“Sailmaker” – Final Question Answer (**social class**)

The theme of social class is elicited in this extract as the audience get the sense of the unpleasant setting of the play. The “dark tenement blocks” convey the setting as one which is bleak; one in which there would be few aspirations or little hope for the future. This setting is developed for the audience throughout and the playwright references the rather dangerous nature of the setting. In dialogue with his son about learning to box, Davie notes that there would be “nae harm in knowin how to look after yerself. Specially in a place like this.” Here, the playwright makes it clear to the audience that the two main characters’ setting is impoverished and the people who live in the area are similarly bleak and unwelcoming. Unlike Alec, the inhabitants within this area are unlikely to ever find a way out; they will be confined to this setting and position within society. Therefore, the lowly social status is exemplified in this extract and in the play as a whole.

Just as the playwright’s setting evokes the theme of social class, so too does the characterisation the writer develops. Alec, the central character, is noticeably more middle-class than his father. Indeed, his education has granted him a bursary which allows him to attend a school which as his family sees it is a school filled with a “bunch ae snobs…aw toffee nosed wee shites”. Here, the playwright conveys the contrast between Alec and his family and, in doing so, points up the fact that Alec is becoming further removed from his family – particularly in terms of social class. This highlights social class as an important theme within the drama as Alec is a character who is in contrast with his setting and, in fact, has an opportunity to elevate his status through education.

The dialogue between father and son also highlights the growing distance between them as a result of an increasing difference in their social class. And so, when Alec speaks to his father about going to University he tells him that he might get “a wee place ae [his] own”. Here, it is interesting that the dramatist has Alec make use of scots in “ae” and “ma” which encourages the audience to understand that Alec does still have a connection with his background but the very desire to move to his own place and put geographical distance between himself and his father suggests the divide which now exists between them. The divide is borne out of Davie’s hopelessness: his inability to be proactive and make money, to move beyond what happened in the past and start working to develop a better future. Therefore, the fact that Davie sees his trade as lost and advises his son that he (Alec) should have a job in which he’ll “never have tae take [his] jacket off” is suggestive of the fact that Davie recognises the contrast between he and his son. Davie knows that Alec can “get out usin [his] brains” whereas Davie is trapped in an endless cycle of procrastination and empty dreams. Therefore, social class is an important theme within the play: it is evoked as a result of the setting in which the characters exist; the way particular characters are condemned to be forever poor as a result of their own characterisation (Davie); and how some characters (Alec) are able to elevate their status beyond that expected of their setting and become something more, despite their background.