with Jodie's mother. Both situations repeat in the wedding and the funeral, as they both seek respite, or comfort in Russian-Red's mother.

As my cousin Kerrie, the biological daughter who uncle Paul acknowledged, danced awkwardly with her new wife on an empty dance floor to a song they hadn't picked and didn't know, my cousin Louise cornered my mum to ask why she thinks Uncle Paul won't acknowledge her as his biological daughter (Russian-Red, 2019, p. 39).

I steered the conversation away from there being any possible revelation that I hadn't actually taken my purse with me, and we talked about how awkward it was when Paul's ex-wife Trish turned up (Russian-Red, 2019, p. 40).

They feel an intense sense of alienation, which is understandable, as it must be hard to move on when one has been involved with a family for large parts of one's life. And it must be incredibly alienating seeing your father with the daughter he has chosen over you. Even in a wedding which feels alien to the father and the bride, there is an intense sense of anxiety, alienation and anomie, most of all that her father would see her as his own. These factors arising from just one individual's action amplify the feelings of the 4As for them and the ones around them. A sense of anomie for Jodie's cousin, as she wishes everything was different, so that she could have the safety of a father in her life. Anomie for Jodie and her mother, as they want to get away from the whole awkwardness of the situation. A strong sense of anxiety in her cousin, as she drinks and starts pouring her heart out over her father. His ex-wife however diverts that anxiety through working class stoicism, not addressing the situation, and moving towards Jodie and her mother, leading to awkwardness. The last piece of the 4As, anger, is missing from these characters. Later in the thesis, I will show the chaotic amalgamation these 4As create, but for now, we must understand what these three emotions do, and how it expresses itself in the text. Here, the feelings of Alienation, anomie, and anxiety, coalesce into

a form of general despair, with disdain to one's surroundings, making it hard to address the problem directly at the root. But it is through solidarity between the strong women, like Jodie's mother which they can alleviate some of these emotions and reactions to the precarity they face.³

Chapter Closer – An Uncertain Future

Tying this chapter together, I would like to analyse one last central passage. In this passage we see Jodie reflecting on her future and her life, and for a moment, she is offered a break from the repetition. It is the day after the wedding, and she is in the backyard, swinging in a hammock.

The next day I sat in the garden swinging on the hammock that's been reconstructed with Gorilla tape since my dad fell through it; I was watching the cat watching nothing. I was wondering whether I should get married, whether or not I'd left it too late, whether there was any point, if anyone would come, if I'd ever own my own house, if I'd have children, if I could picture myself living a normal life; the cat sat and watched nothing.

My Mum cracked across the kitchen wearing my brother's parka, leaned down to the hob to light the cigarette already in her mouth, inhaled, slipped on my dad's heel flattened shoes, opened the back door and came down the patio steps before exhaling. 'I just cannot believe that round. Sixty-eight fifty; it was Jackie's gin and tonic that did it you know' (Russian-Red, 2019, p. 40).

The first thing that I would like to analyse in this passage is the gorilla taped hammock, which Jodie lays in. It paints a picture of working-class solidarity in the face of precarity, for as her father has fallen through it, it has been reconstructed with tape. I view this reconstruction as connected to the solidarity that is present in her family. It is literally a reconstruction of a net, which could be interpreted as their safety net. When her father fell through it, it was fixed, and is now holding Jodie. This net is not permanent and must be fixed or upheld through

³ Understanding precarity through Uncle Paul, his neglect for some of the women in his life, could be compared to the neglect working-class people feel while at the polls, as they have been left out of traditional ballot politics since the arrival of neoliberalism.

vigilant solidarity. Further, Jodie's reflects on life itself. She is thinking on love, and whether it is too late for her or if there is any point to it. She is thinking on whether she will ever own a house, and lastly, she is thinking on her family and life, if she will have children of her own, and if she could ever picture herself living a normal life. Her thoughts on love are interesting to understand in the light of the men and women in the text, namely her father and uncle Paul. Her father is loveable, and a bedrock in her life, yet a bit vain sometimes. Jodie has a mixed impression of the women and men in the text. Her uncle Paul is a continual source for disappointment and uncertainty for women in her family. Looking at her mother, and the other women in her family, there is a strong sense of independence from their men, even though they are married. She comes out to the patio wearing Jodie's parka and her dad's heel-flattened shoes, appropriating male clothing. Through this picture of Jodie's mother, one could argue through she stereotypical notion that "she is the one wearing the pants in the relationship" alluding to her matriarchal position within her family. Is she to inherit her mother's matriarchal role? That is for Jodie to decide.

Jodie might be wondering whether it's worth it to get married, as she is doing just fine on her own. The thought of marriage strings her then to the thought of owning a house, which is a strong signifier of the underlying precarity she, and other working-class people face, as owning houses is becoming more and more difficult even in one's early thirties. The following thing she ponders in this string of thoughts is whether she will have children. It is worth to note here that for young adults today, financial security is often a prerequisite for planning to have children. Jodie echoes this current trend, as it's important for her to have security for that to happen. Later, in the next chapter of this thesis, children and precarity will become a focus. For now, we must understand Jodie's own intentions in her string of thought. To get the security, and funds, to get a loan to buy a house, it is advantageous to have a spouse. There seem to be a certain sense of rigidity in the pursuit of a "normal life" for a

working-class person. This string of thoughts and the complication that each step brings entangles her into the final thought – whether she will ever live a normal life, or more importantly, if a “normal life” is what she wants. In the passage, Jodie watched the cat watching nothing. At the end of her string of thoughts, she is looking back at the cat, as it is watching nothing. I understand this as her looking at her own life. As the cat watches nothing, so does she to a degree at the wedding and the funeral. Or she could have watched nothing because she has seen it all before countless times. The cat here could be a representation of Jodie as the spectator at her family gatherings, passively watching everyone.

Despite temporary, or sweeping changes in their lives, their worries never change. The force of these worries being the underlying precarity that these working-class people face. This underlying force of precarity, stays still in the face of change in the lives of working-class people, forcing the social interactions between them into a standstill of repetition, creating a sense of alienation and anomie. Continuing with our understanding of the 4As, there is an existential sense of anxiety and anomie when thinking about the future. The anomie of trying to progress out of the repetitious precarious life she currently leads lead her into a sense of anxiety. Her anomie is not directed directly somewhere either, she does not have a goal in mind. It is just apparent that what she is doing now can not last forever. The gorilla tape will hold for some time, but who knows if it will snap at any moment, sending her through the hammock, creating a picture of further precarity. I have no fears for Jodie though, as she comes from a line of strong working-class women and displays those same independent, matriarchal traits as her mother. Next, we will see when precarity from society intertwines with the one created by individuals, and how that affects children in the working-class.

Chapter 4: My Name is Leon

Leon has begun to notice the things that makes his mum cry: When Jake makes a lot of noise; When she hasn't got any money; when she comes from the phone box; when Leon asks too many questions; and when she is staring at Jake (de Waal, 2016, p. 12).

Continuing the hammock metaphor used in “The Funeral and the Wedding”, the hammock Leon swings in has ripped, and he is caught in a freefall, in dire need for some gorilla tape or a vine to catch on to for that matter. *My Name is Leon* tells the story of how extreme precarity stemming from both society and individuals affects a working-class child. As the narrator has insight into Leon's thoughts and feelings through the story, we can get a close look at how the 4As manifest in him, and how they coalesce into the actions he takes during the story. This chapter also further expands on the idea of the 4As, as it includes the emotion of anger, which has not been touched upon by the two preceding texts. As there has been strong foundations of solidarity present in both *Allen* and *Russian-Red*, the feeling of anger has been pacified to a degree. The families in those texts, although not “perfect”, create a sense of security in their lives. This is not the case for Leon, however. As we will see later in the chapter, the lack of solidarity and a foundation for a working-class child starts brewing an anger within him as well as on the outside in the climax of the novel. The text shows a child manoeuvring himself through the precarity created by his close family, child protective services, as well as the expectations each of these two groups have for him. The eight-year-old Leon is expected to understand concepts that are hard to face as adults, while at the same time having his perspectives and needs played down as a child. His situation demands that he grow up fast, but at the end of the day, he is still a child. Through reading *My Name is Leon* I believe we can get a better understanding of the experience of working-class children trapped in precariousness, as well as introduce the concept of the clash between different groups within the precariat. Through looking at the climax of this story through the concept, we can get a deeper understanding of the power structures at play, and the vital role of solidarity to

overcome these struggles. This is a longer narrative, being a novel, and as such, I will look at specific topics as they arise sequentially in the text.

Leon and Carol – Extreme Precarity Affecting a Family

No one has to tell Leon that this is a special moment. Everything else in the hospital seems to have gone quiet and disappeared. The nurse makes him wash his hands and sit up straight. ‘Careful, now,’ she says. ‘He’s very precious.’ But Leon already knows. The nurse places the brand-new baby in his arms with its face towards Leon so that they can look at each other. ‘You have a baby brother now,’ she says. ‘And you’ll be able to look after him. What are you? Ten?’ ‘He’s nearly nine,’ says Leon’s Mum, looking over. ‘Eight years and nine months, nearly.’ Leon’s mum is talking to Tina about when the baby was coming out, about the hours and the minutes and the pain. ‘Well,’ Said the nurse, adjusting the baby’s blanket, ‘you’re nice and big for your age. A right little man.’ She pats Leon on his head and brushes the side of his cheek with her finger. ‘He’s a beauty, isn’t he? Both of you are.’ (de Waal, 2016, p. 1).

The year is 1980 when we meet Leon at the hospital, as his mother, Carol, is giving birth to his brother, Jake. The father of the child is nowhere to be seen. Here at the hospital, there is a sense of serenity, as Leon sees his new-born brother for the first time, and there is a moment of pride, and maternal love coming from his mother. The serenity passes however, as the birth of Jake will prove to be the catalyst of her deteriorating mental condition, due to financial and psychological precarity. Carol sadly has a past with post-partum depression, and the symptoms start showing themselves to Leon when the family is back home from the hospital. Leon starts to notice what makes his mother cry, “(...) When Jake makes a lot of noise; when she hasn’t got any money; when she comes back from the phone booth; when Leon asks too many questions; and when she’s staring at Jake.” (De Waal, 2016, p. 12). In this moment, the relationship between Leon and his mother changes, not due to anything that Leon did, but rather on account of his mother’s reality sinking in for her. She was a single mother of one but is now a single mother of two. When Carol is crying after going to the phone booth, it is because Jake’s dad is not accepting him as his own. Leon and Jake have different fathers, Leon’s being of Caribbean, while Jake’s of English descent. For the second time, the men

Carol has loved leave her with the responsibility of taking care of a child, and the immense pressure of her precarious situation is starting to take its toll on her. Tina however, Carol's friend, is a strong solidaric ally of hers at the start of the novel. She takes care of Leon and Jake when Carol cannot take care of them. She is the only proper support Carol has, as the fathers are not present. Carol cries when she does not have any money, as it is yet a reminder of the responsibility she has for the survival of her children. Having no money to alleviate the felt precarity is extremely depressing for a single mother, as she is left with a feeling of hopelessness, of an inability to do anything to alleviate her situation. It is this constant reminder of her precarious situation, the lack of help from the children's fathers, and her own perceived lack of response to her children's survival which leads to Carol's mental state deteriorating in front of Leon as she continues to cry.

De Waal manages to express the inner thoughts of Leon eloquently, in a very serious, yet childlike way. Through Carol, we can see how the 4As can leave one individual incapacitated, and de Waal does such a good job in showing us the start of the neglect through the observations of Leon. The novel is written from a third person limited subjective perspective following Leon, and as such, we perceive the world around him in a third-person stream of consciousness technique. Through this technique, the narrator brings us into intimate contact with Leon's interior thought processes, which lends the novel more authenticity and reality in its narration. Furthermore, the stream of consciousness is also used as an ironic narrative technique in that it expects the reader to grasp what Leon cannot himself. The obliviousness and childlike thought processes make Leon miss certain inferences, which the reader gets, leading the reader to feel more sympathy Leon and his precarious situation. The authentic way it conveys the thought processes of a child is one of the novel's strong suits, as it creates vivid imagery of the working-class uncertainty and strife a child can face under neoliberal precarity.

Leon is eight years old at the start of the book and grows to be 10 during it.

Throughout however, Leon is forced to grow up fast, due to his material conditions shifting.

There is a shift around chapter 5, where the structure in Leon's life is deteriorating.

As soon as the summer holidays start, things get jangled up at home. Leon can go to bed whenever he wants and sometimes he can even go to sleep on the sofa because his mum doesn't notice. He can even eat whatever he wants but if there is nothing in the fridge and nothing in the cupboard it doesn't really count" (de Waal, 2016, p. 21)

Through these first sentences of chapter 5, we can get a sense of how Leon experiences the start of the neglect, as well as a sense of how Leon deliberates. Being able to sleep whenever he wants to, and even on the sofa, seems like freedom for an eight-year-old child. Questions are raised however, when he adds the fact that it is because his mother is not noticing him.

There is a sense of misplaced optimism only a child could have to find the light and fun in his precarious situation. De Waal effectively portrays the thoughts and experiences of Leon through his inability to understand the gravity of his situation. This lets the reader infer the actual conditions he is living in, rather than having the narrator tell the reader it directly. He continues thinking on the fact that he can eat whatever he wants, but there is nothing in the fridge to eat. The lack of support and structure is threatening one of the core physiological needs of a person, especially a child, namely food. The way Leon deliberates on his own situation is done in a typically childlike stream of consciousness way. This way of thinking is to a degree selfish, focused on one's own experience and how it directly ties to oneself. De Waal expresses this by using longwinded sentences, restraining her use of punctuation. This leads to the sentences being breathy, like a child coming into the kitchen, talking about their day, as they are drinking a glass of water, all simultaneously. I believe that this feeling is present in the passage above. De Waal's track record of working with children at this age, in these types of precarious positions, gives her special insight. I would argue that for *My Name is Leon* to be effective in the way it portrays precarity through children, the author should

have authentic experience of working-class life. De Waal herself is the daughter of working-class Irish and Caribbean parents, lending even further authenticity to the experiences of a young biracial child in the 80s.

Precarity and Its Consequences on Parenthood

Comparing Leon's circumstances to Paul and Jodie, we can see how important it is for young working-class children to have strong, solidaric, parental figures in their lives, to help them to traverse the pitfalls of precarity. The parents in "No Lay, No Pay" are seen as strong working-class people. Paul's father is stoic and enigmatic, but a reliable factor in Paul's early life.

Jodie's strong matriarchal mother and easy-going father also are a sense of security for Jodie as she traverses working-class life. However, both Leon and Jake's fathers are not present for them. Jake's father never takes any responsibility for his own child and leaves him with Carol. Leon's father was present in prior years; however, he is currently incarcerated. Their mother Carol falls into despair and drug abuse due to her not coping with the pressure of being a single mother. There is a complete lack of solidarity offered from the fathers to Carol. They are taking an individualistic, selfish choice to leave their own children behind. This could be equated to Uncle Paul, from Russian-Red's story, but as an even larger force of precarity in Carol's and her children's lives. The opportunities for "working-class nepotism" and safety that can be provided by strong working-class parents are missing from Leon's life. More importantly than the "working-class nepotism", Leon is missing a father figure who could offer emotional, financial, and practical support. Single parenthood is hard, especially if the financial ends do not meet. As the father of Jake does not take on his responsibility as a father, Carol feels a strong sense of anomie, of being trapped. She is the only one who will take care of her babies, and the pressure of this, pared with her broken heart amplifies her feelings of despair.

Through the lack of a strong parental presence, Leon feels he must take the role of the provider for his mother and brother. This eventually leads to Leon running out of money to steal from his mother's purse, and as such, he must ask Auntie Tina for money. She sees the state of him, which leads to her calling child protective services. Carol's only support is the one who calls for her children to be taken away. You cannot really blame her though. She has kids of her own to look after and is also living under precarious circumstances. There had previously been an argument between them about Tina having Carol's kids over more than they were at home. This led to Tina not speaking to Carol for a while, and as such, she did not see her quickly deteriorating mental condition. Carol's outbursts towards her only safety structure have sent her and her family even deeper down the pitfall of precarity. Jake and Leon get taken away from their mother, who is still incapacitated and, at this point, not in any shape to be a mother. The failings of the men in Carol's life to take responsibility of their children has cost Carol her kids. This obviously feels both cruel and difficult for not just Carol, but also Leon. In Leon's eyes, he was doing good with taking care of Jake and Carol. For Carol, it is the worst thing a mother can experience, seeing her children being taken away by force. These feelings drive Leon's motivations later in the story. As someone standing on the outside looking in however, it is obvious that the situation was not suitable for any child to be in, and that Carol at this point is an unfit mother. Her postpartum depression has incapacitated her.

Leon has shaken her and he has begged her and he has pulled her at her arms but nothing happens. Even though she's awake she won't talk or eat and she won't get up. That was yesterday and the day before yesterday, and now, today, Leon has got to do something. He goes upstairs again into her bedroom. Pink lights, like someone's holding their breath. One of Carol's hands lies on the sheet. Leon touches it with the tip of one finger. She doesn't move but her papery lips pucker over and over, like she's a goldfish in a bowl. 'Mum?' Carol turns her head to the wall. 'I'm hungry, Mum.' He realizes that the whole room smells like Jake's nappy and that his mum has wet the bed again. He opens the window but only a little crack in case Carol gets cold (de Waal, 2016, p. 23).

The despair of Carol's situation has led to the neglect of her children. As we see it through the eyes of Leon, it is utterly heart-breaking. Through the lens of institutionalized individualism that the neoliberal economic system has encouraged, Carol's neglect, depression and subsequent drug abuse are solely products of her own shortcomings as a parent. The novel rejects this, as through the context of everyone failing her, it paints a picture of abandonment by those around her. This situation could have been avoided long ago, if Carol's men stayed with her and took some responsibility and provided for their children. If Carol could receive help for her postpartum depression as well, a lot of the ensuing problems in her, Leon's and Jake's lives could have been avoided. The un-solidaric, institutionalized individualist choice the men made, has led to a mother losing her children to child protective services.

Precarity and Children Growing Up Fast

Working-class children must adapt at an early age to their family's material conditions to a larger degree than middle- or upper-class children. In recent years, there is a sentiment which states that "30 is the new 20". This carefree approach to life is not afforded to working-class children, living under neoliberal precarity, nor has it ever afforded them this approach. The thought of helping the family as soon as one can is a trait of working-class solidarity, and can be a viable option, as we saw in "No Lay, No Pay". There is however a stark difference in the age where Paul and Leon are expected to be grown up. Leon thinks he must provide for his mother and brother at the age of eight, which puts a lot of pressure on such a young boy. When he eventually must ask for money from Tina, it feels like a betrayal when she does the correct thing of calling child protective services. Leon had created a sense of security for them while he took care of them, but it was never going to last. And as Leon and Jake are taken from their mother, Leon's expectations of himself and his own abilities and the expectations others put upon him start clashing.

The expectations others have of Leon to be able to understand complex themes and ideas is throughout the novel a source of conflict. He often has to find himself accepting concepts which an eight-nine-year-old has trouble understanding, while at the same time being babied and coddled when he acts out on the maturity level, he believes he is at. From Leon's point of view, it feels like the world around him cannot figure out how to respect him as a young working-class child. The first clash happens when Tina is talking to child protective services about their situation, where Leon thinks she is saying mean things. "No one says a thing and then Tina starts all over again, saying the same things, saying bad things about Carol and pretending that Leon wasn't looking after Jake properly" (de Waal, 2016, p. 27). Here we see Leon taking offense to Tina accurately describing the situation to the care worker he feels a sense of disrespect. For Leon, Tina is actively sabotaging their family life, as he perceives her accurate statements to the authorities as lies, stating that she is merely "pretending that Leon wasn't looking after Jake properly".

When Leon and Jake are brought to Maureen in temporary foster care, he finally meets someone who takes him seriously. Maureen starts gaining Leon's trust through asking him about Jake, as she rightfully understands that Leon is the one who knows what Jake wants. It is done in a very pedagogical sense, but also in a very beautiful respectful way towards Leon.

'And you are the quiet one.' 'Yes.' 'But he's the boss.' She smiles so Leon smiles back. 'I get the picture,' she says. 'Bet he's had you up and down like a yo-yo. He'd be giving you orders if he could speak, wouldn't he?' She goes over to Jake and gives him a plastic mixing spoon. Jake starts banging the tray on his high chair. Leon and Maureen put their hands over their ears. 'Have I made a mistake?' she says and Leon laughs. 'So what's his routine then?' she asks and she sits down opposite him at the yellow table. She picks up a pad and a pencil and writes 'Jake' at the top of the page. (de Waal, 2016, p. 31-32).

Leon is understandably tense and untrusting, as he just been moved into foster care with an unknown woman. At the start of the passage this lack of trust, which is at this point ingrained within him, is expressed as he mirrors the smile of Maureen. Through Maureen's humour and

her reaction to Jake's loud banging, Maureen manages to be the first one to make Leon genuinely laugh. Through this genuine laughter, she finds yet another way to gain Leon's trust by asking him while sitting opposite of him how to take care of Jake. It is apparent that Maureen knows what she is doing and that she is experienced within her field. The fact that she sits directly opposite Leon is a strong signifier of the respect she has for Leon as a working-class child who has been through some of the hell which life thus far has laid in front of him. This interaction leads Leon into lowering his guard, telling Maureen what Jake likes and dislikes. It is also the start of a positive change in the life of Leon, as he finally has a guardian in his life who understands him. The respect that Maureen has shown Leon is not a given however, not even from the other ones working in child protective services.

Before continuing, I find it important to add some thoughts on intersectionality. For this thesis, there has been a heavy emphasis on the authentic, the real lived experiences, of the working class and precariat. Therefore, when I have been exploring the old working class, I needed both male and female perspectives to avoid painting a monolithic view of this group of people. At this point, we must further expand the intersectional lens to include not just class and gender but also race (Crenshaw, 2016). Sadly, race plays a large part of how one is perceived in the UK, and this is no different during the 80s. Evidence of this in *My Name is Leon* is the fact that the brothers are split up to give the white child a fighting chance at adoption. When race, gender and class interplay, the different ways one experiences precarity and oppression changes, one amplifying the other. This will be a focal point when discussing the climax of the text, as it pertains to class, race, and the perception of blame.

Leon's first proper meeting with racism happens after they have been living with Maureen for six months. The childcare worker Salma talks to Leon about Jake's future. Throughout the conversation, Leon only nods and answers "yes", almost like an early onset form of working-class stoicism.

Everyone knows how much you love your little brother. Even though you look different, you can see you're brothers and that you love each other". "Wouldn't you like Jake to be in a family with a mum and dad of his own? (de Waal, 2016, p. 45).

The childcare worker here acknowledges Leon's distinct disadvantage in the adoption pool, that being race. "Even though you look different, you can see you're brothers and that you love each other". She is deliberately vague when explaining the reason as well as the concept of adoption to Leon. And through her vagueness, she expects Leon to understand that he is disadvantaged due to his race, while at the same time asking him to be "sensible" about the whole ordeal.

You're not a little boy anymore, Leon. You're nine. You're nine years old and so tall that you look about eleven or twelve, don't you? Yes. Or thirteen. A lot of people think you are older than you are. And you are very sensible as well. You had a long time looking after other people, didn't you, and that made you grow up very fast. Oh I know you still like your toys, but still (de Waal, 2016, p. 45).

It is as if the care worker is justifying that it is fine that Leon is not being adopted due to him having to act more grown up than what he is. The overall vagueness in the way she speaks to Leon leads me to infer what the narrative tries to make us understand. She wants to be "sensible", not bringing up race to not make it uncomfortable for her, as well as not to stir a reaction from Leon and especially Maureen. To make Leon act respectful and "sensible", she disrespects him in an indirect way as she sneakily continues to express racist undertones in her explanations to 9-year-old Leon. It all ends up being manipulative towards Leon, as he agrees to her request of Jake being adopted.

After the childcare worker leaves, Leon's actual understanding of adoption is revealed when Maureen directly asks him about it. "She means it, you know, love. Did you understand that, Leon? Jake is going to be adopted." Leon answers "What's adopted?" "Jake is going to have a new mum and dad" "Why?" (de Waal, 2016, p. 47). de Waal makes it apparent for the reader

that Leon has not understood the gravity of the situation before this, and that Jake is being taken away for adoption without him. Maureen also offers us her two cents on why only Jake is being adopted. “Because, love, just because. Because he’s a baby, a white baby. And you’re not. Apparently. Because people are horrible and because life isn’t fair pigeon. Not fair at all. And if you ask me, it’s plain wrong and –“ (de Waal, 2016, p. 47). Maureen tells both Leon and the reader the unfortunate truth about why Leon is not as desirable as Jake for adoption, which the childcare worker could not do. In their own selfish way, parents who are looking to adopt want a young baby, a clean slate so to speak. They do not want one that has gone through the trauma created by precarity. They want a child that looks like them. The one that is arguably the most in need of a safe home is denied it, because he had to grow up fast in a precarious environment, but also because of his skin. In Maureen’s rant to Leon, she displays the last A that we have not touched upon at all in the other texts, namely anger. The anger she feels is directed towards the society putting a child who was already in a precarious situation into an unwinnable one. There is also a frustration there, as the one representing society couldn’t even explain in a way Leon could understand why he is being put in this situation, due to her beating around the bush over the inferred racism within the system. Maureen is direct in her condemnation of the racism informing the childcare worker’s decision on splitting the boys, stating that “it’s not fair at all”. Like uncle Paul, society has decided it wants one and not the other, leaving one to have a good life and leaving the other in total despair. Leon is expected to understand very complex concepts at his early age, because society has to a degree given up on him. There is a duality, where he is expected to understand complex grown up concepts as a child but while also being treated as a child.

Trying to explain the duality, I would propose that Leon is going through adultification put upon him by society and the ones around him, except Maureen. Linda Burton at the University of Durham explains it as a contextual, social, and developmental

process in which youth are prematurely, and often inappropriately, exposed to adult knowledge and assume extensive roles responsibilities within their family networks (Burton, 2007, p. 329). Research done on adultification by Jahnine Davis and Nicholas March focuses on Black children in the UK, applying an intersectional lens to their work. They conclude that they are more likely to go through adultification than other children (Davis, March p. 255). The picture that is painted of Leon through the story so far implies that Leon is subjected to adultification. Him having to inappropriately take the role as the caretaker of his brother and mother at the age of nine is him taking an inappropriate responsibility within his family. Maureen sees that the care worker is exerting adultification towards Leon as she is calling him old for his age and as she is explaining the complex and heart-breaking idea of a split-adoption to him poorly. Maureen on the other hand sees the situation for what it is, explaining it to Leon in a direct, working-class fashion, that life is not fair, it is because you have darker skin, but then she stops herself. “And if you ask me its plain wrong and-“ (de Waal, 2016, p. 47). Maureen realizes she is doing the same thing as everyone else around has done around Leon, namely adultification. A child should not have to be thinking about adult knowledge which he is not yet equipped to understand. Working-class and Black children are to a larger degree not afforded the luxury of childlike ignorance. Leon reacts in a “working-class stoic” fashion, not just as a product of his lack of understanding, but also out of fearful respect.

It was only yesterday and since then nothing has been the same so of course Leon remembers her. She has a sad smile back on her face and also the look of fear. Maureen also has a different face. Leon knows that if the social worker wasn't here, Maureen would have rung her sister and said, ‘Know what, Sylvia? They’ve pissed me right off again, they have. Social services? Waste of bloody space, if you ask me.’ But she never swears when the social workers are around. Neither does Leon. (de Waal, 2016, p. 44).

Leon senses from the change of manner in Maureen that he must follow along accordingly to receive the best possible outcome. The reaction chosen is stoicism, as opposite of the bawdy

presence Maureen usually has. Through adultification, it is implied that he should be reasonable when talking about being split from his brother.

Jake is Adopted – The 4As Cements in Leon

With the departure, and the subsequent splitting of the siblings, the 4As start taking hold in Leon. So far in the novel, there is a pattern emerging that is amplifying the 4As Leon is experiencing. The pattern is tied to the expectation others have of him and the lies the ones around him tell him. It seems to Leon that every time he has a good thing, the rug gets pulled from under him, and he is once again thrust into precarity, amplifying his experience of the 4As. The first obvious ones are his father being present in his early life, only to leave him and Carol later. The second would be him and Jake being taken away from their mother, despite Leon believing he did a good job taking care of them. Leon is promised by the care workers he can go back to their mum's and get the remaining toys, this never happens. Jake is split from Leon, due to his age and the fact that he is white. When Leon finally starts liking living with Maureen, she turns ill, and he has to move to Maureen's sister Sylvia, who he does not really like. It seems like every time Leon attains a sense of stability, the rug is pulled from underneath him. The frustration is manifested through the 4As. As he is moved around in the childcare system, he is alienated, as he has no semblance of home. When he adjusts, it constantly changes, not due to anything he himself has done. Leon also feels anxiety over his mother and Jake. He strongly, yet wrongly believes that if only he was with them, he could take care of them. Leon even brings it up to the care workers but is obviously denied this opportunity, as he is a child. He constantly feels an anxiety over the fact that his mother and especially Jake are gone from his life. The anxiety over Jake eventually fuels Leon's desire to go and get him back, which is the climax of the novel. The anxiety also fuels his anomie, as

he wants to get away from the care workers and to be with his mother and brother. This will be discussed further later in the chapter.

The precarious nature of Leon's security leads to him feeling a strong sense of alienation. Leon finds himself having to take up new roles every time his situation changes. There is a clash between Leon's apparent and felt maturity, with the fact that he is a nine-year-old child. The precarity surrounding Leon is amplifying it, as we saw previously with the care worker conflating his role as an independent agent of his own life, and his role as a nine-year-old child who is in dire need of nurturing. These feelings of anxiety, anomie and alienation, manifests into the last A, namely anger. Leon is very often angry towards the others in his life, his father, mother, brother, and care takers. This anger stems from the accumulating feelings of precarity. And in Leons instance, the form this takes is anger. This may also be due to Leon being a child, making this anger not just a product of precarity, but also his physical age. Leon is continually being thrust into situations not due to him doing anything wrong. I find this to be a good picture for the ruthless way precarity affects the working class today.

After staying at Sylvia's for a couple of days, the living arrangement at hers becomes a lot more permanent and Leon even switches schools. The care worker he only calls the Zebra, because of her hair, gives Leon a BMX bike. When Leon gets on the bike, he can really express his sense of anomie, to get away from the precarious mess he so usually finds myself in. Through the bike, he senses a form of freedom which has not been afforded to him. He can choose how fast he wants to go⁴, he can choose whether to take the next intersection, and he can choose to go home when he is feeling tired. He can finally start acting out his anomie, if only for a moment. Riding around he encounters a man, who brings him to an allotment garden, which I will discuss in the next part of the chapter.

⁴ And he wants to go fast

The experiences precarity pulls Leon through, has had a lasting effect on the way Leon views people. Leon has evolved trust issues towards new people in his life, and he is wary of strangers. These trust issues are tied to the ones in the child protective service system, which he sees as the cause of the struggle he finds himself in. He does not have the same issues with the people he meets on his own accord, like the one he finds biking. When Leon meets Tufty, his friendly and cool demeanour towards Leon lends him to trust him enough to fix his bike to be perfect for him

He unscrews something and pulls the seat higher. He unscrews something else by the handlebars and pushes them down. He tightens everything up and pushes it towards Leon. ‘Now you’ll go faster. It’s a bit small for you, you know. But this will fix it.’ Leon sits back on and he’s right. It is better. He rides round in a little circle. (de Waal, 2016, p. 91)

Leon meets someone who does a nice thing to him solely from the goodness of their heart, and not as a distraction from the strife he so often finds himself facing. This is a new experience for Leon. Interestingly, he also has a sense of blind trust in his mother as well, which is understandable for a child to have for his mother. It becomes more and more evident by each visit however, that she absolutely is not in any shape to take care of a child. Leon is still hopeful for the time being, misjudging his mother. Then again, how can we expect a nine-year-old to fully understand the hardships of postpartum depression and drug abuse, and the effect that has had on her ability to be a parent.

Allotment Gardening – A Grounding Agent

After Leon gets his bicycle, he gets to know Tufty, who is also riding his bike. Leon feels a strong sense of admiration towards Tufty. He is older than Leon and like Leon, is black. For Leon, seeing someone like him being that cool instantly makes him gravitate towards him. As

they get to know each other, he takes on a big brother role for Leon. Tufty brings Leon to the allotment gardens, where Tufty has his own plot, where he starts teaching Leon about gardening. When he arrives there for the first time, he is also acquainted with Mr. Devlin. He is a middle-aged man from Ireland, who works as the groundskeeper on the allotment gardens. It is never explicitly stated, but one could assume that he possibly escaped the troubles, and that is why he is there in Birmingham. It is alluded to in an argument between Tuft and Devlin towards the end of the novel.

‘That’s what you do, isn’t it? You and your IRA. It’s a protest. Get it? A protest. Except we don’t bomb people in their beds like you Irish people.’ ‘Oh, every Irishman is a terrorist, is that what you are saying?’ (de Waal, 2016, p. 222)

It is also later revealed in this argument that Devlin has lost his son. Our first meeting with Devlin is right after meeting Tufty, where Devlin is telling Tufty not to bike on the path, and to keep the bike off the grass. There is tension between Tufty and Devlin, and they don’t seem to like each other very much. When Leon Meets tufty and Devlin, he lies about his age, telling them that he is older than he really is. I see this as a symptom of the duality of adultification he has endured. If he lies about his age, maybe they will see him as more of a man, rather than the boy he is, respecting him more.

Through Tufty and Devlin, Leon is introduced to allotment gardening, which is very much a working-class activity. The gardening is done in a productive way, to grow some food, but its main purpose is as a recreational activity. For working-class people, gardening at an allotment can be a safe haven from the precariousness waiting for them in their work and social life. For Leon, I see the introduction to allotment gardening and the relationship he forms with Tufty and Devlin as grounding agents for Leon’s life. These are the first people he has met on his own accord, out of his own free will. Everyone else so far in his life has come to him through the ones around him, ringing his doorbell, coming with bad news. This is not

the case for Tufty and Devlin, however. They are also seen as friends, especially Tufty, of which Leon has had a staggering lack. The only friend Leon has so far had has been the television set in the various living rooms he has found himself in. Leon has previously had an absence from the men in his life but is now get familiar with two new male figures in his life. Tufty takes on the role of a cool big brother, while Devlin is seen as a father figure to an extent. Leon now finds himself with male role models which he can look up to. The gardening can be regarded as a form of escapism, which is one of the main ways children might tackle precarity. But the gardening is not just useful as a form of escapism, through learning a skill, Leon is also getting a sense of accomplishment, which has been absent so far in his life as all of life's distractions so far have robbed him the opportunity to experience accomplishment.

The Clash and Climax – A Tale of the Precariat from Its Inception

Throughout the novel, Leon has been stealing. The first reference to stealing is in the quote analysed earlier in this chapter, when Leon steals money from his mother to buy food, sweets, and diapers. From this point, Leon steals sporadically from Maureen when he lives with her and puts whatever it is he stole in his rucksack. It is as if he steals not to gain the thing, but for the act itself. In the stealing Leon takes the initiative he controls it. The stealing can be interpreted as a way to make up for a lack of felt control over one's life, which is accelerated by his felt precarity. After the adoption of Jake however, the stealing has a goal, or a purpose. For Leon, the desperation that has resulted from the loss of his brother has fuelled a fire within him to get him back. Leon wants to go to Bristol where Jake has been adopted to reunite him and himself with his mother. This leads to Leon stealing more frequently and now even from the new acquaintances he has made on the allotment, Mr. Devlin and Tufty. The things he steals in preparation for his mission are coloured by the fact that he is a child. Of course, he steals money, to buy a map of England and to have enough rations for the trip. Further, he steals soda cans from Tufty as well as some of his gardening equipment. From Mr.

Devlin however, he steals his wooden gun, which looks very lifelike. Leon has been told that he should not touch it, so the act of stealing the gun while Mr. Devlin is sleeping in a drunken stupor is yet another moment where Leon can assert his control over a situation. The addition of this wooden gun to the story starts the trope of “Chekov’s Gun”, which states that if a Gun is introduced, it must go off at some point during the story. When Leon hears Sylvia making plans for her and Maureen to move out near the sea, he thinks he is going to be left again. It is at this moment where Leons’s eavesdropping leads him towards the climax of the story, facilitated by the preparation and stealing he has done.

Throughout the novel, references to conflicts and social problems have been prevalent in the background. The way de Waal has included it is in quite a clever way. We only get glimpses of it through the perception of Leon. He overhears Maureen talking about a miner’s strike, and he notices that she always swears when talking about Thatcher. Later, when he lives with Sylvia, he overhears them talking about the IRA and their hunger strikes. When a friend of Tufty, Castro, is a victim of police violence based on race, the problems are put to a forefront in the characters’ lives. This leads the local community of people of colour to start a riot based on this injustice. As Leon tries to run away to save Jake from his foster family, Tufty and Devlin follow him, and they end up in the middle of the riot, between the police and the rioters. Leon enters the midst of the riot as an oblivious spectator, ending as a target from both sides. The reason this happens is because Leon brandishes the gun in the middle of the crowd, yelling at them to take him to Bristol where Jake is. The confrontation after this is quite interesting to look at through the lens of the precariat.

No one is looking at Leon. No one is listening. No one ever listens. No one even knows he’s there. Leon takes his rucksack off and puts it down by his feet. He opens the top and takes out Mr Devlin’s gun. The policemen have truncheons and shields. The angry men have bricks and swearing. Leon has a gun. He holds it out towards the police. He turns and points it at the black men. Everything goes quiet. Leon stands tall and raises his head. ‘Hey!’ he shouts. The loudspeaker screams. ‘Put the weapon down!’ Leon turns back to the police and holds the gun up to eye level, looking down

the barrel. Mr Devlin has done a good job with this gun. The dark wood is oily and shiny. It has a little trigger and a little sight n the end of the barrel. ‘Dovedale Road!’ he shouts. ‘Take me to Dovedale Road!’ The angry men start creeping forward behind Leon. ‘He’s got a fucking gun!’ ‘That kid’s got a gun!’ ‘Get the fucking gun, man!’ As they get closer, Leon hears scuffling. ‘Don’t crowd him!’ ‘Get him!’ Then Leon hears one voice, clear and sweet over all the others. ‘Yo, Star!’ (de Waal, 2016, p. 238)

Here we see one of the groups in the precariat, namely the working immigrants and native people of colour, riot against their extreme felt precarity. There is nothing that can amplify the feelings of the 4As more than seeing one of your own being killed by the ones upholding that precarious system which is responsible for the death. Here, both race and class play a large role, but I would argue that race is the main motivation for the violence perpetuated by the police. Their oppression directly pushes people of colour into poverty and subsequently the working-class, amplifying the 4As into action. Extreme precarity leads understandably into a form of organized retaliation against the force putting them under it. Organizing under the parole of “precarity” might be hard, as the feeling of it is quite individual. When the precarity is embodied, like with the murder of a Black man by the police, precarity gets a face, which can be organized quickly and spontaneously around, which happens here in the novel.

This riot shows one of the groups in the precariat rioting against their material conditions. It also shows the inherent weaknesses in understanding the precariat as a monolithic group, able to organize across the different subgroups. There are three moments in the riot which are notable to analyse for us to get a better understanding of the precariat. As Leon runs in the middle and pulls out the gun, the attention of both the police, and the rioters is directed to him. As he raises the wooden gun, it is if is the gun went off, as everyone bows down (de Waal, 2016, p. 239). The tumultuous chaos that has been building within Leon coalesces and finally releases into one final stand, where he demands the police take him to his brother in Bristol. This is the start of a misunderstanding which leads to further violence. Like every other time in Leon’s life so far, he finds himself in the middle, being forced to fall

between the chairs. The rioters start throwing objects at him, and the police start advancing. I see this as a comment on the difficulties of being of being biracial, where Leon finds neither help nor respite in either of the groups. Devlin runs to Leon taking the gun from him, yelling that the gun is wooden. The rioters now see a white man with a gun, while the police see through the lens of adultification a Black child with a gun. As a riot lacks nuance, the rioters cannot possibly know that Devlin is Irish, so they automatically assume he is there to counterprotest their riot due to the colour of his skin. Even though the origins for the protests can be tied to the felt precarity of the immigrant and people of colour group, race trumps class position in this riot, even if their class interests align. The police see a Black child with a gun next to a man who could be his father, as he is biracial. The police judge affiliation in the riot based on skin colour, which made them targets. Devlin is hit, and Tufty runs out to help him to safety. As they drag Devlin into an alley, a police officer runs at them and starts beating Tufty with a truncheon, calling him and Leon multiple racial slurs. The moment where the ones which are expected to keep the peace and watch over your safety sees you as the enemy and attack you must be an utterly alienating experience. The only crime Tufty has committed here is being born with darker skin than the police officer. Leon manages to talk a semblance of sense in the police officer, making him understand that they are innocent. Within this interaction, there is a contrast to the adultification Leon has endured, as the police officer is in a sense infantilized.

We are not warriors (...) we have dignity and worth.” The policeman’s mouth falls, slack and loose his truncheon still in the air, like he’s raised his hand at school to answer a question. “We’ve been growing things” he says. “Scarlet Emperors. That’s what we do. (de Waal, 2016, p. 241)

Leon is the only one who can stop the policeman from beating Tufty. He must rely on the policeman to see his individuality in the context of himself, admitting to Leon’s, and subsequently Tufty’s, inherent humanity. There might not be anything more peaceful than

gardening, and the reference to that, and to explicitly what they are growing, forces the policeman to see them as something more than the group he despises. To see their inherent dignity and worth. Through the humanization of his friends, Leon manages to save Tufty and Devlin, and they go to Sylvia's house for safety. In his interaction with the racist police officer, Leon referenced a poem Tufty wrote prior called 'Ode to Castro'. The name is not just a reference to his friend who was beaten, but the name also refers to Fidel Castro, the now former socialist leader of Cuba. The undertones of this name, speak to the significance of revolution, as well as the utility the poem has in the riot.

I don't want to be a warrior
I didn't come for war
I didn't come for argument
For policeman at my door.

I didn't come for least and last
For the Isms and the hate
That you pile upon me day by day
Till you crush me with the weight

It was you that took me off my land
Took my name, my ways, my tongue
Sold me cheap, from hand to hand to hand
Made slaves from all my young

We are not a warrior
We are Africans by birth
We have truth and rights and God besides
We have dignity and worth.

We have lost the way we used to live
And the way we behaved

We are the consequence of history

We are the warriors you made. (de Waal, 2016, p. 202).

Tufty's poem is a powerful commentary on race relations in the UK, and the precarious nature it brings forth. Through the slave trade the Africans have been stolen from their homes and brought to a country which ultimately demonizes and criminalizes them through racism. The "ism's" and the hate that pile up every day, crushing him with its weight is in a sense an example of the intense alienation and hate people of colour are subject to. This crushing sensation which fills them with the 4As, of anxiety, anomie, anger, and alienation, makes the peaceful people into warriors. As society does not recognize their dignity and worth, due to the colour of their skin, it is understandable that the oppression leads to action against the force which criminalizes their existence. Tufty is born in Britain making him as British as any other, but not in the eyes of the ones who protect and serve, alienating him due to the colour of his skin. This frustration over the intense alienation is expressed in the last quatrain. "We have lost the way we used to live / and the way we used to behave". And as Tufty finishes the poem, it is their countries own doing and consequences of history which has made them warriors. They are people of dignity who are pushed into a corner by the police, forcing them into clashes against the oppressing force. When Leon used this poem, it is firstly a signifier of the bond between Tufty and Leon as a brotherly figure and its solidarity. Secondly, it is notable that Leon references the second to last, rather than the last quatrain, which has a peaceful solidaric tone which resonated with the policeman. There is a strong sense of hope for peace in using these lines.

Tufty's poetics paint an accurate picture of the harsh situation for working-class people of colour, especially in times of crisis. For race is, and will be, a line of conflict in the past, present and sadly the future. The way race-based discrimination intersects with class-

based oppression often hurts the Precariat's main objectives, and its ability to form a cohesive class front. Throughout the story there are references to the miner strikes, which are class-based struggles. The people of colour who are subjected to violence by the police have in essence the same interests as these workers, to alleviate precarity in their life. These are two groups suffering under the same system, but if race is still a point for oppression and bigotry, this will bleed into the mind of the upper, middle, and sadly, some of the working-class, due to cheap populism. When the police, or any other group attack people of colour based on race, xenophobia, or as we will see in *In Our Mad and Furious City*, Islamophobia, the possibility for cross group cooperation within the precariat is diminished greatly, due to the overgeneralization force that race can play. When communities are attacked by the police, it heightens distrust and a divide not only between the community and the police, but also society at large, hindering cooperation. Through the police's "divide and conquer" strategy of oppression of the working-class at large, they manage to hinder any cooperation. The notion of divide and conquer will be further discussed in the following chapter. This aligns with Standing's fears of lack of cooperation within the proposed classes that make up the precariat.

Creating Community Through Solidarity

The end of the book shows the importance of class solidarity in the intersection of race. Here, we see Leon finally getting the support he so desperately needs, from the people who are now his caretakers and role models. Through community and solidarity, they create a home for Leon, when precarity has ravaged his former to smithereens. As Leon, Tufty and Mr. Devlin all arrive at Sylvia's house, they are fixed up by her and Maureen and given a place to stay for the night. This leads to Tufty and Devlin becoming more acquainted with Sylvia and Maureen, and Devlin and Sylvia especially find a good tone. In this moment, past grievances between the men and misunderstandings between Leon and the women are resolved. By finding common solidarity they create community despite old grievances is what is important

for not just themselves, but for Leon as well. The story ends on the day of the royal wedding of Prince Charles and Diana, where Sylvia is hosting a watch party in celebration of the soon to be newlyweds.

The helpers around Leon have always been limited to an extent. It is interesting to look at the women and men that Leon started with, and the ones he ended up with as his guardians, or role models. Carol has been held back by the fact that she is a single mother, heartbroken, going through postpartum depression, coping through drug use. Carol finds herself in utter despair, unable to be a mother for Leon, even now at the end of the book, where she outright tells Leon that she is not fit to be a mother. Tina has her own child to look after, leaving her to call child protective services which put Leon and Jake into the care of Maureen. Carol sadly cast Leon into further precarity due to her neglect, but she is severely mentally ill and in need of professional help. The sad truth is that Carol has no more energy to give to her children, and it was the right thing to put them up for adoption. What was not right however was to split up the siblings, due to the difference of the colour of their skin. Despite this, Maureen is now the bedrock in the life of Leon. She has a beautiful sense of respect for Leon, which is often part due to her being so unapologetically working-class. With Maureen, Leon is not put through the adultification that has been indirectly put upon him by his mother and directly put on him by some of the childcare workers. When Maureen fell ill, her sister Sylvia took over, and like Maureen, she managed to create a solid foundation, a home for Leon to come to when he was done exploring the allotments for that day. Even though everything was good when Leon lived with Sylvia, this fear was always stuck in Leon's mind and eventually led to the misunderstanding that Maureen and Sylvia would move out to the sea.

'Just you and me Mo.' (...) Jake looks at him from his photo with his hand stretched out, trying to pull his hair or take his truck or sit on his lap. Leon lies in his bed, closes his eyes and puts his hands on his stomach in case he's going to be sick. He feels all

his blood turning to clay, feels Sylvia's plans settle like an anchor on his chest, squeezing his throat into a narrow tube, filling his lungs with her sour perfume, her intimate odour. On his palms, he feels the squeeze of his mother's fingers, brown as rotten fruit. And, deep in his brain, he can hear something screaming and wailing, the new realization that Maureen is just like everyone else. (de Waal, 2016, p. 216).

Leon must have felt a sense of déjà vu, that Sylvia and Maureen would call someone to unload him somewhere else. The anxiety of him being abandoned has left him not only with an emotional reaction, but with a physiological one. He draws a conclusion which alienates the bedrock in his life, namely Maureen. And this leads to his anomie over being with his mother and brother to fuel these emotions further, into the actions which are the climax. He must have felt a feeling of undesirableness and alienation. It was all a big misunderstanding however, and Sylvia and the now recovering Maureen form a solid foundation for Leon's future. The men Leon started out with are no longer with him and have not been with him for a while when we first meet him. His only ever male role model up to the point where he meets Tufty and Devlin is his action man figure, which fittingly is lost at Carol's former apartment. For Tufty and Devlin to take on a brotherly and a fatherly role shows the immense strength that can come out of working-class solidarity. Leon has never had the traditional "nuclear family", but that is fine. He does not need it. In the face of despair and precarity, Leon and the ones around him have formed a family of their own. The basis of this family is one of working-class solidarity at its core, akin to the one found in Russian-Red and Allen, a family with three different nationalities transcendent of the boundaries of race, of elderly and of young, black white and biracial. They are all there to help each other, and especially Leon, to traverse precarity.

To end this chapter, I would like to look at a passage from the last page of the novel. Here, we find Leon on the day of the block part for the royal wedding.

He unzips his rucksack and tips everything out, his gardening tools and his packets of seeds. (...) he picks up the packet of Take-A-Chance and tips the seeds into his hand.

They are small and brown with wrinkled skin and nobody knows what's inside. He'll water them and look after them and hope for the best. There's lots more seeds to plant but he's got too much to do today, and anyway, he can hear Maureen calling. She'll want him to do another job or carry something or fetch her a chair. 'Leon!' he turns and runs. 'Coming' (de Waal, 2016, p. 262)

Here, Leon holds the "Take-A-Chance" seeds, which represent himself. The seeds are small, and brown and wrinkled, and nobody knows what's inside them. The skin is brown and wrinkled, like Leon's as he has endured the violent force of precarity thus far. But no one knows what is on the inside of the seeds. And if given a chance, watered properly and cared for, they might grow into something magnificent. When he plants the seeds, it is as if Leon plants himself, continuing the idea of gardening as a grounding agent. He now must come back and take care of these plants, enabling him to further feel a sense of belonging to the area and the allotments. Leon has been left to dry all his life up to this point. Through the family and community they create, Leon is afforded time to grow and, more importantly, to focus on being a child for once. De Waal shows here the latent potential in working class children, which underlines the importance of safety and nurturing, enabling them to bloom into strong individuals, alleviating some of the felt precarity. As Maureen yells for him, Leon feels a sense of importance and a sense of belonging. Leon is no longer alienated in his close environment. This might not be the case for outside of this community, as Maureen's words must echo through Leon when he thinks about the riot and the beating of Tufty; "(...) Life isn't fair pigeon". But for now, the story of Leon is open. He is finally afforded room to breathe and to grow. We do not know what happens next, but we can only hope life is fairer to him now than it was previously for him. Looking ahead in the next chapter, we will try to see if the seeds of London's youth can spring up through the concrete, or if the soil is toxic to the ones who need the mulch the most. Can flowers grow out of the London concrete?

Chapter 5: In Our Mad and Furious city

- 'It weren't the West bruv. We are the fuckin West Irfan. It was you (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 179).

The penultimate analysis chapter will look at Guy Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City* (Shortened to *IOM AFC*). This novel is an exploration of 48 hours of crisis in the life of the multifaceted working-class in modern day London. Keeping intersectionality from *My Name is Leon* in mind, we can see how yet another intersection impacts the felt precarity other than class and race, namely religion. Through *IOM AFC*, we meet a cast of characters with diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and safety nets, all trying to pry their way through the precarious sludge of London. The novel gives us a glimpse into the modern-day working class, as well as the future of the precariat. Through the struggle of the climax, we will see if Standing's fears on if the precariat as a class which has no hope of organising is materialized in working-class literature. Furthermore, this chapter will also be analysing the agency of the working-class individual in the face of chaos, through their actions and reactions. Lastly, the issue of solidarity will be central for our understanding of where the working-class finds itself today, and its hopes for the future.

The Historical Grounding of the Novel

IOM AFC takes place in 2013, in London, right after the infamous Lee Rigby killing where two Muhajiroun convertites to Islam killed a soldier of the British army in broad daylight in London. The novel is based on the historical event, but Gunaratne has fictionalised that event, altering some of the details. The perpetrators did it to retaliate for what they perceive as unjust military inventions in the middle east. Furthermore, the novel looks back at the Notting Hill Riot of 1958 and the troubles of the 1980's in Ireland. Throughout the thesis, the historical background of the texts chosen has closely followed the start of the neoliberal project.

Through this line of thinking, we have also followed the political career of Margaret Thatcher and the Britain she has been instrumental in forming. We have seen before her political career in “No Lay, No Pay”, during it in “The Funeral and the Wedding” and *My Name is Leon*, and now, as the main story starts after the killing of Lee Rigby, we can see that the story takes place after Thatcher’s death, giving us an opportunity to see her neoliberal Britain bask in all its precarious glory. Not only are we completing my proposed structure of the historical grounding of the thesis with this novel, but the same structure following her life and death is also found in this novel. Through the different deliberations on the past, and the precarity and hostility that working-class people of all background have faced before, during, and after her influence on the political landscape of Britain paints a grim picture for the class of the precariat.

Narrative Structure and Characters

For us to understand the story of the novel, and to analyse it properly, we must look at its narrative structure. *IOM AFC* is written from the first-person perspective, giving the reader full access to the narrator’s perception and thoughts. Interestingly, this perspective changes every chapter, jumping from character to character. The use of perspective in these texts is one of its strengths as it gives the reader an incredible sense of place within the story, as well as a strong relation to the characters, as we are intimately in the brain of most of the characters of the book. It also allows us greater insight into different perspectives on the same occurrences, leading to less of a monolithic view of the working-class. The novel demands a different approach than the last chapter, which followed the story and subsequently picked up on themes and points of analysis as it went on. In *IOM AFC*, we enter a world of characters that are truly alive. The novel is more of a meditation on how the different characters interact, react and act in relation to each other, their environment and their circumstances. The whole novel takes place in 48 hours of crisis in London following the death of the soldier. It is a

snapshot in time, but it also condenses different deliberations of the past into the very narrow temporal space. Through the crisis of *IOM AFC*, we will see a greater expression of the 4As in its 48 hours than in *My Name is Leon*'s timespan of two years. Through the climax of the story, and the death of Yusuf, there is nothing gained. There is only loss, grief, and then acceptance that life must move on for working-class people, as to not drown in the mad and furious city of London. As *My Name is Leon* has a grand principal plot in the story, *IOM AFC* has many underarching narratives for each of the characters, which intersect and intertwine. As the narratives intertwine, I analyse the overarching narrative through an intersectional lens to be that of how the exceptionally diverse working-class deal with precarity on the individual, family, and community levels.

Throughout the book, we follow Yusuf, Ardan, Selvon, Caroline, Nelson and for a brief moment towards the end, Yusuf's brother Irfan, as they traverse precarity. All of these characters are relating to time in different ways, some of them mainly looking forward, while some of them are looking backwards. The characters we are mainly following are the young ones, namely Yusuf, Selvon and Ardan, with Caroline and Nelson playing more of a supporting role in the story. In the first sub chapter, we are introduced to the characters one by one. Selvon is the son of Nelson, a first-generation immigrant from the Caribbean. Selvon and his father are the only two of the characters we follow who do not live in council housing, but Selvon has ties to it through his friend group. Selvon is working hard throughout the novel to become a great athlete, to get a scholarship to go to a good university. Selvon and his mother are also the primary caretakers of his father, Nelson. Nelson came to London through the Windrush generation after World War 2 as the UK faced labour shortages. In his chapters we are taken back through his memories to the time before he left London, and the time after he arrived there, he joined the civil rights movement. Later, after leaving the movement, earning enough money to get Selvon's mother to the UK, he eventually suffers a stroke, leaving him

bedridden, without the ability to speak. Caroline is an immigrant from Ireland, having been sent away from Ireland by her family, as they were prominent members of the IRA. Both Caroline and Nelson are sent away from their home, to create something out of their precarious situation. This will be discussed further in the thesis. Ardan is the son of Caroline and dreams of becoming a rapper. He is friends with Selvon and Yusuf. There is no contact with his father, as he left Caroline when Ardan was a baby. Yusuf finds himself without a father, as he has recently passed away due to cancer. His father was the Imam of the local mosque, and now that he is gone, the mosque is on the brink of radicalisation through its new Imam, Abu Farouk. Nevertheless, this new Mosque steps in as the primary caretaker for Yusuf, his mother, and his shut-in older brother Irfan. The characters are all at a crossroads of sorts. They all have questions and deliberations lying latent in the past, or ones that needs answering in the present to inform their way forward into this mad and furious city.

Creating Contemporary London – Authenticity and Transcendent Solidarity

The novel starts out with a prologue, which is not named like the other chapters. It is written in retrospective after the climax of the novel through the deliberations of Yusuf, after his death in the climax of the story. Gunaratne utilises the prologue with a purpose of world building, showing us the multifaceted face of contemporary working-class London, as well as contextualising the murder of Lee Rigby. They show us the incredible diversity of London, through the language used in the text, from each of the characters. “For my Breddas on Estate, they were from all over. Jamaicans, Irish pikeys, Nigerians, Ghanians, South Indians, Bengalis. Proper Commonwealth kids.” (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 3) The characters speak and think in a language tied directly to their background. Gunaratne is effectively giving a voice to the politically voiceless working-class in this novel. In their portrayal of these voices, each

narrator use their respective accents, which lends even more authenticity to the novel. Most striking is the voice they give Yusuf when he dies, as well as Nelson, who is locked within his own body due to his stroke. Through these voices, Gunaratne gives them an avenue to deliberate over their own agency in the face of precarious crises. This will be further discussed later in the thesis. Gunaratne lets Nelson think in his Caribbean accent and Caroline in an Irish. Yusuf, Ardan and especially Selvon all speak in a form of roadman slang, which is typical today in London, where the languages of everyone cramped into council housing blends into a tough fronting masculine language. The way they speak this slang is changed with their background, for example Yusuf using more terms tied to the Muslim community he is a part of. Language is deeply tied to their identity, as if it's a language of their own, to be in the know of.

Just look at how we spoke to one another: ennet-tho, myman, pussyo. Our friendships we called bloods and our home we called the ends. We revelled in calling our mothers crafted curses and receiving hard slaps to the head. Our combs cut lines in our hair and we scarred our eyebrows with blades. We became warrior tribes of mandem, slave-kings and palm-swiping cubs we were. Our parent knew nothing. And most others? Most others only knew us from the noise we made at the back of the busses.
(Gunaratne, 2018, p. 3)

The cornucopia of cultural reference points forms a dense and internal language and, in that, solidarity between “bloods”. The impenetrable nature of this brotherhood in essence alienates those around the ingroup. The inaccessibility is one of the core concepts to it, as the ones speaking it try to use it in such a way neither authority figures does nor bystanders can interfere with their goals, whether the goals are legal or not. These authority figures can be parents, police or the ones listening in front of them on the bus. Through this very explosive language, there is a strong sense of collective stoicism at the core foundation of it, as through the language, the user can front a veil of masculinity over their emotions. All three of the teenagers we meet in the story wear this mask to an extent, which could in a sense be seen as a defence mechanism against precarity. As society renders them voiceless politically, and like

a nuisance socially, they form their own voice which they control, shape, and form. Precarity does not allow mistakes, and therefore a stoic sense of presence is vital to bloom through the concrete. Calling your mates “bloods” as well is an intense signifier of solidarity within the friend groups. This solidarity goes across the boundaries of linguistic, ethnic, and national boundaries. A form of transcendent contemporary working-class solidarity. Overall, Guy Gunaratne has managed to create an authentic representation of the contemporary working-class in London, giving a voice to the voiceless.

Precarity’s Presence and Effect on the Lives of the Characters.

The three main characters of Selvon, Ardan and Yusuf all come from different immigrant groups, while being firmly working-class and British. As such, they encounter precarity everywhere around them in various ways. The three teenager’s worries and goals manifest differently. Yusuf is going through one of the most difficult life-altering crises one can go through, namely the early death of his father. Ardan is at a point of stagnation, lacking support and presence from his mother in his life. Selvon has been through a period of crises, after his father suffered a stroke. All of them have a lack of a paternal presence in their lives. The characters are in various stages of individually tumultuous times in their lives. We can see through these characters how precarity can create times of immense grief, times of dull stagnation, and times of resilient endurance. These three are all part of the working-class experience and are actualised through the feelings of the 4As.

Yusuf finds himself at the start of the story grieving the death of his father, recently lost to cancer. This crisis has left Yusuf without any clear goals for the future, as this momentous thing muddies the already unclear view of his future. Yusuf is very much in the present, trying to look back at what his father tried to teach him when he was alive. Left behind are him, his brother Irfan, and his mother. Yusuf’s family is from Pakistan and are

very conservative and traditional. His father was the Imam at the local mosque, and now that he is dead, the community around the mosque is taking care of the family. The entity of “community” in a sense is trying to act as the father figure for Yusuf and his brother. The mosque is however also in a crisis following the death of their Imam, as the new one, Abu Farouk, is an Islamist extremist, who utilises the Muhajiroun as a policing force in their community. Yusuf finds himself at a crossroads between the Muslim community, which is increasingly radicalising, and his “bloods”, who are the friends he has chosen. Through the 4As Yusuf understandably feels a strong sense of anxiety. His anxiety is over the material conditions for his family, as his mother has always stayed at home, and never worked. His brother’s mental health is also deteriorating at a rapid pace, leading him to feel an anxiety over his condition. The clash of expectations between his friends and radicalising community also leads to a sense of anomie, which manifests itself through escapism. Yusuf would much rather play football with his “bloods” on a Sunday, “(...) dodging Muhajiroun”, as he frames it (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 3). The conflict between his identity as a part of the new face of the working-class Londoner, and the expectations of him at the new increasingly radicalised mosque alienates Yusuf from himself. The expectations he has for his own community are also challenged in the climax, which will be discussed later in this chapter. He is being torn between two worlds, which continues to bother Yusuf all the way to the climax of the text.

The crisis Yusuf and his family are going through demands of him to have a strong presence in the present, but he cannot help himself from trying to look back at what his father tried to teach him when he was alive. Yusuf thinks back at a trip to Pakistan when he was eleven.

This was a memory that had all the simplicity of a photograph for me. Abba opening the world up with every story, and me and Irfran listening on, one enraptured, one indifferent. How distant it all felt now. (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 143)

Yusuf's father was a lot clearer in his advice to Yusuf compared to the father in " ", but it was often coated in religion, which did not always resonate as strongly with. Through his memories, Yusuf seek for a smidge of the "working-class nepotism" he disregarded at the time, but which he so sorely needs now, as the man of the house. Yusuf has had a strong father figure in his life, but it is ripped away from him. Yusuf finds himself being torn at the limbs from all the expectations that he himself, his family, his religious community, and society demands of him to live up to. The burning of the mosque, leads him to join the protest organized by the Muslims that ultimately leads to his unfortunate death at the hands of a racist Islamophobe, as well as his own community.

The precarity surrounding Ardan's working-class experience has led him into a sense of stagnation. He finds himself without a smidge of a feeling of mastery. Ardan and Selvon discuss their future after a sparring match in a boxing ring.

'-How am I going to uni fam?' '-Didn't you get the grades?' '- Blood, I did alright in the mocks. But I dunced my GCSEs. I never got proper marks for sixth form. But they let me off, ennet. Mum's on benefits and that, so'. (...) '-What you gonna do then?' '- Minimum wage, ennet'. (Gunaratne, 2018 p. 161).

Ardan has flunked school, he is not too good with the girls⁵, and not that great on the pitch in the courtyard between the council houses. What he has on the other hand is a talent for rapping. He is constantly writing lyrics down, meticulously studying his craft in the times he finds himself alone. It is through his rapping that Ardan dreams for an opportunity to bloom out of the top floor of the council housing flat he and his mother Caroline live in. For Ardan though, this all seems like a farfetched dream, which probably will not materialize. This is due to his sense of anxiety tied to performing in front of others. This anxiety leas Ardan to act in a stoic fashion towards his mates, not revealing his abilities at all, not even to Selvon. For Ardan, rapping might be what lets him act out his sense of anomie, and therefore he must

⁵ At least not as good as Selvon

hone his skill to its fullest degree. What if he started rapping and everyone made fun of him? What if everyone around him saw it as a joke and used it against him, in a fashion like the banter of “No Lay, No Pay”. Pursuing a creative artistic career to escape working-class life is excruciatingly hard, and one must excel at the highest level for it to pan out. Unlike a middle-class teenager, Ardan cannot just pay out of pocket for all the equipment needed, a recording studio, mixing and mastering. Before even thinking about recording anything, Ardan is in sore need of positive affirmation, from his friends, as well as from his mother at his “ends”. Ardan gets his moment on his way back from the gym, where Selvon pushes him to battle rap some other teenagers who were rapping on the bus, much to Ardan’s dismay.

-‘Ey-yo! Shouts Selvon.’ The backseat crew shoot their still laughing faces at Selvon who is sitting, holding up his phone in front of me. –‘Ey-yo, Myman is next.’ Selvon points at me. He looks back and my breath drops and freezes as he juts his phone at my face. –‘Ey-yo, get myman on that, ennet, he spits too.’ My eyes squint at Selvon and I think, fuck he say? All eyes are on me and the bus is silent like an assembly except for the low hum of the engine and chatter from the front seats a world away (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 166).

After Ardan finishes decimating his opponent in the rap battle, Ardan finally receives the positive affirmation he sorely needs.

-‘fuck you for making me do that-yuno’, I says. –‘What you mean? You ended him blood!’ –‘Yeah, you didn’t have to force me into it-tho. Fucking surprise.’ (...) –‘Bruv. I knew you could spit but I never knew you could spit that-yuno.’ (...) –‘Theres that girl from estate. Missy. I was going to link with later, ennet. She’s with that music label. Jamie bars comes through there on the regular. She could probably get you in front of him.’ (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 170)

This leads to Ardan impressing Selvon so much that he pulls some strings with his love interest ‘Missy’, who works at a local record label, and gets Ardan recording time. He gets his moment through the strong foundation of solidarity built between him and Selvon. In a sense, it is a case of “working-class nepotism” doing what it does best. Getting the studio time allows Ardan to have his “make-it-or-break-it”, which he most likely could not afford through monetary means. This does not alleviate his felt precarity, however. It only gives Ardan a

sliver of hope to make it in a creative field, bypassing his ‘dunced’ grades, which are steering him into a life of stagnation. For Ardan it is either rapping or minimum wage. Perform your poetry for us, and if we like it, you will get paid. If not - you live in squalor for the rest of your life.

Selvon finds himself coping with precarity through resilient endurance. He has seen what life has given his father, who risked it all coming to the UK through the Windrush generation, only to be bedridden by a disease. He knows, like Ardan, that if he does not perform, the precarious streets of London will chew him up and spit him out into minimum wage squalor in a city that does not want him. Selvon aims to box himself out of precarity. His goal is to reach the top level and represent the UK in the Olympics, and to do this, Selvon exerts extreme focus on his craft. Compared to Yusuf and Ardan, Selvon is dead set on what he wants to achieve in the future. This enormous focus leads Selvon to plan his weeks in the most efficient way. He runs a couple of miles every morning, and he boxes at the gym every day. In between these activities he has managed to perform well in school, keeping a good work / social life balance. At night, he comes home to care for his dad, washing him while he tells him some of what he is doing. The conversation is a one-way street, as his father is laying there trapped within his own body, like a reminder for Selvon what this mad and furious city can do to a person risking everything to build a better life for his family. Selvon is living on a knives edge and knows that one wrong move will lead him down the same route as Ardan to minimum wage. This compared to the fact that he is the primary caretaker for his father, leaves Selvon without any options, other than to succeed.

I have to continue this habit. Push myself and earn it, ennet. Earn my place and make my way out. (...) I think about the clouds and Yoos and Ardan. Think about my body, my shape, my sweat, my muscles. I think about that lighty girl, Missy. Her body. How I need to smash it soon, else I'll go mad. I think about my family too. My dad and his failing heart. My marge and her church. I think about what they'll do once I'm gone. Think about the way out, the blue sky above. The sky that I only see when I look

upward and away from everything else around me. I'll be out of these ends like dust, soon enough (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 11).

Through his pursuit of alleviation of precarity and success he attains a stoic, masculine exterior. Precarity can in a sense be a powerful, but cruel motivator. Through his stoic fashion, he uses it as the main motivator for the survival of himself and his family. For working-class teenagers who aspire to something more to life, nothing but being the greatest is enough. Selvon is a testament to that.

The goals of Ardan and Selvon can be understood through the institutionalized individualism which the precarious neoliberal pushes forth. Their success is relying solely on themselves, as the community around them cannot help them in this regard. It is interesting that in the time that this novel takes place, they cannot see a world where they apply for a trade school or go to university unless they can be the best. To reach the same position as a middle-class kid, working-class kids have to be twice as good as the middle-class kids. Thus, what a middle-class kid perceives as his or her "natural" position might seem like an "impossible" dream for a working-class kid, if they do not actually try two or three times as hard. The goals they have set for them are also not goals middle-class kids often choose, they are class specific. Rap and boxing are both professions born out of precarity, which enable traversing the social ladder quickly from a working-class start position. For a middle-class kid, these activities are hobbies, while for some working-class kids, it is their ticket out of their situation. The precarious situation Ardan and Selvon find themselves in pushes them to work hard and succeed. Selvon has understood and mastered this aspect of his precariousness, while Ardan is still trying to find out how to traverse the opportunities offered to him. The opportunities for safety look more like lottery tickets for them. And poor Yusuf? He is not even currently a ticket holder in the race against precarity.

The Past Informing the Present

Caroline and Nelson are both haunted by their past. Their story is a product of their own or their family's anomie. Nelson, as mentioned previously, came with the Windrush generation from the Caribbean to London in search of work and safety. He wants to create a future for him and his family, hoping to start a new life in the then almost post-colonial Britain. What he finds, however, is a gloomy hostile city, which through its cognitive dissonance says that it needs him for his labour, while at the same time despises him as an individual. Caroline has fled the troubles, after being confronted with the implications of her family's involvement in the IRA. They have both been through intense crises, which follow and contextualise the precarity they have felt, all the way from their past to the present. Through these characters, we can understand better the onset catalyst, and the subsequent crescendo of the violence in the novel, that being the fictionalised murder of the soldier, and the riot at the end of the novel.

Caroline's climax in her travel through precarity can in a sense be understood better in light of the catalyst of the heightened conflict of the novel, that being the killing of the soldier in 2013. As Caroline became more and more involved with the IRA through her family, she is confronted with the gruesomeness of the idea of "an eye for an eye". Her cousin Eily, who is disabled, had been raped by a British soldier. Caroline is told by her mother that when the family is going to retaliate, that she is to be sent to London for her own safety. She demands from her mother to be taken seriously and to let her be a part of what that would be done against the soldier. In this defiance, her mother sees a sliver of moxie in her, and finally agrees that she can partake in the retaliation. Little did she know when she agreed to be a part of it, they in turn were going to rape the British soldier's sister. As the imperialist conflict draws closer and closer to Caroline, her anger subsides into a stoic exterior to cope with her tumultuous feelings. "My Numbness was likely the only way my body could find to keep that

promise” (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 198). In alienating her own involvement through numbness, she seeks respite within nothingness. This void of nothingness screams her actual feelings back like an echo, nowhere to go. Inside of her is a horrified anxiety ridden teenager, who wishes for nothing more than to leave the situation, and to not be a part of this horrible act.

I kept screaming to God and Ma and the night beyond the glass. I saw the drops of thick blood spit onto my coat under the light. Don eased off the brake and we bent into the side of the road. The car came to a stop and in all the confusion I saw the lights ahead leading uo to a group of terraced houses, a brickwork town. I saw Newtownabbey. She was there, I thought, this Prot girl. Just beyond those houses, alone and asleep with her skin and highs and hair and fears of her own. The soldier’s sister. I mustn’t see her, I thought, I couldn’t. I stopped swaying and clutched my mouth, full of pain, full of blood. My hand reached for the safety lock and I pushed open the door.

–‘Caroline! Wait!’

Damian called after me. I fled, leaving the door gaping. I ran, jumping over the road side and tumbled into the dirt of the woods, into the cover of the trees. The sound of my brothers, the clattering of the car, I might have heard them but not over my own ragged breath. I swallowed back the spit and blood in my mouth, and as I ran I felt a great surge of broken emotion, it was flooding back into my chest, my heart, my body free now of its cold fear (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 202).

Right when the men are to make their move. Caroline dashes out of the car, spoiling the whole plan, and in a sense, saving a woman from a rape. After Caroline spoils this plot, she is sent to London, and she has not returned to Ireland since the troubles. Here, the conscience of Caroline goes against her own group and community, and her shared experience as a woman steers her into the completely other direction. Seeing her own family plotting sexual violence must be the most alienating thing one can experience with one’s family. It is a tricky situation, because the soldier will never see any punishment for his crimes from the state, and it is understandable that Caroline’s family want to retaliate against him.

I would propose that this intense moment of crisis in Caroline’s life shares some the same sentiments that the Rigby killing had for the Muslim community that Yusuf was a part of. She was guilty by association in her own eyes, which led her to try to stop it. Yusuf was

never afforded the opportunity to stop the killing, which heightened the violence against Muslims from far-right extremists. Both incidents were plots of incredibly unproductive violence, which would in turn cause immense harm to the group rather than to the established order. And the guilt from an individual's actions will paint a whole community as a horribly violent one. Either way, the consequences of her actions have sent her alone into the furious and precarious city of London, where she loses most of her spirit working minimum wage. Even her relationships prove precarious, as Ardan's father was abusive, and left them without ever contacting them again. Caroline ends up being alienated twice, from both her home and the home she tries to make herself in London.

I was alone again. Alone with the boy. And then came the numbness and the tremors again. The anger, the crying. The fucken sick feeling inside whenever I feel my nerves give out. Back to having a drop every so often to calm it. After all these years I can still remember how it felt to dig my nails into the dirt as I did. And it never will go, will it? I'll join Ma, and Damian and Da, and everyone else whose violence follows them (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 244-245).

This double alienation must be an extremely intense feeling, which could possibly fuel her drinking problem and her absence in Ardan's life. Caroline did what she thought was best, in a moment of utter fear, which in turn sent her away from her community for the rest of her life.

Like Caroline's story, Nelson's follows roughly the same arc as Yusuf's through the riot and in a sense Selvon's as well. I would say that the experiences of Nelson fall more in line with the actions of the climax of the novel, and this link will be further explained in that part of the chapter. When Nelson arrived in London, the only group that takes him in and makes him feel welcome are other immigrant groups, namely, the other ones who came on ships like the SS. Windrush. They provided him with a job, and as fast as he started working, he also started experiencing racism towards him and his fellow community by bigoted Brits. This was an organized effort against these newcomers into London by a far-right populist

leader and former leader of the fascist party of Britain, Oswald Mosley, sadly, egging on parts of the disgruntled working-class of post war Britain to blame the immigrants for their lack of safety. Nelson starts organising with the other immigrants, and as time passes, he becomes more and more politically conscientious. This comes as a result of the anger “Keep Britain white” posters hanging in the streets are not an olive branch for a fellow working-class person to latch onto. As tensions and conflicts rose between the immigrants and Mosley’s “Teddy boys”, the working-class white people who followed his ideas, the police turned a blind eye to the violence happening to Nelson and his community. They had to start guarding their own community to keep them safe, which in turn made the police target them as well, as they saw the organisation as a gang. The police worked with the “teddy boys” to find out who was arming them, and Nelson and his mates were surrounded and interrogated. Nelson made the crucial error of addressing the police officer as “Sir”. This makes him lose favour with the other prominent members of the political movement, as they saw him as weak. Nelson is in effect demoted to a peon within the organisation he was a part of forming, shaming him. During all this time organising this political movement, Nelson has used his savings on the movement rather than saving it for the purpose of bringing his future wife to the country. As he realises this, it starts a conflict within him, whether to continue with the movement.

I think about Maise as I stood. I had not received a reply to my letter, the one I sent a month back and was feeling a pinch of guilt for it. I had not saved a penny for she ticket here. And I miss she touch. After all this trouble it would have done good to hold Maise near.

I pack up my box. I was resentful for my own lot. Sour at my Association brothers had decide to put me out on corner-boy duty. They had flag me as somebody who could not be trusted, not after I refuse to pose against the police. I had too soft heart, they said, and so I was in a temper at myself. I should have taken a beating a belt to the lip, I thought, the same way Curtis had. I should never have called the bastard pig a sir (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 182).

The conflicting expectations between the close community of his future family, and his interest in the betterment of the lives of immigrants are put to the test during the Notting Hill

riots of 1958. Here, Nelson has the choice of giving a firebomb to one of the other members as the organisation clash with the “teddy boys” and police. Nelson is frozen at the sight of the violence in front of him, disabling him from handing Jimbroad, one of his oldest friends in London, the bomb. Nelson describes Jimbroad after asking the question. “Him face of wild anger, as if this was the last desperate thing he would do and to hell with what would happen next” (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 211). For Nelson, unlike Jimbroad and the others, this moment cannot be his last. He needs to get his Maise to this city and into what now must seem like only a figment of a better life. Nelson in a split second feels the rush of his fight or flight instinct and chooses flight. He bolts out of the building, away from the police, teddy boys, and his brothers and sisters in the organisation. “Home has never felt so far away as I ran” (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 212). Like Caroline, he feels an intense sensation of double alienation, where his place of birth is an ocean away, and the home he created here is no longer welcoming to him. He has let down both Maise and Jimbroad, and he now needs to realign his priorities and focus firstly on getting Maise to London. We can understand the conflict in the light of “divide and rule”, as the division and infighting within the group inhibited it from making any change, and only those who rule gained anything from the riot. This notion will be further discussed in a later paragraph. The only way he can traverse the precarious pavements of London is by retrieving a piece of his other home on his lonesome, and this fills him with stoic determination, very much akin to the one we see in Selvon. Both characters are put in sink or swim circumstances and achieve their goal through determination.

Nelson is changed now after this riot, and he deliberates on his conscientiousness. “I would not protest, I would not raise a rap, not even make a friend worth calling a friend, but I will get my money” (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 235). After both Nelson and Caroline are confronted with the gruesomeness that their community perceive as required for liberation against the system oppressing them, they both turn around and run. The utter despair created through the

4As, has rendered Nelson and Caroline incapable to fight anymore. I would argue that running away is not a personal failing, they are human after all. The emotions these extreme precarious situations have created within them have sent their body into a physical reaction, which is out of their control. Not everyone can be a hero in their community's eyes. But by letting down their own communities, Caroline let an innocent woman not go through sexual violence and Nelson manages to bring his Maise to him, letting them start a family. Through the agency Gunaratne gives the characters, we get a sense of how action, inaction and reaction all are choices which lead the working-class individual down one path or another. Caroline and Nelson are through their reaction taking an active choice in not hurting another human being, even though the other group have hurt someone in their community badly. The consequences of the reaction to their communities' actions have left them distraught however, lacking any will to fight against the system which upholds the injustice, making them undesirable for their community to have them be a part of it. Their intense experience with the As has turned into A4ification, pacifying them politically, as they now continue into a precarious system without any strength to change it, even though they are politically aware of the systems failings as a society. They must turn within them what resolve they have left and focus on their own survival, rather than changing society.

I think to myself, alright, if this Mother country is a bitch then ii will be a bastard son. I will work. But I will work for my own self. I will ask nothing from nobody. Was like my soft heart turn hard at last and I want put my pain to work (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 235).

The double alienation they face leaves them without a group to organise with regardless of whether they had any fight left in them to continue their political actions. Nelson is literally paralyzed during his attempt to take on precarity on his own, forever encasing his knowledge, thoughts, and opinions within him with no way of uttering them. They must play by the rules of the system set in place. All the characters in this novel find themselves stretched out thin

by the expectations of their own community, and the society they live in. As they react to the broken expectations to their community, the double alienation that follows, hollows them out and utterly A4ificates them. Both characters are tales of a life lived through precariousness and the violence that may follow their stories further contextualise the catalyst and climax of the conflict through their deliberations of the past. The experiences of the riot will be compared later in this chapter, focusing on the riot that ends with Yusuf's life being taken away from him.

Prearity – Society's Gas Leak

Prearity is a gas leak that makes society prone to chaos. As we have seen previously in this chapter and the prior one, the utter despair of prearity can ignite into violence. In a precarious society such as the one we see now in London in *IOM AFC*, the balance of peace is porous, easily shattered as hatred within the precariat based on race or religion is not easily vanquished. This is very much due to the exploitation of the anger that prearity creates, dividing groups that have the same socio-economic aims against each other along lines of race and religion, rather than class. It takes only one individual to lash out in an extreme manner, to mobilize one group against another, breaking the balance of peace. This initial spark of violence can in turn start a chain reaction, as the feelings of anxiety, alienation, anomie, and especially anger build up not just within an individual, but in a whole community, leading to riots and clashes between groups of people, even if their interests overlap. The actions of one, are painted as the action of the many. This is what I would argue happens in the climax that takes place in 2013 in *IOM AFC*.

Irfan, Yusuf's older brother, is this spark that breaks the tensions between two groups of the precariat. Throughout the novel, he has shut himself in from the outside world, which is revealed after the brothers meet with the new Imam Abu Farouk. As the eldest son of the

Imam, Irfan was in an arranged marriage. After his father's death, his deviancy was exposed when his wife Muna found his immense collection of pornography, some of the women in it which may have been underage. He had also filmed some, spreading it on online forums. As his wife went through it, the shame started growing in him. She had gone to the police with the hard drive. He has severely broken the social contract within his community, which his father was the head of, as well as the law. This led to Muna leaving him, and he tries to seek solace with his mother and brother, who find the situation very difficult as they are still grieving the death of their father. When meeting with the new Imam, Irfan is convinced that it is the west that has corrupted him, and that he needs to devote his life to the mosque to absolve his sins. Yusuf sees through this rhetoric and confronts him, which puts Irfan in a fight or flight situation akin to Caroline and Nelson.

(Yusuf) – ‘Irfan, listen yeah? This Imam, the mosque. It's got nuttan to do with us bruv.’ I held on to him as my father would have. I held him straight trying to catch his eyes in mine. I thought of Amma and the pain and hurt Irfan had put us through. I thought of Muna. - ‘There is no-one out here except you bro. You did this. You have to take it man. Take the responsibility, like, even though it's hard.’ He looked up at me then, his eyes terrified and entreating. I had to make sure he heard me. – ‘It was you who did this bruv. No-one else.’ I felt his hands let go of my arms. I moved towards him. I tried to keep my tone gentle as I knew my words could pierce him open. He backed off still, his face creasing up with confusion and pain. I wouldn't let go. - ‘It weren't the West bruv. We are the fuckin West Irfan. It was you.’ – ‘F-Fuck you. you left me. You abandoned me. Abandon me like – ‘No, wait-.’

His eyes were streaming, his strength collapsed no, my words lost to the winds swirling around him. His teeth flashed at me as he stumbled backward, his hood falling off his head. Out of his mouth came a howl, the sound of a dying animal or a heart breaking. My brother was submitting me to his hate, his anger at what seemed to be the first truth he had ever heard. It tore me up to watch him and I did nothing as he turned and ran. He was lost to me. I watched him run away into the city (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 179).

Yusuf has found a place in the furious city as he has managed to create a network outside of his religious community, which he now feels strongly alienated from the new Imam. When Yusuf says they are the West, it shows how London and the western world have changed so much in the globalised age, aligning himself with the youth of the West, showing the

contemporary face of the working-class. Irfan on the other hand, never managed to do the same as Yusuf. The shame Irfan feels over his deviancy, and the criminality of it all, leaves him with an intense feeling of double alienation from both his religious community and his country. Abu Farouk tries to take advantage of this intense sensation of shame, trying to radicalize him. But as Yusuf says, “we are the fuckin West Irfan”. It would have been a radicalization and hatred towards oneself. Confronted with this, the 4As within him push him to run away from Yusuf, eventually returning to the mosque after its closing. Here, he commits arson, and he dies in the fire.

He exhales a deep moan into the orange haze. Mashallah my father, I am free. And just as the wave of Euphoria had swept over his body, it leaves him. Irfan moves towards the exit, his eyes fixed to the smouldering wood and burning floor. An arch begins to splinter at the far end of the hall. He looks upward then and a beam engulfed in swirling flames begins to crack. His eyes widen as shining tears fall down his cheeks. He stops there by the doorway. He smiles at the falling arch above him. An anguished, hateful smile (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 220).

This act shows the utter helplessness he felt, caused by the double alienation and hatred towards not only his communities, but also himself. Through destruction, as he was burning one home, he was closing the door to the other, choosing death over living with his shame in the furious city. It is this literal fire that sparks the gas-filled tension which creates what will become the riot, which in turn will kill his brother as well. This is due to the community of the mosque understandably believing that the mosque was burned down by far-right extremists, who have attacked the community at a smaller scale following the murder of the British soldier. They were already planning a march past the mosque the day after the mosque burning. One spark, and the gas goes up in flame, causing chaos.

The day after the arson, the protests start, which clash in the courtyard between the council flats where the characters live. Yusuf hears the news first thing when he wakes up and goes out into the chaos by the council houses. Abu Farouk is there preaching to the masses of

Muslims, telling them about how they had failed to protect it from the “kuffar”, “the white menace”. They are to meet them in the streets, the ones who “did” it. They are to hang, as they are being protected by the police, according to Abu Farouk. Here, the new leader of their community is feeding their lust for revenge, over something which one of their own members did to them. He holds the same Quran which Yusuf’s father held, further conflating and confusing the paternal role this man is supposed to have for Yusuf, which ultimately leads it to be utterly alienating. After Abu Farouk’s agitation, there is heard a horrifying chorus of cheers. “I looked around and saw what it had all become. I stood invisible among them, too weak to pull away” (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 251). Through their fury, Yusuf cannot recognize his own community. He knows that there will be a clash, and the feelings of the 4As take hold of him. This time however, unlike Nelson, Caroline, and Irfan, he does not run away. He is incapacitated by the sheer force of the moment, seeing this side of his own community. Yusuf loses all his agency, as his reaction stays within him. He becomes one with the masses, all of it moving like a single agent towards its goal. In this moment, it is as if he is in the car where Caroline sat or holding the fire-bomb which Jimbroad requested from Nelson. But like Nelson, he is paralyzed due to the intense double alienation, resulting only in a reaction within, and inaction physically. The police push them into the courtyard, making the far-right protesters come to them. And when they clash, Yusuf gets a bottle thrown in the side of his head by a white nationalist he falls to the ground and is trampled. As the blood streaks down the side of his head, a life of a promising working-class teenager goes to waste on the London concrete, as he is killed by both his homes.

I felt my small life pass. The sound of someone screaming a name that was not my own. The feeling of my body being plunged under hard, heavy waves. Faded inside. My last sense was of the blood draining from me, slowly seeping out of my mouth and onto the broken ground. I lay there then, lost and alone in this pointless, torn-up place (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 274).

Throughout this thesis, I have tried to understand how the emotions that are generated from a sense of precarity affects working-class people, how it makes them act, and what this has to say for the precariat as a group. Whether or not Standing's fears of the precariat being a group that is incapable of cooperation and organisation is reflected in the literature of working-class writers Through the riots in the text, we can see if these fears align with the artistic expressions people within the group produce. Understanding the two groups fighting as two groups suffering under the same system is vital for seeing the conflict through the lens of the precariat. Keeping intersectionality in mind is also important for the understanding I have for the situations portrayed in the novel. Suffering under the same system, does not however absolve one of the groups from their blatant xenophobia, racism, and islamophobia, but a little good faith is needed to properly understand them. Most of the racist working-class have been forgotten by the politicians who now cater for the middle class, which in turn makes them prone to the disillusioning of charlatans like an Oswald Mosley. This is also the case for the riot taking place in 2013. The disgruntled working-class are barking up the wrong tree so to speak. Their disillusionment of their identity as white brits over class, leads them into no meaningful change of their material conditions. For the immigrants and Muslims, it is incredibly reasonable to not want to organise, or even associate with someone who hates them based solely on their race or religion. The rhetoric used by Abu Farouk in the rally is also incredibly inflammatory, actively seeking revenge. Through "divide and rule", infighting within and between the groups of the precariat, as well as the involvement of the police in the riot argues for the fears of Standing. The police are literally dividing and ruling through the climax, as they create a corridor for the clash between the two groups to take place. Men like Oswald Mosley and Abu Farouk seize the opportunities created in times of crisis to attain individual power over a group through the hatred of another. This hatred forms the foundation of the violence found in the novel, which is unproductive, as violence often is. It is

unproductive in its outcome, like the planned rape of the soldier's sister, the Lee Rigby killing, the teddy boy attack, the burning of the mosque, all of it is the result of one group feeling extreme precarity, which has festered into hate. This hate, blinds the assailant from reason, believing it to be productive, as retaliation and revenge sadly is a gathering and sweet thing. Through Yusuf's incapability to move, as he gives up within the masses, it is as if he realises the futility of the situation. The anger that most feel under precarity has festered into hate, a hate that is directed at fellow working-class people, and others suffering under the same economic system. Through the neoliberal project's deterioration of the working class, the precariat finds itself in a standstill, where no large meaningful progress is made, and occasional violence is had. Nothing is gained, while a life is lost. There is no progress, only more division.

Aftermath - The Importance of Community and Solidarity

At the end of the novel, we get some closing words from characters, as well as from Yusuf, who watches over them from the other side of life, peering into their future. Selvon finds resolve, a reason for why he must pursue his goals and to be the best, akin to what his father did to bring his mother to London. He cries for his fallen blood, and he feels anger towards the ones who did this to him. Selvon, through his stoic self, pushes these emotions away, and keeps running. "I never used to run for no-one before. But now I run for him" (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 276). Selvon keeps Yusuf within him, as he continues to push for his goals as a reminder of how life in the furious city is precious and can easily be taken away. Ardan on the other hand find himself talking to Yusuf when he is alone. He too loses the stoic mask, crying for the loss of his Blood. Unlike Selvon, he does not channel this experience into motivation. Ardan is more preoccupied with remembering his late friend. "With a loose Pebble I scrape out your name in the concrete" (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 278). In one last artistic expression, Ardan creates a memorial of his late friend. Yusuf is immortalized in the concrete which held

up his trampled dead body. Caroline reflects on what she has to tell Ardan to console him. She thinks on the uncomfortable truth, that life must go on. They must carry their sadness with them towards their goal of escaping precarity. For the world will still bring the same troubles for the teenagers, regardless of whether Yusuf was alive or not. At the end of the novel, Caroline prepares herself for being there for her son, even though their relationship is to a degree alienated.

All I can do now is to hold the boy, tell him he's tougher than he feels. Tell him that a day will come where he'll look around and notice the world is still moving, that he's survived in his memory. And the days to go get on after all. I look out on the street and the sky. I'll tell him that outside it's the same, look. The weather's just as cloudy. (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 279).

All the teenagers had dreams that they pursued throughout the novel. Yusuf now must sit on the side line and observe as Selvon and Ardan walk into adulthood in the mad and furious city. Selvon manages to achieve his dreams, as he goes to university, excels in sports and participates in the Olympics representing Britain. Selvon becomes an ambassador for his country in the largest sporting event in the world. That is a true testament to the success that can still be achieved from a working-class background. Ardan on the other hand does not have his dream fulfilled as a rapper. But the reflection Yusuf makes shows how working-class lives can still be fulfilling lives. "He found another path where he could walk without stooping, hold his head up, live for smaller graces and be happy. Happy enough, ennet. Those that seek it, seldom find it" (Gunaratne, 2018, p. 286)". Ardan is the norm, while Selvon is the outlier here. But that does not mean that Ardan failed. Not everyone can be everyone's hero. This rescope of priorities can be compared to that of Nelson, who found a reason in the grind of the working-class, for the end goal of enough happiness for himself. Through the rest of their lives, they keep Yusuf, their blood, close to their hearts.

The sadness they feel over the death of their fallen blood is a testament to the solidarity they felt in the council housing courtyard. Even beyond his death, they carry on the

solidarity, as they keep the idea of Yusuf within them as they continue to traverse the precarity of modern-day London. The solidarity that is present here transcends race, nationality, and religion, as their shared working-class experience is enough to branch together these distinctively diverse groups. It is this transcendent solidarity which is the answer the novel brings forth in response to the “dividing and ruling” which the precariat does to itself, and which it is subject to by the police. It can work as the platform to combat A4ification, as it provides a home to working-class people who are double alienated from their communities. The friendships they have, and had, has been their foundation for survival in the mad and furious city. The agency and political voice one has in a crisis rooted in precarity can be supported through the transcendent solidarity. For if one stands alone in the face of precarity, one is subject to A4ification, pacifying any political engagement, subsequently continuing the precarious system in which they live under.

In these forty-eight chaotic hours, three seeds have become two. One of them grew up to become a scarlet emperor basking in the sun. The second found a way through the cracks, making it all the way despite a scraping to its stem. The last seed was carelessly trampled by the weight of the city, never to sprout. But as the seed turned to the earth, the two standing flowers took the third’s nutrients with them, forever as a part of the soil they stand on. And such, life for Selvon and Ardan continue with their late friend within them, as working-class life must to prevail and progress, while no political progress is made, due to the extreme precarity and corrupt power structures in the mad and furious city.

Conclusion

Throughout the thesis, the force of precarity has accumulated for each of the texts. Following the historical grounding of the texts, from before, during and after the implementation of neoliberal economic policies, as well as Thatcher's life, precarity has increased, and division between the working class has increased resulting in violence. Through Paul Allen's work I introduced a baseline understanding of the working-class, as a reference point for the heightening of precarity I presumed would take place as the time progressed within the timeline of the novels. As I presented through the framework, as we moved along each text, the 4As became increasingly visible as we reached modern day Britain. The precarity ramps up between the two last novels, as the amount of crises that has its root in precarity go over a shorter and shorter time, with *My Name is Leon* taking place over years, compared to *IOM AFC's* 48 hours.

Furthermore, it delved into the notion of the repeating nature of the working-class experience. The repetition of the labour in "No Lay, No Pay," the repetition and the sameness in the life of Jodie, the repetition of the safety being pulled from under Leon's feet, the repetition of habits in *IOM AFC* to try to create a future for oneself. The repetition of being stuck somewhere in life, figuratively for Jodie, literally for Nelson who is paralyzed. The working-class experience is a grind permeated with repetition creating a sense of general despair, amplifying the feelings off the 4As.

Understanding the importance of family and community that Paul is provided by his family and his father's friends form a great starting point on the importance of solidarity. From this point on, we can see how deteriorating family and community structures can negatively impact individuals suffering under precarity. These experiences are intersectional, as the identity one has colour one's own experience. The extended family seen in Russian-Red has an overall powerful sense of solidarity. Her uncle is, however, a source for precarity

for her aunt and cousin, which the strong females of her family take care of. As Leon is ripped out of his home due to his mother's illness and her being abandoned by those around her, he finally finds a home with Maureen and the others. After losing their "Blood" Yusuf, Selvon and Ardan must push on with his solidarity within them.

One central notion which the thesis has steadily built upon is the incredible diverseness of the working-class. It is far from a monolith, but all their experiences are painted by the precarity that they all face. The British working-class today is a mosaic of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, which sadly opens the possibility for more avenues of oppression other than just class, namely racism and xenophobia. Understanding the groups affected by this oppression through the framework used, we can see the answer the novels give to the fear Standing has for the precariat as a "class in the making." The conclusions we have seen in *My Name is Leon* and *In Our Mad and Furious City* try to address these lines of conflict. In de Waal's novel we see the community of ethnic minorities being subject to violence by the police. In Gunaratne's we see the notions of divide and rule play out, as a clash between the radicalised Muslim population and the radicalised white nationalists happens at the climax of the novel. These conflicts are in accordance with the fears Standing has for the Precariat to ever be a class of its own, as the differences and hate festered between groups suffering under the same system paints a grim picture of cooperation, transcendent identity. A form of transcendent solidarity which crosses the boundaries of identity, seems like the only hope the precariat and working-class have for any meaningful change. The form of the solidarity shown in the constructed communities of Leon's new family, and the friend group of Ardan and Selvon, show that is possible. The experiences of Paul, Jodie, Leon, Yusuf, Ardan, Selvon, Nelson, and Caroline are all different, but they are still an expression of the working-class experience, given a voice by authentic voices.

For further research, I would propose looking at recent working-class literature written during the COVID pandemic. Jodie-Russian Red's "Working from home" would be a suitable place to start for anyone wanting to analyse the heightened precarious conditions of the working-class, not just under neoliberal precarity, but also a worldwide pandemic.

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