Representing British Working Class at the Turn of the New Millennium: A Study of *The Royle Family*

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Tässä Pro Gradu –tutkielmassani tutkin työväenluokan representaatioita brittiläisessä komediasarjassa *The Royle Family* (suom. *Sohvanvaltaajat*, 1998–2000), joka nimensä mukaisesti kertoo manchesterilaisesta Roylen perheestä. Sarjan suomenkielinen nimi juontunee siitä, että Roylen perhe todellakin suurimmaksi osaksi istuu olohuoneensa sohvalla, kommentoiden televisio-ohjelmien lomassa sekä itse ohjelmia että elämänmenoa.

Aluksi selvitän mitä tarkoitan käsitteillä työväenluokka sekä representaatio. Sen jälkeen tarkastelen yleisesti representaatioita, joita työväenluokasta on esitetty. Esimerkkini ovat lähinnä television komediasarjoista, kuuluuhan *The Royle Family*kin samaan genreen. Työväenluokka on usein esitetty hyvin negatiivisten kuvien kautta: heidät on representoitu mm. lihavina, likaisina, tyylittöminä, räävittöminä, tyhminä, vanhanaikaisina sekä passiivisina.

Kolmannessa luvussa tarkastelen tilannekomedioiden historiaa Britanniassa. Keskityn erityisesti komediasarjoihin joissa on työväenluokkaisia hahmoja selvittääkseni kontekstin, johon *The Royle Family* historiallisesti sijoittuu. 1960-luku sekä 1970-luvun alkupuoli olivat komediasarjojen kulta-aikaa Britanniassa, ja monet komediasarjat sisälsivät myös työväenluokkaan kuuluvia hahmoja. Koska 1980-luvulla tehtiin vain muutama työväenluokkaan sijoitettu komediasarja, eikä 1990-luvun alkupuolella yhtäkään, oli *The Royle Family* alkaessaan vuonna 1998 melkoinen outolintu.

Neljännessä luvussa otan aikaisemmin esittelemäni teoriat käytäntöön, ja analysoin sarjassa esiintyviä työväenluokan representaatioita. Vaikka *The Royle Family*n tekijät sekä ainakin osa näyttelijöistä ovat taustaltaan työväenluokkaisia, sarja toisintaa monia negatiivisia representaatioita. Sarja ei kuitenkaan luo täysin mustavalkoista kuvaa työväenluokasta niin kuin monet aiemmat sarjat. Sarja sisältää myös paljon yhteiskuntakriittistä kommentointia, ja keskiluokka esitetään hyvin mahtailevana ja tärkeilevänä. Näin ollen työväenluokasta jää melko positiivinen kuva.

Tutkielman viidennessä luvussa tarkastelen vielä ilmiötä, joka on mielestäni hyvin näkyvä vuosituhannen vaihteen Britanniassa. Työväenluokasta on nimittäin tullut jossain määrin muodikas ja haluttu, kun aikaisemmin se oli pikemminkin hyljeksitty ja haukuttu. Ilmiö näkyy esimerkiksi muodin maailmassa, sekä tutkimuksissa, joissa jopa 68% vastaajista tunsi olevansa työväenluokkainen – vaikka taloudellisin ja ammatillisin kriteerein suuri osa heistä laskettaisiin kuuluvaksi keskiluokkaan. Keskiluokkaan kuuluminen koetaan yksinkertaisesti tylsäksi ja yllätyksettömäksi. Ilmiöön löytyy monia syitä, mm. poliittiset ja taloudelliset muutokset Britannian yhteiskunnassa, nostalgian nälkä sekä tietenkin inspiroivat televisiosarjat kuten *The Royle Family*, joka kuvaa työväenluokkaista perhettä mutkattomasti.

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1. Introduction

They are a working-class family from Manchester who sit on their sofa watching television, swearing and talking about their bowel movements. They are, in James Rampton's view, "Britain's laziest family" who do not "just sit, they sit for England."[1] They are the Royles: father Jim, mother Barbara, daughter Denise and son Antony. They are also the main characters in this thesis.

The Royle Family is a sitcom first shown on BBC in the United Kingdom between 1998 and 2000. It comprises three series, 20 episodes (each lasting 30 minutes) in total. It has been very popular in the UK and critics have praised it for its inventiveness as a comedy series, calling it "revolutionary" and extolling its originator Caroline Aherne (who also plays the part of Denise Royle) as "a comic near-genius"[2]. In fact, everything that has ever been written about *The Royle Family* seems to be only praise and the amount of mugs, socks and other paraphernalia adorned with pictures of the Royles that have been sold all over Britain reveals that the public loves the sitcom too. In fact, a MORI poll in 2001 found out that 28% of 25-34-year-olds thought that *The Royle Family* is the "most likely to say something important about Britain in 2001."[3] In 2002, 32% of respondents answered that they are interested in *The Royle Family* – while only 36% showed interest towards the Royal Family.[4] Perhaps the biggest compliment to the series is that it has been copied. Impressionist Alistair McGowan used the Royles as a model for a spoof of the Royal Family in his sketch

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[1] Rampton, James. "Make Us a Cup of Tea, Love." *Independent* 15 October 2000. [19 March 2003.] http://news.independent.co.uk/people/profiles/story.jsp?story=40388

[2] Gilbert, Gerard. "Revolution in the Living Room." *Independent* 22 December 2000. [12 July 2005.] http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/theatre/features/article159366.ece

[3] "Shakespeare Still Relevant, Poll Reveals." MORI – Market & Opinion Research International. 23 April 2001. [8 July 2005.] http://www.mori.com/polls/2001/rsc.shtml

[4] "Public Recognition & Attitudes Towards the Monarchy." MORI. 31 January 2002. [8 July 2005] http://www.mori.com/polls/2001/granada2.shtml

show *Alistair McGowan's Big Impression*.[5] The recurrent skit was titled, naturally, *The Royal Family*, and it starred the Queen acting like Barbara, Prince Phillip as Jim, Prince Charles as Dave and Camilla Parker-Bowles as Denise. Thus, for example, Prince Phillip would often exclaim "one's bottom" from his armchair just like Jim exclaims "my arse", and so on. As the Royles undoubtedly are the most loved family in Britain, they could almost be called the new royalty – like the name of the family suggests[6].

The Royles are not like any other family in television. They belong to the working class, although many of the family members do not actually work. Father Jim is unemployed and happy with it, as work would leave him less time to spend in his armchair watching television. Mother Barbara, on the other hand, works part time in a bakery, and the rest of the time, more or less, she is busy cooking and cleaning for her family. Daughter Denise is in her 20s but does not seem to work nor do anything else with her life, while son Antony is a teenager, who does not seem to study nor work either, but who is made to do some of the housework and especially to serve tea to his family. The extended family includes Denise's boyfriend (and later husband) Dave Best, who has a small furniture removal business and mobile disco, and Barbara's elderly mother Norma, who is simply known as Nana. Other characters that visit the Royles from time to time in the sitcom are the Royles' neighbours Mary and Joe and their daughter Cheryl, Jim's friend Twiggy, Antony's friend Darren and later Antony's girlfriend Emma. The three series are all build around a common theme: the first series culminates in Denise and Dave's wedding, the second series follows Denise's pregnancy and culminates in the birth of Baby David on Christmas Day, and lastly, the

[5] BBC, UK, 1999-2002.

[6] As "Royle" and "royal" sound the same, the title of the series cannot be a coincidence. The Royles could thus be seen as a northern, working-class version of the Royal Family, standing in sharp contrast to the real monarchy.

third series follows the first year in the life of Baby David, highlights including his Christening, Antony's 18th birthday and finally, Baby David's first birthday and the announcement that Antony will become a father, too. Other events in addition to these take place in the three series, too, but this does not mean that the sitcom is packed with action. On the contrary, the Royles are mostly seen simply sitting in their living room, watching television, or as Deborah Chambers sums up,

> the Royles perform working-class familyness as they slouch in their armchairs in front of the television, eating snacks, drinking, watching and squabbling about the television programmes. Within plots of seemingly little action, the intricacies of the family relationships unfold to produce an amusing spectacle of couch potato-ness, in which we, as audience, are uncomfortably colluding as voyeurs. Is this the ultimate in family television theatricality: couch potatoes watching couch potatoes?[7]

My aim in this thesis is to examine this family of couch potatoes, and specifically the ways how *The Royle Family* represents the British white working-class family.

Previous Research

There has not been any significant research done on the subject of *The Royle Family*, at least nothing has been published. There are at least two major reasons for this: firstly, the study of issues concerning popular culture is sadly still frowned upon in many universities, which prevents some academics taking up issues they would otherwise be interested in. It is also worth noting that many of the tools that are used when approaching the so-called high culture do not apply when popular culture is studied, thus many academics would not even be qualified to analyse the likes of *The Royle Family*. The second reason for the lack of research on this sitcom is simple: the show may not be recognised as being worth studying at all. There are hundreds of other witty and popular sitcoms in the world, and naturally not all of them can be recognised in the

[7] Chambers, Deborah. *Representing the Family*. London: Sage Publications, 2001. 74. The BBC Comedy website offers a very thorough account of the Royles and the sitcom: http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/guide/articles/r/roylefamilythe_66602940.shtml [8 July 2005]

academic world. Despite the fact that *The Royle Family* has received praise from the critics, it may not seem historically or in any other way relevant to many academics.

The working-class itself has been widely studied, as Kenneth Roberts notes,[8] but mainly by sociologists. Frank McDonough adds that in fact,

> more ink has been spilled about them [the working class] than any other group in British society. They have been portrayed in novels, plays, films and television documentaries. Endless sociological surveys on working-class life and numerous government reports have been produced.[9]

Contemporary research on class seems to be lacking, however, perhaps because class is currently not considered a contemporary or an appealing issue. In Beverley Skeggs's view, "we seem to have entered a time when speaking of class is not acceptable (even distasteful)."[10] In fact, debates whether class even exists or not are fierce among sociologists. Class has been somewhat overshadowed by gender and race as they seem to be more fashionable subjects to study at this moment. Even when class is touched on in contemporary studies, it is often linked to gender or race (or both). Frances Bonner argues, however, that class "is readily identifiable on British television," even though it may not be overtly a subject.[11] Class thus remains an issue in Britain at least, so it should be studied even today.[12]

The study of representations is a whole different field altogether. Research particularly on the representations of the working-class has been done in different fields, such as in literature and media studies, but not to a great extent. My study is thus something that no-one else has done previously, which is one (and good enough) reason

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[8] Roberts, Kenneth. *The Working Class*. London: Longman, 1978. 20.

[9] McDonough, Frank. "Class and Politics." *British Cultural Identities*. Eds. Mike Storry and Peter Childs. London and New York: Routledge, 1997. 215.

[10] Skeggs, Beverley. *Class, Self, Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. 46.

[11] Bonner, Frances. *Ordinary Television*. London: Sage Publications, 2003. 164.

[12] A poll in 2000 asked whether the respondents agreed or disagreed with the claim that "Britain is now a classless society". 76% disagreed. "Oxbridge Poll." MORI. 5 June 2000. [8 July 2005.] http://www.mori.com/polls/2000/ms000602.shtml ; See also Skeggs, 2004, 43.

to embark on this journey of trying to find the representations of the working class in *The Royle Family*.

Tools

Beverley Skeggs emphasizes that "Class formation is dynamic, produced through conflict and fought out at the level of the symbolic."[13] She adds that "social positions are read and recognized through symbolic inscription and its daily practice," entertainment being "one of the central sites where these symbolic struggles take place and are made visible."[14] This is why it is important to study the representations of the working class, so that we would recognise the symbols that are used to form the class and the relations with other classes. She also notes that class does not only take "shape through academic battles, it is also being re-formed through market discourse and circulated in popular culture and political rhetoric."[15] On a similar note, Michael O'Shaughnessy emphasizes the significant role of popular culture in the production of consciousness and ideologies[16], which is why it is important to study a product of popular culture such as *The Royle Family*. This is where we see the multidisciplinary nature of the subject of this thesis: if class itself is not a straightforward issue, and it is not overtly visible on television, it does not make sense to study the representations of class in a popular television series from only one angle, using one set of theories.

Hence, in order to study the representations of the working class in this audiovisual text, I have to use theories from different fields. First of all, theories of representation are naturally useful for this thesis. Secondly, the working class could not

[13] Skeggs, 2004, 5.

[14] Skeggs, 2004, 110.

[15] Skeggs, 2004, 44.

[16] In fact, he claims that popular culture is much more important than high, "elitist" culture in producing consciousness. O'Shaughnessy, Michael. "Box Pop: Popular Television and Hegemony." *Understanding Television*. Eds. Andrew Goodwin and Garry Whannel. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 90, 93.

be studied without the help of sociological theorists. Thirdly, as *The Royle Family* is as an audiovisual text part of the popular culture, I also have to look at media studies, and theories on popular culture. As the Royles' use of language is partly responsible for the representations of the working class, I also use the work of a few known linguistic theorists to help me. Lastly, using theories from cultural studies help me identify the social changes that have happened and are happening in Britain. I am most interested in explaining contemporary culture, in other words to grasp what is happening at the moment in the world we are living in. As the final series of *The Royle Family* finished in 2000, I will look at the British society especially around the turn of the century and the changes that have happened in it before and after the new millennium.

Although any work on class might be expected to employ Marxist theories, I will not do that. The reason for this is simple: class itself does not hold the centre stage in this thesis; rather, my interest lies in the *representations* or the *images* of class. Representations may be used as a tool by the dominant group (the group that holds the power in society) to keep a subordinate group (such as the working class) "in their place", but I will not go into the power struggles between different groups as I see that as a subject for a whole another study. In addition, in the case of *The Royle Family*, such power struggles are not even an issue: the creators of the sitcom have working-class backgrounds themselves, which implies that they have more realistic views of the class and that they have no desire to damage the image of the class.

Research Questions

My first encounter with the Royles happened in autumn 2000. I was living in Manchester at that moment and was flicking through television channels one evening when I saw them. At first I thought I was watching a documentary about a real British family, as the characters, the setting and the tempo seemed so real. Indeed, *The Royle*

Family has been called "a sort of anti-sitcom,"[17] "gritty, anthropological, fly-on-the-wall docusoap,"[18] as well as "an observational comic drama of details which depends on a great deal of irony."[19] Despite these somewhat contradictory views, *The Royle Family* is normally seen and marketed as a sitcom. As I did not know this at the time, I was very confused while watching the programme as it made me laugh – I was not sure whether I was actually watching a fictive programme or whether my understanding of the language (English not being my mother tongue) was so poor that I had misunderstood what the people were saying. By the end of the programme, I of course realized that I had been watching a comedy, and I was completely captivated by it. Later I saw some university students in Manchester almost fighting over Jim Royle posters that were being sold outside the Student Union as they wanted to decorate the walls in their hall of residence with pictures of this working-class hero. I also met people who oddly resembled the characters in *The Royle Family* in Manchester everyday so I wanted to analyse the show in detail to understand what really makes the show seem so realistic and fascinating.

On the other hand, I have met people who do not like the show at all as they think it is boring[20] and completely unrealistic. How people view the show greatly depends on their own position, especially where class issues are concerned. Some working-class viewers enjoy *The Royle Family* as they recognise themselves and their families in the Royles and they are able to laugh at themselves.[21] Others, however, are

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[17] Gilbert, "Revolution in the Living Room."

[18] Rampton, "Make Us a Cup of Tea, Love."

[19] Simpson, Mark. "Sitcoms Go Out with a Couple of Class Acts." *Independent* 15 October 2000. http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/film/features/story.jsp?story=46788 [21 May 2005.]

[20] I have often heard people wondering, "who would want to watch television just to see other people watching television?"

[21] Indeed, as John Fiske declares, "The reward for identification is pleasure." Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1987. 170. See also O'Shaughnessy, 94-95.

not able to laugh at themselves, which is probably why they do not find the show funny at all. Some middle-class viewers seem to think that the show is a completely realistic depiction of working-class life[22], and they laugh at the Royles because they may sometimes seem rather simple and stupid. Some viewers, on the other hand, want to deny that the working class acts like the Royle family – in their view working-class people cannot be so crude and ignorant. These viewers may have not noticed the subtle social criticism that the show contains.

Because the Royles' working-classness is always mentioned whenever the sitcom is talked about, I realized that I have to acquaint myself more with the idea of class. It was not until I read Beverley Skeggs' work *Class, Self, Culture*, where she analyses some of the most common representations of the working class, that I knew what I wanted to do. My aim in this thesis is thus to pinpoint the most common representations of the working class in contemporary culture and analyse *The Royle Family* closely in order to see whether these common representations are reproduced in it, too. Does *The Royle Family* reinforce all the common working-class stereotypes or does it break them and create new representations? Has *The Royle Family* had any effect on how the working class is seen? I could of course study many other things concerning *The Royle Family*, but as class itself is such a broad and complicated issue, I will have to leave the other fascinating dimensions in the sitcom for others to study.

The outline of my thesis is as follows. First, I will define the notions of working class and representation. Then I will look at how the class has been viewed mainly in contemporary audiovisual texts and try to analyse some of the most common representations of the class. After that, in order to set *The Royle Family* in its historical and cultural setting, I will move on to situational comedies and shed some light on the

[22] See, for example, Skeggs, 2004, 113.

history of British sitcoms and especially the working class in them. In chapter four, I put the theory introduced earlier into practice and analyse closely how the working class is portrayed in *The Royle Family* and compare it to the common stereotypes of the class to see if there are any similarities or whether the show actually creates new ways of seeing the class.

My view is that *The Royle Family* has been a part of a phenomenon which has raised the popularity of the working class in Britain and in fact made it desirable or "cool". This unprecedented phenomenon can be seen, for example, in the results of a MORI survey in 2002, in which a record 68% of the respondents claimed that they are working-class "and proud of it"[23], although many of them would be categorised as middle class by occupation. Indeed, as Suzanne Moore declares, it seems that "if there is anything worse than the working classes, it is the middle classes."[24] Being middle class seems almost a crime, as many celebrities try very hard to act "common" despite their riches or middle-class background, so that they would appeal to the "common" people. There are, of course, many reasons why this phenomenon has taken place and many things have affected it besides *The Royle Family*. In chapter five I will have a brief look at this phenomenon and ponder what kind of an effect *The Royle Family* has had on the way people view the working class these days.

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[23] "Working Class – And Proud Of It!" MORI. 16 August 2002. [8 July 2005.] http://www.mori.com/mrr/2002/c020816.shtml

[24] Moore, Suzanne. "Down and out in the class war." *New Statesman*. 18-25 December 1998. Vol. 127 Issue 4416, p. 9. http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=1444071&db=aph

2. Working Class and Its Representations

2.1 Working Class

Defining "working class" is not easy. There are many views on what the class entails and there have been, and continue to be, debates about whether the class even exists or not. I will not go into great detail on the history of the working class or the debates concerning the class as it is not the purpose of this paper. Let us just assume that the working class does exist.

In short, working class could be defined as consisting of "the group of people in society who traditionally do physical work and do not have much money or power."[25] Other definitions give more details about the people belonging to the class: "people who are employed for wages, especially in manual or industrial work."[26] They differ from the middle class in that way that the middle class "includes professional people such as teachers or managers."[27]

Historically, one cannot talk about social classes without mentioning Karl Marx, the founder of modern socialism. Sociologist Kenneth Roberts offers an over-simplification of Marx's theories which demonstrates how Marx made sense of the class structure:

> Marx defined social classes as aggregates of individuals standing in common relationships to the means of production and, in the capitalist society that was maturing in his lifetime, he identified two principal classes; the capitalists or bourgeoisie who owned the means of production, and the workers or proletariat who sold their labour for wages.[28]

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[25] "working class." *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. 3rd edition. Harlow: Longman Group, 1995.

[26] "working class." *Oxford Dictionary of English*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

[27] "middle class." The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

[28] Roberts, 3.

The boundaries of the working class cannot be precisely charted, states Roberts[29]. In fact, the working class is more than just the group of manual workers, but it is easier to simplify like Roberts does: "the majority of blue-collar workers identify themselves as working class, are organized in trade unions and support the Labour Party."[30]

Indeed, it is easy to generalize, but it should be noted that there are some internal divisions within the working class. The British Government has been using a new occupationally based social classification called National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) from 2001, replacing older, perhaps more straightforward classifications.[31] This new classification does not recognize a working class as such, it simply divides people into eight different classes based on occupation. For example, the first, highest class contains higher managerial and professional occupations such as company directors and managers, doctors, lawyers, teachers and so on. The second lowest class (or the seventh class) contains "routine occupations" such as waiters and cleaners. The lowest class, on the other hand, contains those people who have never worked as well as those who are long-term unemployed. By contrast, the British market research industry does recognize a working class and its divisions. Its six-grade classification model is based on the occupation of the head of the household, and it is fairly familiar to the general public, too. The social grades the model recognizes start from A (upper middle class) and go down all the way to E (those at the lowest levels of subsistence)[32]. Grades C2, D and E could all be considered to be divisions of the working class. C2 in this socio-economic classification system denotes skilled working

[29] Roberts, 11.

[30] Roberts, 4.

[31] A full explanation of the NS-SEC and all the classes it recognizes can be found on the British National Statistics' homepage, http://www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/ns_sec/default.asp [8 July 2005.]

[32] A full explanation of the six-grade classification system used by the market research industry can be found on the British Market Research Association's homepage, http://www.bmra.org.uk/glossarycomplete_page.asp [8 July 2005]

class, which includes skilled manual workers such as, for example, coal-miners. D, on the other hand, is the working class proper, including semi and unskilled manual workers such as postmen and cleaners, to name but a few. The lowest group, E, is called "those at lowest levels of subsistence", meaning state pensioners or widows who have no other earnings, as well as casual workers. Thus we see that the working class as a group is not entirely homogeneous; there is some diversity in the occupations and consequently the financial situations of the people within the class.

All these definitions of the working class seem to rise from a very economic point of view. Indeed, Beverley Skeggs remarks that the working class has been defined either by its economic, monetary and market value in certain periods of history; at others, however, it has been defined primarily in relation to moral criteria.[33] For example, dividing the working class into categories of "respectable" and "unrespectable", distinguishing the morally better from the immoral, has been fairly common in history. In addition, there is a group of people that some would count as belonging to the working class, yet others would regard them as belonging to a whole other class, namely the "underclass". These people are unemployed, living on social benefits and unwilling to even find work – thus, perhaps they do not fit the "working" class completely. The NS-SEC classification which I introduced above seems to recognize such an "underclass" as its lowest (the eighth) class is indeed comprised of people who are unemployed and those who have never worked. As the "underclass" is not (yet) an official separate class on its own, I will look at the working class in its broadest sense, including the unemployed, the skilled manual workers and every occupation in between. Hence, I will not attempt to divide the working class into

[33] Skeggs, 2004, 29.

smaller divisions in this thesis, I shall only discuss about the working class as a very heterogeneous group.

As a concluding note, Skeggs reports that the term "working-class" was created to define the urban poor[34]. This should not be ignored, as it means that the people who once were categorized as the urban poor are now called "working-class" – it may sound better, but it does not mean that the people would be any better off. It would therefore be best to keep in mind that when there is a working class, there are also other classes that are positioned higher up on the social scale.

2.2 Representation

According to Stuart Hall, representation involves "the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things."[35] Nothing in the world – objects, people, events and so on – has a fixed or true, final meaning in itself. We human beings make things mean something; we construct meaning within our culture by "using representational systems – concepts and signs."[36] Therefore, it could be said that studying representation is the same as studying meaning.[37] Meaning, Hall adds,

> will always change, from one culture or period to another. There is no guarantee that every object in one culture will have an equivalent meaning in another, precisely because cultures differ, sometimes radically, from one another in their codes – the ways they carve up, classify and assign meaning to the world.[38]

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[34] Skeggs, 2004, 36.

[35] Hall, Stuart. "The Work of Representation." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* Ed. Stuart Hall. London: The Open University, 1997b. 15.

[36] Hall, 1997b, 25.

[37] Richard Dyer sees the study of representation being more about giving us knowledge about reality. In a sense he is right: studying representations does give us, for example, knowledge about the values in society at a certain time in history. This view, however, does not seem to recognize the fact that some representations are false: they do not represent reality for all, only to those who have created the representations (the writer or producer of the text). Therefore, in my opinion, it is better to regard studying representations as studying meaning instead of trying to find knowledge about reality in them. Dyer, Richard. *White.* London and New York: Routledge, 1997. xiii.

[38] Hall, 1997b, 61.

In other words, people see things differently based on their view of the world and all the things in it as well as their position in society. This is very true especially concerning social class – a person's view on the working class, for example, and its representations can vary a great deal in regard to that person's own class position.

Hence, when studying the representations of the working class, we should first have an understanding of what is meant by the concept of working class in our culture, before we can look at a text (a picture, a novel, a film or a television series, for example) and find the things that show us that that particular text is telling us something about the group of people that belong to the working class. The representations of the class can manifest themselves in many ways: how the class is talked about by other people, for example, or how the working-class people talk, dress, or what they look like in the text that is studied. Sometimes class can be referred to indirectly by using symbols or euphemisms – in Britain, for example, talking about "council estates" is the same as talking about working-class people, and the term "Essex girl" has come to denote the white working-class woman.[39]

Studying especially fictive texts (such as films, novels or television series) is very important, as we can then see the ways meaning is constructed and how the stereotypes of certain groups of people are formed. Stereotyping occurs when people are reduced "to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature."[40] Stereotypes are "memorable, widely recognised and frequently repeated," they do not offer a positive image and moreover, they are used in the media to "define

[39] Examples from Skeggs, 2004, 112.

[40] Hall, Stuart. "The Spectacle of the 'Other'." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* Ed. Stuart Hall. London: The Open University, 1997a. 257.

and reinforce the deviant status of particular groups."[41] Stereotyping indeed loses "sight of the individual" as people are described with not unique and individual, but collective characteristics.[42] For example, some non-working-class viewers might think that all working-class people are like the Royle family, that they share the same views, talk the same way and look the same. However, when we study the representations of the class more closely, we can hopefully see how it is in fact the makers of the series that want us to see some aspects of the class that they think are relevant. Skeggs notes that representations are not often generated intentionally; instead, they are born out of ignorance, because the producers lack "knowledge about the cultures they represent."[43] Skeggs also reminds us that very few people in the media have working-class backgrounds, therefore it is indeed the middle classes that often produce the representations.[44] How could the representations of the working class then be in any way accurate if the working-class people have not had their say in the matter in the first place? The producers show us some "signs"[45] that symbolize something, and we as viewers construct meaning according to those signs in our heads. Hall points out that "the reader is as important as the writer in the production of meaning,"[46] as interpretation is an essential part in the process of meaning construction. He also

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[41] Woollacott, Janet. "Fictions and ideologies. The case of situation comedy." *Popular Culture and Social Relations*. Eds. Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986. 209.

[42] Lester, Paul Martin and Susan Dente Ross. "Images That Injure: An Introduction." *Images That Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media*. Eds. Paul Martin Lester and Susan Dente Ross. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003. 2.

[43] Skeggs, 2004, 97.

[44] Skeggs, 2004, 98.

[45] Hall also uses the term 'signifier', which he has borrowed from Saussure. By 'signifier' he means the images on the screen (when talking about a television show), which 'say something' to the viewer. More about Saussure's influence on the study of representation can be found in Hall, 1997b, 36-41.

[46] Hall, 1997b, 33.

emphasizes that "representation works as much through what is *not* shown, as through what is."[47]

I shall now look at some of the common representations of the working class in popular culture, some of which have helped to create a certain stereotypical image of working-class people.

2.3 Representations of Working Class

2.3.1 Dirty and Disgusting

"The working-class have a long history of being represented by excess, whilst the middle-class are represented by their distance from it," writes Skeggs[48]. Indeed, we often recognize working-class people in films and television shows by their excessive physical features: they are often overweight (like Roseanne and Dan Conners in *Roseanne* or Onslow and Daisy in *Keeping Up Appearances*), have big hair and too much make-up (like Rose in *Keeping Up Appearances* or Fran Fine in *The Nanny*) and so on.

While the middle-class characters are reasonable, modest and discreet both in their physical appearance and in their behaviour, the working-class characters are anything but. If a working-class character wants to succeed in life and become, in a way, higher class, s/he must change and lose his/her working-classness and excessive traits, as working-classness has no value. A classic example is G.B. Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (or the musical *My Fair Lady*, which is based on the play), where the working-class character Eliza Doolittle has to lose both her excessive appearance and behaviour as well as her Cockney accent in order to successfully become a lady. There

[47] Hall, 1997b, 59.

[48] Skeggs, 2004, 99.

are such transformation narratives in the contemporary culture, too, for example in the films *Working Girl* and *Pretty Woman*.[49] Interestingly, most transformation narratives are about women – it is perhaps more acceptable for a man to be working class.

Kathleen Rowe has studied unruly women in popular culture, focusing particularly on Roseanne Arnold, the creator of *Roseanne*, a comedy about a working-class family. She writes that the traces of social structures can be read in human bodies. Thus, the working-class body is "grotesque", exaggerating all the body's

> processes, bulges and orifices, whereas the static, monumental 'classical (or bourgeois) body' conceals them. The grotesque body breaks down the boundaries between itself and the world outside it, while the classical body, consistent with the ideology of the bourgeois individual, shores them up.[50]

Alongside Roseanne Arnold, Rowe includes other "grotesque" bodies as those of, for example, Bette Midler, Dolly Parton and Miss Piggy (from *The Muppet Show*). She adds that while the classical, "middle-class" body favours its "upper stratum", namely the head, the eyes and the faculties of reason; the grotesque, "working-class" body is the body in its "lower stratum" – in other words, it is the body that eats, drinks, defecates and copulates. "Whenever the body is engaged in the functions that bring it closest to the thresholds of life and death – being born, having intercourse, giving birth, and dying – it is grotesque," Rowe concludes.[51]

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[49] Examples from Skeggs, 2004, 99. Skeggs, in turn, has borrowed the examples from Yvonne Tasker's *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 1998. Kathleen Rowe also analyses the transformation narrative in *Pretty Woman*, although mostly from the male hero's perspective. In the film, Edward, a wealthy businessman, hires Vivian, a prostitute, for a week to act as his companion in social events. With money and a little education in manners, the trashy prostitute starts to both look and sound like a lady. As Vivian and Edward eventually fall in love, Vivian gives up prostitution and will not settle for anything less than marriage. Rowe emphasizes that the story is more reminiscent of *Cinderella* than of *Pygmalion*, as Eliza Doolittle has to actually work hard to conceal her working-classness. In *Pretty Woman*, writes Rowe, "the signs of class – upper or lower – are as easily taken up or discarded as a borrowed credit card." Rowe, Kathleen. *The Unruly Woman. Gender and the Genres of Laughter.* Austin: University of Texas Press. 1995. 198-200.

[50] Rowe, 33.

[51] Rowe, 33.

Thus, a working-class body is excessive and grotesque and working-class people lack control and restraint – after all, a fat body suggests that the person carrying it is unwilling or unable to control his/her physical appetites.[52] Besides all this, working-class people are often represented as having excessive behaviour, too. According to Bettie, the working class is often associated with "the excesses of trash: junk food, perversions of sex, cheap commodities, and generally tactless and loud behaviour," as a contrast to "bourgeois repression."[53] Rowe remarks how working-class (or "unruly") women especially are also associated with excessive speech: in quantity, content or tone.[54] This again shows how working-class people are supposedly unable to control themselves. "Farting, belching, and nose-picking", comments Rowe, "convey a similar failure – or refusal – to restrain the body."[55] In fact, being at ease with one's body is a privilege held only by the upper classes – for the working classes, on the other hand, "the body is more likely to be a source of embarrassment, timidity, and alienation."[56]

In audiovisual texts the grotesqueness of working-class characters can be seen in their disgusting habits: not only do they drink large amounts of alcohol and belch different tunes, some even collect toenails or navel lint. One habit that many working-class women especially possess in many films and television shows that could be classed as "dirty" or "disgusting" in today's health conscious world, is smoking. For example, in *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps*, the working-class characters

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[52] Rowe, 31. Julie Bettie writes about *Roseanne* too, noting that especially in America "weight is inversely correlated with socioeconomic status." Britain may be a little more forgiving in that fat is not always associated with "lowbrow" status like in America, as many working-class characters in British television are very thin, and on the other hand, many upper-class characters have a little weight on them. Bettie, Julie. "Class Dismissed? Roseanne and the Changing Face of Working-Class Iconography" *Social Text*, No. 45. Winter, 1995. 137.

[53] Bettie, 141.

[54] Rowe, 31.

[55] Rowe, 64.

[56] Rowe, 64.

Janet, Donna and Donna's mother Flo all drink plenty of alcohol and smoke plenty of cigarettes. Louise, Janet and Donna's friend, who is a university student and thus an aspiring middle-class individual, does not drink or smoke as much as the other girls, and it is often made clear how she is different compared to Janet and Donna. Louise's character is rather scatterbrained and girly, but often she is depicted as "the smart one" as well as "the pretty one" and "the thin one". It is usually Louise who shrieks "that's disgusting!" when she finds out about her friends' disgusting habits and who disposes of Janet's cigarettes because they are "smelly".

Furthermore, to the middle-class eye Onslow and Daisy in *Keeping Up Appearances*, for example, are not only overweight; they are grotesque and dirty. They cannot keep themselves nor their living quarters clean and proper – the wrecked car they constantly have on their front yard seems to almost scream that "working-class people live here". Daisy's sister Hyacinth, the main character in the sitcom, aspires to be middle-class herself and makes it very clear how much she despises Daisy and Onslow. They are not, however, the "worst" working-class characters in television: nobody could probably beat Harry Enfield's two comic characters, Wayne and Waynetta Slob. As their name suggests, they are the true underclass, true slobs: they are fat, flatulent and just plain dirty. On many occasions, the Slobs have food all over their faces, their clothes are dirty and their hair greasy. The Slob residence, on the other hand, resembles more of a pigsty than anything else: the floor is covered with litter and there are beer cans and pizza boxes everywhere, not to mention unwashed dishes. Rowe points out that "all marginalized groups are vulnerable to pollution taboos that stigmatize them as less than human and their bodies as 'dirty,' 'foul,' 'greasy.'"[57] The working class, along with, for example, gay people, Jews, people of colour and

[57] Rowe, 42.

immigrants are part of these marginalized groups, as society sees itself as predominantly white, heterosexual and middle-class. Therefore it is not a surprise that working-class characters such as Wayne and Waynetta or Daisy and Onslow are depicted as living in total squalor.

On a similar note, Richard Dyer points out how white working-class people are often depicted darker than middle-class or aristocratic people: "colour distinctions within whiteness have been understood in relation to labour. To work outside the home – literally out of doors but also away from the values of domesticity – is to be exposed to the elements, especially the sun and the wind, which darken white skin."[58] This is how darker skin (though racially white) signifies social inferiority. If we compare, for example, Ralph and Ted in the famous *The Fast Show* sketch, we notice that Ted, the Irish workman who spends most of his time working outdoors, is slightly darker than his pale superior, Lord Ralph.[59] Dyer also notes that usually (national and historical variation may occur) white denotates "good", while black is the opposite, "bad".[60] This is demonstrated well by Dyer's observation that in Westerns, "bad" white characters are often associated with darkness or with non-white others, for example by getting involved with Indian women or by spending time in Mexican bars, and so on.[61] Dyer has also studied many paintings and consequently offers several examples from the art world about this contrast between white and black, good and bad, higher social status and the working-class. He observes that in paintings, "class as well as such criteria of proper whiteness as sanity and non-criminality are expressed in terms of

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[58] Dyer, 57.

[59] Incidentally, Ted is a rare example of the rural working class. The working class is mostly portrayed as being urban; the only exception besides Ted seems to be the Dingle family in the soap opera *Emmerdale*.

[60] Dyer, 58.

[61] Dyer, 35.

degrees of translucence, with murkiness associated with poor, working-class and immigrant white subjects."[62]

All these examples show how the working class has been (and still is, to some extent) associated with excess, grotesqueness and dirt. The class is often described with the term "white trash", which, according to Skeggs, "encompasses perfectly the association of the working-class with disgust and waste – it racializes the working-class so that distance can be drawn from other forms of whiteness."[63] This tradition of identifying the class with waste, excrement and sewerage "that threatens to spill over and contaminate the order of the nation"[64] will stay alive as long as the upper classes see the working class as a potential threat, as something that is beyond governance.

2.3.2 Tasteless

The working class are often depicted as being tasteless, lacking in style, manners and simply good taste. Germaine Greer, for example, describes a particular sort of working-class women known as "the Essex girl" in her article. "The Essex girl" is, according to Greer's not so flattering description,

> tough, loud, vulgar and unashamed. Her hair is badly dyed not because she can't afford a hairdresser, but because she wants it to look brassy. Nobody makes her wear her ankle chain; she likes the message it sends. Nobody laughs harder at an Essex girl joke than she does: she is not ashamed to admit what she puts behind her ears to make her more attractive is her ankles.[65]

Pierre Bourdieu, who has studied the subject of taste extensively, argues that one's upbringing and education have a great effect on one's cultural practices and preferences

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[62] Dyer, 113.

[63] Skeggs, 2004, 103. Bettie also notes that the phrase "alludes to the racist assumption that color and poverty and degenerate lifestyle 'automatically' go together, so much so that when white folks are acting in this way, their whiteness needs to be named." Bettie, 140.

[64] Skeggs, 2004, 104.

[65] Greer, Germaine. "Long live the Essex girl." *The Guardian*. 5 March 2001. [19 November 2004.] http://www.guardian.co.uk/women/story/0,,446451,00.html

and consequently on one's "taste"[66] – thus, it is clear that a working-class person and a higher educated aristocrat, for example, cannot share the same taste for things. Moreover, definitions of taste and tastelessness differ between individuals even within the same class – the so-called "Essex girls", for example, are considered tasteless and vulgar even among some working-class people. It should be noted that the accusations of tastelessness always indicate a judgement of lower value or, as Bourdieu so explicitly declares, "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier."[67] Hence, calling the working class tasteless is only one side of the story: it is only the opinion of the higher classes, and it implies that working-class culture and tastes are somehow worthless.

The representation of tasteless working class can be found in a few audiovisual texts. Skeggs writes about the sitcom *Keeping Up Appearances*, which stars "the mother of all snobs"[68], Hyacinth Bucket[69]. Hyacinth herself thinks she has impeccable (middle-class) taste, and to the misfortune of the people near her, she goes to some lengths to prove it. Her sisters Daisy and Rose, together with their father, live on a council estate nearby, which is a great disappointment to Hyacinth. She often makes it very clear that she thinks Daisy, Rose and Daisy's husband Onslow are vulgar, having no taste nor manners. Skeggs suggests that "the comedy of the series derives both from the central character's energetic obsession to maintain appearances and from the exposure of what those appearances are intended to conceal."[70] In fact, as Skeggs reports, being so preoccupied with questions of taste as Hyacinth is, is not very tasteful in itself.

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[66] Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* Trans. Richard Nice. London: Routledge, 1986. 1.

[67] Bourdieu, 6.

[68] "Keeping Up Appearances." *The BBC Guide to Comedy*. [8 December 2004.] http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/guide/articles/k/keepingupappeara_7773960.shtml

[69] Pronounced "bouquet" – according to Hyacinth herself, at least.

[70] Skeggs, 2004, 109.

American television has had its share of tasteless and vulgar working-class characters in the recent years, too. For example, the hit sitcom *Frasier* is based on a similar kind of setting with *Keeping Up Appearances*: the main character Frasier Crane and his brother Niles both have a very exquisite taste for high culture and their snobbery of everything "common" is simply overwhelming. The humour in the sitcom is mainly based on the clashes that occur when the two arbiters of taste have to deal with people with no taste at all. Frasier and Niles's father, Martin, is a beer-drinking, baseball-loving average joe who thinks his sons are utter snobs while the sons are of the opinion that their father lacks both style and good taste. Although Martin is usually the most vulgar one of the characters, tables are somewhat turned when the mother of Niles' British girlfriend Daphne appears in the show. Mrs Gertrude Moon is from Manchester and she is so loud, vulgar and unashamed that even Martin is scared of her. Suddenly Martin Crane seems almost as sophisticated as his snobbish sons when a brassy overweight working-class woman from Manchester steps into their lives.

In conclusion, it seems that for every "tasteless" working-class character on television there must be a snobbish upper class character despising the vulgarity of the lower orders. Comedies especially rely somewhat on the clashes that occur when the "tasteful" upper class and the "tasteless" lower class meet as it creates laughter. Others laugh at the snobbery of the higher class while others find the tastelessness and vulgarity of the lower classes funnier.

2.3.3 Stupid and Unmodern

Trying to find a smart and educated working-class character in popular culture is almost impossible. In fact, some of the most common representations of working-class people portray the class as being poorly educated and having negative thoughts towards getting an education, as well as lacking in mental capabilities, being backwards, unmodern,

racist and sexist. It should be mentioned that in reality, according to many studies and statistics, working-class individuals are generally not as well educated as middle-class people,[71] for example, but this fact does not tell us anything about the actual mental capabilities or attitudes of the class.[72]

Skeggs observes that a working-class man is generally "recognized as embodying physicality and endurance, rather than cleverness and self-governance,"[73] due to the fact that working-class culture is simply not valued. While "the middle-classes are represented as at the vanguard of the modern, as a national identity and a cultural resource," the working class is being spoken of as lacking in culture and being a blockage to modernity and global prosperity.[74] In other words, working-class people are useless for the nation, a burden even, as they have nothing to offer – they do not even pay as much taxes as the middle-classes. Skeggs reports how the white working class in the north of England were clearly blamed in the media for the 2001 race riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bolton,[75] thus representing the class as being a "blockage to global progress, preventing the development of the nation."[76] Through identifying the working class with these negative characteristics, the division between the working class and its upper classes deepens. "By setting the parameters between being useful to

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[71] Hence, they have working-class jobs: if they had the qualifications that education offers, they would get middle-class jobs and they would not be regarded as "working class". Joanna Bourke charts the history of education in the working class, listing many reasons for why it has been impossible to educate the working class as much as the middle classes. These reasons could be used to explain the lack of interest towards education in the working class that is still evident in some areas. She points out, for example, that "educational policy failed to convince working-class parents that education was the key to upward social mobility." Bourke, Joanna. *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960.* London and New York: Routledge, 1994. 120.

[72] For further analysis on class vs. education see, for example, Roberts, 103-130.

[73] Skeggs, 2004, 75.

[74] Skeggs, 2004, 94.

[75] Clashes between white and Asian gangs flared up into huge race riots in May 2001 first in Oldham, then spreading to many northern towns such as Bolton, Burnley, Bradford and Leeds. Several people were injured, including police officers.

[76] Skeggs, 2004, 98.

the nation and/or having valuable cultural diversity," writes Skeggs, "those whose culture is defined as lacking are unable to participate in political claims-making."[77]

Television has had a radical effect on how the working class is perceived as racist and sexist. The working-class characters Alf Garnett in the 1960s sitcom *Till Death Us Do Part* and Archie Bunker in the American remake of the same show, *All In The Family*, could be called the pioneers of the racist and sexist working-class male character. Although the makers of *Till Death Us Do Part* meant the Alf Garnett character not to be taken seriously, "to be laughed at, not with"[78] – that is why his views and actions were so blatantly politically incorrect – many viewers saw him as a real working-class man. While middle-class viewers were horrified by the crudeness of the working class, some working-class viewers themselves clearly identified with Garnett's opinions, not recognizing the attempts that were made to make Garnett look like a fool instead of a hero. Ian Gordon sees the characters of Alf Garnett and Archie Bunker as "figures of nostalgia" as they "represented a passing era, or an era segments of the audience wished past." Thus, in his view, the humour in the two sitcoms "figured as a means of disengaging the conservatism of such figures from current social norms and placing it in some version of the past."[79]

Although there have been very few other such bigoted working-class characters in popular culture since Alf Garnett, the myth of racist and sexist working-class still lives on strongly. On the other hand, in these politically correct times it is perhaps more common to portray the working class as being almost too stupid to even form opinions on politics or racial issues. Onslow in *Keeping Up Appearances*, for

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[77] Skeggs, 2004, 94.

[78] Cashmore, Ellis. *...and there was television*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994. 105.

[79] Gordon, Ian. "Superman on the Set: The Market, Nostalgia and Television Audiences." *Quality Popular Television*. Eds. Mark Jancovich and James Lyons. London: British Film Institute, 2003. 152-3.

example, is not one of the brainiest or most opinionated characters in television. He is a passive couch potato, just about capable of watching television and drinking beer at the same time. He might be able to form opinions about his sister-in-law Hyacinth, but one would not like to get into political debate with him.

2.3.4 Unruly, unrespectable and immoral

"Respectability is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class," states Skeggs.[80] As the working class is constantly represented as being "dangerous, polluting, threatening, revolutionary, pathological and without respect,"[81] it is clear that respectability is a property which seems to be solely in the possession of the middle classes. It has always been, according to Skeggs, "a marker and a burden of class, a standard to which to aspire."[82] Respectability goes hand in hand with morality: the respected members of a community have moral authority over others, which makes them superior in society. As Skeggs points out, "to not be respectable is to have little social value or legitimacy,"[83] which consequently means that the people who are classified as unrespectable are practically worthless in society and judged as immoral in the eyes of the so-called respectable individuals.

Thus, the working class are seen as being unrespectable, immoral and unruly. This is evident in certain audio-visual representations, although not always very clearly. In the American hit sitcom *Dharma and Greg*, for example, upper class socialite Kitty Montgomery often despises her daughter-in-law Dharma Finkelstein's occasional erratic behaviour. Dharma was not brought up in a conventional way by her

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[80] Skeggs, Beverley. *Formations of Class & Gender*. London: Sage Publications, 1997. 1.

[81] Skeggs, 1997, 1. All the other negative representations that I have dealt with in this thesis could also be added to the list.

[82] Skeggs, 1997, 3.

[83] Skeggs, 1997, 3.

hippie parents, which means that she is not always aware of the social rules of conduct that Kitty lives by. Although Dharma does not portray all the negative aspects that are associated with the working class – namely, she is not overweight nor dirty – her behaviour is somewhat excessive. She is loud, very spontaneous and she even wears bright colourful clothes – something which Kitty never does and could not even dream of doing. She often says and does things without thinking first, following her instincts instead of the rules of social conduct. Therefore, her mother-in-law Kitty finds Dharma vulgar and unruly – it is impossible to control or rule her.

"Unruly" and "uncontrollable" are terms that have also been associated with another American working-class figure, Roseanne Arnold. Kathleen Rowe has studied Arnold's persona extensively and she has used Arnold as an example in her definitions of "the unruly woman". According to Rowe, some of the unruly woman's characteristics include that she "creates disorder", "is unable or unwilling to confine herself to her proper place" and is excessive in appearance and in behaviour.[84] Although some find unruliness a positive quality in a person, most people would think otherwise. They find it scary if a person lacks social restraint and if s/he simply cannot be controlled or disciplined. Consequently, unruliness is seen as a threat: it makes people seem shameless, irresponsible, tough and even dangerous to society and other people.

2.3.5 Immobile

One way of representing the working-class is to present them as immobile, passive and fixed to one place. This portrayal goes somewhat hand in hand with the representation of unmodernity as the ideal, modern citizen is active, able to develop as a person, participating in society, and not fixed to one place. Working-class characters in

[84] Rowe, 31. This list is merely an over-simplification; Rowe offers many other detailed characteristics for the unruly woman besides these.

television rarely travel anywhere or move house; even more rare is it to see a middle-class character glued to his/her television set. In reality, working-class immobility is largely due to the fact that the working class do not have the same opportunities and possibilities in careers and in employment as the middle class do.[85] Thus they simply do not have the same kinds of economic opportunities to move, to further their education somewhere else nor to travel. The representation of the working-class as immobile could be seen as a metaphor of the real situation.

In *Keeping Up Appearances*, for example, Hyacinth aspires to travel to the countryside and abroad as that is what she thinks upper class people do, while Onslow does not want to leave his beloved sofa for anything. Daisy and Onslow move in the same circles day in, day out – even in their house they are only seen lazing about either in their bedroom or in the living room. They may visit Hyacinth if it is absolutely necessary but apart from that, they rarely leave their house. It is usually Hyacinth who visits Daisy and Onslow, although it is mostly because she does not want her neighbours to see her poor relatives. When working-class characters do travel, it is usually for a good reason and there is always something that reminds them of home, the place where they are from and where they "belong". For example, the men in *Auf Wiedersehn, Pet* travel abroad only because they cannot find work in Britain. They stay very true to their origins even when are staying long periods out of Britain – they stick with other Britons, go to British pubs and most importantly, stay true to their local football club. Upper class characters are rarely seen demonstrating such loyalty and yearning for their home district.

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[85] Kenneth Roberts notes how middle-class families are "more likely to be geographically mobile." Working-class people tend to go to local schools and stay in one place perhaps for their whole life while the middle class attends non-local grammar schools and universities, and seeks middle class jobs "away from the areas where they were brought up." Roberts, 85.

Skeggs remarks how geographical positioning is widely used in the media in creating alternative references to the working class.[86] Kathryn and Philip Dodd observe how the working class in television is "relentlessly discovered in the same places – up north and in the East End."[87] Moreover, different areas are used as shorthand to name certain types of working-class people – the term 'Essex girl', for example, has come to mean a bold and brassy white working-class woman, as if all working-class women in Essex were alike. These kinds of euphemisms fix the class more firmly spatially, strengthening the representation of the working class as immobile.

2.3.6 Entertainment

In American television shows and films, British characters are often used as entertainment, as sources of humour and objects of mockery. Many times these characters are upper-class snobs, but sometimes they can be working-class, such as Daphne's relatives in *Frasier*. Daphne Moon is originally from Manchester, thus her brother and her mother sometimes pay a visit and the clashes between the British working-class characters and the more better-off American characters are the source of much of the humour in the series. Skeggs mentions films such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Trainspotting* and *The Full Monty*, where stereotypes of British class (both middle and working) are used to make the films somehow more appealing to American

[86] Skeggs, 2004, 112.

[87] Dodd, Kathryn and Philip Dodd. "From the East End to *EastEnders*: Representations of the working class, 1890-1990." *Come On Down? Popular media culture in post-war Britain*. Eds. Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg. London and New York: Routledge, 1992. 116. Christine Geraghty offers a reason for this, claiming that the "conventions established through the history of British film-making as well as television demand a realism based on the representation of working-class life which speaks for and about a specific region." Geraghty, Christine. "British soaps in the 1980s." *Come On Down? Popular media culture in post-war Britain*. 137.

audiences. Although class is not addressed directly in these films, "it can still be branded and marketed for a transnational audience," adds Skeggs.[88]

Skeggs also comments how, especially in British soap operas, working class is used to "speak" emotions. Most British soap operas portray working-class life and interestingly, different parts of the country are represented: the North (*Coronation Street*), urban South (*EastEnders*) and the countryside (*Emmerdale*). These soaps attract millions of viewers every night and *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* especially compete for the number one slot in the ratings chart every week. Thus, the working class is used as entertainment for all Britons, regardless of one's social class. Using the working class to convey emotions is a way of exploring issues and handling emotions that "cannot usually be expressed by middle-class codes of restraint and manners."[89] Indeed, soap operas definitely offer many opportunities for the working-class characters to show emotional impact, as the plotlines are filled with fights, murders, rapes, abortions, suicides, accidents, explosions, love triangles, weddings and so on.

2.3.7 Language

If a working-class character in television cannot be identified by his / her physical characteristics or behaviour, language is a great giveaway of the character's working-class status. Without a doubt, one's regional and social positions affect greatly the language s/he uses: people in London and in Glasgow, for example, speak different varieties of English, and the same goes for working-class and upper middle class people. In fact, as Peter Trudgill argues, the greater the distance geographically or socially, the more dissimilarities there are linguistically between the two varieties of

[88] Skeggs, 2004, 110.

[89] Skeggs, 2004, 110.

English.[90] Consequently, people with different social backgrounds speak different kinds of English even if they live in the same city. Moreover, Trudgill points out that

> the relationship between social and regional language varieties is such that the greatest degree of regional differentiation is found among lower working-class speakers and the smallest degree at the other end of the social scale, among speakers from the upper middle class.[91]

Thus, teachers or doctors from Newcastle and Bristol do not speak English alike, but they do sound more similar than, for example, most factory workers from the same two cities.[92] McCormick adds that anyone speaking with a regional accent was once assumed to be working or lower middle class[93], and this view may still be alive among some people, although it is not the whole truth.

Standard English, according to Trudgill, is the dialect of English which is normally taught in schools and typically spoken by educated people. It is also used in news broadcasts and in the writing of English throughout the English-speaking world.[94] It can be said to be the most prestigious British dialect, while the most prestigious accent is RP, Received Pronunciation.[95] RP is not the accent of any region, but it is heavily marked socially: it is particularly associated with Public Schools and the upper classes.[96] Although only a very small percentage of Britons use the RP accent, it has the highest status in dialects. Trudgill explains that the prestige of, for example, doctors, top civil servants and bankers, who speak Standard English with an RP accent, "rubs off"

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[90] Trudgill, Peter. Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society. London: Penguin Books, 1974. 35.

[91] Trudgill, Peter. *On Dialect*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983. 186. Trudgill also emphasizes the effect age and education has on language: older people with little education tend to show the most regional variation in their dialects. Ibid., 187.

[92] Trudgill, Peter. *Accent, Dialect and The School*. London: Edward Arnold, 1975. 21.

[93] McCormick, John. *Contemporary Britain*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 62.

[94] Trudgill, 1974, 17; 1983, 186.

[95] According to Arthur Hughes and Peter Trudgill, at least. Hughes, Arthur and Peter Trudgill. *English Accents and Dialects*. London: Edward Arnold, 1979. 12.

[96] Trudgill, 1975, 20-21.

onto their language, making the grammatical features and dialects that are associated with members of the upper classes more preferable and "better" than the "bad" language and dialects used by the lower social classes who have lower prestige in society.[97] Dialect tolerance in Britain is minimal and the attitudes towards non-standard dialects are very unfavourable in some circles, observes Trudgill.[98] Working-class varieties of English are indeed often judged to be "bad" and "wrong",[99] although, it should be noted that the RP accent also has some unfavourable connotations: it is the accent of the "posh", pretentious upper classes. As Gerry Smyth points out, the so-called BBC accent is nowadays "more likely to be used for satiric or ironic purposes."[100]

In 1984, British scholar David Rosewarne drew attention to a new variety of English and labelled it Estuary English. It is, in his own words,

> a variety of modified regional speech. It is a mixture of non-regional and local south-eastern English pronunciation and intonation. If one imagines a continuum with RP and London speech [Cockney] at either end, "Estuary English" speakers are to be found grouped in the middle ground.[101]

The most common feature of Estuary English, according to John Honey, is the "end-of-word 't' strangulation,"[102] in other words, the 't's at the end of words are not pronounced, they are replaced with glottal stops. This treatment of the t's has "reached epidemic proportions in England," comments Honey.[103] Estuary English was first in use in the south east of England, near the Thames Estuary, but it has spread all over the

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[97] Trudgill, 1975, 32. John Honey reports how some linguists indeed consider standard English as a *class dialect*, which should not be taught to "non-standard-speaking children", because "standard English is *not for them*." This obviously is an intricate issue, therefore many different views can be found. Honey, John. *Language is Power: The Story of Standard English and its Enemies*. London: Faber and Faber, 1997. 52.

[98] Trudgill, 1983, 198.

[99] Trudgill, 1983, 205.

[100] Smyth, Gerry. "Ethnicity and Language." *British Cultural Identities*. Eds. Mike Storry and Peter Childs. London and New York: Routledge, 1997. 248.

[101] Rosewarne, David. "Estuary English." *Times Educational Supplement*. October 1984. 19. http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary/rosew.htm [4 July 2005]

[102] Honey, 1997, 167.

[103] Honey, 1997, 167.

country ever since. As it is heavily influenced by Cockney, Frank McDonough in fact equates Estuary English with "fake cockney accent" which "young, upper-middle-class people in London have begun to adopt" in the recent years, "in order to disguise their class origins."[104] According to Lesley Milroy, Estuary English "is currently spreading both socially and geographically as a reflex of Britain's changing mobility patterns and class structure."[105] So much so, in fact, that even the upper classes and famous politicians all over England, including the prime minister Tony Blair,[106] use it nowadays. Foulkes and Docherty explain the possible reasons for the popularity of Estuary English: "all of its features can be located on a sociolinguistic and geographical continuum between RP and Cockney, and [they] are spreading . . . because the features represent neither the standard nor the extreme non-standard poles of the continuum."[107] Thus, by using Estuary English, the lower classes can hide their lack of education and sound more middle class, while the upper classes can sound more like "the common people" and not too "posh". Next, however, I shall have a closer look at some of the common characteristics of working-class speech that distinguishes it from Standard English in order to determine how they are used to represent the working class.

Firstly, pronunciation is perhaps the most noticeable element in identifying working-class people. Working-class characters tend to have very broad accents which place them in certain regions. Another characteristic is the omission of initial 'h's; for instance, working-class people tend to call for "'elp" instead of "help".

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[104] McDonough names violinist Nigel Kennedy as one of the people with a "fake cockney accent". Such people are also called "mockneys". I will return to this issue in section 2.3.8. McDonough, 207.

[105] Milroy, Lesley. "Standard English and Language Ideology." *Standard English: The Widening Debate*. Eds. Tony Bex and Richard J. Watts. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 180.

[106] McCormick, 63.

[107] Foulkes, Paul and Gerard J. Docherty. "Urban Voices – Overview." *Urban Voices. Accent Studies in the British Isles*. Eds. Paul Foulkes and Gerard J. Docherty. London: Arnold, 1999. 11. For more information on Estuary English, see John Wells' website at University College London: http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary/home.htm

'T's are generally omitted too, and replaced with glottal stops, so that "better", for example, becomes "be'er". Trudgill offers evidence from two studies to prove that there are close relationships between the pronunciation of 'h's and glottal stops and social class: it is the upper classes that carefully pronounce their 'h's and 't's while the lower working classes generally do not.[108]

Secondly, there are differences in grammar too, when we compare working-class varieties of English with Standard English. Multiple negation ("I don't want none", "It wasn't no good" etc.) is one of the grammatical features that is much more frequent in the speech of the lower social classes than in the higher classes. It is, however, "not the case that some classes use multiple negation and others do not," observes Trudgill, "it is simply the proportions that are different."[109] Another example of working-class grammar is the omission of the 's' in third-person singular verbs. Trudgill points out how lower class speakers tend to say "he think", "she go" and so on, while members of the upper middle class, for example, virtually never use such forms.[110] Trudgill also offers other examples and more detailed descriptions of typical grammatical features in working-class English, the ones listed here were only some of the most notable characteristics.[111]

Thirdly, vocabularies differ between regions and between social classes. Daisy and Onslow in *Keeping Up Appearances*, for example, eat "bacon sarnies" while Hyacinth would certainly only eat "sandwiches". Hyacinth is quite careful about the accent, grammar and vocabulary she uses as she wants to distinguish herself clearly from the common people by means of language. She shows her "refinement" by, for

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[108] Trudgill, 1975, 32-34.

[109] Trudgill, 1974, 31.

[110] Trudgill, 1974, 31.

[111] Hughes and Trudgill, 1979; Trudgill, 1983.

example, using French phrases such as "café au lait" and "tête-à-tête" – although she does not always use them in their correct sense. Working-class characters on television often show their lack of education when they have difficulties with "big" words, especially if they are of foreign origin. In *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps*, for example, Gaz does not know that "brunch" is a meal and he fails to learn the true meaning of the word even though Donna explains it to him several times. On another occasion, Gaz is distraught about his impotence and when he tries to tell Donna about it, he mistakenly declares that he is "important". All these characteristics of working-class language are often used in audiovisual texts as humorous devices. Misunderstandings with words, for example, can create very humorous situations. On the other hand, exaggerating the characteristics of working-class dialects and accents strengthens the stereotype that members of the working class are somehow more stupid and incapable than the members of other classes. This is especially the case when working-class characters are made to speak almost incomprehensible gibberish just to create laughter in the upper classes.

2.3.8 Anti-pretentious

Skeggs notes that there is a long "tradition of attacking through humour those who are supposed to be not only economically superior but also morally better"[112]. Thus, accusing the middle class of pretentiousness, uptightness and restraint and making fun of them is one way of challenging all the negative attributes that the middle class has attached to the working class. Skeggs adds that "research shows how the middle-class are not valued or authorized by the working-class, nor are middle-class self-dispositions desired. In fact, the middle-class are regularly viewed as having moral flaws in terms of

[112] Skeggs, 2004, 114.

snobbery, elitism and competitiveness or pretentiousness."[113] This critique of pretentiousness aims to "de-value the valuers", yet, on the other hand, "it also operates as a mechanism to keep the working-class in place."[114] After all, if the upper classes are seen as pretentious and uptight snobs, who would even want to be one of them?

This representation of the working class as being anti-pretentious is the only one with positive connotations, which makes it very interesting. Mocking the middle class somehow makes the working class "look good", just because the object of ridicule is economically superior and usually the one who shows disrespect towards the lower classes. Anti-pretentious humour is present everywhere in popular culture. For example, those celebrities in Britain who try to deny their middle-class origins are generally laughed at and the term "mockney" (mock cockney) has been devised to describe people such as Jamie Oliver, Guy Ritchie and Mick Jagger, "who speak a form of working-class language, whilst clearly embodying every other cultural aspect of the middle-class."[115]

Paul Willis documents how "having a laugh" in working-class culture is a way of defeating boredom and fear, of overcoming hardship and problems, staging resistance to authority and simply a way of just being one of the "lads".[116] Indeed, many working-class comedians in Britain make fun of the upper classes, from the middle class all the way to royalty. In addition, comic characters on television such as Lord Ralph and his workman Ted in *The Fast Show* underline the difference between the working class and the upper classes; the upper class character Lord Ralph is very restrained and stiff while Ted the workman is very unpretentious and relaxed, at least

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[113] Skeggs, 2004, 151.

[114] Skeggs, 2004, 114.

[115] Skeggs, 2004, 115.

[116] Willis, Paul. Learning to Labour. How working class kids get working class jobs. Aldershot: Gower, 1977. 29-32.

when Ralph is not near him. Lord Ralph tries constantly to come into contact with Ted and become friends with him, but he never succeeds as the two are from completely different worlds, and Ted especially is too aware of the social gap between the two.

3. Sitcom

In the television vernacular, situation comedies are called sitcoms[117]. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik define a sitcom as "a short narrative-series comedy, generally between twenty-four and thirty minutes long, with regular characters and setting."[118] Each episode consists of "situations rather than plots"[119] and each episode "is generated out of the same 'root joke',"[120] as Michael Mulkay sees it. The episodes can usually be viewed almost in any order and without any knowledge of the other episodes as the storylines do not continue from one episode to the next. Some deviations do occur, however: *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps*, for example, relies heavily on a continual storyline, which results in the need to show the viewers a brief summary of previous events before each new episode.

David Grote calls the nature of the situation comedy form "revolutionary"[121], as it goes beyond what we have always known as comedy. He underlines the multi-layeredness of sitcoms: the situations can be examined both from the point of view of each individual episode and also by taking into consideration the series as a whole. Any background knowledge of the characters and situations from the other episodes of the sitcom helps us in understanding the situations better, and sometimes one series is bound together by a common theme or a larger "situation".

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[117] I will use the term "sitcom" throughout this thesis, although some (David Grote, Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, for example) prefer to use the term "sit-com" instead.

[118] Neale, Steve and Frank Krutnik. *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 233.

[119] Grote, David. *The End of Comedy: The Sit-Com and the Comedic Tradition*. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983. 59.

[120] Mulkay, Michael. *On Humour: Its Nature and Its Place in Modern Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988. 183.

[121] Grote, 61.

Now that the concept of "sitcom" has been established, I shall have a closer look at the history of British sitcoms and pay special attention to the portrayal of the working class in British television.

British Sitcoms and The Working Class

The history of sitcom started from the radio, although its influences can be traced back to vaudeville and music-hall sketches which existed even before radio was invented.[122] According to Neale and Krutnik, the history of continuous and regular radio broadcasting in Britain started in 1922, when the British Broadcasting Company was formed.[123] In 1923 the BBC broadcast its first variety performance on the radio, but attitudes towards entertainment were not very positive at that time and it was not until the 1930s that variety programmes started to be scheduled on a regular basis.[124] In 1937 the BBC started finally to experiment with forms of entertainment that were "more suited to the conditions of radio broadcasting than the studio variety shows and theatre broadcast."[125] According to Neale and Krutnik, "the first radio comedy show that moved towards the structuring principles of situation comedy" was The Jack Benny Show in America in the 1930s.[126] In Britain, on the other hand, the first sitcom on radio appeared in 1937: it was "a series of fifteen-minute programmes entitled *Mr*

[122] Neale and Krutnik, 227. Mick Bowes emphasizes that this was the case especially in Britain, he claims that American sitcom developed mainly from radio soap operas. Bowes, Mick. "Only When I Laugh." *Understanding Television*. Eds. Andrew Goodwin and Garry Whannel. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 130.

[123] Neale and Krutnik, 219.

[124] Neale and Krutnik, 220.

[125] Neale and Krutnik, 221.

[126] Neale and Krutnik, 215.

Muddlecombe, JP."[127] During the war years, there was a general shift towards situation comedy, away from the variety models.[128]

The BBC started television broadcasting in the 1930s, although it was fairly limited at first. Because of the war, there were no television transmissions from late 1939 until June 1946. Coincidentally, that same year saw the birth of the first British half-hour situation comedy series in television, *Pinwright's Progress*.[129] Television did not replace radio as the dominant medium of home entertainment in Britain until the mid-1950s – a few years later than in America. Thus, the production of sitcoms was much more fierce there than in Britain in the early 1950s, and therefore popular American sitcoms such as *The Life of Riley*, *Amos 'n' Andy* and *I Love Lucy* were imported to Britain, too. All these sitcoms were in fact originally transferred from radio to television, as was the custom of the day. Another adaptation of a popular radio show to television was *Hancock's Half-Hour*, which proved to be perhaps the biggest British sitcom of the 1950s and is still much loved and highly valued today. It stayed on air for many years after its 1956 television premiere, although in 1961 its name was changed to simply *Hancock*. What was different about *Hancock's Half-Hour* was that it was not a sitcom about domestic bourgeois life like many of its contemporaries, and it did not have set characters as such: Tony Hancock was its main star, but his character, position and profession changed every week, although within certain limits. The common denominator was that he was always a lower class character with aspirations for higher things.

If in the 1950s it was common policy to transfer popular radio sitcoms to

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[127] Neale and Krutnik, 221.

[128] Neale and Krutnik, 223.

[129] Most of the information in this section has come from *The BBC Guide to Comedy*, which is based on *The Radio Times Guide to TV Comedy* by Mark Lewisohn. http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/guide

television, the 1960s changed that trend, at least in Britain. Some television sitcoms such as *Dad's Army* and *Steptoe and Son* were adapted to radio after they became hits on television.[130] *Steptoe and Son* became indeed such a big hit that when it first ended in 1965 after four successful series, it returned in 1970 for a further four series, all of them very successful. Moreover, when some "episodes were repeated in 1988 they managed consistently to make the top-ten weekly TV ratings."[131] The appeal of the series again was perhaps the fact that it was not about ordinary bourgeois life; instead, its stars were a widower father Albert Steptoe and his unmarried middle-aged son Harold with a rag-and-bone business in London. It was very different and groundbreaking even: it was the first sitcom about the underclass and the constant bickering of the father and the son and the son's desperate attempts to escape his father's tight clutch were something that had not previously been seen in a sitcom. As Neale and Krutnik agree,

> the show works precisely because the Steptoes are not the average middle-class family (otherwise their behaviour would be problematic). They are marked out, in other words, as a special case, and the disordered, junk-cluttered setting of the Steptoe home is very much a 'world apart', isolated from the norms of middle-class existence and only occasionally and reluctantly visited by such representatives of the bourgeoisie as the vicar and his wife, a tax officer, and Harold's short-lived bohemian acquaintances.[132]

Steptoe and Son was so popular that a US version, *Sanford and Son*, was created in 1972. It differed from the original in that the junk dealers were black, but its popularity remained the same across the Atlantic: *Sanford and Son* was a great ratings hit in the USA too.

Another groundbreaking non-bourgeois British sitcom in the 1960s was *Till Death Us Do Part*. It depicted a working-class family living in the East End of

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[130] Neale and Krutnik, 225.

[131] Neale and Krutnik, 247.

[132] Neale and Krutnik, 251.

London, the Garnetts. The head of the household was Alf, a highly aggressive and opinionated bigot, and the family included Alf's put-upon wife Elsie, their daughter Rita and her left-wing husband Mike. Unlike other sitcoms, *Till Death Us Do Part* was filled with bad language and it actually gave viewers something to think about as it dealt with issues that were not dealt with in other sitcoms – perhaps that is why the sitcom was such a success. Arthur Marwick calls it "television's most controversial comedy series ever", noting that it regularly received audiences of over 17 million people as well as enthusiastic comments from the critics.[133] Alf Garnett's character was horrendous with his racist and sexist opinions, but as was discussed earlier, he was intended to look like a fool instead of a hero.[134] Just like with *Steptoe and Son* earlier, a US version of *Till Death Us Do Part* was made, too. Titled *All in the Family*, it repeated the success of its original, gaining millions and millions of viewers every week.[135] *All in the Family* featured the Bunkers: bigoted loudmouth Archie, his wife Edith, their daughter Sally and her husband Michael, who represented all that Archie hated. As Ian Gordon notes, the comedy in these two provocative sitcoms comes from the clash of values: those of the conservative, old-fashioned father figure (Alf / Archie) and those of the liberal, modern and somewhat more sophisticated son-in-law.[136] *All in the Family* was something that had never been seen in US television before the 1970s, as it violated cultural taboos by discussing subjects such as sex, biological functions, death, political ideologies, racism, religious bigotry and so on. While 56 episodes of *Till Death Us Do Part* were made during its seven series, *All in the Family* developed the original ideas

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[133] Marwick, Arthur. *Culture in Britain since 1945*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. 89.

[134] Ellis Cashmore in fact characterizes Alf Garnett as "a caricature", as does Julie Bettie. Cashmore, 105; Bettie, 128.

[135] In fact, Jeffrey S. Miller notes that *All in the Family* was so popular that it stayed on top of the annual Nielsen ratings for five years, 1971-76. Miller, Jeffrey S. *Something Complete Different: British Television and American Culture*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. 150.

[136] Gordon, 152.

and remained in television for eight years with 202 episodes. Both are always mentioned when the history of sitcom is considered and many contemporary sitcoms on both sides of the Atlantic are still compared to these two groundbreaking sitcoms.

The 1960s saw a great rise in the number of British sitcoms, but it is the 1970s that has been called "the golden era of the sitcom"[137] in Britain. This decade saw the birth of such classic, much loved sitcoms such as the longest running British sitcom of all time, *Last of the Summer Wine*, as well as *Porridge*, *Rising Damp* and *Fawlty Towers*. Richard Beckinsale, one of the main actors in the prison sitcom *Porridge*, starred also in the hit sitcom *Rising Damp*. The main character in *Rising Damp* was Rigsby: a nosey, bigoted, racist and miserly landlord of a boarding-house in a northern university town – in a way he could almost be called the Alf Garnett of north of England. Just like *Till Death Us Do Part* earlier, *Rising Damp* also attracted high audience figures and received rave reviews, proving that Britons must really love all politically incorrect loudmouths. Another angry and ill-tempered sitcom character that is still very much loved today – strengthening the point I just made – is Basil Fawlty, the main character in *Fawlty Towers*, which has been dubbed the "greatest sitcom of all time"[138]. The title of the sitcom was also the name of the hotel Basil Fawlty ran in Torquay without much success as everything that Basil tried to do turned eventually to a comic farce. The sitcom was very much "based around the hopelessness of Basil Fawlty trying to resolve an impossible situation," each episode ending more or less in a chaos, as Mick Bowes points out.[139]

Alternative comedy was the word of the day in 1980s Britain. A new generation of comedians started to turn sitcom on its head, attempting to create almost

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[137] *The BBC Guide to Comedy*. Shows by year first broadcast. http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/guide/year/

[138] *The BBC Guide to Comedy*. Shows by year first broadcast. http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/guide/year/

[139] Bowes, 138.

an "anti-sitcom" sitcom. The genre was definitely renewed through such unconventional sitcoms such as *Black Adder*, *The Young Ones*, *Girls on Top*, and *The New Statesman*.[140] Despite the popularity of these new radical shows, some of the most popular sitcoms of the 1980s were in fact very traditional. One of them was *Only Fools and Horses*, which was so popular that seven series and many other special shows were made over the years since it first started in 1981, the final series finishing in 1996. This national favourite, starring roguish but likeable brothers Del and Rodney Trotter from South London, is still repeated on television and some have even claimed that it is the best British sitcom of all time. *Bread*, on the other hand, was a sitcom set in working-class Liverpool. It was about a Catholic family, the Boswells, which comprised matriarch Nellie Boswell, her husband Freddie and their five grown-up children. The sitcom had many elements that are more common with soap operas, which might explain its popularity. For example, one episode in 1988 attracted more than 21 million viewers in Britain, which is very rare for a sitcom, more common with soaps.

Because of new television scheduling in the 1990s, the production of new sitcoms plummeted in Britain. Television channels simply did not show that many sitcoms: the BBC, for example, mostly kept repeating old favourites. Despite this, some sitcom jewels were created in the last decade of the century. *Absolutely Fabulous* was one of them, and *I'm Alan Partridge* another. The latter starred a pathetic, egoistic character Alan Partridge, whom the British public loved – just like it has loved all the other unpleasant characters in sitcoms throughout the years. This sitcom about a radio presenter on Radio Norwich was entirely the product of Steve Coogan, a comedian from Manchester. Meanwhile, in 1998, another Mancunian comedian Caroline Aherne got an

[140] More on these ground-breaking sitcoms in Neale and Krutnik, 245.

idea about a new sitcom about a working-class family, and thus, *The Royle Family* was born.

Looking back on the history of British sitcoms we find that class is not particularly an issue in them. Interestingly, working-class characters have not ruled the history of British sitcom, as there have been a great deal more sitcoms about middle-class families or settings over the years. However, most of the sitcoms mentioned above that have been the biggest hits have in fact featured working-class characters or entire families. Mick Bowes notes how "many of the best sit-coms of the 1960s – *Hancock*, *Steptoe and Son*, *The Likely Lads* – were in part about class and social mobility or the lack of it."[141] References to class are very subtle in some sitcoms; some others show the presence of class more clearly. Furthermore, geographical positioning of class is very clear in British sitcoms. A very small number of sitcoms have been set in the north of England (mostly Manchester and Liverpool, occasionally Yorkshire, too), and almost always these sitcoms have been about working-class life. Some sitcoms have featured the working class living in the south of England, which almost always has meant, more precisely, the East End of London. Lastly, it is clear that if class played at least a small part in the early sitcoms, its absence in the more recent sitcoms is striking. After *The Royle Family*, there has been only a handful of sitcoms that have even remotely had some presence of class. *Two Pints of Lager and Packet of Crisps* and *All About Me* are two the most notable examples; the former featuring young working-class people in Runcorn and the latter a mixed-race working-class family in Birmingham. I shall next look into one of the most successful northern working-class sitcoms in the recent years, *The Royle Family*, and examine the ways it represents a British working-class family.

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[141] Bowes, 129.

4. Representations of the Working Class in *The Royle Family*

In this section I shall take a closer look at how *The Royle Family* in particular depicts working-classness. My analysis is based on the theory and the categories of working-class representations I introduced earlier. I will start with the family's use of working-class language, as it will help in understanding what the Royles actually say.

4.1 "*Gis another one for me mam*" – Representations of Working-Class Language

The Royles show many signs of working-class language. Their northern accents may not be as broad as those of the real life Northerners[142], but the accent is noticeable enough so that the viewer can place the family in a certain region. The family is not too careful with pronouncing their 't's and 'h's, which is one of the common characteristics in working-class language, as was noted earlier. Jim especially drops his 'h's almost every time he exclaims "bloody 'ell" – which is often. Denise, on the other hand, cries out to her father that he is "always 'orrible"[143]. Antony's friend Darren and Twiggy's girlfriend Michelle, both of whom the Royles somewhat despise and laugh at, use an even more distinct working-class language than the Royles, especially when it comes to pronunciation. Darren does not always pronounce the "th"-sound, he says "I fink so" instead, demonstrating a case of th-fronting, which is associated with a working-class accent that has spread all over England[144]. Darren also uses slang utterances such as

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[142] Liam and Noel Gallagher from the rock group Oasis, for example, speak with such broad Mancunian accents that whenever their interviews are shown on American television, they are subtitled. In fact, their speech is fairly incomprehensible to many Britons, too, which is why they are often laughed at even in Britain.

[143] All quotes are as they appear in Cash, Aherne et al. *The Royle Family: The Complete Scripts*. London: Granada Media, 2002. The scripts are not written in standard English, as the writers have wanted to emphasise that the Royles do not use standard English.

[144] Foulkes and Docherty, 11. Peter Trudgill reports on this phenomenon as well. Trudgill, Peter. *The Dialects of England*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990. 75-6.

"deffo" and "laters", which is something that the Royles very rarely do. Furthermore, Michelle not only drops her 't's, she replaces them with another sound, as is seen in this example where she talks about bottle-feeding her children:

> **Michelle:** All four of mine were on the boccle.
> **Denise:** Was they? (III, 6)[145]

As is evident in Denise's speech above, grammatical irregularities in the characters' speech also give clues of their place on the social scale. Denise especially fails to use proper plural forms of verbs, as she says things like "we was in the Feathers". Another grammatical error with verbs can be seen when the Royles talk about a third person:

> **Barbara:** He don't know what she wants.
> **Jim:** How do you know she wants a cardi?
> **Barbara:** I asked her.
> **Jim:** Why don't he ask her? (I, 2)

One of the most frequent grammatical feature in working-class varieties of English is the use of multiple negations, which is common among the Royle family, too. Denise, for example, asks at one point, "he didn't cry or nothing, did he?" and Antony exclaims that he "ain't got nowt to say to her". "Nowt" is especially used in the north of England to mean "nothing, none", while "owt" is used to mean "anything". Thus, Antony's utterance above would have been slightly more grammatically correct had he simply omitted the initial 'n' in "nowt". What the Royles also get wrong grammarwise is the use of the past tense with irregular verbs instead of the past participle form, for example "it'll get ate" instead of "it'll get eaten" and "what you having wrote on it" instead of "what are you having written on it". This is, according to Hughes and Trudgill, common

[145] As there are six or seven episodes per series and the episodes do not have any titles, to distinguish which series and which episode the quote is from, I shall mark the quotes as follows: Roman numerals to mark the series (I, II or III) and then Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3 and so on) to mark the episode.

in many non-standard dialects, although there is quite a bit of regional variation.[146] Another noticeable error in grammar that the Royles manifest in their speech is the improper use of the pronoun "what" instead of "who" or "that"[147]. Hence, Denise, for example, says "this midwife woman what was running it" and Antony "they're his amps what we use". All these grammatical errors make the characters seem somewhat uneducated, and consequently strengthen their working-class image.

The Royles often say "me" when they mean "my", which is actually very common in working-class speech. Utterances such as "it's doing me head in", "I made it meself" and "I've not got me lippy on" may seem grammatically incorrect, but some linguists consider it standard English. They see the "me" in these utterances as being just an unstressed, so-called weak form of "my". Ian Morris-Wilson notes that "in very rapid casual speech" it is common that the vowel in "my" is reduced so that it actually sounds like "me".[148] Katie Wales, on the other hand, classes the use of "me" and "meself" instead of "my" and "myself" as belonging to non-standard regional variety of British English.[149] She notes that certain weak form pronunciations of "my" are "widely used and tolerated in informal standard English," but the "me" pronunciation of the possessive pronoun "is associated with dialect speech and even stigmatised."[150] In

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[146] Hughes and Trudgill, 15.

[147] This too is common in non-standard dialects. Hughes and Trudgill, 18. See also Cheshire, Jenny, Viv Edwards and Pamela Whittle. "Non-standard English and dialect levelling." *Real English: The Grammar of English Dialects in the British Isles*. Eds. James and Lesley Milroy. London: Longman, 1993. 68-70.

[148] He also points out that "such reduced forms are relatively rare and not everyone accepts them as RP." Morris-Wilson, Ian. *English Segmental Phonetics for Finns*. Loimaa: Finn Lectura, 1992. 185-6.

[149] Wales, Katie. *Personal Pronouns in Present-Day English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 16. Backing this up, Joan Beal reports on Tyneside and Northumbrian English, where this kind of usage of personal pronouns is very common. Beal, Joan. "The grammar of Tyneside and Northumbrian English." *Real English: The Grammar of English Dialects in the British Isles*. 205.

[150] Wales, 14. As is evident, different linguists have different views on what is standard English and what is not, but the purpose of this thesis is not to debate this issue. There is a plethora of literature concerning the standard English debate, e.g. Honey, John. *Language is Power: The Story of Standard English and its Enemies*; and *Standard English: The Widening Debate*. Eds. Tony Bex and Richard J. Watts. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

addition, Wales also sees the use of "us" instead of the objective case "me" as being characteristic in non-standard English in northern England.[151] This is certainly very common among the Royles: they say "give us a ciggi" when in fact they mean "give *me* a cigarette, please". Furthermore, while on the subject of personal pronouns, it is worth noting the way the Royles repeat certain pronouns when they want to emphasize something. Nana, for example, claims that "I don't drink at all, me," when she wants to make it clear to everyone that she really does not drink at all (in her own opinion, anyway). This kind of repetition to mark emphasis is common in the north of England,[152] but as it is a relatively new phenomenon, there does not seem to be any data to explain the rules behind this. Ronald Carter does offer one simple explanation to the phenomenon, however. He writes about "tails", which are the grammatical patterns at the end of clauses used to "amplify, extend or reinforce what a speaker is saying or has said."[153] Thus, the "me" in Nana's line could simply be classed as a tail.

The Royles also use plenty of vocabulary that is common in the north of England, especially among working-class people, "owt" and "nowt" simply being the tip of the linguistic iceberg. "Tea", for example, does not only refer to the beverage, but it is used to call a proper evening meal that some people call dinner. "Tea" is eaten especially among the working class and particularly in the north of England. As talking about food and drink is a big part of life in the Royle family, the phrase "have you had your tea" is uttered practically in every episode, most often by Barbara. When, on the other hand, the family simply wants to drink cups of tea, they urge Antony to "make a

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[151] Wales, 16. Beal notes that this usage is possibly common further afield, too. Beal, 206. In fact, Viv Edwards reports on these same kinds of non-standard uses of personal pronouns as occurring in southern British English, too. Edwards, Viv. "The grammar of southern British English." *Real English: The Grammar of English Dialects in the British Isles*. 230-1.

[152] Beal again offers evidence of this phenomenon in Tyneside English. Beal, 210-1.

[153] Carter, Ronald. "Standard Grammars, Spoken Grammars: Some Educational Implications." *Standard English: The Widening Debate*. 152.

brew", as would any northern family. Furthermore, a sandwich is called a "butty", tomato ketchup "red sauce" and mother "mam". Other distinctly northern expressions that the Royles use are "summit" or "summat" for "something", "mithered" for "bothered" and "manky" for "scruffy", "dirty" or "distasteful". Shortened versions are also very common among the family, for example "gis" for "give us" and "s'all right" for "it's alright". These could be, however, seen only as normal use of weak forms.

What is worth noticing is the way the female Royles do not speak the same way as the males. It is in fact very common in many societies and in many languages that there is a difference between the speech of men and women.[154] One difference is that women's speech tends to be more conservative than that of men,[155] and women are also known to "demonstrate greater linguistic politeness than men."[156] When it comes to working-class culture especially, Honey writes that "there is evidence that working-class males use non-standard accents and dialect features, especially during late adolescence and young manhood, as a badge of masculinity."[157] Indeed, Trudgill notes that working-class speech "has connotations of or associations with masculinity" and "toughness"[158]. Therefore, it could be argued that lower-class, non-standard linguistic varieties have covert prestige for men. Women, on the other hand, do not particularly seem to benefit from using working-class language, therefore it is common that working-class women speak a variety of English that is closer to RP than the language that the men use.[159] This is recognisable in *The Royle Family*, too. The

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[154] See, for example, Trudgill, 1974, 78-99; 1983, 161-185; Foulkes and Docherty, 16.

[155] Trudgill, 1974, 84.

[156] Trudgill, 1983, 164.

[157] Honey, John. *Does Accent Matter? The Pygmalion Factor*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1989. 76.

[158] Trudgill, 1974, 87; 1983, 172.

[159] Trudgill, 1974, 89. Honey notes that "women speakers of RP [are] perceived as more competent than women with non-standard accents, but they are also thought to be less weak, and their ratings for adventurousness, independence and even femininity are all enhanced." Honey, 1989, 76.

only characters that swear or use slang are male. The female characters, on the other hand, choose their words a little more carefully than the males, for example when Denise says "I'm with child" instead of simply stating that she is pregnant. In addition, Barbara especially uses very polite language, which makes a strong contrast to Jim's constant mocking and swearing. When it comes to pronunciation, Nana seems to have the strongest standard pronunciation compared to the other female characters – she does not drop her 't's and 'h's as often as the others, for example. Denise's pronunciation, by contrast, is not as careful as she uses many shortened versions and she also demonstrates many aspects of working-class language that Nana does not. Trudgill indeed points out that in addition to male speakers, young women (under 30 years of age) also "attach covert prestige to working-class speech forms,"[160] meaning that working-class language is somehow more acceptable and desirable even among men and younger women. Hence, when women get older, they are expected to use a more polite and "proper" language, as well as demonstrate "more 'correct' social behaviour."[161]

Overall, the language the Royles use is not as refined as that of a higher class person. If we compare the English the Royles use to the English Hyacinth Bucket uses, clear differences can be seen. As Hyacinth aspires to be upper class, she pronounces all her 'h's and 't's very carefully and would never use weak forms such as "there y'are". The Royles, on the contrary, are more relaxed about the language they use: it is not even an issue for them. They would, for example, have very much difficulty in saying "could you give another one for my mother, please" – they simply say "gis another one for me mam" instead.

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[160] Trudgill, 1983, 183.

[161] Trudgill, 1974, 88.

4.2 "*If you're not picking your arse, you're picking your teeth*" – Representations of Grotesqueness

Grotesqueness as Kathleen Rowe defines and analyses it [162] certainly is something that *The Royle Family* does not lack. The subjects that the Royles discuss center mostly around eating, drinking and defecation, all of which are associated with the lower stratum of the body which, in turn, is so often associated with the working class.

"What did you have for tea?" is a common question in the Royle household, particularly when Denise and Dave come for a visit. Barbara especially is always very interested in what others have eaten, and she is eager to comment on this, too. For example, after hearing that Dave has had cornbeef hash for dinner, she exclaims "we should have that one night." She goes on to tell Jim about Dave's dinner, too, but he is not as impressed, blurting out "funny it never mentioned it on the news" (I, 1). The Royles are shown having dinner on a few occasions and food is talked about on other occasions, too. Food usually becomes the topic of conversation when Denise's overweight friend Cheryl, who lives next door, pays a visit in the Royle household. Cheryl is constantly on a diet and she usually has some new idea of how to lose some weight, be it using a blender to mix some vegetables or replacing regular Coke with a diet variety. Sadly, her dieting ideas never seem to work.

Drinking is another very common topic in the Royle household. The characters talk about their hangovers, their plans of going to the pub, and, if alcohol is not involved, there is always someone who is complaining about not getting any tea. Denise's alcohol consumption especially is a recurrent topic of conversation in the series. When she becomes pregnant, she does not even realise it at first as she thinks she vomits due to a hangover. Consequently, her alcohol consumption becomes an intricate

[162] Rowe, 33. I discussed about Rowe's analysis of the grotesque working-class body earlier, in section 2.3.1.

issue. On the one hand, she claims to be "drinking for two", just to get a little extra Pomagne, but on the other hand, she knows she should not drink while pregnant, thus she has to find other ways of enjoying alcohol. She enjoys, for example, just smelling Dave's breath after he has been in the pub: "ooh, you stink of drink. Lovely." When Twiggy asks how Denise has gotten on without alcohol, she informs him that "oh, I'm only not drinking at dinnertime. I'm allowed to drink at night."

While Denise does not hide her love of alcohol, Nana delusionally thinks that her alcohol usage is minimal. She makes a point of saying that she does not drink, although we soon learn that she does, and always with a very good excuse:

> **Nana:** I don't drink at all, me… just a bottle of stout a night and a sherry at Christmas.
> **Antony:** What about a whisky at New Year, Nana?
> **Nana:** Yes, a whisky at New Year, a sherry at Christmas and a bottle of stout.
> **Jim:** You'll have champagne at the wedding.
> **Nana:** Yes, champagne at weddings, whisky at New Year, sherry at Christmas and a bottle of stout… that'll do me. (I, 3)

Nana does not decline a drink at funerals, either, as we learn on the evening of her friend Elsie's funeral:

> **Barbara:** Do you want a brandy, Mam?
> **Nana:** Oh no thank you, Barbara. I can't drink during the day now, you know.
> **Barbara:** You've just had three at Marion's.
> **Nana:** Just the one then, just for medicinal reasons. (III, 4)

Smoking is another, much more frequent, dirty habit that the Royles possess. Barbara and Denise are the worst chainsmokers in the family, and there is a full ashtray on the living room table constantly on show to prove it. Denise just about manages to refrain from smoking while she is pregnant, but once Baby David is born, she has a clear and simple philosophy: she will not smoke in the presence of the baby, but only as long as he learns to walk so he can leave the room on his own two feet if the smoke bothers him. Barbara lets 15-year-old Antony smoke only if he does something

useful in return – namely, washes the pots. Jim tries to educate his son by telling him that "you shouldn't be smoking. It's bad for you," but when Barbara ends up giving Antony a cigarette, Jim changes his argument: "You shouldn't bribe him, he lives here rent free." Thus, the dangers of smoking are understood in the family, at least to some extent. However, the idea behind some rules and regulations concerning smoking remain fairly unclear for the family:

> **Barbara:** They're dead strict about no smoking in the baker's. No ways can you light up. It's health and safety. We have to keep taking it in turns to nip to the toilet.
> **Jim:** You can't do owt these days. Them health and safety won't let you wipe your arse.
> **Barbara:** Some places are only taking non-smokers.
> **Denise:** Well, you just don't smoke in the interview, do you.
> **Jim:** What places?
> **Barbara:** Well, flat-nosed Alan went for a job at the petrol station on the roundabout. (I, 2)

Other signs of grotesqueness as Rowe sees it are farting, belching and nose-picking, which demonstrate failure or refusal in restraining one's body. All of the mentioned behaviours are very familiar with the Royles, particularly with Jim. Baby David and Dave have their flatulent moments, too, which create some interesting dialogue that one could not find in a middle-class sitcom:

> **Denise:** Oh Dave, have you farted?
> **Dave:** What?
> **Dave:** No, that's one of your dad's.
> **Jim:** He who smelt it, dealt it.
> **Antony:** It smells like cornbeef that.
> **Barbara:** We're going to have that one day. (I, 1)

Jim is particularly specific about his bowel movements and he uses new euphemisms in almost every episode, such as "I'm off for a chat with the Arabs … Mustapha Crap!" and "I'm going for an Eartha Kitt" or a "Tom Tit"[163]. He is also very proud when Baby

[163] *The Oxford Dictionary of Rhyming Slang* recognizes "tom tit" and "eartha kitt" as rhyming slang for "shit". These are thus not Jim's own creations, and it is rather strange that he should use such euphemisms. After all, rhyming slang is associated with Cockneys, and Jim has never been to London. *The Oxford Dictionary of Rhyming Slang*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 46.

David breaks wind for the first time, exclaiming "That's my boy! Oh he's a Royle all right!" Thus, there is a great deal of what Barbara calls "toilet talk" in the household, mostly coming from Jim. Although this talk is very commonplace and often ignored by the other members of the family, Barbara does not accept it. She often complains to Jim: "If you're not picking your arse, you're picking your teeth," and she even declares that she is ashamed of the family. Jim's argument, "I'll pick what I want in my own house" (I, 2), does not convince Barbara. This recurrent bickering about Jim's crude behaviour and language does in fact reinforce what Trudgill writes about: women are more status-conscious than men and therefore they are more aware of the social significance of not only language use, but behaviour, too.[164] However, Jim is not the only one who is very vocal about his bowel movements: Nana makes her constipation problems clear to everyone every time she "feels some movement" and goes to "have a try". At one point even an argument breaks out between Nana and Jim, when both of them need to go to the toilet at the same time:

> **Jim:** I've been looking forward to this shite.
> **Denise:** Dad, you could have kept that to yourself, thank you very much.
> **Jim:** Not for much longer, I bloody couldn't.
> **Nana:** Barbara, let him go on the toilet if he wants to.
> **Barbara:** No, Mam, you go on the toilet. Jim, you can wait.
> **Jim:** Barbara, let her go on the toilet.
> **Nana:** Barbara, let him go on the toilet. (III, 5)

And so the argument goes on. In the end, no one goes to the toilet until the very end of the episode, when Nana accidentally farts during a fit of laughter and decides it probably is best for her to go and have another try on the toilet.

The grotesque working-class body, according to Rowe, exaggerates all the body's "processes, bulges and orifices."[165] Thus, based on this analysis, the bodies of

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[164] Trudgill, 1983, 167; 1974, 88.

[165] Rowe, 33.

Jim Royle, Cheryl and Twiggy are grotesque, as they are the most overweight characters in the series. Other characters are so thin that it would not be fair to claim that all working-class people are overweight solely based on this sitcom. Jim's obesity is not an issue or topic of conversation, as he is supposedly the head of the household and would probably not even tolerate such talk. He himself, however, does notice and comment on other people's obesity, like he says about his friend Twiggy: "He's a scruffy get, that Twiggy. Wouldn't you think he'd do something about his weight" (I, 1). Another object of mockery in the Royle household is Denise's overweight friend Cheryl, who is constantly on a diet. The Royles laugh at her attempts at dieting as they never seem to work, and they make comments that imply that she is not sexually desirable as she is obese. When Denise announces to her family that Cheryl will be her bridesmaid, the family's reaction is very revealing:

> **Jim:** Bridesmaid my arse. She'll look like a bloody Easter egg on legs.
> **Antony:** You're only having her as a bridesmaid to make you look better.
> **Denise:** Get lost, Antony.
> **Barbara:** Is she really on a diet?
> **Denise:** Yeh.
> **Barbara:** Do you think she'll ever get married?
> **Antony:** Who'd have her? (I, 1)

On another occasion Jim tentatively asks Cheryl if she is "courting yet". Barbara immediately hisses "stop it, Jim. Course she isn't," again implying that nobody would find Cheryl attractive. Some comments that the characters make about Cheryl are simply mean. Jim, for example, gives Dave a tip for the farmyard he is making for Baby David: "If you're having a pig [in the farmyard], Dave, we could always get Cheryl to model for it." Jim also exclaims "talk of the devil" when Cheryl walks in the room – the others have just talked about gammon. Twiggy, too, joins the others by declaring "Ah it's not right, that much weight on a young girl", not noticing that Cheryl is not that

young and that he himself is certainly not as thin as his name would suggest.[166] The way the Royles talk about Cheryl demonstrates snobbery on their part, as they talk about her as if they themselves were better than Cheryl just because they are not as heavy (although Jim truly is).

"Being born, having intercourse, giving birth, and dying" are also processes that are grotesque from the middle-class perspective, Rowe notes.[167] These processes are present in *The Royle Family* too, but in a subtle way. For example, sexuality is an issue that is only addressed through some comments by the male characters when they give their assessments on certain women, such as "she is well fit" or "she looked the biz". During the second series, which is based around Denise's pregnancy, certain issues that women have to go through during pregnancy are addressed, but not in a very crude way. Jim is the only one in the family who does not agree with this, though, as he is not used to hearing about menstrual cycles or nipple pads: his look of disdain when Denise starts telling that her period was late gives him away. Nevertheless, the two most dramatic moments in the whole show are perhaps in the first Christmas Special, where Denise's waters break and she goes into labour and Jim tries to calm her down by asking "are you definitely sure it wasn't just a great big piss, love", and then later, in the third series, when Denise breastfeeds her baby and talks about nipple pads and lactation. Thus, when such "grotesque" issues are addressed in the show, it is not done too graphically in order to arouse indignation, although some viewers might get offended by them anyway, like Jim does. Instead, pregnancy and the bodily functions in motherhood are dealt with in a fairly natural way: after all, going into labour and breastfeeding are very natural occasions. Menopause is also dealt with

[166] Twiggy Lawson (née Lesley Hornby) was a famous model in the 1960s, who was known for her very skinny, twiglike figure. Naming Jim's very bulky friend Twiggy is thus very ironic.

[167] Rowe, 33.

briefly in a couple of episodes. It is mostly referred to as "the change", and it is not properly discussed about, as nobody in the family knows how to deal with a hormonal matriarch. Barbara thus suffers mostly in silence, like all the women before her have done, although her distress with the hot flashes is evident. Needless to say, it causes great horror to Jim as he does not know what is going on and what he could do about it. Death, on the other hand, is only addressed in one episode, where Nana mourns the loss of her friend Elsie after Elsie's funeral. Even then the focus is more on Nana's pretence and false modesty, not precisely on death and dying: Nana is more interested in Elsie's things than she ever was in Elsie as a person when she was alive. Her constant moanings about "it was like losing a limb" when she lost Elsie are thus all part of a great act. As is her pretence that she is so stricken with grief that she cannot even consider eating anything:

> **Nana:** Nothing for me, Barbara, not today, on account of Elsie, God rest her soul.
> **Barbara:** You had all them voluvents earlier, didn't you.
> **Nana:** Oh yeah, just a Holland's pie and chips for me please, Antony. But I can't eat all the chips. I'll have to share them. (III, 4)

On a more general level, grotesqueness is demonstrated in the crude language used by Jim Royle. Jim swears rather a lot, most often by exclaiming "bloody hell" or "my arse" to anything he does not quite agree with. According to Anderson and Trudgill, swearing is "a good example of the 'untidy' use of language"[168] – consequently, with his swearing, Jim strengthens the stereotype of dirty working class. Jim's behaviour is certainly something that is rarely seen with a middle- or upper-class person or character in television: swearing is something that a sophisticated and well-mannered person simply would not do. Jim Royle is therefore neither sophisticated nor well-mannered, which does not really come as a surprise. Moreover, the living quarters

[168] Anderson, Lars and Peter Trudgill. *Bad Language*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990. 64.

of the Royle family reveal quite a bit of the family's position in society. Unlike Wayne and Waynetta Slob or Daisy and Onslow, the Royles do not live in total squalor. Their residence is not, however, completely spotless either: the ashtray on the living-room table is always full and the whole decor has certainly seen its best days. Barbara tries to redecorate the house for Baby David's Christening party, but Jim and Twiggy never manage to finish stripping the old wallpaper in the dining area. The party thus takes place with the partially stripped wallpaper in the background.

All these examples demonstrate that the Royles are represented as being grotesque. They are not, however, as bad as Twiggy's girlfriend Michelle, who only appears in one episode. Her character is a stereotypical working-class woman: she is overweight, has big hair, she talks loudly and has many things to say, most of them about matters associated with the "lower stratum of the body". Her detailed description of her diarrhoea after a curry, for example, is something that Jim could never compete with. Such characters, when compared with the Royles, make the family look a little better: yes, they are working-class, but at least they are not as grotesque as some other working-class people. Thus, it could be said that *The Royle Family* does and at the same time, on some level, does *not* strengthen the stereotype of the working class as grotesque, dirty and disgusting.

4.3 "*They're laughing at you, you dopy bugger*" – Representations of Stupidity and Unmodernity

As I noted earlier, representations of the working-class as stupid, unmodern, racist and sexist are very common. *The Royle Family* does not make a big exception to the rule: none of the characters are highly educated nor do they value education to a great extent.

There is a clear age gap visible among the Royles: younger members of the family have different views on certain things, education being one of them,

compared to the older characters. Consequently, Denise and Dave, being part of the younger generation, have a more positive attitude towards education than Jim does, for example. Although Dave thinks Baby David should get a trade behind him that he can fall back on if he does not get into university, the couple open up a savings account for their baby anyway, "for when he goes to university". Barbara is delighted at the idea, as always, and she confirms Denise's hunch that two- or three-month-old "Baby David is really bright for his age", in fact he is "bright as a button". Jim, on the other hand, is not as impressed at the idea of Baby David going to university: "Uni-bloody-versity my arse. Well I just hope he's got his mother's brains" (III, 1). Jim, being the opinionated cynic that he is, does not think too highly of Denise – nor anyone else, in fact. Later in the series Jim has a private moment with Baby David and he confides in him: "I know Dave isn't the brightest lamp in the street and your mam wants a firework up her arse every now and again, but they love you, Baby David" (III, 6). Hence, even though Jim thinks Denise is stupid, he also thinks that at least she is brighter than Dave.

Just like Alf Garnett and Archie Bunker before him, Jim Royle is also a somewhat nostalgic figure, at least in Ian Gordon's definition: he too represents "a passing era or an era segments of the audience wished past"[169]. Jim tries hard to remain the patriarch in the family although it is his wife who goes to work and brings in the bacon. Hence, he terrorises the rest of the family with his rantings about huge phone and electricity bills. He also stubbornly keeps hold of the remote control and changes the channel whenever he feels like it even though everyone else wants to watch the current programme: "Bloody *Changing* bloody *Rooms*. More like changing bloody channels." Jim is also old-fashioned in appearance with his beard and heavy glasses, yet he claims that "I'm with it, me," just because he does not constantly wear a suit like his father

[169] Gordon, 152-3.

used to (I, 2). When Twiggy tries to offer him a pair of jeans, he does not even want to try them on before Dave informs him that "everybody wears them nowadays" (I, 1). His views on the role of men and women are very old-fashioned, too. He, for example, calls Dave a "soft sod" and laughs at him on many occasions when Dave changes the nappies or carries his son, Baby David, around:

> **Jim:** He's under Denise's bloody thumb, isn't he, the lanky streak of piss. Seen him carrying the baby round all the bloody time. I never picked me kids up. Unless they fell over.
> **Twiggy:** Me neither.
> **Jim:** No he's a bloody old woman with that baby. . . . Not even any fun going for a pint with the bugger now, is it? After three pints, he's got the bloody photographs of the nipper out and he's crying his bloody eyes out. Oh and that bloody farmyard he's making for Baby David. It's doing my head in. . . . He's always on edge. He's under the bloody thumb all right. He's not a bloody man. (III, 3)

Dave, on the other hand, thinks it is natural for him to participate in taking care of his son, as he is a more modern man than Jim. Deborah Chambers claims that white working-class fathers are often represented as being dysfunctional, as failures in fatherhood.[170] This could well be said about Jim, as he does not show any fatherly devotion towards his children. Although Dave does not always seem very smart, he is nevertheless a very caring and loving father who sings to his son, builds him toys and takes care of him in every way – he is not dysfunctional in that sense at all. Moreover, Dave simply has to get more involved in taking care of the baby as Denise makes it very clear from the start that she won't be available: "I can't look after it full-time. I've got to keep my independence" (II, 1).

Denise is a very modern woman, at least in her own opinion. She strives for things that she thinks a modern woman should have: a food processor, a microwave

[170] Chambers mentions this in relation to popular (Hollywood) films, giving the British blockbuster *The Full Monty* (1997) as an example, but some dysfunctional white working-class fathers can be found on television too. Although he is a cartoon character, Homer Simpson from *The Simpsons* could be said to be one, for example. Chambers, 107.

oven and a nanny to look after the children. It could be said that she has some aspirations towards middle-class life: after all, she lives beyond her means when she buys clothes and exercise equipment that she could not really afford (and does not always even use) and when she plans on hiring a nanny. Keeping her independence is the most important thing to her, but she has misunderstood the ideas of female independence held by middle-class feminists: she does not recognise the importance of building her own career and having her own money, being financially independent of her husband. She thus considers herself to be independent, when she does not look after her baby full-time – or, indeed, when she does not do anything at all. Therefore, when the baby is born, she makes everyone else take care of him – even though she herself does not work or study. Still she complains that "it's a full-time job" and makes up great excuses for her unwillingness in taking care of the baby, as is seen in the following:

> **Barbara:** You are a good mother, Denise.
> **Denise:** Ta.
> **Barbara:** Are you still doing your pelvic floor exercises?
> **Denise:** I've not had time, you know, with the baby.
> **Barbara:** Oh yea. Ey isn't it good of Cheryl using up her holidays to look after Baby David.
> **Denise:** Well she is godmother you know. He is her responsibility.
> **Barbara:** Yeah. You know Denise, you're going to have to spend a full day with him soon.
> **Denise:** I know but Post Baby Fatigue. What can you do? (III, 3)

Denise is quite content with the traditional roles of men and women in some things. For example, as she does not work herself, she is quite happy to let Dave support her and she has no trouble spending Dave's hard-earned money. She does not even have trouble spending the money on the baby's bank account. She would not even dream of getting a job herself, like any real modern woman would do. In other words, she is not independent at all – nor modern. Furthermore, at one point she complains to Cheryl that "I'm like a bleeding sumo me… and I've got an arseful of cellulite" and adds that "mind you, Dave likes girls with a bit of meat on them," to which Cheryl comments that

Dave is a "sexist pig". To this Denise sighs "yeh, he is… ey, thank God" (I, 1). This could be taken as a sign that she likes her man to be a little sexist, and not too modern. She may have also misunderstood the meaning of a "sexist pig", or at least it seems like a positive quality to her.

Furthermore, Jim too considers himself a modern man when he lets his wife work outside the home and when he takes part in doing the chores by washing the pans or making everyone cups of tea once in his lifetime. He pretends it is ok that Barbara is working part-time at the bakery, but in reality he is not happy about it as he has to wait for his dinner:

> **Barbara:** Hey I've just thought… who's going to make tea tomorrow, I'll be working?
> **Jim:** You're all right, love, we'll wait till you get back.
> **Barbara:** Why does everything in this house have to revolve around me?
> **Jim:** This bakery job's more trouble than it's worth. (I, 1)

On another occasion, when Barbara announces that she is "not doing anybody's tea tonight", the whole family is shocked, Jim the most – at least until they hear that their dinner will be coming from the chip shop. Jim thus refuses to make dinner, wash the dishes or even prepare a cup of tea, as those are jobs suitable for a woman. When Barbara complains that "oh Jim, I've got all that horrible washing-up to do" after Christmas dinner, Jim bluntly answers "well, it won't do itself, Barb," (II, 7) without offering his help. Yet, he considers himself as "too easy-bloody-going", as he lets Barbara "walk all over" him: "I mean the days she does work in the bakery, it can be half seven, quarter to eight, before my tea's ready. But I don't say nothing, I just get on with it" (II, 5). Moreover, on another occasion, when Antony's girlfriend Emma wonders out loud if Barbara would need a helping hand with the buffet she is setting, Jim quickly remarks that "Ah, don't be bloody daft, love, she's not disabled. You go and relax" (III, 6). In addition, in one episode Barbara gets very angry and storms out of

the house. When she returns a little later, Jim tries to earn some extra points by offering to "make the brew", to everyone's disbelief. Although Jim manages to make cups of tea for everyone, it does not go perfectly as he constantly has to ask Barbara where she keeps the sugar and everything else in the kitchen – he spends so little time there that he does not even know where everything is. Jim's male chauvinism extends outside the home as well, as his opinion on female talk show hosts demonstrates: "you've only got to sit in the house to hear women talking a load of bollocks. I mean you don't want that on the box, do ya?"

Furthermore, Jim demonstrates his unmodernity by joking about homosexuals: he constantly calls Antony and his friend Darren "arse bandits" or "sausage jockeys" just because they spend a lot of time together. Incidentally, homosexuality is a topic of conversation on several occasions in the show, and every time the subject comes up, the characters show their lack of understanding. The others are not as homophobic as Jim, but the discussions always receive some very humorous overtones. Barbara, for example, tries to make it clear to everyone that she is very modern and open-minded, declaring that "I don't care what anybody is… whether they're gay, straight, Australian. It's what they're like as a person that counts" (I, 4). On another occasion, when Jim has once again implied that there is something more going on between Antony and Darren than mere friendship, Barbara reminds Jim that "it's the millenium", meaning that the times have changed and they all should be more open-minded. She tries to demonstrate that at least she is: "I don't care if he's straight, gay or homosexual, he's still our son" (III, 1). Although Barbara does not get the terms right, she at least tries not to seem too unmodern and stupid. If Barbara sometimes appears to be a little simple, so does Nana: she is sometimes completely oblivious of what is going on around her, which is mostly due to her old age. She for example gets very confused

when the others are talking about breast implants – she has to check with Barbara whether she remembers if Elsie next door had implants. Barbara then reminds her that Elsie had eggplants, not implants. Despite her slight simple-mindedness, Nana is nevertheless the most open-minded when it comes to homosexuals. Her ignorance is obvious, though:

> **Nana:** Oh I do love the gays, Mary. I do love the gays. And do y'know I hadn't actually met one until 1987?
> **Mary:** And which one was it that you met?
> **Nana:** It was Moira's son Gary. He went to work in Brighton and he came back as one. Didn't he, Barbara?
> **Barbara:** Who did Mam?
> **Nana:** Moira's son Gary. Went to Brighton and came back a gay.
> **Barbara:** Oh yeah.
> **Nana:** Ah but he is lovely. He's very effeminate but he's lovely. He calls him his partner but we know he's his boyfriend. Apparently Michael Barrymore is one sometimes. (PAUSE) Mary, what do they actually do? (III, 6)

Although Jim himself is probably not the brightest in the family, he is nevertheless very keen on telling everyone else how stupid they are. In fact, he does not have anything good to say about anyone else, and he does not recognise his own shortcomings at all. For example, he often wonders out loud where his children Denise and Antony could get their laziness from, not noticing that he himself is constantly fixed to his armchair. He rolls his eyes at Nana's comments and makes jokes about her that she does not even understand. He does not share any kind words even to his wife Barbara. When Barbara attempts to make fun of Jim for once by telling the others that Jim reminds her of "Homo" in The Simpsons, all the others laugh but Jim naturally does not. He simply has to have the final word, as always:

> **Barbara:** Ooh, look at his face. He doesn't like it when we laugh at him, does he?
> **Jim:** They're laughing at you, you dopy bugger. It's not Homo, it's Homer. (II, 3)

Although sexism and homophobia play a part in *The Royle Family*, at least racism and religious bigotry are absent, unlike in *Till Death Us Do Part* and *All in the Family*. Thus, *The Royle Family* does not represent the working class in the same ways that earlier sitcoms have done previously, it depicts a working-class family that has evolved and moved on a little instead. Jim Royle does somewhat resemble Alf Garnett and Archie Bunker, the politically incorrect loudmouths of the 1970s, but his protestations are much more toned down. Indeed, many of the old stereotypes of stupid and unmodern working class have not totally vanished, but *The Royle Family* demonstrates that at least some working-class people are in tune with what is going on in the world, to some extent anyway.

4.4 "*She's a right slapper*" – Representations of Unruliness and Immorality

Beverly Macca, a girl Dave once went out with, is an 18-year-old single mother with two children. She is not a prominent character in *The Royle Family* as she is only talked about and never seen, but to the Royles she represents everything evil; she is the epitome of an unrespectable, unruly and immoral working-class woman.

The male members of the family do not mind Beverly Macca: after all, "she's got gorgeous knockers her," as Jim and Antony exclaim (I, 5). Denise is clearly jealous as Beverly and Dave have a little history together, thus she calls Beverly "a dirty cow" as well as "yoyo nickers" and complains when Beverly laughs loudly at everything Dave says, even though "he's not that funny" (I, 5). Denise and Dave almost call their wedding off because of Beverly Macca, as they have a huge drunken row about her. Denise wants to distinguish herself from Beverly and she does it by emphasizing her own respectability in her outburst to Dave: "I could wear a low top like that and a bleeding miniskirt but I've got more respect for myself, but you don't, you don't respect me" (I, 5). Other members of the family call Beverly's respectability and

morality into question, too. This is evident in the family's discussion about Beverly's two children:

> **Barbara:** Who's the father of them two?
> **Dave:** Don't know.
> **Denise:** Could be anyone's in the Feathers.
> **Antony:** Could be anyone's in trousers.
> **Denise:** You fancy her. She's a right slapper.
> **Barbara:** Ah, I always feel a bit sorry for her with them two kids. She has it hard.
> **Jim:** She likes it hard, that's her trouble. (I, 1)

Beverly Macca is not the only unruly woman in the show. Denise and Cheryl have their moments too, for example when they tease Antony:

> **Cheryl** [to Antony]**:** Have you got a girlfriend yet?
> **Denise:** Yes, his hand. (BOTH GIRLS LAUGH) Here, Cheryl, that'd look good on you. [pointing something in a clothes catalogue]
> **Antony:** What is it, a tent? (I, 1)

Although this kind of banter seems very mild compared to that of Jim's, it is nevertheless something that a respectable middle-class woman would never be seen doing. Furthermore, especially Denise's ideas of motherhood would certainly class her as unruly, unrespectable and immoral on the one hand – another view (mainly hers) would be that she is simply feministic, a modern woman. She is not too keen on taking care of her offspring herself; instead she makes everyone else work hard taking care of Baby David. On one occasion, for example, the whole family hears Baby David crying on the baby monitor, but nobody does anything about it. After a long awkward silence in the living room, Cheryl is the first one to react to the crying and she offers to go upstairs to have a look at the baby. Denise immediately takes the moral high ground and reminds Cheryl, who is Baby David's godmother, that "you're not supposed to let them stay crying, Cheryl" (III, 4).

Other female members of the Royle clan are not much better than Denise, they bend their morals when it suits them, too. Barbara, for example, is quite adamant in

her refusal on one occasion when Antony wants a cigarette, as he is only fifteen: "you can't smoke until you're old enough to buy your own" (I, 1). On another occasion, however, she lets him have a cigarette after she makes him promise that he will wash the pots. Barbara also makes it clear that Antony is too young to gamble when she does not lend him a pound for the family's weekly bet when they watch the *Antiques Roadshow* on television. This does not stop Nana giving Antony a pound, on condition that he splits his winnings with her. Nana does not understand that she gives Antony permission to do something that is against Barbara's principles – although, it should be noted that Barbara does not even say anything even though her son takes part in gambling right in front of her. Thus, Barbara's moral principles can clearly be compromised whenever it suits her. In addition, Nana has rather vague principles, too. She clearly knows that it is wrong, unrespectable and immoral even, to take someone's things without their permission, yet she does it with great pleasure it seems, when her friend Elsie dies. She starts reporting to the others that she saved "one or two perishable things" from Elsie's fridge, such as "a packet of fish fingers, two chops and er six bottles of Guinness." She justifies this by saying that Elsie would have liked that. Jim immediately calls Nana a vulture, as Guinness is not likely to go off quickly. Despite this, Nana starts wondering out loud a little later: "Barbara, Elsie had a cupboard full of medicines you know, may she rest in peace. Do you think I could have her Sennapods?" She also offers to bring some bacon back from Elsie's, to which Denise cries out: "I don't want dead old woman's bacon." Denise does not mind getting other things from Elsie's, though, and the same goes for Barbara. Jim seems to be the only one who disapproves of Nana's behaviour, as the following shows:

> **Nana:** I just want to pop into Elsie's and pick up some things before Marion [Elsie's daughter] comes tomorrow morning.
> **Jim:** Bloody hell. She hasn't got more bottles of Guinness perishing away, has she.
> **Denise:** Nana, did Elsie have a copy of the *Radio Times*? A recent one?
> **Nana:** I don't know, love. I'll er, I'll have a look but er I don't like to root, you know.
> **Barbara:** Mam, I really liked that set of pans that Elsie had.
> **Nana:** Ohhh I know. Non stick.
> **Barbara:** Oh were they?
> **Nana:** Aye. Shall I bring them back here?
> **Barbara:** Oh yeah.
> **Nana:** Oh yeah. Marion will be awash with pans so it will help her when she's sorting out. (TO CHERYL) She's very high up in North West Water, you know.
> **Jim:** Did Elsie say you could have all them things, Norma?
> **Nana:** Well she got very confused in the end, but I don't think she'd mind. It's not the place to ask in a hospice, is it?
> PAUSE
> **Nana:** Oh David, David, there might be one or two things for Baby David's farmyard there. There's a couple of drawers I haven't had time to look in yet. (III, 4)

Later Jim has enough of Nana's stories and he snaps at her: "that's all we've had all bloody afternoon. Elsie, Elsie, Elsie rest in bloody peaces. I've heard more about Elsie today than when the poor cow was alive." The situation reaches a climax when Jim goes upstairs and pretends to be Elsie's ghost by talking to the others in the living room through the open baby monitor: "Wooooooo. Wooooo. Is anybody there? It's Elsie may I rest in peaces here. Wooooo. Call yourself a friend, Norma. Leave my stuff alone, you robbin' old get!" Everybody, including Nana, roars with laughter at this, and thus the situation is resolved. Everyone is happy again, and Nana's nor anyone else's immorality is addressed again.

Although the Royles behave somewhat unrespectably and immorally on occasion, they do not, however, have children out of wedlock (like Beverly Macca) nor do they get involved with crime. They seem to know plenty of people with criminal histories, however: Antony's friend Tiggsy, for example, is said to be doing his community service and his other friend Darren, whose brother is in jail, has been caught

stealing twice. Twiggy's son Lee has been caught stealing as well, thus Twiggy calls him a "thieving little get". When Jim points out that "he gets that off you, Twig," Twiggy replies: "thanks, Jim, yeah" (III, 3). Twiggy certainly is not a good role model for his son as he himself is involved in some shady business: he deals in pirated and stolen goods such as jeans, shampoo and so on. The Royles buy some things from him, consequently getting involved with illegal goods themselves. When Twiggy hears about Denise's pregnancy, he makes an offer the others do not refuse even though Denise tries to:

> **Twiggy:** Don't worry about gear for it [the baby]. I can get all that sort of stuff.
> **Denise:** Oh, I don't want dodgy gear for this baby, Twiggy.
> **Dave:** We do.
> **Twiggy:** I'll tell you what, I'll knock off a cot for the baby. That'll be my present for it.
> **Nana:** Aah. Heart of gold, ain't he. (II, 2)

In conclusion, the representation of the working class as unrespectable, unruly and immoral is somewhat strengthened in *The Royle Family*. The family has moral principles but they bend them when it suits them and they do not spend time wondering about the moral implications of their actions. They also know so many people with criminal records that it is easy to come to the conclusion that petty crime is very commonplace among the working class.

4.5 "*You're one lazy little sod, you*" – Representations of Immobility

"How come we never go round to my mam and dad's?" asks Dave on one occasion, receiving an answer from Denise: "Well, I'll tell you why, Dave – 'cause they sit on their arses and watch telly all night and it's boring" (II, 5). This is a very interesting observation from Denise as it is exactly how some people who do not like *The Royle Family* would describe the sitcom: "they sit on their arses and watch telly all night and it's boring".

If one would have to characterize the Royle family with one word, it would have to be "immobile" or simply "lazy". James Rampton goes as far as naming the Royles as "Britain's laziest family".[171] The family is sometimes seen in the kitchen or in a bedroom, but mostly they are glued to their sofas in the living room watching the television. Television indeed is their little "household god" that they worship every night, and turning the television off is something out of the ordinary, shocking even:

> **Jim:** Tell you what, Dave, you should have seen her [Barbara] before. She's gone too far this time.
> **Dave:** Why?
> **Jim:** Bang. She just switched the bloody telly off.
> **Dave:** No need for that.
> **Jim:** That's what I mean. (II, 5)

As Denise's comment above indicates, she does not realize that her family does not do much of anything else, apart from watching television. The same goes for Barbara: when Jim tells her that they should get Sky digital television, she objects: "Oh Jim, we don't want Sky. We don't watch telly enough to get the value" (III, 1).

Jim Royle is a particularly lazy individual who is fixed to his armchair, where he shouts at everyone, complaining how lazy all the others are. He will not get up from his armchair even to take the remote control from the top of the television, he makes his son do it instead: "Antony, chuck it over, you lazy little sod" (I, 1). When all the others get up from their seats to go to the window to have a look at the neighbours' new car, Jim stays put in his chair and contents himself with asking questions about the car from Antony. When Antony gets tired of Jim's questions and urges him to "come and look yourself," Jim snaps at him: "you're one lazy little sod, you" (I, 2). Although Antony seems to do the most work around the house, Jim has a very different opinion of him: "God, he's bone idle. Don't know where he gets it from" (II, 1). Antony getting a girlfriend is a huge shock to Jim as Antony spends less and less time at home doing the

[171] Rampton, "Make Us a Cup of Tea, Love."

chores. Jim's opinion is that "when you fall in love, it makes you dead lazy" (II, 3). He does not have high hopes for Antony's relationship with girlfriend Emma: "it'll only last five minutes. She'll soon suss out the lazy-arse sod" (II, 6). Antony is not the only one accused of being lazy, Denise gets her share as well, for example when Jim finds out that Denise "couldn't be bothered" to cook any dinner for Dave:

> **Barbara:** Well don't forget, she *is* pregnant.
> **Jim:** Bloody 'ell, Barbara, there's no chance of us forgetting, is there? I don't know where she inherits this lazy streak from. (II, 4)

There is no doubt that Denise and Antony have inherited their so-called "lazy streaks" from Jim, but he would not ever confess to that. He is probably too busy complaining about everything so that he does not see himself as immobile and lazy. When the doorbell rings, for example, he shouts at Barbara to "get that", while he sits in his chair and mutters "you don't get a bloody minute in this house" (II, 6). When at one point he does get up from his chair in the middle of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* and offers to make some tea to calm Barbara down after a particularly heated row that Jim puts down to her menopause, he makes a great fuss about it:

> **Jim:** I'll tell you what, Barb, there was a woman just like you, on the change. She made a thousand pounds there on the telly. So it's not all doom and gloom. Look, you and your change, you just sit there and I'll make us a nice cup of tea.
> THEY ALL LOOK AT JIM IN DISBELIEF
> **Jim:** Nice cup of tea, Barb? (SHE IGNORES HIM) Nice cup of tea, Dave? Denise? Nice cup of tea for you and the little one? Medium to strong, eh? I'll go and heat the pot and we'll let it brew, eh. There's a nice cup of tea coming your way. A nice cup of tea coming your way. Oh and keep an eye on Dave from Halifax for me because *I am making a brew.* Even though it's my favourite programme, *I am making a brew.* And do you know why? Because *I am a family man*. (II, 5)

Thus, Jim getting up from his chair is a big deal as he is permanently fixed to that chair in front of the television. He also knows himself that he is lazy, as he lies fluently to Emma's middle-class father Roger about working – after all, if he had nothing to be

ashamed of in his current situation, he could simply admit that he does not want to get a job as he is too comfortable sitting in his armchair all day watching television:

> **Jim:** I do love to work, you know, lad. I'm a bloody grafter. Anyone round here'll tell you that.
> DAVE LOOKS AMAZED.
> **Roger:** Hey I tell you what, I'm always looking for blokes, I mean I'll…
> **Jim:** No, no, no you're all right, cock. I've got far too much work round here to do now what with Barbara working, the big family, well you know what it's like, Rog… (III, 7)

As has been established earlier, Denise is not a particularly active mother as she makes everyone else take care of her baby. When she is still pregnant, she uses the age-old excuse to avoid doing anything: "I've got to rest – I'm with child" (II, 1). She also says that "when that baby's born I'm gonna be rushed off me feet" (II, 5), but after she has the baby, it is clear to everyone that what makes her busy is trying to make up excuses not to be with the baby and trying to find babysitters so that she could go shopping. Baby David's godmother Cheryl is not the only one who is made to feel guilty and forced to take care of the baby, Antony is exploited, too. In one episode the family is once again sitting in the living room, while Baby David is upstairs. He starts crying and the family hears it through the baby monitor, but no one does anything: everyone is too lazy to go upstairs, including Denise. She asks her parents and Dave to go see the baby, but as no one wants to go, she sighs "ohhh, I can't bear hearing him like that," and offers a cigarette to Barbara. They light up their cigarettes, and Denise finally asks Antony to go up. When Antony eloquently answers "kiss me arse", Jim explodes: "Ey, baldy! That's my grandson you're talking about. Now get up there and see to him. You lazy little sod." When Antony then leaves the room to go see the baby, Denise starts complaining: "I can't believe our Antony, he'd have left him crying all day. And he's his uncle" (III, 2). Hence, Antony is again blamed for being lazy and immoral, although it is evident that he does more around the house than anyone else.

The others can afford to be fixed to their seats as long as they have Antony as their servant.

In addition to being passive and lazy, the Royles do not travel practically at all – although on one occasion they do talk about their family trip to Cleethorpes together with Dave. They very rarely leave the house, and if they do, it is mostly to go to work, shops, visit relatives or to the pub. Moreover, if they go to a pub, it is always The Feathers. When on one occasion Dave goes to another pub, The Peartree, it has bad consequences as his hangover the next day is worse than ever. He claims he had a "bad pint" at The Peartree, and Jim knows what he is talking about straight away: "he [the owner] never cleans his pumps". If someone does travel somewhere, it is always a big deal with the Royles. In one episode Antony tells his parents about his friend Darren's cousin Steve, who has "been abroad twice this year", to Magaluf and Lloret de Mar. Barbara's reaction is an enchanted "ooh", while Jim cannot reveal that he could be impressed by something like that, thus he has to find fault in everything:

> **Jim:** Na, them foreign holidays are a swizz. Them bloody travel agents ripping every bugger off and mugs like him fall for it.
> **Barbara:** What they falling for, Jim?
> **Jim:** Well, there's nothing you can do abroad that you can't do here. It just costs you twice as bloody much.
> **Barbara:** They're on their holidays – they're having a good time.
> **Jim:** Having a good time, my arse. They spend half the time on the khazi, don't they, having the wild shites. You may as well do that here in the comfort of your own home. (II, 1)

Jim always thinks he knows better, although it is clear that he has not ever travelled anywhere. He even comments "Bermuda my arse," when Barbara points out that it looks lovely there while watching a holiday programme (II, 1). Nana has not been abroad either, but she tells the others about going to the airport with Elsie just to watch the planes land and take off. She is consequently very intrigued when Denise tells her

about her and Dave's honeymoon to Tenerife and especially about what planes and flying are like:

> **Denise:** Ey Nana, you wouldn't like the toilets on them planes – they're tiny.
> **Nana:** Do they have toilets on the planes?
> **Denise:** Yeah.
> **Jim:** Of course they have toilets on the bloody planes.
> **Denise:** How do you know, you've never been on a plane?
> **Jim:** I know and you wouldn't get me on one either. (II, 2)

It seems that Denise and Dave have travelled the most, as they have been to Tenerife on their honeymoon and no one else is said to have travelled anywhere. Nonetheless, Antony has a very exciting piece of news for the rest of the family in one episode: he is going to London. This is big news, and the others cannot believe their ears at first. When they hear that Antony is going there to visit some record companies with Darren, the others start joking about them and Antony retorts:

> **Antony:** Oh yeah, well you've never even been to London, Denise.
> **Denise:** Yeah, I know I've never but Dave has. Mam, will you tell him?
> **Barbara:** Dave! Have you been to London?
> **Dave:** Yeah. Well not exactly London but er we stopped at Scratchwood Services on a removals job, y'know.
> **Barbara:** Oh.
> **Jim:** I'll tell you about bloody London ey, a pint of beer – three pound a bloody pint and it's as flat as a witch's tit.
> **Barbara:** Well how d'you know, Jim? You've never been to London.
> **Jim:** I've never been to Dave's mother's bloody house but I know it's bloody boring there. (III, 5)

Antony has probably never had as much attention as he does when his plans of going to London are revealed. Jim keeps making fun of him and Darren, calling them "a couple of little rent boys", causing Denise to snap, "Dad! Don't say that! You're always 'orrible to our Antony. It's just not fair." Denise surprises everyone by sticking up for her brother, Dave even asks "What's up with you?" Denise explains, "Well he is my brother. I'd hate anything bad to happen to him in London," to which Barbara sighs in a very Barbara-like manner, "Oh Denise, oh that's lovely. What a lovely thing to say,

Denise. Oh I'm proud of you." It takes a while, but finally Jim comes to his senses and shows some love and respect for his son:

> **Jim:** You take care of yourself, Antony. You look after yourself in London, son. You're not a bad lad really. Ey and if there is any trouble you just call home all right and they'll have me and Dave to answer to. Is that right, Dave?
> **Dave:** Yeah. We'll look after you, Ant. Don't you worry, lad. (III, 5)

This is a very rare moment in the Royle household: the family does not talk about their feelings for each other at all normally and Jim very seldomly – if ever – shows any respect towards anyone. The solemnity of the dialogue is striking, and it is obvious that Antony gains this respect from his family simply by going to London. It seems he is the only one of the family who will ever visit London, which makes him a man who has great prospects, at least in his mother's eyes: Barbara even says that Antony reminds him of Dick Whittington[172]. However, the somber moment is broken when Nana enters the living room, and she is told about Antony's plans, too. She is very surprised about the news and proudly gives Antony three pounds for his trip to London. She also has a story about London, about when Elsie's daughter went to London to see something. When Barbara asks if it was *Cats*, Nana replies: "no, it was a musical." Still, Nana has an amusing story to tell: "I know they stopped at an hotel, I don't know what it was called or where it was but I do know that every night they had a mint chocolate put on their pillow." When she asks Barbara if she knows why they do that, Barbara admits: "I don't know, Mam. I've never been to London." London is thus seen as a distant, faraway place where people have very peculiar habits and where only a selected few get to go.

[172] According to the legend, Dick Whittington was a poor country boy who came to London with his cat to seek his fortune. He eventually became very rich, got married and became Lord Mayor of London, serving three terms.

The Royle Family does indeed strengthen the stereotype of the working class as immobile, lazy and fixed to one place. The Royles are passive couch potatoes that rarely step outside their home, and when they do, they move in very small circles. Travelling to another city or abroad is almost unheard of, and when someone is said to travel, they are regarded almost as a hero – especially if it is someone within the family. Antony Royle gains more respect and admiration in the family than he has ever done in his life when he tells about his plans of going to London – although, it must be said, that respect does not last very long as in the following episode he is again laughed at and made to do all the menial chores in the house. The Royles do not aspire to travel nor move house and as was seen earlier, they have very negative attitudes towards education. They do not thus strive for moving up on the social scale, they are happy staying where they are.

4.6 "*My hovercraft's still being repaired*"– Representations of Anti-Pretentiousness

When the Royles laugh and make snide comments about Cheryl's or Twiggy's obesity, Twiggy's girlfriend, their neighbour Lorraine and her leggings or Beverly Macca's appearance, they position themselves above these people and consequently seem great snobs. As these people show more signs of working-classness (or even underclassness) than the Royles themselves, they regard these people as social inferiors to them – although Cheryl and Twiggy are supposed to be their friends. The Royles could be thus seen as showing signs of pretentiousness.

The Royles are not, however, as pretentious as Antony's girlfriend Emma's parents Roger and Valerie Kavanagh, who pay a visit at the Royle residence at Christmas, in the final episode of the whole show. The Kavanaghs are clearly middle class, as they have plenty of money and they are not afraid to show it. They live in a

very affluent area of Greater Manchester, Altrincham, and they also have a second home, a little "country retreat" in the Lake District.

When Valerie and Roger first arrive at the Royle residence, everyone is a little star-struck: they are fascinated by everything that has to do with the Kavanaghs. Denise asks Valerie whether her coat is real leather, and later she and Barbara secretly try the coat on. Nana insists on sitting next to Valerie and pulling a cracker with her, and she is over the moon when Valerie gets a paper hat that is the same colour as her own hat. The women admire Valerie's breast implants, Barbara even goes as far as saying that "Mary next door will be really sick she's missed them." Roger boasts that he got them for Valerie for Christmas, although she wanted a Dyson vacuum cleaner instead. Valerie adds that she did get the Dyson too, and the women are very impressed by this. The women also notice that Valerie is "lovely and slim", and they soon find out that Roger treated Valerie to liposuction for her birthday. This consequently makes the other women, including Nana, sigh that they would love liposuction too, even though Nana does not even know what that means.

Roger and Valerie start talking about Antony and Emma, who is pregnant with Antony's baby, and what they have planned for their future. They have been looking for a house for the young couple in Altrincham, which they are willing to pay for, and they also think that Emma should have the baby delivered privately as they do not trust the NHS: "you just want the best for your kids, don't you". At first Jim says he does not have any complaints about the NHS, but when Roger clarifies that of course they can pay for everything, his opinion changes: "Oh yeah. I totally bloody agree with you. I mean the NHS has gone completely down the bloody pan, hasn't it. I mean we're talking about a new-born baby here. Not a bag of bloody crisps." The division between the Kavanaghs and the Royles becomes more evident when at first Roger almost offers

Jim a job – which he obviously declines straight away – and later he starts boasting about his riches. Roger wants to make it very clear that he has done well in life, as he brags about owning boxes at football stadiums, driving a Jaguar with "ROG1" as its number plate, going to cruises and lap dancing clubs and about visiting a prostitute on a regular basis. Jim politely agrees with what Roger says, laughs at his jokes and boosts his ego by showing his admiration, while Dave simply whistles whenever he hears something that impresses him. Roger's boasting soon turns slightly unpleasant:

> **Roger:** Ey, I tell you what, Jim, Valerie, you can organise this. We'll get 'em all down on the boat. It's a forty-two footer, you know.
> DAVE WHISTLES
> **Dave:** Has it got a toilet?
> **Roger:** It's got two.
> DAVE WHISTLES AGAIN.
> **Jim:** That's great that, Rog, because my hovercraft's still being repaired.
> THEY BOTH LAUGH.
> **Roger:** Hey I'm only from a place like this. I'm a self-made man. Valerie, wasn't my mam's place as bad as this. I mean I didn't have a pot to piss in, me. Look at me now. (III, 7)

Roger certainly goes overboard with his boasting, as Jim starts complaining about Roger as soon as the Kavanaghs are out of the door:

> **Jim:** Ohhh, he's a big-headed get, him. It'll take him ten minutes to get in the bloody car with his bloody big head. He's a big-headed get. He never stops boasting – his house, his car, his bloody yacht, even his port bloody wine. And I tell you what, I'd love to meet bloody Joe Longthorne, but as for you, Dave Best.
> **Dave:** What?
> **Jim:** What? You were all over him like a bloody rash, you long lanky whistling arsehole licker ya. I'm going upstairs.
> **Barbara:** What for?
> **Jim:** What for? To check the helicopter pad for his next flying bloody visit. (III, 7)

Unlike Jim, the women are very impressed by the Kavanaghs, especially Valerie, as they keep on praising her even after she is gone. Barbara then sighs: "How the other half live. Aren't you lucky, Ant, ey, marrying into that lot?" The women do not see the pretentiousness in the Kavanaghs, as they are so busy admiring Valerie and dreaming

that they themselves could be more like her. They do realise that the Kavanaghs are different compared to themselves, that they represent "the other half" of the society, but they do not particularly criticise the social divide. Jim is more critical when he really realises the economic differences between Roger and himself. He goes upstairs to complain to Baby David, the only one in the family who will listen to his outbursts:

> **Jim:** I wish I'd have bloody well stayed here with you instead of downstairs with his gob bloody Humpty Dumpty head Roger. Hey are you having this, Baby David, he's got a bloody yacht, a bloody Aston bloody Martin, he's got a big bloody house in the country, he's got a box at Man United, a box at bloody Manchester City. Hey and he's got a lovely tart out in Hale. And what have I got? I've got absolutely bloody nothing. We haven't even got a bloody Dyson. Hey and no one would have loved to have got a pair of bloody implants for Barbara more than me, ooh and I'd have got so much enjoyment out of them. But what have I got. I've got absolutely bloody nothing. Nothing – I never have had. I haven't got two hapennys to rub together. I'm always bloody skint and I always will be. Where did it all go wrong, Baby David? (III, 7)

This final episode of the whole sitcom is very special, as it includes at least two very unique moments: the middle-class visitors and Jim feeling very sorry for himself. There is a definite undercurrent of social criticism in the sitcom, but mostly in a subtle way: no middle-class people are seen in the other episodes and whenever Jim does criticise the pretentiousness of the upper classes, he never puts himself down in the process.

Indeed, most of the social critique present in *The Royle Family* is not as evident as in the final episode with the Kavanaghs. The Royles comment on the middle class mainly through mocking famous people and their actions, such as radio and television presenter Chris Evans or famous entrepreneur Richard Branson:

> **Jim:** Eh, I know, you don't read about crashes because they keep it all covered up, but you can't tell me the likes of Richard Branson, whose got his own bloody airline, goes everywhere by balloon, he is not bloody soft, is he?
> **Anthony:** Hey, he's loaded, he is. He's worth over a billion.
> **Jim:** Bloody 'ell that's only about ten quid less than you, isn't it, Nana?
> **Dave:** D'you know how he started off his business that Branson? From a little record shop.

> **Barbara:** Ooh, can't imagine him behind a record shop, can you? With his beard.
> **Jim:** What's his beard got to do with it?
> **Barbara:** Ey, imagine what it must be like to be him. All that money.
> **Jim:** Can't get that rich without being as tight as a camel's arse in a sandstorm, can ya? He wouldn't give you the steam off his piss that fella. (II, 2)

Furthermore, whenever someone in the family shows signs of having aspirations for middle class life, they are reminded of their place mostly by mocking from Jim. For example, showing interest towards decorating one's house is, according to Jim, pretentious and stupid as he comments in a very Jim-like manner: "stencil my arse" and "feng shui my arse". He does not approve of buying expensive designer clothes for a baby either, as the following shows:

> **Denise:** I love getting Baby David stuff from Baby Gap.
> **Barbara:** Aah.
> **Jim:** What! He's got more bloody gear than baby bloody Brooklyn.
> **Denise:** Dad. It's dead important what he wears. I don't want him getting teased for not having designer gear.
> **Jim:** Are you paying for this lot, Dave?
> **Dave:** Well I only want the best for the Baby David, Jim. He's gotta be all logo'd up, ain't he? (III, 2)

Finally, naming a baby after his father is unheard of in the Royle family. Denise, Barbara and Jim thus consider it very odd that Dave wants to call his son Dave, too, as they find it too confusing. Handing down the father's name to his son is not very common at all among the working class, it is more of a custom in the upper classes. The Royles therefore see the habit as somewhat pretentious, and they try to persuade Dave to think otherwise, too:

> **Denise:** Well, I really want Keanu, but Dave wants Dave.
> **Barbara:** I don't think you should have a Dave.
> **Denise:** No.
> **Barbara:** I mean, Dave's Dave. What do you think, Jim?
> **Jim:** Eh? What about?
> **Barbara:** Well, if it's a boy, Dave wants to call it Dave.
> **Jim:** (TO DAVE) Well, you're already a Dave. What d'you want another one for? Come on, son, get a bloody grip of yourself.
> **Denise:** See.

> **Dave:** Well, it's like handing it down, innit. I mean, my dad was Dave, and his dad, and I think his dad was as well. PAUSE. And his dad.
> **Jim:** Well it's about time you put a bloody stop to it. C'mon. (II, 1)

In conclusion, *The Royle Family* depicts working class as being anti-pretentious and, at the same time, middle class as pretentious. Again, a difference between the sexes can be seen: the women in *The Royle Family* are not as anti-pretentious as the men, and it is indeed the women who show more signs of having aspirations towards middle-class life. Furthermore, as there is such a great deal of social criticism woven into each episode, Beverly Skeggs in fact sees the sitcom as being "a sustained attack on pretensions."[173] As the sitcom is widely perceived in this manner, as attacking pretensions and revolving around social criticism, it has, in my opinion, had an effect on the image of the working class. I will delve deeper into this in my final chapter.

[173] Skeggs, 2004, 115.

5. Desirable Working Class?

After seeing how *The Royle Family* reproduces the common representations of the working class, it is interesting to have a closer look at how these representations have affected the way the working class is seen today. The anti-pretentious social critique that the Royles exercise has, perhaps because it is spiced with humour, helped to create a new image for the working class. It could even be argued that *The Royle Family* has helped to make the working class more desirable than it has ever been.

Firstly, however, in order to understand the change in the perceptions of class, it is important to have a look at the changes in society that have occurred between *The Royle Family* and the last great working-class sitcom that preceded it, *Till Death Us Do Part*. As I noted earlier, *Till Death Us Do Part* was a sensation at its time and other distinctly working-class sitcoms were very few and far between after it, at least until *The Royle Family* was created. These two sitcoms are sometimes compared to each other as they both feature a working-class family with an opinionated, politically incorrect loudmouth father. Both sitcoms were also created at a time when Britain had a Labour Government and the British economy was doing fairly well. During the 25 or so years that elapsed between the two sitcoms, British society saw some great changes. Perhaps the biggest influence on the British society was the long reign of the Conservative party from 1979 to 1997. Beverley Skeggs notes how in the 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher tried to introduce new measures to help the British economy, trade unions as well as the working class were seen as "a major obstacle to renewal."[174] Her politics were therefore not popular among the working class as her view of "classless"

[174] Skeggs, 2004, 92.

society meant that the rich got richer and the poor poorer.[175] During the economic boom of the mid-1980s the whole of Britain became "more interested in cash than class,"[176] and the absence of class in television, in sitcoms too, is a proof of this. Indeed, as was noted earlier, there were several popular sitcoms with working-class characters in Britain in the 1960s and 70s, but only two in the 1980s: *Only Fools and Horses* and *Bread*. These two were similar in that both of them were pure entertainment, portraying the characters as lovable losers who got into amusing situations. The lack of social commentary made the series different compared to many earlier working-class sitcoms. After them, the next popular working-class sitcom was *The Royle Family* in 1998. By this time, the Labour party with its leader Tony Blair had come into power. The working class has traditionally voted for Labour, while the Conservative party is more popular among the middle and the upper classes.[177] Although such distinctions are not completely true today, certain connotations are nevertheless attached to the Labour party as the "the people's party".

In the introduction to this thesis, I mentioned the 2002 MORI survey, in which 68% of the respondents agreed with the statement that "At the end of the day, I am working class and proud of it"[178]. In 1997 only 58% agreed with the same statement, thus a clear rise in the popularity of the working class can be seen: even some middle class people had developed working-class feelings by 2002. In 1997 Britain was,

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[175] A more thorough account of Margaret Thatcher's era and the effects her politics had on British society as a whole can be found, for example, in Cannadine, David. *Class in Britain*. London: Penguin Books, 2000. 171-180; Christopher, David. *British Culture: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 11-16; McCormick, 26-28.

[176] Christopher, 13.

[177] McCormick, 65. This division is not as straightforward as that, of course: there used to be a substantial minority of working-class people who voted for the Conservatives, and especially nowadays, when the number of people belonging to the working class is declining, there are great many middle-class people that vote for Labour. Consider Alf Garnett, for example. He was a Conservative – and who is not to say that Jim Royle is too?

[178] "Working Class – And Proud Of It!" MORI. 16 August 2002. [8 July 2005.] http://www.mori.com/mrr/2002/c020816.shtml

according to Yvonne Roberts, "on the tail end of Thatcherite propaganda, in which the working class had for almost two decades been identified as the source of scroungers, layabouts and juvenile delinquents."[179] It could well be the case that "The Blair Revolution"[180] which brought about many changes[181] has managed to renew the image of the working class simply by terminating the negative "propaganda" of the Thatcherite era and by implementing policies on removing social inequalities. It is also a known fact that with the decline of heavy industry and the loss of manual occupations, the number of people belonging to the working class has declined.[182] The working class may have consequently acquired rarity value, which attracts some middle class people so that they want to become part of the "rare" working class.

One explanation for the unprecedented popularity of the working class is nostalgia. When Tony Blair became Prime Minister after the long reign of the Conservatives, people may have remembered the last time Labour was in power, in the "good old days" of the 1970s. Indeed, there has been something of a nostalgia boom at least on television in the recent years. American television has seen the likes of *That 70s Show* and *That 80s Show*, which are set in the 1970s and the 80s respectively. British television, on the other hand, has seen modern remakes of old sitcom favourites, all starring working-class characters, such as *The Likely Lads* and *Hancock*,[183] as well as a

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[179] Roberts, Yvonne. "Working Class Hero: Something to Be?" *Community Care*. 29 August 2002. Issue 1437, p. 19. http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=7307951&db=aph

[180] Christopher, 16.

[181] A thorough account of the changes that have happened during the Blair administration can be found, for example, in Christopher, 16-21; McCormick, 28-31; and the Labour Party website, http://www.labour.org.uk/top50achievements

[182] See, for example, McCormick, 65.

[183] In 1996 comedian Paul Merton starred in a series of comedy writers Simpson and Galton's classic script remakes, including a few episodes from *Hancock's Half-Hour*. The series was simply titled *Paul Merton in Simpson and Galton's…*; In 2002, a remake of *The Likely Lads* was made, titled *A Tribute to the Likely Lads*; Impressionist Alistair McGowan also made a spoof of *Steptoe and Son* in his comedy show, *Alistair McGowan's Big Impression*. For more information on all of these, see the BBC Guide to Comedy, http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/guide

series of shows titled "I love…", in which celebrities reminisce the decade or phenomenon which the show is dedicated to.[184] As was mentioned earlier, the figures of Alf Garnett / Archie Bunker and Jim Royle are nostalgic, as they represent a passing era with their old-fashioned, politically incorrect views on women, other nationalities and so on. Mark Simpson also notes that *The Royle Family* is "clearly located in the Seventies of [Caroline] Aherne's childhood."[185] The television shows and the celebrities the Royles talk about clearly demonstrate that the Royles are in fact living at the end of the 20th century, therefore Simpson is possibly referring more to the decor of the Royle house and the pastime activities of the family, among other things. *The Royle Family* does thus feed the nostalgia hungry public. All the comparisons of the sitcom to *Till Death Us Do Part* strengthen the association with the 1970s, which in turn may be one reason behind the popularity of the Royles. Those who watched the Garnetts in the 60s and 70s may feel a sense of nostalgia when they watch *The Royle Family* and enjoy the similarities between the two sitcoms. Those who were too young or not even born yet when *Till Death Us Do Part* was broadcast, may enjoy the "fresh approach" in *The Royle Family*. It is completely different compared to anything that was done in the 1980s or early 90s[186], and the Royles themselves may seem even exotic to many, as they do not behave as well as other sitcom characters usually do and they do not even speak standard English. This could explain the interest in Jim Royle posters among university students in Manchester, which I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis – the

[184] There was a show dedicated to the 1960s, titled "I love the 60s", as well as shows about the 70s, 80s and 90s. Later special shows were also dedicated to the Royals, Jamaica and Kung-Fu. http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/ilove/

[185] Simpson, "Sitcoms Go Out with a Couple of Class Acts."

[186] The Royles do not at least represent a "deviant" family, but more of an old-fashioned nuclear family, which, according to O'Shaughnessy, was not very fashionable in 1990. O'Shaughnessy, 95.

character of Jim Royle may seem funny and somewhat exotic to the students, most of whom have middle-class origins.

Nostalgia or not, the desire to be working class is something new for the middle class. "Now it's really unpopular to be middle class. It's worse than being upper class or lower class. Middle class is worst. People think it's been really easy, and they get at you but they can't articulate why, because you're not actually that posh,"[187] complains middle-class pop star Sophie Ellis-Bextor. Rita Felski adds that

> Being lower-middle-class is a singularly boring identity, possessing none of the radical chic that is sometimes ascribed to working-class roots. In fact, the lower middle class has typically been an object of scorn among intellectuals, blamed for everything from exceedingly bad taste to the rise of Hitler.[188]

Yvonne Roberts lists economic factors such as "uncertainty in employment, the pensions fiasco and the volatility of the stock market" as devaluers of "the middle-class habit of prudence to ensure security for the family's future."[189] When middle-class existence is not as safe anymore as it used to be, people have started to look towards the working class, which is more used to living in uncertainty and taking risks. Working-class values such as "collective action, inter-dependence and mutuality"[190] as well as "attachment to family, sincere personal relations, loyalty and honour,"[191] which previously were not associated with the middle class, have produced more respect towards the working class. Moreover, Skeggs writes that

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[187] Hattenstone, Simon. "Sophie's World." *The Guardian*. October 28, 2002. [15 June 2005.] http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,,820467,00.html

[188] Felski, Rita. "Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class." *PMLA*, Vol. 115, No. 1, January 2000. 34. http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129%28200001%29115%3A1%3C33%3ANTDISA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-4

[189] Roberts, "Working Class Hero: Something to Be?"

[190] Roberts, "Working Class Hero: Something to Be?"

[191] Skeggs, 2004, 151.

> research shows how the middle-class are not valued or authorized by the working-class, nor are middle-class self-dispositions desired. In fact, the middle-class are regularly viewed as having moral flaws in terms of snobbery, elitism and competitiveness or pretentiousness.[192]

When such views of the middle class are expressed for example on television in shows such as *The Royle Family*, and when the current political leaders do not seem to offer as much support for the middle classes as the previous ones did, it is not surprising that the middle class may feel uncertainty in their position. Furthermore, Skeggs comments that people have a strong desire not to be read as pretentious and superior, they want to be read as "ordinary" instead, "because they do not want to be held as responsible for perpetuating or agreeing with inequality."[193]

Just like some poets with aristocratic or upper-middle-class backgrounds admired the life of the peasants in the countryside two hundred years ago, so too has the British middle class started to admire some aspects of working class life in the recent years. It is most visible through the fashion world: certain aspects that are judged as tasteless and trashy on a working-class woman have actually become very fashionable among the upper classes in the recent years. For example big jewellery, big hair, bright colours, too much make up, clothes that show plenty of skin and so on have been re-valued as fashionable and glamorous outside the working class. Skeggs notes that "fashion designers have long been attached to a white trash aesthetic as it gives them a way of doing sexuality with femininity, extending the type and range of femininity to open out new markets, offering something 'different'."[194] She adds that this marketing of working-class aesthetics to new audiences means that "what was projected onto one group (the working-class) as the site of the immoral and dangerous is now re-valued

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[192] Skeggs, 2004, 151.

[193] Skeggs, 2004, 116.

[194] Skeggs, 2004, 104.

when it become attached to another group (the middle-class) as exciting, new and interesting."[195]

There are differences between sexes in this matter, as always. It seems that it is more acceptable to be working class for men than it is for women. Skeggs has studied the lives of working-class women and found out that they put in a great deal of effort so that they would not be recognized as working class because working class for them has many not-so-flattering connotations.[196] Most of the connotations that are linked to working-class males are to do with positive qualities such as sociability and solidarity, which may explain the fact that men aspire to be working class more than women do, and that all the so-called "mockneys" I mentioned previously (Nigel Kennedy, Guy Ritchie, Mick Jagger and Jamie Oliver, to be precise) are in fact male. Furthermore, as I noted earlier, working-class language has more prestige for men than for women. Honey comments that the speakers of non-standard accents are associated with "friendliness, humour, [and] kind-heartedness to others,"[197] which may account for the desirability of the working class, although this perhaps is not as valid an argument for women than it is for men.

So, how has *The Royle Family* in fact contributed to the new image of the working class as desirable? Much of the appeal of *The Royle Family* comes from its whole approach to traditional, middle-class sitcoms. The Royles are from the north of England and they have a working-class background – to many Britons and English speaking population in the world alike, they speak "funny" with their northern accents and vocabulary. Although the sitcom does reproduce some of the common stereotypical images of the working class, it also offers positive representations of the class, which

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[195] Skeggs, 2004, 105.

[196] Skeggs, 1997, 74-76.

[197] Honey, 1989, 67.

may inspire some (middle-class) people. For example, the Royles show loyalty towards their family and most of all, they are not uptight and pretentious. What Bettie writes about *Roseanne* could as well be about *The Royle Family*: "the most common response [from viewers] was that the show is well liked because it is about 'real people'. . . . the term real might function as a class marker: 'real people' (read 'common folk') as opposed to the 'middle-class characters of most sitcoms.'"[198] Gilbert maintains that *The Royle Family* does not leave a "queasy" feeling "of working-class life turned into a psychodramatic freakshow"[199] like many other depictions of the class do – the writers of the sitcom surely feel affinity with the family as they grasp the characters' likes and dislikes so well. In fact, what makes *The Royle Family* so "real" is the fact that its writers as well as most of the actors are working-class themselves. To the British public at large actors Ricky Tomlinson (who plays Jim Royle) and Sue Johnston (Barbara) were already known before *The Royle Family*, as they both starred in the working-class soap opera *Brookside* in the 1980s. Both of them also publicly supported and campaigned vigorously for the infamous Miners' Strike in 1985.[200] *The Royle Family* is thus a working-class sitcom through and through.

Finally, judging the working class as desirable is not straightforward (as class issues never are), it depends entirely on who you ask. My view is that certain aspects of working-class life have become more accepted and even fashionable in the recent years, but if the middle class had a chance to pick either middle or working class life, I doubt that many would choose to live in a less privileged environment among the working class. Different surveys tell us that some people clearly see working-classness

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[198] Bettie, 142.

[199] Gilbert: "Revolution in the Living Room."

[200] Gottlieb, Vera. "*Brookside*: 'Damon's YTS Comes to an End' (Barry Woodward): Paradoxes and contradictions." *British Television Drama in the 1980s*. Ed. George W. Brandt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 40-61.

simply as a state of mind or as an accessory, which you can add on or take off whenever you please. *The Royle Family* has made the working class visible again after many years and as a result it has given a role model for all those aspiring to be working class. After all, would 68% of the respondents in the 2002 MORI poll really have claimed to have working-class feelings, if they had not seen contemporary examples of working-class life, like in *The Royle Family*? The sitcom is not, however, the only reason why the class has become fashionable. Changes in British society, both politically and economically, as well as many other factors have contributed to this phenomenon.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, my aim was to study the representations of the working-class present in the sitcom *The Royle Family*, in order to find out what kind of an image it portrays of the British white working class at the end of the 20th century.

First, I defined the notion of working class, which was not a straightforward matter. Class does not play as big a role in British society as it used to some decades ago. All the official government reports at least seem to try very hard not to talk about class as such; the society is now classified based on people's occupations, instead. I thus found the work of certain sociologists more helpful, as sociology does not shy away from using such simple terms as "working class" or "middle class".

Secondly, I explained the notion of representation, before embarking on charting the most common representations of the working class. Skeggs' *Class, Self, Culture* was a great help in this, as she mentions some of the common representations, although I soon found plenty of others that Skeggs has overlooked. With examples mostly from contemporary television (and sitcoms in particular), I analysed these common representations and found that almost all of them carry very negative connotations in them. Hence, the working class is, if we believe all the common representations of it, dirty, disgusting, excessive and grotesque; tasteless, lacking in style and manners; stupid, unmodern, racist and sexist; unruly, unrespectable and immoral; lazy, passive and immobile; a source of entertainment, emotional, a source of humour and object of mockery; speaking regional varities of non-standard English; and, finally, they are anti-pretentious, making fun of the upper classes. This last category was the only one with positive connotations, which was interesting to notice.

In chapter three, I defined the notion of sitcom and charted the history of British sitcoms, in order to place *The Royle Family* in its historical context. I mentioned

some of the most popular and groundbreaking British sitcoms, paying special attention to sitcoms with working-class characters. I discovered that there were many working-class sitcoms in the golden era of British sitcoms, the 1960s and 70s, but only a handful after that. *The Royle Family* was the biggest (and virtually the only) sitcom with working-class characters in the late 1990s. This strengthens my finding that class is not particularly an issue in contemporary Britain.

In the following chapter, I put the theory introduced earlier into practice and analysed closely how the working class is portrayed in *The Royle Family*. I found that some of the common representations are reproduced in *The Royle Family*, too, although the sitcom also neglects many of the most negative representations. Skeggs agrees: "*The Royle Family* offers simultaneously a temporary respite from the pervasiveness of middle-class judgments, but also a reproduction of fixity, waste, excess, authenticity and being unmodern."[201] Anti-pretentiousness plays a big part in the sitcom, as the Royles practice their own anti-pretentious social critique throughout the sitcom. The middle class is represented as being somewhat arrogant boasters, making the Royles and therefore also the whole working class look good.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, I widened my scope by taking into consideration the British society as a whole, in my attempt to explain the recent change in the image of the working class. The working class has become fashionable and desirable among the middle class, as is seen in different surveys, in the fashion world and in certain celebrities, who try to come across as working-class even though their wealth and their background would certainly place them in the middle class. There have been many aspects contributing to this phenomenon. As *The Royle Family* was created near the turn of the new millennium, around the same time when this phenomenon

[201] Skeggs, 2004, 116.

started to evolve in Britain, it has certainly contributed to the positive image of the working class.

There were thus two slightly separate issues under study here. My main interest was in the representations of the working class in *The Royle Family*, as the sitcom is such a rare example of contemporary television programming with working-class characters. On the other hand, I was keen to get to the core of the recent phenomenon that has made the working class fashionable and desirable. Although in political rhetoric, class does not seem to be an issue in contemporary Britain as such, in popular rhetoric it does: the middle class is seen as boring and the working class as "cool" and more exciting. These two issues are linked closely, as *The Royle Family* has been very successful and consequently it has contributed to the phenomenon. In my view, the thesis would not have been complete if I had not at least tried to explain the role of *The Royle Family* in this contemporary phenomenon, therefore I could not ignore it completely. I personally would like to see more studies on it.

On a final note, before I leave the Royles for good, I want to give attention to the way the Royles articulate Britishness, the way they actually speak to the whole nation. Even though *The Royle Family* was created when the Labour Party was in power, it does not position itself politically in any way. The rise of Tony Blair and Labour may have had an effect on the rise of the working class, as it meant that the long reign of the "pretentious" Conservatives was over. The popularity of politicians rarely stays up, however. This is evident in the following passage, where the Royles are talking about plans for the millennium:

> **Barbara:** Mary's really looking forward to it, Joe's not really bothered. She said he can't get excited about the millenium.
> **Jim:** Bloody 'ell, that's a surprise, isn't it. Millennium my arse. It's just another bloody swizz they've come up with to bloody rip me off, isn't it. Well I'm gonna treat it like any other New Year's Eve, me. That's it. I'm

> gonna get totally bladdered and I'm doing nothing else, that's it, I'm doing nothing else. They can take it or leave it.
> **Denise:** Who can, dad?
> **Jim:** Tony bloody Blair – and his show who've bloody organized it. It's all a bloody con to get more money out of me. (II, 7)

As the dialogue reveals, Jim Royle is again being his own, anti-pretentious self with complaints about everything – no surprises there. I believe, however, that Jim is simply articulating what most Britons were feeling at that time. This makes him not a working-class hero, but a British hero, and certainly instances such as these have had a great effect on how the working class is more accepted and desirable these days. However, the construction and representations of not only class but of Britishness in *The Royle Family* could easily be developed further into a whole another study.

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