



Mind the Gap: The New Class Divide in Britain, by Ferdinand Mount (Short Books, £8.99)

It seems a bit rich for someone with a baronetcy, even a semi-dormant one, to be lecturing people on class. This aside, Ferdinand Mount does have some interesting things to say. First published in 2004 and revised for the forthcoming election, *Mind the Gap* skewers the fallacy that 21st-century Britain is a classless society. More people may go to university, but the gap between rich and poor is widening. And it's the "not-so-brilliant children" of the middle classes who are going to university, not the lower classes (or "Downers", to use Mount's term). In fact, the Downers have never had it so bad. Not only is social mobility declining, he says, but they are now disadvantaged economically, culturally and spiritually. Perhaps surprisingly, the former editor of the Times Literary Supplement blames "the intelligentsia" for trashing working-class culture (chapel, patriotism, marriage etc). His solution involves a smaller state: schools run by parents, cooperatives and less planning regulation. At his worst, Mount sounds like a backwoodsman; at his best, his analysis is depressingly accurate.

PD Smith