



# The Depiction of Class and Self-Created Identity in "The Buddha of Suburbia"

*Robert Willrich*

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Seminar paper from the year 2009 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Literature, grade: 1,3, University of Bamberg, course: London in Literature through the Ages, language: English, abstract: Being one of Hanif Kureishi's most famous works, *The Buddha of Suburbia* has been discussed numerously in academic writing. Up to now, most scholars have, unfortunately, only focussed on the most apparent topics of hybridity and racial as well as migrational identity. Although fairly striking, only few have paid attention to the British class system that is portrayed in the novel, and if they have, only in passing. This paper is not intended to be added to this long list. I rather want to concentrate on how diverse and comprehensively the topic of class is approached by Kureishi, how class is depicted. For this reason, I want start with some more general facts about lower middle class, but will try to directly compare them to the contents of *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

Secondly, I aim to show how, especially, class is depicted and to describe what makes someone belong to a certain class. How is affiliation expressed and how can one distinguish from other social groups? What does influence our thoughts and beliefs, and why do people want to break out? In regard to this, I will pay special attention to how the suburbs are presented in the novel and to what extent they differ from London.

Finally, I want to examine in how far London offers a chance to flee suburbia and lower middle class influences. Does the anonymity of England's capital provide the basis for a new self, to create something new, and leave the past behind? Do people have to surrender, not to say sacrifice, their old identities in order to make it in London? What is the price for climbing the social ladder, and can one find a new, but genuine, self after having left the old behind?

My paper shall answer these questions, it seeks to unfold some of the complexity of Kureishi's debut novel and to offer a new approach for interpreting *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

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