

UNIVERZITA PARDUBICE  
FAKULTA FILOZOFICKÁ

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

2023

Barbora Bohatová

University of Pardubice  
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

**Literary Image of Margaret Thatcher's policy**

Barbora Bohatová

Bachelor Thesis

2023

Univerzita Pardubice  
Fakulta filozofická  
Akademický rok: 2020/2021

# ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: **Barbora Bohatová**  
Osobní číslo: **H19403**  
Studijní program: **B0231A090018 Anglický jazyk**  
Specializace: **Anglický jazyk pro odbornou praxi**  
Téma práce: **Literární obraz politiky Margaret Thatcherové**  
Zadávací katedra: **Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

## Zásady pro vypracování

Studentka se nejprve zaměří na obecnou historickou situaci ve Velké Británii ve druhé polovině 20. století. Konkrétně poté rozebere podstatu politiky Margaret Thatcherové a především její sociální dopady v různých oblastech Británie. Konkrétně bude tyto aspekty reflektovat v analýze díla Billy Elliot. Protože se jedná o dílo z oblasti populární kultury, bude práce obsahovat i krátkou charakteristiku této oblasti.

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:  
Rozsah grafických prací:  
Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**  
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Burges, Melvin. *Billy Elliot*. Glasgow: Egmont UK, 2011  
Seldon, Anthony, Daniel Collings. *Britain under Thatcher*. London: Pearson Education Limited, 2000  
Crafts, Nicholas, Ian Gazeley and Andrew Newell. *Work and Pay in 20th Century Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007  
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Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D.**  
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **1. května 2021**  
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **2. května 2022**

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**doc. Mgr. Jiří Kubeš, Ph.D.**  
děkan

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**Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D.**  
vedoucí katedry

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D., M. Litt. for her guidance, support, and time. I am also thankful to my family and friends for their support during writing this thesis.

## **ANNOTATION**

This bachelor thesis focuses on the era of the government of Margaret Thatcher and reflects it in the literary work *Billy Elliot*. The musical, used as a primary source for the analytical part, is defined and provided with the appropriate literary background. The thesis analyses the situation of British society at the time with an emphasis on social class and the situation of the miners' community and the depiction of the miners' strike of 1984-1985.

## **KEYWORDS**

Margaret Thatcher, Thatcherism, Miners' strike 1984-1985, Billy Elliot, Popular culture

## **NÁZEV**

Literární obraz politiky Margaret Thatcherové

## **ANOTACE**

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na dobu vlády Margaret Thatcherové a její vyobrazení v díle *Billy Elliot*. Muzikál, jež je zde použit jako hlavní zdroj pro analytickou část, je definován a zasazen do příslušného literárního kontextu. Práce analyzuje situaci tehdejší Britské společnosti s důrazem na sociální třídu a situaci v dělnické komunitě a vyobrazení stávků horníků v letech 1984-1985.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Margaret Thatcherová, Thatcherismus, Stávka horníků 1984-1985, Billy Elliot, Populární kultura

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## Introduction

Margaret Thatcher is considered a controversial political figure. She was the first woman prime minister of the United Kingdom and held the position for eleven years. During her time in the office, Britain experienced the worst economic situation since the Second World War. Thatcher is arguably most known for putting Britain's mining sector to death. Thatcher's policies, particularly her staunch opposition to labour unions and aggressive privatisation of state-owned industries, have devastated the mining town's economy and led to massive unemployment in Britain. This has made her deeply unpopular among working-class and miners' families, who saw her as an enemy of their way of life.

This difficult period is displayed in the story *Billy Elliot* which depicts an eleven-year-old boy, Billy, who comes from a working-class family. His father and brother are miners who are currently both on strike. Their lives are, therefore, directly affected by Thatcher's policies. But Billy does not want to be a miner like his father; he wants to be a ballet dancer. Billy's affection towards ballet is misunderstood in his community, as it is considered effeminate. Thanks to support from his ballet teacher and, in the end, also from his father and his community, Billy breaks the class and gender stereotypes and fulfils his dream.

This thesis deals with the depiction of the period of the Thatcher government during the miners' strike of 1984-1985. The primary source for the analytical parts is *Billy Elliot: The Musical* and the book *Billy Elliot* by Melvin Burgess, based on a motion picture screenplay by Lee Hall. While the musical enriches the story with songs, often used to express emotions, the book is written in ich-form and contains the character's thoughts. As musical is one of the genres of popular culture, the first chapter of the thesis describes the definitions and themes of popular culture and its depiction in the musical. As Thatcher-hatred among miners is one of the musical's central themes, political satire is also emphasised.

The second chapter discusses theatre and the differences between the musical and written form of *Billy Elliot*. The features of social, musical, and political theatre are analysed. One of the main differences between the two versions is the focus on music and dance in the musical. The book focuses more on Billy's journey and the social and economic struggles of the mining community, while the musical puts a greater emphasis on the transformative power of music and dance in Billy's life. Another difference is the use of the stage as a storytelling medium.

The musical incorporates elaborate dance numbers, larger-than-life sets, and special effects to create a visually stunning and emotionally powerful theatrical experience. This allows the story to be told more theatrical and immersively than in the book.

The third chapter examines Britain's social situation in the 1980s. The start of the economic crisis is reflected, which was vital to Thatcher's government's initial decisions. Given that the story's main characters are from the working class, the British class system is essential to the thesis. The people most impacted by the policies were miners' families and working-class members. The significance of community and camaraderie among working-class people is emphasised in the story and depicted in the analytical part as well as classes' stereotypes towards homosexuality. The final chapter describes the miners' strike of 1984-1985 and its impact on British society, especially the miners' community. The analytical part reflects the tense situation in the miners' community. Miners who were desperate and decided to continue to work and not attend the strike were segregated and rejected by their former friends and colleagues. Strikes were brutal and led to many injuries. However, the end of the strike did not destroy miners' sense of community and brotherhood.

## Popular Culture

Popular culture is strongly associated with the nation, its culture, and its society. This is because popular culture's development relies on the country's broader cultural development. This chapter examines how popular culture evolved in Britain, how it was perceived, and how it affected society.

The definition of popular culture has been a topic of discussion probably since the creation of the term. John Storey suggests that popular culture is always defined as an individual category in contrast to other conceptual categories, such as folk culture, mass culture, or work culture.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, in their article *Popular Culture*, Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson argue that popular culture includes beliefs and practices of both – folk and mass cultures.<sup>2</sup> Thus, they believe popular culture is a combination of more cultural categories. Storey, therefore, describes folk culture as a culture labelled by intellectuals in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He sees folk culture, especially folk songs and folklore, as the first concept of popular culture.

But what does the word 'popular' mean? Generally, this word is defined as 'something in favour of a large number of people' or 'created by people for people'. Storey agrees this would be the most straightforward and logical definition of the term and would possibly be approved by many. The numbers of sales of books, albums or movies could easily examine this. However, he assumes this would be redundant. Storey's idea is that unless we can agree on a threshold below which something remains culture and above which it becomes popular culture, we might discover that something is generally favoured or well-liked by many people so much that it is practically meaningless as a conceptual definition of popular culture.<sup>3</sup> Similar to Storey, David Glover and Scott McCracken believe it would be inaccurate to state that the success of popular fiction is solely dependent on sales. The concept of the 'popular' has a more extensive and nuanced political and cultural background, influencing how popular literature has been interpreted.<sup>4</sup> This definition suggests that popular culture could be understood as culture by people.

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<sup>1</sup> John Storey, *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, "Popular Culture" *Annual Review of Sociology* 12 (1986): 48

<sup>3</sup> John Storey, *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> David Glover and Scott McCracken, *The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 3.

According to Storey, the other possible definition is a degradation of the mass culture of the working class. The first thing that supporters of this idea try to establish is that popular culture is an unavoidably commercial culture.<sup>5</sup> Mass culture includes television, films, novels, and magazines, which is why it is easily available to most people. For some cultural critics, mass culture was invented in America and imported to Europe. This term is known as Americanization. For many young people in Britain throughout the 1950s (one of the primary eras of Americanization), American culture served as a liberating force against the dreary realities of British daily life. It is also evident that mistrust of rising popular culture, regardless of national origin, is directly tied to the fear of Americanization.<sup>6</sup> One of the characteristic elements of popular culture in America was the adoration of celebrities. Celebrities began to appear in the 1950s and 1960s, along with the already mentioned arrival of television, movies, and other forms of entertainment. According to Henderson, the 20<sup>th</sup> century's rise of celebrity-based culture can be partly linked to America's shift from a producing to a consuming society.<sup>7</sup> People like Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe gained worldwide fame and are still famous today.

Popular culture is also often used as the opposite of high culture, usually called the elite culture. Storey states: "Popular culture, in this definition, is a residual category, there to accommodate cultural texts and practices which fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture."<sup>8</sup> In *Inventing Popular Culture*, Storey takes the example of Shakespeare's plays and opera. In the nineteenth century, opera was available and in favour of people of all classes. Mid-nineteenth-century modernists decided to purify arts by distinguishing culture on high and the "other" culture. This led to the institutionalisation of the connection between class and culture. In order to elevate opera or Shakespeare's plays into high culture, they had to be removed from mainstream popular entertainment. They did not become unpopular but were made unpopular.<sup>9</sup> In other words, opera and Shakespeare went from being popular forms of amusement to a culture appreciated only by the few. Dennis R. Hall also supports this thought. He claims popular culture was perceived negatively because of the defensive response of those who consider themselves the guardians of elite and folk culture and who see the development of

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<sup>5</sup> Storey, *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> Storey, *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Amy Henderson, *OAH Magazine of History* 6, No. 4, (Spring, 1992), pp. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Storey, *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture* (New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 37-46.

popular culture as nothing less than an attack on the foundation of civilisation.<sup>10</sup> However, despite high and low cultures being perceived as opposites, according to Harmon, they do have something in common – the portrayal of folk culture. The folk involved are frequently "unschooled" in elite or popular culture or reject it. In recent years urban folk culture, prevalent among black or immigrant communities in cities, has replaced rural folk culture.<sup>11</sup>

A new term, *kitsch*, was invented to describe low culture. Dwight MacDonalD later popularised the term. In his article *A Theory of Mass Culture*, he states that "mines" high Culture like ungrateful frontiersmen mining the soil, taking its wealth and leaving nothing behind. Kitsch also starts to draw on its past as it matures, and some of it drifts so far from high Culture as to seem completely unconnected from it.<sup>12</sup> Mass culture, therefore also popular culture, is, in his opinion, characterised by vulgarity and kitsch, which is in opposition to high culture.

Popular culture defines the arts, events, myths and beliefs, and artefacts widely shared by a population at a particular time. Because popular culture emerged in the late eighteenth century as a reaction to elite culture and as a result of advances in technology, literacy, and living standards that created a middle class during that time, the characteristics of popular culture and elite culture can be understood in relation to one another. The eighteenth century served as the foundation for a 'large market for entertainment, with definable demands and responses' because of its expanding population that moved from Europe to America or congregated in urban areas. Education and literacy among the middle class produced an audience that started to form its tastes and standards after the revolution reduced the power of the aristocratic classes.<sup>13</sup> The focus of popular culture was on people and society – what people and society are and their reflections.

According to Harmon, popular culture aims to better understand our beliefs, fears, hopes, gains and losses as participants in mass culture and how we "process" and use popular culture in our personal and professional lives.<sup>14</sup> This also supports the previous thought that popular culture

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<sup>10</sup> Dennis R. Hall, "The Study of Popular Culture: Origins and Developments" *Studies in Popular Culture* 6 (1983): 16.

<sup>11</sup> Gary L. Harmon "On the Nature and Functions of Popular Culture" *Studies in Popular Culture* 6 (1983): 5.

<sup>12</sup> Dwight MacDonalD, "A Theory of Mass Culture," *Diogenes*, No. 3, (Summer 1953): 1.

<sup>13</sup> Harmon, "On the Nature and Functions of Popular Culture" *Studies in Popular Culture*: 6.

<sup>14</sup> Harmon, "On the Nature and Functions of Popular Culture" *Studies in Popular Culture*, 4.

is mainly meant for people. By portraying daily topics from “normal people’s” lives, popular culture had great success, not only among these classes.

One of the elements of popular culture that is crucial for the thesis is political satire. Political satire has many functions and reasons for becoming so popular, especially in Britain. It has its origins in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Netherlands. In Britain, writers at the time were Catholics or Puritans, and they were permitted to express their opinions freely on topics close to their hearts, which they had not previously been able to do<sup>15</sup>. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when caricaturists like William Hogarth and James Gillray depicted politicians and society with a satirical view, the political dimension of British caricatures emerged. When the term "caricature" first appeared in English in the seventeenth century, it referred to prints intended to be humorous or satirical. Caricatures have roots in ancient Greece, where actors used masks to imitate specific people or emotions.

Though it is used differently, humour is a crucial component of both comedy and satire. The use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule in current politics or other pressing concerns is used to highlight and expose incompetence or vices. According to the authors of the article “*Laughing and Thinking? The Appreciation, Processing, and Persuasiveness of Political Satire*”, political satire can open new perspectives on political issues, make the "taken-for-granted" less obvious, and have an impact on how people acquire attitudes.<sup>16</sup> But Glazier has the opposite opinion. She states that recent studies indicate that political satire could increase cynicism and reduce political efficacy.<sup>17</sup> It is, therefore, clear that political satire evokes various responses from the public.

During her government, Thatcher was often depicted in satirical shows, mocked by comedians, or mentioned in music and pop songs. One of the well-known series was *Spitting Image*, a satirical television puppet show. The show was first introduced in 1984. The series includes parodies of current celebrities and prominent leaders, including the British royal family, Margaret Thatcher, and John Major. As Brian McNair points out, any media outlet has two complementing responsibilities: it conveys the politicians' message and offers a journalistic

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<sup>15</sup> Nicole Allardyce, “Political Plays of the Restoration” *The Modern Language Review* 16, No. 3/4 (1921): 224.

<sup>16</sup> Mike Boukes, H. G. Boomgaarden, M. Moorman and C. de Vreese. “At Odds: Laughing and Thinking? The Appreciation, Processing, and Persuasiveness of Political Satire” *Journal of Communication* (2015), 722.

<sup>17</sup> Rebecca A. Glazier, “Satire and Efficacy in the Political Science Classroom” *Political Science and Politics* 47, No. 4 (2014): 867.

bias. In this regard, *Spitting Image* had to base its parodies on factual information.<sup>18</sup> Despite the BBC and ITV's self-censorship on topics like the Falklands War or the IRA attacks, it was nevertheless able to portray the British political scene in an original, irreverent way.

A puppet of Margaret Thatcher is displayed in her hometown Grantham. She is frequently portrayed in the series as an uncompromising politician whom the British people hated, despite the fact that in real life, she had many followers that allowed her to hold onto power for eleven years. Some scenes are summarised in Golder's article. Thatcher's puppet is, for example, presented as an authoritarian school mistress, often aggressive or more masculine, by wearing men's clothes or being called "sir". She even meets Adolf Hitler and discusses with him contemporary British affairs without recognising him. She is thus shown to lack common sense or, at the very least, to have no comprehension of social norms.<sup>19</sup> Kiene Brillenburg claims that the program itself received a lot of criticism when it first debuted since it was seen as disrespectful to politicians and the royal family.<sup>20</sup> But there are people who have different opinions. In an interview from 2008, Peter Fluck, one of the creators of *Spitting Image*, admitted that he despised Margaret Thatcher and said that one of the show's most significant accomplishments had been exposing her nasty tendencies. He also mentioned that many people still thank him for helping them to get through Thatcherism. In his opinion, People desired a program that would address these challenges head-on.<sup>21</sup> Thatcher appears to be a favourite subject for many comedians and satirists due to the numerous contentious actions and choices she was forced to make while in office. Many people favoured political satire because they disapproved of her government and her policies or were negatively affected by them. Humour and comedy helped people to get through difficult times.

This thesis analyses *Billy Elliot the Musical*, based on the original movie, created by Lee Hall as a motion picture *Billy Elliot* in 2000. In the musical, there are numerous elements of popular culture.

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<sup>18</sup> Brian McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication* (London: Routledge, 2011), 10-11.

<sup>19</sup> Yves Golder, "Margaret Thatcher in *Spitting Image*" *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* 24, No. 4 (2019): 3-6.

<sup>20</sup> Kiene Brillenburg, "Spitting Image and Pre-Televisual Political Satire: Graphics and Puppets to Screens", *Image and Narrative* 12, No. 3, (2011): 115.

<sup>21</sup> Chris Hastings, "*Spitting Image* Secrets Revealed by Creator", *The Telegraph*, 6 April 2008, last accessed 19 February 2023

The musical's composer is the well-known British musician Elton John. According to the article in *The Independent*, John immediately agreed to write the music for the musical because the original movie moved him. The reason was that he saw himself in Billy – he claimed that the concept of a parent unable to comprehend his son's creative goals mirrors his childhood. But in the end, Billy gets more support than he had from his father.<sup>22</sup> The musical had the potential to become well-known due to the success of the original film, but the fact that a celebrity composed the music was undoubtedly advantageous. One of the defining features of the pop-culture era is the adoration of celebrities. In the musical, there are numerous appearances of references to celebrities. However, depending on the year the musical's version was produced, the names mentioned in the musical are not necessarily the same. When Billy tries to convince his dad that not only “poufs” do ballet, in the original version (2005), he gives as an example Rudolph Nureyev, while in the newer version (2014), he mentions Wayne Sleep. While Nureyev is a ballet dancer from the Soviet Union whose peak of fame was during the 1950s and who appeared in many classical ballets, Sleep is a British dancer who has been famous since the 1970s and participated mainly in more modern works. The change of names suggests the authors and editors wanted to catch the spectator's attention by mentioning someone they might know. Referring to celebrities also makes the story more real for the spectator because it gives a feeling that the characters of the musical are real people, not actors.

One of the musical's central themes in *Billy Elliot* is dancing and ballet. While the musical is a popular culture genre, ballet is indisputably identified as high culture. Hence, there is an intriguing merging of the two cultures, historically fiercely opposed. Throughout the work, miners and Billy's father and brother perceive ballet as an activity for women. Billy's father considers men who do ballet effeminate and refers to them as homosexuals: “...you're here, running around here like a...like a fruit!”<sup>23</sup> This dismissive approach towards high culture portrays an overall view of high culture through the eyes of a working-class or lower-class member. For Billy's father, there are other, more masculine sports Billy should focus on, such as boxing. He mentions this in a book, but his refusal of ballet is also evident in the musical. While in the musical, father yells at Billy and Mrs Wilkinson after he bursts into the ballet class,

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<sup>22</sup> Louise Jury Arts Correspondent, “Elton John writes 'Billy Elliot' the musical because 'he's like me'”, *Independent*, 23 June 2004, last accessed 20 February 2023 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/news/elton-john-writes-billy-elliott-the-musical-because-he-s-like-me-733199.html>

<sup>23</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, (2005; Universal Stage Productions, 2014), 0:46:36.



in the book, he first takes Billy home, where they talk. After grandmother enters the conversation saying she also did ballet, he tells Billy: “For your nan. For girls, Billy. Not for lads. Lads do football or boxing or wrestling or summat.”<sup>24</sup> According to Ashley’s study, the stories in which a guy challenges traditional discourses of masculinity that claim hobbies like singing or dancing are inappropriate for young men and hence “gay” are well-liked by media. As he states, *Billy Elliot*, who depicts the ascent of a working-class “lad” from the North to the Royal Ballet, served as a landmark example. Any boy in the news for dance (of any genre) for a number of years following its release was likely to be referred to as the “Billy Elliot boy.”<sup>25</sup> But it was not only during the few years after the musical’s release. In a BBC article from 2017, a 10-year-old boy from Suffolk is also called the “next Billy Elliot”. It is not only because he is doing ballet but because he plans to attend ballet school in Birmingham, which means he must move away from his parents.<sup>26</sup> That a musical character can be used to characterise a person merely goes to show how prevalent popular culture has been. The fact that even children born after the musical's debut are familiar with the plot and can draw connections further demonstrates *Billy Elliot's* widespread appeal.

Mrs Wilkinson, who symbolises a feminine figure in Billy’s life and is a member of the middle class, has a different opinion. She believes that a male doing ballet is not unusual in any way. She is the only person who has supported Billy since his first ballet lesson and gave him the idea to attend Royal Ballet School. This may be because she considers him to be a natural talent, as well as the fact that her daughter is not particularly enthusiastic about ballet. The day before the first audition, Mrs Wilkinson tells Billy: “Now, listen, you can do this, Billy. You’ve worked so hard, and I know you can do it. You just have to forget about everything else. Do it for you.”<sup>27</sup> Billy then hugs her tightly. She provides him with the support he does not receive from his father. However, this is precisely how his mother would possibly support him. Billy's mother, as the letter from her implies, would always be there for him in his time of need and would support him in any situation:

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<sup>24</sup> Melvin Burgess, *Billy Elliot* (Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books, 2001), 39.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Ashley, “Time to Confront Willis's Lads with a Ballet Class? A Case Study of Educational Orthodoxy and White Working-Class Boys” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 30, No. 2 (March, 2009): 178

<sup>26</sup> “Boy, 10, dreams of being the next 'Billy Elliot',” *BBC News*, 5 May 2017, last accessed 4 March, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-england-suffolk-39817324>

<sup>27</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:05:25.

“Know that I will always be proud to have known you.  
Proud that you were mine, proud in everything.  
And you must promise me this, Billy.  
Always be yourself, Billy, and you always will be true.”<sup>28</sup>

Billy receives much-needed support from Mrs Wilkinson, who takes the role of a mother's affection. This is only proven by the fact that he allows Mrs Wilkinson to read the letter from his mother. Debbie, Mrs Wilkinson's daughter, similarly views the notion of a guy doing ballet as ordinary. Although she is not very supportive of Billy, she is the one who tells Billy: “Not only poufs do ballet, look at that Wayne Sleep”<sup>29</sup>. This argument Billy later uses against his father. The middle class is therefore depicted as more open-minded towards accepting male ballet dancers than the working-class members.

Billy's brother, Tony, does not understand Billy's enthusiasm towards ballet. When he finds out that Billy wants to go to an audition at Royal Ballet School, he gets mad and aggressive. Tony screams at Mrs Wilkinson: “Ballet? What are you trying to do, make him a scab for the rest of his life?”<sup>30</sup> Even though the term “scab” is used for people crossing the picket line during the strike and continuing to work, Tony uses it as a definition of an outcast. He blames her for being ignorant about the current situation in the village and says that she is only doing this for her own gratification. While screaming, “Go on then. If you're a bloody ballet dancer, then let's be having you. [...] C'mon, dance you little bastard!”<sup>31</sup> he puts Billy on a table and forces him to dance, humiliating him in front of other miners. Tony is so committed to the idea of the strike that he dismisses the possibility that anyone could care about anything else. Billy's father provides Tony with the following justification for his decision to continue working in a mine:

“No one else can give what I can give.  
He could go, and he could shine,  
Not just stay here counting time  
Son, we have got the chance to let him live.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:15:00.

<sup>29</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:35:05.

<sup>30</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:18:30.

<sup>31</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:19:30.

<sup>32</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:52:32.

When Tony finds out their father wants to support Billy in his dream to become a dancer and therefore go back to the mine, he gets angry, and they fight. Tony says: “It’s not about a bairn who wants to dance, it’s about our history.”<sup>33</sup>, which implies that his anger is not directed at support in Billy's dancing but rather at his father for giving up the strike's purpose. Even though they found a way to get money for the audition, Tony is still angry: “What’s left here, eh? [...] What’s the point in trying to keep your community together? What’s the point in trying to keep your family together, anyway?”<sup>34</sup> Tony undoubtedly knows the miners' strike will not end well and blames everyone else for not being dedicated enough. However, in the end, he is happy for Billy. When Billy gets his letter from Royal Ballet School, he celebrates with others. So, it is hard to say whether he despised Billy's desire to be a dancer or whether it was about Billy pursuing his dream while his own dream was crushed and not sharing the dedication for the miners’ unity and strike.

Another person who supports Billy in dancing ballet is Michael, his best friend. When Billy tells him he likes dancing ballet, he does not seem shocked, calls it “bloody weird”, and asks whether Billy will wear a tutu. But later, they sing:

“If you want to be a dancer, dance.  
If you want to be a miner, mine.”<sup>35</sup>

Michael, therefore, sees dancing as a regular activity, despite the dancer’s gender. In the book, he mentions the reason why he is happy that Billy does ballet. He finds it admirable because boys in school tease Billy for being a dancer. He wants to support Billy in activities he enjoys, but Michael is also glad he is not the only “weird one”: “And then he took up ballet, and after that, he was just as weird as I was, and I stopped worrying about it.”<sup>36</sup>

As mentioned in the theoretical part, a common feature of popular culture is humour and satire. Political satire is one of the main themes of *Billy Elliot*. Throughout the whole work, miners make jokes about Margaret Thatcher.

At the beginning of the musical, Billy’s family is in the kitchen. While listening to Thatcher's speech is playing in the background, Billy's brother Tony is making a banner for a strike. His

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<sup>33</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:53:00.

<sup>34</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:57:07.

<sup>35</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:55:04.

<sup>36</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 52.

father turns the radio down, saying: “Turn that bloody witch off!”<sup>37</sup> The book explicitly mentions the placards statement: ‘No surrender!’ ‘Thatcher out!’ ‘SCAB! SCAB! SCAB!’<sup>38</sup>. Father is the one who is instead trying to avoid hearing about Thatcher, while Tony is interested in what is happening and participates actively in strikes. At the boxing lesson, George, a boxing trainer, screams at one of the boys: “D’ya call them press-ups, you lazy little git? I’ve seen more life in Maggie Thatcher’s knickers.”<sup>39</sup> Thatcher became a daily joke, an idiom used in everyday conversation.

The musical's second act, set in 1984–1985, opens with the song *Merry Christmas, Maggie Thatcher*, during a “temporary soup kitchen annual Christmas party”.<sup>40</sup> The miners and miners’ wives wear a mask of Margaret Thatcher’s face and have her puppets. The most controversial part of the whole song is undoubtedly the following part, where miners express their hatred towards Thatcher by indicating that they are counting the days until her death:

“Merry Christmas, Maggie Thatcher  
We all celebrate today  
Cos it’s one day closer to your death.”<sup>41</sup>

The song was played even after Thatcher’s death in 2013. As Trueman wrote in *The Guardian* article, which was released the day after Thatcher’s death, the creators of *Billy Elliot: The Musical* took the highly unusual step of inviting audience members to vote on whether a song calling for her death should be performed or taken out as a token of respect hours after the revelation of her death on Monday at the age of 87. The piece was performed as usual at the Victoria Palace theatre following a “near-unanimous verdict” in which only three persons opposed its inclusion.<sup>42</sup> One of the miners is dressed as Thatcher, in her signature blue suit and union jack shorts, imitating Hitler’s gestures. Another part of the Christmas welfare is a “political puppet workshop forum”, where are conservatives and police compared to fascists. A massive puppet of Margaret Thatcher with a wicked visage makes an appearance towards the song's end while ballet girls are singing:

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<sup>37</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:11:50.

<sup>38</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:16:43.

<sup>40</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:25:45.

<sup>41</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:28:40.

<sup>42</sup> Matt Trueman “*Billy Elliot audience puts Thatcher to one last vote*”. *The Guardian* 9 April 2013, last accessed 26 February 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/apr/09/thatcher-vote-by-billy-elliott-audience>

“...oh, my darling Heseltine,  
you’re a tosser, you’re a wanker,  
and you’re just a Tory swine.”<sup>43</sup>

This section implies that there was a particular animosity towards the entire government as well as Thatcher. This is supported by the song's opening, which begins with the words: “Oh, It’s bloody Maggie Thatcher and Michael Heseltine”<sup>44</sup> and where Heseltine is mentioned as well. The musical is filled with jokes about Thatcher and the government. The book is more moderate in this regard. Billy’s father ponders Thatcher’s reasons for closing pits: “ [...] That’s Thatcher. She must have a fist where her heart is. The whole community is going to be left to rot. She just doesn’t care. She doesn’t care about us – that goes without saying – but she doesn’t care about anything else either.”<sup>45</sup> In conclusion, it is evident that the musical *Billy Elliot* and its accompanying book convey a strong sense of resentment towards the government and particularly towards Margaret Thatcher. The lines of the song, as well as various jokes throughout the musical, highlight this animosity. Ultimately, the portrayal of Thatcher in *Billy Elliot* reflects the frustration and anger felt by many members of the community whose lives were directly affected by her policies.

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<sup>43</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:31:01.

<sup>44</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:28:26.

<sup>45</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 10.

## Theatre

One of the most popular ways of depicting society is theatre. The theatre of ancient Greece is a significant influence on the modern Western theatre. Modernisation of certain performance arts, such as ballet, cinema or theatre, led to the professionalisation of these arts.

During the 1970s, when new ways of engaging in social and political life were sought after, one of the most powerful forms of self-representation and a powerful cultural force was discovered. According to Schininà, the result was the theatre seen as a component of show business, a widely disseminated theatricality evolved and permeated schools, institutions, political groups, marginal communities, suburbs, and cities, while new models of dramaturgy, like collective work and the workshop theatre, also emerged.<sup>46</sup> Theatre, therefore, became a form of communication in society.

As already mentioned, new forms of theatre were discovered during the 1970s. Until then, the theatre had a primarily aesthetic function. Due to the emergence of identity politics, there has been a drastic division of the public into numerous groups of people who share a common ideology, religion, gender, sexual orientation, race, country, ethnicity, etc. Therefore, many new forms of theatre emerged.

One of the new forms is social theatre. James Thompson and Richard Schechner described social theatre as the theatre of specific agendas. According to them, social theatre is staged in a variety of settings, including prisons, refugee camps, and hospitals, as well as schools, orphanages, and senior living facilities and is mostly performed by local residents, disabled people, young prisoners, and others, frequently those from marginalised, underprivileged, and vulnerable communities.<sup>47</sup> This enormous change of themes only confirms the overall change in the perception of the theatre and a greater emphasis on society.

The form of theatre essential for this thesis is political theatre. The interest in theatre within the labour movement in England dates back to the medieval period. More recently, political theatres were particularly prevalent in the 1930s. About 150 of these organisations staged plays in

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<sup>46</sup> Guglielmo Schininà "Here We Are: Social Theatre and Some Open Questions about Its Developments" *TDR* (1988-) 48, No. 3 (2004): 18-19.

<sup>47</sup> James Thompson and Richard Schechner, "Why "Social Theatre"?" *The Drama Review: TDR* 48, No. 3 (2004): 11-12.

England at the start of that decade in accordance with Soviet Communist beliefs. The Cold War and the economic boom that followed the war significantly impacted the English labour movement, and the political theatre was rare until the 1960s. The production of Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* led to a theatre's development of interest in working-class issues.<sup>48</sup> Kirby defines political theatre as a theatre which takes sides and concerns politics, the central theme which distinguishes it from other theatres. It discusses political concepts and ideas, frequently in an effort to refute or support a specific political stance. However, the government is not the only active subject in political theatre. It specifically alludes to current political difficulties and problems. It has intelligence.<sup>49</sup> So, the focus of political theatre is necessarily not the government or the politics but its consequences and impact on society. Kirby and Shank agree that the main aim of political theatre is to reach the correct audience. This audience was masses, working-class people, who were unable to gather information elsewhere. According to Kirby, the majority of the population is assumed to be illiterate, probably semiliterate, and of low intelligence; many political plays purposefully employ crude, stupid, or juvenile methods and ideas. This creates a "we vs them" feeling that is non-existent in other theatres.<sup>50</sup> However, Kirby also states it would be wrong to assume that influencing and changing the masses' opinion is not the case in all political theatre. It only raises particular concerns, investigates difficulties, and poses certain queries. It does not promote specific options, is not instructional, and does not proselytise. He even argues that political theatre may give spectators the impression that they are not alone in their opinions and that others share their passion and objectives. It can therefore be a powerful factor for political change.<sup>51</sup> Shank's opinion differs, as he states that political plays are rather ideological. In conclusion, both authors agree that political theatre is not necessarily only about politics. While Shank sees it mainly as a tool for political manipulation, Kirby assumes political theatre may broaden people's political knowledge and give them emotional and intellectual support for their beliefs.

The final form of theatre crucial for the thesis is musical theatre. This theatre form consists of two main genres – opera and musical. The main difference is that opera is considered a part of "high culture". While opera originated at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, musical comes from

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<sup>48</sup> Theodore Shank, "Political Theatre in England" *Performing Arts Journal* 2, No. 3 (1978): 48-49.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Kirby, "On Political Theatre" *The Drama Review: TDR* 19, No. 2, (1975): 131.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Kirby, "On Political Theatre" 134.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Kirby, "On Political Theatre" 134.

America, where it appeared in the 1920s on Broadway. According to Platt's and Becker's article, musical theatre had a significant impact on theatre aesthetics and was a crucial phase in the modernisation of theatre. It made strong assertions about being a distinctively modern cultural form. It interacted with ideas about the modern world in complex ways, documenting and influencing current attitudes toward class, gender, and national identities as well as articulating with mainstream political ideologies.<sup>52</sup> A musical can be described as a combination of song, dance, and spoken word. Osolsobě, a theatre theorist and specialist in musical theatre, describes a musical as "a theatre that talks, sings, and dances."<sup>53</sup> Musicals typically emphasise entertainment more than conveying a negative message to the audience. Another difference between opera and musical is its characters. Musical characters significantly evolve, whereas opera characters do not change over the course of the plot. As Osolsobě states, the transformation of the hero sometimes takes place in stages, and it is the source of the audience's emotions - the audience cheers for its heroes and rejoices in their reconciliation at each turning point in the play, releasing the audience's emotional energy and resulting in cathartic bliss.<sup>54</sup> The aim of the musical is, therefore, to entertain, catch the attention of the audience and fill it with emotions and joy.

Both *Billy Elliot: The Musical* and the book *Billy Elliot* contain themes of social realism. The aim of social realism is to expose the true socio-political circumstances of the working class in order to criticise the systems of power that underlie these circumstances. As mentioned in the theoretical part of this chapter, social theatre focuses on marginal communities - communities that share a shared racial or ethnic background, religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or political stance. As this chapter focuses on theatre and its genres, *Billy Elliot: The Musical* will be primarily discussed.

The story describes the current situation in Britain from the perspective of working-class members. Hence, it highlights the problems and struggles of the working class. The miners, members of the working class, are going through a difficult time during the strike. If the play were presented in 1984, miners would undoubtedly respond favourably since it is told from the viewpoint of working-class members and mine workers. The play would be seen as a support

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<sup>52</sup> Len Platt and Tobias Becker, "Popular Musical Theatre, Cultural Transfer, Modernities: London/Berlin, 1890-1930" *Theatre Journal* 65, No.1 (2013): 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ivo Osolsobě, "Muzikál je, když... 1. Vyd." (Praha - Bratislava: Supraphon. 1967), 7. (own translation)

<sup>54</sup> Osolsobě, "Muzikál je, když... 1. Vyd.", 85. (own translation)



for those individuals. The same could be said about homosexuality, another theme crucial to the story. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the story's main themes is politics. The story describes the situation of the working class. It is, therefore, obvious that Thatcher's politics is being reviled. There is no doubt that the working class is portrayed as being less strong in comparison with the government. The viewer might feel sympathy and pity for the miners. However, the narrative would be very different if it were written from the viewpoint of a member of the middle class or a politician. The third chapter of the thesis discusses how the working class and homosexuality are depicted in *Billy Elliot*.

Musicals are a favourite genre of popular culture. In the theoretical part is already mentioned the difference between opera and musical theatre. Because of the usage of mainly pop songs, musicals are considered popular culture, not high culture. While there are musicals which consist of singing only with little spoken word, *Billy Elliot: The Musical* is the case where both appear. *Billy Elliot: The Musical* supports Atkey's assertion that musicals primarily serve to amuse audiences. The story is mostly realistic but contains many humorous scenes. These often ease the tension, as the jokes are used even during fights. In comparison with the book *Billy Elliot*, the overall atmosphere in the musical is more enthusiastic, especially during specific scenes. For example, when Billy gets a letter from the Royal Ballet School, the atmosphere in the room is rather tense. Billy opens the letter in a different room, where others find him crying. He then tells them he got in, and everyone is happy. In the musical, Tony, grandma and father are fighting for a while about whether they should open it or wait for Billy. Grandma even tries to attack the men with a knife. When Billy arrives, he sees everyone standing around the letter. Looking at the letter from a distance, he reads aloud: "William Elliot is queer."<sup>55</sup> Grandma comments it with "Oh no...", having no idea about the misunderstanding, while his father shouts, "Esquire! Just open it, man!"<sup>56</sup>

The very different is also Michael and his personality. A section in the book where Michael is dressed in girls' clothing is quite sad as he wonders why people frown on him and why he is so different from others.: "If there was something I could give up that would stop people picking on me, I'd do it. But there's not. You can't give up being just yourself."<sup>57</sup> In the musical, the

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<sup>55</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 2:19:32.

<sup>56</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 2:19:50.

<sup>57</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 51.

atmosphere of the scene is very different. Throughout the whole musical, Michael is depicted as a happy, humorous boy. In this specific scene, Michael is singing enthusiastically:

“Everyone is different it’s the natural state.

It’s a fact, it’s plain to see.

The world’s grey enough without making it worse.

What we need is individuality.”<sup>58</sup>

Michael is more receptive to accepting his uniqueness and differences in the musical. Even though the musical deals with serious subjects like politics and the acceptance of homosexuality, it frequently does so in a more humorous manner.

In the musical, the story is enriched with songs. They are typically used to express the thoughts of the character or take the form of dialogue. The audience might experience more intense emotions since it is easier to express feelings by singing. After the audition, one of the members of the committee asks Billy ‘what it felt like when he danced’. In the book, Billy answers: “Dunno. [...]It starts off sort of stiff, but once I get going, I forget what’s going on, and I sort of disappear. Like there’s fire in me whole body. Like a bird. Like electricity. Yeah, like electricity.”<sup>59</sup> In the musical, Billy has a longer musical monologue where he describes his feelings. The words and similes are very similar, but it is obvious that singing is a more expressive tool:

“And then I feel a change like a fire deep inside.

Something bursting me wide open, impossible to hide.

And suddenly I’m flying, flying like a bird.

Like electricity, electricity, sparks inside of me.

And I’m free, I’m free.”<sup>60</sup>

While singing this part of the song, Billy is looking at his father, who bursts into tears, finally understanding Billy’s passion for dancing.

Billy’s mother is in the musical depicted only as Billy’s imagination. His mother sings the lines as he reads her letter, evoking memories of her in his mind. This makes the scene sadder and more emotional. At the end of the musical, Billy tells his mother he wrote her a letter as well:

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<sup>58</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:57:42.

<sup>59</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 123.

<sup>60</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 2:10:25.

“Me reply. It’s a bit scrumpled. Dear Mam,

And please, mammy...

Know that I will always be proud to have known you.

Proud that you were mine, proud in everything.”<sup>61</sup>

Billy is referring to the letter he got from her before she died. This final duet and encounter with his mother might

The character’s development is one of the important elements of musical theatre, just like in classical theatre, and is also perceptible in *Billy Elliot: the Musical*. Billy’s father is probably the character who got through the most noticeable development. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, while in the beginning, Billy’s father is strictly against dancing, in the end, he supports Billy and even accompanies him to the audition instead of Mrs Wilkinson. When a member of a committee asks him: “A child can only succeed with the 100% support of his family. You are completely behind Billy, are you not?”<sup>62</sup> he immediately answers ‘yes’. Billy seems surprised at first, and then his father repeats his answers, looking at Billy.

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<sup>61</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 2:33:03.

<sup>62</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 2:08:18.

## Britain during Thatcherism

This chapter focuses on Britain's political and social situation during Margaret Thatcher's government. Since the events before Thatcher's government affected the development of British economics and society, they are also mentioned. Further in the chapter is described the situation of the working class during Thatcher's government. Because homosexuality is one of the themes of the story, the perception of homosexuality in Britain is also discussed.

Margaret Thatcher became the prime minister in the 1970s. It's crucial first to provide background information for this era, as it influenced the beginnings of her government. During the Golden Age of Capitalism, the British economy expanded far more slowly than other capitalist European nations. As in many other western countries, the difficulties were caused by the consequences of the rising oil prices during the oil crisis in 1973. However, compared to other European nations, Britain had the highest unemployment and inflation rates. Britain was known as 'the sick man of Europe', and both its political and economic systems were on the verge of collapsing. Garfinkel describes the 1970s as "a rough and stormy decade".<sup>63</sup> The country also had to deal with the growing influence of trade unions, which led to numerous strikes. The adoption of a three-day workweek, conflict with the miners, and trade union demands for greater salaries to keep up with growing costs finally resulted in the defeat of the Conservatives in the general election of February 1974.<sup>64</sup> With unemployment approaching half a million, which was 2% of the labour force in Britain and the prospect that it could approach closer to 750,000 by next March. The peak of the economic crisis in Britain was in 1978-1979, called the "winter of discontent".<sup>65</sup> The rate of increase in unemployment between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s was seen as a north-south divide, as this was the location where most of the industries were located. A third of all unemployed people were young workers under 24 years old. Young people made up an even larger portion of the unemployed population for women: in 1976, nearly two out of every three unemployed women were between the ages of 18 and 24.<sup>66</sup> The average wage of British workers was less than that of most Northern European nations. The desperate situation of the working class and

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<sup>63</sup> Bernard Garfinkel, *Margaret Thatcher* (London: Burke Publishing, 1985), 51.

<sup>64</sup> Terry Macalister, "Background: What caused the 1970s oil price shock" *The Guardian*, March 3, 2011, accessed January 26, 2023, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/mar/03/1970s-oil-price-shock>

<sup>65</sup> Garfinkel, *Margaret Thatcher*, 56.

<sup>66</sup> Nicolas Crafts, Ian Gazeley, and Andrew Newell, *Work and Pay in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 236-237.

unemployment led to the rise of the power of unions, primarily supporters of the Labour party. This negatively affected the already unstable economy in the country.

The Conservatives' agenda was not based on the destruction of unions. It was based on economic freedom and tax cuts. Thatcher believed the government needed to start re-establishing private ownership of nationalised companies. As Garfinkel states, the Conservatives insisted that Britain needed a radical break with the recent past, which is contrary to the typical image of conservatives. On the other hand, Labour, typically considered the party of change, preferred to maintain the status quo.<sup>67</sup> Despite Thatcher's style not appealing to everyone, in 1979, her desire for change helped her become the first woman prime minister of Great Britain.

The two biggest challenges Thatcher's government faced during the first term (1979-1983) were the economic recovery and the Falkland war in 1982. Thatcher fought against socialism and the welfare state in Britain and supported a free market economy. She wanted to cut government spending, end government support for unprosperous businesses, and reduce income taxes. Her economic policy was based on Friedman's monetarism – the amount of money the government invested in the economy determined inflation and economic growth. During the first year in office, a record 10,000 businesses had filed for bankruptcy, and almost 2,5 million people were unemployed. Even after two years without any improvement in the economic situation, Thatcher declined to change the policies.<sup>68</sup> The well-known fact that Thatcher was not very popular at the time due to her policies is supported by D. M. Bruni, who even labels her situation as shaky. The turning point came with the Falklands War's victory. The victory in The War of Falklands gave Thatcher almost certain re-election. She proved herself as a strong leader. A government with strong leadership ensured the accomplishment of predetermined goals. Compared to the practical shortcomings of administrations in the 1970s, this changed how the British people thought about politics.<sup>69</sup> Despite the situation in which Thatcher took over the country, she convinced the British people in her favour and became prime minister for another term. However, the situation for the working class did not improve.

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<sup>67</sup> Garfinkel, *Margaret Thatcher*, 58-60.

<sup>68</sup> Garfinkel, *Margaret Thatcher*, 64-73.

<sup>69</sup> Domenico Maria Bruni, *The British Political Parties and the Falklands War* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan 2018), 170-172.

Britain has always been characterised as a class-conscious nation with significant differences in political attitudes and behaviour between classes. Surprisingly, the working class, at the bottom of the social scale, received the most attention as a group. Story and Childs claim they have received more media attention than any other group in British society. Novels, plays, movies, and television documentaries have all featured them.<sup>70</sup> Stereotypical representation of the working class was prevalent, particularly among males. These individuals were characterised as having dropped out of school before acquiring any formal qualifications and consequently sought employment as manual labourers. They spoke with a regional accent and held a trade-union membership card. Political affiliation was consistently aligned with the Labour Party, while a shared sense of community was cherished. The working class identified as "Us" and perceived the middle and upper classes as "Them." As Shafer states, over the past thirty years, the working classes have been portrayed in popular movies less distinctly and more sharply.<sup>71</sup> In an unusual way, these changes may mimic political accusations made about a waning sense of working-class cohesion and purpose following the Margaret Thatcher and post-Thatcher eras.

As already mentioned in this chapter, Britain was struggling with an economic crisis, and the most affected group was the working class, especially miners. According to Spence and Stephenson, the strikes in 1984-1985 were primarily about the attack on jobs in areas with few options for similar work. As a result, it included worrying about how mining-dependent families and local communities would fare in the future. In the eyes of the miners, the strike served as a defence of local working-class cultures and communities against the possibility of imposing such a national community.<sup>72</sup> Michael and Mike Mansfield also support the idea that strikes were not only about pay and work conditions. Instead, it was a fight for the basic foundation of normal, moral societies and their social fabric. For the Tories, however, this was a clearly intended conflict between organised labour and the government.<sup>73</sup>

Miners and miners' families had close community relations. The interdependence of job, family, and community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries enabled tight

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<sup>70</sup> Mike Story and Peter Childs, *British Cultural Identities*. (London: Routledge, 1997), 187.

<sup>71</sup> Stephen C. Shafer. "An Overview of the Working Classes in British Feature Film from the 1960s to the 1980s: From Class Consciousness to Marginalization" *International Labor and Working-Class History* No. 59 (2001): 3.

<sup>72</sup> Jean Spence and Carol Stephenson, "Side by Side with Our Men? Women's Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984-1985 British Miners' Strike" *International Labor and Working-Class History* No. 75, (2009): 68-69.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Mansfield and Mike Mansfield, "The Miners' Strike 1984-85." *Socialist Lawyer*, No.52 (2009): 16-18

networks, emotional ties, and reciprocal interactions. Families moved as a community in search of new pits or better surroundings. Group cohesion was a crucial barrier against harsh physical environments and contentious workplace dynamics.<sup>74</sup> In the history of labour, brotherhood is an important theme. Numerous labour unions have it in their names, including the brotherhoods of carpenters and joiners, railroad employees, locomotive engineers, sleeping car porters, and electrical workers, to name a few. "Brotherly" language pervaded demands for labour organisation and protest, and union men regularly referred to one another as "brothers." In Baron's opinion, the idea of "brotherhood" is crucial because it has made it easier for workers to comprehend what it is like for men to work, but it is also significant because labour historiography has adopted it so widely and blindly that it has constrained the historian's perspective. It referred to unions as fraternities and highlighted the value of male friendship at work.<sup>75</sup> Working-class members had a close community which usually shared the same values and ideology, such as solidarity and brotherhood.

As homosexuality is one of the main themes of the work for the analytical part, the attitude towards homosexuality, especially during the 70s and 80s in Britain, is also relevant to the thesis. It is undeniably true that Britain still has tighter censorship rules than many other European nations. With "swinging London," the expansion of British youth culture, and the legalisation of homosexuality, abortion, birth control, and divorce reform in the 1960s, the country's view on homosexuality changed. Storry and Childs assume that the trial under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959 that ultimately led to the decision that D. H. Lawrence's sexually explicit but critically acclaimed novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* would be made available to the British public served as a dividing line between permissive, contemporary Britain and conservative, "Victorian" Britain.<sup>76</sup> Later in 1967 was introduced Sexual Offences Act. The Act approved homosexual acts between two willing individuals at least twenty-one years old. The Act only applied to England and Wales, and restrictions were established on what was deemed private.<sup>77</sup> While the Act was a significant step in changing the legislation

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<sup>74</sup> Spence et. Al. "Side by Side with Our Men? Women's Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984-1985 British Miners' Strike": 69.

<sup>75</sup> Ava Baron. "Masculinity, the Embodied Male Worker, and the Historian's Gaze", *International Labor and Working-Class History* No. 69 (Spring, 2006):150

<sup>76</sup> Storry, et al. *British Cultural Identities*, 129.

<sup>77</sup> "Sexual Offences Act 1967," Sexual Offences Act 1967 – UK Parliament, accessed February 13, 2023. <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/collections1/sexual-offences-act-1967/sexual-offences-act-1967/>

around homosexuality, equality for the LGBT community was still a long way off. Plummer describes the 70s in Britain as a setting where the boundaries between gender and sexuality were clearly defined and where male homosexuality was considered a crime, disease, and pathology. Any gay culture that did exist was fiercely prohibited and kept at the farthest limits of society. In a cultural environment, homosexuals had no place at all.<sup>78</sup> The situation became even worse after the appearance and the first death of AIDS in Britain in 1982. Early in the crisis, there was a wave of anti-gay panic that was made worse by the media, which incorrectly labelled AIDS as a disease that only affected homosexuals. In Plummer's opinion, this crisis had a positive effect on the perception of homosexuality. It significantly revived a dormant gay movement and brought "gayness" firmly into the mainstream, making its "leaders" more professional and visible and allowing them to talk to government officials.<sup>79</sup>

According to Evan and Tilley, there is also a tradition of considering how occupational class affects these sentiments, supposing that those in the middle class are often more accepting of different groups. Regarding attitudes about homosexuality, there is some cross-national evidence for this, and we discover similar tendencies in Britain. There are significant disparities by occupational class and level of education when people are asked if they think that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are always wrong. To support their argument, they emphasise that working-class people were usually less educated.<sup>80</sup> But education was not the only factor – age and religion were crucial for the result. Ward agrees with this thought. As he mentions in his study, older people or people of the lower class were usually less tolerant.<sup>81</sup> These people made many stereotypes about homosexuality, which they then believed. Simmons investigated these stereotypes in his study. Supporting the opinion of the importance and class, he also states homosexuals were the ones who were most rejected, according to results of his social distance scale of thirteen deviant and semi-deviant types, which included, for example, alcoholics, prostitutes, lesbians or political radicals. Sexual aberration, perversion, mental disease, maladjustment, and effeminacy were the characteristics most often associated with homosexuals. Those with less education and those who scored lower on a scale measuring

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<sup>78</sup> David Morley and Kevin Robins, *British Cultural Identities: Geography, Nationality and Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 389.

<sup>79</sup> Morley et al., *British Cultural Identities: Geography, Nationality and Identity*, 390.

<sup>80</sup> Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley. *The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 76.

<sup>81</sup> Russel A. Ward "Typifications of Homosexuals" *The Sociological Quarterly* 20, No. 3 (1979): 412.



liberalism were more likely to be stereotyped.<sup>82</sup> Homosexuals were not connected only with deviancy or perversion. Besides already mentioned effeminacy, other created stereotypes were artistic traits and sensibility. Ward explains in his paper that homosexuals were also seen as harmless. Including effeminate in a "mentally sick" image is consistent with research showing that younger gays are more likely to act out the stereotypical effeminate character, which is associated with psychological issues and transitional identity problems.<sup>83</sup>

The working class was the least accepting of homosexuals. These viewpoints make it appear like living as a homosexual in a working-class setting would be much more challenging. While a sizable majority of individuals believed homosexuality was always wrong in the 1980s, this compares to only a small minority today. Despite the fact that many stereotypes prevail, the attitude towards homosexuals is not as dismissive as it used to be. Ward analyses this change in society's behaviour. According to him, in contemporary society, homosexuals are becoming less "threatening" and more "pathetic." The portrayal of homosexuals in the media today is a sensitive, creative intellectual. This is frequently employed in situation comedies as a hilarious device.<sup>84</sup>

Rayside agrees that not only class, but also political ideology has a significant impact on one's perception of homosexuality. The Conservatives and Labour have both contributed to the upkeep of a hostile environment for gays and lesbians, with the Conservatives doing so through their selective adoption of a morally conservative outlook firmly rooted in a middle-class culture of respectability. The Labourites did so through their timidity on sexuality issues, which was motivated by a worry about the puritanism of a significant portion of their working-class constituency.<sup>85</sup> Thatcherism had come to stand for more than simply economic conservatism—it also stood for a moralistic pro-family agenda. As Jeffery-Poulter states, Thatcher said that children who must be educated to respect conventional moral norms are taught that being gay is an inalienable right.<sup>86</sup> The attitude and dismissive approach towards homosexuality forced homosexuals to keep their sexuality a secret and hide their identity.

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<sup>82</sup> J. L. Simmons, "Public Stereotypes of Deviants" *Social Problems* 13, No. 2 (1965): 228.

<sup>83</sup> Ward, "Typifications of Homosexuals", 417.

<sup>84</sup> Ward, "Typifications of Homosexuals", 419.

<sup>85</sup> David M. Rayside, "Homophobia, Class and Party in England" *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 25, No. 1 (1992): 122.

<sup>86</sup> Stephen Jeffery-Poulter, *Peers, Queers & Commons: The struggle for Gay Law reform from 1950 to the Present* (London: Routledge 1992): 218.

The story *Billy Elliot* depicts the years 1984-1985 from the point of view of working-class people and miners. The economic situation is portrayed negatively because the characters are members of the most affected group. The musical starts with a bare stage and authentic film production of news: “It was the first Durham rally since the pits were handed over to the people. [...] The whole country is watching to see how this new organisation, this new adventure, this new experiment comes out. [...] The whole future we are trying to build up in our country is for all our people and all our children, and it depends on you.”<sup>87</sup> This gives the spectator the necessary context for further understanding the story. In the book, Billy’s father considers the strike a fight for their future and the community. He also expresses his fear of the future: “If Thatcher came here today and said to me, ‘Look, we’re going to close down the mines and we’re going to open up a whole town full of shiny new factories...’ I don’t know rightly if I’d say yea or nay, but at least it’d be some sort of hope. Not like this.”<sup>88</sup> In the eyes of the miners, Thatcher wanted to increase the unemployment rate in Britain, which was already extremely high. “She doesn’t care if the whole country gets closed down, so long as she runs it her way. She’s already shut down half of it. The mills all gone, half our industry closed down or sold off abroad. Now it’s our turn.”<sup>89</sup> The miners’ community plays a significant role in showcasing the cultural divide in society at the time. In the musical, the miners are depicted as proud, rough, hard-working men who have a deep sense of community and loyalty to one another. Their wives support them and participate in striking as well. The women can be seen in community gatherings, during the Christmas party or when going on a strike. In the song *The Stars Look Down*, miners and their wives express their dedication to starting the strike and their togetherness:

“We will always stand together.  
In the dark, right through the storm.  
We will stand shoulder to shoulder.  
To keep us warm.”<sup>90</sup>

When singing the song, the miners and wives greet each other, and the mood is tense as they await news about the strike. Then one of the miners enters and announces they are officially on

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<sup>87</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:03:29.

<sup>88</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 10.

<sup>89</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 10.

<sup>90</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:05:25

strike. The whole atmosphere in the room changes; people are happy, hug and congratulate each other. After a short intermezzo of Billy's solo, the miners return to the stage. They are no longer dressed in their working uniforms but wear daily clothes and have banners in their hands that read 'Close a pit, kill a village' or 'Save our community, save our pit' and sing:

“And the stars look down and see the struggle.  
And the stars look down and know the pain.  
And the stars will lead to where the light shines again.  
When we'll stand as one beneath the sun.”<sup>91</sup>

The song serves as a reminder of the importance of community, solidarity, and hope in times of hardship. The miners' community plays a significant role in Billy's personal journey. Billy's desire to pursue ballet is initially met with resistance from his family and the wider community, who view it as an activity for girls. But thanks to his talent and persistence, Billy can get over these obstacles and win the respect and admiration of everyone around him. This sends a strong message about how crucial it is to follow one's passions despite obstacles.

As already mentioned, the miners' community was built on solidarity and brotherhood. When Billy's father wants to return to the mine, and Tony stops him, other miners decide to support Billy's father and, most importantly, Billy in his dream:

“We're all in this together, Jack,  
There is another way.  
All for one. And one for all.  
Take this and this. And this and this.”<sup>92</sup>

Miners give Billy money for the audition. In the musical, Billy does not get enough money from miners. Suddenly one of the scabs appears and gives Billy more money, enough for the audition. Even though Tony is against taking them at first, he then agrees: “Go on then. Do your audition. Take the bloody money. Go to London.”<sup>93</sup> In the book, miners make a fundraising campaign and collect money for Billy's school. It is mainly thanks to Tony's convincing speech: “You all know, Billy and me haven't had a mam for the past couple years. And, well, she'd have wanted

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<sup>91</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:10:05.

<sup>92</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:53:51.

<sup>93</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:57:06.

this. In fact, she'd have made him. So, dig deep. We need your help."<sup>94</sup> This incredible act of kindness demonstrates how willing and supportive the miners' community is.

The characterisation of Billy's father, Tony and other miners in *Billy Elliot* conforms to the previously mentioned Storry and Child's depiction of the portrayal of working-class individuals. All characters in the musical have a strong northern accent. Tony and his father are miners and members of the Durham Miners Association. Billy's father has been a miner his whole life. He sees mining as an honourable profession, and he wants Billy to share in that pride and sense of community. He also values hard work and sees mining as a way for Billy to contribute to the family's economic well-being. However, as the story continues, he realises Billy will not be a miner and decides to support him in his dream to be a dancer. Billy's father is a proud man, just like other members of the working class in the story. He denies financial help from Mrs Wilkinson when she offers to pay for an audition: "Oh, for Christ's sake! When are you going to get over your pig-ignorant working-class pride? The kid is gifted, he's got a chance. What have you got to offer him – mining? [...] I'm not the enemy, Mr Elliot. We're all in this together."<sup>95</sup> Despite his loyalty to the union, Billy's father ultimately decides to return to work in the mines because he feels a sense of responsibility to provide for his family. He values the importance of family and the need to take care of those who depend on him.

Tony is also a miner and sees mining as his destiny. In the book, father ponders about the strike and that he is on strike primarily because of Tony: "Well, what's here for Tony if we lose this? After all, if the world stopped tomorrow, I'd have been in love, and I'd've worked and lived and had my kids. But Tony? What's he got? He was brought up to be a miner, and what's a miner without a mine?"<sup>96</sup> Father is aware that Tony values the community above all else. He himself is against violence during the strikes, which is why he does not want to participate. On the other hand, Tony is taking part in the vicious attacks and strikes against the police. In the musical is a scene where the father catches Tony at night, taking a crowbar. When he asks Tony to put the crowbar back, he replies: "Make us. What are you going to do about it, like? Hit us? [...] You've been a complete waste of space since me mum died. You useless piece of

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<sup>94</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 110.

<sup>95</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:49:10.

<sup>96</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 10.

shit.”<sup>97</sup> Father then hits him, and Tony leaves. Tony demonstrates his devotion towards the working class and miners, speaking about it as ‘us’.

When Billy’s father wants to go back to work and crosses the picket line, Tony stops him. “I’d thought I didn’t care who’d saw me. I’d thought nothing mattered anymore, but when Tony watched me riding the coach in through the gates of the pit, I thought I was going to die of shame.”<sup>98</sup> Tony is determined to prevent his father from entering the mine at all costs. First, he begs him not to go, but they also fight:

“It’s about our history, It’s about our rights.

Think about the sacrifice we’ve made.

It’s what you always taught us since I was a kid.

Oh, please, dad, don’t let that passion fade.”<sup>99</sup>

Tony reminds his father that this is what he taught him. He was brought up to be a miner, to support the community. That is why he cannot understand why his father, whom he looked up to, would wish to abandon and betray his own people. While his father says he is against violence during strikes, Tony attacks police officers and sets a horse’s tail on fire. In the book is also mentioned that Tony spends the night in jail and goes to court for that. Among all the characters, Tony's commitment to the community is arguably the strongest.

In *Billy Elliot*, the concept of social class is a central theme that is explored throughout the story. While most of the characters are from the working class, Mrs Wilkinson and her family are from the middle class. This is depicted mainly in the book. Billy once refers to Mrs Wilkinson as “middle-class Millie”<sup>100</sup> to emphasise Mrs Wilkinson's middle-class status and the perceived gap between her world and Billy's world. He is later surprised that middle-class life is not as perfect as he thought. Billy’s idea of the middle-class household was very different from the reality: It was, like I say, not much bigger house than ours and the furniture wasn’t any better either. I don’t know what I’d been expecting, antiques or something. [...] Maybe it isn’t so marvellous being middle class after all.<sup>101</sup> When he finds out Debbie’s father was unfaithful and he and Mrs Wilkinson sleep in separate beds, he is shocked and says to Debbie

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<sup>97</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:00:10.

<sup>98</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 100.

<sup>99</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:53:04.

<sup>100</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 42.

<sup>101</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 42.

her family is weird: “I always thought that if you were middle class and you had a mam and a dad and all, then that was all normal, like. But instead of that, there I was in a middle-class house and it was completely weird.”<sup>102</sup>

The story captures the conflict between the classes. When visiting Mrs Wilkinson’s house, Billy talks to her husband, who asks Billy whether his father is on strike. From his comment is obvious he is against the strike: “It’s just a few commies stirring things up. [...] If it costs more money to pay blokes like your dad to dig the stuff up out of the ground than you get when you sell it, well. What does it tell to you? [...] If it were up to me, I’d close the lot of them down tomorrow.”<sup>103</sup> After Tony’s disappearance with a crowbar at night, he gets home with a few other miners, beaten. They were attacked by policemen: “This isn’t a strike anymore. It’s a bloody class war.”<sup>104</sup> Tony's statement reflects the underlying social and economic tensions present during the miners' strike in the UK. The strike was not just about wages and working conditions but also a struggle for the working-class people to assert their rights and dignity against the ruling elite. Tony's comment suggests that he sees the strike as a battle between the working class and the upper class, with his family on the losing side. He also expresses his hatred towards the middle class while shouting at Mrs Wilkinson: “And if you come near him again, I’ll smack you one, you middle-class cow!”<sup>105</sup> The tension between the working-class and middle-class worlds is ultimately resolved positively. The story shows how individuals can overcome the limitations of their social class and pursue their passions, even in the face of resistance and opposition. At the same time, it also acknowledges the challenges and barriers that individuals from working-class backgrounds face when trying to enter the world of the middle class.

As was noted in the theoretical section, working-class people generally had stereotypical and unfavourable views on homosexuality. The fact of denial of homosexuality in the working-class community often appears in *Billy Elliot*. Miners often use homophobic slurs, such as pouf or fruit.

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<sup>102</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 44.

<sup>103</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 43.

<sup>104</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:16:33.

<sup>105</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:19:45.

In the musical, Michael is shown to be confident and outspoken, with a flamboyant personality and expresses interest in dressing up in women's clothing and wearing makeup. He has a more significant role and is given his own solo song, *Expressing Yourself*, in which he encourages Billy to embrace his own unique identity and talents. Michael also serves as a source of support and encouragement for Billy throughout the musical, particularly in his pursuit of ballet:

“Cos what the hell is wrong with expressing yourself,  
For wanting to be me?  
What the hell's wrong with wearing a dress, woo!  
Being who you want to be?”<sup>106</sup>

Throughout the story, there are suggestions that Michael is a homosexual. In the book, Michael mentions that he feels to be different: “My dad always says that I'm different and I should be proud of it, but round here being different is not such a good thing at all.”<sup>107</sup> While being different does not mean anything specific, Michael also mentions that he considers the possibility that he might be a homosexual. When Billy shows him how to dance, he tells him he is a girl, and Michael reacts: “No, I'm not. Just because I might be gay doesn't mean I'm a girl. It's not the same thing.” In the musical, it is depicted when Michael gives Billy a kiss on his cheek. Billy's reaction suggests he does not share his affection: “Just because I like ballet, doesn't mean I'm a pouf, you know.”<sup>108</sup> Billy's family and the community first reject his love of ballet because they believe it to be a sign of weakness and effeminacy. As already mentioned, Billy is expected to do other, more masculine sports. This is also mentioned in the book during the fundraising event for Billy's audition. George, one of the miners, informs others about the purpose: “There's a strike on, for one thing, no one has much to spare. We've sent kids away to be boxers and footballers and all sorts, but this time it's Billy Elliot, and he wants to be a ballet dancer.” The people in the room laughed, as was first expected, but they soon came to understand Billy's love for dancing.

Although the story does not directly support or condemn homosexuality, it does question preconceived stereotypes about gender. While Michael's sexuality is left open to interpretation,

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<sup>106</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:54:28.

<sup>107</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 51.

<sup>108</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:37:56.

the character can be seen as a representation of the LGBT community, particularly during a time when homosexuality was still widely stigmatised and discriminated against. His character, as well as Billy's passion for ballet, serves as a vehicle to challenge gender norms and stereotypes and to promote acceptance and diversity.



## **Miners' Strike of 1984-1985**

This chapter's primary subject is the miners' strike, which took place between 1984 and 1985 and was a consequence of Thatcher's policies, especially the closure of non-profitable mines. The strike divided the nation and caused significant social and economic upheaval. It had a massive impact on people's lives and the relationships in the community of miners.

One of the worst labour conflicts to ever occur in Britain was the miners' strike of 1984–1985. As pit communities from South Wales to Scotland battled to keep their local collieries, which were, for many people the only source of employment, the year-long strike was difficult and violent. The date of the beginning of the strike varies. According to Hendy, the strike is typically stated as beginning on March 9, 1984, when the Yorkshire region National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) went on strike in reaction to a local National Coal Board (NCB) announcement to close Cortonwood for environmental reasons and because it was considered uneconomic.<sup>109</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of Thatcher's policies was reducing the power of unions and closing businesses. She thought reducing the excessive costs associated with collieries' rising inefficiency was necessary to expand the economy. Therefore, Thatcher intended to shut down ineffective pits and rely more on imported coal, oil, gas, and nuclear power. As Glyn states in his article, NCB's intentions to reduce capacity by around 4 million tonnes would necessitate the closure of about 20 collieries and the loss of about 20,000 jobs.<sup>110</sup> The decision to close so many collieries resulted in numerous strikes since so many jobs would be lost. However, this strike was unusual in that it had a longer-term aim than just immediate material objectives like better pay or working conditions. This time, the fate of the mining industry, the industrial professions, working-class neighbourhoods, and the trade union movement were all on the line.

The strike was not global because many workers or whole counties decided not to participate. The Midlands, South Derbyshire, and Leicestershire all followed the trend of the Nottinghamshire pits, which continued to operate with relatively few miners responding to the demand to stop working. According to Hendy, even though miners from other mines and those in Nottinghamshire chose not to take part, in a couple of weeks, 80% of the total number of

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<sup>109</sup> John Hendy, "The attack on the miners was a turning point" *Socialist Lawyer* No. 52 (2009): 20.

<sup>110</sup> Andrew Glyn, "Economy and the UK Miners' Strike" *Social Scientist* 13, No. 1 (1985): 23.

miners were on strike.<sup>111</sup> As this attitude was against union ideology, there was much focus on those counties and miners who decided not to participate. In response, a number of miners on strike were sent to the coalfields of Nottinghamshire to discourage those who were still working. This only led to fights between mining areas and their workers. The police responded by sending thousands of officers from all across the nation to the region, ensuring that everyone who wanted to go to work could do so. Turner states that in the first six months of the conflict, the chief constable of Nottinghamshire claimed that there were over 165,000 occurrences of persons being stopped from entering the county. Even more contentious was the setting up of obstacles to impede the passage of anyone suspected of being a picket.<sup>112</sup> Naturally, striking miners perceived this as a violation of their freedom to move about the nation as they pleased. Their opponents recognised it as a justified attempt to stop the widespread physical intimidation of people attempting to conduct lawful business and go to their places of employment.

One of the most important events of the miners' strike period was the confrontation in Orgreave. This strike became known for the brutality of police towards striking miners. As Conn states in an article for *The Guardian*, in addition to being the most brutal police behaviour ever witnessed in a contemporary labour conflict, what occurred at Orgreave was also the result of a determined political effort to weaken the influence of unions.<sup>113</sup> On 29<sup>th</sup> May, around 5,000 miners gathered at the Orgreave coke station to try to halt the movement of coal. Mounted and heavily armoured police repulsed them, but the battle was repeated every day for three weeks with horrible acts of brutality on both sides. Campbell states that on the first day alone, 104 police officers and 28 pickets were hurt, and by the end, several hundred had been arrested. According to him, the preservation of peace and order was at stake in this situation rather than the future of the coal industry, and Thatcher was unable to remain impartial. Spence and Stephenson state in their article that Thatcher referred to the miners as "the enemy within," putting her idea of the country as a community in danger.<sup>114</sup> Campbell also states this fact but adds that she later specified "the enemy" as the ones who resort to violence and intimidation in order to force

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<sup>111</sup> Hendy, "The attack on the miners was a turning point": 21.

<sup>112</sup> Alwyn W. Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice!: Britain in the 1980s*. (Readhowyouwant.com Ltf, 2014), 192.

<sup>113</sup> David Conn, "The Scandal of Orgreave" *The Guardian*, May 18, 2017, accessed February 15, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/may/18/scandal-of-orgreave-miners-strike-hillsborough-theresa-may>

<sup>114</sup> Spence et al., "Side by Side with Our Men? Women's Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984-1985 British Miners' Strike": 69.

others to do what they are unable to persuade them to do are the enemy inside.<sup>115</sup> That means she did not generalise the miners. For the government, the victory was those workers who decided not to participate in strikes. These workers were called “scabs” by their previous colleagues. Campbell mentions in his book that Thatcher perceived these people as heroes, not “scabs”.<sup>116</sup> But in their social circle, they were mostly seen as traitors, helping to destroy an industry.

*Billy Elliot* takes place in County Durham in North-East England during the 1984-1985 miners’ strike. The story begins at the very beginning of the miners’ strike. Billy's father is initially depicted as a staunch supporter of the NUM and their decision to go on strike. He is shown to be proud of his role as a miner and deeply committed to the cause of protecting his fellow workers' jobs. However, as the strike wears on and the economic situation becomes direr, Billy's father begins to feel the weight of the family's financial struggles. He becomes increasingly conflicted about the strike and its impact on his family, and he eventually breaks ranks with the union to return to work in the mines.

This change in perspective is a significant moment in the musical, as it reflects the complex and often difficult choices that working-class families had to make during the miners' strike. Billy's father's opinion on the strike highlights the tension between the desire to fight for one's rights and the practical considerations of making a living and supporting a family. Overall, Billy's father's opinion on the strike is a nuanced portrayal of the impact of the strike on working-class families and the difficult choices they had to make in the face of economic hardship.

The hatred between police and miners is depicted in the song ‘*Solidarity*’. The song is a dialogue between these two sides that insult each other:

“Oi, Geordie, wanna see something  
You’ve never seen before?  
And that’s just off the overtime,  
Wanna see some more?”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> John Campbell, *The Iron Lady: Margaret Thatcher: Grocer's Daughter to Iron Lady*. (London: Vintage, 2009), 361.

<sup>116</sup> Campbell, *The Iron Lady: Margaret Thatcher: Grocer's Daughter to Iron Lady*, 362.

<sup>117</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:37:14.

Officers call miners ‘Geordies’, which is a nickname for a person from the Tyneside area in North-East England. Typical words for this accent are ‘naught’ or ‘bairn’, often used in the musical.<sup>118</sup> While singing the lines, police officers are showing miners money. This is also reflected in the book when Tony recalls what happened during one of the strikes: “They don’t have to be like that – waving their big fat wage packets in our faces, all bloated up with the overtime they got paid for kicking our backs for Thatcher.”<sup>119</sup> Policemen tell miners they get paid well to stand on the picket line and encourage them to continue their protest:

“Keep it up ‘til Christmas, lads, It means a lot to us.  
We send our kids to private school on a private bus.  
We’ve got a lot to thank you for, Geordie, you’re a corker.  
A nice extension on the house and a fortnight in Mallorca.”<sup>120</sup>

As the song goes on, miners and police officers get more aggressive. While in the beginning, they only shouted, close to the end of the song, they start attacking each other, and the language gets more aggressive:

“(officers) We’re here to kick your Geordie arse, you little Geordie gits!  
(miners) We’re terrified, we’re petrified, those words are so obscene.  
We’ll boot your fuckin’ cockney skulls,  
Right back to Bethnal Green.”<sup>121</sup>

Cockney and Bethnal Green’s references imply that the police officers are from London, demonstrating the fact that officers were dispatched from across the nation. The reference to the police in ‘*Solidarity*’ serves to highlight the division and conflict between the miners and the authorities at the time. It also emphasises the bravery and determination of the strikers in the face of opposition and violence.

The hostility towards scabs, the miners who chose to continue working, was evident and frequently mirrored in *Billy Elliot*. In the book, Tony and his father meet Tony’s friend from

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<sup>118</sup> “Geordie voices: dialect in the North East” British Library, 1 Apr, 2007, last accessed 15 March 2023 <https://www.bl.uk/british-accent-and-dialects/articles/geordie-a-regional-dialect-of-english>

<sup>119</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 70.

<sup>120</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:39:44.

<sup>121</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 0:43:37.

school, who did not join the strike: “You could tell Gary was a scab just by looking at his trolley. No striker gets a load of shopping like that six months into this strike. Gary had it hard, had a lot of commitments, but who didn’t?”<sup>122</sup> Tony is then aggressive towards Gary, accusing him of betraying the community: “You were my best mate. The first rule of the union. Never cross a picket line. We’re all done for if you don’t remember that. [...] And if we lose, it’ll be because of the likes of you!”<sup>123</sup> When Tony is trying to stop his father from returning to the mine, he will never see him the same:

“You can’t give in now, dad, we’ve all been out a year!

I’ll never be able to talk to you again.”<sup>124</sup>

The relationships in families and between friends were affected by the decision to join the strike or to keep working and be able to provide for the family. In the musical, the most significant donor of the audition money is one of the scabs. The level of animosity towards the scab was so intense that Billy's family nearly forbade him from using the money.

The day Billy receives the letter from the British Royal Ballet School, Billy's family get the information that the strike is over. When Billy’s father announces that Billy was accepted to the school, other miners tell him they lost and that they are coming back. “The end of the strike overshadowed everything. I remember thinking well, at least I’ll be able to pay for the ballet school now.”<sup>125</sup> Father’s thinking suggests he might be disappointed by the outcome of the strike but still sees some positives. In the book, Billy’s father mentions that he understands that he and Tony lost their futures, but they also won a future for Billy. Tony, on the other hand, is devastated by the ending of the strike. For him is impossible to feel at least some happiness for Billy leaving the town: “When you come back here, Billy, everyone you know will be unemployed. [...] In ten years, there won’t be any pits left. We’re dead. We’re dinosaurs. 200,000 men. We can’t all be fucking dancers.”<sup>126</sup> His words suggest he feels a grudge against Billy’s escape from the village and the community. The time after the strike is reflected only in the book: “We lost. Thatcher won. I expect it got her a few more votes at the next election, and the one after that, too. [...] I was glad to stop working when the time came – but Tony’s been

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<sup>122</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 34.

<sup>123</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 34-35.

<sup>124</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 1:51:59.

<sup>125</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 126-127.

<sup>126</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 2:23:00.

out of work for three years now.”<sup>127</sup> In the musical, the final song *Once We Were Kings* describes miners’ feelings while going back to the pit, knowing it will be closed soon:

“We walk proudly, and we walk strong.

All together we will go as one.

The ground is empty and cold as hell.

But we all go together when we go.”<sup>128</sup>

Despite the unfavourable outcome of the strike, miners prove their spirit is not broken. The song also acknowledges the struggles and hardships that the community faced but emphasises the sense of solidarity and camaraderie that helped them to get through those difficult times.

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<sup>127</sup> Burgess, *Billy Elliot*, 127.

<sup>128</sup> Daldry, Stephen, dir. *Billy Elliot the Musical*, 2:31:03.

## Conclusion

This bachelor thesis aims to analyse the government of Margaret Thatcher in *Billy Elliot*. The first chapter defined popular culture and its features and reflected them in *Billy Elliot* the musical and the book by Melvin Burgess. The opinions on the definition of popular culture differ. According to some sources, popular culture is dependent on the number of sales, while others assume this term is connected with the fact that it is the culture created by people for people. Popular culture may also be defined as mass culture and consequently being more commercial. The typical features of mass culture are the arrival of television, celebrities, and Americanization. Popular culture is often used as the opposite of 'high' culture and therefore identified as 'low' culture. Political satire is one of the elements of popular culture and is crucial for the thesis. *Billy Elliot: The Musical* fulfils the definitions of popular culture. It is a musical theatre, which is considered a 'low' culture. In the musical, famous people are frequently mentioned. Over time, the names of the celebrities were changed to make them more relatable to audience members and, in turn, to make the plot of the musical and the references more straightforward. The sources also proved that the story *Billy Elliot* was very popular since the movie came out. The fact that "Billy Elliot boy" became a characterisation of a boy who enjoys dancing is evidence of the story's popularity. The political satire is reflected in the story many times, but one specific part is the song *Merry Christmas Maggie Thatcher*, which describes miners' hatred towards Thatcher and her policies by expressing their happiness that each day they are closer to her death. During the song, many caricatures and pupils are used as well to ridicule Thatcher even more.

The second chapter of the thesis discusses specific features of theatre. The aim of the theatre is mainly to entertain people. Three types of theatre were relevant for the thesis and therefore mentioned – social, political, and musical. Social theatre is focused on not usually portrayed subjects in a unique environment and with greater emphasis on society, which is in *Billy Elliot* depicted by reflecting miners during the strike. The political theatre was not necessarily used as propaganda but can be used as the opposite – to express dissatisfaction with the government or to portray a specific period. The musical depicts a period of miners' strike from the viewpoint of working-class members. It is, therefore, evident that the story is primarily hostile towards the government, as miners hold a grudge against the current government but mostly against Thatcher herself. Musical theatre is considered a popular culture, and its aim is mainly to entertain the spectator and evoke emotions. One of the main differences between musical and opera is character development. While in opera, character mostly prevails, in the musical,

characters develop and change. In *Billy Elliot*, Billy's father's priorities change because of the decision to support Billy in his dream. He decides not to participate in the strike anymore, to betray his community and his other son Tony and go back to the mine. Singing is a more accessible tool to express emotions and entertain the spectator.

The third chapter deals with the depiction of the era of Thatcher and the social situation in Britain at the time. The primary emphasis of the chapter's theoretical part is on the British economy before Thatcher and how it influenced her subsequent actions. Thatcher's policies regarding unemployment and the closure of the mines are also discussed. The policies had the most significant impact on the working class and the families of miners. British society has always been viewed as a class-conscious one, with notable disparities in political beliefs and behaviour between classes. It was common, especially among men, to see stereotypes of the working class. They were mostly seen as uneducated and doing manual work. There were strong ties between miners and their families. Those who belonged to the working class formed a close-knit society that frequently held similar beliefs, such as those in brotherhood and solidarity. The miners saw the strike as a means of defending local working-class traditions and communities from the threat of imposing such a national community. This sense of community is profusely depicted in *Billy Elliot*. While almost all characters are members of the working class, Mrs Wilkinson represents the middle class. Billy's enthusiasm for dancing is rejected by other members of his community but supported by Mrs Wilkinson. This reflects the stereotype that the working class is less educated and more conservative, as dancing is perceived as effeminate and homosexual. The topic of homosexuality is crucial as well, not only because of the class stereotypes but also because one of the main characters, Michael, is possibly a homosexual and enjoys dressing in women's clothes. Homosexuality was not accepted by society at the time, and homosexuals were seen as sick maniacs.

The final chapter of the thesis looks at the consequences of Thatcher's policies, specifically the miners' strike of 1984-1985. The strike split the country in two and significantly disrupted social and economic life. It had a profound effect on people's lives and interpersonal interactions in the mining town. The miners who decided not to participate were called 'scabs' and seen as outcasts of the community. *Billy Elliot* reflects the situation from the perspective of miners. It shows police officers' attitudes towards miners and changes in relationships between friends and families. Tony rejects his former friend for becoming a scab and even indicates he would be willing to forsake his own father if he gives up the strike. This demonstrates how committed some of the miners were to the idea of the strike.



## RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na období vlády Margaret Thatcherové a její vyobrazení v literárním díle, konkrétně na období Stávky horníků ve Velké Británii v letech 1984-1985. Jako primární zdroj pro analytickou část je použit muzikál *Billy Elliot: The Musical* a dále kniha *Billy Elliot* od Melvina Burgesse, psaná dle scénáře stejnojmenného snímku režiséra Lee Halla. V první kapitole se práce zabývá problematikou definice populární kultury. Dle odborníků vychází populární kultura z různých druhů kultur, především však z lidové kultury. Její vznik se datuje do 18. století, kdy byl vytvořen její název, avšak již v té době vycházela právě z kultury lidové. Přesná definice pojmu populární kultura není dle odborníků pevně stanovena. Někteří autoři ji charakterizují jako díla oblíbená velkým počtem lidí, která jsou mnohem více podmíněna kulturním a politickým pozadím dané kultury. Jiní autoři se zaměřují na faktory spojené s prodejem děl. Další možnou definicí je že se jedná o masovou kulturu, která je považována za výhradně komerční. S masovou kulturou je nejčastěji spojována televize, filmy, romány či celebrity. Populární kultura je často označována za opak tzv. vysoké kultury, za kterou jsou označovány například balet či opera. Je tak naznačováno, že se jedná o díla méněcenná, jelikož nedosahují dostatečné kvality. V polovině 19. století se modernisté rozhodli pročistit umění tím, že odlišili kulturu na vysokou a „ostatní“ kulturu, což vedlo k institucionalizaci spojení mezi třídou a kulturou. Díla se nestala nepopulárními, ale byla jimi učiněna. Ačkoliv populární kultura dle mnohých nespĺňuje požadované standardy jako kultura vysoká, je považována za dostupnější lidem všech tříd. Často vyobrazuje společnost a její lid, život „normálních lidí“, jejich naděje a sny.

Jedním z typických prvků populární kultury, který je zásadní pro tuto práci, je politická satira. Tento žánr vznikl v 17. století v Nizozemí a v Británii se stal populárním na přelomu 18. a 19. století. Charakteristickými rysy politické satiry jsou humor a ironie, ale ty jsou využívány s cílem zdůraznit a odhalit neschopnost nebo špatné vlastnosti jedinců v kontextu aktuální politiky. Jedním ze známých satirických pořadů je *Spitting Image*, loutková televizní show, kde byla Margaret Thatcherová často vyobrazována jako dominantní, agresivní a více maskulinní. Analytická část první kapitoly této práce prokazuje, že muzikál *Billy Elliot* je dílem populární kultury a analyzuje jednotlivé prvky, které ho tvoří. Hudbu pro muzikál složil známý britský hudebník Elton John. Muzikál *Billy Elliot* obsahuje mnoho odkazů na celebrity, což dodává příběhu na realismu. Jedním z hlavních témat muzikálu je tanec a balet, který je tradičně vnímán jako vysoká kultura, zatímco muzikál je žánrem populární kultury. Muzikál *Billy Elliot* si udržuje popularitu i po letech od uvedení a ukazuje tak, jak rozšířená a vlivná je populární

kultura. Důkazem toho je fakt, že se slovní spojení "Billy Elliot boy" stalo označením pro chlapce, kteří tančí balet. Muzikál také bojuje proti homosexuálním předsudkům vůči tanečníkům mužského pohlaví. Horníci, otec a bratr Billyho nechápou, že by muž mohl být tanečníkem. Pouze paní Wilkinsonová, učitelka baletu ze střední třídy, Billyho po celou dobu podporuje. V muzikálu se často vyskytuje také politická satira. V písničce *Merry Christmas Maggie Thatcher* horníci na Vánočním večírku vyjadřují svou radost z toho, že jsou o den blíže smrti Thatcherové. Celkově je zobrazení Thatcherové v Billy Elliotovi odrazem frustrace a hněvu mnoha členů komunity, jejichž životy byly přímo ovlivněny jejími politikami.

Druhá kapitola této práce se věnuje divadlu, které již od antiky patří mezi nejoblíbenější formy zobrazování společnosti. V rámci této kapitoly jsou diskutovány tři formy divadla: sociální, politické a hudební. Sociální divadlo se vyznačuje nestandardními tématy a umístěními. Muzikál *Billy Elliot* vyobrazuje dělnickou třídu a členy hornické komunity během období stávků horníků. Dále obsahuje narážky na homosexualitu, jež nebyla v té době společností uznávána. Politické divadlo se rozvíjelo zejména v 60. letech 20. století. Tato forma divadla není pouze prostředkem politické propagandy, nýbrž slouží i k vyjádření pohledu na politickou situaci a dopadu politiky na společnost. Politické divadlo nezaměřuje svou pozornost na ovlivňování názorů svých diváků, nýbrž poskytuje informace a pocit, že nejsou ve složité situaci sami. V muzikálu *Billy Elliot* je napjaté období stávků horníků vyobrazováno z pohledu horníků. Lze tedy předpokládat, že je zde politika Thatcherové a celá vláda zesměšňována a kritizována. Jelikož jsou veškeré informace a situace vykládány z pohledu stávkujících horníků, divák se spíše stává sympatizantem horníků a členů dělnické třídy. Hudební divadlo, se vyznačuje zapojením hudby a zpěvu. Tento prvek se objevuje jak v operě, považované za vysokou kulturu, tak i v muzikálech, tedy populární kultuře. Na rozdíl od opery mají muzikály diváky spíše pobavit a vyvolat v emoce a dochází také k rozvoji charakteru postav. Například postava Michaela působí v muzikálu jako šťastný chlapec, který ochotně přijímá svou odlišnost od ostatních a je považován za jednu z hlavních postav díla. V knize je naopak nešťastný a uzavřený. Písňe v muzikálech jsou vhodnější pro popis emocí a vyvolání reakce u diváků, nežli knižní

Třetí kapitola se zabývá sociální a politickou situací v Británii v průběhu prvního období vlády Margaret Thatcherové. Před nástupem Thatcherové se Spojené království potýkalo s ekonomickou krizí způsobenou ropnou krizí v roce 1973. Země měla již tehdy nejvyšší nezaměstnanost a inflaci. Navíc musela čelit nárůstu moci odborů. V období zvaném "winter of discontent" se nezaměstnanost vyšplhala na téměř 750 000 lidí, což vedlo k sérii stávek po

celé zemi. Program konzervativců byl založen především na ekonomické svobodě a snížení daní. Slibovali změnu a oprostění se od minulosti, což pravděpodobně Thatcherové pomohlo získat pozici premiérky. Během prvního období své vlády se Thatcherová potýkala se dvěma závažnými výzvami - řešením ekonomické krize a válkou o Falklandy. Základem její ekonomické politiky byl monetarismus - množství peněz, které vláda investovala do ekonomiky, určovalo inflaci a hospodářský růst. Během prvního roku zkrachovalo téměř 10 000 podniků a skoro 2,5 milionu obyvatel bylo nezaměstnaných. I přestože Margaret Thatcherová nebyla oblíbená a její politická budoucnost jako premiérky byla nejistá, její znovuzvolení bylo zaručeno díky vítězství ve válce o Falklandské ostrovy. Ekonomická situace, a celková situace pro dělnickou třídu, se však nezlepšovala.

Británie je tradičně charakterizována jako národ s výrazně vyhraněným vědomím třídní příslušnosti a s významnými rozdíly v politických postojích a chování mezi různými třídami. Dělnická třída je často vyobrazována v románech či filmech stereotypně, především muži: nevzdělaní dělníci, hovořící regionálním přízvukem a podporovatelé odborů a labouristů. V dělnické třídě, především v komunitě horníků, vládly pevné vztahy a smysl pro komunitu. Stávka pro horníky znamenala více než vyjádření nesouhlasu s politikou Thatcherové a uzavíráním dolů – představovala obranu hornické komunity a jejich cti. V dělnické třídě byla také méně tolerována homosexualita. Dle odborníků souvisí homofobie s nižším vzděláním, jelikož u střední třídy nebyl odpor k homosexualitě tak výrazný. Všechny tyto aspekty jsou vyobrazeny v muzikálu i knize *Billy Elliot*. Horníci jsou zobrazováni jako hrdí, tvrdě pracující muži s hlubokým smyslem pro komunitu a loajalitu k sobě navzájem. Ochota a podpora komunity utvrzena, když nezaměstnaní horníci darují Billymu peníze, aby se mohl zúčastnit konkurzu. Pro mnohé horníky, především pro Tonyho, představuje stávka budoucnost pro celou komunitu a jen těžce se srovnává s jejím ukončením, což jen dokazuje jeho oddanost. Téma homosexuality se v díle vyskytuje především v kontextu s baletem, jelikož hornickou komunitou je právě balet považován za zženštilý a nevhodný pro muže. V muzikálu se také často objevují homofobní nadávky. Ačkoliv se to nezmiňuje explicitně, Michael sebe sama vnímá jako odlišného od ostatních chlapců a pravděpodobně se identifikuje jako homosexuál nebo transsexuál. Zatímco v muzikálu svou odlišnost dává najevo a užívá si převlékání do šatů, v knize se cítí nešťastný. Příběh sice přímo nepodporuje ani neodsuzuje homosexualitu, nicméně klade otázky k předem vytvořeným stereotypům o genderu. Michaela lze v díle vnímat jako reprezentaci LGBT komunity, zejména v době, kdy byla homosexualita stále výrazně stigmatizována a diskriminována. Jeho postava, stejně jako Billyho vášeň pro tanec, slouží jako

prostředek ke zpochybnění genderových norem a stereotypů a k propagaci přijetí a různorodosti.

V poslední kapitole se práce zabývá některými politikami vlády Margaret Thatcherové a jejich následky, především stávkou horníků v letech 1984-1985. Stávka byla vyvolána rozhodnutím vlády Margaret Thatcherové uzavřít neefektivní doly a snížit výdaje spojené s rostoucí neefektivitou dolů. To by vedlo k uzavření mnoha dolů a ztrátě mnoha pracovních míst. Stávka byla neobvyklá tím, že měla dlouhodobý cíl a zahrnovala v sobě budoucnost těžebního průmyslu, průmyslových profesí, pracujících čtvrtí a odborového hnutí. Jednou ze zásadních událostí byla „bitva v Orgreave“, brutální konflikt, který měl za následek přes stovku zraněných na obou stranách a několik stovek zatčených. Horníci, kteří se rozhodli pokračovat v práci a neúčastnit se stávky, byli nazýváni „scabs“. Stávky a konflikty probíhaly denně u tzv. „picket line“, kde policisté bezpečně eskortovali pracující horníky do dolu. V díle *Billy Elliot* je klíčový moment, kdy se Billyho otec rozhodne vrátit do dolu, aby mohl finančně podpořit syna v jeho snu. Tony ho však zastaví a jasně mu dá najevo, že by tato volba navždy změnila jejich vztah. Tento moment ilustruje, jak výrazně stávka ovlivnila mezilidské vztahy v komunitě. Když je oznámeno ukončení stávky, horníci dávají najevo že jejich duch a smysl pro komunitu nebyl zlomen.

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