

## Peter Black, Christopher Stevens, class and inequality in the Daily Mail

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**Peter Black, Christopher Stevens, *class* and inequality in the *Daily Mail*.**

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**Abstract**

This article is part of a larger study of changes in British newspaper representations of wealth inequality in the UK from 1971 to the present-day. Selected findings are reported from a corpus linguistically-based comparative critical discourse analysis of large samples (approx. 55,000 words each) of TV programme reviews that appeared in the *Daily Mail*, written by the TV critics Peter Black (in 1971) and Christopher Stevens (in 2013). Occurrences of *class* and their collocates and co-texts are a particular focus of attention. In Black's reviews, it is a recurrent contemporary concern, and recognised as indicative of inequality of opportunity. In Stevens's much longer stories, class has largely disappeared from the discursive agenda of contemporary Britain, and is only mentioned in relation to the past, or other countries. By 2013 it seems to have become 'natural' not to discuss class and present-day wealth inequality in *Mail* TV reviews. The part-quantitative, part-qualitative methodology adopted here suggests that the tracing of something as masked as the discursive acceptance of wealth inequality must

inevitably be more piecemeal and multi-factorial than other more sharply and overtly categorized forms of discrimination (based in ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, for example).

**Keywords:** inequality, newspaper discourse, CDA, Daily Mail, class

## **1. Newspaper representations of ‘normal and inevitable’ inequality.**

This article is part of a larger project in progress, which uses corpus linguistic methods to underpin a study of British written news media representations of wealth inequality, and shifts in wealth inequality, over the past forty-five years or so. That there is much greater wealth inequality in the UK in the second decade of this century than there was in the 1970s has been widely recognised, by commentators, economists and think tanks of all political persuasions (see, e.g., Stiglitz 2012; Westergaard 2010; Hills & Bastagli 2015; and Atkinson 2015). To quote one of innumerable studies, in 2012, Cribb et al. noted:

Up to 1977, income inequality had been on a long-term downward trend....

[But] the 1980s saw a historically unprecedented increase in inequality.... The income share of the richest 1% has nearly trebled. Even after tax, the richest 1% of households took home nearly 9% of all income in 2009-10 compared with 3% in 1977.

The present paper seeks to address two main questions: Are British newspapers writing about wealth inequality differently circa 2011-6 than they did in 1971, and might those differences have helped present-day inequality seem reasonable and unavoidable? The project aims in part to contribute to what Partington, Duguid &

Taylor (2013) call corpus-assisted discourse studies. But there is an important diachronic dimension and a critical motivation to the project also, which situates it in the critical discourse tradition of work by Fowler (1991) and van Dijk (e.g. van Dijk 1991, 2008) and many others. The basic idea is that, taking two genuinely comparable or equivalent, substantial, and representative samples of newspaper discourse from the years 1971 and 2011 (or thereabouts: 2012/3 in the present case, for reasons explained below), a study of discursual change—if there has been any—should be possible. The larger research project focuses on texts in just two national daily newspapers across the forty-five year period: the *Times* and the *Daily Mail*. The changes in the newspaper discourses about wealth inequality which I hope to identify arguably not only reflect completed change (e.g. in socio-political assumptions) but also in part enact or advance change, by performatively re-shaping mainstream common-sense thinking. That ‘common sense’ contributes to the background understanding in Britain of the ‘new normal’ in matters of wealth disparity.

Why single out the *Daily Mail* (and in the larger project the *Times*) for study? My interest was in moderately centrist or centre-right newspapers which one might expect broadly to welcome rather than resist (cf., the *Daily Mirror* and the *Guardian*) the political developments that have led to greater wealth inequality. The *Daily Mail* has been severally described as ‘middle-market’ and ‘tabloid’; it is centre-right in politics and conservative in values generally, like *The Times*, but targeted at a lower-middle and

upper working-class readership, who are more often women than men (55% to 45%). Far older than the *Sun* or even the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail* has a long and sometimes chequered history. The *Mail* remains the UK's second largest-selling newspaper, after *The Sun*, with 1.7 million copies in daily circulation and an estimated readership of the print version of more than double that number. Alongside the daily and Sunday printed newspaper, *MailOnline* is a free online newspaper, the content of which mostly duplicates the printed paper; in 2011 it was the second most visited English-language newspaper website worldwide.

A number of text analyses in recent years have devoted some attention to discourse and ideology in the *Daily Mail*; these and the many critical studies of news journalism more generally are part of the background to the present study. There is room to note only a very few of these here: van Dijk 2011; Fengler 2003; Hart & Cap 2014; Baker et al. 2013; Mayr & Machin 2012; Kelsey 2015; Khosravini 2009; Bennett 2013; and the work of the Glasgow Media Group (e.g., Philo et al. 2013). There have been studies, too, specifically of the practices of television reviewing, often in historical perspective (Rixon 2011 and 2014, Moran 2013, and Ellis 2008 are rich resources). But there have been no studies, to my knowledge, that focus specifically on the discourse of prominent critic-reviewers of TV programmes in print newspapers, and their interesting intermediary position, communicating about communicating.

## **2. The TV programme reviewer as spokesperson of everyday ideology: Peter Black and Christopher Stevens**

It was while reading extensively in the *Daily Mail* of 1971 that I began to notice that alongside its hard news stories, comments and features, sports pages, and readers' letters, there was a particular person recurrently and prominently present in the paper, speaking in his own voice but about specific recent experiences that many in the readership had surely shared. This was Peter Black, the *Mail's* TV critic, who two or three times a week throughout the year was to be found occupying roughly half of one page of the newspaper, reviewing one or more of the previous night's television programmes.

This was at a time when a third, non-commercial, station had only fairly recently been launched (so that UK viewers' choice of viewing was between BBC1, BBC2, and ITV), and at a time when far more people watched television. Thus there was every possibility that Black's commentary would be about a programme that the reader had watched too, thus one on which they might have had their own opinions. Some sense of participation as addressee in a conversation was arguably involved, in which the viewer-reader's unstated assessment of a documentary, contemporary play, soap opera, or historical dramatization was 'answered' by Black's considered and entertaining commentary. Black enjoyed no special experience of the programmes he wrote about;



without benefit of preview or videotape recording, he watched them under much the same conditions as his readers. All these factors fostered, I suggest, a kind of trust between Peter Black as named and visually-presented writer and the individual reader, making him more influential with readers than most of his fellow journalists.

I decided to collect a large sample of the stories appearing under Peter Black's name in the *Mail* in 1971 (nearly all of them are TV programme reviews), as *one* potentially revealing expression of the newspaper's broadest socio-political values at that time. And with a view to using CADS to measure continuity and change in values, I sought a comparable sample of TV review/criticism stories by a named writer, also in the *Daily Mail*, in 2011-- thus exactly forty years later. But the *Mail* had no regular TV critic/reviewer in any of the years from 2007 to 2012 inclusive. Varying the year, I chose to build a corpus of reviews from the *Daily Mail*'s new TV critic, Christopher Stevens, for the first full year of their appearance, 2013.

### **3. Methodology**

All the analyses that follow relate to two small corpora. That of Black items in 1971 was laboriously compiled but aided by the recent availability of the *Daily Mail Historical Archive*, while that of Stevens 2013 stories was easily gathered from the

newspaper text databases, *Nexis UK* and *EBSCO host Regional Business News*. The corpus of Peter Black stories (henceforth often abbreviated to PB) is of approximately 53,000 words and 100 stories or columns—all of the substantial TV reviews published under Black’s name in that year. Alongside this, the corpus of Christopher Stevens TV reviews from 2013 (henceforth often referred to as CS) is of approximately 62,000 words but contains just 46 stories: thus while PB’s average story length is just over 500 words, CS’s is 1350 words.

There are many proposals as to how to analyse discourse to identify its values, predispositions, and socio-political affiliations. Only a few of those most directly relevant to the present study will be mentioned here: van Dijk, 2001, van Dijk 2008, Fairclough, 1995, van Leeuwen, 2008, Stubbs, 1996, Hardt-Mautner, 1995, Baker, Gabrielatos, Khosravini, Krzyzanowski, McEnery, & Wodak, 2008, Moon & Caldas-Coulthard, 2010, Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2013, Baker, 2015, Partington et al. 2013, and Mautner, 2007. In the present abridged study, I mostly follow the key stages of a corpus-assisted CDA, as outlined in Baker et al. (2008), stages which comprise a fairly standard sequence, with recursion. Research questions and corpus construction are followed by analysis of frequencies and keywords, leading in turn to a qualitative analysis of representative data, with proposed interpretations of the latter leading to further hypotheses and corpus searches. The interpretive statements are in a clausal (or propositional) format for reasons that space prevents fuller discussion of here.

#### 4. Peter Black on class

The corpus-based critical discourse analyst aims first to identify patterns in the corpus but thereafter also seeks to derive from these patterns, in plausible ways, an account of the underlying ideology of the discourse, the views and values of its author or authors. To do any of this, the analyst must start somewhere, and every ‘somewhere’ is contentious on one ground or another. Using Wmatrix (Rayson, 2009), a calculation of word, part-of-speech, and semantic category frequencies was rapidly undertaken. Since the overarching interest is in what PB and CS say about economic inequality, a reasonable preliminary question to ask was: what do the two journalists actually say about the following concepts: class, poverty, being poor, being rich, inheriting and inheritance, and wealth? But that question cannot be answered directly, except through identification of candidate passages, and analysis of suitably contextualised excerpts; but identifying all and only those sentences or paragraphs in discourse that are ‘about’ class, or poverty, or being rich or poor is a far from straightforward exercise. A simpler corpus-linguistic question can be answered first, namely how often do Black and Stevens use specific words reflective of those concepts? Wmatrix found these frequencies, in the PB corpus, for all forms of the following items: *class* (46), *poverty* (5), *poor* (16), *rich* (22), *inherit* (4), and *wealth* (2). The counterpart frequencies in the slightly longer CS corpus (where frequencies accordingly should be roughly one-fifth

higher) are: *class* (38), *poverty* (5), *poor* (14), *rich* (9), *inherit* (4), and *wealth* (1). The comparatively high frequency of expressions containing the word *class* (in CS as well as PB) suggested to me that further consideration of these should be a priority.

It may be objected that the discourse pertaining to wealth inequality (in PB and CS) is entextualised by many other means than the uses of *class* in context, and that other discourse samples would be identified if other search terms were selected.

However, a search in PB and CS for other words from the same UCREL semantic categories as those to which *wealth*, *income*, *(in)equality*, etc are assigned (e.g. II.1, money and pay), uncovered no item used with the frequency (and relevance) of *class*.

Roughly a quarter of the forty-six words or multi-word expressions in PB containing the *class* morpheme these can be ignored, being unrelated to any social-stratificational sense of the word (e.g., *classical music*, *classics*, *first-class*, *in the Muggeridge class*, and so on), leaving 35 from the initial 46 instances of *class* relating to socio-economic class. It is customary to display the instances of a targeted expression from a corpus in a Key Word In Context format. But for reasons that space limitations prevent elaborating, I opted instead for examining the target expression in its more informative full sentential contexts. These are reproduced, with explanatory comments in brackets, for the qualifying 35 examples below.

PB'S 35 USES OF *CLASS* (IN THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION SENSE, BOLD ADDED), IN THEIR SENTENTIAL CONTEXT, WITH SOURCE STORY ANNOTATIONS IN SQUARE BRACKETS.

1. Her vision of folk music is as something solely political, a form of cultural expression reserved for the working class (as long as it uses it, one gathered, only to vocalise the class struggle). [profile of Peggy Seeger]
2. Of the eight women, mostly professional and middle/upper class, only two wore slightly masculine gear. [a study of lesbians]
3. The failing torch, we gathered, would be picked up by Billy's sons, waging the class struggle under the cry of: One day we're going to stand up and screw them first. [review of Neville Smith's play, *After A Lifetime*]
4. *The Harder They Fall* was about the highly paid directorial class who've lost their jobs.
5. Jeremy James's *Excuse Me, Your Class is Showing* (Man Alive. BBC 2) pinpointed some fascinating examples of change, coming up with two conclusions.

6. The class structure is best dealt with either by ignoring it or contentedly accepting it. [also from review of *Excuse Me, Your Class is Showing*]
7. His wife, however, snobbishly defended her self-awarded status of 'working class' and would deeply resent, she said, being called middle class. [also from review of *Excuse Me, Your Class is Showing*]
8. Next to old Parsloe the most serene was an artist who had totally rejected class. [also from review of *Excuse Me, Your Class is Showing*]
9. East Anglia appears to be immovably associated by some TV playwrights with class distinctions of the most obnoxious sort. [review of Robert Holles's play, *Michael Regan*]
10. Programmes about class distinctions have an endlessly guilty fascination for us British. [also from review of *Excuse Me, Your Class is Showing*]
11. Finlay had everything: The mystery of medicine, a triangular relationship which could change from doctor-housekeeper-doctor to father-mother-son; the nostalgic appeal of the recent past; and all in impeccable, classless Scots accent. [review of *Dr Finlay's Casebook*]
12. The genius of the three [profiled aesthetes: Aubrey Beardsley, Oscar Wilde, and Ernest Dowson] was reasonably well suggested (for Wilde and Dowson there were recitals from the works), but the complicated motives that propelled them towards ruin boiled down to little more than

reaction against the overstuffed middle-class prosperity of their Victorian milieu. [programme about the fin-de-siecle aestheticists]

13. The middle-class innkeeper Oxlade ('I try to run a civilised place') mistook Michael and his wife for a pair of bog-trotting Irish, though Michael had been his neighbour's farm manager for five years and his wife, to judge from the accent Anna Calder-Marshall gave her, had clearly been born thereabouts. [also from review of Robert Holles's play, *Michael Regan*]

14. It then became a melodrama about a decent middle-class chap with a good war record and an obviously correct attitude towards such things as long-haired psychiatrists, BBC plays, and the questioning of the Army by TV news men; who, after demonstrating how firmly he put down attempts to lower his standards, rescued the police from an awkward situation by a cool display of courage in the face of an armed opponent. [further description of Robert Holles's play, *Michael Regan*]

15. It will be objected that these girls were all taken from the middle class; but they had to be articulate because the programme was discussing complicated attitudes. [programme about young black women in the Midlands]

16. The play was every bit as cosy in its own way as Esther McCracken's accounts of the quiet weddings of the southern middle class. [review of Neville Smith's play, *After A Lifetime*]
17. Moreover he had a girl, middle class and black. [review of Carey Harrison's *The Private Sector*]
18. His wife, however, snobbishly defended her self-awarded status of 'working class' and would deeply resent, she said, being called middle class. [also from review of *Excuse Me, Your Class is Showing*]
19. She wouldn't allow the middle classes—'the bank clerks and professors'—any share in its comforts. [critical profile of Peggy Seeger]
20. Former IRA leader Peadar O'Donnell told how he tried and failed to change the IRA from a terrorist organisation to a genuine working-class movement. [about the Irish Republic, at 50]
21. I've never been able to take to the glum, working-class secret agent myself, though it is a purely personal quirk. [review of *Callan*, crime detective series]
22. She identifies completely with the working-class struggle. [critical profile of Peggy Seeger]



23. Clearly it is not possible for a man who has climbed out of a comfortable Southern working-class background to become Tory Prime Minister to be dull. [profile of Ted Heath]
24. The Birthday Run (Granada) had the simplest of plots, designed to bring the close-knit working-class family of bicyclists into collision with the working class novelist who's escaped. [review of Arthur Hopcraft's play, *The Birthday Run*]
25. A carafe of water now stands on Annie Walker's table instead of the bottle of tomato sauce that directors used to introduce as a kind of dramatic shorthand to indicate a working-class situation. [Review of *Coronation Street*]
26. The author's heart was clearly in the right place, and a good play about the gap between the educated generation of working-class and their elders, and about the loneliness of an old widower, unused to rest, lay somewhere alongside it. [review of Peter Hankin's *The Pigeon Fancier*]
27. The Sinners play, taken by Hugh Leonard from Frank O'Connor's story The Holy Door, showed the effect of these thunderous sexual taboos on the lower-to-middle working class.
28. Her vision of folk music is as something solely political, a form of cultural expression reserved for the working class (as long as it uses it,

one gathered, only to vocalise the class struggle). [critical profile of Peggy Seeger]

29. See 2<sup>nd</sup> mention in example #24. [review of Arthur Hopcraft's play, *The Birthday Run*]

30. If you weren't as moved by it as you felt you should have been, it was because the author jumped cheerfully into the trap that threatens working class playwrights, tempting them to write with an indiscriminate affection for the working class which is a kind of sentimental snobbishness. [review of Neville Smith's play, *After A Lifetime*]

31. See 2<sup>nd</sup> mention of *class* in example #30 above.

32. Armed with a tape recorder and a sympathetic manner, Seabrook once did a very good radio series about working class attitudes in Blackburn, and the observation of facts in a modern Midlands cosmetics factory in Skin Deep rang equally true. [review of O'Neill and Seabrook's *Skin Deep*]

33. The only family that is still defiantly working class is the Ogdens, Hilda and Stan and daughter Irma--and Hilda is pestering Stan to install a shower. [Review of *Coronation Street*]

34. Now, said the script, the policy is to industrialise further; and as this cannot be done without creating and depending upon a skilled working

class it may be that the Lisbon docker we saw may get more than £6 for a 60-hour week. [review of documentary *Portugal--Dream of Empire*]

35. Once again the political theme was the working classes' exploitation by the Tories, betrayal by Labour, and in the case of these Liverpool Irish, the oppression of the Church. [review of Neville Smith's play, *After A Lifetime*]

#### ***4.1 Peter Black's view of class in general***

Just considering these 35 instances (0.07% of the PB corpus) in their immediate sentential contexts, we may deduce a considerable amount about Peter Black's understanding of class in the UK in 1971. In so proceeding, we are recognising what Van Dijk noted long ago: "One of the most powerful semantic notions in a critical news analysis is that of implication..... There are various types of implication: entailments, presuppositions, and weaker forms, such as suggestion and association." (Van Dijk 1991: 113-4).

A first thing to note is that class simply is important to Black: consider how often *class* appears in the relevant sense, compared with the infrequency of relevant uses in PB of these other social categorizers: *race* (1), *gender* (0), *ethnicity* (0), *religion* (5), and *age* (12). Even *sex*, 32 instances (mostly *sex*, 13 uses, and *sexual* 10 uses) is

less prominent. We will find *sex* is far more frequent than *class* in the Stevens corpus. While none of the other terms just listed, including *sex*, has any significantly frequent collocates in PB, *class* has *middle* (2.23) and *working* (2.82) as left-hand collocates and *struggle* (1.73) as a right-hand one (T-scores in parentheses). In the CS corpus, among the listed terms (*race*, *gender*, etc.), only *sex*, in the collocation *sexual violence* (T-score of 1.73), and *age* (in *all ages*, T-score 1.72) have any significantly frequent collocate (just one, in each case).

If class is important to Black, the working class seems of particular interest to him, since approximately half the mentions have *working* as the immediate leftward collocate: talking about class is mostly talking about working classness, but also, to a lesser extent, middle classness. There is another stratum besides working and middle, but it is vaguer--those who are *professional*, or *middle/upper* (both in #2), or *directorial* (in #4): these categories are each mentioned once only.

Class entails *distinctions* (this is explicitly mentioned twice: in #9 and #10) or *structure* (#6). Some of the class distinctions are *of the most obnoxious sort* (#9), which implies that many if not all class distinctions are on a continuum of unpleasantness with 'most obnoxious' as an endpoint. Whether for this or other reasons, in example #10 (in expanded sentential format) PB avers that these class distinctions are endlessly fascinating to us British, and the fascination is a guilty one, to boot.

## 4.2 *Black on middle-classness*

On the basis of the immediate collocates of *middle class* in this corpus, we are also given to understand that middle-classness may go along with prosperity and ‘overstuffed-ness’ (both in #12); innkeeper/proprietor status (#13); decency, being a *chap*, and having a good war record (#14); and southern-ness (#16). Interpreting the collocational evidence in this way is open to challenge, I recognise. But I suggest that the implication (in #14) is that *decent* and *chap* tend to associate with *middle-class*, while having a good war record is so strongly associated with middle-classness that one hardly ever reads of a working-class person having one. A quick search of the Bank of English online found no exact match for “good war record”, but 89 matches in its 717 million words for “good war”, with these middle-class-describing examples being not atypical:

1. They were young, energetic, of good family , well-educated with good war records
2. ‘He’s an old Harrovian, my dear, and a superb bridge player,’ while their husbands closed one eye because ‘He had a damned good war, and is a member of the MCC.’
3. My grandfather, a naval doctor, had a ‘good war’, which meant that those left at home had a pretty terrible one.

### 4.3 Black on working-classness

As for the working class, individual members may be *glum* (#21), but it also contains close-knit families (#24). It has sometimes experienced rapid, *gap*-creating (#26) change in educational matters (and in other respects) between the younger generation (*educated*: #26) and the older one, who by implication are not educated at all even though, in some cases, *skilled*: #34. Again I suggest that in 1971 discourse generally, one almost never reads of *the skilled middle class*, only of an *educated* or a *professional* one. Bank of English data (717 million words, but often gathered three decades later, admittedly) would seem to confirm this:

*skilled middle(-)class*, 2 instances

*skilled working(-)class*, 10 instances;

*educated middle(-)class*, 37 instances;

*educated working(-)class*, 1 instance;

*professional middle(-)class*, 13 instances

*professional working(-)class* 1 instance

The final single instance, of *professional working class*, strikes an odd note until on closer inspection one finds it comes in an American National Public Radio broadcast, and like the Peggy Seeger quotation reflects the different US conception of class. The

most revealing example in the Bank of English is *the aspiring middle and skilled working-class voters*. Black is thus reflecting widespread assumptions that *educated* is a common attribute of the middle class and a rare one in the working class, while *skilled* is an attribute of some in the working class and almost none in the middle class.

The strong, quasi-paraphrastic, association of middle-classness with education perhaps helps explain example #15. The reasoning behind Black's phrasing here seems to be that middle-classness enabled these girls (but not working class ones) to be articulate; but the unstated intermediate link between middle-classness and articulacy is very probably education. Thus middle-class means, roughly, both 'educated' and 'articulate'. You cannot expect the working-class to have these qualities, #15 implies.

More can be said about *articulate*: it is used by Black on four occasions in the 53,000-word selected corpus, always referring to women, and on two of those occasions it collocates with *intelligent*:

*Rachel Kempson's embittered but intelligent and articulate woman;*  
*including the intelligent and articulate ones [viz., Women's Liberation*  
*campaigners] we saw.*

So for Black *articulate* means, roughly, 'intelligent, female' and as we have seen, normally 'middle- or upper-class' and educated. (We can compare these with the one use of *articulate* in CS in 2013, describing a 21-year-old philosophy student said to be outraged at her treatment on *The Great British Bake Off*: *Ruby is intelligent, articulate*

*and forceful.*) This helps explain Black's wording when he reports a comment about their quality of life made by one of the evidently *working*-class women resident in a state-run high-rise housing estate comprising twenty-eight tower blocks in Battersea:

*The most articulate of the women wondered if the architects would design such places for their own families to live.*

The subtext is that, among a group where from their class you would expect neither education, nor intelligence, nor articulacy, nevertheless one of their number produced something worth reporting.

This is not quite the whole story, however, since PB evidently regards educational opportunity as the key enabler of a better, fuller life for younger Britons, and a means by which class division can be reduced, and exclusion by birth from the opportunities afforded by meritocratic access can be ended. In his 'Five lies about the British' on July 15, he writes:

*First, one has to recognise that there appear to be two apparently quite different types of British, separated by World War II. The division is between a generation that hadn't much and one that's seen the ironing out of differences in incomes, education, opportunities.*

In the second sentence, the post-war generation (denoted by the pro-form *one*) is logically one marked by a working-class/middle-class distinction, while the first generation mentioned in this sentence appears to refer to everyone in the pre-war



generation, but must be chiefly referring to the working classes. Black cannot mean that the pre-war middle class 'hadn't much' in the same way as the working class. In the post-war period the working class have done so much better thanks to some 'ironing out of differences' in the three named areas, the most instrumental of which was undoubtedly education. It is education, Black either states or implies, that empowered the angry young working class playwrights, Ted Heath, Callan, the 'articulate' Battersea council house resident, young Parsloe of the Oxford Union, and Ken Barlow in *Coronation Street*.

#### ***4.4 Class struggle***

A struggle between the classes exists, in the world of PB: *class* and *struggle* are close collocates three times here (#1, #3, #22); and the frequencies noted above might suggest that the antagonists are the working and middle classes. The struggle is implicitly asymmetrical, in that the working class are struggling against the middle class, but not the reverse. Accordingly one can have or hope to create a *working-class movement* (to advance the struggle) (#20)—but the collocation *middle-class movement* sounds rather unnatural (although not entirely unheard of). Whether or not working-classness surrounds you as a 'movement', it can be a constraining container and therefore something that only with effort one can 'escape' (#29). Evidently Prime Minister Ted Heath got free too (#23), but in his case the unspecified figurative pit or valley which he

*climbed out of* was not constricting but *comfortable*: Black believes there are contented working class Britons as well as struggling discontented ones (in an unspecified proportion). He champions Mr Heath in arguing he cannot be dull, because he had the talent to ‘climb out of’ his working-class origins; by contrast the fictional Callan (#21) has stayed put class-wise, and reaps the reward of *glum*-ness. By implication, anyone with talent can ‘climb out’ if they choose to, and it’s Callan’s own chippy fault if he decides not to.

The working class is in some respects under siege, then, and sometimes can only survive by means of acting *defiantly* (#33). At the same time Black is critical of those he judges too strident in their proclaiming of working-class credentials. Of these people he twice complains that they are ‘snobbish’: playwright Neville Smith is found guilty of ‘sentimental snobbishness’ (#30), while in a different column the wife of a servant/housekeeper who defends her ‘self-awarded’ working-class status is said to be doing so ‘snobbishly’ (#7).

The class struggle is understood by PB sometimes to be quite vigorous and heated; e.g., example #3: *waging the class struggle under the cry of: One day we’re going to stand up and screw them first*. In context the reader sees that PB reports this ‘cry’ with detachment if not irony and disbelief; but the reported cry presupposes that the middle class does screw the working class and never the other way about. Likewise example #35, which comes just a few lines earlier in the same story, reports as

presupposed *the working classes' exploitation by the Tories*. The fuller context, however, makes it clear that PB is reporting what he understands to be the values espoused by the TV play he is reviewing, and not views that he holds himself. And as noted he accuses the playwright of 'a kind of sentimental snobbishness' and 'indiscriminate affection' for the working class—predominantly negative qualities.

But perhaps most strikingly Black ends his review of Neville Smith's play (the source of examples #16, 30, 31 and 35) with the remark *It was at least a personal view*. Not only has he spent valuable space reporting ideas about class that he is unpersuaded by, he has also implied that such sharply different views are to be welcomed. There is an open-mindedness about this engagement with others' different assessments of life in Britain which we may find contrasts with what emerges nearer the present day in the realm of TV reviewing, where the journalist may be more inclined to reject or simply ignore views or themes they regard as aberrant. Vehement rejection is very much Stevens's choice in a review of a BBC five-part crime series called *The Fall*, about a serial killer (*WHY DOES THE BBC THINK VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS SEXY?* June 10, 2013): in his opening sentence he calls it "the most repulsive drama ever broadcast on British TV". There is no mention of any positive qualities in this series, which seems to have attracted Stevens' attention in the first place because of what he sees as its sadistic and demeaning representation of women and female sexuality: these,

and not class, we will find are among the prominent discussable themes in CS's 2013 TV reviewing.

### **5. Class and other values in Christopher Stevens 2013**

How is *class* treated in the Stevens corpus? While the shorter PB corpus has 35 uses of *class* in the relevant sense, Wmatrix analysis of the CS corpus reveals 38 uses of *class* (all forms), and most of these are used in non-relevant senses (e.g., 15 uses of *classic*). Just 14 instances of *class* are relevant, comprising only 0.02% of the CS corpus, thus they are less than a third as frequent as in PB, where the counterpart frequency is 0.07%. As for the other identifier terms (all forms) briefly computed earlier for the PB corpus, the frequencies in the CS corpus are as follows: *race* (2), *gender* (3), *ethnic* (0), *religion* (2), *age* (27). Thus, with the interesting exception of *age* (*aged*, *middle-aged*, etc.), these terms are neither more nor less prominent than in PB.

While *sex* was present in PB (32 instances), as expected it is much more prominent in the CS (71 instances, not including the proper name *Sex Pistols*). On the evidence so far presented we might surmise that where PB frequently ponders class concerns as explored in the 1971 programmes he watched, these are far less salient in CS, who dwells more on the sexual concerns he finds in the 2013 programmes. How

does television reviewing that has sex as a major interest differ from such reviewing that has class, instead, as one? Is it too speculative to suggest some shift of attention, over the years, away from 'struggle' of a social and economic nature and towards 'pleasure' (and, perhaps, prurience or gossip) of a more personal or individualised kind? An interest in other people's sex lives is arguably removed from the realities of wealth inequality in ways that an interest in other people's comparative socioeconomic status is not.

Here now are the 14 relevant uses of *class* in the CS corpus, in their graphological-sentence contexts:

1. Thomas Barrow again, holding forth on class injustice: 'I get fed up seeing . . .' a. How our lot always get shafted'; b. How it's always the same old, same old' c. How it's the rich what gets the pleasure and the poor what gets the blame' [Quiz item about anachronisms in the *Downton Abbey* script, 6.5.13]
2. Such accurate social and class satire was the joy of Clarke's scripts. [nostalgic appreciation of Roy Clarke's 1970s-1980s sitcom, *Open All Hours*, 9.10.13]
3. South Africa's class divisions are vast. [programme about a group of South Africans, whose lives have been traced every 7 years since 1992, 12.5.13]

4. When she was introduced to Matthew's mother, she uttered a classic line that defined the chasm she hoped to maintain between the classes. [*Downton Abbey* review, 27.12.12]
5. In the Seventies we had *Upstairs Downstairs*, the double story of two classes in one house, aristocracy and servants. [Item on the top 50 TV shows of all time, 19.4.13]
6. The working-class people in South-East London and Kent, pictured here, had just survived six years of war and night-time air raids. [background to *Call the Midwife!*: 4/2/13]
7. How could a soap opera about an ordinary British working-class street have blundered so far from its origins? [critical review of *Coronation Street*, 20.8.13]
8. Nearly half of working-class viewers watched for four hours a night--a level gauged by sociologists to be 'addictive viewing'. [book review by CS of Joe Moran's *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History Of Britain In Front Of The TV*, 20.8.13]
9. Played by emerging heart-throb Dan Stevens, his Manchester lawyer character was the symbol of a rising 1920s middle-class, bridging the old divisions of aristocracy and servants. [*Downton Abbey* review, 27.12.12]

10. 'I have a big, healthy affinity for the middle class and the blue-collar, and I don't like the way the government is treating them.' [Quotation from American actor James Gandolfini, in obituary/appreciation, 21.6.13]
11. Born in 1946, he never felt he belonged among his upper-class schoolfellows. [profile of Poirot actor David Suchet, 9.11.13]
12. He also thinks we should feel sympathy for Stephen Ward, the go-between who procured showgirls for upper-class sex parties at a Thameside stately home. [programme about Andrew Lloyd Webber and the Profumo Scandal]
13. The class system has been turned inside out, unions have held the country to ransom and have been vanquished, the workplace has changed beyond recognition and women have won equal rights. [book review by CS of Joe Moran's *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History Of Britain In Front Of The TV*, 20.8.13]
14. Though he rarely read crime novels, he sat down with a stack of Agatha Christie books, almost everything she ever wrote about this former Belgian police inspector who became the most celebrated private detective by appointment to the British upper classes. [profile of Poirot actor David Suchet, 9.11.13]

The information about story provenance shows that two of these items are from a David Suchet profile, two from a book review of *Armchair Nation*, and two are from a

*Downton Abbey* review; but the remaining 8 instances come from eight further stories, so there is a reasonable dispersion in this small sample.

### **5.1 Working-classness and middle-classness in CS**

What do these sentences suggest CS thinks about class and its significance in 2013 Britain? Taking them in order they imply that *class injustice* (#1) existed at the time depicted in the *Downton Abbey* serial (1910-1920), although the mention of it in a gently mocking quiz question, attributed to a particular speaker said to be *holding forth again* (implying tiresome iteration, and a haranguing of his addressees), all suggest irony or qualified assent even to this historical claim. Example #2 presupposes that at an earlier time at least there were class practices and pretensions worthy of satirical mockery. Example #3 implies that the UK is unlike South Africa, where the class divisions are *vast*, even though formerly, at fictional Downton Abbey, there was a *chasm* between the landed gentry and the upper-middle professional class (#4). But considering #1 - #3 together, notwithstanding differences of time and place, a picture emerges of British class divisions of the past (so different from the vast ones of South Africa) as something to be observed and laughed at, rather than as a current wrong to be righted. A seemingly alternative typology of class (#5; also #9) focusses chiefly on the



aristocracy and their servants. But #9 somewhat questionably suggests that the division between aristocrats and servants can be *bridged* in some cases: e.g. by someone who is a lawyer, from Manchester, rising, and a heart-throb (but this claim is confused since the Dan Stevens character is actually only bridging the middle/upper class *chasm* mentioned in sentence #4.)

Working-class-ness was a property of some of the people in London and the South-East who survived the Second World War (#6), but it is or was also a property of *streets* (#7), and there is something *ordinary* and *British* about such working-class streets. A search for either *working(-)class* or *middle(-)class* followed by either *road* or *street* in the 98 million word BNC corpus yields no matches other than 4, for *working(-)class street*. The same searches in the CQPWeb Bank of English found 5 uses of *working-class street* and 2 of *middle-class street*. But it was not just certain thoroughfares, ordinary British streets, that projected working-classness. Some of the people watching television could be classified as working-class—there was such a thing as the *working-class viewer* (#8) in the period that Moran’s book discusses; and half of these watched far too much TV (they were addicts), a debility not reportably affecting viewers from other classes. As for sentence #10, this chiefly reminds us that the United States is another country, where assumptions are different; for James Gandolfini there is no contradiction between *middle class* and *blue-collar* (implicitly co-referential).

Example #11 reports a different kind of near-contradiction. It describes actor David Suchet as a person who attended an independent fee-paying school filled with upper-class pupils (it is hinted that schools, as well as their pupils, can be upper-class) but claims not to have *belonged* with those schoolfellows: he was among them but not of them. This outsiderhood may have made it all the more useful that the profiled actor read all of Agatha Christie's books on the fictional detective who acts *by appointment to the British upper classes* (#14), now understood to be plural. Readers of the quoted phrase are expected to recognize the echo of a phrase about elite, and sometimes secret, service to a court or monarchy, reinforcing the idea that anything to do with *the British upper classes* may entail exclusivity. Just as schools and private detectives could be upper-class or not, so could *sex parties* (#12), and their upper-classness might be evidenced in part by a *stately home* venue and the presence of *showgirls*.

Two important things emerge from the small set of *class* mentions in the CS corpus. First, the scant mentions of the working class (just three, making it no more frequent in the CS corpus than *mother-in-law* or *Ibiza*, by comparison with sixteen mentions in PB). Second, the emphasis on class as mentionable only in relation to Britain's past, but not the present.

## ***5.2 The past 60 years....***

Instance #13 of *class* in CS is arguably the most revealing of them all, particularly when considered not just in its framing sentence but as part of the entire paragraph in which it sits:

*The past 60 years have seen the greatest social upheaval in Britain's history. The class system has been turned inside out, unions have held the country to ransom and have been vanquished, the workplace has changed beyond recognition and women have won equal rights. Same-sex marriages and single-parent families are now the norm.*

Here is a social history of Britain since 1963 in just four lines—one version, a partial history. The shaping influence on *Mail* readers of just such compact histories, repeated sufficiently often, could be considerable; with time, it is possible that Stevens's narrative(s) become his readers'.

And yet we must also remember that Stevens is not a political scientist but a journalist, aiming to entertain a diverse readership. Thus his final claim, that single-sex marriages and single-parent families “are now the norm”, clearly absurd if interpreted literally, is better understood as a loosely rhetorical way of saying that these situations are now widely accepted, rather than seen as illegal and shameful, respectively, as they mostly were in Britain circa 1963. The rhetorical looseness may also hint at the speaker's covert antipathy: the use of *is/are now the norm* as here, referring to changed

sociocultural practices (as distinct from more neutral reference to new technologies, or new material arrangements), may imply that the phenomenon so described is now admittedly legal and unexceptional, but for the speaker/writer its ‘normality’ is still surprising or questionable. Of the 67 uses of *now the norm* in the 700-million word Bank of English, a minority are sociocultural rather than material/technological in application. In many of the sociocultural instances, the practice that is ‘now the norm’ is one to be regretted:

*It points out that it is now the norm for both parents to work, often not from choice but to meet a mortgage.*

*A young father was killed recently by a stray bullet as he read his son a bedtime story. And this is now the norm?*

*Who does the dirty work? Subcontracting one's life is now the norm for time-poor westerners.*

Similarly rhetorical is the claim that more social upheaval has happened in the last sixty years than ever before. These having been noted, Stevens’s metaphors, constructions, and word-choices invite comment:

1. The clause *The past 60 years have seen the greatest social upheaval* is a classic ‘ideational metaphor’ in Hallidayan terms, i.e., a construction that is overtly expressed as one kind of process—here, a mental one of seeing—but underlyingly entailing a different kind—here, a material one about unnamed

people changing social relations, with the 60-year timespan being a circumstantial adjunct. Indeed essentially the same construction is one of Halliday's textbook examples (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014: 717). Both Subject and Object, or Senser and Phenomenon in semantic terms, are vague nominalisations that avoid specifying human actors and affected parties. The adopted wording puts the passage of time itself in subject/agentive position, rather than any human groups or historical forces. And even if done by people rather than by the past 60 years, 'seeing' is a significantly more passive process, a powerless witnessing, than a material process such as 'causing' or 'achieving'.

2. In *The class system has been turned inside out*, the precise meaning of the metaphor of 'turning inside out' is obscure (more so than 'turned upside down'), and possibly strategically so. The source may be football match commentary, where a skilful attacking player who flummoxes the defender is said to 'turn them inside out'. It implies fundamental change to the class system but does not specify its nature.
3. *Upheaval* (in the first sentence) always has a negative semantic prosody: 'an upheaval is a big change which causes a lot of trouble, confusion, and worry' (*Collins Cobuild Advanced Learners Dictionary*, p. 1603). So beyond saying

that recent years ‘saw’ great social change, Stevens is expressing the view that these 60 years of social change have been far from an unqualifiedly good thing.

4. *Unions have held the country to ransom and have been vanquished*: A narrative in which specified agents *hold to ransom* but are also *vanquished* would appear to be self-contradicting. But perhaps these predicates are tacitly time-specific, the alleged ransoming occurring in the 1970s and the alleged vanquishing occurring in the 1980s. Again CS’s evaluation is clear, since holding anyone to ransom is by definition criminal; and *vanquished* associates the victor with heroism and moral justification. We are not told whom the unions were vanquished by, but there is a suitable textually-adjacent candidate, which readers may interpret as implied: the unions have been vanquished by *the country*. This would only reinforce a simple opposition expressed in the first clause, the unions vs the country, as if these were well-defined and mutually exclusive groups (whatever ‘the country’ denotes, it does not include the unions). There is a danger, in the interpretation of this paragraph, that the highly questionable separation of ‘the country’ from ‘the unions’ will be extended, as a cancellable presupposition, to the other large groups named in the paragraph, as if they too are separately named here because they are quite separate groupings with no overlap: unions, women, same-sex marriages, and single-parent families. Those

most seriously misrepresented by such a faulty classificatory extension are women, if they are interpreted as separate from rather than instrumental within unions, same-sex marriages, and single-parent families.

5. ...*the workplace has changed beyond recognition*: This is a further highly condensed formulation, where *workplace* is a stock metonym, not to be taken literally, and *beyond recognition* logically cannot be literally true either. But the most important effect stems from the sentence's verb, *change*, used here in a one-participant structure of the kind some linguists call 'ergative', to distinguish them from commoner transitive uses of verbs which have Active and Passive counterparts (*I changed the arrangement/The arrangement was changed (by me)*). In the 'ergative' use of *change*, an underlyingly transitive process (X changed Y) is re-cast with the affected or theme/medium participant in Subject position, and mention of any agent or causer (the X) is completely elided—to the point that it cannot be reintroduced grammatically: e.g., *The arrangement changed*. Thus in the business of concealing agency or initiating causes, ergative constructions are much more effective than agentless passives. In the case of workplace change, CS has decided it is either inappropriate or unnecessary to specify who caused the radical changes, implying that in relation to this part of British history it is more important to note the change than to draw

attention to who or what (but behind most *whats* there is a *who*) brought it about. Given the pressures of journalism, the wording is defensible. But it is often interpreted as saying ‘it just happened’, things change, the world moves inexorably on, propelled by forces far beyond human control, and there is no alternative to our making the best of changed circumstances. It didn’t just happen: the workplace changed because employers and employees adopted new or revised terms and conditions of work and reward, including new technology, none of this happening spontaneously or without agentive effort. Stevens’s ergative construction means that no causers of change need be mentioned at this point, although one key agent of workplace change has already been named in this typographical sentence, albeit only to be shamed: trade unions. In short, *the workplace has changed beyond recognition*, tells the story in a way that avoids crediting the unions or any other agency with effecting this change.

## **6. Conclusions**

Even from the present limited analysis, some firm trends emerge. For PB, class has undoubtedly been important, and middle class life is clearly represented as more desirable than working class life, in terms of material comforts, education, and



articulacy. But being working class is 'not their fault', Black recognizes, and is rather a consequence of the cards life has dealt them; and class distinctions are often distasteful. Furthermore, nowadays (1971) the talented can 'climb out', and into the middle-class. Snobbery and inverted snobbery are both to be deplored. Class-based identity and qualities (middle-class as well as working-class) are still important (several stories are centrally about class), but in some respects he regards them as *passé*, the world having moved on. There is plenty of evidence that Black is conflicted on these questions: on some occasions he half believes class 'no longer matters', or that the divisions are coming down; on other occasions he treats it as a persistent social reality in modern Britain. He shows no sympathy for the more militant forms of class struggle, but over and over again his phrasings reflect an awareness that differences and contrasting identities (of class, race, politics, sexuality, and nationality, among others) are real and merit recognition, and may need sensitive renegotiation. His columns become a forum in which some of these tensions, differences, and perceived and real inequalities, are talked about, in a reflective but conversational way.

In CS, in the *Mail* of 2013, class has disappeared from the discursive agenda of contemporary Britain, like black and white film. It is only mentioned in relation to Britain in the past, or elsewhere. Nor is there some other vocabulary with which social and wealth inequality is discussed. Union-powered class strife is gone, and women have equal rights. If anything, the upheaval and new norms (same-sex marriages etc.)

have taken us too far. Nor is there mention of the UK in 2013 as meritocratic (as there was in PB) or, generally, a land of equal opportunity for all. Perhaps these characteristics now go without saying; or perhaps they are ideas so far from reality for many that it would be inappropriate and ‘demoralising’ to mention them. In the CS reviews, celebrity performers are a major focus of attention. They are profiled via a prototypical narrative of almost Proppian formulaicity: first, a wayward youth or a failing early career; then an addiction, depression, or period of low self-esteem; later a ‘breakthrough’ to huge fame, wealth, and acclaim. The celebrities mostly come from comfortable or ambitious families, rarely emerging from ‘nowhere’. Thus the ‘conversation’ in the CS stories is along different lines from PB’s, and offers a different kind of interest and entertainment.

As the foregoing corpus-based analyses attest, it would be hard to read Black’s columns in 1971 without thinking from time to time about the differences of life chances that followed from differences of economic background, and the complex interaction of characteristics influencing that economic standing: your class, gender, race, age, nationality, education, talents, and personality, to name just some of the contributory factors. But in 2013 it would be hard to read Stevens’s columns and turn your thoughts to contemporary wealth inequalities and the differences with which they are bound up because—if these reviews are our guide—mostly the viewers’ attention (hence the readers’ also) is being turned away from those everyday matters and towards

the jungle, the dance floor, the *Bake Off* kitchen, the sports arena, the talent show studio, and *Downton Abbey* circa 1915: a range of theatrical settings, where viewers can marvel at the spectacle of Olympians performing in exceptional ways. Nevertheless, even if these *Daily Mail* TV reviews can be regarded as in some ways symptomatic and representative of changes in the national newspapers' values and norms, they are still only a small sampling of a larger shift, a hidden persuasion imperceptible to the daily reader.

Methodologically the article demonstrates some of the difficulties encountered when seeking to capture, by sampling, discursive representation and changes in discursive representation across time, where the phenomenon of interest (wealth inequality and attitudes to it) tends to be dispersed across many texts and imbricated with a great diversity of more explicitly-addressed topics. Controlled analysis is more complex than in the situation where a seemingly categorical label, assumed to be indexical, can be the focus of analysis (e.g., *Blacks, lesbians, Catholic priests, madrassah, junior doctors*, etc.). But I would contend that it is methodologically valid to compare the discourses of just two prominent journalists, sampled fairly extensively and across the entirety of the two years in question. These single-author corpora are arguably more influential on ordinary *Mail* readers than similar quantities of editorial comment (which will be from diverse authors) or of direct-discourse material from single politicians, with all the suspicions that they may provoke. It is more important

that Black and Stevens are influential (on readers) than that they are 'representative' (of the newspaper): my interest is less in profiling the *Mail* than in exploring the possible ideological effects of its discourse on its readers.

Methodologically, also, the article has argued for a 'Key Word in *Sentential* Context' basis of analysis, in which the assumptions and presuppositions of the actual text are reformulated, without interpretive elaboration, as propositions. In future work the aim will be to seek a defensible procedure for synthesizing these propositions (e.g., all Peter Black's or Christopher Stevens's assertions about class) into a narrative format, which best tells the story being covertly told to readers, a story they are being encouraged to accept and live by.

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