

**The Political and Social Reality of Post World
War II in Britain as Reflected in the Novel
Room at the Top by John Braine**

نعكاسات الأوضاع السياسية و الاجتماعية في الرواية الانجليزية
بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية كما صورتها
رواية جون برين: مكان في القمة

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**Middle East University for Graduate Studies
Authorization Form**

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as Reflected in the Novel *Room at the Top* by John Braine was defended and
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Dedications

I dedicate this humble thesis to my country Syria and to the Syrians. I dedicate it to the soul of my beloved late father, my precious mother and family. I also dedicate the thesis to my beloved husband for both his patience and support; and to all the people who helped me to complete this thesis.

Table of Contents

Thesis Title.....	i
Authorization.....	ii
Thesis Committee Decision.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Dedications.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi-viii
Arabic Abstract.....	ix
English Abstract.....	x-xi
Chapter One	
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Post-War Britain Politics.....	2-5
1.3 Post-War Economic Changes and the Rise of Middle Class	5-7
1.4 Post- War Cultural Changes in Britain.....	7-8
1.5 The Emergence Angry Young Men’s Literature.....	8-11
1.6 Angry Young Men and the Political Protest.....	11-12
1.7 Angry Young Men’s’ Fiction and the Social Classes in Post-War Britain.....	12-13
1.8 Social Realism in Angry Young Men’s Literature	13-15

1.9 John Braine, the Writer and the Man.....	15-16
1.10 John Braine's <i>Room at the Top</i>	16-19
1.11 Statement of the Problem.....	19-20
1.12 Questions of the Study.....	20
1.13 Objectives of the Study.....	20-21
1.14 Significance of the Study.....	21
1.15 Limitations of the Study.....	21-22
1.16 Research Methodology.....	22
1.17 Definitions of Terms.....	22-24

Chapter Two: Reviews of Literature

2.1 Introduction.....	25
2.2 Theoretical Reviews.....	25-35
2.3 Empirical Reviews	36
2.3.1 Kingsley Amis's <i>Lucky Jim</i> “”””	36-37
2.3.2 John Osborne's <i>Look Back in Anger</i>	37-38
2.3.3 Alan Sillitoe's <i>Saturday Nights and Sunday Mornings</i>	38-40
2.3.4 Literature Review of John Braine's <i>Room at the Top</i>	40-47

Chapter Three: Discussions

3.1 Introduction.....	48
3.2 Preliminary Notes.....	48
3.3 Political frustrations in the Novel.....	49-60

3.4 Social Changes in the Novel.....	61-82
3.5 Frustration with Working Class Conditions.....	82-92
3.6 Social Realism in <i>Room at the Top</i>	92-99

Chapter Four

Conclusions.....	100-105
References.....	106-110

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بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية كما صورتها

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ملخص الدراسة

تتناول الدراسة الحالية أدب الجيل الغاضب الذي ظهر في بريطانيا عقب الحرب العالمية الثانية. وقع الاختيار على رواية جون برين "مكان في القمة" (١٩٥٧) كنموذج عن أدب هذا الجيل. يتميز هذا الأدب بتعبيره عن الغضب ضد اخفاقات السلطة البريطانية في المجالات السياسية و الاجتماعية والاقتصادية في فترة الخمسينات من القرن العشرين. بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية، وعدت السلطة البريطانية مواطنيها بدولة منصفة و غنية وخصوصا لأبناء الطبقة العاملة الفقيرة، إذ ضمنت لهم مجانية التعليم الجامعي الضروري لتحسين أوضاعهم الاقتصادية و الاجتماعية و ذلك للمرة الأولى في بريطانيا المعروفة تاريخيا بتصنيفاتها الاجتماعية الثابتة و المتحيزة. يوضح أدب الجيل الغاضب أن هذه الوعود لم تنفذ على أرض الواقع خلال الخمسينيات من القرن الماضي. اعتمد هذا الأدب أسلوب المدرسة الواقعية لضمان توثيق حقيقي لهذه المرحلة الانتقالية المفصلية في تاريخ بريطانيا الحديث.

أظهرت رواية جون برين "مكان في القمة" زيف هذه الادعاءات، حيث بينت أن الطبقة البرجوازية التي حكمت بريطانيا لمدة طويلة قد احتفظت بالسلطة و الامتيازات الاجتماعية و الاقتصادية المرتبطة بها ، و كذلك لم تتغير ظروف الطبقة العاملة التي عانت من الفقر و التمييز الاجتماعي ضدها. وثق جون برين هذه المرحلة و اخفاقاتها، كما فعل أبناء جيله، باعتماد أسلوب الرواية الواقعية.

The political and the Social Reality of Post World War II in Britain

As Reflected in The Novel:

Room at the Top

by John Braine

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Abstract

The present thesis studies the literature of Angry young Men in post-war Britain. It chooses John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957) as a representative of Angry Young Men's literature. The literature expresses frustration against the broken promises of Welfare State in post-War II Britain. The reasons of anger are political, social and, dissatisfaction with the working class conditions that have existed in Britain during the fifties. The literature turns to the realistic novel in order to reproduce an authentic picture of the prevailing mood of the decade.

The thesis describes and analyzes the mood of anger in John Braine's *Room at the Top*. The novel shows that the Welfare State fails to turn Britain into a true democratic country in the fifties, since the rich men have continued to rule the country. The deep-rooted rigid social class discrimination remains a force hindering the new working class citizens from achieving themselves. The Welfare State ensures full

employment for the working class population. Still, there is an atmosphere of poverty and injustice. *Room at the Top* is a realistic novel; it reproduces an authentic picture reflecting the disturbances that have prevailed in post-war II Britain.

Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the historical context in which the literature of Angry Young Men is written. The anger in this literature springs from the political, social, economic and cultural environment surrounding it. The introduction presents post World War II (hereafter is used as post-war) political context in Britain, historically called the Welfare State. Then, it presents the economic changes that have led to the emergence of a middle class majority. It also explores the cultural changes within the British society that have led to the emergence of new terms like liberalism, cosmopolitanism and the rise of working class consciousness. It also presents realism as the literary style of the literature of Angry Young Men. It also presents John Braine as an angry writer, and introduces to *Room at the Top* (1957) as a representative of the literature of Angry Young Men. Finally, it presents the statement of the problem, questions and objectives of the study, the methodology of the study as well as the definitions of terms.

1.2 Post- War Britain Politics

Britain celebrated the victory of World War II but lost the Empire. It was not too long before the ecstasy came to an end as the British realized that there was little to make them feel they were part of a victorious nation. Davis (2001) noted that in the Second World War, 264,000 military men and 90,000 civilians were killed; the industrial and commercial centers of the British cities and towns had been destroyed (p.1). Not to mention those handicapped by the War. Much of Britain's housing, railways, roads, hospitals and schools suffered severe bomb damage. The British economy that had been one of the strongest before the War was now bankrupt. The end of World War II marked the fifties in Britain with disturbing instability as political, social, economic, and cultural changes were drastically taking place.

The War transformed the global political and economic order, and Britain's position within it. Though the Empire remained intact in 1945, it was gradually diminishing. Britain was a wounded state in a world divided between two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. One American politician, describing British dilemma, famously remarked, "Great Britain has lost an empire and not yet found a role"(qtd-in Davis, 2001, p.1). As the War ended, there was continuous decolonization; the British Empire was losing its overseas colonies. As India declared its independence in 1947, it was clear that Britain lost its

political power. The deep disappointments of British population were evident when the War hero Winston Churchill, the head of the Conservative Party, lost the election for what was thought to be a radical, the Labor Party in 1945.

The Labor Party claimed that it would recover Britain from the trauma of the War. Britain was exhausted by six long years of bombing and deprivation. Despite this, there was a mood of optimism, which carried people through the years of immediate post-war labeled as the years of austerity. Earlier in 1942, the Conservative Party, in an attempt to encourage people to participate in the War, promised a Welfare State that would distribute the national wealth equally among its citizens. Naturally, the government could not deliver such promises during the War. In 1945, the Labor Party promised to bring the Welfare State into reality bringing financial security and prosperity to all British citizens from cradle to the grave. The Welfare State promised to bring improvement in employment, housing, health care, and to insure education to all members of society.

In spite of the reforming enthusiasm of the Labor Party, economic impact of the War became clear. British people had few of any of the luxuries enjoyed by their American counterparts. In the immediate post-war years almost everything was rationed including basic foodstuffs such as flour and eggs, clothing, petrol, and other essential items like soap.

Furthermore, series of economic crises including the drastic devaluation of the pound against the dollar in 1949, highlighted Britain's economic decline and its new relationship of dependence on the United States (Kalliney, 2007).

In the years after 1945, leading figures of all political parties came to agree on certain assumptions about the development of British society. The radicalism of the Labor government was limited; it offered no challenge to key institutions such as the public school and the monarchy, which remained off limits for reform. The Conservative opposition soon came to accept reluctantly the Welfare reforms. These consensus values underlying political debates were crucial to British post-war experience. British populations were not satisfied with Labor performance and the Conservative Party won the election of 1951.

The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union had its impact on Britain just as on the rest world. Firstly, it kept reminding the British people of their lost power. Secondly, there was an atomic race in which Britain had to build an atomic bomb in order to keep its balance within the new powers. Indeed Britain succeeded and tested its bomb in 1952. Thirdly, Britain was obliged to take side naturally; the official attitudes took the side of its old ally America .The population had different attitudes; some preferred the communist side that led to a division within British society. In 1949, the government ordered the

dismissal of any employee in its department stores who refused to sign an anti- communist declaration creating a division within the British society (Bentely , 2008).

1.3 Post-War Economic Changes and the Rise of Middle Class

The immediate post- war years were drab and dull; Britain had been promised peace and prosperity; but when peace came, expectations of prosperity were quickly shattered. Despite this, there was a mood of impassiveness, even optimism, which carried people through the years of austerity. However, the harsh reality was that Britain emerged from World War II deeply in debt to the Americans. Many cities such as London had been devastated by airborne attacks. Rebuilding these cities would take many years and considerable amount of money and labor.

One main problem facing the government in 1945 was unemployment. As had been the case of World War I, men returning from the War needed work. In order to find jobs for them, women who had been persuaded to share the War effort by working in factories and on the land, were now encouraged to quit their jobs and return to their traditional position as house wives and mothers once again. Many women

left their jobs immediately after the War but others were hesitant to give up their newfound independence.

World War II had, only temporarily, broken down some of the classes barriers in Britain. The skill and experience of people from all social classes were needed for the War effort creating a solidarity spirit in Britain .For a short time, it seemed as if this new spirit might continue into peacetime, but Britain was still a class-based society and the divisions that existed throughout the British history remained although there was more social mobility than in the pre- war years.

Class distinctions were set-aside in the face of common crisis, and this pragmatism accelerated a process of change in the perception of class status. This was not to deny the existence of inequality, or the persistence of class struggle in the post-war era in Britain. There was a popular demand for a wider share in the new prosperity that emerged in the 1950s after the years of austerity. The Labor government practiced a policy that favored the working class. This claimed positive policy attempted at abroad goal aimed toward greater prosperity of working class population. One significant result of the Butler Act was that the cultural life of England was passing to a new class, to those who have gone to the universities based on their brains and effort regardless of their origins. Despite this, however, class in British culture was tense with

contradiction and confusion. Nevertheless, the later years brought economic prosperity to re-build the country that led to the years of affluence when a great majority of middle class had risen between the 1950s and 1960s.

It was important to give such details about the political and economic life in post-war Britain because the literary movement discussed in the paper drew heavily on these swifts and unpredictable changes in post-war Britain. The Welfare State presented the political environment in which the Angry Young Men literature developed its hostile attitudes toward the Establishment. The Angry Young Men literature could only be understood within its historical context.

1.4 Post- War Cultural Changes in Britain

Marwick (1984) illustrated aspects of cultural revolution in post-war Britain culture were terms of Liberalism, Cosmopolitanism and the rise of working class consciousness. Liberalism, a term reached the British society that referred to “the attack upon and release from the social control and conventions established in the Victorian times”(p.129). Second term was Cosmopolitanism which referred to “the manner in which intellectuals and artists began to break with the cozy insularity of post- war era and at more general level there were interactions with

American and Continental changes”(p.129). Thirdly and most complex, there were new attitudes to class .It would be absurd to claim that the class distinctions and conditions of working class in particular had not been seriously presented before the late fifties but it was a fundamental and characteristic feature of the cultural revolution that the class differences were made clear cut and explicit. It was also absurd to claim that post-war era was classless, but the working class, mainly because of its increased power, was now visible in a way it had never been before (p.129).

1.5 The Emergence of Angry Young Men’s Literature

The devastating effect of immediate post-war era on the British population led British authors to put writing aside or to question its relevance; therefore the literary scene between 1945-1950 seemed sterile. In the early 1950s, a mood of anxiety prevailed between many artists and writers that Britain was facing cultural decay as a result of both the loss of the Empire, and the ever-growing influence of American culture on the British way of life. The rise of the middle class and the decline of aristocracy made it possible for a poor but clever young from back streets to go to university without costs upon the parents .It was a fruit of Mr. Butler’s Education Act of 1944 (Davis & Sinfield, 2000). It was thought

to produce positive consequences for such an act, but it proved to be the cause of social trauma for the hopes of the lower working classes had risen for no concrete reasons. The Welfare State attempted to equalize wealth and provide greater educational opportunities for the working class that led to an entirely new generation of writers from working-class or lower middle-class background entering the literary scene in the 1950s and their work reflected the social disturbance surrounding them, introducing a contemporary and restless voice.

The new voice, which made its way in the early 1950s, was labeled as the Angry Young Men movement. Literature of this movement primarily represented a rebellious and critical attitude towards the post-war British society. The label Angry Young Men was assumed to have been borrowed from Leslie Paul's autobiographical book *Angry Young Man* (1951) that talked about angry youth in politics, left wingism and unemployment during the 1930. (ibid, 2000). After critical acclamation of Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), the British newspapers employed the label to describe the mode and temperament of this group of writers. Included among the Angry Young Men were the playwrights John Osborne, Arnold Wesker and the novelists Kingsley Amis, John Braine, John Wain, Alan Sillitoe and others.

Literature of the angry Young Men spoke strongly to the British reader and audience in the fifties since it represented the new post-war

attitude. It had been praised for its enthusiastic remedy to literature long dominated by the production of the classic or uninteresting little comedies assuming that manners had actually not changed since 1914. The tribute had centered on the notion that these new plays were sociological statements, and the presentation of how a prolonged existence of British society was neglected. The new fiction presented the way that this part of British society lived and thought. They set their literature in contemporary society. Orwell highlighted the popularity of the new voice saying “the people of about five and younger are excited by and are talking about” (qtd-in Harkness, 1958, p.398).

Harkness (1958) stated that the trend began with John Wain’s *Hurry on Down* (1953) and Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954). Wain and Amis spoke out strongly: “the new voice was lusty, non-political, funny and immediately successful”(p.389). *Lucky Jim* Dixon became the standard of the whole attitude toward life. Protagonists in the Angry Young Men literature were usually male working- class opportunists and sexual hunters who resented authority as a matter of habit and extremely conscious and sensible toward class distinction.

Despite of the popularity of Wain and Amis, the angry writers were introduced officially to British audience by John Osborn’s play *Look Back in Anger* (1956), which was presented at the Royal Court Theatre. The play was essentially emotional and dramatic statement that applied

far beyond particular time and place. Osborne's play was one about the rebellion of an educated young man of the lower classes against current society as well as about what it meant to give and receive love.

1.6 Angry Young Men and the Political Protest

Angry Young Men writers were claimed to have leftist and socialist attitudes, considering their struggle against class distinction and seeking equal mass culture. However, critics pointed out that their anger was not political but social one. Moreover, the anger was not directed toward any thing concrete or definite. Head (2002) clarified that the angry writers like Amis, Wain and Braine stated socialist argument at the beginning of their careers, but later they turned into the capitalist ideology in the name of anti-totalitarianism. Even as they criticized social rigidity, they did not suggest any alternative resolution. They protested without any clear vision of what they did want. They were passive and severely indulged in personal selfish issues. Ronald Hyman agreed with the majority of critics concerning this argument, and pointed out the arbitrary features of the anger in this movement saying that, "anger has to be directed against something and if you're angry about every thing then you're not really angry"(qtd-in Wilson, 2000, p.38). This arbitrariness of their anger would

be the distinctive trait of their literary efforts, and this chaotic anger would trigger different reactions and interpretations.

1.7 Angry Young Men's' Literature and the Social Classes in Post-War Britain

The action of *Look Back in Anger* took place in a Midlands town, in the one room flat of Jimmy Porter and his wife Alison. Jimmy was a university graduate but earned a living from running a sweet stall. His anger was largely directed at his upper class wife, a colonel's daughter. Jimmy protested against the conventions and smugness of society represented by Alison's parents and friends. Osborne offered no alternative to the ideology underlying his points of view. Harkness (1985) noted that Osborne attacked those who looked for profound meaning in the play saying, "it was a simple expression of an ordinary despair" (p.389). Angry men did not visualize their new young hero as a victim or an idealized human being. He was a real human being that the working class men identified themselves with.

The Angry young men's main trait was their extreme sensibility toward class distinction. Pre-war British society was rigid toward class classification setting un-dissolved barriers between the aristocrats, upper-middle class, middle class, working class, and the lower working class. It

was impossible to trans-pass these boundaries. Welfare State promised to dissolve these barriers. Nevertheless, there was a huge gulf between the ideology and the implementation; post-war society was not classless but there was a possibility of class mobility. The Angry Young Men were not patient or tolerant since change was necessarily gradual and slow. They wanted to enjoy immediate and radical changes. Thus, there was a common theme among the movement, they introduced a new educated male hero, unhappy with his situation, mourning the broken promises of Welfare State thinking; that the universe owed him more, and that he deserved better status; therefore the hero got married to an upper class girl. The upper class wife became the subject of his protest since she represented the class he both was angry with, and aspiring for its benefits. Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Braine and John Osborne in drama introduced this type of hero.

1.8 Social Realism in the Angry Young Men's literature

British literature in the fifties lost its universal appeal in the time of globalization. The trauma that the British suffered because of the break up of the Empire pushed them to quit on politics because of the great disappointment of losing the once greatest Empire. Consequently, the British population indulged into local economic and social concern as a means of healing and moving forward. Bergonzi asserted that:

English literature in the fifties and sixties has been both backward and inward-looking, indication that the in literary terms, as in political ones, Britain preoccupied with parochial matters, and less innovation than the novel elsewhere especially in America. English fiction offers little that can be translated into universal statement about human conditions (qtd-in Head, 2002,p.14).

Such focus on English life produced a literature that was rich in its social relevance and historical density.

Angry Young Men reacted against Modernism and retreated to conventional novelty of the thirties. Angry Young Men returned to the linear plot. They expressed the universe as the majority of people did; they expressed the concerns of ordinary young men, troubles at work, financial problems, and dissatisfaction of the political and social hypocrisy. Though there was an interest in existential issues, the manner of asking was in a way of every day man rather than the elitist modernistic novelists. The characters were social beings in so far as they play roles in society, as student or employee. Emphasis was on the action, the movement of the story. There was no interest in an exploration of single consciousness. Angry Young Men returned to the traditional Victorian novelty. The author's aim of emphasis was the external world and his tone was, in most cases, to be satiric. The novel of Angry Young Men was a realistic one. It was a return toward the traditional Victorian

type of writing in order to recreate an authentic picture of the chaotic disturbance of a crucial transitory decade in Britain.

1.9 John Braine, the Writer and the Man

John Braine (1922-1987) was the product of a Bradford family, which had managed to move out from the working class into the lower-middle class. His father, as a child, had worked half time in the woolen mills, but by the time of Braine's birth in 1922 he was a corporation sewage works supervisor. Braine's mother was a librarian. The family was Catholic, which meant that they were firmly excluded from mainstream Protestant middle-class life in Bradford. Braine left his Catholic grammar school at the age of sixteen, and took various marginal white-collar jobs, before ending up in the Bingley Library. Braine served as a telegraphist in the Royal Navy between 1940 and 1943. In 1950, Braine abandoned librarianship to move to London as a free-lance writer. The new position elevated his social status to the middle-class and he ceased to be lower-middle-class member. Besides his occasional pieces in the *New Statesman*, Braine had self-consciously assumed a prestigious role in Britain, that of an intellectual. Between 1952 and 1954, Braine stepped further into the world of the imagination, and further away from the ordinary realities. As *Room at the Top* was published in (1957), readers

as well as critics received it enthusiastically, and Braine's name was linked with those of Kingsley Amis and John Osborne, being seen as another Angry Young critic of the society (Marwick, 1984). Although Braine wrote twelve works of fiction, Braine was chiefly remembered for his first novel, *Room at the Top* which was also turned into a successful film in 1959.

1.10 John Braine's *Room at the Top*

Room at the Top was a story about a young man's journey to get a head in his job. Joe Lampton, the narrator, was the son of a mill worker who gained an accountancy qualification while a prisoner in Germany. Finding himself faced by social snobbery and envying the wealth of upper classes members around him, he decided to beat the top people by joining them in Warley. He became involved with an older woman, Alice Aisgill, who was married to a prosperous businessman, and with Susan Brown, the daughter of the richest and most powerful man around. Joe Lampton left Alice to marry Susan and thus went straight to the top. Alice was killed in a horrific car accident. *Room at the Top* concluded with Joe drunkenly attempting to cope with remorse over Alice's death and his successful scheme to marry upwards. Though nobody blamed him for Alice's death, Joe struggled with his conscience, forced to live with

his guilt and responsibility for what has happened to Alice (Kalliny, 2006).

Wilson (2007) stated that traditional critics attacked the novel and described Joe Lambton as a “lout and lecher”, “a money grabber” (p.101), opportunist obsessed with elevating his social status stepping on women’s emotion to achieve his goals. Colin Wilson, one of the earliest angry men whose book *The Outsider* (1956) represented the philosophical ideology of the movement, admitted that reading the harsh reviews of the protagonists “delayed his purchase of the novel” (p.101). And when Wilson started to read the novel, he realized that it was a very “impressive novel” (p.101). Joe Lampton was sensitive and intelligent. He had sexual honesty, when he allowed himself to slide into an affair with a married woman in the drama group, she was as willing as he was. Meanwhile, Susan became pregnant, and Joe was obliged to leave the married women in order to marry Susan. The novel was vague about the cause of the accident. The characters in the novel told Joe explicitly that he was not the cause of the accident yet; he took his punishment of living with guilt when he surrendered to his pragmatism. Braine did not suggest a clear end; it could be interpreted both ways.

The novel was a modified version of a real story that happened to Braine himself. Braine fell in love with an upper-class woman. In the actual life experience, the upper-class woman ditched Braine to marry a

man of her upper social status. Braine ended up with a middle-class schoolteacher and constituted a typical middle-class family. The changed end in the novel revealed the dichotomy between what was supposed to happen and what really happened, indicating that no real change was taking place in post-war Britain that explained the anger and protest in Angry Young Men's fiction. Richard Lester stated, "If you want to know the way which the young products of Welfare state were feeling and reacting *Room at the Top* will tell you" (qtd- in Marwick, 1984,p.131).

Joe graduated from the university; he studied at he state's expense. Joe thought that the act of graduation would ensure him a decent job with a salary that would provide him with an affluent life. More importantly, Joe believed that the act of graduation would bring him closer to the upper class; it turned out that he was stigmatize by his low breed, and the system insured that the rich kept their privileges. Joe said that only Cambridge graduate were getting the high jobs, and they ran the country. The political and the social protest lied in the fact that Joe was compelled to sacrifice his love and identity in order to achieve his goals .In an ideal system, Joe would be able to achieve his goals due to his efforts based on the principles of equal opportunities. Life was frustrating for the working class young men as it had ever been, and the Welfare State did not make it any easier.

Braine's *Room at the Top* presents a coherent, real, down to earth and rich documentation of political, economic, social, and working class conditions in post-war Britain. Thus, the paper will apply the characteristics of post-war era showing the portrayal of the previous conditions in the novel. The rich details of everyday life of ordinary people made it a valuable historical document of a significant decade in Britain during which the society was in constant change breaking old establishments and conventions and moving into a new system which Britain is now enjoying.

The label of Angry Young Men carried the inevitability of their doom since no one stayed angry or young. The reforms eventually took place but it needed time and patience, which young people usually lacked. As the generation grew up, they realized this fact. The movement lasted ten years, from 1950s to 1960s, therefore their literature was considered to be periodical and local.

1.11 Statement of the problem

The research studies Angry Young Men literature of post-war Britain. The paper illustrates the anger that emerged from the broken promises of the Welfare State. The paper uses John Braine's *Room at the Top* to draw on disturbances and disappointments created by the political, social, economic and cultural changes caused by the Welfare State policy in

Britain in the fifties .As well, the paper reveals reasons that make the social realism of *Room at the Top* the adequate literary style to document this transitory decade in modern British history.

1.12 Questions of the study

1. What are the political failures of the Welfare State as suggested in *Room at the Top*?
2. What are the social changes in post-war Britain as suggested in *Room at the Top*?
3. How does *Room at the Top* present the life of the working class?
4. Why does Braine use social realism to write *Room at the Top*?

1.13 Objectives of the Study

1. To show the political failures of the Welfare State as exposed in *Room at the Top* and the reasons behind that.
2. To present the impact of social changes on the British society that caused a hostile relationship between aristocracy and the new consciousness of the working class.
3. To present the conditions of the working class in British society and their disappointments of the broken promises as Braine clarified them in *Room at the Top*.

4. To illustrate the reasons for abandoning the experimental modernistic novel and adopting the social realism literary style in *Room at the Top*.

1.14 Significance of the Study

The literature of Angry Young Men re-produces a valuable and authentic description of a transitory decade during which the British old Establishment is being destroyed in order to give way to new one. Thus the literature offers a valuable source for literary socio-political studies. It is hoped that this paper will help to understand the frustrations and disappointments of a whole generation due to various political, economic and social factors. As such, the study of this novel may fill a gap literature existing about this period, pointing that critics do not prefer this decade since it breaks the old conventions and introduces vulgar and un-aesthetic literature.

Room at the Top is usually discussed as representative of both social antagonism that prevailed in the 1950s as well as the working class conditions. The novel has its own political sides which will be discussed in this paper.

1.15 Limitations of the Study

The Angry young generation contains numerous numbers of writers with different genres as essayist, poets, playwrights, theorists and even literary critics. The present research studies only one novel, Braine's *Room at the Top* that will not exemplify fully the features of the whole movement.

1.16 Research Methodology

The research investigates the topic through descriptive and analytic methodology. The study describes and analyzes the political frustrations of post-war generation as presented in Brain's *Room at the Top*. The paper presents the social antagonisms that prevailed in post-war Britain as it is portrayed in the novel. It also presents the working class conditions as depicted in Brain's *Room at the Top*. It also illustrates the characteristics of realist novel and the departure from experimental modernistic novel as manifested in *Room at the Top*.

1.17 Definitions of the Terms

Angry Young Men are group of young novelists and playwrights, from working class or lower-middle class origins. These young men graduated from universities on the state's expense. They appeared in the 1950s in Britain. They expressed dissatisfaction with the established socio-

political order of their country. Their disdain was directed to the hypocrisy and mediocrity of the upper and middle classes. They shared disdain for the drabness of the post-war Welfare State, and their writings expressed anger and frustration as the post-war reforms failed to meet high aspirations for genuine change (Lumbering ,2011).

Welfare State refers to a concept of government in which the state plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well being of its citizens. It is based on the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life. The general term may cover a variety of forms of economic and social organization. The United Kingdom, as a modern Welfare State started in 1906. In December 1942, the Conservative Party, in an attempt to encourage people to participate in the War, promised to bring the Welfare into reality (Kalliney, 2006).

Hypergamy is the action of marrying a person from an upper class in order to elevate one's social status (*New Oxford American Dictionary*).

Butler's Act referred to a new education Act that was shaped by a Conservative minister in Wartime coalition, R.A Butler. The Act made education available to all British children (Davies& Sinfield, 2000).

Social Realism is an [artistic movement](#), expressed in the visual and other [realist arts](#), which depicts social and racial injustice, and economic hardship through unvarnished pictures of life's struggles; often depicting [working-class](#) activities as heroic. The movement is a style of writing in which the scenes depicted typically convey a message of social or political protest edged with satire (Bentley, 2007).

Chapter Two

Reviews of Literature

2.1 Introduction

The following reviews present critical readings of the Angry Young Men fiction and the way they documented the angry decade. They present aspects of political frustration; drastic social-economic changes arose from the gradual disappearance of aristocracy and the emergence of the middle class. It also presents the intellectual changes and the tendency toward ascertaining Englishness as well as the adopting the socialist realistic novel. The empirical reviews present critical opinions about Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954), John Osborn's *Look back in Anger* (1956), Alan Stiletto's *Saturday Nights, Sunday Mornings* (1958), and finally the novel in question, John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957).

2.2 Theoretical Reviews

Pritchett (1958) described the style of the Angry Young Men literature as “unfocused vernacular, using every popular or slang phrase to avoid the literary expression of feeling” (p.31). Pritchett declared that authors of Angry Young Men were in search of different literary models; abandoning the modernist precedents because they were the product of a revolution; they were occupied in an adventure, which was a muddled journey from the old traditional society into a new one.

Kroll (1959) clarified that writings of the Angry Young Men literature ranged through diverse forms, incorporating essays, picaresque comic novels, heroic tragedies, and endeavored at literary criticism, poetry, and drama. These writers face the world as adults after World War II. These writers opposed their society; the instrument of opposition was their stories of young men with a substantial university education, middle class financial difficulties, and popular upbringing. The main conflict was between the individual and his society.

Gindin (1963) saw that the concerns the post-war British society was obvious in the works of Angry Young Men. Though it would be an over simplification to generalize, the Angry Young Men literary works showed a good amount of resemblance with one other. All the protagonists were better educated than their fathers, and all their worries were focused on obtaining jobs and women in a competitive society. They all spoke furiously to the aristocracies emotional hollowness, although they frequently the aristocracies self-assurance. They all bothered about how they could manage in a world in which they exerted very restricted control. Gindin summarized the traits of all protagonists of angry writers as:

Working- class men still defy authority, still feel themselves the enemies of policemen, prelates, and the pillars of society. They care no more for religious or political authority than they do for the

economic authority of the factory's management. Often, older characters recall past attitudes that linger (p.17).

Paul (1965) proclaimed that their anger was without clear self-consciousness because the instant at which this literary movement appeared corresponded with the most genuine political and spiritual lethargy that Britain had ever felt since the end of the Second World War. Paul pointed out to the social complications subsequent from the rise of the working class noticing that the Angry Young Men's literature documented the experiments and disappointments of this age group. *Lucky Jim*, *Look Back in Anger*, *Room at the Top* revealed the predicament of the young working class graduates, where an educated poor young man was having an affair with a married woman or was married to a higher social class woman in order to upgrade his social status.

Segal (1990) noticed that Anger in Angry Young Men literature was often directed to the political and social experience of its audience. Working young men in the fifties identified intensely with the tough working class heroes in the literature of Angry Young Men who were searching for a sense of liberty and joy against the monotonous jobs and marriages that were waiting for them. The male protagonists opposed all authorities. It was clear that the disdain that they hurled at the

Establishment was class bitterness. They revealed the myth of classlessness in post-war Britain. They were promised to be able to climb the social ladder due to their efforts instead they found Britain as class conscious as ever, where upper classes remained to possess power, authority and prestige.

Gasiorek (1995) argued that though modernist novelists produced remarkable works, it had sunk the novel in extreme subjectivity and confusion. It was unable to express the concerns of post-war society. Thus novelists of the fifties abandoned the experimental novel and its innovations to a realistic one. Novelists of the era told believable stories about flesh and blood characters in a straightforward style without the tricks and innovations of experimental modernistic novel.

Head (2002) affirmed that the defining feature of the political scene in post-war Britain was economic policy that aimed at common ownership and full employment. The historical opinions of this period were usually ones that praised the achievements of the political authority that governed in post-war period. Considering the bankruptcy of Britain during the War, and the financial burden of fighting it, post-war novelists were not persuaded that the work of social rebuilding was coherent. The popular temper of post-war optimism was made partially on hope; nevertheless, this hopeful mood was not represented in the novel .In the

1950s writers were finding errors with the festive mood connected with a new beginning.

Brannigan (2003) revealed that war “shook up the geography of England and transformed the people and the landscape of England”(p.15). Britain fought the War in order to maintain the English ways of life, but the War proved to reshape the British society, “it destroyed the topographical icons of Englishness”(p.16).The old-fashioned conservative identity of English nation was transforming which explained the shift of the politics of post-war years to the left in terms of economy and politics. Brannigan declared that Angry Young Men’s literature “registered the new disturbances of class, gender, culture, race and sexuality, which interrupted national identity”(p.16).

Lee-Browne and Merz (2003) marked the mood of anxiety that existed among writers in early 1950s; they felt that Britain was facing cultural decline as an outcome of both losing the Empire and the increasing influence of American culture on British way of life. Britain began to celebrate a new festival in which Britain attempted to restate its cultural superiority. The Angry Young men contributed in sustaining the English culture by producing literary works that represented local issues. Therefore they reacted against different Isms fashionable in the 1940s, including Modernism and Internationalism instead, they represented a kind of Englishness characterized by irony and rationalism.

Browne and Merz (2003) thought that the angry literature constituted the first step toward bringing around the dramatic art in England. Tynant, one of the earliest members in the angry cult, argued that the Angry Man's emphasis on the straightforwardness of the English as opposed to the “ethereality of the French would energize domestic stagecraft. The crude violent themes of the Angry Men imply ambiguous rejection of the foreign material; the angry writers nationalized literature” (qtd-in Browne and Merz, 2003,p.16). In this regard, Amis declared in 1951: “Nobody wants any more poems about philosophers or paintings or novelists or art galleries or methodology foreign or cities or other poems or at least I hope no one wants them”(qtd-in *ibid*, 2003, p.19).

Sinfield (2004) clarified that the desire for class distinction of pre-1939 English society were hindering the efforts of younger intellectuals in fields to produce distinctive works and make their marks. As John Wain was invited to present the movement of the Angry Young Men on the third program, Wain remarked :“this was a chance to move a few of the established reputations gently to one side and allow new people their turn sprightly” (qtd-in Sinfield,2004,p.168). During pre-war Britain, the academic establishment was perceived as an upper class in position while post-war Britain witnessed new educated aspirants who were lower middle class and working class.The novels of Angry Young Men assumed working class origins were intelligent but rude and insensitive.

The angry protagonist said that he was an outsider and irritated and he committed to life as it was. Evelyn Waugh complained about “the new wave of philistinism... grim young people ... coming off the assembly lines” (qtd-in Sinfield, 2004,p.264). The traditional critics disdained the new protagonist of the angry writers and thought of them as opportunist and unsystematic youth. Somerset Maugham in the *Sunday Times* attacked these protagonists saying that, “they have no manner and are woefully unable to deal with predicament ... they are scum”(qtd- in ibid ,2004,p.264).

Sinfield expressed controversial view concerning Angry Men’s genuine goal claiming that, “they aspired to rise in society rather to change it”(p.263). Sinfield argued that most of the angry writers in the 1950, did not express a political dimension in their works. Sinfield supported his judgment citing the issue of John Lehmann’s *London magazine* in May 1957, asking different writers how far they were concerned in their writing with current political issues; the angry writers produced either explicit disinterest in politics or an ambiguous response. Only Osborne expressed out of political commitment.

Sinfield observed that the new generation was interested in elevating their social status through education. The novels of young men trying to rise up into upper class were based on the experience of writers

who had finished their education before 1944. The protagonist achieved the social mobility at the expense of breaking up with lower-class culture and unease in his new upper environment. These varied writings were read through a preoccupation with education and social mobility that developed along with the growth of middle class employment besides the ideology of equal opportunity. Most upward movement was not because the class system was weaker but because there were more middle class jobs and the relation between social mobility and political outlook was complex, selfish and conservative.

Choudhury (2005) found that the some thematic concerns of the Angry Young Men literature were tales of individual struggles with the self and the society. This literature was interested with the issues of national identity resulting from the collapse of the Empire. They wrote about the dissatisfaction of the youth with the fragmentation structure of the state.

Kalliney (2006) noted that social realism of the Angry Men's fiction offered an obvious dismissal of present situations translated into crud, and vulgar language thought to be typical of the working class reality. The 1950s were characterized by the working class prosperity with the rise of the new Left in British policy that undertook to eliminate social class differences. However, class discrimination and social prejudice continued which bothered the new generation. The recurrent employment

of class difference by angry protagonists imitated the conflict between the real and ideological axes of class politics in the context of the British Welfare State.

Bentley (2007) stated that between the two peaks of modernism in the twenties and thirties and post-modernism in the sixties, seventies and eighties, the fifties seemed dull era in terms of literary works. It was marked by a return to the traditional realistic fiction of the nineteenth century rather than the experiments creations of the former generation. Bentley explained that the realistic novel was the suitable literary form of the fifties because “unless Angry Young Men adapted the realistic style, the novel would be out of tune with profound cultural changes taking place during the fifties”(p.8).

Kalliney (2007) recorded that Angry Young Men used social realism because it offered an adequate narrative style to express the anxiety and disturbance of the era. And more importantly, it was popular among the population of affluence. Most angry texts presented “a sense of extremely conflicted and highly clear class-consciousness existence”(p.16). Some linked angry literature with a social class agenda. They supported their opinions by the oppositional attitudes of the protagonist of *Look Back in Anger* Jimmy Porter who raged against an incompetent government and England’s stiff social barriers. Jimmy lamented his fate with a rise of

disillusioned youth, unsatisfied by inherent restrictions of the Welfare State reformism.

Brannigan (2008) explained that many English people of the 1945s believed in heroism and the glory of fighting the War. But the young men of the 1950s, saw the concept of heroism as mythic or exaggerated. The economic, industrial and military power of the United States and Russia confirmed them to be the factual winners of the War. Branning found the source of the angry protagonist's predicament in Jimmy's words "Jimmy: I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. (Osborne,1957,pp.84-5). Jimmy's lamentation about the loss of great goals to live and fight for pushed the generation to care only for trivial life of post-war era. Thus, they cared about getting jobs, getting married, having children and continuing to live supposedly in calm, perfect and conformist life which created a dilemma for energetic youth. This typical life was not enough; it imprisoned them.

Waugh (2010) noticed that in post-war Britain, the mainstream of literary intellectuals were pessimistic so that they wrote different sequences of pessimistic works: "apocalyptic, melancholy, incensed, exasperated, nostalgic, envious, impatient and enervated varieties abounded and, indeed, even intensified at the beginning of the new decade despite improved affluence, the end of rationing, and general increase in popular optimism by the this time"(p.38). The literature of

Angry Young Men unmasked that under the delicate layer of social optimism there was a deeper emotional layer of distress. These feelings resulted from both the experience of the War as well as the Cold War, which created worries about totalitarian control, and loss of national identity.

Dix (2010) found that the mere act of publishing the literature of Angry young Men indicated the historical change that was taking place in Britain. The 1950s occupied moment of considerable change within the history of Britain in the twentieth century during which the old dominant political and social roles were transforming into new classes. The new literature questioned and challenged the social traditions of an earlier period. Dix declared that, “the 1950s novel anticipated the social liberation and the moment of 1960s” (p.18).

Lumbering (2011) stated that Angry Young Men expressed social discontent. They shared an outspoken disrespect for the British class system, its traditional network of aristocratic families and the elitist Oxford and Cambridge universities. They showed disdain for the drabness of the post-war Welfare State, and their writings frequently expressed raw anger and frustrations at the post-war reforms that failed to meet high aspiration for genuine change. They expressed rage at the persistence of class distinction, pride in their lower class mannerisms and disliked for anything highbrow or phony.

2.3 Empirical Reviews

2.3.1 Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*

Green (1984) stated that Kingsley Amis was the spokesman, in fiction, for post-war era. *Lucky Jim* put stress on “ordinariness” experience that was less exciting than expectation would have wished, but was accepted or at least asserted, vigorously, and anti-romantically. *Lucky Jim* was a comedy, even farce, and satire with rich cultural specificity. It was arrogantly scornful; Jim's motives were embarrassment, revenge, humiliation, and repression. The farce was much more physical clumsy, and undignified. Amis satirized and was disgusted with the modern world.

Segal (1990) said that the hero Jimmy Dixon was a tough intellectual, and Jimmy was rude, crude and clumsy, boasted his political apathy. Jimmy was suspicion of all causes, and he did not offer any body any good but himself. Jimmy's heroism consisted in the fact that he was honestly self-serving, fiercely critical of all he saw false, pretentious or conformist.

Luebering (2011) stated that Amis's *Lucky Jim* presented a comic figure that became a household world in Britain in the 1950s. It was immediate success and remained his most popular work. Its discontented

anti-hero, young university instructor named Jimmy Dixon, a newly important social group, Angry Young Men, that had risen by university education from lower-middle classes and working class background only to find more comfortable perches still occupied by the well-born.

2.3.2 John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*

In 1956 John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* opened at the Royal Court Theater. Weiss (1960) in an article entitled, *Osborn's Angry Young Play* illustrated the dilemma of the post-war Britain as Allison, the wife of the hero Jimmy, was saying to her father the former imperial colonel that he was unhappy because everything had changed while young Jimmy was angry because everything stayed in one way or another the same. Weiss added: "men like Jimmy, educated beyond their working class origins yet fully conscious of class allegiance, articulate beyond stiff upper-class, reticence and possessed of by a " burning virility of mind and spirit find themselves in a world with no acceptable outlets for their energies, a world without good, brave causes"(p.285).

Tynan (1987) praised the play's "drift towards anarchy, the instinctive leftishness, the automatic rejection of official attitudes" (p.42). Tynant hailed John Osborn's *Look Back in Anger* and Porter as the " completes young pop since Hamlet" (p.19). Tynan considered the hero, Porter, as ambiguous and important as Hamlet. Its significance was that

it changed the history of British theatre. It expressed the sensibility of the Angry Young Men and Jimmy Porter, its anti-hero, became the spokesman of a whole generation.

Sternticht (2005) noted that *Look Back in Anger* changed the direction of the British drama. As Osborne brought the young back into the British theater with their radical departure from comfortable and satisfied, middle- class, drawing-room drama that had dominated the mainstream British stage in 1930s and into the 1950s. Sternticht found that the revolution lied in:

Osborne fire was political, but it was also a revolution in style, the new drama was raw as well as radical, as it freed the British theater from the shackles of improbable plots, happy endings, star turns, to an extent conventional staging. But the play was more a sociological phenomenon than a total artistic break through (p.59).

2.3.3 Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*

Gindin (1963) declared Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* revealed the false satisfaction of a steady job with a few pound left over at the end of the week, in which the young hero Arthur Seaton, represented the working man as pretty satisfied to spend his fourteen pounds a week on clothes, women, and Saturday night indulged in the local pub. The standards were completely material, among Sillitoe's

characters, memories of empty bellies and inability to pay the rent were still sharp. Even in the post war world poverty existed for not all members of the working class were as lucky as young Arthur Seaton. Happiness, in large part, was dependent on money, money that supplied food, drink, sex, and the diversion of television in the working class world. Sillitoe did not romanticize the working class life. His working-class men defied authority, felt themselves the enemies of policemen and the leaders of society. They cared no more for religious or political authority than they do for the economic prosperity of the factory's management.

Green (1985) declared that Sillitoe's characters could understand and express sympathy, could respond honestly and directly, yet they were incapable of heroic action. Characters were born into rigid world, with little money, hunted by forces of an oppressive society; these characters took what they could and rarely expressed their deep emotion. Gidion called the following words as keynote of *Saturday Nights and Sunday Morning*:

And trouble for me it, I'l'bem fighting every day until I die. Why do they make soldiers out of us when were fighting up to the hilt as it is? Fighting with mothers and wives, landlords and gaffers, coppers, army, government. Born drunk and married blind,

misbegotten into a strange and crazy world (qtd- in Green, 1985,p.16).

Stade and Kabiener (2009) stated that Sillitoe emerged as an author of the working class. Most of his works, set in Nottingham, the industrial town of his youth, examined the lives of, and was often narrated by a factory worker or shop girls who live lonely lives controlled by social and economic factors beyond their control. In *Saturday and Sunday Mornings*, factory worker, Arthur Seaton faced a number of problems; he had trouble with his factory supervisor, hated his long hours of monotonous work, and was involved in complicated romantic relationship with two married sisters. His life revolved around wild Saturday nights and peaceful Sunday mornings. The novel began with Arthur horribly drunk in a bar on a Saturday night and end on a Sunday morning with the much wiser Arthur revealing that although he fully understood the bleak realities of his life, he would make the best of it.

2.3.4 Literature Review of John Braine's *Room at the Top*

Hollway (1958) criticized Joe Lampton for holding a grudge against higher-classmen. For instance, Jack Wales, a high class young man and better suitor for Susan, was a relatively sympathetic character and showed gentlemanly characteristics of restraint and good sportsmanship yet, Joe had doomed him with envy and hate. Class antagonism was established

quickly by Joe who condemned the upper class and was not willing to change his hostile attitudes. Yet, Joe craved their social status. Braine, just like the angry writers, belonged to a school of persistent realism associated with the depiction of northern industrial life. This working class novel reinforced class distinction or 'us' and 'them' view of society.

O'Connor (1962) considered *Room at the Top* as a considerable and significant social document because of its "treatment of class, its rigidities, inequalities, and antagonisms of class, and more importantly to the era the possibilities for mobility and change" (p.120). The insistent message that the novel delivered was that older conventions were breaking and a new working class in Britain was thrusting into visibility. Joe Lampton was moving from working class Dufton to middle class Walrey and later to upper class. Soon Braine began to draw social class distinction most obvious in the material attributes that went with it as expensive cars, furniture and clothes. The novel was thorough in recording the detail of physical possessions which Joe had a keen eye for recording.

Paul (1965) thought of the novel as a plot about a certain type of ruthless Yorkshire climber, an outcome of the politics of Welfare State which managed to educate him in the new schools but turned into greedy beasts lusting for money and status. Paul criticized the novel since "there was much to be said for a study of the latest of apostle of the gospel

where there's muck, there's money" (p.348). Moreover, its boring writing ruined the style of the novel and the unprofessional device used for narrating it, the strong man looking back in remorse. Still the novel had effect in its day. Paul judged Braine by saying "nothing John Braine has done since he landed so squarely on target" (p.348). Indeed, many critics shared Paul's view since Braine was only known for *Room at the Top* settling and satisfying with a single achievement. Paul thought of the novel as non-political in the narrow sense, just as the typical new novel whose hero made the best of his life in the Welfare State that he wanted but did not like.

McDowell (1970) said that Joe Lampton was alternately critical of the great world of upper class and was fascinated by it, critical to the hollowness and passing pleasures and its materialistic bias and fascinated by its glamour and easiness. Joe Lampton glared at society in every detail, in the physical material things, into the manner of behavior of all class and even the type of each class language. He differed greatly from the public school men of earlier generation, the well-to-do spenders. He was lower class but highly trained and educated but by the end, "Lampton sacrifices completely to the golden calf" (p.406).

Laing (1983) explained that Joe Lampton was in transition between his working class origins and a new middle-class identity, combining worldly success with private guilt. Anger was not quite right. Essentially,

Joe was restless, bored with the same old British way of life, and eager to break with social conventions. He came from unpromising places and unglamorous backgrounds. Braine attacked the Establishment, invaded the reservations of culture as an expression of protest. Braine advised the new writers of the fifties, not to write a novel about novelists as James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) saying that now there was a new life to explore and introduce which was the life of working class (p.122).

Marwick (1984) pointed out that, between the early fifties and the seventies, a cultural revolution took place in Britain. There was a change in social attitudes and behavior in British society. *Room at the Top* presented these changes, as the novel was adapted into a film there was a conflict between the revolutionary filmmakers and the Establishment-minded censorship. The film was faithful to the basic plot lines of the novel except the sexual passionate scenes were changed into acceptable ones according to English conservative conventions. Marwick declared that one could get a clear vision into the prevailing stiffness of the upper circles of British society in their formal attitude from the objections raised by censors to phrases as "damn you to hell you stupid bitch". Besides, the requirements for some general reduction in the use of words like "bitch" "bloody" "bastard" and most significant of all "lust". In the end, the producers could force the censorship to allow them with rather

more language than the board would normally wish for. By the end they changed bitch to witch and dropped lust. The sexual scenes were considered continental, and not British (pp.132-133).

Marwick said that Braine's *Room at the Top* was the most famous post-war novel about class mobility, recording the material success of its working class protagonist Joe Lampton. Joe had to vanquish the resistance of upper-class power structure. The novel was narrated in retrospective style by Lampton ten years later setting in the forties. This setting established a temporal framework of specific political importance presenting the conditions of immediate post-war years. The reader might feel suspicious what to think of the wealthy Lampton who was reconsidering his greedy journey and his success since he acknowledged that this younger self "was of higher quality more emotionally sensitive and responsive to others" (Braine, 1957,p.123). This was a moral tale, of Lampton, whose rise in the classes cost him his true love. This bargain made him appear as a "Modern Faust" (p.53). It was the immobility rather than mobility that embodied the main temper of the working class novel of the period, indicating that ideological convictions did not keep with economic reality.

Stevenson (1993) said that Second World War continued to disturb Britain in the fifties and later decades. But by the mid fifties, it began to be clear that society had 'shaken itself' into a new shape. Many novels

reflected the new shape in the fifties that established new relations between social classes and opportunities of mobility within them. Brain's *Room at the top* and John Wain's *Hurry on Down* provided models for this new phenomenon of social mobility. Brain's hero Joe Lampton was determined to fight his way upwards to material success, meanwhile showing his disdain for conventional social expectations. Joe Lampton was secured in the end by a well-paid job and a match with upper-class woman. The same destiny awaited another protagonists of Angry Young Men like, Wain's in *Hurry on Down*, Kingsley Amis's Jim Dixon in the social comedy *Lucky Jim* showing heroes secured by money and matrimony. Such endings exemplified these fifties novelists' disposition towards reconciliation with society, rather than the wish for its reform which they seemed to flirt with. Stevenson claimed that anger in Angry young men was largely self-indulgent more than politically motivated.

Browne and Merz (2003) said that Joe was a rich man in the 1950s looking back remorsefully at early post-war years. Joe reflected on the way his personality had gradually corrupted as he allowed ambition to overcome his personal affection. Sexual relationships became means of climbing the social ladder for the young ambitious Joe who could not challenge the system therefore he conformed to it. The novel was written in a down to earth and naturalistic way criticizing the downgraded circumstances of the post-war Britain. It could also be interpreted as a

moral tale. Joe's honest condemnation of his sacrifice gave a psychological depth to the story.

Leach (2004) commented on the film depicted from the then best selling novel, and later critical and commercial success saying, that its realistic approach was the first come to British screen. "it's realistic approach to social and sexual themes proved highly controversial it was transitional text" (p.48).

Wilson (2007) described the new hero of Angry Young Men as a rebel who was against all class barriers. The Establishment hated them, and lots of old fashion critics, as Humphrey Carpenter, dismissed them from British literary scene. Wilson testified that the movement was based on a real political protest that hoped something would be done. Britain said about the hero of *Room at the Top*, "Joe does not want to do away with the class system. But he would say that from now on its achievement that counts. It should not matter who your father was" (p.16). In the previous interpretation of the novel, Braine expressed the natural human tendency for liberty and justice that had struggled since Rousseau, and had finally brought about the French Revolution. Wilson, who was thought to be the pioneer who introduced the philosophical ideology of the Angry Young generation, clarified that Rousseau was "virtually the patron saint of the angry movement" (p.16). Rousseau, in his book *the Social Contract*, stated that "Man was born free and is everywhere in chains"(qtd-in Wilson,2007,p.17). Rousseau developed the argument that

civilization caused man to be enslaved by man-made Establishment. The ideal society would be that which gave the individual the ultimate freedom to participate in state affairs. Rousseau's perception about unlimited liberty captured the spirit of Angry Young Men and fuelled the protest against the system.

Wilson admired that Braine had thrown off the "defeat premise that had dominated the serious novel since Goethe's *Young Werther*, whose suicide triggered a plague of imitation in Europe" (p.101). For a long time the heroes of serious fiction had been defeated men. Of course, there were plenty of non-tragic heroes, but among serious writers, it was as if the unstated premise was 'you can't win'. Wilson praised John Braine for defying the trend and creating an intelligent hero whose outlook was cheerful and positive and ended up achieving his goals.

Kalliney (2007) described Jimmy Porter, Joe Lampton the protagonists of *Room at the Top* as the most known protagonists who were discontented members of lower middle class expected post-war prosperity to fulfill the social and economic aspirations but it failed to deliver real opportunities. The deep disappointment was transformed into "angry texts that displayed a sense of acutely conflicted, highly ambivalent class-consciousness"(p.113). The disappointed Joe Lampton ranted against an ineffectual government and England's rigid social barriers.

Chapter Three

Discussions

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses reasons of anger in *Room at the Top*. It discusses the political frustration against the limited and insufficient political changes of the Welfare State. It presents social antagonism that resulted from the Welfare new policy of allowing lower classes to rise into upper classes and the disturbances that emerged from the new social mobility. Then, it presents the dissatisfaction of the working class conditions in Welfare Britain. It also discusses the justifications that make social realism the best narrative style to reproduce an authentic picture of the previous elements of frustrations in *Room at the Top*.

3.2 Preliminary Notes

This chapter discusses features of the political and social disorders and the conditions of working class in the novel. The Welfare policy is economic and social; thus the discussion will fluctuate between these topics. The researcher tried her best to separate the analysis but in vain, since overlapping took place due to the nature of the topic. The researcher needs to draw the attention that Braine uses slangs which explains the grammatical and spelling mistakes in some of the quoted sentences.

3.3 Political Frustration in the Novel

Reviewers and critics did not consider *Room at the Top* as a statement against political authority in the fifties. It was considered mainly as a social document of the period. O'Connor (1962) believed that Angry Young Men wrote protest fiction from a social perspective more than apolitical one. Wilson (2007), as an angry writer, testified that it was a political movement that wanted radical change. Angry Young Men protested against injustice in any form. The novel seemed un-political in the narrow sense. Because Braine did not commit to or advocate for a specific cause; instead Braine maneuvered around political protest showing the impact of politics on the lives of the simple and ordinary people. The literary genre of social realism of the novel was a device of political protest. The Welfare policy claimed that it would transform Britain into a democratic country. It also claimed that it would bring economic prosperity to the working class population. Moreover, it promised to eliminate the social discrimination against the working class. The novel revealed that the former promises were not delivered in the fifties.

It was a political fiasco to see poor taxi drivers waiting in the station area to drive passengers to get some money: “ there were half-a-dozen of them in the station yard, their drivers all apparently frozen at their

steering-wheels”(p.9). The rich Mrs. Thompson felt “quite sorry for those poor men, they just wait here, day by day year by year, for fares who never come, I sometimes wonder how they live”(p.9). Braine put words of sympathy over poor people in the mouth of upper class lady not by Joe, who experienced poverty and misery since he grew up in working class environment. Joe was familiar with such vain effort, men struggling to put bread on the table unlike Mrs. Thompson who was surprised by the imagery. Welfare politicians were still descendants of upper classes who “ never go hungry. Or have to scrat and scrap saving for thi old age” (p.96). Naturally, such unrepresentative authority would not seek to improve living conditions for working class. The Welfare State policy reproduced the old system in which the rich governed the poor therefore no genuine change was taking place in Britain.

Welfare State offered the British working class citizens a bargain, that was to fight the War in exchange of improving their economic as well as social conditions. When the War was finished, the Welfare State broke its promises toward men who fought the War. Roy, who fought courageously and won the War, did not receive what he had fought for:

I’ve killed forty Japs at least... what thanks have I received for it,
what recognition of my devotion to duty and disregard for danger?
None at all. Am I bitter? No. Only glad that forty are dead instead
of me (p.209).

Roy expressed deep sense of injustice and disappointment because he suffered and scarified dearly for his country, yet the Welfare State showed no signs of recognition. Roy had to reconcile his agony by reminding himself of the simple grace of being alive. The political authority committed to take care of those who fought the War instead it failed them. They found themselves fighting and struggling in peace times as hard as they did in the War.

Sinfield (1989) proposed a model to classify the political function of the literary works. According to Sinfield, the literary work supported the dominant authority by reproducing the authority in a manner of satisfaction and approval by highlighting the positive aspects of the dominant authority. Sinfield (1989) declared that the Angry Young Men promoted “oppositional interpretation of the dominant socio-political system that was articulated historically, through the politically aware sectors of both working class and the middle- class. Cultural production can function politically to challenge dominant meaning system” (p.34).

Room at the Top adopted oppositional attitude toward the dominant authority by highlighting its injustice and deficiencies. Braine suggested that the Welfare State did not offer a real change in the fifties since old political system remained in power. The rich Mr. Brown was:

The most important cog in the machine is, theoretically, the councilor. In

practice, however, it is the senior official who runs the show. The councilor can be removed from his post, the official, unless he is dishonest, unbelievably dissolute, or incompetent to the point of idiocy, is absolutely secure. If he does his work as work as you do, Joe, no one will attempt to touch him. For their own sakes, not just his (p.154).

The old power of the rich continued to control ordinary people's lives though, it was not the propaganda of Welfare politicians, which claimed to ensure individual liberty and equal opportunity to all British population. The Welfare propaganda created a widespread feeling in Britain that a new start would be made when War was over. Especially, for the working class population that suffered dearly from the War. The Welfare propaganda created a hope for better life in which poor people would be able to live a dignified life. This hope helped them to endure the miserable present. However, reality proved otherwise, the prestige and power remained in the hand of the rich. Reality proved that nothing was changing post-war Britain that triggered anger and protest against the lies of the Welfare in the fifties. However, Joe's mood for change proved irresistible.

Joe challenged the dominant system for he was going out with Mr. Brown's daughter, Susan. Poor people were not supposed to love rich

ones. Thus Joe found himself in a problematic situation with the powerful Mr. Brown. The power and influence of Susan's father could destroy Joe's career. Joe, being a government officer, could not behave out of certain restrictions. Mr. Hoylake, his old and wise boss, made it clear to Joe that: "Local government officials are by no means free to behave as they like in their spare time. There's always the shadow of the Town Hall looming over one. You have to listen to the old bore" (p.154).

According to Sinfield's classification of literary works, Braine defied and criticized the dominant system by glaring at its negative practices and revealing the inconsistencies within the ideology of the dominant authority. Young Joe would not submit to older roles of the society, he belonged to the new generation that would refresh the system and rearrange the power relation within the stiff British system. Joe was persistent in his demand toward radical change within the British system. The reshaped British system should include the working class as an influential power.

The American Liberalism invaded the world after the Second War; it was appealing for the new generation. British policy adapted the principle of human liberty but the system proved the contrary. It was a contradiction within the dominant ideology; it opposed its own policy of human liberty. Joe did not question it existentially, to say the idea that human beings were born free was a great myth, he did not believe in

abstract thinking; there was a concrete reason for capturing the spirit of Joe; it was the old Establishment that imprisoned him.

Braine's constant strategy of exposing conflicts and injustice within Welfare policy was his method of deconstructing the authority and reconstructing the power relation between British classes. Braine and the movement were in the process of destroying old columns of power and establishing new ones as a basis of the new power system in Britain. Working class members wanted to share the power. Joe Lampton was the voice to protest against the system, his restless soul, his deep sense of justice, his young rebellious spirit would continue to disturb the conventional Establishment until the desired changes were accomplished. Young people had the innocent and ideal thought of justice and the possibility of change; they always fantasized an ideal society, a utopia. Angry young men were not exceptional, they were the representative of a youthful spirit . Bentley (2007) clarified that:

The movement was part of a broad social revolution and that was motivated by the injustices reproduced in the contemporary class system... the main bone of contention was that despite the 1945 labor government's aims to make Britain a true meritocracy, the entrenched class demarcations proved more durable than expected (p.127).

The old wise Hoylake clarified that Joe had to play by the old rules governed the British regime, the poor served the rich otherwise, they would lose their lives. Joe must submit to Mr. Brown wishes even in the most private things in his life, like choosing a wife. Joe was not supposed to love the rich Susan, but if he chose to disobey, he would suffer the consequences of making an influential man angry. Joe was intelligent and hard worker. Ideally speaking, Joe must control his fate. Actual experience proved the insignificant presence of Joe as an individual within the complex relation within the political system and the impossibility of breaking it. The whole official members would follow Mr. Brown because:

They'll follow him to carry favour, or because they're indebted to him in some way, or simply because they feel that, since the wise Councilor So-and-So is against the man, there must be something wrong with him. And, of course, there's always the last resort of offering some solid inducement to anyone likely to upset the plans of our hypothetical councilor ... He's an engineer; he liked everything about him to run with the smoothness of first-class machinery- he has his whole life, and the life of all his family, arranged in detail for the next twenty years. If anyone got in his way he'd be utterly ruthless (pp.155-156).

Mr. Brown had great influence practically, he ran Warley. The positions were firmly set and nobody was supposed to trespass it, in spite of claims

of liberty, free will, and equal opportunity that the Welfare propaganda promised to achieve. Underneath liberalism lied a deep-rooted dictatorship. Old Establishment institution ensured its power through conventional conception. Thus it was only normal for Joe to refuse obeying old conventional laws.

Political authority served the interests of the upper- classes and ensured their luxurious life. Political strategies banned building factories and industrial establishment within upper class sectors. The industrial establishments were built in working class environment polluting the air that they inhaled. The air in the rich side of Warley was fresh and clean. Breathing dirty air caused poor people diseases and did not nourish their vital organs, stealing the vitality out of them. While in fair situation, the working class needed good health to labor in order to build the country. Instead, the lazy un-working rich breathed all the good air. Braine demonstrated sympathy with working classes conditions. Joe highlighted the discrimination that the political authority practiced on them. Political planning favored the rich; Jo contrasted between the environmental atmosphere of the poor Dufton and the rich Warley where:

The air tasted fresh and clean ... the effect was as if all the industries of the town had been crammed into one spot. Later I discovered that the segregation was Council policy; if any one wanted to set up a mill of factory in Warley, it was east or nowhere (p.9).

In Dufton: the last bit of unspoiled countryside in Dufton, which the Council cut down and surrounded with barbed wire fences, putting the dank orderliness of a pine plantation in its place. The slump didn't only make Dufton miserable and broken-spirited whilst it lasted, though; even when full employment came, there was still an atmosphere of poverty and insecurity, a horde of nasty sniveling fears left in the town like bastards in the wake of an invading army (p.37).

Harkness (1959) judged the novel of being un-political, and Paul (1998) claimed that the novel had political protest but without consciousness. Sinfield (2004) stated that the Joe wanted to rise in society rather than to change it. A close reading of the novel would suggest the contrary; Braine deliberately drew the attention of the mass population into the inequality and discrimination practiced upon them. Furthermore, Braine opened their eyes to a new and better potential existence. Braine cleverly was shaking the submissive nature of the working class; the dominant system was based on two axes. The first one imposed by the power of higher classes, the other one was the acceptance of the mass population of the imposed authority. Braine shook this structure by suggesting subtly that the population should ask and demand its normal human rights. Furthermore, they must demand their rights as British citizens. The British citizens were familiar with the French revolution that overthrew

Mary Antoinette for suggesting that the poor eat cake instead of bread. It was indirect hint to the population to refuse the unfairness of the existing dominant power. Angry young Men worked like prophets or leaders for the working class in order not to settle for the promises of Welfare State politicians but to act and rise to take control in the country, to participate in writing their own history instead of living in the shadow of older Establishment.

Welfare State created its own foes; The Butler's Act enabled the young working class to acquire knowledge and self-awareness. They became familiar with terms of liberty, equal human rights, and citizenship. Some might say these young men were ungrateful for the generosity of Welfare State that wanted to civilize the mob. The new knowledge of the young working class suggested that education was their right and not an act of kindness and charity of the Welfare State. This created a disturbance for those young men, like Joe Lampton who figured out the massive amount of injustice they were living since Britain had ever existed. Joe remembered " Three quarter of the working population of Dufton was unemployed... I remembered the streets full of men with faces pasty from bread and margarine and sleeping till noon" (p.36). Joe described a pitiful situation that the working class were living; they suffered the humiliation of unemployment and poverty. Joe mourned the long deep history in which they were marginalized and exploited. The

new realization made him frustrated so he wanted to make even with a long history of wretchedness and exploitation .The best way of taking their revenge was to step up and demand to penetrate the power system. Joe vigorously announced that, “ General Joe Lampton, you might say, had opened hostilities” (p.32).

Joe came from a series of miserable working class citizens, his grandfather was killed in First World War, and his parents were killed in the Second World War .Joe being a practical man did not reflect on his bad fortune existentially as the modern or postmodern writer would have done. He did not blame God or the arbitrary or absurdity of human conditions, instead, he blamed the political forces of Britain. Joe was not going to accept to revolve within old circle of miseries and misfortunes of working class. His grandmother “has all t’ heart knocked out of her when your grandpa was killed at t’mill during t; first war... but not a penny piece of compensation did your grandma get”(p.96). His father died dreaming to buy his own car thus Joe would not rest till his demands were answered.

In 1956, the British, French and Israeli governments conspired to invade Egypt, as retaliation of its nationalization of the Suez canal. The action not only divided public opinion in Britain with an unprecedented intensity, it was also condemned by the rest of the world, most significantly by United States which ordered an end of the attack. British

troops were withdrawn .The Suez crisis humiliated the British policy for it appeared as a follower and submissive to the new American power. *Room at the Top* was published in 1957, Braine showed discontent with the American control over Britain. Joe said: “If every business were run as smoothly as even the most slatternly little urban district, then Americans would come over here to learn the technique of greater productivity instead of being the other way about” (p.235).

The British consciousness associated the end of the Second World War with the end of an Empire that caused real pain and trauma. The British agony deepened at the realization that the once greatest Empire was merely a follower of the new power, the United States. This tremendous loss disappointed the British. Later on, they transformed the disappointment into apolitical apathy as a mechanism to vanquish the trauma. This public apathy disturbed young Joe who refused to surrender and wanted to continue to work to rebuild Britain; Joe presented the restless voices that disturbed the authorities as well as the population. Braine was patriarchal since they criticized the policy of Britain in order to push it to restore its position as influential power in the world.

3.4 Social Changes in the Novel

Social class diversity remained a distinctive feature of British Society. The British were, and still, conscious of class differences, and their awareness of class framed their own identity. British society had been divided into three main classes: the upper class, the middle class and the working class, occasionally called lower class. In the pre-war era the British social hierarchy was strict and rigid and one stayed where he/she was born. Post-war Welfare policy in Britain awakened the working class consciousness and gave them the possibility to rise into middle and upper classes. *Room at the Top* depicted the new social mobility that allowed the educated and working class protagonist to face the older rigid social conventions in order to elevate his/her social status.

The new social mobility disturbed the old-established British class system creating chaotic social antagonisms that prevailed in post-war Britain. The new working class hero had to pass the barriers of the two classes. The protagonist had to overcome his own sense of inferiority, in addition to the annoying experience to trans-pass the superiority of the upper class, and prove himself worthy of the new class. The major conflict in the novels of class and conduct was between the individual and his society.

The novel of conduct and class was not new in the English literature. In the nineteenth century, Thomas Hardy used a theme of young man from the lower or lower middle classes attempting to enter a more urban society. Hardy's hero in *Jude the Obscure* (1895) had the dream to escape his working class background into more urban being to discover that it was impossible to achieve (Gindin, 1963). Jude possessed the individual and the intellectual superiority that distinguished him from his poor environment. Beside, Jude had the necessary ambition and readiness to work hard to elevate his social status. But all these individual traits were not enough because Jude lacked the necessary high breed origins. The restrictions were firmer and stronger; the system did not allow him to get into university because it used to be considered upper class privileges. Poor people could not afford to obtain college degree. Unlike Jude the obscure, the protagonist of *Room at the Top*, Joe Lampton, could rise up in society due to Butler's Act that allowed him to graduate from the university at the state's expense.

The British class classification doomed the working class culture as inferior, dull, and barbarian. It was the vulgar class with the lower culture. On the contrary, upper classes were identified as sophisticated, intellectuals, elegant and sensitive. It was the high culture that the lower classes aspired to obtain its dominant privileges. Joe belonged to the

lower culture; therefore he had the legitimate aspiration to join the glamorous classes. It was a natural aspiration of human existence to seek better life, but Joe wanted to join it out of inferiority complex, and he wanted to climb the social ladder so quickly and at all costs.

The title of the novel *Room at the Top* gave an instant impression of Joe's ambition to join those people at the 'Top', as Joe referred to it in the novel. The old and rich Joe Lampton was recalling his journey from his hometown the poor Dufton to the rich Warley. Joe left a familiar environment into a totally strange one yet he was relieved that he would not see his hometown people because they were boring and irritating working class population. Joe used to call them zombies. Joe felt an ease since there were "No more zombies, Joe, no more zombies" (p.7). Linguistically speaking, zombie was an "animated corpse metaphorically refers to a person who was or appears lifeless, apathetic, or completely unresponsive to their surroundings" (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). The word zombie would be repeated several times in the novel, reflecting the lifeless nature of working class members who: "pretend to be alive" (p.17) and "they're dead already" (p.20). Joe had an obsession not to turn into a lifeless creature by settling to a laborer's life.

Braine presented class antagonism that prevailed in Britain in the fifties. The upper classes held to its privileges and continued to look

down at the poor. The poor classes, in return, began to question the legitimacy of their privileges. Unlike his contended ancestors, Joe Lampton protested against the class distinction most obvious in the material possessions like expensive cars as “Bentleys, Lagondas, Daimlers, Jaguars parked everywhere”(p.10), and the “Victorian mansion”(p.72). Joe expressed hostility against upper classes, criticizing their trivial interests and affected manners that were, “so well mannered and mild and agreeable- but what’s behind it all? Violence and death they’ve seen things that you think would drive anyone mad. And yet there’s no trace. There’s blood on everyone’s hands”(p.111). Joe pointed out their unexplained privileges that were gained by the mere fact of birth, “Jack had a rich daddy to look after him to buy him an education. He could afford to waste his time. I couldn’t ... let those rich bastards who have all the fun be heroes. Let them pay for their privileges” (p.128). Joe rendered their affected superiority as a natural result of living a gracious living rather than individual traits. In the novel, Joe stated that, “honour, like freedom, is a luxury for those with independent incomes”(p.233). Rich people could afford to be honorable; they could afford all their needs. Whereas, a poor man might be forced to steal if he had, at home, hungry mouths to feed.

Joe was very alert toward material possessions through noticing every single difference between the rich and poor: which style of suit

each group wore, which kind of car each drove, or what brand of liquor each drank. The amount of emphasis on the symbolic indication of the materialistic distinctions drew the attention to the new generation nagging and disturbed by the fact that old class barriers had not been removed. Reality revealed that the deeply rooted British classes system continued to govern social life. In the old Britain, each class accepted its accustomed intuitions and committed to the prevailing system tailored for each class. Rich class was content with old conventions but the working class had changed its attitudes. Joe Lampton was eager to join the snobbish classes “ It was as if every sound of the wood fire’s friendly crackling, the tinkle of crockery, the splash of running water were invented especially for my pleasure”(p.24).

The upper classes in return fought back against the hostile attitudes of the working class members through reminding them of their barbarian history. The act of arrogance and superiority that was practiced by Susan’s parents asking him about rich and influential people who lived in north Britain where Joe had come from. They were faking an astonishment sign, “Oh, you must have met him. You couldn’t miss old Chick”(p.176). While their true hint was that Joe’s kind of people, poor ones, could not meet that type of people, rich ones. Joe said, “It’s well-known game, its object being the humiliation of those with less money than yourself”(p.176). Joe was fed up with the game, so he raged at the

rich Jack Wales. Thus Mrs. Brown's face turned red because of the working class un-polite manner, she thought, "Jack had been remarkably kind, speaking to him almost as if he were human being, and naturally it had gone to the creature's head"(p.178). Joe was de-humanized by Mrs. Brown. Her attitude affected Joe so he felt "I've never in all my life felt so completely friendless"(p.177). Braine's personal experience to refer to common social antagonism between the rich and the poor; it was not a personal issue; it was an illness within the British society.

Joe was extremely sensitive and class-conscious. Joe felt humiliated when Alice asked him if he could drive a car. He answered: "Oddly enough, yes" .Joe rendered her question to emphasize the fact he was poor saying, she supposed that because, "my father did not own an engineering works or a mill but that doesn't mean that ... I can't drive a car" (p.57). Joe felt humiliated when a richer man refused to drink at his expense because he was poor. Joe remembered "the way Holylake had in effect, refused a drink from me ...He bought the drink, not out of kindness but because of a protocol that wasn't ... Hoylake was the richest man in the room"(p.122). For Joe, poverty was a correlative to humiliation. Joe felt an urge to be " free of tension and worry and shame"(p.198). Joe tasted the humiliation of poverty which caused his agony and disturbance "All the humiliation I'd suffered...from Holylake, from the Storrs, from Jack Wales, from the Browns"(p.181). He was

tormented because of “accumulated anger and humiliation”(p.83).Also, poverty was an equal to hunger, need and misery. In Dufton there were: “the cold bedroom and the stuffy living- room with the blaring radio...worry about exams or a job or the price of new clothes” (p.150).

In Dufton:

Images of pain and distress, more memories of things I'd seen during the war and would rather have forgotten, rose to the surface of my mind. As long as I kept on walking they'd remain mixed and chaotic, like imperfectly recollected books and films; if I walked quickly I could cram my mind with the speed of my own movement... Wherever I looked there was a memory, an italicizing death... why hadn't I noticed it before? Because in Warley I'd lived in a place without memories... in the three months I'd been there I was already more part of the town, more involved in its life, than ever I had been in my birthplace... Dirty Dufton, Dreary Dufton, and Despicable Dufton (pp.103-104).

On the other hand, money for Joe was an equivalent to power, pride,dignity, happiness, and security. Joe saw laborers playing court to Jack Wales “represented the power of money, he was another king and all paying court to them”(p.69). Rich people did not know the true meaning of misery because there was: “a hundred thousand pounds as barrier between [them] and real sorrow”(p.169). Joe's perception of rich men

“looked sure, safe and solid” (p.175). He reached a conclusion that he preferred the upper life:

it wasn't that I didn't care for Aunt Emily and her family, but I was too much of T'Top now and half-hating myself for it, I found myself seeing them as foreigners I found myself seeing them as foreigners. They were kind and good and generous; but they weren't my sort of person any longer (p.92).

The glamorous lights of rich life enchanted Joe yet he criticized the rigid social discrimination, and knew that working class had suffered great injustice and exploitation by the upper classes. Joe and working class protagonists suffered this dichotomy between the individual aspiration and the social commitment. Musgrave (1990) stated that though Angry Young Men literature were interested in the social experience of its audience, they were incoherent with their visions. The new protagonists were living in a world in a state of rapid social change, they could not function, there were not any tangible or stable ideology to stick to which, caused them tension and instability, the only clear and obvious vision they had, was the possibility of discovering new pleasures of the upper classes. They were eager to leave the world of poverty into the world of the rich and wanted to do it quickly in order not to miss the chance.

Joe lost his logic when faced with the possibility of joining the upper life. Once Joe succeeded to join the top he suffered psychological torment, lamenting his old poor face which was “not innocent exactly, but *unused*. I mean unused by sex, by money, by making friends and influencing people, hardly touched by any of the muck one’s forced to wade through to get what one wants”(p.8).

There were inconsistency in Joe’s Lampson social frustration .He was desperate to join the very people he was angry with. He criticized the hollowness and trivial nature of upper class yet he wanted to join them. The critic Pritchett (1958) claimed that the center character in the new fiction were “trimmers, pursuers and only self interested but the authors as a new class of uprooted people belonging neither to their origins nor committed to the dying culture of the upper class”(p.172). Other critic Stevenson (1993) stated that angry protagonists used to protest in order to gain rather than to reform. Another point of view might argue that: if the function of Joe’s protest against class distinction in *Room at the Top* was merely a mean to gain, the recipients of the working class background would not identify or find it relevant to their situation. On the contrary, *Room at the Top* was extremely popular among readers and audiences of working class citizens. It was a best sell novel in the fifties. Moreover the film depicted from was a huge success. Besides, Joe’s individuality was suppressed within the poor environment; he wanted a vibrant life in order

to exploit his potentiality. Furthermore, Joe had a legitimate right to seek self-interests. Joe only set himself as an example. Naturally, he could not elevate the whole population of his class. Joe manipulated his arguments when he criticized the smugness of the upper classes to establish his moral superiority of the class. Thus, he would share their luxurious privileges without sharing their morality.

The deep feeling of deprivation and humiliation that poor people face in everyday life overcame Joe's genuine sense of justice. Joe repeatedly expressed his longing to escape the feelings of "accumulated anger and humiliation" (p.84). The sensations of the misery and poverty did not allow him to stick to his ideals instead, he surrendered to the wicked rich. Braine presented the interior struggle that Joe had to face in the process of mobility. Joe had to cut off with a long history of working class ideology. It was a disturbing mission to abandon old yet stable system into a new and unknown one. Joe had to overcome his own class conventions besides the resistance of the upper class. His aunt lamented him for buying a dressing-gown, she thought of it as "extravagance" a sign of "decadence" which an overcoat would serve their purpose ordering him to "Spend your money on something sensible"(p.13). Besides, his aunt and uncle could not understand his need for separate room because he needed privacy that was not a familiar concept in the world of the poor. Joe felt more comfortable with the new world:

Neither my uncle nor my aunt would have understood the desire for privacy... Now following Mrs. Thompson into *my room*, I was moving into a different world. It was marvelous, I said, feeling the inadequacy of the world and yet not wanting to appear too impressed after all; I hadn't been living in the slums (p.12).

Joe revealed the artificial satisfaction working class had always acted in order to convince themselves with the worth and grace of their wretched life: "a heart of gold underneath a rough exterior...underneath the rough exterior their hearts were as base and vicious as any one's from the Suave and Treacherous South"(pp.19-20). Joe thought that the rich as well as the poor were phony. Poor people were not innocent and satisfied, and the rich were self -indulged and ruthless.

Kenneth Allsop (1964) said, " Joe is a lout and lecher, a money-grabber ready to knock-up a virgin as necessary detail of his master plan" (p.101).In the novel, there were no evidences of this judgment. For example ,while Joe was walking along the "clean river" in Warely, he noticed two young boys walking in the company of their mother. Joe, being motherless, appreciated this moment though it was taken for granted by others. Joe was satisfied by the affectionate image of a clean river, two young boys, and their mother so that he felt:

I didn't bother to read my paper; and I stopped myself at the point of lighting a cigarette. There wasn't any need to fill the moment with

trivialities- it was already filled to capacity. It was sufficient to sit there, to breathe, to look at the river and the trees, simply to exist (p.28).

Joe wanted to join the upper class for the sake of its materialistic values. More significantly, he wanted to be freed from worrying about every little expense that the poor people felt. Poor people worried about providing food, clothes and rents. Joe described the world of the poor as “the world of worry about rent and rates and groceries, of the smell of soda and black lead and No Smoking and No Spitting and Please Have the Correct Change Ready”(p.137). Joe described the financial burden that poor people suffered all the time. Moreover, poverty imposed restrictions that poor people needed to follow in order to survive. Joe wanted to be free from the annoying feeling of caring about providing the essential materialistic things in order to survive. Joe possessed the intellectual feeling that once lower physical needs were fulfilled, the supreme mental and spiritual traits of humans would be released. Joe thought that, “the rich were simply being, not thinking, not wanting, not making plans”(p.87). Joe Lampton imagined that money provided rich people with serenity, assurance, security and pride. They took for granted that everything would be set right for them by the laborers. Joe envied the Queen for: “Queen Victoria, who always sat down immediately she felt the desire to, never for an instant bothering whether or not a chair might

be there” (p.175). The previous argument suggested that Joe was not a money digger but he suffered deep sense of insecurity, anxiety that annoyed his being. Poverty enslaved him, and it narrowed his potentiality, Joe imagined that money would release him into a quiet and wider existence that he deserved. It was compulsive impulsive urge that forced him to choose the rich over the poor.

The new social mobility tormented the young protagonists rather than pleasing them. Joe must overcome two obstacles in order to elevate his status. The first one was physical, and the second was psychological. The physical one could be summarized with the fact that: Welfare State offered the opportunity of mobility but did not deliver the means. Joe graduated but he did not find his dream job. Joe faced Britain as class-conscious as ever. Cambridge and Oxford graduates occupied good and decent jobs. Joe spilled out his jealousy of the rich Jack Wales because “it’s as if people take everything worth having by a divine right. I’ve see it too often”(p.57). Joe supposed that the Welfare State would change the old conventions that favored the rich who did not earn their advantages. Joe could not compete in unfair world in which “one was earmarked from birth, and only the scoundrels and the geniuses ever rose out of the class into which they were born”(p.129). Joe reached the harsh truth of the impossibility of elevating his social status based on his own effort; he lacked the necessary background. Therefore, Joe had to join the class by

marrying one of them; but he had to sacrifice his love and happiness.

The psychological obstacles summarized by the fact that Joe was brought up in working class environment, his mentality and psychology were working class; the mere act of mobility did not mean the spontaneous integration within the class. When rich people invited Joe to their parties in which there were a plenty of food. Joe felt the deprivation of poverty. Alice served supper with “the thinnest slices of bread over thick slices of cold roast beef. The plate was piled high with them”(p.75). The plenty of food awakened the memories of rationing that working class suffered in the immediate post-war years. Joe commented on the pile of meat, he said to Alice “ you’ve cut all your ration”(p.75). The struggle between the nature of working class and the appearance of high class tormented the protagonists. Marwick (1984) explained that: “it is the immobility rather than the mobility that characterizes the predominant mood of the working class novel of the period, indicating that the ideological convictions do not keep with economic reality”(p.53).

Joe could not elevate all the working class population. Thus he had to abandon his working class roots in favor of holding with the seductive, fruitful twigs of the luxurious tree of rich life, but he would be un-rooted hanging in the middle, he did not realize the painful situation he was putting himself into, until it was too late. Joe wanted to escape the bleakness of poverty where it was impossible to dream “in Worely it was

possible to dream”(p.95). He was enchanted by the leisure of the rich. Joe thought that the rich world provided its members with endless potentialities .Joe imagined that he would experience the pleasures of comfort and assurance thus experiences the ecstasy of spiritual and mental world. One might argue that poor people could think, feel and experience intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual existence. However, Joe Lampton, Braine and the angry protagonists disagreed and their judgment was based on actual experience.

Braine and Angry writers did not develop an independent ideology for themselves. They were intellectual from working classes origins. The new knowledge did not endow them with a distinctive anatomy, they were tormented between the working class self-image and the aspiration for middle-class position. Blackburn stated that:

The background and situation of the converses made them predisposed to the bourgeois ideas of individual freedom and character-as-process which later dominated the early British novel; the disintegration of traditional value systems, the rise of bourgeois ideology, and the increasing difficulty of reconciling aspirations for upward social mobility with psychological needs for security and self-respect in a hostile, dehumanizing society (qtd-in Hague 1986, p.212).

The male hypergamy , marrying an upper class woman as a mean to elevate his social status, was a common theme for Angry Young Men. Joe was a typical young protagonist whose situation Geoffrey Garner demonstrated saying:

Men who pass through the present educational system of state school and grant- aided university, marry into a higher class than they come from- male hypergamy- and get adapted into it. The price they pay is psychological strain that they or their representatives, and then they put into a play or novels (qtd- in Paul, 1965, p.130).

Susan was the upper class woman who would elevate Joe into the world of power. Later on in the novel, Joe would prove that he fell in love with Susan's social status rather than with her as a woman. Joe started to charm her maneuvering to win her affection using his charm, intelligence and wit .To establish a conflict, Braine introduced a grade one rival, the rich and handsome Jack Wales. The first time Jo took Susan to the theatre, he was excited because he tasted the "flavour of power. Of being one up on Jack Wales"(p.76). He was thrilled with the idea of sharing a rich man's position rather than winning Susan's affection.

When Joe decided to love Susan, the social clash began to rise in the novel. Joe had to overcome the heavy heritage of both classes. Joe had to be confident enough to face the snobbery and superiority of the upper class. In addition, Joe had to defeat his own working class

mentality of being inferior, vulgar and even barbarian. The second obstacle of beating his psychological inferiority proved to be the rigid one.

Allsop (1960) pointed out the generation predicaments that: “ the ’50s and its writer were a sensitive, emotional, intelligent but faced a wretchedly neurotic society, obedient to the protocol beneath the exhibition rebelling, and obsessively class- conscious” (p.350). Joe was Susan’s inferior rather than her equal. For Mrs. Brown, the voice of reason and old conventions, Joe was “uncouth and vulgar and working class with the faults of the *nouveau riche*”(p.76). Joe was extremely self-conscious with Susan; he calculated every move to suit the moment in order not to mock his lower working class manner, “oh he had the manner of working class”(p.77). Joe struggled internally in his relationship with Susan. It awakened his anxieties, Joe said:

I always had the fear of doing the wrong thing, of making a fool of myself in front of the higher grades. Saying the wrong thing to the waiter or picking the wrong fork or not being able to find the cloakroom immediately wouldn’t have mattered in an ordinary café. In fact, there wouldn’t have been any possibility of me making any faux pas. In front of those with no more money than men there would be no necessity to be careful, in people in one’s own. Group can’t be enemies. The rich were my enemies, I felt: they were watching me for the first false move (p.81).

Joe was extremely self-conscious within the upper class sphere, he had to watch every single move in order not to appear as an outsider; he had to follow unfamiliar etiquette within the higher class. Joe felt he was a hostage in territory of the enemy; there was a war between the poor and the rich. Therefore Joe did not belong to upper class sphere, within the rich world he said:

I felt loneliness come over me, real as the damp churchyard smell of the grass, melancholy as the sound of the beck in the little glen below us. I felt heavy as Sunday, as if time might drag me into a world like a band engraving; stiff and dark and dull and lost (p.147).

Joe felt unease and loneliness within the rich world, and his individuality was suppressed within the working class environment. Indeed, Joe lived a predicament; he did not belong to the sphere of rich or to the poor one. Joe faced a cross road; whatever direction he would choose; he would not be happy.

Alice was a working class woman who elevated her status by marrying a rich man, a female hypergamy; thus there was an instant intimate relation between Joe and Alice springing from sharing the positions. Firstly, he liked Alice as friend without any sexual desire; Joe considered her his “buddy”, a female version of his hometown friend Charles: “I can talk with you like a man. I realized that I’d never told any

woman as much about myself – not only that but I hadn't any fears of having said too much, of having made a fool of myself"(p.59). Unlike his extreme self-consciousness with Susan, Joe felt pleasure and security with Alice; she was his friend just like Charles. He would be "able to take away all the accumulated anger and humiliation"(p.84). Joe reached a moment of satisfaction with Alice, he was looking at big houses without "anger or frustration"(p.86). And even felt stupid to want to marry Susan. Susan asked him about how much he loved her, he answered, "a hundred thousands pounds' worth" (p.152). While in his dreams he "called out not Susan's name but Alice's"(p.60).

It was obvious that Joe felt genuine affection for Alice. Though Alice made him feel contented with his working class situation, and with Susan he suffered an "induced and uncomfortable inferiority"(p.84). Joe felt compelled to choose Susan as a defensive mechanism to overcome his painful feeling of inferiority. Joe felt that if he turned into a rich man, he would automatically feel the pride and superiority of the class. It was not a spontaneous feeling that came with the mere process of upward mobility .It was a mental and psychological state that sprung from the manner and the nature of being. Joe was a victim of a long history of deprivation, humiliation and helplessness. His fears controlled his mind; he was a prey of his miserable past. Joe's ultimate fear was to turn into a zombie. Memories of poverty aroused in him an aching disturbance, which

shut down his mental judgment. Joe did not want to continue feeling the humiliation of the need that deprived his life of its human nature. For Joe, living in poverty was too disturbing and almost unbearable. Human beings were supposed to live with dignity. The long history of poverty prevented him from following his heart; love was not as important as money for Joe. Love neither provided dignity nor prevented humiliation. After all, Joe watched his parents loving each other. Love did not dignify their life or fulfill their desires. Joe did not choose his destiny, the disturbing memories of poverty and the fear of reliving the nightmare of a poor life drove him to choose Susan over Alice. Joe was a victim of the conditions of his class as well as the false hopes that the Welfare State had promised his class.

Joe had to marry Susan in order to achieve his goals. A dignified mobility would be obtained due to personal efforts. It was only normal that marriage between two unlike persons would not be happy one. Susan and Joe were different in their patterns of social upbringing, identities, ideals, and behaviors. Joe had to surrender to new set of manners and ideals. Joe realized this fact saying:

I must transfer myself into different person for her. She had, I felt instinctively, a conception of Joe Lampton which I'd never to depart from the smallest detail, self pity and class consciousness weren't included in that conception (p.150).

Joe must break with his past, and submit himself at the cost of old ties to new set of ideals. Alice elevated her status by compromising into a marriage of convenience. Joe witnessed a living example of the miserable consequences of hypergamy. After all, if Alice were happily married, she would not cheat on her husband. The marriage between an upper class and working class members was futile. It caused the actual death of Alice and the symbolic death of Joe as he turned into a living corpse, a zombie.

Ten years later, Joe had got married to Susan and achieved his goals. Joe assumed that he would achieve happiness and security once he became an upper class member. It turned out that rich people were not as happy and secure as he mistakenly thought them to be. He gave the summary of his sad tale:

I wouldn't say that I was dead; simply that I had begun to die. I have realized, you might say, that I have, at the most, only another sixty years to live. I'm not actively unhappy and I'm not afraid of years to live. I'm not alive in the way that I was that evening I quarreled with Alice. I looked back at the raw young man sitting miserable in the pub with a feeling of genuine regret I wouldn't, even if I could, change places with him, but he was indisputably a better person than the smooth character I am now, often ten years of getting almost everything that I ever wanted, I know the name he'd give me: the Successful Zombie (p.134).

Jo was blinded by his vision of the nature of the rich life. He ran as hard as he could in order not to turn into a zombie. Ironically, Joe turned into a rich and successful one. The bitter cynicism in the phrase “Successful Zombie” indicated the deep sadness and disappointment that Joe felt as he reached his goals. Material gains did not achieve the psychological security or the individual fulfillment he wished to reach. In the process of his journey from poor man into rich one, Joe sacrificed his love and more importantly his true identity only to turn into a zombie; it was a circular futile journey.

3.5 Frustration with Working Class Conditions

In 1942 the conservative government persuaded the working class to increase their share in War's effort in exchange of improving their economic and social conditions. As soon as Britain won the war, it sank into six years of economic depression during which bread was rationed. The rationing years ended in 1951. Historians called the years following 1953 as years of affluence when majorities of working class population were freed from the pressures of unemployment and need. According to literature of Angry Men, the working class indulged in the trivial materialistic pleasures they could afford now, like buying drinks, clothes and casual expenses. The affluence distracted the working class from achieving true power in the new system. Angry Young Men were not

pleased in the working class narrow perspective, thus they annoyed the members of the working class by drawing their attention that there was more to be done in order to achieve genuine and lasting change. Braine highlighted negative aspects and unfair conditions under which working class were living in order to suggest that there were no real change in Welfare policy toward the working classes. Braine reproduced authentic picture of working class life in the fifties.

Joe, and his family living in Dufton manifested the conditions under which working class had lived in the post-war Welfare State. Joe represented the struggle of the young educated generation who aspired at better life than their descendant. His uncle and aunt represented the typical working class couple that could merely survive in post-war Britain. Dufton represented the environment within which working class had lived.

Joe Lampton was a typical worker who could not afford unexpected expenses. For example, Joe went to a bar unexpectedly with Alice who insisted on paying for her own beers. Joe was relieved because “ I lived on my salary; and it didn’t allow for casual expenditures”(p.59). Braine revealed that in post-war Britain poverty still prevailed: “when full employment came, there was still an atmosphere of poverty and insecurity” (p.37). The majority of working class people in Britain were still smarting under the pressures of poverty and inadequate income.

Braine used the setting to contrast between the low and upper class physical environment; while the former was ugly and dirty, the latter radiated with light and luxuries. In the rich Warley there were:

Big houses, a preparatory school to which the boys would soon return from adventures in Brittany and Brazil and India...expensive cars- Bentleys, Lagondas, Daimlers, Jaguars parked everywhere ... as evidence of its wealth; and, above all, the wind coming from the moors and woods on the far horizon(p.10).

While in Dufton there were:

A lot of mills. And a chemical factory. And a grammar School and a war memorial and a river that runs different colours each day. And a cinema and fourteen pubs. That's really all one can say about it (p.17).

Additionally, the Welfare State rebuilt the broken houses, because of War bombing, of the working class without baths, “ at the time the houses in Oak Crescent were built it wasn't considered that the working classes needed bathes”(p.14). This was because it assumed that working class did not need baths, based on a long history of discrimination as well as the working class mentality that “anything was good enough”(p.164). In Joe's aunt and uncle's house eight- pounds made “great help” considering their type of living.

The novel suggested that economic conditions of both classes did not change. Welfare State did not succeed to distribute the national wealth equally among its citizens. The upper classes remained to live in leisure and ease while working class continued to struggle against need. Joe was frustrated because of the unfair conditions that working class had to face though they were the class that contributed dearly in the War.

War contributed to the rise of the poor working class consciousness. Needless to say, working class citizens were the poor ones in pre-war British society; they were the majority who fought the War, died in it, lost their loved ones, and then suffered the rationing years. The logical result of the previous equation suggested that Welfare policy should favor working class. The working class deserved to live decently by their sacrifices. Kalliney (2006) stated that “many angry protagonists, frustrated by the climate of political conformity and inherent limits of Welfare State reform, vociferously denounce the state” (p.121). The novel showed dissatisfaction with the limited reforms of the Welfare policy. Moreover, Braine claimed that there were no reforms and even discrimination against those who fought and won the War.

Joe Lampton gave a short flashback to the history of his working class family: his grandfather was killed in First World War; consequently, his grand mother suffered undignified old age conditions not to mention her sadness over the death of her husband:

grandma had all t' heart knocked out of her when grandpa War killed at t' mill during t' first war, that was, and them coining money then, but not a penny-piece of compensation did grandma get... [she] have to scat and scrape saving for old age (p.96).

His father was killed in the Second World War. His father was a good and hard working man even though he was under-paid. Joe remorsefully remembered his father, "I thought of my father. He was a good workman; too good a workman to be sacked and too outspoken about his labour convictions to be promoted" (p.102). Likewise, things were not better for Joe Lampton who lived during the Welfare State. When Joe came back from War, "because of inhuman planner" (p.120), he found, "that the bloody Library Association had made their exams ten times as difficult, thus giving a flying start to the women and conchinies" (p.120). Joe thought of the men who stood back and did not fight the War as effeminate men. They lacked the proper masculinity necessary to fight for their country and sacrifice their lives for the sake of others. Brave men went to War; some of them died; others returned handicapped. Post-war Britain was inhabited with women and effeminate men who took the jobs of those who fought the War. Braine mourned the death of the courageous men; Britain lost its best men in the War.

Throughout the miserable history of a working class family, "The rich

always had the most fun during the War. The rich had the double pleasure of influencing the course of events and making themselves still richer” (p.83). An anger of this generation emerged from their realization of the unjust fact that: while some were fighting the War, others benefited from their absence. Britain owed the very reasons of its existence to the pain and the sacrifices of the working class. They fought and won the War. The state owed them. The Welfare promises to improve their conditions were not an act of charity, they earned it. Working class had suffered enough, it was high time to turn the wheel of fortune for their interests. Braine sympathized with working class and opened their minds to the privileges they deserved due to the great sacrifices during the War. These privileges were still enjoyed by the upper classes. Braine enlightened them. It was his commitment toward his class.

Kalliney (2006) illustrated that Jimmy Porter was “outspoken opponents of the British class system, and they see in Socialism the ethical standard by which these things can be judged and condemned” (p.112). Braine’s novel revealed that working class continued to suffer a social and economic discrimination in Britain in the 1950s. Braine criticized the unequal and unfair wealth distribution between British classes, and advocated a view of society based on fair opportunities. Braine showed the difference between the material properties of the rich

against the working class, yet there was no suggestion for socialist resolution.

Allsop (1968) considered one of the reasons of frustrations of the Angry protagonist was the unsolved struggle between Capitalism and Socialism. The official economic policy of the Welfare State was a capitalist one. Capitalism associated the wealth with the amount of individual labor thus it enhanced individualism. Still, capital economic did not distribute wealth equally. The capital continued to be in the hands of few people who gave little for the laborers. Joe said that Susan's like were those who continued to benefit from the Welfare Capitalism. As Susan gathered with other working girls; she stood out in glamour, looking expensive unlike the laborer girls who could not afford such luxurious appearance. Joe said: "if anyone ever needed a justification of the capitalist system, I thought, here it was: a human being perfect of its kind, a phoenix amongst barnyard fowls"(p.138). In the Welfare capitalism, the working class were freed from the burden of unemployment but the wages were not fare, and the class barriers continued to rule. The rich continued to enjoy a leisure life, and the working class labored to survive. Moreover, the luxurious life of the rich was provided by the labor of the poor. On the other hand, the socialist ideology of equal wealth distribution appealed to the Angry Young Men and many people in different countries. Eliminating individualism in Socialism caused feelings of

unease and anxiety for them. Angry Young Men possessed a deep sense of individualism that eventually overcame their sense of justice. The urge for individuality might explain Joe's abandonment of his class in favor of the upper class because it asserted that sense of unique identity. Critic Head (2006) declared that the angry men abandoned their socialist ideology because they were afraid of the idea of "totalitarianism" (p.52).

Joe was a typical post-war university graduate whose aspirations and dreams were fuelled by the promises of the Welfare. Subsequently, Joe was disappointed by the limited opportunities provided by the Welfare State. He was unhappy with his working conditions. Joe decided to marry Susan when he realized that "the £ 75,000cheque was, after all, only a dream" (p.83). Joe saw himself in the image of the assistant at the chemist who was submissive and lifeless. Unlike a rich man who always stood in straight posture, the assistant's shoulders were bending out of submission. Joe was disturbed because:

He'd sold himself, and what price had he got? Perhaps seven pound a week, and not even any assurance of security; he was dependent for his daily bread on one man, and that man was ignorant, ill-mannered, and mean... how much difference there was between the assistant and me. True, I had more money, better working conditions, and security; but essentially our positions were the same... my price was a shade higher, that was all (p.159).

Joe expressed the false satisfaction of being an employee, enslaved to other human being or to the government, because you could not survive without the pay cheque by the end of the month. The employment of working class would pay for their expenses but it was not going to change their status within the British system. Braine was frustrated by the new tendency of the working class to enjoy drinks, clothes, and other casual expenses. They wanted the working class to have effectual control to direct the economic policy of the British system. Otherwise, they were going to continue their peripheral existence within the British system.

Money was power, and still and will continue to be; it was the disturbing yet undeniable truth. Joe stated the rich men represented the, “power of money... they were kings, and I watched all paying court to [the rich men]” (p.69). “All” in the previous sentence probably referred to working class men or workers who paid court to rich men because they knew that, “the power of high class, the power of money, where the right word or smile or a gesture could transport one into a higher grade overnight” (p.221). Joe realized that unless the working class acquired financial power, they would remain un-influential within the power system in Britain. Indeed since the late 1960s, the working class had become a major consuming power. Eventually, they controlled the growth of the Capital British economy. The government was forced to share the power, especially when working classes formed the unions, the

shabby masses acquired the power of money. The new power forced the government to share the power; thus they acquired an influential voice necessary to direct the history for their favor.

The Angry Young Men had an insightful and future perspective; they did not allow the working class to presume their habit of apathy, accepting whatever the government would give them. They wrote a protest fiction in order to disturb the foundations of the mainstream power by showing the silent masses that their life was not as shiny as the government wanted them to believe. There was more that they could gain only if they asked for it. The critic Segal (1990) stated that the “literature of Angry Young Men anticipated an image of Britain in 1960s and 1970s” (p.17). It was obvious that there was a generation of young men who were not going to settle with old conventions.

Sillitoe, one of the angry writers, stated that literature had discriminated the working class population before the 1950s. The middle class member could see in the literary books a mirror of themselves. On the contrary, the working class members did not “ have the privilege of seeing themselves honestly and realistically portrayed in novels” (qtd-inGindin,1963,pp.5-6).Almost all the literary reading of the literature of Angry Young Men judged them with chaotic and unsystematic anger. Critics and reviewers saw that their ideology was ‘whatever it was I’m against it’.It was accurate that they did not suggest any alternative or

concrete methodology to fix whatever was disturbing them. But they were writers. Writers did not have the means of change; their function was to mirror reality, to show the population a clear and objective look from a distance. The purpose behind this was to pull them from self-complacency and the tendency to accept reality. Therefore, they would realize what their lives were really like; still more, there was an opportunity of a better life.

3.6 Social Realism in *Room at the Top*

Critic Lee (1998) stated that in late the 1940s, “a crisis was perceived in fiction. Between them, World War II and modernism had driven the novel into one of its periodic bouts with exhaustion”(p.133).The modernist subjectivism, the devastating events of the War and the turn by audiences to cinema and radio for their entertainment put pressure on novels and novelists.

Britain lost its influence in world policy. America took the leadership of the world. There was increasing influence of American all over the world. Its culture conquered the world, including Britain. Patriarchal British who were once the models of the world would not deliver their distinguished identity into the new power easily. Britain wanted to assert its national identity, thus it invented a British festival that celebrated British customs, food, and clothes among other national tradition. Angry

Young Men were the literary alternative to resist Americanization. Angry Young Men wrote about English people as they were, asserting their Englishness. They abandoned the Modernism ideology that wrote about elitist intellectuals, and abstract concept of the world, which did not address the real needs of people.

Angry young Men turned into their nineteenth century ancestors in terms of style. They adopted the realistic form of the novel, concentrating on the plot, linear narration and physical interpretation of the world. These authors had ceased to care about the foggy darkness of individual consciousness, and the disturbances of an isolated mind. They expressed the universe as the majority of people did; they expressed the concerns of ordinary young men troubles at work, financial problems, and dissatisfaction with political and social hypocrisy. The authentic recreation of reality allowed them to criticize the dominant political, socio-cultural ideologies. Braine adopted the realistic style in *Room at the Top* because realism served his main purpose of introducing critical view to the socio-political circumstances in post-war Britain.

Post-war fiction was autobiographical, documentary, rooted in the experience of family community, and locality. It was valued for its sincerity and simple truth. *Room at the Top* literature portrayed the life of the working class with its sufferings and struggles. Previously, all attempts to raise the wretched poverty came from middle class writers

who were unable to give an authentic picture of the life of the poor. The novel introduced truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances, using familiar words of working class vocabulary.

Harkness (1958) considered *Room at the Top* as “definitely an old hat”(p.391). It followed the style of eighteenth and nineteenth century novels. The narrative style of the novel was linear, chronically ordered. Old Joe recalled his journey from poverty into richness. The plot was the main focus of the writer. To a realistic writer the plot was as old as the novel itself. The novel ended in typical a happy resolution in the sense that the hero achieved his purpose.

The action started slowly, the prose was ordinary, so that it indicated the nature of working class people, and the characters were not interesting but normal and real. Half way through the book, when the nature of the conflict became definite, one’s attention would be easily distracted. It became straightforward and expected. The first half of the novel was interesting and full of hints and suggestions to arouse the reader’s attention.

Braine presented the concerns of workingman of worrying about food, clothes and other real interest of every day man. Joe did not reflect on universe existentially. Joe said I was not “fond of abstract thinking”(p.35). The reasons of the misfortune of humans were not God

or the arbitrary conditions of human life. The reasons were concrete; they were man-made Establishment, political ones, economic ones, and most importantly social ones. It was absurd to draw the miserable world of working class aesthetically. Writers could not romanticize a thick yellow river or present a hungry man reflecting on the nature of existence. Nevertheless, there were few existential interpretations in the novel. Joe introduced the concepts of free choice and determinism. Joe stated, "I'm sure that we choose our own destinies; but I can't help feeling that once one's chosen a certain track, there's remarkably little opportunity of changing it" (p.180). Joe indicated that man possessed some control on the track of one's life but the amount of that control was limited. It was as if the person had one chance to choose, and he/she had to live up with the consequences of his/her initiative choices. Man might spend all his/her life in misery based on the wrong choices that one took in earlier stages in life; as it was in Joe's case.

The language was un-eloquent and ordinary. The metaphors and imagery lacked imagination, beauty and sensation. Joe's first kiss with Alice felt to as "urgently needed cooked meal"(p.90). He says that the prosperity of Eagle road was as smooth and nourishing as "egg-nog" (p.26). "Charm follows ambition like a "pilot fish"(p.19).Joe spoke in vulgar language like "bitches", "bastards", "shove it", "bloody", "the bog-eyed hogger". Such vulgar speech was thought to be characteristic of working class

manner of speech. Braine made use of the dialect, though he made sure not to overuse it. The vernacular of their working class districts, most strongly used in dialogue helped to intensify the feeling of a working class atmosphere. For Example the following sentence was spoken by Joe's father, a typical working class member, "If Ah'd joined I'Con Club, led, Ah'd riding to work in mi own carp"(p.102).

It was important to realize that the literary works depended on the context in which they were written and read. *Room at the Top* aimed at political, social and economic protests, rather than seeking an aesthetic literary work. It aimed at identification with the mass population. Thus social realism was the best method to achieve its end. Indeed, this was the appropriate mode for expressing keen destabilizing and restless forces at work.

Critics had misjudged the fiction of the Angry Young Men. They thought that it did not hold on consistent ideology and described their anger with all the adjectives of randomness. They sympathized with the working class and attacked the superiority of the upper classes. Yet, they preferred to join the rich. Once they became rich, they were not happy. They could not stick to a socialist or capitalist ideology. The fifties in Britain were chaotic and disturbed years that had huge impact on all the British population who lived this decade. The impact on writers would be magnified due to their sensitive nature thus the Angry writers expressed

the dominant mood of the decade. But they had the benefit of ensuring the continuity of the process of change. They refused to rest until there was real and genuine change. Joe expressed this tendency to make things right saying, “what matter is that he felt something was wrong and he did something about to”(p.209). Angry writers sensed there was something wrong and wanted to change it. They wanted to make sure that the mass population would participate in writing the British history. Their anger was chaotic yet significant, it had the worth of change and hope.

Critics pointed out other point of weakness of their literature. It was its literary style. They found their novelty as conservative and amateurish. Its only real novelty was a skeptical, humorous, colloquial narrating tone. Laing (1983) referred to the discrimination practiced by critics on this literature stating that: in more recent accounts such as Bergonzi’s *The Situation of the Novel* (1970) and Bradbury and Planer’s *The Contemporary English Novel*(1979) had “tended to sweep some novelists as Wain, Sillitoe, and Braine entirely off the map”(p.153).Critics ignored that the Angry Young novelists were concerned in criticizing the dominant English socio-political and cultural ideologies, and had little interest in technical innovations. Moreover, realism was, and still, a genre, a school, and a style of writing writers would continue to use. Realism represented a general mimetic orientation for all seasons and it would be valid for all times.

Angry Young Men literature was marginalized and reduced into a literature of a period. It was true that they wrote only for a period of time but the significance of those works were massive in British history. They documented delicate and disturbed transitory decade in which Britain was transferred from a rigid monarchy into a true democratic country. The British population preferred to forget those ten years of disturbance and preferred to jump into the 1960s when the modern British system was crystallized. Likewise, critics preferred to ignore the writings of this lost decade. However, these works could form an interesting subject; it could function as a precious reference for literary-sociological research. More importantly, the generation was courageous and expressed a deep sense of self-awareness and genuine and innocent dream to achieve human justice. They were committed to their class and country. They wrote in order to change. As Jean Paul Sartre argued that, “one of the primary impulses behind writing should be engaged in the social and political environment in which the writer found him or herself. The committed writer knows that words are actions. He knows that to reveal is to change” (qtd-Bentley, 2007,p.68).

The novel was set in the forties because it could be relevant for the British in terms of its political and social frustrations only in those limited ten years. The novel was, and still, perceived as a timeless love story as

well as a moral tale. Still, its true value lied, other than its historical one, in the state of frustration, the intense urge to change, and the innocent ambition for better life. The frustration was significant because it was directed to concrete real Establishment. Braine wanted the entire dominant Establishment to fulfill its role in improving people's life. The political system had to create an equal and democratic atmosphere. The social conventions needed to be more tolerating. The annoying and constraining man-made social fabrications contributed to make everybody's life more complicated. The working class needed to rise and help themselves instead of resting in apathy. Braine believed that people had control on their live, more than they claimed to have. They could help each other to run an easy life instead of making life worse and more complicated. The value of the novel lied in the innocent appeal for humanistic justice. Critics said that it did not have universal appeal. It had, in the symbolic suggestion that humans did hold responsibility of complicating their life. They could help each other to survive instead of blaming God all the time.

The British people were lucky because there was a true political intention to create a democratic state; it took them till the 1970s when the Welfare State fully achieved its goals. The novel, and the literature as a whole, indicated that societies did not settle unless, there was a middle class majority that participated in running their countries.

Chapter Four

Conclusions

Room at the Top documented a crucial decade in Britain during which it was transforming from an Empire into an island. The Welfare State policy disturbed a long-established political, social and cultural system. The novel showed that the political forces did not change in Britain in the fifties. *Room at the Top* depicted the influence of transformation of the British society, particularly on young men of the working class who were educated due to the Butler's Act. The Welfare State provided the opportunity for working class population to rise but did not produce the means. There was a huge gap between the ideology and the implementation. Welfare State had not produced only positive results. The new working class individuals now launched on the search for self-realization. But while the traditional set of conventions had offered a certain psychological stability even if it meant repression of individual desires, the now-opened prospect brought feelings of disorientation, insecurity and loneliness along with the promise of new pleasures, the new generation was torn out by two worlds. Realism was the literary style in order to reproduce an authentic image of the British life in the fifties.

In Writing *Room at the Top*, Braine stated an oppositional attitude against the dominant political system through the act of revealing the negative aspects of its practices. In fact , Braine adopted the strategy of concentrating the spotlights on negative and even ignoble aspects within the system as a means of opposition. British politicians participated in the World War II to preserve the British way of life, as well as to protect the Empire. Instead, Britain lost its overseas colonies and was shrinking into an island. The once great British economy sank into a deep depression. Moreover, it was the working class population that paid dearly for those decisions. Once the War was over, rich people did not suffer rationing and hunger; they possessed money necessary to obtain food .It was people like Joe Lampton who suffered the deprivations of rationing and all types of humiliation and injustice.

Even when the rationing years were over and full employment became possible, there was still an atmosphere of insecurity and poverty. The working conditions were not fair; working class population had to work for long hours for few pounds that did not ensure a decent human life. The new working class young men like, Joe Lampton, who were educated by the Butler's Act, found themselves working under the managements of graduates of Cambridge and Oxford. Thus, the old establishments of social privileges were still governing .The political strategy polluted poor zones and ensured clean environment for the rich. The War that was

triggered by politicians caused the death of most good men .It took the lives of his parents and only left women and effeminate men. In the mean time, the rich were not affected by the War. Their money bailed them out of its wretchedness.

Angry protagonists, like Joe Lampton, expressed loathing against the class system that had been around since Britain had existed. Britain had always classified its citizens into upper, middle, working classes. Each class had its own identity and living customs and aspirations. The Welfare State made it possible for hard working class citizens to join the upper classes but it was not as easy as it appeared. Joe wanted to join the upper classes but he had to overcome exterior and interior obstacles. The exterior ones centered around the prejudices of the upper classes. The more challenging proved to be the internal struggle; he had to vanquish his deep feeling of inferiority and to adapt to the new sets of upper classes conventions. The new social mobility tormented the young generation.

Joe Lampton observed the glorious and vibrant life of the rich. They possessed Victorian mansions, big cars and wore expensive clothes, unlike poor people who did not have baths. Joe envied those who granted the automatic privilege of an inherited position within the Establishment like Jack Wales and he wanted desperately to penetrate this world.

Joe wanted to climb the social ladder and earn as much money as possible. For money was considered as the key to the satisfaction of the deeper longings for self- fulfillment of the young Joe. According to young Joe, the workers' mind ,was as raised and sharpened by the long experience of want and misery .He sought his self realization not through a philosophical search for a meaning in life as the bourgeois heroes did before, but in the much more concrete hunt for physical delights and private happiness. Joe Lampton was socially ambitious, for both the symbolical satisfaction of being permitted to the higher grades as well as the concrete advantages of being able to buy and enjoy things formerly un-obtainable for people of his class. Joe demonstrated sympathy with the working classes, but he did not plead for a particular class perspective. Joe resented the articulations of the system. He felt no class unity, no public identification, and therefore worked hard for the direct and the tangible self-progress; he aimed at a high-class woman to ensure financial and social luxuries.

Working conditions were not satisfying; Joe Lampton did not gain enough money. Thus he took the decision to marry the rich Susan Brown who was his passport toward upper class. The price, however, was that he had to abandon his love and peace of mind .The end was pessimistic ; Joe was left in state of frustrating suffering from bitter cynicism. Joe Lampton was obsessed with not turning into a poor zombie; however, by

the end of the novel he turned into successful rich one. Though he was rich, he was lifeless. Happiness did not automatically follow the social upgrade that he had paid dearly for. Joe Lampton lost his true love as a cost of his ambition.

Angry Young writers of the World War II returned to a traditional nineteenth-century theme and structure. Braine aimed at authentic reproductions of working class sufferings and struggles, and the most suitable literary form to deliver his aim was the realistic novel. The plot centered on details of jobs, money, sex and success. The novel revisited the English well-established nineteenth century preoccupations: the detail of the local life as a strategy to preserve the English identity, which was threatened by the rising power of America. Braine made use of dialect, the vernacular of their working class districts to intensify the working class atmosphere, though Braine was careful not to overdo it. The novel described a picture of social reality, with authenticity in the representation.

Angry young Men literature was obscure and considered ordinary, just as the lives of its practitioners. The writers introduced a concrete physical reading of human existence. High-brow critics saw it as merely a periodic literature. Seen from another angle, it was an important documentation of the disturbances of a nation at a stage of transformation from one political and social stage into new ones. Other nations facing

the same process of transformation would benefit from such literature to identify the frustrations of its youth and its transitory stage.

Room at the Top remains one of the important landmarks in the history of modern British novel where the author succeeded in presenting the aspirations, ambitions and dreams of a generation of young men that were suppressed for a long time. The “Top” in the title is the key toward understanding such hopes and misgivings.

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