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Reconfiguring Gender Roles in Russian-German Imaginary Families

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Abstract

This article deals with the representation of the transnational family in two films (Andreas Dresen's *Die Polizistin* and Bernd Böhlich's *Du bist nicht allein*) and one novel (Alina Bronsky's *Scherbenpark* [*Broken Glass Park*]) that focus on the relationship between portrayals of German and Russian family structures. Each text reflects the reconfiguration of "family" as its components respond to shifting gender roles, ethnic difference, and the effects of migration and immigration on the perception of the family as constituting a basic social unit. The intersection of literature and film around the issue of the changing family reflects contemporary demographic trends as well as anxiety about intimacy, citizenship, and linguistic identity. In these representations, the family assumes attributes of an "imagined community" (Anderson) inhabiting "imaginative geographies" (Said).

Keywords

Aussiedler; citizenship; family; femininity; gender; Germany; immigration; masculinity; poverty; Russia; Andreas Dresen; Bernd Böhlich; Alina Bronsky

The influx of immigrants with German ancestry from the former Soviet Union has contributed to a significant Russian-German population in the Federal Republic of Germany today. This presence is by no means homogeneous, but in terms of cultural representation, the image of a diverse community occupies a realistic realm of everyday life often associated with relatively recent immigration: poverty, unemployment, illegal substances, and violence. The media projection of the Russian immigrant is often corroborated in contemporary film and literature, but, as I contend in this article, more often it mirrors "German" anxieties about the challenges and failures of cosmopolitan identities, or at least identities defined in a post-national Europe. Intricately connected to these anxieties are family fantasies, represented with varying degrees of commitment in film and literature. Ruth Mandel explores "cosmopolitan anxieties" in her superb study of German Turkish culture. She writes of emerging, even merging, subjectivities not as a breaching of cultures: "Rather, it implies a coming to terms with both the consequences of deracination and the refashioning of assumptions about 'our culture.' This has entailed Germany's recognition of the multiple links to Turkey, or, more generally, between Europe and its fantasies of the Orient."[1]

1. Ruth Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1.

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Mandel's work establishes a model for understanding the effects of immigration on identity and culture in an increasingly post-national Europe. In the case of Russian immigration to the Federal Republic of Germany, the "fantasies" and ethnic identifications are mediated not only by recent East-West-German history, but also by the ostensible ideological and political alliance between the German Democratic Republic and the former Soviet Union. More importantly, the real existing laws governing citizenship accommodate newcomers from Russia in ways that expose other fantasies of national identity. As I argue, the conflict between the notions of "our culture," ethnicized otherness, and portrayals of Russians in Germany inhabits a space in which gender difference constitutes a prominent concern, and the consequences of immigration become legible in the destabilization of the family. Of equal importance, however, is the idea of families as "imagined communities"—and the project of imagining the family across national boundaries.[2] I also rely on Edward Said's elaboration of imaginative geographies from his seminal work *Orientalism*. Said describes their construction as the "universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs'" as a "way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary."[3] The construction of imagined families occurs, in some cases, around the concept of the national, but also increasingly the transnational. For this reason, issues of immigration and citizenship in works about changing families take on new importance. In the works I analyze, the imagined family deterritorializes the space between "ours" and "theirs" precisely through asserting family ties beyond the boundaries of origin. These boundaries are tested on the territory of the contemporary Federal Republic of Germany.

Significant for the representation of Russian-German minority identity is the role historical gender roles play in the construction of the family after the fall of the Berlin Wall. More specifically, the image of motherhood shifts, accommodating itself to new economic, social, and geographic demands. The revision of female roles has repercussions for the "nuclear family," with the male bread-winner at the head of the household, the (working) mother responsible for nurturing, and dependent children expecting care. Issues related to immigration further complicate the relationships among paternity, maternity, and desire. The texts I discuss here capture crucial moments on the arc of changing familial roles. This reconfiguration of the basic social unit in turn aligns with the re-purposing of the family as an economic unit in the Federal Republic, which continues to drive the European Union's economy despite the impact of recent recession. In contrast to the increasingly symbiotic relationship between Germany and Russia at the

2. Deborah Fahy Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela, "Transnational Families in the Twenty-first Century," in *The Transnational Family: New European Frontiers and Global Networks*, ed. Deborah Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 10.
3. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 54.

macro-political and economic level, the cultural representation of subjective relationships between the two demographics is refracted through the lens of socio-economic privation. In reduced, intentionally realistic portrayals of German institutions as they encounter recent Russian immigrants, a power struggle emerges that necessarily mobilizes and destabilizes gender roles. The works I analyze in this article depart significantly from the darkly humorous depictions of minority culture in urban life portrayed, for example, by Wladimir Kaminer.[4] Instead, they represent the process of "German" family dissolution as coterminous with immigration and integration.

The role of income, authority, and love exerts pressure on hegemonic models of masculinity and femininity, both of which are affected by ethnic identity. Robert Connell's notion that all masculinities are "historical" posits as a corollary a concept of historical femininity.[5] In this counter-concept, the history of uniting Germanys and former GDR identity intervenes and varies the shift in gendered identity. To substantiate my claim, I analyze three works in which the presence of Russian-German figures significantly alters the perception and representation of the "German" family.[6] In Andreas Dresen's 2000 film *Die Polizistin*, the director employs a documentary style to craft a feature about a young policewoman and her search for love in unlikely places. The family, despite its fractured state, still provides a model of the primary social constellation. The rules of attraction are compromised by a relationship between a policewoman, who uneasily occupies her position of authority, and a former Russian sailor who, in economically reduced circumstances, neglects his (half German) son and leads a life of petty crime. Bernd Böhlich's *Du bist nicht allein* (2007) explores the effect of a Russian neighbor on an otherwise distressed yet otherwise stable (East) German family. Here the figure of a strong-willed, working mother asserts her equality and even touts her ability to be the breadwinner; precisely this role undermines her identity as a willing object of sexual desire. Finally, in Alina Bronsky's novel *Scherbenpark* (2008; *Broken Glass Park*, 2010), we encounter a protagonist who consciously deliberates on the contingencies of family, the conventions of gender, and the extremes of ethnicity that can dominate identities living in immigration. The headstrong, stubborn, and damaged young woman refuses to enter into a transnational family unit in which she would function as daughter and sexually complicit prey. Instead, she packs her backpack and walks away. Each

4. On Kaminer as an "ethnic writer," see Katharina Gerstenberger, "Writing by Ethnic Minorities in the Age of Globalisation," in *German Literature in the Age of Globalisation*, ed. Stuart Taberner (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2004), 209–28, esp. 222–26.

5. R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 185.

6. On the role of gender in satirical novels about the post-millennial German family, specifically in contrast to the 1968 generation, see Carrie Smith-Prei, "Satirizing the Private as Political: 1968 and Post-Millennial Family Narratives," in *Women in German Yearbook 25: Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture*, ed. Katharina Gerstenberger and Patricia Anne Simpson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 76–99.

text contributes to a discussion about the effect of immigration on concepts of motherhood, social institutions, paternity, and family when borders shift with transnational contexts.

According to recent statistics, approximately three million Russian-Germans live in the country, and the politics of citizenship have exacerbated tensions among immigrant groups. Russians of German ancestry are eligible for citizenship, thus bypassing the need to negotiate the process that others, German Turks, for example, must undergo. The sense of propriety on behalf of Russians with distant German descent and the inequities implicit in policy resulted in profound tragedy in 2009.[7] More specifically, like many recent immigrants, members of the Russian minority inhabit a milieu of poverty, joblessness, and crime; and with the right genealogy, they are entitled to German citizenship. The issue of citizenship, as well as a more figurative sense of belonging, ethnic identity and location, and a sense of ownership and investment in the host culture, all continue to focus the attention of a nation attempting to reconcile its history of racism and anti-Semitism with a commitment to a concept of cosmopolitanism and hospitality.

Beyond the headlines and media representation, voices from Russian-German communities are articulating the experience of ethnic identity, poverty, and crime often associated with recent immigrants. In the case of Russian-Germans, several texts evoke a relationship predicated on the past alliance between the former Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Moreover, the relationship between the two political entities was not one of purported equality implied in the epithet "socialist brother countries," but rather was one of dominance and subordination. This ostensible violation of socialist politics and ideology leaves traces on the development of gender roles in a contemporary context, and these, I contend, reflect and refract historical images of masculinity and femininity, which both are informed by ethnic background. In the two films and novel I analyze, there is a progression from a historically specific to a more ethnically inflected model of gendered identity, so much so that the identification of a figure as "Russian" becomes synonymous with a disruptive and destructive agent of emotional violence inflicted on the family. The films and literature depict a conflict between Russian and German models of male identity within the family, both real and imaginary.

The three different works represent varying ideals of the transnational family; each fails in a different way, though all reconfigure gender roles in a larger social and cultural context. In Dresen's film, the protagonist, a young postal worker who retrains as a police officer, Anne (Gabriela Maria Schmeide) gets involved with a man from Russia (Jegor, played by Jevgeni

7. A Russian-born German man, Alex W., stabbed an Egyptian woman to death outside a Dresden courtroom. The victim, Marwa al-Sherbini, was pregnant at the time. The assailant had insulted her, referring to her as a terrorist at a public playground for wearing the veil. The murder elicited mass protests in Egypt (and elsewhere), and al-Sherbini became known as the "headscarf martyr." "Egypt Mourns 'Headscarf Martyr,'" *BBC News*, July 6, 2009: http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/8136500.stm.

Sitochin) by vicariously "mothering" his son, Benny (Paul Grubba). In this film, her desire to preserve some notion of social justice is expressed in her advocacy of a transnational family structure that is collapsing in the face of poverty and banality. This film, which is set in the dodgy Lütten-Klein section of Rostock, avoids specifically political themes, but the politics of immigration encroach on the emotional register of the characters nonetheless. A particular affiliation between the recent past of alleged solidarity between East Germany and the former Soviet Union emerges in the portrayal of an underground economy. These economic relations highlight the tension between the German policewoman and the Russian. By contrast, Böhlich's feature film focuses on the interplay among work, money, and middle-aged disappointment. Again, the futility of German authority—when embodied by a female character—marks the epicenter of events. Katharina Thalbach plays Frau Moll to Alex Prahl's Hans, the unemployed industrial painter who falls in love with Jewgenia (Katerina Medvedeva), recently arrived from Russia. Her presence disrupts the middle-class German family, complete with television set, *Essecke* (breakfast nook), and the symbol of family wholeness, the potted rubber tree. While the film ultimately affirms a belief in the human ability to renew one's life through work and love, any notion of the homogeneous German family is discarded in the process, and the transfer of conventional gender attributes contributes to its collapse.

Finally, I turn to Alina Bronsky's novel in which the narrator, Sascha Neimann, fantasizes about murdering the man who killed her Russian mother along with her German partner; the young protagonist consciously exerts her power by refusing to be a victim of domestic violence or sexual predators. Instead, she establishes an accidental family, only to abandon it. In all these works, conflicting images of ethnic gender roles destabilize the family as a defensible social unit. Gender and ethnic differences erode the persistence of historically "German" concepts and practices of work and family values. As I argue in this article, the presence of Russian influence compounds the challenges already posed by destabilized gender roles.

Policing Maternity

The voice-over narrator in Dresen's film muses: "Ich möchte mal wissen, ob es die grosse Liebe wirklich gibt, oder ist alles nur blödes Roulettspiel. Ist es wahnsinniger Zufall, wenn so ein Sonnenstrahl dich trifft" (I'd like to know if there really is such as a thing as a great love, or whether it's all just some idiotic roulette game. Is it a crazy accident if a ray of sunlight happens to find you?).[8] Anne, the newly trained policewoman, is assigned to the small, overburdened force in Rostock Lütten-Klein, the impoverished *Neubauviertel* with somewhere between 80,000 and 90,000 residents, and six or seven police officers. As the director and Laila Stieler, who wrote the screenplay, both comment in the

8. Andreas Dresen, dir., *Die Polizistin* (WDR, 2000), DVD. Translations are modified from English subtitles.

bonus material, they are motivated by a desire to portray bitter reality. In fact, the camera pans across the monotony of the Soviet-era apartment buildings while the female voice wonders about great love, and her chances strike the spectator as unlikely. The film, which was made for television but eventually and somewhat atypically was later released for theaters, references reality, the everyday and its persistent tedium and occasional violence both aesthetically and substantially. That realism includes moving the story from the busy Berlin to the more manageable Rostock, incorporating local actors, issues, and atmosphere into the production, and using frequent improvisation and regional dialect. The residual Russian population figures in this framework: Jegor, formerly a Russian sailor employed at a once robust shipyard, represents not only the love interest in the film. The estranged father of young Benny, and the remaindered immigrant, he is also a German citizen. His fleeting, somewhat reluctant relationship with Anne, combined with her desire for love and a shadowy projection of the "heile Familie," construct a transnational, imaginary family to reconfigure the real-existing, post-socialist social unit that needs constant police intervention in this milieu.

Anne, the protagonist, was inspired in part by the published diary of a real policewoman. Her male colleagues accept her, but remind her at key moments that she needs to develop a thicker skin. Her own story makes her sympathetic: she worked at the post office for five years, but was let go when two offices were consolidated. In an opening interview with her new superior at the precinct that is persistently interrupted by phone calls and demands for his attention, she states: "Dann war ich . . . über" (Then I was left . . . over). On her first patrol with the hardened but endearing partner Mike (Axel Prahl), they are called to break up a domestic disturbance. The alcoholic mother and stepfather fight while Anne speaks to the ten-year-old Benny, who is left in charge of his baby sister and tells about the beer, schnapps, and pills his mother needs for her sickness "an der Seele" (in her soul). This child becomes a key player in Anne's pursuit of happiness and so does his father, Jegor.

She meets him first on the job. The police team catches a nocturnal thief at a supermarket. Anne pursues the fleeing perpetrator, clubs the man, and subdues him. The police assume the man speaks no German, but he insists: "Deutscher Staatsbürger" or German citizen. Anne addresses him in Russian. When her astounded and impressed partner comments on her language skills, she remarks: "Ist irgendwie hängengeblieben" (I remember it somehow). The reference to having learned some Russian identifies the relatively young woman with the East German school system, in which Russian was mandatory. This opening encounter establishes first the legal status of the Russian criminal as a citizen, and also incorporates the historical references to a former historical relationship between East Germany and the Soviet Union. In their next accidental meeting, however, Anne sees him at a club; their eyes meet, she leaves, and he follows her outside. Again, she starts to speak to him in Russian, but he replies in German. Her profession forces an intersection between her national past and her transnational present.

Anne's police partner Mike provides a model for her idea of the perfect life: he is married, has two children, a profession, and someone waiting for him when he returns home. He and Anne share a powerful attraction that they manage to contain until a breaking point precipitated by an intense emotional experience on the job. After the discovery of a corpse in sexually unusual circumstances, the police partners must tell an older couple of their son's death. (Not a suicide; the young man is found dead in the woods where he suffocated in a scuba diver's gear, worn to achieve sexual pleasure through oxygen deprivation during masturbation.) The Siegels, shocked and crushed by news of the death, press for details—they are legitimately puzzled by the wet suit in the woods, given their son's passion for and expertise in diving—and the director cuts away to the police team coping with the emotional intensity of the day by sharing a bottle of whiskey, mulling over what they could have done or said differently. Then, at Anne's behest, they act on their attraction and sleep together at her apartment.

This is her second encounter in the film, and the director describes the contrast between the scenes of failed intimacy. First, Anne intentionally pursues Jegor, buys a washing machine from him, and pretends to have just gotten up when he arrives on time, but she insists he is an hour early. She and he carry the heavy appliance up her stairs, and her hapless seduction leads to sex on the newly delivered washing machine, in the bright light of day. By contrast, Anne and Mike have one-sided sex in darkness; she is disappointed sexually, emotionally, and professionally. The director notes the difference in lighting, an external marker of Anne's ethical assumptions about the sanctioned and illicit relationships.

Mike's family status weighs on them both. Anne is the one who tells their boss that she wants another partner, and the reasons, though unspoken, become obvious. Mike is furious when he finds out, assuming everyone will know soon enough, and he defends himself: "Ich habe Familie" (I have a family). Anne criticizes him for having forgotten that detail the night before. His defense and her ethical barometer read the same: family is to be cherished and protected. While Anne sees some potential for a cobbled together transnational family with Jegor and Benny—however unrealistic and far-fetched—she cannot allow her loneliness and search for great love to overshadow Mike's relationship to the essential and indispensable family unit.

Her relationship with Jegor, which also centers on aligning desire with respectability, forces the issue of cross-national relationships and their potential for success. There is very little evidence of real intimacy in the film, but one shared moment between Jegor and Anne invokes an imaginary family. After their sexual encounter, Anne prepares a fish dinner in her under-furnished apartment. There is no soundtrack to speak of in this film; all sound is diegetic, but in the dinner scene, romantic music plays in the background. Anne makes a playful gesture, flicking a small forkful of food at Jegor as they eat the fish Anne admits she has never prepared before. When she chokes on

a bone, Jegor leaps up, slices a thick piece of bread, and instructs her to eat it with minimal chewing. Anne eventually stops coughing and gasping, and nuzzles in his shoulder. Jegor recounts a memory of Benny, who, when he was five, choked on a fish bone. Jegor uses the word *Knochen* (bone), but pauses to consult the recovering Anne about a vocabulary correction: she supplies *Gräte* (fish bone), and the differences in cultural and ethnic practices rise to the surface along with the further accuracy in the language. Jegor smiles and strokes Anne's hair, recalling his ex-wife's fury at the very idea of giving a child of five fish with bones. He muses that he himself was eating fish without assistance at the age of two. In the comforting embrace, the child Benny is present in the narrative. In fact, it is Jegor's affection for his child that permits Anne's feelings in the first place. When she pursued him at first, it was to admonish him about his duty to the child. "Sie können nicht einfach hierher kommen und Kinder auf die Welt setzen und nicht um sie kümmern" (You can't just come here and have children and not take care of them). He defends himself at that early stage of acquaintance, insisting that he stays for Benny and it is the ex-wife who limits contact.

The thin-skinned Anne intervenes with the intention of repairing relationships among the repeat offenders, the substance abusers, the incensed drug addicts, and comforting the downcast. However, with Benny and Jegor, her interventions assume an extremely personal nature and she inserts herself into an imaginary family constellation that will never be realized. She does not react to Jegor's disapproval of the coddling of male children in a milieu that differs from his own process of masculinization and socialization, as symbolized in the fish bone story in which Anne is aligned with the child.

These unacknowledged differences prevent any lasting connection. As events unfold, Jegor reveals an emotion approximating contempt toward Anne. She may be a police officer; she subdued and arrested him, only to fall in love with him—as Benny's father and as a candidate for her assistance. As Laila Stieler notes in her commentary, the character Anne is a woman who has boundless love to give, and that is not something everyone can stand. When Jegor progresses from petty theft to armed robbery, ostensibly to help pay for Benny's class trip to Denmark, Anne and her new partner Albert arrive on the scene of the criminals' escape. Albert has cuffed Jegor to a pole, and Anne pursues but fails to apprehend his accomplice. Albert makes a clearly dismissive reference to her ability, presumably because of her gender: "Ja, klar," and she mimics him in disgust and disappointment, only to realize her lover is one of the perpetrators. When Albert leaves them to give chase, Anne unlocks the handcuffs, insisting that she could help somehow, but Jegor takes her weapon, kidnaps her, and forces her to drive him to the highway in the police van. She continues to offer help, puzzled by his refusal. Pushed past the point of caring, Jegor declares: "Ich liebe dich nicht. Ich liebe keine Frau, die dauernd für mich was machen will. Ich brauche das nicht. Ich werde aggressiv" (I don't love you. I don't love any woman who always wants to be doing something for me. I don't need it. I get aggressive). Anne confuses her

professional identity with a personal, parenting role. When Jegor ejects her from the van and drives off, and Albert picks her up, he asks, baffled, why on earth she set the culprit free. She can only answer: "Er hat mir leid getan" (I felt sorry for him).

Anne identifies with the "clients," the alcoholics, the thieves, the victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, and rejects her own identification with the extended arm of impersonal laws. Though she concedes on several occasions that she indeed needs a thicker skin, she seems positively incapable of designing one. In the final scene, Benny is back at the precinct. He had run away when his father failed to meet him on the playground before his birthday party. It is clear; no one in his unemployed family can muster up the 250 D-Mark for the class trip. Anne steps in yet again as the mothering social worker, and suggests that she take him to the beach during the trip. Benny asks in astonishment whether she could really make that happen: "Klar, ich bin die Polizei" (Of course, I'm the police).

Both Dresen and Stieler stress the relationship between the film, the documentary style, and their desire to portray reality. The screenplay, based in part on the novel of a policewoman and her milieu, *Meine Nachtgestalten* (My Night Figures), by Annagret Held, underwent fourteen versions, relocated from Berlin to Rostock, and crossed just about every television producers' desk before it found support at WDR for the 20.15 slot, directly following the evening news. Dresen mentions the "bitter reality" of the milieu, noting, for example, that the Vietnamese Imbiss where they shot two scenes had its window smashed in regularly, and the film captures a passing glimpse of a skinhead horde on patrol. They discuss the real attack on a home for asylum seekers in Lichterhagen, which forced Vietnamese to take refuge on the roof. There were no injuries, but the incident, familiar from the headlines, left deep scars on the collective psyche of the nation. The filmmaker reveals that he wanted to end the film with a similar attack on the Imbiss, but closed instead with the more hopeful image of Anne, in uniform, crossing the police station parking lot with Benny at her side. There is little mention of the Russian minority, though the Russian sailor provides a "reales Vorbild" (real model) of the late 1990s in Rostock. Dresen and Stieler speak about the presence of Russian men, scavenging in garbage in search of items to sell at home in Russia. They speculate about the character Jegor, who set out to sea and ended up in a 60-square-meter apartment. It is curious in some ways that they do not comment on the function of paternity that motivates his decision to stay, or his German citizenship, thematized prominently in the film. They do, however, remark on the desire of even the lowest inhabitants of the socio-economic ladder to attain and preserve some notion of a "heile Familie" (intact family). Though it remains unarticulated in the screenplay, Anne, as I have argued and I hope demonstrated, aspires to some notion of a transnational family and reconciles a contiguous relationship between her role as police officer and her role as surrogate mother to Benny. In her version of the world,

the fatherless family provides a metaphor and a model for a plural society in the process of personal and political healing.

Security and Family Assets

The Russian father figure in *Die Polizistin* reinforces preconceived associations between Russian men: a thick skin, and a life of crime. By contrast, the image of Russian femininity in the next film I analyze functions as a benign, even redemptive installment in the cultural and national imaginary. Her presence forces questions about (East) German masculinity. In *Du bist nicht allein*, issues of unemployment, loss of socio-economic status, and limited horizons fracture relationships that already begin to shift when (East) German and Russian family units become neighbors. The film foregrounds the specific differences in gender roles from the outset, along with the forced adaptation to a market economy and—in stark contrast to the former GDR's right to work policy—a challenging and humiliating job market. The few moments of promise in the film originate in the contiguous relationship between Jewgenia, recently arrived from Russia with her father and a truculent daughter, and Hans Moll, the remaindered breadwinner and head of household who must yield to his circumstances and defer to his wife's employment.[9] Several crucial moments in this work lend insight into the ethnic specificity of family: the assumption of a diminished East German past in which men and women alike viewed work as an expression of political and communal identity as much as an economic necessity; the traces of Russia as a noble liberator in East German memory; and the identification between recent immigrants and the specific experience of East Germans during the short-lived yet powerful euphoria inspired by breaching the Berlin Wall.

The director integrates references to an admittedly dated, socialist valuation of human labor in oblique but significant ways. The film opens in an *Arbeitsamt*, with Frau Moll defensive about her age, eager for work, and submissive to the official who comments on her *Jahrgang* (1956), her use of the term *Fleischerei* (butcher shop; "knacker"), with its East German connotations, over the preferred

9. The literature on the decline of the male breadwinner in Europe focuses on important socio-economic trends, but does not generally consider the specific effects of this diminished status in post-socialist economies. See Rosemary Crompton, *Employment and the Family: The Reconfiguration of Work and Family Life in Contemporary Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8. See also Laura den Dulk and Anneke van Doorne-Huiskes, "Social Policy in Europe: Its Impact on Families and Work," in *Women, Men, Work and Family in Europe*, ed. Rosemary Crompton, Suzan Lewis, and Clare Lyonette (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 35–57, esp. 37. On trends in Central and Eastern Europe, see Hana Hašková, "Fertility Decline, the Postponement of Childbearing and the Increase in Childlessness in Central and Eastern Europe: A Gender Equity Approach," in *Women, Men, Work and Family in Europe*, ed. Rosemary Crompton, Suzan Lewis, and Clare Lyonette (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 76–85, esp. 80–82. Her conclusions about gender equity and strategic postponement in the Czech Republic could explain some demographic trends in the former GDR as well.

Metzgerei (butcher), and her lack of formal training in a profession.[10] As he describes a position that requires diligence and modest English skills, she affirms, in Berlin dialect, "Bin ick…bin ick," with a wink to her son, who is seated next to her to provide moral support, but his presence demonstrates the integration of work into the entire family structure. The employment officer, however, casually negates the fundamental idea that work not only provides wages, but also shapes identity. He muses, as much to himself as to Frau Moll and Sven, her son, "Wie kommen wir in die Rente?" (How are we going to get you to retirement age?). For him, finding Frau Moll a job fulfills no larger purpose: there is no teleology beyond bridging the gap until she reaches retirement age. The audience, aware of Frau Moll's stage in life, cannot help hearing the meaning and dignity sucked from this question. In the post-socialist context of Berlin, gender and work are reconfigured in such a way that the full-employment policy of the former Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED) seems in retrospect to have lifted certain burdens from gender roles by de-emphasizing the identity between the male breadwinner and the female domestic. In the new economy, the new Germany, work reverts to alienated labor.

The importance of employment informs the emotional life of the family, but also leads to its downfall. In the *Plattenbau* apartment with a balcony, she shares with her husband glossy brochures advertising work for painters in Holland. In the absence of gainful employment, Hans occupies himself with landscape painting, transforming the small balcony into a makeshift studio. In one telling gesture, he kneels before his masterpiece, but is annoyed by the dripping from wet laundry hanging above him. Hans pauses to squeeze the excess water from the garments, including his wife's very functional lingerie. His own feelings about unemployment express themselves in self-deprecating humor. In one scene, he agrees, after some prodding, to accompany Sven to the pool. At the entrance, the woman at the window asks about discounts, to which he unblinkingly replies: "Behinderter Student, zur Zeit arbeitslos" (disabled student, currently unemployed). Her lack of appreciation for his joke pries him from his grim humor, and he adds the truth: "Nee, nur arbeitslos" (no, just unemployed). In this seemingly ancillary exchange, he identifies himself by his lack of work, and succumbs to a social stereotype: he needs assistance, both public and private.

The appearance of Jewgenia and her family provide initial distraction, even irritation, but Hans quickly overcomes his initial annoyance at having to help her out with the heavy lifting when she first moves in next door. Instead, he seems charmed by her vulnerability, and attracted to her and her way of life. At his wife's bidding, he drives the new neighbor to a furniture store in Lichtenberg, only to find it closed. He agrees to return the next day: they test the comfort of a living room set. Jewgenia needs a washing machine,

10. Bernd Böhlich, dir., *Du bist nicht allein* (RBB, WDR, and SWD, 2007). Subtitles Babelfisch Translations. English: Thomas Cooper. Translations are based on the subtitles with my modifications.

but cannot afford one. Without hesitation, he offers to buy it for her, "zur Begrüssung" (as a welcome gift). Hans hits the nearest ATM for the needed 200 Euros. He justifies this gesture of generosity with an allusion to the money East Germans received when they came West after the fall of the Wall. Everyone received *Begrüssungsgeld* (welcome money) in the sum of 100 D-Mark. From the first, he associates her experience of immigration to Germany with his own loss (and gain) of nation. From this point on, he reveals his affection in small gestures of assistance that lead to larger infractions and betrayals.

It is important to trace the cues that portray Hans's deepening affection for his neighbor. In addition to being vulnerable, she embodies a quietly noble commitment to forging a new life in Berlin. In a series of encounters with neighbors, potential employers, and various forms of authority, Jewgenia demonstrates joy in the quotidian, regardless of the challenges. While driving an old English truck, she hums a folk song. In another scene, the newly self-important security guard, Frau Moll, drags her new Russian neighbor's daughter home after she catches the girl begging in the street with a sign claiming she is a Russian orphan. After the incident, Jewgenia weeps discreetly on her adjacent balcony. Hans hears her and tries to comfort her. She manages to thank him for the balcony mural he completed, complimenting him on its beauty: "Es ist wunderschön. Es sieht aus wie zu Hause" (It is beautiful. It looks like home). In response, he mumbles, "So hab ick mir das vorgestellt" (I tried to imagine how it is). Hans's relationship to Jewgenia mobilizes his imagination. His desire to imagine her homeland's beauty transforms his painting as work into art. The newly achieved combination of skill and imagined beauty is more than work; instead it is part of a process of seduction and affection, expressed here as a positive predisposition toward Jewgenia's Russian heritage. He associates her identity with beauty of a physical and spiritual nature—and he longs to participate in that beauty by proximity, by his contiguous relationship to a German-speaking Russian neighbor.

Security, both personal and economic, surfaces in the film both as a constitutive element of self-definition and as a stifling yet nonetheless necessary aspect of family life, no less significant than the breakfast nook and the fichus. Frau Moll's role as a security guard lends renewed importance and purpose to her identity, but she is equally devastated when the facility she is guarding with such dedication and consequence turns out to be empty. This disappointment is shattering. Similarly, Jewgenia's rejection of Hans's affection leads to his downfall. The title of the film echoes emptily throughout the relationships among characters.

"Du bist nicht allein" is used as the marketing strategy—you are not alone anymore, you are one of a team, etc.—for Frau Moll's new work as a security guard. She learns that her personality is her capital, and her vigilance makes her part of a community—of security guards. "Sie sind nicht allein" (You—in a formal way—are not alone, but also They are not alone.) is the phrase that resonates, however ironically, with the more intimate theme song, a

1960s ballad reluctantly performed by Roy Black, and sung by Hans at his neighbor's house-warming party next door. His touching, somewhat awkward performance of this sentimental love song endears him to the Russian guests who understand very little about him. He leaves Sven at home, brings the family rubber tree as a gift, and tries his best to feel comfortable among the other, mostly Russian-speaking guests. The song exposes his vulnerability, and this emotion gains him acceptance in the round of drinking and laughing immigrants. His reaction, after the percolating of deep emotion and a hope for renewal, exacerbates the resentment he feels toward his working wife and nearly all aspects of their shared existence, including her nickname for him: *Bärchen*, sweetheart, literally "little bear."

In stark contrast, Jewgenia represents a world of real and imagined beauty, from Hans's painting of her *Heimat* to the woman herself. In a moment at the gas station, Jewgenia is distracted by Hans's courting, and she accidentally runs over a man in a cell phone costume, there to advertise. This development precipitates the downfall of the family. Frau Moll comes home to find her husband banging on the neighbor's door, sobbing and loudly proclaiming his love. After work, Frau Moll pays the new neighbor a visit. She has previously noticed the missing fichus in her own home, and registers its new location next door. She compliments Jewgenia on the new highlights: "Die sehen gut aus, die Strähnchen. Sie sehen überhaupt gut aus" (Your highlights look nice. All of you looks nice). This scene sets up a complicated moment: Jewgenia highlights Frau Moll's hair, and makes reference to the accident. The phone rings, and both women assume it is the police. Frau Moll answers to clear up the situation, but it is her husband, calling to say good-bye to Jewgenia. He is on the platform, waiting for the train to depart, and does not recognize his wife's voice when she answers the phone. Hans describes his emotions, his belief that no one like her would come into his life again, and assures her of his love. Frau Moll assures him of her love, knowing he cannot recognize her voice. He hangs up and jumps on the train to Holland.

In this exquisitely crafted scene, the car accident and love story become one. Katharina Thalbach's performance emphasizes the truth and depth of ambivalence in her character. Jewgenia, assuming the police have called, asks what's the matter. She says nothing, swallows her sobs, and refers to the "Unfall" (an accident), and adds a legal explanation: "Eindeutig, also nicht vorsätzlich" (not premeditated). Jewgenia does not understand, and here the idioms of the legal and the intimate coincide: "Nicht mit Absicht" (not on purpose). Frau Moll is referring to her husband's alienated affection; Jewgenia is limited in her understanding of the situation and the language. Hans in fact heads for Holland, and Frau Moll learns to swim—a skill she had never before mastered—as a gesture that speaks of risk and personal growth; both characters declare good wishes for the other in voiceovers, both participate in rituals of renewal, both utter forgiving and encouraging words to their absent partners, but the upbeat end may strike the audience as contrived.

One aspect of Jewgenia's life includes belonging to a community of alienated Russian-immigrant consciousness. Similarly, Jegor's Russian identity is crucial in that it is historically accurate and realistically convincing in the post-GDR context. In both films, ethnic identity seems at first glance to be contingent. However, the implication of a shared political history, now lost, and a lingering solidarity in the relationship between Hans and Jewgenia both sharpen the focus not on a specific ethnic affiliation but rather on the fragile nature of the German family that cannot bear the weight of working women with any sense of ascending femininity. In these two portrayals, masculinity is defined by paternity, work, and desire. In the case of the dedicated but flawed father in *Die Polizistin*, ethnic identity also shapes character: Jegor repudiates any connection to the Russian mafia, but escalates his life of crime from misdemeanor to felonious—ostensibly in order to provide for his son. While he claims paternity as partial motivation, it turns out he just wants money to survive, and in the ethical context of the film, family and children trump individual needs. Jegor turns out to be another Russian criminal. His desertion of family, of his son Benny, constitutes the worst crime of all, at least in Anne's eyes. Her German assumptions about family and decency prevail, though she is able to "maternalize" the role of the police officer. Jewgenia, on the other hand, provides a model of ethnic femininity and beauty, also a positive image of Russian maternity, and a plucky desire for self-sufficiency—she is partner-less upon immigration—and she asks for and accepts help without the expectation of romantic involvement. Her social life immediately exceeds the loneliness and isolation of the nuclear family. Even in immigration, she quickly forges bonds to a community whereas the Molls seem to have no one but themselves for company. And that is not enough. It is the relationship to Jewgenia that re-purposes Hans's masculinity, but also drives him away from the family circle. The Russian presence in both films, for all their differences and nuances, ultimately disrupts any notion of family stability.

Leaving Behind the Broken Glass

The broken glass park that provides the title for the story of a young woman alone in the world also symbolizes the fate of the contemporary transnational family in Germany. In this work, which has received wide critical acclaim, we meet Sascha Naimann, the daughter of an absent and distant Russian father and a murdered, vibrant, bohemian mother, who inhabits the marginalized Russian-German ghetto on the outskirts of a large city, presumably Frankfurt am Main. The scene shifts, then, from the residual East German apartment blocks of *Du bist nicht allein* to the former West, but the setting is the same: a low-income housing project (the Emerald) that functions as magnet for the dispossessed. Sascha's plan is twofold: to write a book about her mother, and to murder the man who killed her, Vadim, a stepfather with violent and abusive tendencies. We learn that he and his wife have two other children, Sascha's younger half-siblings toward whom she feels protective. Indirectly, the female protagonist, who excels in her studies, plays chess like a champ,

cares for her younger sister and brother, cultivates the ability to absent herself from threatening situations, most of which involve dominant males. Sascha speaks from the margins to the mainstream and declares without apology: "I hate men."[11] This proclamation is motivated by the pattern of violence and victimization Sascha knows and rejects. The author, who was born in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 1978 and lives in Frankfurt, repudiates any autobiographical associations (Alina Bronsky is a pseudonym), but gives us insight into a world in which language, identity, and family all must negotiate international boundaries. We learn that Vadim's distant cousin comes to watch over the orphaned children; she enters into a relationship with a Russian compatriot despised by Sascha, who moves out in protest. Sascha seeks and finds refuge, but she eventually considers and rejects a series of possible family constellations as unbearable. In contemporary German fiction, she represents a shift from some of the desultory protagonists who have populated recent works, into a figure who refuses to become a victim like her educated and artistically inclined mother. This novel depicts an apparently intact family, two parents and three children, and in some ways insists on the most conventional constellation for the family unit. As newcomers in Germany, family life falls apart with the most acute representations of domestic violence. This family image is countered by the partnership between Sascha's mother and a German man, but also by the representation of a professional couple and their sick son, which, however prosperous, fails to attain fulfillment or enjoy stability. Bronsky's narrator functions as a point of intersection among these three models, and rejects them all.

The 17-year-old narrator introduces herself as Sascha, short for both Alexander and Alexandra, a resident of Germany for seven years and fluent in German "ten times better than all the other Russian Germans put together" (13). She refers to her mother as "too sentimental" (14), in contrast to her own logical nature, and alternately upbraids her in imagined conversations and asks for forgiveness: "Why did you marry that asshole? Why did he get to come with you to Germany? Why in the hell did you let him into the apartment that night?" (21). The narrator shares the aspects of her mother's pedigree that led to her downfall: art history student and artist, cosmopolitan, credentialed, and refined. Her mother's German boyfriend, Harry, also a victim in the double murder, appears as a slightly bumbling but benign model of manhood. Sascha recalls her first visit to Harry's studio apartment: "He was exactly as my mother had described. A little difficult to be around at first because he was so unsure of himself. But as he gained confidence, he was kind and thoughtful" (30). Yet even the prematurely hardened Sascha finds him endearing, because he breaks the stereotype she carries of German men, and proves to be the opposite of the Russian man she despises: "So meek, so helpless. Never thinking of himself. Broke but still generous. . . . My mother's great love" (32).

11. Alina Bronsky, *Broken Glass Park*, trans. Tim Mohr (New York: Europa, 2010), 18. Hereafter cited in text.

In other words, Harry, who studied literature, never finished his degree, and had difficulty keeping a job, provided the exact opposite model of masculinity from the crude and self-important, not to mention abusive, Russian Vadim who murdered him. He menaces, beats, lashes out, and blames everyone for his problems but himself. Sascha runs through a list of Vadim's prejudices, many of which are directed at the German host culture, but his venom seems "democratically" distributed. Women seem to be the real evil: all women in general, his wife in particular.

Sascha encounters Volker Trebur, the City Section Editor of a Frankfurt newspaper, after she reads an article about the imprisoned and now remorseful Vadim. Its sympathetic portrayal sends her into a rage, and she tracks down the writer, an intern, and the editor who has already taken action against the piece. Though she dismisses any statements of understanding, she does take his card when he offers help at any time, and when things get unbearable at home in the Emerald, she calls him to test the sincerity of his offer to help, and asks for a place to stay. Uneasy in the house, she meets Felix, her host's sixteen-year-old son, eventually sleeps with the young man but develops an intense affection for his father. In her core, Sascha becomes the ethical barometer that measures the relative success of families, accidental and otherwise.

When Felix points out his mother on the news from Berlin, Sascha asks for confirmation that the parents are split up. She marvels that he chose to stay with his father; Felix did not like his mother's new boyfriend, nor did he want to move. Sascha never had this option. After a health emergency that lands Felix in the hospital due to a chronic condition with sporadic crises, Sascha and Volker are alone at his home. She acts on her attraction, but stops when things get scary. At this point, she feels the unwanted emotion of pity for the older man whose wife left and whose son must cope with frail health:

> Who could possible leave someone like that, I think. Someone with graying hair, someone good-looking and sophisticated and funny. How can you just abandon your child, especially when he's so sick? A red-haired kid with freckles and a white scar beneath his T-shirt. (126)

In the scheme of family configurations, Volker is the ideal father, exemplifying an intelligent and warm version of professional paternity. Sascha's search for an adult relationship constitutes a search for a father figure, albeit after the fact.

Volker becomes the name she speaks when she learns fear. Her status, orphaned by the double murder, accords her a certain exemption, but the peripheral presence of a rich German man in her life offer more source of provocation than protection on the turf known as Broken Glass Park. A teenager, Peter, heads up the local gang of Russians; they leave Sascha alone for the most part, but she cannot seem to help herself when it comes to provoking them verbally. They catch her alone outside and Peter and two other guys from the Emerald harass her. Even though she shares their knowledge that she has no chance against them of defending herself, she brandishes an empty bottle. When Peter expresses surprise that she does not want to have sex with him, and confesses that there is something about her he likes,

she lashes out: "'I only sleep with guys who can read,' I sneer. It's like I'm possessed. 'Which means you're out, dear Peter. I'm afraid welfare checks and broken German just don't get me off'" (152). But the bottle refuses to break when she hits him and flies from her hand. Her scream saves her from rape. Sascha screams Volker's name, and why it has such a prohibitive effect on her assailants remains ambiguous. He plays the role of a rich German sugar daddy in some ways, but the vehemence of her fear also wards off Peter and the other two. After the attack, she calls him and speculates: "Maybe they thought someone was coming. They tried to cover my mouth. I bit that hand so hard it bled" (153). Some combination of her German protector and her own unbridled defense saves her. Given this attack and her response, the reader can wonder what motivates her to seek out these guys as allies. The reasons involve ethnic and immigrant identity trumping gender difference.

The representatives of German masculinity include another Volker, a member of the NPD who assumes Sascha is German and tries to date her. Sascha intentionally baits young Volker, who intriguingly shares the name of Felix's father. In her attempt to hold feelings of loneliness and rejection at bay, she seduces this substitute Volker, but he wants to talk and get to know her. His favorite topic, cars, leads quickly into a tirade against foreign elements in German society. Sascha eggs him on with references to "foreign crap" (175), and Volker segues into politics when the fluent young narrator prompts him with a question about identity and community: "Who—we?" (176). Volker responds by showing his ideological cards: "We Germans, of course. Me and you. We're losing everything—our economy, our language, our genes" (176). He directs his hatred more toward the Chinese and Turks, but Sascha steers him back onto her territory, suggesting the Russians are worse than the Chinese. "The Russians? Nah. They used to be bad. But you can forget about them nowadays. They drink themselves to death. They're degenerates" (176). In the conscious entrapment, Sascha reveals much about the clichés associated with the media image of post-Soviet Russia in a litany of negative attributes: "Bad food, bad weather, social injustice. The old dictatorship replaced by a new one. Arbitrariness and violence" (177). Volker's final words on the subject of her unannounced heritage inspire her alliance with Peter and company. Volker insists he is not worried about Russians: "It won't take long for them to kill each other off. Anybody left will be in the slammer. And when we take power, we'll seal the border tight" (177). His unwitting description of her family's fate ends this topic. They have sex, but it makes her feel worse. She leads him on rollerblades to Broken Glass Park, introduces him as a German Nazi, and muses, while Peter is forcing him to drink a medicalized beverage, "legal speed" known as sailor's tea. The combination of vodka and brown liquid, as Peter notes, is costly. Sascha observes with admiration: "Then he pours the liquid in Volker's mouth, though the bulk of it sloshes down the sides of his face, causing Peter to issue a stream of comments, 'I'll fuck your mother' being the most friendly of them. I listen with my mouth agape. It sounds almost poetic. If only I could curse as fluidly as that" (182). In the previous scene with her Russian peers, German was the

language of attraction, and she gave them demerits for their broken language. Now that she has encountered a nationalist who would see her for the ethnic stereotype she represents to him, she indulges in drug use, bonds with Peter, communicates silently with him, and feels at home. Her admiration extends to his fluent, poetic cursing.

At that point, she begins to unravel. When she identifies more closely with her ethnic ties over the gender ones, she loses control. She gets in a roller-blading accident, then discovers with destabilizing disappointment that Vadim has killed himself, depriving her of the right to murder him. That pushes her over the edge. A nosy neighbor tells her to leave, round up her nasty clan and leave all the men and boys alone. Driven to the edge, Sascha stands outside hurling rocks at the windows of the housing complex known ridiculously as the Emerald. The inhabitants strike back: someone hits her, sending her to the hospital with a head injury. The crisis leads to a resolution that rejects both real and imaginary families.

The images of gendered identity in the novel all disappoint: her beautiful, artistically inclined, and fatally generous mother only managed to fall for people like Vadim, her assassin, and Harry, a kind, gentle, albeit bumbling German man. Sascha shares her mother's joy in this unlikely relationship after the brutality of Vadim. After her stepfather commits double murder, Maria (the cousin) crosses borders to take custody of the children, but remains trapped in the Russian community because she fails to learn the language. She hooks up with a fellow Russian, much to Sascha's disgust. Still, at the end, Maria anchors the family, but it is the news of Vadim's suicide that pushes Sascha past the point of no return. The failure of all models of masculinity and maternity, both German and Russian, drive her away. It must be noted that for Sascha, her mother's desire for love was expressed as part of her maternal role. Femininity in this case includes maternal devotion. Sascha ultimately rejects all available family models. In the end, Volker and Felix return from vacation, hear of Sascha's hospitalization after the incident described above and come to the Emerald. In a scene that would fulfill the fantasy of an accidental family, we encounter only disappointment and failure of family. While the others all enjoy blueberry *Torte*, Sascha escapes: "I throw my backpack over my shoulder, turn my baseball cap backwards, and head out into the sun" (221). While it would be overdetermined to equate the shattered glass that is strewn all over this novel with the family, there is compelling evidence that the shards, both figuratively and literally, inform Sascha's identity within larger social structures. At every critical juncture, glass breaking—or not, as in the case of her defensive offense with the predatory Peter—and shattering windows reflect the disarticulation of her role as daughter, sister, and surrogate mother to her siblings, Felix, and surrogate wife to Volker.

Conclusions

The three works, each in its own way, demonstrate the destabilizing effects of the Russian-German characters on the German family. Though I have

described this process as a "decline"—taking the two films and the novel as examples—the necessarily negative connotations of downfall mask a more redemptive trend. The decline of the male breadwinner, stagnant birth rates, and economic and existential discontent associated with globalization generate the loss of ego, stability, and national identity conflated with prosperity and pride in a flourishing currency. In both films and in the novel, the female characters experience a transition to individualism associated with post-national, post-communist societies in which pro-population policies have been withdrawn. Dresen's police woman effectively humanizes a German institution, the police, not known for providing comfort and social support, by overemphasizing the maternal potential of her position intervening in the lives of Russian immigrants and citizens. In that film, ethnic identity is specific to GDR history, and from there, individuals build motivated relationships beyond historical and geographic contingencies. Böhlich's Frau Moll emerges, through work, from her husband's crisis, and by extension, the family crisis, into a newly found sense of individuality as a middle-aged working mother. Her neighbor, the Russian single mother and recent immigrant, exemplifies the self-reliance and beauty needed to survive, if not assimilate. Finally, Sascha considers and rejects multiple models of family identity and rejects them all, but she recasts the role of the young foreign female in contemporary German fiction; she consciously seeks integration into a society that she must first create by taking leave from the real existing and imagined Russian-German family unit.

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Bonding and Moving On: Southern Female Companions in Motion (Pictures)

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Abstract

The early 1990s witnessed an outpouring of movies that follow southern heroines through various stages of development as they search for new "selves." The intersections of gender, race, and class seem to define the selfhood of southern women, which more often than not comes into being through the agency of female bonding. Through "mothering the mind," lesbianism, laughter, and getting outside, female bonding precipitates women's growth, it sets them in mental motion that leads them to self-discovery, and in so doing it allows women to challenge the practices of the hegemony of white (heterosexist) patriarchy trying to define female existence. The films chosen for the analysis—Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple* (1985), Jon Avnet's *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), Richard Pearce's *The Long Walk Home* (1991), John Sayles' *Passion Fish* (1992), Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991)—illustrate these essential functions of female bonding, which provide oppressed women with an avenue for self-expression, self-determination and self-discovery.

Keywords

female friendship; the American South in cinema; "mothering the mind"; Adrienne Rich's lesbian continuum; laughter; the outside

> How each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.
> —Anaïs Nin[1]

The qualities and imperatives of the patriarchal definition of the feminine can easily be characterized by words beginning with the letter *c*. Code of beautiful behavior. Conformity. Containment. Conservatism. Confines. Female bonding makes southern women see these imperatives as threats to their sovereignty, and, what is more, it becomes a vehicle for neutralizing these threats. Through "mothering the mind," lesbianism, laughter, and getting outside, female bonding precipitates women's growth and sets them in mental motion that leads them to self-discovery, and in so doing it allows women to challenge the practices of the hegemony of a white (heterosexist) patriarchy trying to define female existence.

Even though the main female characters in Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple* (1985), Richard Pearce's *The Long Walk Home* (1989), Jon Avnet's *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991), and John Sayles' *Passion Fish* (1992) differ in terms of class, race, and sexual orientation,

1. Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1934–1939*, ed. Gunther Stuhlmann (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1967), 193.

they all begin journeys of self-discovery through the agency of female bonding. Put into a stiff corset of social expectations, women, with the aid of their female companions and friends, begin to question and consequently rebel against the stereotypical roles codified as "feminine," those of white middle-class housewife, black wife/servant, and privileged white lady. A dramatization of the conflict between the desire to discover the self and the duties imposed by patriarchy unites all the portrayals of the southern women under analysis in this essay. All the movies share a transparent cinematic narrative which focuses on characterization and the relations among the protagonists rather than on an action-packed plot.[2] Hence, with female bonding as the center of gravity of the cinematic narrative, the time and setting in the movies supplement the female quest for self-discovery via female companionship or friendship. Three of the movies that are analyzed are set in the historical past and rural or small-town South; thus, as Myra Macdonald states, by "removing the unease of the modern city, these films replay the romantic values of community and family."[3] In those movies there is substantial evidence for the claim that the cinematic narrative priority given to gender and racial oppression was precipitated by the time and setting of the movies in question.

Friends who are able and willing to "mother the mind"[4] pull oppressed women out of the surrender or extinction of their identity in uncongenial heterosexual relationships. Through all the functions of "mothering the mind," such as "intercepting the world, conferring unconditional approval, regulating the environment, supplying missing psychic elements, and mirroring certain aspects of the self,"[5] a woman ushers her friend/companion/sister into a journey of self-discovery. The decision to protect oneself and those close to one against the violence, oppression, and abuse received at the hands of men, if taken by a southern woman, is a contradiction in terms.[6] Men certainly did not see

2. See Michael Z. Newman, "Character and Complexity in American Independent Cinema: *21 Grams* and *Passion Fish*," *Film Criticism* 31, nos. 1–2 (2006): 89–106.

3. Myra Macdonald, *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media* (London: Arnold, 1995), 156–57. Respectively, small-town Louisiana in *Passion Fish*, small-town Alabama in *Fried Green Tomatoes*, and rural Georgia in *The Color Purple*. Moreover, two of the movies—*Fried Green Tomatoes* and *The Color Purple*—record periods of time that fell within the first half of the twentieth century, and *The Long Walk Home* refers to the historic episode of the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–56.

4. Ellen Barker uses the term "mothering the mind" about the relationship Celie and Shug build in Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* in her article "Creating Generations: The Relationship Between Celie and Shug in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*," in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker*, ed. Ikenna Dieke (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 55–65.

5. Ruth Perry, introduction to *Mothering the Mind: Twelve Studies of Writers and Their Silent Partners*, ed. Ruth Perry and Martine Watson Brownley (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984), 5–6.

6. In *Fried Green Tomatoes*, Evelyn Couch is instructed by her colleague that "what we really need instead of this baloney . . . is an assertiveness training class for southern women. But that's a contradiction in terms, isn't it?" Certainly, Evelyn cannot learn self-confidence from dry instructions on a course conducted by a stranger. Yet when Evelyn learns from Ninny Threadgoode, an octogenarian she befriends, about Idgie—Ninny's sister-in-law—and Ruth's

assertiveness as a desirable attribute in southern women, as without the need to protect their weaker dependants it would be harder to justify their fondness for violence. The patriarchy has it that women need protection, which only men can provide. However, the proponents of patriarchy conveniently forget that it is mostly men who are the perpetrators of aggression towards women. In *Fried Green Tomatoes*, Idgie Threadgoode saves Ruth Jamison from her abusive husband by taking her under her roof, barbecuing her dead husband's body, and serving it to Curtis Smoote, a Georgia detective investigating his suspicious disappearance.[7] In a similar fashion, though without the culinary component, in *The Color Purple* Shug Avery offers Celie emotional support once she learns that Albert, Celie's husband and Shug's lover in one person, beats her for not being his mistress. In the course of the movie, having realized the psychological abuse Celie has suffered, Shug takes her girlfriend to Memphis, where she offers her shelter and support, both emotional and financial.

The expression of approval from a friend, another function of "mothering the mind," often emboldens women to challenge and verbally oppose the right of the patriarchy to subordinate them. Those who have access to language are able to define and shape reality. Language is not repressive in itself, though. It gains the characteristics of oppression once it is used by those in power to subordinate others. Thus, for female friends finding a voice or access to language it may become a vehicle for opposition and resistance. It is no coincidence that in *Thelma & Louise* Thelma attempts to reject Darryl's power to decide about her life by saying "Darryl, you're my husband, not my father. . . . Go fuck yourself."[8] It is even less of a coincidence that Thelma opposes Darryl only after she ventures outside of her household with Louise—her entry into the space of the open road empowers Thelma to actively define her own identity.

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loving and supportive relationship, she develops an alter ego, Towanda the Avenger. This alter ego frees Evelyn from the role of a victim in her contacts not only with men but also with younger, impudent women. This and all further quotations from the movie are taken from the DVD subtitles of *Fried Green Tomatoes*, dir. Jon Avnet (Universal Pictures, 1991).

7. The initial confrontation about Ruth's safety takes a different turn. Upon Idgie's first visit to Ruth once she is married, it is, paradoxically, Ruth who is protecting her best friend. Realizing her husband's abusive nature, Ruth begs Idgie, "If you care about me, if you really do, you'll turn around and leave this minute. You understand?" Realizing Ruth's need to protect her own mother, who is living with the newly-weds (neither of them would forsake their own families), Idgie honors her friend's wish. After her mother's demise, Ruth recognizes her own vulnerability and sends a letter to Idgie with her mother's obituary and a fragment from the Bible. This excerpt is from the Book of Ruth: "And Ruth said, Whither thou goest, I will go; Where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people." Using the metaphor of a journey and the promise of fidelity, Ruth gives Idgie a clear sign that she is ready to follow Idgie from Frank's domination and abuse into the safety of Idgie's friendship and the shelter of her family household. This veiled message sets Idgie in motion, and with the help of Julian (Idgie's older brother) and Big George (the son of the Threadgoode cook, Sipsey) off Idgie goes to Georgia to protect her friend. (Idgie's threat to Frank, "If you ever touch her again, I'll kill you," seems to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.) Idgie helps Ruth to move on by moving out of this abusive environment.

8. All the quotations from the movie are taken from the script of *Thelma & Louise*, dir. Ridley Scott (MGM, 1991). Hereafter cited in text as *TL*.

Also muted by patriarchal oppression, Celie from *The Color Purple* begins her quest to find a speaking voice. Because of her race and class, Celie's process is quite different, though. As a poor black girl she is abused, both physically and sexually, first by the man whom she believes to be her father and then by her husband. Celie understands her position as an object of exchange between two domineering men (the future husband offers a cow in exchange for a new wife/servant); therefore she does not even dare call Albert, her "owner/husband," by his first name. She simply refers to him as Mr. ___. Despite the limitations of her own youth and gender, Celie, upon her sister's visit, makes her first shy attempts at reducing Albert's power over her personhood. By mimicking and making fun of Mr. ___'s movements and voice, Celie and Nettie attempt to challenge the distribution of power which is transmitted through language. Mr. ___ not only hushes Celie up through marginalizing her presence in his household, but also, and maybe more importantly, he severs the bond between the sisters, once Nettie is made to leave after not returning Mr. ___'s advances.[9] Mr. ___ seizes the letters the girls exchange, knowing that the interception of the letters will be a blow to Celie's self-esteem that she will not be able to recover from.

The next stage of Celie finding her voice consists of long conversations with Sofia and Shug. Those talks with her stepson's wife and husband's mistress, respectively, endow Celie with enough confidence to acquire an oppositional voice against patriarchal abuse. During her last dinner at Albert's home, Shug announces that Celie is leaving with her. Initially, this scene looks like other moments in her life when Celie has been told what to do. Albert's reaction to the announcement is also not a surprise; he tries to devalue her personhood: "You're ugly. You're skinny. You're shaped funny. You're too scared to open your mouth to people. All you fit to do is be Shug's maid. … You ain't that good a cook anyway" (*CP*). Albert appropriates the naming power, that is, the ontological power to intimidate Celie, and thus to discipline his wife. At this point Celie can see her reflection in Shug's face, which gives her the courage to accuse Albert of prolonged psychological cruelty: "Any more letters come?" (*CP*). Celie's newly-found voice is such a shocking development to Mr. ___ that he is virtually left speechless, spluttering with indignation, "You're black, you're poor, you're ugly, you're a woman! You're nothing at all!" (*CP*). Celie utters the words of her newly-discovered self-worth: "I'm poor, black. I may even be ugly and can't cook. But dear God, I'm here! I'm here!" (*CP*) while stepping into a car with Shug, which will take her to liberty and the safety of Memphis. She appropriates the language and concomitant power at her husband's expense, and here her assertiveness is born.

Similarly to Celie, who, according to Ernece Kelly, "eventually moves from being ashamed and silenced to living proud and in full possession of her

9. In the pivotal scene of the process of her emancipation, Celie will accuse her husband: "You took my sister Nettie away from me. You knew she was the only person in the world who loved me." All the quotations from the movie are taken from the DVD subtitles of *The Color Purple*, dir. Steven Spielberg (Amblin Entertainment, 1985). Hereafter cited in text as *CP*.

voice,"[10] Mary Agnes also asserts her identity through the acquisition of a voice. Once Sofia left Harpo, her husband and Albert's first-born, Mary Agnes replaces her in Harpo's heart and bed. As the exact opposite of the militant Sofia, Mary Agnes, now Harpo's second wife, is gladly welcomed in Alfred's home. Because of her hysterical and squeaky voice, nobody treats Mary Agnes seriously. Her nickname—"Squeak"—aptly reflects both her elfin figure and her meekness. During the family dinner at which Celie announces her departure, Squeak's assertion of liberation from patriarchy also takes the form of verbal nonconformity, she says: "I'm going with Shug. . . . With Miss Celie and Shug. I'm fixing to sing," followed by "My name ain't Squeak. My name is Mary Agnes" (*CP*)—she not only informs the family about her plans reaching beyond the position of being an appendage to a man, but also rejects the trivialization and marginalization that come with her diminutive nickname.[11]

Apart from protection and unconditional approval, the supplying of missing psychological elements is another key component of "mothering the mind." A feeling of acceptance and understanding is necessary for self-disclosure, which in turn is conducive to revealing the needs of a damaged psyche. By supplying those missing psychic elements, a friend acknowledges those needs and attempts to answer them. The first woman whom Celie befriends in *The Color Purple* is Sofia. Married to Harpo, one of Celie's stepchildren, she refuses to be subordinated by any man. When Sofia walks she looks as if she were going to war, and when she talks she assertively looks her interlocutor in the eye (unlike Celie, who habitually avoids eye contact). Hence, her movements and posture disclose her defiance of patriarchal authority. But for all her militancy in asserting her rights, Sofia does not actively stand by Celie when she is oppressed. She may shake the foundations of Celie's consciousness but she does not get personally involved in improving Celie's lot. Sofia is more concerned with her own pride and life. The offer of a job as a personal maid coming from Miss Millie, the Mayor's wife, was intended as an honor for Celie; however, Miss Millie's earlier comment, "Your children are so clean" (*CP*), reveals patronizing racial superiority. Sofia knows how to fight both physically and verbally—the bluntness of "Hell, no" (*CP*) and the right hook to the jaw of Miss Millie's defender—however, what she learns from Celie's experience is that docility and submissiveness are sometimes a good survival tactic—Celie says earlier to her sister Nettie that she cannot fight; she admits "All I know how to do is stay alive" (*CP*). It is Celie's meekness which complements Sofia's list of characteristic

10. Ernece B. Kelly, "Paths to Liberation in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)," in *Women in Literature: Reading through the Lens of Gender*, ed. Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 75.

11. At this point it may not be amiss to note that apart from the dinner scene, Mary Agnes also "finds her own voice when she intervenes to release Sofia from prison. . . . Mary Agnes fights for her man; symbolically, after acting on Sofia's behalf by satisfying her jailer's sexual demands, 'Squeak' triumphantly discards her diminutive nickname" (Kelly, "Paths to Liberation," 75–76).

features. Acquiring these features of character turns out to be life-saving for Sofia in prison.[12]

Central to *The Long Walk Home* is another relationship, between Miriam Thompson, an affluent white female employer, and Odessa Cotter, a black maid, which supplies a missing psychic element in Mrs. Thompson's integrity during the Montgomery Bus Boycott.[13] The issue of motion in connection with raising social/racial awareness is essential in this relationship. However, the transformative impetus of their bonding seems to be imbalanced on both sides of the color line. Mrs. Norman Thompson is not a typical white establishment housewife. On the one hand, she attends bridge club meetings with pretentious housewives and, despite her higher education, she seems complacent about her career choice (running a house). On the other hand, she demands that a policeman apologize to Odessa for evicting her from an "all-white park" where she was taking care of a white woman's children. However ethically sound her reaction is, Mrs. Thompson demands the apology on the basis of her own sense of self-worth; in a conversation with her husband she says: "It's not like she was paradin' her *own* children around the park, for heaven's sake!"[14] Moreover, when the bus boycott commences, Miriam, behind her husband's back, drives Odessa to work; she does it mainly for her own convenience (Odessa's decision to walk to work may affect her performance at the Thompsons'). Odessa's walking to work, as an example of dignified stoicism, perseverance and integrity exhibited not only during the bus boycott, spurs Miriam into action. Not only does it open Miriam's eyes to problems greater than organizing a cocktail party, but also, and maybe more importantly, it motivates her to be personally involved in the racial cause. Miriam's decision to drive any black person in Montgomery needing a lift is not simply an act of opposition to her husband's dominance and of defining her selfhood in marriage, but, more importantly, it is also a bold statement about the need to stop ignoring any institutionalized social inequality.

The conspicuous interconnectedness of Miriam's life with that of black women, revealed in her childhood photos in her family album[15] and an honest

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12. The final irony of the situation is that "after many years, they let Sofia out of jail just to put her in the next. She had to be Miss Millie's maid after all. Mayor bought Miss Millie a car, and she had Sofia teach her how to drive. Poor Sofia, stuck with Miss Millie for the rest of her life" (*CP*).

13. The Montgomery Bus Boycott, as a social and political protest against the policy of racial segregation in the public transportation of Montgomery from December 1, 1955 till December 20, 1956, is a suitable setting for the action of *The Long Walk Home*. Odessa Cotter and other fictional African American women, inspired by the very real Rosa Parks, took an active stand against "the back of the bus" rule—that is, the unconstitutional segregation of buses. This social milieu precipitates Miriam Thompson's greater understanding of the predicament of other women over the color line.

14. *The Long Walk Home*, dir. Richard Pearce (Miramax Films, 1990). Hereafter cited in text as *LWH*.

15. Sharon Willis observes that Miriam is "holding the hand of a black nurse, the top of whose head is cut by the upper frame of the photo. She is emphatically *not* its subject." "Race as Spectacle, Feminism as Alibi: Representing the Civil Rights Era in the 1990s," in *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies*, ed. Matthew Tinkcom and Amy Villarejo (London: Routledge, 2001), 109.

conversation with Odessa, awaken Miriam to greater self-understanding, personal growth, and moral integrity. Recollection of the past allows Miriam to reach the depths of empathy and humanity in her soul and, in the course of time, to become genuinely concerned about Odessa's plight. Their honest conversation, initiated by Mr. Thompson's outburst upon learning that his wife is driving their maid to work, ushers Miriam into reaching out instinctively to a woman who can supply her missing psychic elements. Odessa's bold statement—"What scares you is who you are, who Mr. Thompson wants you to be" (*LWH*)—acts as a catalyst for Miriam's awakening. In the final, pivotal scene, Miriam and her daughter join black women at the carpool station and start singing "Walking with Jesus" as an act of passive resistance to racial oppression.[16] She literally and metaphorically "walks over"; she steps over the line—the color line and gender line. Even though, as Willis writes, "Miriam directs our gaze to Odessa and symbolically allows all the other women to fade away,"[17] suggesting that Miriam joins the opposition against racism only for and because of Odessa, she does it nonetheless, thus proving that her bonding with her colored maid facilitates her own emotional, ethical, and moral growth.

The complementarity of May-Alice and Chantelle's characters and life choices in *Passion Fish*, which initially add to the complexities of a hierarchical patient-caregiver relationship, also allows the employer/employee dependence in this hierarchical relationship to be transcended, and in so doing sets their companionship in mental motion. If it were not for her being an invalid, career-wise, May-Alice would seem to have it all; she is rich, successful, and famous. By moving to New York and becoming an actress May-Alice has rejected her white, privileged upbringing in Louisiana. Now, after having suffered a paralyzing accident, she is back home in the South. Not much is known about Chantelle, though, except for the feeling that being a nurse to some spoiled, sarcastic soap-opera star is not her dream job. Midway through the movie Chantelle's problematic past (drug addiction) surfaces. Where initially Chantelle plays an important role in defining May-Alice's emotional trajectory after the accident, now, after the revelations about Chantelle's past, May-Alice begins to pay attention to her companion's emotional well-being.[18] The awareness of a recovering addict (thanks to Chantelle, May-Alice is recovering from alcohol

16. The lyrics of this hymn seem particularly appropriate in the context of the rhetoric of motion and institutionalized racism in the South. Singing this hymn unites black women in the face of an angry mob of white men shouting "walk, Nigger, walk," but it also gives them courage to continue boycotting the buses. By evoking the religious aspect of African Americans' fight for equality, the lyrics of "Walking with Jesus" locate the civil rights struggle not only in a moral and ethical context but also a religious one. In the hymn, as in life, they have Jesus on their side. Therefore, rather than taking "separate but equal" buses to work, a more comfortable but less ethically sound option, these women decide to walk to work, because they know Jesus accompanies them in their endeavors to gain freedom and equality.

17. Willis, "Race as Spectacle," 112.

18. In his article Michael Newman notes that as "the film progresses, we come to see that Chantelle is also undergoing a process of recovery and that May-Alice is helping *her*, giving her an opportunity to grow into herself." "Character and Complexity," 101.

addiction), combined with knowledge of the destructive power of stereotyping, allows these women, whom Michael Newman sees as "both ambivalent about their past and anxious about their future,"[19] to transcend fixed gender and racial roles by empathizing with each other without unnecessary and uncomfortable sentimentality. Their friendship allows them to move towards more flexible gender and racial roles.

Idgie Threadgoode and Ruth Jamison's friendship in *Fried Green Tomatoes* also functions, to use Rita Felski's words, "to complement and extend the protagonist's sense of self rather than to threaten it by absolute otherness, and thus to provide a framework within which a gendered identity can be meaningfully located."[20] In their friendship each woman discovers herself through the other. As a maternal type, Ruth is able to tame the drinking, male-dressing, poker-playing bee-charmer Idgie and bring her back to society; as Idgie says "I'm as settled as I ever hope to be" (*FGT*). She reciprocates by infusing Ruth's personality with doses of assertiveness, energy, and determination. Their shared experiences of the outside—literally, outside their homes, and metaphorically, outside fixed gender roles—accentuate the complementarity of their characters, which paves the way for their respective self-definitions.

In a similar fashion, Thelma and Louise balance each other. Thelma Yvonne Dickinson runs wild when she leaves the domestic cage. At the beginning of their journey she is hysterical and disoriented when Louise kills her near-rapist. However, during their journey Thelma slowly but gradually enters a previously uncharted area of her personality: she imitates her friend, learns self-control from her, and even takes charge—she robs a convenience store, locks a policeman in the trunk of his car, and orders Thelma to shoot a police radio. Under Louise's influence, Thelma metamorphoses from a submissive, sheltered housewife at large to a woman who values freedom and independence more than the security and complacency of a patriarchal society. Thelma reciprocates by mirroring her friend's qualities of character, which confirm Louise in her decision to go down the path they have chosen.

A point of reference in female friendships can also fluctuate between commonality and complementarity.[21] Intuitively sensing the need for either of these personality enhancement strategies, women help their friends with the process of self-definition and self-discovery through either showing the strength and celebration of opposing/complementary features or reflecting "mirroring certain aspects of the self."[22] A mixture of commonality and complementarity seems to be an organizing principle of Thelma and Louise's

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19. Newman, "Character and Complexity," 103.
20. Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 132.
21. Judith Gardiner stated that "the categories of commonality and complementarity reverse themselves like figure and ground." "The (US)es of (I)dentity: A Response to Abel on '(E)Merging Identities,'" *Signs* 6, no. 3 (1981): 436.
22. Ruth Perry, introduction to *Mothering the Mind*, 6.

friendship. Their transformed images are a metaphor for the changes in their mentalities.[23] Thelma and Louise discard the attributes of femaleness—clothes, mannerisms, jewelry—in a defiant gesture to eradicate associations with passive and complacent femininity and "appropriat[e] the cultural markings of masculinity."[24] The freeze frame of the final scene, in which the women, having sped towards the abyss of the Grand Canyon, are suspended in the air above it and the scenes recording their transformations running through the duration of the credits, are metaphors for the changes in their mentality.

The L-words

The patriarchal definition presents female friendship without an erotic/sensual component of lesbianism. Thus, from a patriarchal perspective, female comradeship is a platonic union of souls, while lesbian relations are understood to be predominantly concerned with the sensual.[25] Adrienne Rich professes that a lesbian existence includes not only sexually charged behavior, but, more importantly, embraces "many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support."[26] In a society where marriage defines women's identity, "heterosexual romance has been represented as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment."[27] *Thelma and Louise* subverts that claim by showing that female friendship can be equally, if not more, adventurous and fulfilling, and definitely more liberating and eye-opening.[28]

Adrienne Rich's claim that "[i]f we think of heterosexuality as the 'natural' emotional and sensual inclination for women, lives such as these [lesbian] are

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23. Yvonne Tasker identifies the analogy between physical and psychological metamorphoses: "[t]he rites-of-passage narrative that situates women in relation to health or body culture defines the heroine's transformation through the body." *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), 137. In *Fried Green Tomatoes* Evelyn Couch's transformed body image also parallels her becoming more conscious of her needs, expectations, and desires. The heuristic value of listening to Mrs. Threadgoode telling stories of Idgie and Ruth's love, understanding, and support is visible in the transformation of Evelyn's image: a new haircut, clothes, and weight loss mark the next stage on her journey to self-understanding and the discovery of her self-esteem. From a meek, submissive, and self-indifferent housewife Evelyn metamorphoses into the assertive Towanda the Avenger. She admits her debt to Ninny Threadgoode in a conversation with her husband: "Somebody helped put a mirror up in front of my face. And I didn't like what I saw one bit. You know what I did? I changed. And that someone was Mrs. Threadgoode" (*FGT*).
24. Lynda Hart, "'Til Death Do Us Part: Impossible Spaces in *Thelma and Louise*," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4, no. 3 (January 1994): 436.
25. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980): 650.
26. Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality," 648–49.
27. Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality," 654.
28. Thelma confesses to Louise: "I feel awake. . . . Wide awake. I don't remember ever feelin' this awake. Everything looks different. . . . I know you know what I mean. Everything looks new. Do you feel like that too? Like you've got something to look forward to?" (*TL*).

seen as deviant, as pathological, or as emotionally and sensually deprived"[29] is exemplified in *Thelma and Louise*, which identifies lesbians with female criminals.[30] From the patriarchal perspective, their shooting and blowing up of a truck is a sign of emotional deprivation, whereas their intimate look and final kiss on the lips before driving off the cliff bear the signs of sensual deprivation. The price to pay for transgressing socially accepted behavior is often the death of one of the friends or of both, as in the suicide pact in *Thelma and Louise*.[31] Heterosexual cinematic narratives present the death of one of the female friends as a final resolution to the subversive nature of women's camaraderie. It is interesting to note that patriarchy endows female friendship with contradictory powers: on the one hand, female bonding can bring a wayward girl back to a "decent" community—for example, Ruth is able to tame and slightly feminize the wild and strong-minded Idgie; on the other hand, once its function has been fulfilled, society expects their bonding to move back into the background of heterosexual romance.[32]

In *The Color Purple*, Celie and Shug's friendship illustrates Rita Felski's theory that "the transference of allegiance from a heterosexual relationship to one of intimacy between women involves overcoming the negative value which women have been conditioned to place upon their own sex; the recognition of the other woman serves a symbolic function as an affirmation of self, of gendered identity."[33] The initial dependence—that of a guest and a maid/nurse—that was established between Celie and Shug when Shug comes down with "a nasty woman's disease" is replaced by a conscious companionship. Independent and self-confident, Shug teaches Celie self-respect and confidence. Shug, who treats her sexuality as a tool in her relations with men, realizes that a lack of acceptance of one's body can have a damaging effect on a woman's self-esteem. Once she learns that Celie is reminded all the time that she is ugly, that her sexuality is virtually non-existent—Celie was raped by Pa and is used by her husband to relieve his sexual tension—Shug begins to teach Celie the pleasures connected with her body. The lyrics of Shug's song to Celie, "Miss Celie's Blues," focus on the sisterhood of women, which offers safety and acceptance, and reflects women's commonality. This important step on Celie's journey to self-discovery takes place outside the house, in public. Celie's breaking free from the repressive domestic space into the public space of Harpo's juke

29. Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality," 652.

30. Lynda Hart quotes from Caroline Sheldon, one of the first film critics who noted the identification of homosexuality with "the criminal element—both as a warning to those stepping out of line and a method of containment of anti-social (anti-heterosexual) tendencies." Hart, "'Til Death Do Us Part," 441.

31. The warning included in the movie that punishment awaits those who violate gender norms certainly locates the movie within the genre of the cautionary tale. Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 144.

32. Idgie and Ruth are unwilling to leave it behind them and form an even stronger bond of acceptance, understanding, and love. In this situation, the weaker one *has* to die.

33. Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 138.

joint allows her to experience sisterhood with Shug and produces enough self-confidence in her to listen to Shug's lessons about sexuality in the privacy of her room. The circumstances of their first passionate kiss—Celie wearing Shug's sexy red dress at night—are made possible by the transition from the repressive environment of both her Pa's and Albert's homes to the affability of Shug's private room. In return, as a maternal type, Celie encourages the development of a more responsible, sympathetic, and nurturing side in Shug. This presentation of female friendship invites an analogy with Felski's statement that "the other woman provides a mirror in which the protagonist discovers herself, finding her own female identity reflected."[34]

Through their intimate bonding women can transcend relations based on subjugation and exploitation. They can create unions of body and soul that redefine heterosexual scripts of behavior. Once Shug opens Celie's eyes to the fact that her marriage is like chattel slavery, Celie begins to value the rights of the autonomous individual and realizes that her love for Shug cannot be possessive. Even though she cannot eradicate her feelings of jealousy, Celie does not act on her twinge of envy when Shug takes off with a young musician. Hurt though she is, Celie does not want to trade places with men who dominate, constrain, and possess women. Moreover, Shug knows that loving and being loved back are the prerequisites of growth as they are connected with acceptance, a sense of belonging, and support. Therefore, she moves beyond gender divisions in choosing the object of her passion; she is not very particular about whom she endows with her love and desire, be it Albert and/or Celie. Shug stirs Celie's development into motion by teaching her that, rather than eliminating men from their lives altogether, women should reevaluate the presence of men to further their own growth.[35]

Heterosexual dependency and oppression simply precipitate a relationship that is inherent in women's nature. The instinctive bonding between Idgie and Ruth, Celie and Shug, and Thelma and Louise illustrates what Adrienne Rich called "an electric and empowering charge between women."[36] Thus, greater self-reliance, self-understanding, and self-acceptance are the direct result of a lesbian existence. Drawing on Rich's statement that a lesbian existence "is also a direct or indirect attack on the male right of access to women,"[37] we may say that Shug and Celie reject male definitions of sexuality. When Pa is exchanging Celie for a cow in a marriage trade with Albert, he describes Celie

34. Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 131–32.

35. Ernece Kelly explains in her article that "Walker eschews categories—thereby questioning social constructs such as heterosexuality, monogamy, and marriage—and instead delineates a relational universe in which the ability to give and experience love is more important to one's growth than *whom* one loves." Kelly, "Paths to Liberation," 76. Spielberg does not include the triangle Walker envisioned for Celie, Shug, and Albert at the end of her novel. His adaptation ends in a glorification of pure (read: platonic) female friendship, with a remorseful Albert in the distance, secretly making amends for what he has done to Celie.

36. Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality," 658.

37. Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality," 649.

as "not fresh"—she bore Pa two children. However, when Shug, instrumental in the formation of Celie's sexual self-awareness, learns that her friend has never had pleasure in her sexual encounters, she calls her a virgin and then teaches Celie that very pleasure.[38]

Overall, if we eschew a limiting patriarchal definition of lesbian relations while examining female friendships in the movies under analysis, we can see that Adrienne Rich's observations perfectly describe the liberating power of the lesbian relations between Idgie and Ruth, Thelma and Louise, and Celie and Shug, as: "[w]oman-identification is a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, violently curtailed and wasted under the institution of heterosexuality. The denial of reality and visibility to women's passion for women . . . meant an incalculable loss to the power of all women *to change the social relations of the sexes, to liberate ourselves and each other*."[39]

Laughter is another L-word which moves and unites women, offers psychological support, and allows the venting of stored-up anger. All these functions combined together enable the process of self-determination to begin. Celie's liberation from patriarchal oppression would not be possible without all those functions of laughter. Her natural joviality is hushed by Pa's words: "Celie you got the ugliest smile I seen" (*CP*). In so doing, Pa deprives Celie of the self-expression so necessary in the process of identity formation. It is Shug, many years later, who teaches Celie how to laugh in an unhampered way, trying to cure her of a self-effacing gesture—covering her mouth when she smiles. Through laughter, Shug also welcomes Celie into the community of women, as Shug seems to be aware that laughter brings people together, especially in the recognition of common enemies. Therefore, Celie and Shug share rebellious laughter at the expense of those who abused Celie—men.

It is no coincidence, then, that a photo of a beautiful woman laughing on her husband's bedside table is the first visual image of Shug that Celie has. Even though at this point they are not acquainted yet, Shug, through the mere fact of existing and symbolizing self-confidence and defiance through laughter, keeps Celie from sinking into despair. When Albert uses Celie as a sexual convenience, there is a voiceover, "while he on top of me . . . I think about that pretty woman in the picture and maybe she like it. I know what he doing to me, he done to her" (*CP*). Already Celie treats Shug as a point of reference on the road to self-determination. The more Celie can identify with Shug's laughter, the more immune to Albert's cruelties she becomes. This situation illustrates what Hélène Cixous stated: "[c]ulturally speaking, women have wept a great deal, but once the tears are shed, there will be endless laughter instead. Laughter that breaks out, overflows, a humor no one would expect to

38. In the already-mentioned scene in the privacy of Shug's room, Celie describes her sexual experiences with her husband: "most time I pretend I ain't even there. He don't know the difference. He don't never ask me how I feel. He never ask me about myself. He just climb on top of me and do his business" (*CP*).

39. Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality," 657. Rich's italics.

find in women—which is nonetheless surely their greatest strength because it's a humor that sees man much further away than he has ever been seen."[40] Thelma's comments to the state trooper whom she and Louise are about to lock in the trunk of the police car also reveal this power of laughter to create ironic distance and defy male authority: "I swear three days ago neither of us would have ever pulled a stunt like this, but if you was ever to meet my husband, you'd understand why. . . . My husband wasn't sweet to me and look how I turned out" (*TL*).

Defiance of authority expressed through laughter is most visible in Sofia's giggle in *The Color Purple*. After returning from prison, Sofia has been further humiliated by compulsory work as a maid to Miss Millie, the Mayor's wife. During the aforementioned dinner, which marks the declaration of Celie's and Mary Agnes's self-recognitions, Sofia begins laughing after a period of non-responsiveness and confusion. The comment of Albert's father: "My God the dead has arisen" (*CP*) attests that laughter brings Sofia back to life. She can again actively participate and define her existence in opposition to institutionalized sexism and racism. Sofia says: "Old Sofia home now. Sofia home. Things are going to change here" (*CP*), as laughter, according to Hélène Cixous, is able "to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth'. . ."[41] Clearly, laughter, after a period of non-responsiveness, galvanizes Sofia into action. After Celie calls Albert names in the presence of his own father and firstborn—"Your daddy ain't nothing but some dead horseshit" (*CP*)—the women start giggling. Harpo's defense of his father's good name—"Shut up! It's bad luck women laughing at a man" (*CP*)—is prophetic, with the subversive potential of derisive laughter; nothing good for patriarchal hegemony comes of women laughing at a man. Laughter sets Sofia into mental motion and it brings back her principles, pride, and selfhood which men, prison, and Miss Millie unsuccessfully tried to annihilate; in so doing it acts as a catalyst for Sofia's self-empowerment.

The Outside

Getting outside is another method used by female companions to encourage each other's growth and liberation. It is in line with Rita Felski's observation about the female *Bildungsroman* that "female self-discovery and emancipation is depicted as a process of moving outward into the public realm of social engagement and activity, however problematic and fraught with difficulties this proves to be."[42] Thus, motivating each other to get outside the house, both metaphorically and literally, allows female friends to discover uncharted areas of their personalities. Celie, Miriam Thompson, and Thelma Dickinson all embark on what Felski calls a "journey from the enclosed realm

40. Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" trans. Annette Kuhn, *Signs* 7, no. 1 (1981): 55.
41. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 888.
42. Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 126–27.

of the familial home into the social world."[43] Houses, both her family home and the one she was to run for Albert, are the site of humiliation, sexual abuse, and constraint for Celie. Moving out of "Mr. jail" (to use Celie's words) to Memphis with Shug constitutes a milestone in Celie's development. She ventures from the known, albeit oppressive world of the domestic to the unknown world of business. In Memphis, Celie blossoms as she is finally a member of a larger extended family of women, and, by extension, is reconciled with the world.

The outside used to be a proverbial part and parcel of May-Alice's life in *Passion Fish*—an acting career in New York is quite unlike housewifery in a small Louisiana town. However, now May-Alice has to get outside her house to face her new identity. Drinking wine, watching TV, being bitter and self-pitiful is a defensive mechanism the actress develops in order not to deal with her paraplegic state. Chantelle understands that May-Alice has to confront her fears; therefore, she pushes May-Alice out of the house, near the bayou. Getting outside is, in this case, getting out of the hideout into the unknown, which offers both challenges and opportunities. The result of the ensuing verbal exchange, when May-Alice does not want to wheel herself back to the house (she orders Chantelle: "Now push me back inside"), and complains "But it's all uphill," and Chantelle retorts "So's life," suggests that the road to May-Alice's self-discovery is going to be bumpy, but not impassable.[44]

Suburbia instantiate the inside/outside and domestic/worldly dualisms. Being a suburban housewife was supposed to guarantee satisfaction and contentment with the domestic sphere. However, many women were dissatisfied as home connoted mind-deadening routine, oppression, even if veiled, and constraint. Housewifery, to paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir, is not productive as it is repetitious and monotonous.[45] In *The Long Walk Home* Norman Thompson feeds his wife with the illusion that she controls her life and that the domestic space is her domain, while he is the one who, through his business enterprise, occupies the public sphere. Yet, even though Norman allows his wife some unconventional behavior, he reminds Miriam of his being the provider—Norman asks his wife "Aren't you forgetting who pays the bills around here?" (*LWH*). In reality, when Miriam serves him an ultimatum—either she runs the house her way or she finds herself a job—Norman would have the final say, if it were not for female camaraderie. A mind-opening conversation with Odessa motivates Miriam to oppose her husband, and it is Odessa who literally gets her employer outside, into the public domain. Her car is the locus of the dramatization of the conflict between the desire to discover herself and the wifely duties imposed by a patriarchal system. Miriam's joining the carpooling action marks her move from benign

43. Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 134.

44. All the quotations from the movie are taken from dialogue lines from *Passion Fish*, dir. John Sayles (Miramax Films, 1992). Hereafter cited in text as *PF*.

45. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1989), 451–55.

indifference to racial consciousness, from a mixture of convenience and private altruism to a public expression of sympathy for the bus boycotters. In this sense, Odessa Cotter plays an important role in defining Miriam Thompson's emotional and moral trajectory.

Leaving the golden cage that is a suburban house and going outside is also a metaphor for Miriam's appropriation of the masculine space. Mark Clapson, using observations made by other sociologists, claims that cities are "male" as they are "thrusting, public and action-orientated. The suburbs, by contrast, are 'female': more inwardly inclined, and even submissive. They apparently signify 'domesticity, repose, closeness to nature, lack of seriousness, mindlessness, and safety.' . . . The suburbs have been deemed to 'conform to the Freudian conception of femininity.'"[46] Thus, by refusing to be "cooped up at home all day in comfortable coffins for the living,"[47] Miriam is transformed from a stereotypically passive housewife with a 'trivial' everyday existence into an active woman who enters public life with clear aims and motives with a vengeance.

Driving a car becomes a symbolic expression of rebellion against patriarchal abuse in *Thelma and Louise*. Similarly to *The Long Walk Home*, where a car is the site of the solidification of the bonding between Miriam and Odessa, Thelma and Louise define their hopes and desires and discover new depths and potentials of their friendship in a car.[48] These two female buddies move from the closed spaces of the house and diner (traditionally designated for women) to the open spaces beyond the city limits, which allow them to be themselves. They "move from the routines and confinement of everyday life to the freedom of the open road. In the process they move from the supposedly female space of the home to the freedom of the supposedly 'male' space that is the great outdoors."[49] On the road, they are "outside" society, beyond patriarchal restrictions and control. By escaping society and driving through open spaces Thelma and Louise express their disapproval of patriarchal constraints.

As *Thelma and Louise* tracks two women embarking on a crime spree, it is a variation on a buddy movie and road movie. From the road movie formula *Thelma and Louise* takes the idea of the road offering the possibility of search and self-discovery, as well as alternative choices to mainstream society. As a reformulation of the buddy movie, instead of a heterosexual, white male friendship, which was a mainstay of the cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, *Thelma and Louise* centers on female friendship, with lesbian

46. Mark Clapson, *Suburban Century: Social Change and Urban Growth in England and the United States* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 125.
47. Clapson, *Suburban Century*, 125.
48. Shari Roberts rightly observes that these two female buddies are trying to escape "outdated prescriptions for social roles, changing expectations for gender identities, and their personal goals, hopes, and fears for themselves, born out of a male-dominated society." "Western Meets Eastwood: Genre and Gender on the Road," in *The Road Movie Book*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1997), 65.
49. Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 136.

undertones. It appropriates "action, comedy and an exploration of the sexualized relationship between the two protagonists" from the buddy movie formula.[50] Moreover, as Lynda Hart observes, integral to *Thelma and Louise* is "the ideological heart of the buddy film, the absence of home signifying the security of 'normality' and the death of the protagonists as the most effective impediment to consummation of the same-sex relationship."[51] The suicide pact the women form—Louise accepts Thelma's proposal "Let's not get caught. . . . Let's keep going" (*TL*)—is a decision not to get caught in the snares of the "normality" of the domestic space of heteronormative patriarchy.

Because male heterosexual (predominantly white) bonding has been the normative relationship preferred in US cinematography, female bonding was shown as "expedient, trivial, temporary, and secondary to women's relationships to men."[52] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, movies began to offer a mimetic representation of supportive and empathetic female communities, where interpersonal attraction, acceptance, and caring assure security and a sense of belonging as a reaction to gender/racial oppression.[53] Indeed, female friendships can set women in mental motion to gain an awareness of selfhood and give the necessary motivation and support for a changing life. However, female bonding only enhances high self-esteem but does not create it; it gives shape to/defines an already-existing female sense of injustice and sets the consequent resistance into motion. It provides oppressed women with an avenue for self-expression, self-determination, and self-discovery. All the female friendships analyzed in this essay allow women to question, challenge, and move beyond stereotypes about female identity, desires, and hopes, though to varying degrees and with different consequences. All the functions of female camaraderie, such as "mothering the mind," lesbian relations, the transgressive power of laughter, and encouragement to get outside, allow women to remove the infringement of social restrictions from their lives.

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50. Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 162.
51. Hart, "'Til Death Do Us Part," 432.
52. Miles, *Seeing and Believing*, 142.
53. In the 1980s women in America witnessed a backlash against the feminist movement. Society and the media were schizophrenic about women's liberation, on the one hand, promoting it, on the other, negating its value. It is little coincidence, then, that in the 1990s female friendships would publicize women's liberation. For more information about the backlash, see Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994).

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From Heteroglossia to Worldmaking: Fictions of Robert Burns and Iain (M.) Banks

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Abstract

The essay compares the fictions of individual and collective identity in the major works by Robert Burns, the tale *Tam O'Shanter* (1791) and the "cantata" *Love and Liberty* (1799, better known as *The Jolly Beggars*), with the representations of identity in the fictive worlds of sci-fi and non-sci-fi novels of Iain (M.) Banks. It discusses the importance of Bakhtin's paradigms of dynamic, heterogeneous structure ("heteroglossia" or "grotesque body") for the interpretation of Burns's poetry and the transformations of these paradigms in Banks's fictional "worldmaking" (Nelson Goodman). While Burns's poetry achieves a balance between dynamic representations of individual and collective identities (including Scottishness, Britishness and humanity), Banks's fictions problematize them. This especially influences Banks's "versions" of collective identities but also has a significant bearing on the individual identities of the protagonists.

Keywords

identity; fiction; Robert Burns; Iain (M.) Banks; heteroglossia

The title of this essay describes only one trajectory of my argument—the movement from the questions of representation, including those of referentiality and discourse (discussed, among others, in Bakhtin's writings on the novel), to the problems of fiction as a "worldmaking" activity, already discussed by Joseph Addison and elaborated by Nelson Goodman and more recently by Wolfgang Iser. The other and perhaps more important trajectory can only be expressed by a rather imperfect pun: "From a Comic to a Cosmic Opera." Robert Burns's posthumous "cantata" *Love and Liberty*, written in 1785, published in 1799 and known as *The Jolly Beggars*, has aptly been called "a miniature comic opera,"[1] while the voluminous science fiction novels of Iain M. Banks[2] are described by enthusiastic reviewers as "space opera[s] on the grand scale."[3]

1. See John C. Weston, ed., *The Jolly Beggars: A Cantata*, by Robert Burns (Northampton, MA: Gehenna Press, 1963), quoted in Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg, eds., *The Canongate Burns* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), 592. All quotes from Burns's work follow this edition. Page references are in parentheses in the text.
2. Banks uses his name with the middle initial only in his sci-fi writings.
3. Lev Grossman, "A Night at the Space Opera," *Time*, February 29, 2008: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1718574,00.html: "Banks writes space opera on the grand scale: he measures time in eons, space in light-years, tragedies in gigadeaths. His human players strut and fret on that vast stage, struggling to retain a sense of purpose."

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The latter is a more exciting, as well as intriguing, level of argument, to which the representational, referential and—broadly speaking—structural problems of heteroglossia and fiction are mere conduits. On this level, the essay addresses dilemmas of collective identity which, in their specific form, are tentatively called "versions of Scottishness." Importantly, in both the common idiom of romantic nationalism and the twenty-first-century discourses of globalization, these versions of cultural identity are closely related to what could be called the *versions of humanity*. Since the late eighteenth-century revolutions and emancipation movements, humanity has no longer been represented by the human nature of the Enlightenment, uniform, as Dr. Johnson put it, "from China to Peru,"[4] but by diverse ethnic or even multiethnic entities called nations.[5] Although these are believed to result from historical processes, they are also produced by what Michel Foucault has called "deployment of sexuality,"[6] including discourses of pleasure, desire, or "inclination" (as Burns names the supreme law of nature and society in *The Jolly Beggars*, 587).

More specifically, the second strand of this essay will follow the path leading from Burns's *spontaneous* "we" to the *problematic*, morally indeterminate and potentially meaningless "we" of Banks's galactic civilizations. Burns's "we" often denotes a group of jovial cronies, who, as in *Tam O'Shanter* (1791), "sit bousing at the nappy / . . . feeling fou and unco happy" (263) and who, even as the social outcasts of *The Jolly Beggars*, may be said to form a collective "grotesque" body, a foundation of national identity. In contrast to this, the hybrid "we" of Banks's fictions signifies innumerable intelligent living species hooked up to sophisticated, autonomous and infinitely more efficient machines. Obviously, the latter "we" carries us beyond the bodily or organic symbolism of collective identity and even beyond the confines of the empirical and moral universe: "We think we're right . . . but we can never be sure . . . we deal in the moral equivalent of black holes, where the normal laws—the rules of right and wrong . . . break down."[7] Despite their enormous difference, both these "we's" are represented in the same traditional way: in relation to the individual identities of outsider heroes spelled out in their stories and also to the global framework of empires, no matter whether British or galactic. In *The Jolly Beggars*, the empire is represented by a catalogue of eighteenth-century British military pursuits in the Caribbean or in Portugal, and even *Tam O'Shanter* mentions "Five tomahawks wi' blude red rusted; / Five scymitars wi' murder crusted" (266),

4. Samuel Johnson, *The Vanity of Human Wishes: The Tenth Satire of Juvenal Imitated* (London: Dodsley, 1749), 1.
5. For a detailed discussion of this issue see my "Romantic Revivals: Cultural Translations, Universalism, and Nationalism," in *Cultural Learning: Language Learning: Selected Papers from the Second International British Studies Conference*, ed. Susan Bassnett and Martin Procházka (Prague: The British Council and Charles University, 1997), 75–89.
6. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 1:75–132.
7. Iain M. Banks, *Use of Weapons* (1990; New York: Orbit, 2008), 338. Hereafter cited in text as *UW*.

symbolizing the limits of British colonial expansion. And Banks's universe has a complex history of galactic empires, of which The Culture is the most prominent.

According to Bakhtin, heteroglossia is an intentional (as well as unintentional) parodic-travestying interaction of different discourses[8] productive of the novel or any dialogical work of art (Bakhtin also speaks about the "novelization" of poetry).[9] Burns's *Tam O'Shanter* is based on a "heteroglossia" of two folklore sources, two different ghost stories told about the ruined kirk of Alloway. One of them uses macabre details of a witches' sabbath—"simmering some heads of unchristened children, limbs of executed malefactors" (261)—for propaganda purposes: to show how everyone, when "fortified from above on his devout supplication," or merely by getting "courageously drunk," can resist the Devil and "his friends and emissaries" (261). The feat of the hero of the first tale is simple: "pouring out the damnable ingredients" (262) of the product of witchcraft and bringing the chief object of the devilish ceremony home as the evidence of the persistent danger of witchcraft practices. The second story is different: it decentralizes the devil, reducing him to a folk tradition figure of a "sooty blackguard master . . . keeping [the witches] alive with the powers of his bag-pipe" (262). The dominant feature of this tale is parodic laughter connected with sexual desire.[10] Fascinated by respectable women from his neighborhood romping about in their smocks and aroused by one with a very short shirt ("cutty sark"), the hero "was so tickled that he involuntarily burst with a loud laugh" (262).

Burns composes Tam O'Shanter to mediate between these two discourses: a didactic "tale o' truth," warning people against the "joys" of drinking and sex as dangerous excitements bought "o'erdear" (269) from demonic forces, and a multiple parody. The poem, for instance, inverts traditional religious and necromantic rituals: both are present in the folklore theme of the "spectral mass" celebrated before a congregation of the dead holding candles. High

8. "[I]n ancient times the parodic-travestying world was (generically speaking) homeless. All these parodic-travestying forms constituted, as it were, a special extra-generic or inter-generic world. But this world was unified, first of all, by a common purpose, to provide a corrective of laughter and criticism to all existing straightforward genres, styles, languages, voices; to force the men to experience beneath these categories a different and contradictory reality that is otherwise not experienced in them. Such laughter paved the way for the impiety of the novelistic form. In the second place, these forms are unified by virtue of their shared subject: language itself, which . . . becomes in this new context the image of language, the image of the direct world. I imagine this whole to be something like an immense novel, multi-generic, multi-styled, mercilessly critical, soberly mocking, reflecting in all its fullness the heteroglossia and multiple voices of a given culture, people and epoch." Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 59–60.

9. "The novelization of literature does not imply attaching to already completed genres a generic canon that is alien to them, not theirs. The novel, after all, has no canon of its own. . . . It is plasticity itself." Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 39.

10. "We find this tight matrix of death with laughter, with food, with drink, with sexual indecencies . . ." Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 198.

literary genres, such as the epic, are parodied by means of downgrading Homeric similes into comical scenes using low-style folklore images: “As open pussie’s mortal foes / When pop! she starts before their nose” (268). Stylistic features of sentimental fiction or didactic poetry are treated ironically: “Ah gentle dames! it gars me greet / To think how mony counsels sweet, / How mony lengthen’d sage advices, / The husband from the wife despises!” (264); “But pleasures are like poppies spread, / You seize the flower, the bloom is shed; / . . . / Nae man can tether time or tide” (264). The well-known invocation “Inspiring bold John Barleycorn!” (265) mixes folk myth and conventions of heroic epic to subvert religious discourse: “Wi’ usquabae we’ll face the Devil!” (265). Apart from conventional ritual practices, genres and styles, Burns’s parody also subverts patterns of male and female sexual behavior. The folklore narratives are “novelized” using a number of genres, from folk ballad to the contemporary mock epic or reflexive lyric, and also of diverse languages (a local dialect of Scots, English with occasional Scots words and contemporary intellectual English) and “multiple narrators of the story,” including a drinking crony, as well as an educated contemporary poet.

The heteroglossia in *Tam O’Shanter* does not merely “novelize” folk narratives and traditional Classicist genres. It transcends the limits of literary language, towards what Bakhtin has called “the image of language, the image of the direct world,”[11] that is, towards a dynamic unity of referential, expressive and performative functions of language. This emancipates the speaker of the poem, who is no longer constricted by traditional identities and can mediate between the local Scottish village folk and the heterogeneous community of readers. In other words, the speaker can cross the boundaries of the individual self in a series of identifications and dis-identifications with the narrow, parochial “we” of the village community, which in Romanticism often becomes a model of the ethnocentric nation. By losing its particular identity, the narrator’s self opens up to new dimensions of individual and social freedom. In contrast to Bakhtin’s theory, whose framework is the necessity of “the time of labour . . . the collective battle of labour against nature,”[12] Burns’s heteroglossia is a practice of emotional liberation, overcoming traditional religious associations of human sexuality with the demonic and establishing communication between culturally different social groups.

This tendency is more evident in *The Jolly Beggars* and is expressed even in the original title of the poem, *Love and Liberty*. Although some commentators try to make a neat distinction between the voice of the narrator speaking in “broad Scots” and the characters “singing in neo-classical English” (589), the heteroglossia of the poem is much more complex. For instance, even in the initial lines of the first “Recitativo,” there are poeticisms typical of the neo-classical “high style” intermingled with Scots expressions: “When lyart leaves bestrow the yird / Or, wavering like a Bauckie-bird [bat], / Bedim cauld

11. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 60.
12. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 207.

Boreas' blast" (578). Compared with *Tam O'Shanter*, the heteroglossia in Burns's *Cantata* has a performative, rather than parodic, function. It may be said to produce a "grotesque body" no longer determined by mere resistance to the Christian repression of the flesh,[13] but by the desire for freedom, both political and sexual. In the song of the piper called "Poor Merry-Andrew," the "mountebank squad" of social outcasts and cripples from imperial wars competes in its capering with "the Premier," who can only "[m]ak faces to tickle the Mob" and who is no worse a buffoon (or "Tumbler") than any one of them (581). The heterogeneous grotesque body composed of humans of both sexes in various lovemaking postures, as well as, metonymically, of inanimate objects, such as the military paraphernalia—"[f]rom the gilded SPONTOON to the FIFE" (580)—attains full expression in the songs of the "BARD" drawing a fascinated crowd ("the glowran byke") "HOMER LIKE . . . / Frae town to town" (586). The "thunder of applause" (587) at the end of the Bard's song endorses his simple creed—"great love to a' the fair" and the defiance of all people of "lordly WILL" (586). It also authorizes his selfless subjectivity, having "no WISH but—to be glad, / nor WANT but" of a drink, and hating "nought but—to be sad" (586). As a result, the grotesque body performed by the Bard of Burns's poem is no longer a mere polemical representation of repressed corporeality but a new alternative community emerging after the disintegration of the First British Empire (the secession of the American colonies) and the decay of political life in the metropolis. Burns's alternative is a community of "Love and Liberty" ("LIBERTY's glorious feast"), whose only law is "INCLINATION" (587) understood both in the sentimentalist way as obeying spontaneous, "natural" impulses of pleasure and love, and in the Epicurean sense of following "your inclination as you will,"[14] with which Burns could have familiarized himself among freemasons.

As a consequence, the liberating gesture of Burns's heteroglossia is the reconstitution of society as a collective grotesque body. This collective does not repress individuals but integrates them on the basis of their "inclination" to pleasure and love, identified with the supreme natural law of "Life," which is immensely variegated and diverse, or, in Burns's phrase, "all a VARIORUM" (588). As a result, the ideal of a society which exists in keeping with the fundamental laws of nature is expressed in a non-idealistic way, as an endless

13. "This new picture of the world is polemically opposed to the medieval world, in whose ideology the human body is perceived solely under the sign of decay and strife, while in the real-world practice, there reigned a crude and dirty physical licentiousness." Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 171.

14. "I understand from you that your natural disposition is too much inclined toward sexual passion. Follow your inclination as you will, provided only that you neither violate the laws, disturb well-established customs, harm any one of your neighbours, injure your own body, nor waste your possessions. That you be not checked by one or more of these provisos is impossible; for a man never gets any good from sexual passion, and he is fortunate if he does not receive harm." Epicurus, "Vatican Sayings, 51," in *The Essential Epicurus: Letters, Principal Doctrine, Vatican Sayings, and Fragments*, trans. Eugene O'Connor (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1993), 80.

diversity of life holding the potential for emotional emancipation. The latter quality is evident in the only conflict of the poem, the clash between the aggressive and self-important "Tinkler," a parasite of the powerful, taking "share, wi' those that bear / The *budget* and the *apron*!" (585, Burns's italics), and the "Fiddler," who defeats his rival not only by sexual tricks or "shavies" (585) but chiefly by the "raptures" (586) of his songs.

The problems of heteroglossia, individual identity and freedom are also typical of the already voluminous *oeuvre* of the contemporary Scottish author Iain (M.) Banks, which includes eleven science-fiction volumes (ten novels and one collection of a novella and short stories, *The State of the Art*, 1991) and thirteen non-sci-fi novels, the former published under the name with the middle initial. Banks's work is characterized by the convergence of its sci-fi and non-sci-fi tendencies, evident as early as in his first book, *The Wasp Factory* (1984), but manifest in the last novel, *Transitions* (2009), which takes place in recent history, from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the attack on the World Trade Center, and whose protagonists cross the boundaries between parallel realities of quantum physics. It is not surprising that in the United States, the novel was published under the science-fiction name of the author, that is, with the middle initial.

The link between Burns and Banks is not so arbitrary as it may appear. Both authors connect heteroglossia with the questions of individual and collective identity, as well as with the issues of power, freedom and "inclination" as the supreme law. Both are vitally connected with popular culture, although at different imaginative levels: while Burns's work draws from the folklore diction, rhythm and imagination, Banks bases his "space operas" on material from popular science fiction, including, for instance, the *Star Trek* series in *The State of Art*, Alfred Bester's novel *The Stars My Destination* (1956 as *Tiger! Tiger!*) in his first sci-fi novel *Consider Phlebas* (1987) or H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* in *Use of Weapons* (1990). His other sources are fantasy and mystery, including George R. R. Martin's series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (from 1996) and David Anthony Durham's novel *Acacia* (2007) in *Matter* (2008).[15] Similarly to Burns, who, in the preface to the Kilmarnock edition, refers to Theocritus and Virgil and proceeds to quote an eighteenth-century English author of natural and reflective lyric and landscape gardener, William Shenstone, as a "celebrated Poet whose divine Elegies do honour to our language, our nation and our species" (3–4), Banks combines influences from popular culture with those of mainstream literature: for instance, *Consider Phlebas* contains several allusions to the key passages of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (especially the sections entitled "Death by Water" and "What the Thunder Said").[16] In spite of these resemblances, Banks

15. See Arachne Jericho, "Review: Iain M. Banks' *Matter*," *Tor.com*, May 8, 2009: http://www.tor.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=blog&id=26946.

16. On T. S. Eliot's influence on Banks, see Gary Wilkinson, "Poetic Licence: Iain M. Banks' *Consider Phlebas* and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*," *Vector*, no. 203 (January/February 1999): 15–18.

differs from Burns in at least two main respects: he no longer builds on folklore imagination but develops a specific quality of fiction called "worldmaking"[17] based on the acknowledgement of the "relativity" of innumerable "alternative worlds," which form what is called "reality." According to Nelson Goodman:

> [f]iction then . . . applies neither to nothing, nor to . . . possible worlds but, albeit metaphorically, to actual worlds. Fiction operates in actual worlds in much the same way as nonfiction.[18]

Like Burns's poetry, Banks's fiction is deeply concerned with the problems of individual and collective identity and freedom, but Banks does not approach them as general human issues. Instead, he multiplies them in tales about different galaxies, civilizations and "worlds" (such as the mysterious artificial planet in *Matter* that includes fourteen concentric spheres). These stories are connected by at least two general themes, which, in Greek, could be called *agon* and *polemos*, the game and the war. The same topics are dominant in the science fiction novel *A History Maker* (1994) by Alasdair Gray, whose *Lanark* (1981) was an important influence on Banks's first "hybrid" novel, *The Bridge* (1987). It can even be conjectured that *History Maker* responds, in a satirical and comic way, to some major sci-fi novels by Banks.[19]

Let us start with a discussion of the common features of Burns's and Banks's writings, especially the heteroglossia and the problems of individual and collective identities. In Chapter 4 of *The Wasp Factory* the main protagonist, after an excess of drinking, uses "correctly spoken English" as an inefficient attempt to get out of his stupor: "I *had* to pull myself together. I had to *communicate*."[20] However, his only message—in intellectual English with tortuous syntax—is a strange account of his "misconception" connected with a local street name: associating "Union Street" erroneously with "the [socialist] acknowledgements of the worth of trade unions" (*WF*, 81) and not with the 1707 Act of Union, which marked the end of Scottish independence. Both allusions refer to the frustrating situation of Thatcherite Britain before Devolution. In contrast to Burns's poetry, here the heteroglossia signifies the impossibility of communication, not only between the young generation, whose slogan used to be "no future," and the rest of society, but even among young people themselves: "Dud he say sumhin er?" asks a girl who has been drinking with the protagonist. "I thought he was just clearing his throat," says the protagonist's friend Jamie (*WF*, 81). In another novel, *The Crow Road*, the contrast between the working-class dialect and educated English is used to problematize the British identity:

17. Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), 7–17 and *passim*.

18. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 21, 104.

19. On the link between Gray and Banks see, e.g., Dietmar Böhnke, "Shades of Gray: The Peculiar Postmodernism of Alasdair Gray," in *Beyond Postmodernism: Reassessments in Literature, Theory and Culture*, ed. Klaus Stierstorfer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 255–68.

20. Iain Banks, *The Wasp Factory* (1984; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 81. Hereafter cited in text as *WF*.

> 'Ah ken that; but I mean they're British; they're ours.' 'Well I don't know about "ours", but they belong to Britain.' 'Ah'm British, am ah, no?' 'Hmm. I suppose so.' . . . 'But I don't see how you can call it yours; you don't even own your own house.'[21]

The response of another interlocutor to this exchange between a working-class boy and the son of a factory owner does not have any effect, although a third "intellectual" boy attempts to define Britishness as a common national identity, based on the political concept of representative democracy:

> 'It is the British Empire and we are all British, and when we're older we can vote for MPs to go to parliament, and they're in power, not the King; that's what the Magna Carta says; and we elect them, don't we? So it is our Empire, really, isn't it? . . .' (*CR*, 149–50)

A similar failure is typical of another Bakhtinian feature of Banks's work, the "grotesque body" expressing collective identity. In *The Wasp Factory* the androgynous body of the main female protagonist is maimed by her/his father's crazy experiment, feeding the girl from an early age with male hormones. Her/his insane brother Eric finally appears as a "dancing" and "leaping" figure of a savage with an ax and a torch, surrounded by a flock of burning and wailing sheep (*WF*, 175). The protagonist thinks of herself/himself "as a state; a country or, . . . a city" where "the different ways" she/he feels "about ideas" are "like the differing political moods that countries go through." According to her/him, political life and representation "have more to do with mood, caprice and atmosphere than carefully thought-out arguments" (*WF*, 62). In this elusive world, thinks the protagonist, acts of cruelty and murder and "reprisals against people only distantly or circumstantially connected with those who have done others wrong are to make the people doing the avenging feel good." And she/he draws an obvious conclusion: "it's all to boost my ego, restore my pride and give me pleasure, not to save the country or uphold the justice or honour the dead" (*WF*, 63).

Even more repressive features of grotesque bodies can be found in the science fiction novels. In *Consider Phlebas* there is the monstrous fat body of Fwi-Song, the leader of an apocalyptic sect, "the Eaters," who are forced to feed on "ashes," "filth," "sand," "tree" and "grass."[22] The monster eats the flesh of aliens, and tortures his proselytes with a poisonous diet. Curiously enough, the purpose of his cruel practices appears to follow that of Burns's grotesque body: to keep the community linked with nature and to defy the power of institutions. However, instead of the freedom of natural "inclination," celebrated by Burns, the monstrous religious leader envisages the communion with nature in eating natural materials, including excrement (*CP*, 162). The cruel community of the Eaters is integrated by means of the cannibalism of the leader and the suffering of his followers and victims: "Let

21. Iain Banks, *The Crow Road* (London: Scribner, 1992), 149. Hereafter cited in text as *CR*.
22. Iain M. Banks, *Consider Phlebas* (1987; New York: Orbit, 2008), 160. Hereafter cited in text as *CP*.

his pain be our delight, as our unmaking shall be our joining; let his flaying and satisfaction be our satisfaction and delectation!" (*CP*, 179).

In Banks's novels heteroglossia is superseded by "worldmaking." His fictional worlds are different "versions of the same facts"[23] about the human species. As Goodman points out, "Though we make worlds by making versions, we no more make a world by putting symbols together at random."[24] This "actuality" of "made" worlds is also typical of Banks's work. In *The Crow Road* the protagonist tells his young friends "how the sun and the solar system were made out of the remnants of older stars that had blown up; how the elements that made up the world had been made in those ancient stars, and that meant our bodies, too, every atom" and they think he is "going to explode" like a supernova (*CR*, 497). Nonetheless, Banks's worlds are "actual" not merely because of his gnoseological optimism—"we were stuck down here on this one little planet and still just savages really, but we'd glimpsed the workings of the universe, worked out from light and radiation what had happened over the past fifteen billion years . . ." (*CR*, 498)—but also because of his eminent interest in cultural and technological aspects of "worldmaking": in the problems named by Derrida "Structure, Sign and Play."[25]

The difference between the human mind and the artificial intelligence of cybernetic machines, "the minds" running, together with the humanoids, a heterogeneous galactic empire called The Culture, is not in the matter or spirit, but in organization. According to a "drone," an advanced robot talking to the protagonist of *Use of Weapons*, "the huge, slow cells of the animal [i.e., also human] brain . . . can claim themselves to be conscious, but would deny a quicker, more finely grained device of equivalent power" (*UW*, 331). The equality of humans and machines does not lie in their resemblance but rather in a set of structural and functional differences.

The closest resemblance between the two entities is in their capacity to play games. In Banks's second sci-fi novel, *The Player of Games* (1988), this is a central theme: games and their players represent different galactic civilizations: The Culture, as well as an autocratic, oppressive and cruel empire called Azad. However, they can never have a totalizing function: the Emperor of Azad, who uses the eponymous game to confirm his absolute power and to identify himself with the empire, is beaten by one of the best players of The Culture, who almost loses his identity in empathizing with his antagonist. The narrator of this novel is a machine, a member of a force called Special Circumstances (i.e., an elite body of humans and machines used by The Culture to intervene in dangerous situations). The "drone" asks a challenging question: "Does identity matter anyway?" and also answers it:

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23. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 93.
24. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 94.
25. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 278–93.

> "We are what we do, not what we think. Only the interactions count. . . . And what is free will anyway? Chance. The random factor. If one is not ultimately predictable, then of course it's all it can be. I get so frustrated with people who can't see this!"[26]

These reflections cannot solve the recurring dilemma of individual identity. While in the novel no one doubts the identity of galactic civilizations, such as The Culture, the identity of Banks's protagonists is repeatedly in jeopardy. When "the Player of Games," Jernau Gurgeh, watches "the Clouds" (most probably the Magellanic Clouds, teeming with new-born stars), tears distort his vision. There is something unbearable in his loneliness, which is difficult to define, but has to do with his mortality, "a little dust" (*PG*, 390) he finds in his pocket. Others of Banks's characters are still worse off. Bora Horza Gobochul, the protagonist of *Consider Phlebas*, is able to change his identity: because of this he can survive the toughest skirmishes of the galactic wars. Nonetheless, he has to suffer the worst anxiety before his death, when he forgets his name. Overheard by the cybernetic machine, one of the Minds, the hero's name and story become the identity of a computer. The most disquieting case is Cheradenine Zakalwe, the protagonist of *Use of Weapons*, whose identity is split between that of "The Good Soldier" helping The Culture to influence and control potentially dangerous and aggressive civilizations, and of a mass murderer using, like the Nazis in their concentration camps, his sister's bones and skin as material for making a chair.

Zakalwe's split identity testifies to the resilience of a crucial Scottish theme, sometimes called antisyzygy and explored by numerous writers, including James Hogg, Robert Louis Stevenson, Alasdair Gray or, recently, James Robertson. Banks's contribution to the debate on the Scottish predicament lies mainly in its new and variegated contextualization (including family chronicles, post-catastrophic tales or "space operas") and also in mingling mainstream and pop-culture influences, genres and techniques. However, unlike Burns's innovative *Cantata*, Banks's works no longer convey the optimistic message of harmony between "Love and Liberty" based on human "inclination." On the other hand, by mingling the themes of Scottish cultural memory (especially present in *The Crow Road*) with a space epic, Banks changes the frame of reference for Scottishness, linking it with a plurality of fictitious worlds, products of powerful and versatile imaginative activity. This may pose an alternative to a protracted crisis of political identity, emptying out the meaning of Britishness and threatening the breakdown of "the complex machinery of devolution."[27] But there may be—as Ascherson believes—still "another Britishness which will survive, a cultural intimacy of the kind which Robert Burns enjoyed and which—stripped of politics—will continue to enrich all the islanders of the British archipelago."[28]

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26. Iain M. Banks, *The Player of Games* (1988; New York: Orbit, 2008), 291. Hereafter cited in text as *PG*.
27. Neal Ascherson, "What Was Britain? Scotland at the Tipping Point," *Litteraria Pragensia* 19, no. 38 (2009): 17.
28. Ascherson, "What Was Britain?," 19.

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Žižek's Act and the Literary Example

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the role of literary characters in Slavoj Žižek's political theory. Žižek, when theorizing political agency, likes to turn to literary texts such as Sophocles's *Antigone* or Herman Melville's *Bartleby, The Scrivener*, which exemplify his concepts. In his thinking, the truth of theory lies in its exemplification, in its practical demonstration. Thus the literary characters (Bartleby, Antigone) who provide examples register the fatal limits of his theory insofar as they prove to be models of authentic political agency, which one cannot actually follow. At the same time, however, they prove to be decisive in allowing Žižek to manipulate his readers in a more indirect and yet crucial manner.

Keywords

Slavoj Žižek; agency; the act; fiction; literary characters; Antigone; Bartleby

I

This essay is concerned with the specific function of fictional characters, with special emphasis on the literary ones, in Slavoj Žižek's political theory. It is based on the following simple insight: Žižek, when theorizing political agency, likes to turn to literary and sometimes also film characters who exemplify and dramatize his concepts. It therefore evolves around the question of why fiction plays such a specific role in Žižek's edifice.

Cultural digressions occur frequently in Žižek's work, and some claim that the exemplary character of Žižek's theory is its defining characteristic. Scott Stephens and Rex Butler, for instance, see in such a propensity for digressions a way in which Žižek's writing manifests itself as "endless enquiry into its own discursive conditions." Cultural examples, from Stephens's and Butler's perspective, index the fact that there is no philosophical concept that is free from its necessarily twisting enunciative conditions, i.e., its exemplification. Like the mediators in the psychoanalytical process of *passe*, cultural examples can be said to deform Žižek's thought system, but this is precisely where to look for the truth of this system.[1]

1. Butler and Stephens draw a parallel between Žižek's discourse and the institution of *passe* in Lacanian psychoanalysis, by which the analysand becomes an analyst by giving an account of his analysis to a committee of analysts through two witnesses who are still in analysis. The two, moved by unconscious impulses, are expected to distort the message. Yet the decision depends precisely on whether such distortions still manage to communicate a certain truth of the analyst-to-be, in fact: "These distortions *are* the truth." See Rex Butler and Scott

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In particular, the foregoing must apply to the acts of the fictional characters who stage Žižek's concept of the ethico-political act proper (the ethical and political dimensions remain inseparable in his work). Some cultural examples, allegedly, serve didactic purposes in order to illustrate abstruse theoretical concepts (e.g., the Lacanian Real), while others are explored in more detail to arrive at controversial interpretations. The fictional figures in question, however, are privileged among all others, for they articulate the ultimate wager of Žižek's whole theoretical project—his concept of political agency—which they dramatize, translating concept into action, theory into praxis.

In his early publication *For They Know Not What They Do*, Žižek shows that exemplarity, truth and action/praxis are all closely interrelated. He targets the problem of examplarity when drawing an analogy between hysteria and Hegel's figures of consciousness in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. These figures, writes Žižek, represent examples which "subvert the very Idea they exemplify,"[2] revealing the implicit presuppositions or unspoken impasses inherent in the idea itself. The ascetic's asserted denial of his body, when put into practice, is nothing but a constant preoccupation with it and with the ways of mortifying it. The notion that such examples represent the (subversive, unconscious) truth of a theoretical attitude is a perspective that can also be traced in Žižek's view of philosophy itself. From his discussion of other philosophers such as Heidegger, Derrida, Habermas, or Butler, it becomes clear that the truth of philosophy, for Žižek, lies in the actual praxis the particular "system" leads to; the political failures, whether collaboration with Nazism or ultimate conformity in regard to the status quo, reveal a disavowed impasse in the theoretical work. Such a political failure need not concern the thinker himself/herself (e.g., Habermas as a state philosopher, Heidegger as a Nazi sympathizer); those who follow this philosophy are also likely, as a consequence, to make serious political mistakes (e.g., Heideggerians in Communist Yugoslavia[3]). In other words, the truth of

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Stephens, "Editors' Introduction," in *Interrogating the Real*, by Slavoj Žižek, edited by Rex Butler and Scott Stephens (London: Continuum, 2005), 3–4. Italics in the original.

2. Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment As a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2008), 143.

3. "When, in my youth, I was bombarded by the official Communist philosophers' stories of Heidegger's Nazi engagement, they left me rather cold; I was definitely more on the side of the Yugoslav Heideggerians. All of a sudden, however, I became aware of how these Yugoslav Heideggerians were doing exactly the same thing with respect to the Yugoslav ideology of self-management as Heidegger himself did with respect to Nazism: in ex-Yugoslavia, Heideggerians entertained the same ambiguously assertive relationship toward Social self-management, the official ideology of the Communist regime—in their eyes, the essence of self-management was the very essence of modern man, which is why the philosophical notion of self-management suits the ontological essence of our epoch, while the standard political ideology of the regime misses this 'inner greatness' of self-management . . . Heideggerians are thus eternally in search of a positive, ontic political system that would come closest to the epochal ontological truth, a strategy which inevitably leads to error (which, of course, is always acknowledged only retroactively, *post factum*, after the disastrous outcome of one's engagement)." Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 13.

a philosophical notion is the political drama of those who profess it, which leads one to the conclusion that the ultimate success of philosophy is workable politics. The political motivation is also what lurks behind Žižek's Lacanian revival of German idealism, as he himself attests in a 2007 interview with Michael Hauser:

> So I think that I'm very traditional, basically, that German idealism, the metaphysics of German idealism, still offers the best conceptual tools to deal with the crisis we are approaching. Because, as Hegel knew, philosophy and crisis are always connected. All philosophy, it's clear, Hegel, Heidegger, Marx, even Plato—you cannot imagine Plato without the political crisis of Greece. No wonder that Plato's representative book is *The Republic*, which, typically, although you have all of Plato's ontology there, the metaphor of the cave and so on, but nonetheless all this emerges to answer which kind of political order we need. So, that would be the point.[4]

Earlier, in *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek writes unequivocally:

> While this book is philosophical in its basic tenor, it is first and foremost an engaged political intervention, addressing the burning question of how we are to reformulate a leftist, anti-capitalist political project in our era of global capitalism and its ideological supplement, liberal-democratic multiculturalism.[5]

Žižek's philosophical project is therefore driven by a deeply political interest. Naturally, all this immediately poses a question about both Žižek's own political interventions and the success or failure of Žižek's politics as it emerges from his heterodox re-reading of German idealism through Lacanian psychoanalysis. The latter is registered by literary examples.

Literary characters often appear at the end of Žižek's books, precisely where abstract issues (interlaced with discussions of culture) elaborated on in the text are to be led to a desired conclusion, i.e., a proposal for alternative forms of political agency. While they embody a decisive move from abstract concepts to concrete models of behavior, they can literally be said to test Žižek's theory *in actu*, staging its deadlocks or implicit presuppositions, its politics, and its truth. This is also attested by the fact that they have become frequent sites of debates over Žižek's politics.

Unlike other cultural works that Žižek likes to explore in detail, in his use of literary characters as exemplary agents he does not engage in lengthy interpretation and is not actually interested in the details of the plot. In fact, the texts are usually condensed into a single, aesthetically charged gesture which is employed to animate the point of the whole theoretical project. Thus we are presented with Antigone's monstrous insistence or Sygne de Coûfontaine's repulsive tic combined with Bartleby's inert "I would prefer not to."[6] In what follows I will examine these figures as crucial points of

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4. Michael Hauser, "Humanism Is Not Enough: Interview with Slavoj Žižek," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009): http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/211/310.

5. Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 4.

6. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 381; Herman Melville, *Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street*, in *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities, Israel Potter:*

convergence of Žižek's philosophy, politics and aesthetics. In the first part of this essay, I will examine their peculiar role of "impossible examples" that register the failure of Žižek's attempt at prescriptive politics. Later on, I will shift my focus and examine fictional characters as specific rhetorical tools that make possible a more intimate relationship between readers and Žižek's theory, and that play a role in Žižek's attempt to unite theory and practice.

II

The political stakes of Žižek's philosophy lie in his revival of Cartesian subjectivity, namely its subversive hidden core, which was first registered and further developed by Kant (who, according to Žižek, ultimately shrank from the radical implications of his own conclusions) and later Hegel. This radical core of German idealism has been left unnoticed by post-structuralist theories that, however, claim to be the inheritors of this particular tradition.[7] The post-structuralist achievement (of, for example, Althusser or Foucault) is represented by the detailed and intricate exploration of the ways in which human subjects are always already determined by factors beyond their control (power, ideology, etc.), which offers little hope for political agency. Žižek's rise to popularity in Western academia can also be attributed to the fact that, at least at first sight, he seems to overcome what some perceive as the political deadlocks of post-structuralism.[8] On account of his Lacanian tools, Žižek manages to extract a notion of an absolutely autonomous, if unconscious and non-substantial, subject that remains irreducible to socio-historic conditions.

From Žižek's complex discussions of subjectivity, two moments seem especially relevant for the discussion of the ethico-political act, namely, the subject as a void and the subject as a negative-contractive force, the "vanishing mediator" between nature and culture, both notions having profound political ramifications.

His Fifty Years of Exile, The Piazza Tales, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, Uncollected Prose, Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative), ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (New York: Library of America, 1984), 635–72; Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. J. E. Thomas (Clayton, DE: Prestwick House, 2005); Paul Claudel, *The Hostage*, trans. Pierre Chavannes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917).

7. Matthew Sharpe and Geoff Boucher, *Žižek and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 65.

8. In their introduction to a collection of critical responses to Žižek's work, *Traversing the Fantasy*, Matthew Sharpe and Geoff Boucher note: "Positions that wholly 'write away' the subject in the play of some other more profound ontological instance—whether arch-writing, power, or the body without organs—tend infamously to be left wondering about their own position of enunciation and to what agency they might be addressing their 'radical' appeals. By contrast, Žižek's (Kantian-Hegelian) 'critique of metaphysics' aligns itself directly and from the start with the reflexive (or 'apperceptive') potential of individuals—precisely as subjects—not only to 'stand out' from, but also to actively intervene in and change, the historical orders into which they have been 'thrown.'" Geoff Boucher and Matthew Sharpe, "Introduction: Traversing the Fantasy," in *Traversing the Fantasy: Critical Responses to Slavoj Žižek*, ed. Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos, and Matthew Sharpe (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), xiii.

The implicit radicality of Descartes's inaugural attempt to think purely formal subjectivity devoid of any content apart from "I think" is taken into account, according to Žižek, by Kant's objection that the subject is not self-transparent.[9] It is the "X that thinks," the formal "unity of apperception" that itself makes experience possible and thus must be logically presupposed, but its notion can never be filled with intuited experiential reality.[10] Adrian Johnston explains: "The (presupposed) being of the Kantian noumenal subject can only ever appear, within the frame of phenomenal (self-) experience, as a void."[11] In other words, the subject, as an inaccessible locus that sustains what we perceive as reality, can be registered only indirectly, in the way the reality we encounter is never consistent, never a harmonized totality. This is, however, always obfuscated, in Lacanian terms, by unconscious fantasy on the level of an individual, or ideological fantasy on the level of a society. As Fabio Vighi explains,

> we *are* the very impossibility that we ascribe to external reality, and that [reality] we must constantly disavow or displace if we are to connect with it. The very surplus generated by our attempt to grasp the meaning of the world is both what prevents us from fully grasping it and what allows us to engage with it in its material guise.[12]

Thus the subject-as-void corresponds to the basic incompleteness of reality (both epistemological and ontological); in Lacan's conceptual edifice, the barred subject is correlative to the barred Other.

Žižek draws an analogy between this Kantian transcendental subject and Lacan's subject of the empty signifier without a signified (which has been primordially repressed). The latter is distinct from ego—a sense of identity, inner richness. There is a connection, however, between the subject and the ego. The subject, as a formal structure lacking "any positive-substantial determinations,"[13] underlies man's potentiality to assume an infinite number of identities, roles, and mandates, without being reducible to any of them. It manifests itself only in the form of a failure of every self, man's ultimate non-coincidence with himself. This deficiency, however, is what drives identity formation; the urge to embrace identities and roles is but a defensive strategy to avoid the abysmal negativity that disavowed truth about our being. Nothing attests to the Žižekian subject better, Adrian Johnston claims with regard to the postmodern celebration of multiple and diffused subject-positions:

> [T]he more one insists upon subjectivity as a dispersed multitude of shifting and unstable identity-constructs, the more one is confronted with the necessity of positing a

9. See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 13.

10. Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 14.

11. Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 62.

12. Fabio Vighi, *On Žižek's Dialectics: Surplus, Subtraction, Sublimation* (London: Continuum, 2010), 133.

13. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 44.

> universal, empty, and contentless frame, a formal void, as the backdrop against which the "mad dance of identifications" takes place.[14]

The ultimate point, however, is that the ruling social order can never capture the subject by its "ideological interpellation"; there is always a negative dimension that escapes it.

The subject is sometimes also described as a dynamic gesture, a contractive force, and a kind of madness. Descartes's withdrawal into radical doubt, Kant's transcendental imagination, and the Hegelian "night of the world"[15] are coupled with the Lacanian death drive to introduce the freedom of subjectivity as "the violent gesture of contraction that negates every being outside itself,"[16] man's capacity to cut his ties to his immediate environment. This impulse is sometimes theorized by Žižek in terms of a disruptive withdrawal from immersion in the so-called natural cycle, man's "denaturalization." Already not nature, but not yet culture, this move is one of the basic dislocations in which humanity is thrown out of joint with its object, on account of which man never fits his environment, which remains a state of radical contingency and as such open to change. The subject names an imbalance introduced in the self-sufficient functioning of the natural world, the process of satisfying one's biological instincts. It is presented as the drive that persists beyond mere biological life, as "beyond the pleasure principle."[17] Culture is then merely an attempt to control and discipline this excess which makes culture possible, yet in itself remains ultimately indifferent to and incompatible with its laws and its norms. It is this basic-level indifference towards social conventions and rules, as well as towards one's self-interest, which constitutes the basic ethical dimension of the death drive, the abyss of freedom as subjectivity.

The drive then manifests itself as a "wild, unconstrained propensity to insist stubbornly on one's own will, cost what it may,"[18] on account of nothing but the excess that defines the subject. Such explosive occasions, when the drive at the heart of human beings rises to the surface, correspond to moments when subjects "traverse their fundamental fantasy" insofar as they acknowledge the disavowed beliefs that tie them to a particular social

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14. Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, 11–12.
15. "The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity—an unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him—or which are not present. This night, the interior of nature, that exists here—pure self—in phantasmagorical representations, is night all around it, in which here shoots a bloody head—there another white ghastly apparition, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears. One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye—into a night that becomes awful." Hegel quoted in Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), 7–8, quoted in Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 29–30.
16. Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 34.
17. Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 37.
18. Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 36.

organization and perceive the latter's contingency, its very inconsistency on account of the excess (of the death-drive, of the *jouissance*—the pleasure in pain beyond the pleasure principle) around which the social-symbolic fabric is structured.

By virtue of its negative restlessness, the subject is capable of rejecting all of its symbolic mandates, of cutting itself off from the social fabric (undergoing a so-called symbolic death), and withdrawing into the abyss of autonomous subjectivity from which any reality can be radically questioned while new possibilities emerge. It is this unconscious and unruly dimension which escapes socialization that forms the basic structure of the act, the paradigm of the ethico-political agency. Such a negative cut of "wiping the slate clean," of a violent subtraction from the socio-symbolic field, is a necessary pre-requisite for a truly new beginning (a new individual identity, a new symbolic order). The events that exemplify the act in its collective dimension are revolutions, such as the French revolution of 1789 or the Russian revolution of 1917. For individual examples of the act, which by far outnumber Žižek's examples of collective revolts, Žižek prefers to have recourse to fiction.[19]

III

Žižek's literary examples of the act are often adapted from Lacan's commentaries on literary texts as they appear in the latter's seminars *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* and *Transference*. Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone, and Sygne de Coûfontaine are figures driven precisely by the excessive drive, "unyielding right to the end, demanding everything, giving up nothing, absolutely unreconciled."[20] As Žižek himself comments:

> In all his [Lacan's] great literary interpretations, from *Oedipus* and *Antigone* through Sade's *Juliette* to Claudel's *Hostage*, he is in search of a point at which we enter the dimension of the "inhuman," a point at which "humanity" disintegrates so that all that remains is a pure subject. Sophocles's Antigone, Sade's Juliette, Claudel's Sygne—they are all figures of such an "inhuman" subject.[21]

I wish to focus on *Antigone*, in particular, the comprehensive exegesis of which appears at the end of Lacan's *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Antigone's act is one of the most frequently cited examples in Žižek's work, as well as a frequent target of criticism that aims at Žižek's political (mis)appropriation of Lacanian theories.[22] One of the reasons for the

19. The exceptions include Žižek's account of the case of the American teacher Mary Kay Letourneau, who had a love affair with her underage student. See Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 382–88.

20. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, vol. 7 of *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 310.

21. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 42.

22. See, for example, Yannis Stavrakakis, "The Lure of Antigone: *Aporias* of an Ethics of the Political," in *Traversing the Fantasy: Critical Responses to Slavoj Žižek*, ed. Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos, and Matthew Sharpe (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 171–82, or Ian Parker, *Slavoj Žižek: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 78.

controversial nature of Žižek's use of the text, however, lies in the ambiguous function of Antigone's agency in Lacan's commentary.

In Lacan's *Ethics* Antigone's suicidal insistence on the burial of her brother despite Creon's interdiction exemplifies the ultimately transgressive and destructive nature of desire (the death drive) and its incompatibility with any established social values and norms. At the same time, through Antigone, Lacan focuses on the cathartic function of tragedy. Like psychoanalysis, tragedy confronts us with the true nature of desire and it does so by aesthetic means, via the hero's sublimity and grandeur. The question remains of whether the hero also represents exemplary ethical behavior. Lacan's text seems to vacillate between descriptive and prescriptive levels, while both positions can be argued, a fact which divides Lacanians into two camps. On the one hand, Lacan explicitly discusses the limits of psychoanalysis at the beginning of the seminar.[23] Psychoanalysis, like tragedy, guides us toward an existential experience but then leaves us at the threshold to find our own measure, our own direction in between destructive, transgressive desire and the social goods. As Marc De Kesel notes, we are no heroes and we always compromise our desire in one way or another.[24] On the other hand, we are presented with a tragic heroine who is explicitly praised and admired in the text for having remained true to her desire. Importantly, towards the end of the seminar, Lacan famously articulates that "the only thing one can be guilty of is to have given ground from one's desire," which is likely to be understood as commanding that no ground be given at all.[25]

23. "On the other hand, I will straight away point out to those who might be inclined to forget it, or who might think that I am following in this direction only by referring to the moral imperative in our experience—I will point out that moral action poses problems for us precisely to the extent that if analysis prepares us for it, it also in the end leaves us standing at the door." Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 21. In a similar vein Lacan writes: "psychoanalysis can accompany the patient to the ecstatic limit of the 'Thou art that,' wherein is revealed to him the cipher of his mortal destiny, but it is not in our mere power as practitioners to bring him to that point where the real journey begins." Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror-phase as Formative of the Function of the I," trans. Jean Roussel, in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 1994), 99.

24. See Marc De Kesel, *Eros and Ethics: Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar VII*, trans. Sigi Jöttkandt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 264.

25. Lorenzo Chiesa further argues that Antigone must be acknowledged as an ethical model since it follows from Lacan's statements that her actions lie at the heart of psychoanalysis: "I believe that Antigone as an image of lack is also inevitably understood by Lacan as a *model* for the ethics of psychoanalysis as articulated in Seminar VII. This can be easily demonstrated by means of a simple syllogism. We are told that Antigone represents 'the essence of tragedy'; we are also told that 'tragedy is at the root of our [psychoanalytic] experience,' and hence (the suicidal nature of) Antigone's act is at the root of Lacanian psychoanalysis. An aesthetic ethics cannot be reduced to an aesthetics: the centrality of Antigone's image can be extracted only from Antigone's own *act*." Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 177. However, far from suggesting that Lacan praises a suicidal action, Chiesa argues that Antigone presents us with a deadlock in Lacan's edifice that can be satisfactorily resolved only from the standpoint of Lacan's later writings.

While acknowledging the validity of interpretation in favor of the descriptive, Žižek seems to suspect in that reading a tendency to confine Antigone's radicalism exclusively to the realm of aesthetics and treat "aesthetic contemplation of a radical ethical stance . . . as a supplement to our 'real life' compromising attitude of 'following the crowd,'"[26] a stance which, according to Žižek, cannot be claimed as Lacanian. Žižek, conversely, seems to consider Antigone as more than relevant to our political or ethical behavior and approaches her act as a paradigm of the ethical-political act proper. Yet, as we shall see, his actual treatment of this fictional example emerges in a similarly equivocal manner. As in Lacan's interpretive case of her, in Žižek's hands Antigone's act oscillates between exemplarity and the merely revelatory.

IV

In one of his encounters with the theory of Judith Butler,[27] Žižek has recourse to a reading of *Antigone* precisely as he ponders the possibility of a genuinely subversive and autonomous action. As both Butler and Žižek agree, we are unconsciously (phantasmatically) invested in the specific symbolic and social organization that we are born into and that gives us identity. The problem is then how it is at all possible to undermine or displace such an organization. In Butler's view (as paraphrased by Žižek), the Lacanian (forced) choice remains confined either to fundamental alienation in the symbolic order or to the transgression of that order at the price of psychosis. Any other resistance remains "a false transgression" and ultimately serves to maintain and further reproduce the law. The Žižek *vs.* Butler debate, however, asserts another option: "the effective symbolic rearticulation *via* the intervention of the real of an *act*."[28] The *act* constitutes a violent withdrawal from any symbolic identifications with their concomitant unconscious (phantasmatic) supports. The *act* is at the same time performative, it is a negative intrusion which, Žižek claims, at once transforms the socio-symbolic coordinates.

Enter Antigone. Via her defiance of Creon's order and her stubborn insistence on the burial of her brother, as Žižek claims, Antigone manifests her disregard of the "big Other," i.e., the whole normative system that regulates inter-subjective

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26. "It is possible to read Lacan's interpretation of *Antigone* asserting that Antigone is not a model to be followed, but just a fascinating image, an aesthetic appearance: Antigone's fascinating beauty explodes when she is elevated into the position of the living dead on account of her not compromising her unconditional desire. If, however, this implies that in 'real' life we should follow the 'safe' path of remaining within the symbolic coordinates and allowing the radical stance of 'going to the end' only in the guise of aesthetic image, does this not reduce art to the aesthetic contemplation of a radical ethical stance, as a supplement to our 'real life' compromising attitude of 'following the crowd'? If there is anything foreign to Lacan, it is such a stance." Slavoj Žižek, "*Concesso non Dato*," in *Traversing the Fantasy: Critical Responses to Slavoj Žižek*, ed. Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos, and Matthew Sharpe (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 246.

27. See Slavoj Žižek, "From 'Passionate Attachments' to Dis-Identification," *Umbr(a)*, no. 1 (1998): 3–17.

28. Žižek, "From 'Passionate Attachments' to Dis-Identification," 5.

relations in a community. She not only puts at stake her entire social identity, but also sacrifices everything that ties her to the community, even perhaps all that is dear to her (her libidinal attachment to her sister and her potential marital happiness with Haemon) for the sake of a cause that matters to her more than life itself. Both Lacan and Žižek thus locate her in the domain "between two deaths," beyond the adhesion to biological life, in the sphere of the death drive. Let us proceed to how this actually affects or transforms the very community.

In *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, Žižek emphasizes that, through the way in which Antigone's demand defies social reality (the big Other), she does something deemed impossible within the coordinates of the life of the polis. Antigone creates a new horizon of possibilities and, as a result, changes the contours of that reality itself; what is considered good and not good, possible or impossible. Antigone's stubborn insistence determines afresh what is considered as the sovereign good in that particular social milieu.[29] The extent of such a transformative effect of the act, however, depends utterly on the particular position of the agent(s) in a society.

Žižek further focuses on Antigone as the figure of the Other qua real, as the inhuman partner. Antigone relates to her cause directly; her demand is not communicated through the symbolic order and that is why it emerges as monstrous. While Žižek differentiates between the imaginary Other, with whom one engages in mirror-like relations (of competition, of mutual recognition, etc.), and of the symbolic Other (the explicit or implicit social rules and codes), Antigone, as the agent of the act, represents the real Other, "the Other with whom no symmetrical dialogue, mediated by the symbolic order, is possible."[30] As the embodiment of inhuman excess, the abyss of subjectivity, which usually remains hidden behind symbolic and imaginary shields, she is frightening. This inhuman aspect is translated into aesthetic terms, into the sublime monstrosity of Antigone that is later adopted by other writers for other literary characters, such as Sethe from Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) or Euripides' Medea, both of whom kill their own children. Paul Claudel's Sygne de Coûfontaine commits suicide by intercepting a bullet meant for her husband, whom she despises and hates. For Žižek, her act lacks any of the ancient sublimity or grandeur and, being modern, remains merely repellent.

The crucial point, however, arrives when we learn that while acts emerge as traumatic encounters for others, they also do so for the agents themselves. The agent remains a stranger to his own act, which becomes difficult to subjectify, to assume as one's own, for the act is something external, radically contingent or even psychotic.[31] Moreover, we do not commit such acts, they

29. See Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2001), 168, 172.

30. Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, 163.

31. A psychotic is someone who can project his own private social reality and ignore the dependence of the Other. Even though Žižek differentiates between the act and the psychotic *passage à l'acte*, uncannily, they seem to overlap. See Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), 84.

occur to us, and we must come to terms with them, concludes Žižek. Beyond any strategic-pragmatic calculation, they are acts of absolute freedom that we perform blindly, in utter passivity, "as an *automaton*, without reflection."[32] Naturally, such coincidence of freedom and necessity fatally complicates Žižek's implicit invitation to follow Antigone's example, as well as any possible ethical-political program one might derive from Žižek's theory of agency.

V

Not surprisingly, Žižek has faced a lot of criticism precisely on account of *the act* he focuses on, namely its excessively violent nature,[33] "its suicidal heroic ethics."[34] The act, moreover, seems to dwell far beyond any everyday, necessarily pragmatic, politics and thus poses the danger of introducing an excuse precisely for what Žižek otherwise relentlessly criticizes: a life of political quietism, redeemed in advance by the comfortable waiting for a miraculous act. As if to respond to this criticism or eager to intervene in the debate on the "what should be done" question, at the end of *The Parallax View* Žižek proposes an alternative form of subversive agency. In the last chapter, Žižek launches a fierce critique of a form of imaginary resistance which, in the final instance, remains dependent on the law and order it rebels against. The "rumspringa resistance," a representative of which Žižek perceives in Simon Critchley, shrinks from actually trying to take over the situation—since, above all, it enjoys its own dissident status.[35] In contrast to this resistance, Žižek proposes a politics of withdrawal. While we cannot plan the act, what we can do is to eschew activity. For where there is no activity, something else becomes evident, i.e., the very space where that activity is taking place, its symbolic coordinates, the socio-political organization in its violence and its radical contingency.

Herman Melville's Bartleby, the protagonist of *Bartleby, The Scrivener* (1853), comes to exemplify precisely this kind of subtractive politics. Like many others before him, Žižek focuses on Bartleby's repeated utterance in the form of "I would prefer not to":

> We can imagine the varieties of such a gesture in today's public space: not only the obvious "There are great chances of a new career here! Join us!"—"I would prefer not to"; but also "Discover the depths of your true self, find inner peace!"—"I would prefer not to"; or "Are you aware how our environment is endangered? Do something for ecology!"—"I would prefer not to"; or "What about all the racial and sexual injustices that we witness all around us? Isn't it time to do more?"—"I would prefer not to." This is the gesture of subtraction at its purest . . . [36]

32. Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, 162.
33. See, e.g., Simon Critchley, "Violent Thoughts about Slavoj Zizek," *Naked Punch*, supplement, 11 (2008): 3–6.
34. Stavrakakis, "The Lure of Antigone," 173.
35. "[I]s not Critchley's position one of relying on the fact that *someone else* will take on the task of running the state machinery, enabling us to engage in critical distance toward the state?" Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 333. Italics in the original.
36. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 382.

It is clear that Žižek does not read the utterance as radically indeterminate (as Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, or Giorgio Agamben do), but rather as a statement of refusal, a sign of withdrawal. Not the negation of a predicate, for Žižek it becomes an affirmation of a non-predicate (after Kant's negative judgment). Bartleby does not refuse to do something but he *wants not to do it.* For Žižek this slight shift marks the difference between transgression that feeds on what it opposes and a gesture which, as an active preference for the negative, remains independent of the dominant ideologies and thus moves beyond the fatal embrace of hegemony and of its negation. At one point we are told that Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" has the structure of a Lacanian *Versagung*: a rejection of the symbolic order as such, a purely formal rejection without any content, which cannot be integrated into the realm of meaning. Like *the act*, this enigmatic statement remains incomprehensible from the point of view of the order in which it intervenes. In the same book Žižek turns to the character of Sygne de Coûfontaine, and to the subject of the death drive, to elaborate on the Versagung structure. The void of both Sygne's and Bartleby's refusal repeats and enacts the radical negativity of subjectivity, the Real over which words stumble. Both are driven by an excess that cannot be grasped or represented by their respective social milieux.

In a sense, Bartleby can be read as a culmination of Žižek's efforts to translate his complicated metaphysics into concrete models of human agency. At first sight, what the character of Bartleby is taken to exemplify appears almost as a prescription. A refusal to undertake any activity that only helps the deleterious system to maintain itself can quite easily be translated into a conscious step. However, this aspect of Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" uneasily combines precisely with the act of *Versagung* as an expression of the unconscious death drive, the transcendental point of Žižek's materialism. Problematically for Žižek's theory, there is a clear gap between the two. Fabio Vighi's question is precisely to the point:

> Should we think of subtraction as a goal to be actively pursued, or as an event that takes place irrespective of our conscious intervention?[37]

And he further points to the danger that

> I might be convinced that I "subtract" for all the right social and political reasons, while unconsciously I fetishize my disengagement through a range of disavowed modalities of enjoyment.[38]

The withdrawal always risks being another form of false resistance. As Vighi argues later on, our conscious agency is unlikely to become a truly subversive political intervention unless driven by an unconscious drive; our unconscious

37. Vighi, *On Žižek's Dialectics*, 137.

38. Vighi, *On Žižek's Dialectics,* 136. Interestingly, Fabio Vighi tries to resolve this deadlock of Žižekian politics by suggesting that many people do not even need to subtract from the present order as they are already disconnected from it. He points to the dispossessed masses of people, inhabitants of slums, refugees, etc. The point would then be to unite/identify with them. See Vighi, *On Žižek's Dialectics*, 21, 137.

must then be piloted by a political project, otherwise it is not likely to achieve much. Even though Bartleby could be perceived as an attempt to connect the two aspects (the pragmatic and the unconscious), his renowned statement and withdrawal in Žižek's reading fail to do so, for Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" remains split from inside.

Matthew Sharpe sees the failure of Žižek's theory to link the conscious-pragmatic in its Kantian strategy. In his opinion, Žižek moves from phenomena back to their transcendental conditions of possibility; however,

> [t]o abstract from this realm in order to disclose the semantic, historical or ultra-transcendental conditions of its possibility (or of the language that political agents use to frame their understandings) means that the employee of this philosophical mode of argumentation can say nothing directly concerning the actuality of this realm, nor concerning the norms, ideals or projects which might inform political praxis within it. In his inimitable fashion, Žižek only brings this "abyss of essence" between the ontic and ontological, or empirical and transcendental realms to a hypostasized head, when he openly argues that from the perspective of ordinary political life, the mode of action authentically true to the subject's terrorizing death drive must appear as diabolically evil.[39]

Further than this, the death drive should be not only "diabolically evil" but even monstrous or abhorrent, as Žižek's description of the heroes' acts suggests. When translated into everyday reality, Žižek's metaphysics remains and must remain repulsive, if not incoherent. Literary fiction then enacts the incompatibility of the two levels—of the Real and the real, the gap between Žižekian transcendental truth and politics—through the fictionality of the example and its extreme aesthetics.

VI

Let us first address the specifically exaggerated aesthetics that surround the act. Adrian Johnston sees in Žižek's inclination to employ excessive adjectives (repelling, horrific, etc.) a more general phenomenon of the subject's anxiety over *jouissance* and the drives that pose a threat to its well-being. Such exaggerated aesthetic designators merely register the tension and conflict between the subject's striving for balance and the drives—their incompatibility with our well-being, with the pleasure and reality principles.[40] We are confronted with the deeds of Antigone, Bartleby and Sygne, who are presented to us as the true picture of who we are. At the same time, they are described as threateningly inhuman (repulsive, monstrous, inert, etc.) and thus impossible to identify with. In this way, however, we perceive the disturbing power, uncontrollable nature, and externalness of the unconscious drive.

Once the drives distort the fragile balance of the subject, the following occurs, as Žižek describes it:

> The result of experiencing and/or witnessing some excessively cruel (or otherwise libidinally invested) event, from intense sexual activity to physical torture, is that, when,

39. Matthew Sharpe, "'Critchley is Žižek': In Defence of Critical Political Philosophy," *Critical Horizons* 10, no. 2 (2009): 194.

40. Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, 59.

> afterwards, we return to our 'normal' reality, *we cannot conceive of both domains as belonging to the same reality*. The reimmersion in 'ordinary' reality renders the traumatic memory of the horror somewhat hallucinatory, derealising it. This is what Lacan is aiming at in his distinction between reality and the Real: we cannot ever acquire a complete, all-encompassing, sense of reality—some part of it must be affected by the 'loss of reality', deprived of the character of 'true reality', and this fictionalised element is precisely the traumatic Real.[41]

Precisely this logic of the Real of the drive as incompatible with "reality" can be perceived in Žižek's depiction of the act via fictional heroes/heroines. The act, as a traumatic intrusion into ordinary reality, is grasped through that reality in the form of fiction; it is thus that its irreducibility to that reality is felt and experienced. In a certain sense, the truth of the Žižekian act could not be conveyed otherwise. In *The Fright of Real Tears*, when discussing the decision of Krysztof Kieślowski, the Polish filmmaker, to abandon documentaries for feature films, Žižek claims that it is *only* through the distance guaranteed by fiction, the awareness that what is at stake is a false image (e.g., an actress playing her role), that one can express or feel the trauma of the Real—the Real of subjective experience.[42] Otherwise it is simply rejected as obtrusive and simply too horrid. The only possible representation of the Real and thus also the representation of agency of the drive requires the suspension or distancing of the symbolic network through fiction.

VII

When discussing Žižek's failure to be prescriptive, Jodi Dean suggests that Žižek occupies the position of an analyst who frustrates the perception of himself as "the subject supposed to know" and intentionally upsets the demand to tell us what to do. Like the analyst, Žižek merely creates the occasion so that we can figure it out for ourselves. The criticism of Žižek for his lack of concrete political vision is, according to Dean, more suggestive of the critics' unwillingness to tackle the problem themselves.[43] Indeed, in the documentary film *Žižek!*, Žižek appears to be mindful about the transferential relationship he happens to be in with regard to his audience. He takes into account the fact that many look up to him as to "the bright intellectual" with all the answers. He confirms Dean's hypothesis when he explicitly speaks of trying to place himself in the analyst's position and to purposely disappoint the demands others address to him in order to force his interrogators to face the very problem of their demand.[44] Elsewhere he insists that philosophers in general, when expected to intervene in the public space, should act

41. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Kieślowski and the Future* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 66. Italics in the original.
42. See Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 30.
43. See Jodi Dean, *Žižek's Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xix–xx.
44. See Žižek in Astra Taylor, dir., *Žižek!* (Zeitgeist Films, 2005).

toward their audience in a manner not unlike that of analysts towards their patients.[45]

Levi Bryant takes Jodi Dean's point even further when he suggests that we should treat Žižek's texts primarily as psychoanalytic interventions. When trying to understand Žižek's political program, rather than what Žižek says, we ought to consider what he does. Žižek's theses, like the Lacanian psychoanalyst's interpretations, regardless of whether they are accurate or not, themselves reconfigure the framework of the situations into which they intervene.[46] This approach is also validated to an extent by Žižek himself when he claims that the task of philosophy is, above all, to change the basic concepts of the debate.[47]

Bryant's and Dean's approach to Žižek's politics is thus perfectly legitimate. Yet it is one which risks disclaiming the clearly discernible intention on Žižek's part to articulate a prescriptive model of political behavior. As the case of Bartleby implies, Žižek does attempt to propose practical solutions and answers and is apparently interested in having us converted to his vision of what should be done at the moment, hardly a classically conceived psychoanalytic interest. In agreement with Matthew Sharpe, Žižek's confusing prescriptions are much more a matter of the gap between his transcendental philosophy and everyday politics than a question of Žižek's intentional efforts to frustrate his readers' demands. However, this is not to diminish the interventional or psychoanalytical aspects of Žižek's texts as described above; rather, one simply should not ignore the fact that in the light of his own thesis, presented at the beginning of this essay, Žižek's project is a fiasco. His theory fails at the prescriptive level. One ought not to reject him for that reason (as Ernesto Laclau or Simon Critchley do[48]) and thus remain blind to the more indirect effect of Žižek's work, but all the same one should not disavow the failure.

Literary characters, then, reflect both aspects: they are the loci of the conflict between Žižek's philosophy and Žižek's politics but their function can also be described in terms of the performative and interventional nature of his theory. For, besides being exemplary if impossible agents, fictional characters represent a way in which it is possible to decisively intervene in the reader's world.

VIII

As Bryant reminds us, Žižek's principal method, as announced by the latter in the foreword to *The Parallax View*, is that of short-circuiting levels that

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45. Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present*, ed. Peter Engelmann, trans. Peter Thomas and Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 50.

46. See Levi R. Bryant, "Symptomal Knots and Evental Ruptures: Žižek, Badiou, and Discerning the Indiscernible," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 1, no. 2 (2007): http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/30/89.

47. See Badiou and Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present*, 51.

48. See Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 237; Simon Critchley, "Foreword: Why Žižek Must Be Defended," in *The Truth of Žižek*, ed. Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (London: Continuum, 2007), xiv.

are usually kept apart; for instance, a reading of a hegemonic subject matter through the lenses of a marginal or excluded element (e.g., reading Lacan through popular culture, or Heidegger through pornography, etc.). By combining what is considered mutually incompatible, Bryant argues, Žižek dissolves fixed libidinal attachments. As a consequence, possibilities not previously discernible in the configuration emerge and must be reacted to by other elements.

Precisely such "impossible" short-circuiting is what is at stake in Žižek's employment of fictional agents. As we have said, everyday political reality and the theory of the act as exemplified by fiction remain incompatible. However, the strategic confrontation of mutually untranslatable perspectives is precisely what defines the Žižekian parallax gap, a juxtaposition of two incompatible sides of a phenomenon which "can be grasped only in a kind of parallax view, constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis and mediation is possible."[49] Therefore, the importance of the juxtaposition of social reality with its recognized models of political agency, on the one hand, and fictional characters, on the other, lie not only in the reader's changed view of forms of political agency but the transformed status of agency as such: acting itself becomes something different. This shift of the subjective position, as well as the status of agency, emerge as a consequence of oscillating between recognized forms of agency and the act with its fictional "impossible" examples.

Looking at political reality through fiction distances readers from that reality, and contests the naturalness of its implicit dogmas. The point is to launch an annihilatory attack on contemporary cynicism and a loss of faith in grand political causes as against the heroic background of ancient and modern literary texts and films. In addition to that, Žižek's admiration for the radical deeds of the heroes and heroines indirectly invites us to grasp their greatness negatively, through the recognition of our own limitations (i.e., our own cynicism, our own strategic compromises, etc.). As Žižek writes about film, its ultimate achievement as a cultural form

> is not to recreate reality within the narrative fiction, to seduce us into (mis)taking a fiction for reality, but, on the contrary, to make us discern the fictional aspect of reality itself, to experience reality itself as a fiction.[50]

By looking awry at social reality through fiction—e.g., through Bartleby's gesture of non-preference or via Antigone's insistence—we might experience our own "reality" as contingent, and its accepted ways as arbitrary. What is at stake, in other words, is "traversing the fantasy" which sustains our social organization as the only legitimate one, and necessary.

In his recent volume *Living in the End Times* Žižek introduces a slightly different version of the thesis from the one I cited at the beginning of this essay. When discussing the overall strategy of the book, he draws an analogy between Lacan's performative concept of interpretation—"Interpretation is

49. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 4.

50. Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears*, 77.

not tested by a truth that would decide by yes or no, it unleashes truth as such. It is only true inasmuch as it is truly followed" and Marx's Thesis XI: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."[51] Both Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist theory exemplify the "dialectical unity of theory and practice" insofar as the value of theory lies in the transformative effects it produces in its recipients. Here what is important is apparently not so much a coherent articulation of a viable political project, but rather the very interaction between a theoretical thesis and its audience. The ultimate goal becomes an intervention that is effective to such an extent that it manages to interfere in the unconscious of the individual and, by extension, even the transindividual, which itself jump-kicks social transformation. If otherwise, we are left with nothing but a fetishistic split—"I know very well . . . but nevertheless"—illustrated by Žižek's frequently repeated joke about the ignorance of chickens.[52] In such a case, however, it is in the actual dialogue between the reader and the theory that the stakes lie—the reason for the most sophisticated strategic-rhetorical approach, the important part of which is the fictional characters. For, according to Žižek, truly great art confronts us with the fundamental fantasies of both our personal and social realities, inviting us to traverse them. It seems no coincidence that Žižek attributes to fiction a psychoanalytical power precisely when he writes that "fiction intrudes into and hurts *dreams themselves*, secret fantasies that form the unavowed kernel of our lives."[53]

It might be possible to relate the peculiar role of the fictional characters to Žižek's repeated suggestions related to the emancipatory power of art,[54] exemplified in his writing almost exclusively by opera. Art, it seems, entertains precisely the power to speak to the very negative restlessness hidden in human beings; the drive as the excessive yearning for what radically differs from whatever is, which therefore cannot be assigned any content, and of which Simone Weil writes:

> And what is this good? I have no idea— . . . It is that whose name alone, if I attach my thought to it, gives me the certainty that the things of this world are not goods.[55]

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51. Quoted in Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), xiii.

52. "For decades, a classic joke has been circulating among Lacanians to exemplify the key role of the Other's knowledge: a man who believes himself to be a grain of seed is taken to a mental institution where the doctors do their best to convince him that he is not a grain of seed but a man; however, when he is cured (convinced that he is not a grain of seed but a man) and allowed to leave the hospital, he immediately comes back, trembling and very scared—there is a chicken outside the door, and he is afraid [it] will eat him. 'My dear fellow,' says the doctor, 'you know very well that you are not a grain of seed but a man.' 'Of course I know,' replies the patient, 'but does the chicken?'" Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 251.

53. Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears*, 77.

54. See, for example, Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears*, 272, or Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute; or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), 159–60.

55. Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 316, quoted in Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 80.

Towards the end of *The Fragile Absolute* Žižek describes a scene from the movie *The Shawshank Redemption* (dir. Frank Darabont, 1994), where a convict talks about the emancipatory effect of Mozart's opera on the prisoners. As Žižek describes it,

> In hearing this aria from *Figaro*, the prisoners have seen a ghost—neither the resuscitated obscene ghost of the past, nor the spectral ghost of the capitalist present, but the brief apparition of a future utopian Otherness to which every authentic revolutionary stance should cling.[56]

At work are the sites of utopian Otherness, where the abyss of freedom at the core of human being finds its articulation. And it is this negative restlessness that Žižek is trying to bring alive in his audience through his appropriation of Antigone, Sygne, or Bartleby.

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56. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 159–60.

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Compliance Versus Defiance: The Characters' Response to Social Structures in Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* and *1982 Janine*

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Abstract

The article focuses on two novels by Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981) and *1982 Janine* (1984), in particular on the ways in which the characters are influenced by externally imposed social structures and the attitudes they assume in dealing with them. The adverse workings of official institutions, such as education and employment facilities, are received with compliance on the part of the protagonist in *1982 Janine* but meet with resistance from both of the two mirror protagonists in *Lanark*. In the context of the standing of Scotland within the United Kingdom, institutions represent the interests of the powerful English majority rather than the dependent Scottish minority, and therefore any act of rebellion against them is charged with a subversive potential. Besides the political implications, the article explores the social dimensions of the novels and illustrates by means of individual examples the means used by the powerful to exploit the powerless, as well as the strategies the latter employ to defend themselves.

Keywords

Alasdair Gray; *Lanark*; *1982 Janine*; politics in literature; sexuality; twentieth-century Scottish literature

When Alasdair Gray was asked by an interviewer whether the concern with monstrous institutions recurrent in his writing is a "kind of obstreperousness" springing from "a genetic perturbation" of the author, he replied:

> My approach to institutional dogma and criteria—let's call it my approach to institutions—reflects their approach to me. Nations, cities, schools, marketing companies, hospitals, police forces have been made by people for the good of people. I cannot live without them, don't want or expect to. But when we see them working to increase dirt, poverty, pain, and death, then they have obviously gone wrong. Is it mere obstreperousness to show them wrong? The genetic perturbation you refer to is a sense of justice.[1]

Political and social injustice, coupled with the exploitation by those with power of the less fortunate, have indeed been the issues that Gray most often chooses to tackle. Besides being the preoccupation of his polemical treatises, *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland* (1992, revised 1997) and *How We Should Rule Ourselves* (with Adam Tomkins, 2005), these topics also figure

1. Quoted in Mark Axelrod, "An Epistolary Interview, Mostly with Alasdair Gray," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 108.

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prominently in his fiction, including the much acclaimed epic *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981) and the controversial work of political pornography *1982 Janine* (1984). Whereas *Lanark* portrays alternately the strivings of a young artist thwarted by the strictures of inflexible institutions and the failure of a common man in the face of an inhuman global syndicate devoted solely to earning profit, *1982 Janine* focuses on a life marred by the less tangible but nonetheless powerful social constructs imposed on a protagonist seeking upward class mobility. As the protagonist-narrator of *1982 Janine*, Jock McLeish, puts it in his drunken soliloquy addressed to God: "I am very sorry God, I would like to ignore politics but POLITICS WILL NOT LET ME ALONE. Everything I know, everything I am has been permitted or buggered up by some sort of political arrangement."[2]

An original achievement that first announced Gray as a major talent, the monumental *Lanark* stretches the possibilities of incorporating a double plot into a single novel in its innovative juxtaposition of a crudely realistic story and an allegorical narrative. The two major plot lines follow two versions of one and the same character: the novel opens with the protagonist stranded in a decaying metropolis and, having no memories of his former existence, coming to call himself Lanark for the earliest name that he could recall and which happened to be one of a town depicted in a poster. Divided as it is into four books arranged out of chronological order, the novel continues to shift the focus onto Duncan Thaw, an artistic youth whose life terminates in suicide only to be resumed in the physical form of Lanark. Gray's next published novel, *1982 Janine*, cemented the author's reputation as an incorrigible iconoclast while also causing a minor sensation owing to its explicit sexual content. The entire novel is narrated through the disjointed memories of an insomniac fantasist, outwardly an unadventurous man plodding through a dull middle age, who spends his sleepless nights conjuring elaborate pornographic scenarios involving, among other things, bondage, fetishism, and rape. The book takes its name from the protagonist's favorite fantasy woman, Janine, whom her inventor, Jock, forces into assuming a series of humiliating roles according to the various scripts devised by him. Janine and her female fellows are subjected to shameless abuse in a world where human beings are treated as a commodity, which is a characteristic equally applicable to the actual world of Jock, who shares the experience of exploitation. Where Jock appropriates Janine on the grounds of her sexuality, he himself feels violated by a system that purchases his labor without allowing him to participate in its management or exercise any influence on its policies. In the final analysis, *1982 Janine* interweaves the themes of sexual and political abuse to the point of identifying the one with the other; ultimately, it illustrates that whatever form an arbitrary abuse of power takes, it results in a fundamental violation of the human beings exposed to it.

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2. Alasdair Gray, *1982 Janine* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 231–32. Hereafter cited in text as *J*.

A bleak view of the state of human society permeates *1982 Janine* and *Lanark* alike, but it is only in the case of the latter that this quality—assisted by the apparent science fiction elements in the portions of the book set in the apocalyptic city of Unthank and in the city-in-a-building of the Institute—might lead to the easy assumption that *Lanark* takes the form of a dystopian novel. To dismiss the disturbing portrayal of the predatory Institute and Unthank societies as a mere dystopia would, however, be to oversimplify the complexity of the novel's structure and to overlook one entire dimension of its multifaceted text. M. H. Abrams applies the term dystopia to works that forge an "imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected into a disastrous *future* culmination."[3] In other words, dystopias elaborate in fictional terms on the possibility that in a more or less distant future, humankind might experience a regressive development and degenerate to the condition of savage beasts. A series of subtle hints interspersed throughout *Lanark* enables a clear connection to be established between the two protagonists, as much as a strong link to be drawn between their respective settings: the amnesiac Lanark reincarnates the suicidal Duncan Thaw in a similar way to that in which Lanark's nightmarish Unthank reenacts Duncan's post-Second World War Glasgow. What disqualifies *Lanark* from being described as a dystopia is that, despite the surreal fluidity of time and space and the futuristic feats of technology manifested in the sections featuring Unthank and the Institute, the ideological content of the whole of the novel is firmly rooted in contemporary reality. *Lanark* cannot be said to develop a dystopian vision of what might happen in an imagined future; the novel rather prefers a realistic method of observing what is already happening at *present* and then translates the painful actualities into allegorical terms. Thus, the cannibalistic community of the Institute may be read on the literal level as a portrayal of a fictional society that lives on actually devouring its own members, or, even more disconcerting, it can be understood on the allegorical level as a realistic rendering of contemporary conditions under which the energies and efforts of the hapless majority appear to be consumed to accomplish the aims of the fortunate ruling minority rather than aims of their own. The science fiction elements employed in the novel do not rule out the insistent presence of serious social concerns in an allegorical disguise; quite the contrary, as Frederic Jameson suggests, the form in this case reinforces the content: "SF [science fiction] more than most types of literature relies heavily on conceptual schemes (which is to say, on ideological materials) for its construction of future or alternate universes . . . , whereby elements of our own world are selected in accordance with this or that abstract concept or model."[4] In each of its several settings, realistic or otherwise, *Lanark* does

3. M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th ed. (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1999), 328. Italics mine.
4. Frederic Jameson, "In Retrospect," *Science Fiction Studies* 1, no. 4 (September 1974): 274.

not conceive a dystopian speculation but issues an outspoken comment on a world evacuated of humanity and dominated by a powerful few who prosper at the expense of the powerless many.

Both the above-mentioned novels deal with subjects of universal resonance; however, they feature explicitly Scottish main characters and substantial parts of the stories take place in the author's native Glasgow, which inevitably invites a more specific reading within the discourse surrounding the question of the condition of Scotland. Three hundred years after the 1707 Act of Union, which joined the previously separate states of Scotland and England into a single unit, Scotland does not seem much of an integral part of the United Kingdom. The status of Scotland could be described as that of a stateless nation: "Politically, Scotland functions as a region, but socially it maintains many of the institutions, especially legal and educational ones, that are characteristic of a nation."[5] Along with social institutions, the Scottish have preserved their distinctive culture, which, on the one hand, never fully managed to assert its rightful position within the English canon, while on the other hand, it resisted attempts to be forcefully assimilated into and consequently replaced by English traditions. In terms of political rule, major decisions affecting the course of the whole country are forged in a distant capital by representatives promoting the interests of the English majority rather than those of the Scottish minority. A Scot may suspect that "no government need to be moved by the wishes of the northern native, especially not the Gaelic native" (*J*, 134), as the fictional Jock McLeish, an advocate of Scottish home rule, says, commenting on the policies of Margaret Thatcher and her first Conservative government, which manifested little understanding for Scottish (or any other) separatist complaints.

In some respects, the contemporary standing of Scotland resembles a postcolonial condition; "colonizing," after all, is the very word used by an apparently anti-English character in *1982 Janine* to describe the attitude of dominance exercised by the English over the lesser Scottish nation (*J*, 288). It has been argued "that there is, in fact, nothing 'post' about Scotland politically or economically";[6] this assertion, however, seems to ignore the fact that with regard to politics, the country embarked on a new stage with the establishment of a devolved Scottish parliament effected by the Scotland Act of 1998, and that the last dozen years of development have been accordingly referred to as the post-devolution era. In terms of economics, the Scotland of the last third of the twentieth century could be conveniently labeled as a postindustrial country, a situation realistically depicted in *1982 Janine*, which juxtaposes the comforts of the postwar welfare state with the condition of Glasgow in the early nineteen-eighties, described by William M. Harrison "as an abandoned, late-capitalist, postindustrial locus: a city in decay and on

5. Christie March, "Bella and the Beast (and a Few Dragons, Too): Alasdair Gray and the Social Resistance of the Grotesque," *Critique* 43, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 324.
6. March, "Bella and the Beast," 326.

the dole."[7] What relates Scotland most clearly to this postcolonial status is the fact that the nation has been historically subjected to exploitation perpetrated or sanctioned by the English government and that Scottish distinctiveness has been continuously discouraged by a system upholding English values, including the use of Standard English as the official language. Political and social institutions have been effectively employed to these ends, as a result of which they came to be identified as the embodiment of the English oppressor in the Scottish mind, notably in the mind of Alasdair Gray.

When discussing literary texts with a strong underlying social message, it seems appropriate to refer to terms employed most commonly by theorists of Marxist criticism. Throughout *Lanark* and *1982 Janine*, the main characters continuously experience feelings of entrapment within an antagonistic sociopolitical system which, they believe, has been tailored to the needs of a small group of the powerful and affluent who pursue private rather than public goals and do so at the expense of society at large. Admittedly, the Marxist approach has been massively discredited and vulgarized in recent decades; as Terry Eagleton, however, helpfully comments, the cause of this decline is not that the issues addressed by Marxism have disappeared and so rendered the theory redundant—obviously, social problems still persist.[8] Far from arguing for the simplified solution of a socialist revolution, both *Lanark* and *1982 Janine* revolve around the conflict of an individual with what Marxist theory labels "ideology" and characterizes as a set of "'definite forms of social consciousness' (political, religious, ethical, aesthetic, and so on)" whose primary purpose "is to legitimate the power of the ruling class in society."[9] The abstract concept of ideology materializes in the physical presence of institutions founded in order to enforce established norms to which each member of the particular society is expected to submit. Neither the ideology nor the social structures set up to promote it should be perceived as inherently evil, but Gray's novels nevertheless present the perversion of a social system gone astray and invite, if not require, a reading in terms of the abuse of power and a struggle for liberation from oppression. *1982 Janine* offers a view of a society which, for example, refuses to grant social assistance to an unmarried woman who shares a home with her partner, thus, by virtue of a cohabitation law, officially assuming her condition to be that of "a self-employed whore" (*J*, 242). *Lanark* in turn features an atrocious system which literally feeds on the deaths of its members, putting into service advanced scientific knowledge to recycle dead bodies into nutritious food. Both novels center on protagonists who recognize the inadequacies and inhumanity of the degenerate ideology sustained by their respective societies and both equally

7. William M. Harrison, "The Power of Work in the Novels of Alasdair Gray," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 163.
8. See Terry Eagleton, "Was Marx Right? It's Not Too Late to Ask," *Commonweal*, April 8, 2011: 9.
9. Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 5.

examine the consequences of the characters' choice as to whether to comply with or to resist their own dehumanization.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, such as his fellow-chronicler and celebrator of Glasgow James Kelman, Alasdair Gray has decided to address his audience mostly in Standard English, and yet he remains aware of the subversive potential of the vernacular and deploys it at strategically selected points in his novels. *1982 Janine* presents a protagonist haunted by the traumatic experiences of his past, among them the painful memories of a tyrannical English language teacher appropriately dubbed Mad Hislop, who, when not busy making boys into men by exercising his lochgelly on their outstretched hands, devoted his energies to pouring euphonious English poetry into his pupils' ears. Not Robert Burns, however, for Hislop despised the Scottish poet, and this detail renders him all the more suitable as a representative of English-centered educational practices. Hislop clearly realizes the implications of his role in a system promoting English culture and language, which shows, for example, in his accusing a boy who uses his native dialect of "either a conscious or unconscious effort to destroy communication between the provinces of a once mighty empire" (*J*, 84). What the authoritarian teacher carries out in his classroom can properly be called a "cultural invasion," described by Paulo Freire as a form of violation which "implies the 'superiority' of the invader and the 'inferiority' of those who are invaded, as well as the imposition of values by the former, who possess the latter and are afraid of losing them."[10] Hislop serves as a loyal extension of English rule: set on the task of guarding an outpost of culture in what he perceives as barbarian Scotland, he brings to mind the image of a missionary dispatched by an imperial power with the objective of converting the savages and forcing them to comply with an alien set of values.

Before his breakdown, Hislop becomes identified with his institution to such an extent that he ceases to be an individual human being, however whimsical and cruel, and assumes the appearance of a monstrous, inhuman machine. This impression is reinforced by the mechanical, automaton-like movements in which Hislop carries out his curative beating of Anderson, a boy with a lisp, and which he intends to continue until Anderson asks him to stop while pronouncing the word with the correct articulation. In the face of such violent injustice, young Jock McLeish discovers in himself the strength to defy an appointed authority, the strength that he is to lack in his later conformist life, and speaks up on behalf of Anderson. In a wonderful moment of compassion for a fellow creature and rightful anger over the abuse of power, the whole class takes over Jock's chant "You shouldnae have done that" and eventually has Hislop crushed and defeated (*J*, 336). Cairns Craig suggests that Jock's employment of the vernacular stands as "the assertion not just of moral condemnation but of linguistic independence" and notices that Hislop

10. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 1996), 141.

himself has recourse to his mother tongue when he is delivered from the madness of his pupils by the headmaster and whines childishly: "Oh sir they wullnae lea' me alane, they wullnae lea' me alane."[11] The machinery enforcing alien language structures on natural speech breaks down when "[t]he enforcer of the power of the written over the oral, of the standardly typographic, is defeated by the power of the oral, just as Jock himself will be redeemed by the discovery of his own voice and by his—and his author's—refusal to be bound by the conventions of the world of type."[12]

The oppressive figure of Hislop finds its match in *Lanark* in the abusive character of Sludden, the inconsequential self-proclaimed leader of a cafe clique who rises to the influential position of a city provost, apparently by making use of his manipulative powers. The connection between Hislop and Sludden rests on the lasting influence that they exercise over the lives of the protagonists, Jock and Lanark respectively, and on the fact that they operate as parts of an overarching system rather than as independent individuals. Furthermore, both Hislop and Sludden represent institutions professing to benefit those who come into contact with them, but in fact contribute to corruption and cause harm, intentionally or otherwise. Hislop's far-too-frequent resorting to corporal punishment illustrates his perverted belief that "teaching small people to take torture from big people, and crushing their natural reaction to it, was a way of improving them" (*J*, 85). One cannot help noticing that Gray does not refer to "children" and "adults," but to "small people" and "big people," which emphasizes the universal validity of the assertion and suggests that the pattern of the weak being abused by the powerful recurs at all stages of one's life.

Inflicting physical pain and spreading psychological terror serve Hislop as a means of crushing resistance and numbing the spirit of young persons so that they will grow up to accept unquestioning obedience to the system that produced them. In the single purgative night during which *1982 Janine* is purported to take place, Jock seeks to banish the haunting memories of his past by summoning pornographic fantasies but is eventually led to realize that his elementary school teacher has firmly planted in him a version of himself, another Hislop, a "mean snigger at a world ruled by shameless greed and cowardice and which thinks these insanities are serious essential traditional straightforward commonsense business" (*J*, 176). Unlike Hislop, Sludden begins by pursuing his private interests without being affiliated to any official body; however, his patronizing leadership of an assembly of lovers and would-be friends might be considered a mere rehearsal of the public role that he is to assume later in the novel. Sludden views love and work as "ways of mastering other people," an idea which he is clearly bent on putting into practice, particularly regarding the exploitative nature of his relationship to

11. Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 190.
12. Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, 190.

Gay, his fiancée, and Nan, the mother of his child.[13] As Gay explains, "Sludden never lets go," a claim reinforced by the description of her straining attempt to get farther away from him, which is prevented by an imaginary "elastic cord fixed to her back" binding her to Sludden and literally pulling her in his direction (*L*, 45). Nan, the woman Sludden has tired of, pictures herself as "being crushed under a whole pile of women with Sludden jumping up and down on top, wearing a crown and laughing" and Sludden as "a frantic greedy child running everywhere looking for breasts to grab and mothers to feed him" (*L*, 361). Whereas the long line of Sludden's women—reaching from Gay and Nan to Rima, Lanark's common-law wife—at least realize that they are being taken advantage of, Lanark himself remains unsuspecting when Sludden disposes of him by sending him off to what looks like a conference of world powers with a delegate decree and the misled belief that he has the power to save the city of Unthank from destruction. Unsurprisingly, Lanark fails to achieve anything by his speech at a conference that has already decided to let Unthank go down; nevertheless, he manages to preserve his personal integrity, a comfort denied to the opportunist protagonist of *1982 Janine*. Whereas Lanark consistently acts on what he perceives as a moral imperative and disregards the potentially adverse consequences of his defiant actions for his well-being—such as the prospect of starving himself to death when he refuses to eat the Institute food—Jock prefers the easy way of compliance and throughout his actions he seeks in the first place to benefit himself.

In *1982 Janine*, the enduring normative efforts of Mad Hislop, the pressure to conform on the part of the protagonist's irreproachably respectable parents, and, perhaps, also the proneness to manipulation manifest in Jock himself all combine to produce a perfect tool in the service of whomever desires it, in Jock's case, the National Security Installations. As a supervisor of electronic security devices, Jock serves his employer for twenty-five years as infallibly as a cog in the wheel of a well-oiled machine, belonging to "those frequently mocked individuals who are proud to have never lost a day's work through illness in their lives" (*J*, 322). Jock becomes dehumanized to such an extent that he does not allow any human weakness, no matter how natural, to interfere with his work responsibilities; he ceases both to think and to feel, deliberately benumbing his reasoning faculties by continuous heavy drinking and eventually discovering himself incapable of experiencing any kind of authentic emotion, whether positive or otherwise.

Jock's education and upbringing invariably followed the pattern of what Freire defines as an "antidialogical action,"[14] referring in the context of pedagogy to the mechanical practice of transferring ready-made content to passive recipients and requiring its faithful reproduction in much the same way as one would record and recall data in a computer system. Freire

13. Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981; Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007), 6. Hereafter cited in text as *L*.

14. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 119.

continues to identify the elements of an antidialogical action, including in the foremost place the "conquest," which "involves a Subject who conquers another person and transforms her or him into a 'thing.'"[15] Speaking about Jock, as a young person he was subjected to appropriation through a repressive institutional education, as well as a restrictive home environment, the former inhibiting his individuality, the latter suppressing his spontaneity. Jock reports on his parents' house as "COMFORTABLE BUT DEPRESSED" (*J*, 196); he never heard his mother and father either cry or laugh aloud—with a single exception when he contrived to trick them into openly showing their pleasure over a letter announcing his admission to college—and adopting this model of behavior, he himself unlearned to exhibit his emotions. At the end there remains little to nothing by which Jock can be distinguished from an inanimate object: stripped of his human qualities, he loses the ability to engage in interaction with other human beings and continues to exist as a mere automaton.

Jock's well-meaning mother, intent on having her only child eclipse the limits of his working-class background, quite physically restrains him from mixing with colliers' and crofters' children by sending him to school in an uncomfortable suit which prevents its wearer from moving freely and joining in rough games. Jock's father brings the boy's perverse clothing scheme to perfection with his seemingly sensible suggestion to equip Jock with "three jackets and three waistcoats and seven pairs of trousers and two overcoats of the same cloth" because when changed daily, "[t]he fabric will suffer so little strain that with ordinary care it will look continually smart and last him a lifetime" (*J*, 201). The father dismisses the mother's feeble protests against such suffocating uniformity, pointing out that Jock's prospective employers will value consistency even in dress, and thus Jock is denied the chance to assert his individuality and is instead turned into a standardized part of a working machine. Jock's only peculiar distinction is his bow tie, a piece of clothing at the time most probably "worn by professional people in risky businesses like horseracing, the arts and journalism" (*J*, 202), certainly not by a working-class boy enrolled at a technical college. Both the strength and the foolishness of social constructs are humorously illustrated by the first confrontation between Jock and his future father-in-law, who, judging from Jock's bow tie, assumes him to be an upper-class scoundrel with artistic pretensions, and reacts in an insulted manner when Jock points out that he, too, is wearing a bow tie. Jock's surprising choice of the bow tie remains an exceptional and probably inadvertent act of challenging the social constructs with which Jock later in his life duly complies, first out of timid cowardice, later with knowing cynicism.

Jock's uniform appearance contrasts starkly with the flamboyant variety exhibited by some of his more adventurous fellow college students, especially the bohemian Alan, who "dressed like a tinker," yet wore his randomly

15. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 148.

assembled clothes with an unpretentious dignity that made them "[look] like the improvisations of a Grand Duke who had lost his fortune and valet in a revolution, like the casual wear of a more elegant, more easygoing, more practical civilisation" (*J*, 109). Jock's reminiscences of Alan truly resemble "at once love poem and threnody,"[16] for Alan qualifies as a complete person, a fully human being who positively fills the space he occupies, and, were it not for his premature death, Alan would "have changed Scotland . . . , he would have set an irresistible example by doing exactly what he wanted in the middle of the back row" (*J*, 108). Eccentric dressing habits alone obviously do not necessarily imply a rebellion against the constraints of social structures, and as far as Alan is concerned, his colorful costumes serve as a mere extension of his versatile personality. Jock characterizes his admirable friend-mentor as "a natural engineer who learned as he breathed," as a genius who "seemed to know everything in the world but was completely unintellectual," and, above all, as a man "incapable of caring what a mere boss, a mere professor said, unless he found it useful or entertaining" (*J*, 107, 111). Alan would not be appropriated by either an institution or an individual, which means that he does not feel obliged to attend his mathematics lessons when he deems them irrelevant, but also that he feels free to refuse a request by a friend when it does not suit him to fulfill it.

This friend, or rather acquaintance, happens to be Jock's future wife, Helen, to whom Jock is offered by Alan as a substitute, and whom Jock later marries by mistake, as well as out of cowardice. Frustrated by her boyfriend's infidelity, Helen seduces Jock and has a phantom pregnancy, and although she realizes her mistake before the wedding, both the young people prove too cowardly to cancel it. Jock falls prey to the manipulative behavior of Helen's father, whose looming presence suffices to persuade Jock to agree to the marriage, and to the intrigues of Helen herself, for she resorts to a lie in order to convince Jock of his supposed paternity. Jock lacks Alan's confidence and courage to defy authority, which renders him an easy target for abuse and exploitation, and eventually turns him into an obedient tool in the hands of his masters. Unlike Jock, Alan "[is] not a coward, not an instrument" (*J*, 106); on the contrary, he is an inspirational figure whose very resourcefulness, according to Harrison, "reconstructs a commonly mythologized Scotland, where the 'enterprising Scot' overcomes any number of obstacles."[17] As has been pointed out, Alan and Jock's belief in the regeneration of the nation through modern science does not stand the test of time; Alan dies, and Jock's youthful idealism gradually dissolves, to be replaced by defeatist pessimism.[18]

At some points in both *1982 Janine* and *Lanark* it certainly does seem that "the texts call for a regenerative impulse built powerfully upon the

16. Philip Hobsbaum, "Alasdair Gray: The Voice of His Prose," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 152.
17. Harrison, "The Power of Work," 163.
18. Harrison, "The Power of Work," 163.

Scottish work ethic and capability,"[19] and yet at the same time the novels illustrate the potential pitfalls of an unreserved trust in these values. When the middle-aged Jock McLeish opens up his life for inspection, the limited achievement of his having become an exemplary employee is contrasted with the significant failure in his having grown into a miserable person: an abandoned divorcee, secret alcoholic, and insomniac fantasist. In the midst of Jock's blackly comic suicide attempt, the God conjured up by him enters the page in the margins ("Jumping Jehovah! Is it yourself? How are the mighty fallen!" Jock reacts to the revelation [*J*, 178]) and summons Jock back to existence by the injunction: "Listen come alive for gods sake [*sic*] work as if you were in the early days of a better nation" (*J*, 185). Considering the circumstances of the story, God's suggestion strikes a rather ironic note because Jock swallows barbiturate pills with whiskey when he comes to the conclusion that he cannot carry on in his job and fails to conceive of any other alternatives. The voice of God represents an exteriorized development of Jock's conscience, which he has been attempting to benumb with alcohol throughout his professional career ("Shut up you foul little still small voice. Sip. Take that, you stupid stinking turd of intelligent conscience. Sip. Sip." [*J*, 124]) and which revives in full strength after Jock's failed suicide attempt, disturbing his asinine complacency, preventing him from the peaceful enjoyment of his violent sexual fantasies, and pressing him to take assertive action ("i insist that you hear me, did we ride through the valley of the shadow of death just to let you tickle yourself into another wank?" [*J*, 321]).

Whereas *1982 Janine* portrays a man plagued by a sense of betrayal of his own people for giving up his moral integrity and selling out his skills to an apparently foreign-owned company—whose business name, National Security Installations, therefore strikes a rather ironic note—*Lanark* focuses more on the complexities of another common social ill related to work: the corrupting effects of unemployment. Lanark spends much of the novel ostensibly in a search for sunlight, to him more generally associated with the achievement of simple human happiness, a natural part of which is formed by finding fulfillment in a meaningful occupation. Lanark begins the book named for him stranded in the apocalyptic city of Unthank, where jobs are scarce, diseases spread, and people disappear mysteriously. He is diagnosed with dragonhide and discovers that the disease grows worse with the patient's inactivity, while it miraculously stops spreading when he takes up the task of writing down an account of his arrival in Unthank, and yet he cannot force himself either to accept dubious employment in the weapons industry or to join the army, the only options available. Lanark's disease embodies his helplessness in the face of a vast sociopolitical system, as it paralyzes the afflicted person in a similar way by encasing their body in an armor of impenetrable, unfeeling skin. After a short spell in the institute, a peculiar

19. Harrison, "The Power of Work," 163.

hospital establishment staffed by cured patients, Lanark, now with a wife and a son to support, reluctantly condescends to work in a job center which does not specialize in offering employment but in killing "hope *slowly*, so that the loser has time to adjust unconsciously to the loss" (*L*, 439). Social service institutions under the surveillance of repressive regimes often tend to be appropriated for the above-stated purpose, that is, as Freire formulates it, training the oppressed "to adapt to the world of oppression"[20] and serving to "adjust them to a reality which must remain untouched"[21] if the ruling elite is to preserve its superior status.

A labor exchange where no jobs are available stands as but one instance in a series of atrocious institutions portrayed in *Lanark* whose actual activities come in serious conflict with their original purpose. Another powerful illustration of a public service provider striving to benefit itself instead of individuals in need is a hospital where no patients are cured because the system draws profit from letting the diseased die rather than from restoring them to health. Indeed, Lanark's dragonhide disappears in the institute; the healing, however, occurs somewhere between Unthank and the patient ward, presumably in the giant mouth that swallows Lanark when in extremes of despair he cries for a way out. The only recorded case of a dragonhide patient resuming their human form again as a result of the treatment they received remains that of Rima, who is brought back to life by Lanark's self-sacrificing attitude to his fellow-sufferer as much as by his breaking the institute's fundamental rules. Considering the fact that the hospital recruits its staff from surviving patients, some of the sick must actually regain their health during their stay, though this perhaps only extends to those whose disease does not trigger the transformation of men into dragons and salamanders.

An institute doctor hints at the horrendous practices of the so-called hospital when he muses over the body of a man who has just died naturally: "Strange, isn't it. We can find a practical use for any number of dead monsters, but a mere man can only be burned or shovelled into the ground" (*L*, 56). The casual remark leaves Lanark bewildered and it is only by accident that he learns about the institute's ingenious devices for recycling the corpses of patients into food, clothes, fuel, and all the other necessities required by the isolated complex in order for it to be self-sufficient. Significantly, the monstrous machinery can only make use of monsters, while those who manage to retain the qualities of human beings even in an inhuman environment resist contributing to the growth of the system, and continue doing so even after their death. The leading representatives of the institute turn out to be closely interconnected with the highest officials of Unthank, the city which supplies the patients, the two parties being united by one of the "mutual assistance pacts based upon greed" (*L*, 80). Regarding the nature of this unsound alliance, George Donaldson and Alison Lee poignantly note

20. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 59.
21. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 75.

that the Unthank citizens "subjected to a political system develop diseases propagated by that system, and when they die, they are literally consumed so that the system might continue in the same way."[22] The motif underlying the whole novel, the menacing statement "Man is the pie that bakes and eats himself" (*L*, 101) uttered successively by different characters, serves "as a persistent reminder that the system feasts upon those who nevertheless participate in keeping it going."[23] Lanark defiantly refuses to conform to the corrupt system and achieves his dismissal from the institute, which is willingly approved by the authorities because of Lanark's supposed offenses, among the gravest being his curing a patient in the hospital. Much to his dismay, Lanark finds himself back in the Unthank of job centers devoid of purpose and social security systems which reenact the policy of the institute by distributing among the impoverished "three-in-one," a substance that "nourishes and tranquillizes and stops your feeling cold"—and "after a while it damages the intelligence" (*L*, 432), thus effectively killing at least a part of a human being.

Where *Lanark* revolves around the cannibalistic metaphor of society as a system whose "ordinary behaviour" is that "the efficient half eats the less efficient half and grows stronger" (*L*, 411), *1982 Janine* elaborates on the outrageous proposition, voiced by the protagonist, that "if a country is not just a tract of land but a whole people then clearly Scotland has been fucked. I mean that word in the vulgar sense of *misused to give satisfaction or advantage to another*. Scotland has been fucked and I am one of the fuckers who fucked her" (*J*, 136). The challenge of *1982 Janine* rests in its idiosyncratic use of language, its bold typographic experiments that make some of the pages balance on the edge of readability, but above all in its iconoclastic fusion of frivolous sexual fantasies and serious social and political concerns. The novel does not employ sexuality and politics as two separate themes; rather it interweaves both into a complex tapestry in which, as Donaldson and Lee claim, "violent sexuality is used as a metaphor for a whole host of political abuses that the strong foist upon the weak."[24] A despicable drunkard though he may be, the protagonist demonstrates a sharpness of observation and an acute sense of injustice which serve him in his devastating analysis of the state of the United Kingdom. Despite his professed Tory loyalties, Jock's views of Britain, especially the overlooked section north of England which is Scotland, tend to be radical, to say the least. He ventures so far as to draw a link between the five million Jews exterminated in the Holocaust and the population of Scotland, roughly the same in number, which, in a prophetic seizure, he envisions being kept back by British soldiers overseeing that "the inhabitants of the Central Lowlands

22. George Donaldson and Alison Lee, "Is Eating People Really Wrong? Dining with Alasdair Gray," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 160.
23. Donaldson and Lee, "Is Eating People Really Wrong?," 160.
24. Donaldson and Lee, "Is Eating People Really Wrong?," 155.

die in their own ditch" when a nuclear war erupts and "the unhealthy bits of Britain will be sliced off to ensure that the healthy bits survive" (*J*, 135). This daring comparison illustrates Jock's belief that the Scots are either uncomprehending victims of a ruthless power beyond their control or cowardly traitors who willingly collaborate in the destruction of their country. The latter category applies to Jock, of course, who openly admits that he has become "a selfish shit but a comfortable selfish shit" and asserts his refusal "to feel bitter or guilty about this" (*J*, 136–37), yet the very fact of his bringing up the question of guilt on his own and emphasizing it by the use of upper-case letters suggests that guilty feelings do haunt his mind.

In contrast, Denny, a sparsely educated and poorly paid cafeteria girl, Jock's first love, represents the large group of those being preyed upon; she feels so little connection to English power that she even "used to think England was a different island from Scotland, like America is" (*J*, 214). The figure of Denny underlies many of Jock's rambling memories, both cherished and banished, since it is only when he is older that Jock realizes how he mistreated the trustful creature. Walker formulates it succinctly: "McLeish's guilt comes from recognition that having tutored Denny in the rules of exploitation he has proved them by exploiting her himself."[25] Jock succumbs to the temptation of a whimsical exercise of power over a person vulnerable to abuse, thus reenacting the crude treatment to which he was exposed at the hands of Mad Hislop and further disseminating the harm inflicted on him by the misguided teacher. Freire comments on the ambivalence manifested in the attitude of the oppressed toward the oppressor, observing that the victim as often as not tends to regard the victimizer with a mixture of aversion and admiration.[26] In other words, it is natural for men to hate being subjected to exploitation, yet it is also not unnatural for them to degenerate into exploitative behavior themselves when they change places and happen to get into a position of power.[27] By taking advantage of Denny on the grounds of his socioeconomic superiority, Jock inadvertently reaffirms the validity of the ruthless social order that produced him.

Ostensibly, Jock abandoned his devoted girlfriend when he found her in the arms of their landlord after he had been absent for three weeks and had satisfied himself as to finding out how many other girls he could have. In fact, Jock had always been actively ashamed of Denny's lack of taste, manners, and education, to such an extent that he did not even introduce her to his friends, and Denny's dependency threatened to undermine his aspirations to assimilate into the upper-middle class. Harrison interestingly interrelates two symbolic incidents in the novel: one when young Jock, overcome by feelings of hopeful creativity and visionary optimism, surveys the view of the country from atop Arthur's Seat and discovers "that Scotland [is] shaped

25. Marshall Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707* (London: Longman, 1996), 338.
26. See Freire, *Pedagogy*, 44.
27. See Freire, *Pedagogy*, 27.

like a fat messy woman" (*J*, 281); the other about twenty-five years later, when Jock comes across a battered prostitute, "squat and old with a bloated discoloured face" (*J*, 161), who reminds him of Denny and who slips away from him as he does not assent to marrying her.[28] Harrison insightfully explains that at this moment Jock "reinscribes, however tragically, the fate of the nation upon a woman's body, one he quite physically desires. But Jock's recognition of the link between his (and the southern capital's) exploitation of nation and woman, be it sexual or otherwise, is not enough to relieve him of his guilt and anguish."[29] In accordance with this reading, Denny could be perceived as an embodiment of Scotland, an entity subjected to abuse and exploitation by Jock and his likes, with the prospect of being abandoned when it outlives its usefulness.

What makes Denny a perfect target for victimization is her ignorance and gullibility, conditioned not so much by a lack of mental capacity as rather by an adverse environment which seems deliberately to discourage critical thinking and questioning in the underprivileged class so that it could be more easily steered toward conformity to the goals of the ruling class. In his thorough examination of the ways in which the powerful manipulate the powerless, Jock expresses his suspicion that anarchy would ensue if suddenly "most people tried to act intelligently on their own behalf" because the ordinary course of society is that "politicians do our thinking for us" (*J*, 12). In *Lanark*, the eponymous protagonist encounters very much the same attitude at the international conference held by top powers for the apparent purpose of carving up the world among themselves, where the program proudly presents a contribution exploring "the disastrous impact of literacy on the undereducated" (*L*, 475). The interests of the ruling minority lie in stupefying rather than stimulating the intelligence of the subdued majority, or, as Freire puts it: "From the point of view of the dominators of any epoch, correct thinking presupposes the non-thinking of the people."[30] Enabling the exploited to gain an understanding of the vile practices of the exploiters and allowing them to form a critical judgment of their social situation certainly would produce a disastrous effect, though not so much for the oppressed as for the oppressors, for it would inevitably lead to their (self-)appointed authority being challenged.

Besides denying the underprivileged the advantage of adequate schooling, corrupt political establishments seeking to cement their power can cunningly take advantage of the existing educational system and appropriate it for the purpose of propagating their own ideology. Such a twisted education aims to produce pliant puppets rather than independent individuals, and, what in Donaldson and Lee's opinion particularly applies to *1982 Janine*, "the triumph of ideology is clear here in making victims share complicity in, and be grateful

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28. See Harrison, "The Power of Work," 163–65.
29. Harrison, "The Power of Work," 165.
30. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 112.

for, their own victimization."[31] An obvious instance of a willingly accepted victimization is Denny, who is materially as much as mentally fully dependent on Jock, to whom she looks up with admiration and gratitude, ready to submit meekly to whatever treatment should come on his part. Indoctrination with official ideology, Eagleton observes, "ensures that the situation in which one social class has power over the others is either seen by most members of the society as 'natural', or not seen at all."[32] Aware of her ignorance but unable to overcome its limits, Denny counts among those who fail to recognize themselves as exploited; in contrast, Jock clearly perceives the order of society as corrupt, but in keeping with his conviction that only humans "have an inborn capability for intoxication, greed, lust, cruelty and murder" (*J*, 184), he apparently regards this state as natural. Jock morbidly enlightens Denny as to the fact that her lower-class background predetermines her to "live and die in that trap" of spiritual and physical destitution, a trap from which Jock hopes to escape by his treacherous decision "to work for the trapmakers" (*J*, 214–15). Although Jock likes to deceive himself regarding his indispensability to his employer, he must finally admit that he serves his boss merely as an instrument, as readily replaceable as any other part in the great inhuman machinery that his society has become. "The parents and educators of this damned country teach cowardice, herding us toward the safest cages with the cleanest straw" (*J*, 35), Jock bitterly observes, and though he enjoys considerably more comfort in his cage than Denny in her trap, both ultimately fall victim to the same system of restraint and oppression.

Jock manifests an ambivalent attitude to the system that made him and destroyed him: early in the novel, he reflects that if he had a son, he would reinforce compliance to the system in the child; at the end of the novel, under the pressure of God's reproachful presence, he parts from the system by the act of writing his employment resignation letter. Unlike Jock, Lanark abhors the idea of submitting to a prescribed role in the system and flatly refuses to have his son, not yet born at the moment, exposed to education in the rules of exploitation. Toward the conclusion of *Lanark*, the protagonist's now adult son briefly appears as a soldier reporting to "movers and menders," and while rescuing his old father from a collapsing building in an Unthank stricken by a natural disaster, he voices a sentiment akin to Jock McLeish's lost hope of social progress through everyone's hard work contributing to the development of modern science: "The world is only improved by people who do ordinary jobs and refuse to be bullied" (*L*, 554). Lanark's son, named Alexander, and young Jock share the same belief in the regenerative power of work, but only Alexander recognizes that the prerequisite for progress, whether private or public, is acting out of conviction rather than of constraint.

A disdain for and distrust of ready-made contents presented as unshakable truths also characterize Duncan Thaw, Lanark's alter ego, a troubled teenager

31. Donaldson and Lee, "Is Eating People Really Wrong?," 157.
32. Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 5.

with artistic gifts growing up in Glasgow after the Second World War. As has been noted, Duncan's story resists the pattern of the conventional growing-up novel in which "the subject is tamed into conformity with constituted authority through education and bruising experience . . . . When the subject rails or rebels or fails to comprehend the social order, that act . . . fixes both the central character's still imperfect understanding of order and fixes the seemingly objective nature of that order yet more firmly."[33] Duncan spends the bulk of his short life stubbornly fighting against authority, be it his father or the director of the art school, and struggling untiringly to find his own way. Similarly as with Lanark, Duncan's defiance against established conventions does little good either to him or anyone else; nevertheless, its disturbing power lies in the vitality of his point of view and the undeniable logic of his arguments. Duncan's strong preference for self-tested knowledge shows already in such apparent trifles as his refusal to wear climbing boots for a mountain hike; an unreasonable decision, perhaps, but defended with a startlingly profound observation, unlooked for in a teenager arguing with his father about the trivial matter of footwear: "There would be no science and no civilization and all that if everybody did things the way everybody else does" (*L*, 136). The sharpness of intellect and complexity of reasoning in young Duncan worries the boy's mother and annoys his father, over whom Duncan achieves a small but substantial victory when he conquers a local mountain on his own—wearing sandals.

Duncan's journey uphill to reach a mysterious female figure in white beckoning him from the top epitomizes his quest for the fulfillment of his artistic vision. On climbing to the hilltop, Duncan discovers with a pang of disappointment that the alluring woman was a sham, that what appeared to be a person is in fact the concrete block of a triangulation point. Whenever he finishes a picture, Duncan feels similarly overwhelmed by a conviction that he has been misled by a false vision and tries to resolve the tension by compulsively repainting his work in a vain attempt to capture the unattainable ideal. Duncan's obsessive pursuit of perfection in artistic expression culminates in a monumental mural which aspires to represent the progress of God's creation of the earth in a static art form, probably an unachievable goal. The enormous task consumes all of the artist's mental and physical faculties and prevents him from devoting any serious attention to his final exams at the art school, to whose authorities Duncan explains before he is expelled: "This exam is endangering an important painting. It would be blasphemy to waste my talent making frivolous decorations for a non-existent liner. But I see your difficulty. You must uphold the art school, while I am upholding art" (*L*, 323). The shocked school registrar dismisses Duncan's honest proclamation as "a display of intellectual arrogance" (*L*, 323), but it is also a proof that Duncan does his thinking for himself and so can enjoy, for

33. Donaldson and Lee, "Is Eating People Really Wrong?," 159.

a short time, the satisfaction of acting in accordance with his internal beliefs rather than submitting to external directives.

"I'm *sick* of ordinary people's ability to eat muck and survive," Duncan declares in a fit of despair over the horrendous crimes of human history and continues to consider that unlike beasts, "human beings have the hideous versatility to adapt to lovelessness and live and live and live while being exploited and abused by their own kind" (*L*, 295). Duncan's announcement sounds all the more appalling when one recalls that the young man actually remains loyal to his principles and finally prefers not to live at all rather than to suffer living in subservience. Duncan's decision to take his own life admittedly follows from a complex of causes, yet a sense of being divested by antagonistic social structures of the right to develop his talents in such ways as he thinks appropriate ranks as one of his strongest motives. Interestingly, the character of Jock similarly contrasts humans with animals and concludes that the laws of nature neither explain nor excuse man's cruelty: "You need ideas to be cruel and only men have ideas. Parts of the universe bump and break each other but storms and earthquakes are not cruelty. Not even animals are cruel. . . . Only man is evil" (*J*, 29). Being a corrupt person but not a hypocrite, Jock realizes that he is denouncing not merely humanity in general but also himself in particular, since his own career offers the sad spectacle of talents wasted for the wrong purpose and intellect misused to multiply vice rather than rectify it. Jock's choice of compliance with externally imposed rules which he knows to be unjust acknowledges his dependence on the system and gives a tacit assent to the system carrying on in its exploits as it does.

On the contrary, Duncan's deliberate death could be viewed as an individually liberating act, as an assertion of independence from an order which Duncan recognizes as wrong and in which he refuses to take part. Having his attempts to alter the rigid rules imposed on him frustrated, Duncan resorts to an act of ultimate defiance: by taking his own life he not only releases himself from his constrained existence but above all prevents his oppressors from molding him in their own corrupt image and exploiting his abilities to achieve their own dubious aims. The story of Duncan shows a private tragedy with a public twist, for Gray adds a political edge even to what at first gives the impression of a completely apolitical narrative dealing with purely personal concerns. Frustrated by the obstacles posed to the free expression of his vision by the stiff rules of the art school, Duncan dreams of proposing a school reform giving the responsibility for their education over to the students and moves on to picture himself as a charismatic politician achieving the establishment of a separate Scottish parliament. His earlier boyish fantasies feature him as an enlightened prime minister of a perfectly harmonious country built up after the Third World War in keeping with the ideals of democracy. Jock calls forth similar images of himself as the founder of world peace, as the torch that illuminates social ills and therewith brings about their reform, and as an upright patriot faithful to his country and his wife, Denny: "The whole world was astonished by my devotion to a plain wee

woman in a Glasgow tenement, but the Scots understood me. They knew I was still one of them" (*J*, 264). The common element present in both Duncan's and Jock's daydreams is being in a position of power from which one can act independently on one's own behalf and has the chance to actually influence events by one's actions. As Jock poignantly puts it when he comments on his vote for Scottish self-government: "Not for one minute did I think it would make us more prosperous, we are a poor little country, always have been, always will be, but it would be a luxury to blame ourselves for the mess we are in instead of the bloody old Westminster parliament" (*J*, 66).

Lanark and *1982 Janine* share the central idea of human beings threatened with the deprivation of their humanity and being reduced to mere standardized parts in a degenerate social system which grows by feeding on the energies of those who are too ignorant to notice that they are being exploited and those who are too cowardly to fight against their exploitation. Duncan Thaw defies authorities which impose dogmatic truths on him, be it the doctrines of the church or the instructions of his teachers, who seek to suppress his individuality and replace his peculiar artistic vision by a uniform expression. Duncan's art school instructors count among the "wee hard men," an insult originally meant for Jock McLeish, who bear the responsibility for the country's mediocrity because they continually "hammer Scotland down to the same dull level as themselves" (*J*, 288). Duncan resists all normative efforts and retains the qualities of a fully human being, unlike, for instance, one of his former schoolmates, who bitterly comments on his experience at a machine shop: "You stop thinking. Life becomes a habit. You get up, dress, eat, go tae work, clock in etcetera etcetera automatically, and think about nothing but the pay packet on Friday and the booze-up last Saturday. Life's easy when you're a robot" (*L*, 216). This benumbed and dehumanized condition is exactly what Lanark, who reincarnates Duncan's defiant spirit, intends to avoid when he rejects the idea of joining the army or working at an arms factory.

Lanark preserves his personal and moral integrity even in an environment where parts of persons are processed into food or turned into lifts, such as Gloopy the people lover, who appears perfectly content that his mental faculties can continue serving people, though he has no idea as to what happened to the rest of him. It might seem that neither Duncan nor Lanark have achieved anything by their revolt against conformity beyond adding to their personal misery; still, they can both be credited with a minor yet significant contribution to their society. Duncan's gift to the world lies in his imaginative rendering of the most hopeful moment in human history, the moment of its creation, presented in the form of "a complete, perfect, harmonious, utterly harmless thing; something whose every part is the result of intelligent, loving care; something which isn't a destructive weapon and can't be sold at a profit by public-spirited businessmen" (*L*, 336). Lanark in turn has engendered a son and, despite some of his flaws as a husband and a father, he has provided his child with what Sludden, the boy's stepfather, could not: a fair example to follow. Leaving something behind, even if it is a work of art in a building that is about to

be demolished or a child to be brought up in a world threatened by destruction, is a comfort that Jock McLeish cannot enjoy. Jock has not lived his life as a human being; rather he acted out his role as “a character in a script written by National Security” (*J*, 333), closely observing an exact whole-life plan which left no place for improvisation and freedom of action or even thought. Although the part prescribed for Jock demands considerably less discomfort and danger than the roles that Jock devises for the females in his fantasies, all the actors are equally bound by the script and powerless against violation, physical or spiritual, on the part of the scriptwriter. Jock manages to disentangle himself from the trap by resigning his post and makes a tentative attempt to grant the same liberty to his imaginary Janine by furnishing her with a magazine story which describes in detail what awaits her at the Cattlemarket to which she is being taken at the moment. Janine appears as puzzled by the knowledge as Jock by the endless variety of steps which he can take next, now that he has opted for freedom; what matters, however, is that Jock abandons his former passive complacency and assumes a newly active stance.

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Book Reviews

Still in Print: The Southern Novel Today, edited by Jan Nordby Gretlund. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010. 285 p. ISBN 978-1-57003-944-7.

Southern studies in Europe are alive and kicking. As Jan Gretlund notes in his introduction to this collection, southern literature is still widely taught and studied in Europe, actually to a larger degree than in the United States. Reading the collection, one certainly comes away with a renewed sense of hope that the American South remains a very distinct region, producing a very distinct kind of fiction. Gretlund's collection *Still in Print: The Southern Novel Today* brings together eighteen critics of southern fiction, discussing the same number of southern novels chosen by the critics themselves. As noted by Gretlund in the preface, the critics are a mix of established, prominent critics and young, talented ones who will hopefully dominate the field in the future. Much as the hope is to keep the southern novel in print, the hope is clearly also to keep these upcoming critics—and with them southern literary criticism—in print.

The essays are grouped into general areas or topics that will not come as a surprise to readers and critics of the South and its writers: A Sense of History, A Sense of Place, A Sense of Humor, and A Sense of Malaise. On the surface it might appear as if southern writers always write about the same themes and have done so for at least 150 years, or more. And in many aspects this assumption is correct. But just as southern identity is "always being created, lost, and reinvented," to use Gretlund's words, so are the consistent themes southern writers tend to write about. *Still in Print* sets out to prove why southern fiction and these themes (history, place, humor, malaise) are forever topical and relevant, both in the South and beyond.

Jan Gretlund's introduction can be read on its own as a stimulating and thought-provoking status report on southern fiction in the first decade of the 2000s by someone who has read, taught, and studied the field for more than thirty years. One of the most interesting sections is his assessment of New Southern Studies, a direction that operates with the idea of an intellectual "global South," thus placing the South in a transnational framework. Gretlund appreciates the effort, but ultimately deems it too idealistic and not grounded in realism, saying that if "literary critics propose what novelists should write, it is putting the cart before the horse."

However, Gretlund's chief and most interesting concern in the introduction is to some extent linked to the discussion on New Southern Studies and the idea of a "global South." He discusses the question of regionalism and the local against the global and the cosmopolitan world of the new millennium. What happens to the local in a globalized world? Does it disappear completely? Or does the local actually stand out more strongly as a distinctive and unique element, though still seen in the context of the global? Perhaps the local and global can indeed successfully merge, creating a new hybrid: the "glocal." Even

if Gretlund never uses this word, he hints at it throughout his introductory remarks, where he assesses the traditional themes of southern fiction, linking the past and the present. He shows how relevant the merger of the local and global becomes when we talk about southern fiction. Near the end of his introduction, Gretlund poignantly concludes: "It is the preoccupation with the human condition that gives southern fiction a place in world literature." On this basis, one might call good southern fiction "glocal." The best southern—or regional—fiction manages to meticulously describe its particular region or place and people while also describing and commenting on a universal phenomenon. On the one hand, it is impossible to imagine that Flannery O'Connor's southern grotesques could live, (barely) function, and speak from any other place than the South. On the other, they are all displaced persons and Misfits, "much like yourself perhaps," to take a line from Cormac McCarthy's portrayal of the murderous but oddly sympathetic necrophile Lester Ballard in *Child of God* (1973). Gretlund's introduction, then, aptly sets the stage for the essays and novels to come by convincingly showing that the best southern fiction skillfully depicts the South while simultaneously dealing with global issues.

The first part of the collection, A Sense of History, discusses novels by Charles Frazier, Josephine Humphreys, Kaye Gibbons, Pam Durban, and Percival Everett. M. Thomas Inge's essay on Frazier's *Cold Mountain* constitutes a somewhat uneven opening to the section on history. Although Inge's approach is very academic—relying on other scholars, research into inspirations for the novel and its title, and quotes from Frazier himself—the essay, while interesting in parts, is not particularly successful in its attempt to convince a reader who has not read *Cold Mountain*, such as myself, why I should, and why it is a magnificent and important novel that deserves to remain in print. Unfortunately, *Cold Mountain* disappears along the way because Inge does not let the novel speak sufficiently for itself. In the end I learned more about the Chinese poetry that inspired the title and place than about the merits of the novel.

Clara Juncker's essay on Josephine Humphreys' *Nowhere Else on Earth* is excellent, precisely because Juncker allows the novel to do most of the talking. She quotes extensively from *Nowhere Else on Earth* and perceptively comments, interprets, and contextualizes throughout. Extremely well-written, the essay points to several themes and characteristics in Humphreys' novel. One is left with the feeling that this novel is interesting, needs to be read, and has plenty of substance for further studies by students and scholars. While not on the level of Juncker's essay, the other essays in this part of the collection—focusing on Pam Durban's *So Far Back*, Kaye Gibbons' *On the Occasion of My Last Afternoon*, and Percival Everett's *Erasure*—are all good, interesting reads that should inspire potential readers to seek out the novels, *Erasure* especially. Jan Gretlund—here writing on Durban's *So Far Back*—has said elsewhere that *Erasure* has the potential to become a classic, and he is right.

In the section titled A Sense of Place we encounter novels by Steve Yarbrough (*The Oxygen Man*), Larry Brown (*Fay*), Chris Offutt (*The Good Brother*), Barry Hannah (*Yonder Stands Your Orphan*), and James Lee Burke

(*Crusader's Cross*). Much like Clara Juncker's essay, Jean W. Cash's piece on Larry Brown's *Fay* is an example of what this collection can do at its best: Cash outlines the novel clearly and discusses the themes it explores. Throughout, she compares Brown's themes and characters to those of other southern works. Editor Jan Gretlund did not want the contributors to make comparisons, but rather wanted them to focus solely on the novel they had each chosen. However, most contributors, if not all, point to possible influences from and connections to other works in English literature. Apart from Carl Wieck's essay on Chris Offutt's *The Good Brother*, which is as much about Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* as it is about *The Good Brother*, none of the contributors provide long, developed comparisons between their featured novel and other works. They are, however, attentive to other works and place them in a wider context of southern, American, and/or English fiction, and this is a definite plus for the collection. After all, as Cormac McCarthy reminds us, "[t]he ugly fact is that books are made out of other books." The balanced references to other works and authors also underline why this collection is well suited for teaching purposes and as inspiration for further studies by students and scholars.

Humor is the theme of the third part of the collection: George Singleton (*Work Shirts for Madmen*), Clyde Edgerton (*The Bible Salesman*), James Wilcox (*Heavenly Days*), Donald Harington (*Enduring*), and Lewis Nordan (*Lightning Song*). Any reader of southern fiction is accustomed to the language, which is often one of the great joys of reading fiction out of the South. Charles Israel writes that the tall tale is a mainstay of southern fiction and shows how Singleton's *Work Shirts for Madmen* continues this tradition by weaving related tall tales into a novel. Humor as a topic in a southern context usually means that tragedy and darkness are forever looming in the background. Much as "[t]he possibility of death is clearly indicated . . . " in the pages of Wilcox's *Heavenly Days*, the possibility and, undeniably, reality of sadness and despair are not far removed from these humorous novels. The contributions on humor successfully convey why this dynamic makes for truly stimulating works of fiction.

To show how closely connected light and darkness often are in southern letters, the collection ends, following the section on humor, by being plunged into darkness—A Sense of Malaise—with Ron Rash (*One Foot in Eden*), Richard Ford (*The Lay of the Land*), and Cormac McCarthy (*The Road*). Death, both psychological and literal, dominates this final section of the collection. Richard Gray notes that the landscape in *The Road* defies definition and distinction, and that it progressively becomes a landscape of vacancy, of empty space. In Ron Rash's *One Foot in Eden*, the South is a disappearing place. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the whole world is a disappearing place—or perhaps the disappearance is already complete. *The Road* has been called McCarthy's artistic return to the South—even if one can ask whether there is a South, or a North, or a West, or an East in the world the novel depicts—and indeed it corresponds with his earliest Appalachian novels, which Gray also points out in his essay, more than the Border Trilogy does. But *The Road* is as much *Blood Meridian* as it is *Outer Dark* or *Suttree*.

Richard Gray's essay on *The Road* is one of the gems of *Still in Print*. He manages to place the novel in a wider context (for instance, arguing why it can be read as a post-9/11 novel) and relies on several sources to demonstrate the many layers of the novel. But *The Road* is always present and it speaks throughout. One would think that *The Road* is one novel that will definitely survive the test of time—thank you, Oprah.

Generally, the final section of *Still in Print* is one of the best. Thomas Ærvold Bjerre's essay on Rash's *One Foot in Eden*, Robert Brinkmeyer's piece on Ford's *The Lay of the Land*, and Gray's musings over McCarthy's *The Road* constitute a strong finish to a solid collection.

As briefly mentioned above, one of the best qualities of the collection is how suited it is for teaching. From a teacher's perspective, the collection can spawn plenty of different courses on southern/American fiction. Whether it is a survey course on southern fiction, or a course approaching one or more specific themes, there is plenty of potential in the collection. While the essays are grouped together with a heading suggesting their overall theme, they all share some of the same themes, styles, and characteristics. Steve Yarbrough's *The Oxygen Man*, for instance, is as much a novel about A Sense of History or A Sense of Malaise as it is a novel about A Sense of Place (the section in which it is placed).

Every essay comes with a brief biography outlining the life and body of work of each author. The essays all emphasize the important characteristics and themes of the novels, while making comparisons to Faulkner, Alice Walker, Joyce, Dickens, Flannery O'Connor and many more. Since none of the essays are absolute in their interpretations, they will no doubt help inspire students when they assess the novels critically in class, or when writing essays and assignments. The same can be said for scholars who are interested in fiction from the South and wish to go into greater depth with one or more authors or themes. Additionally, a helpful tool, a list of works cited and consulted, is included at the end of each essay. Ultimately, Jan Gretlund has successfully put together a collection that is an engaging and stimulating point of departure for further reading and study. Just like the novels it tackles, this book deserves to stay in print.

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Kolář, Stanislav, Zuzana Buráková, and Katarína Šandorová. *Reflections of Trauma in Selected Works of Postwar American and British Literature*. Košice: Pavol Josef Šafárik University, Faculty of Arts, 2010. 129 p. ISBN 978-80-7097-849-8.

Trauma studies belongs among the fastest-evolving disciplines of social sciences. It provides a theoretical framework for understanding trauma and its psychological consequences for the minds of both individuals and groups. With the growing emphasis on interdisciplinarity of all academic research trauma theory has recently also entered the field of literary criticism, combining philosophy, psychoanalysis, sociology, and literature.

As the history of Western literature has proven, trauma can be successfully represented as a narrative. Numerous events leading to trauma are often unspeakable or incomprehensible. That is why the process of writing or using literary language can often function as a therapeutic device. The application of trauma studies to literature can therefore be seen as a valuable tool for critical inquiry into multiple aspects of trauma in art, offering new interpretations and perspectives to literary criticism, social sciences, law, or education. In the United States, this new collaborative approach has already inspired diverse studies and numerous projects (let me name only the emergence of *The Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies* or the *Center for Literature and Trauma* in 2007), whereas in the Czech and Slovak literary contexts it has been neglected so far. That is one of the reasons why the collection *Reflections of Trauma in Selected Works of Postwar American and British Literature* represents an influential and pioneering study.

In the "Introduction" to the volume, Stanislav Kolář outlines diverse approaches to trauma and points out the elusiveness of the term. Confronted with the naming of the unnameable, the author presents a substantial theoretical background based on the research of influential critics dealing with trauma studies and selects the main points of interest for the collection, namely memory, accuracy, identity, and the trans-/intergenerational effects of traumata.

As one of the most significant traumatic events in European history was the Holocaust, its representation in American literature is analyzed in the first and longest chapter of the volume, called "Trauma and the Holocaust in the American Novel." By means of an illustrative sample of American Holocaust writing Stanislav Kolář explores the literary techniques used to represent trauma and pays significant attention to the ethical side of recreating events in which the authors were not personally involved. He concentrates on seven texts from different decades, namely Edward Lewis Wallant's *The Pawnbroker* (1961), Saul Bellow's *Mr Sammler's Planet* (1970), William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* (1979), Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1986, 1991), Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl* (1989), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* (2002), and Dara Horn's *The World to Come* (2006).

The novels that are analyzed differ significantly in their presentation of the Holocaust and provide a solid ground for a detailed academic inquiry into the representation of trauma from multiple perspectives. Whereas some

works emphasize the psychological consequences and examine the role of memory, other focus on the intergenerational aspect of trauma and the search for accuracy in the survivors' narratives. In the works that are presented America, the *goldene medine* as the Jewish immigrants often saw it, is transformed into yet another prison which only deepens and reopens old wounds and consequently also affects the following generations. Even though none of the selected writers had direct or personal experience of the Holocaust (except for Art Spiegelman, whose father was an Auschwitz survivor), their urge to depict it proves that coping with collective traumatic history forms a "hugely significant part of Jewish collective identity" (55).

The second and shortest chapter, called "Nuclear Holocaust and Trauma: John Hersey's *Hiroshima*," also by Stanislav Kolář, suggests even with its title the connection between these two events. *Hiroshima* is the only book in this collection that is not fiction but "a novel of contemporary history," as Hersey preferred to call it, or a non-fiction novel rendering historical events as imaginative literature. Nevertheless, Kolář calls it "a detailed reportage" or "a work of non-fiction" (61). Even though genre analysis is not the primary aim of this essay, the critical approach taken to various types of texts significantly affects the interpretation. If *Hiroshima* is indeed seen as a journalistic presentation of facts, its place in this volume would be disputable. The chapter focuses on the consequences of trauma caused both by a lack of knowledge and fear of the unknown and ungraspable. The trauma is thus presented not only as a result of the atomic explosion itself but also of anxiety and insecurity prior to the attack. As Hersey's work is partly based on interviews with survivors, a closer examination of oral history and its relationship to trauma studies and literature would enhance the contribution of the volume that is presented, especially when the accuracy and truth of the victims' narratives are set out as some of the proposed topics of the collection.

The third chapter, named "Finding Identity through Trauma," by Zuzana Buráková, focuses again on American Jewish literature and examines the transmission of trauma onto the following generations in connection with the formation of their identity. Not avoiding the Holocaust completely, Buráková also explores other sources of trauma connected to the self-definition of American Jews, such as displacement or exile. In her thorough analysis of three contemporary works—Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002), Lara Vapnyar's short stories *There Are Jews in My House* (2003), and Gary Shteyngart's *Absurdistan* (2006)—she persuasively draws a link between a traumatic historical event and the formation of identity. Confrontation with the past of their nation often forces the characters to redefine their relationship with their culture and heritage. Trauma can thus be seen as a positive source of self-reflection and discovery. Even though the complexity of American Jewish identity is pointed out, a deeper explication of this concept would be highly beneficial, as the understanding of traditions and roots as defined by Irving Howe has been considerably shifted since then, especially in the later generations of American Jews.

The final chapter, "Whose Trauma Is It?," focuses on the sources and forms of trauma faced by lesbian women as depicted in three novels by contemporary British writers: Joanna Trollope's *A Village Affair* (1990), Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (2001), and Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (2003). Katarína Šandorová persuasively argues that "it is not only orientation as such which operates as a traumatizer, but also public opinion" (97). As she asserts, the trauma is a consequence of the characters' newly found lesbian identity, which affects them both on the individual/intimate and social levels. This chapter undoubtedly offers a new perspective on the representation of trauma in fiction, but as it is the only essay dealing with British literature, the question remains to what extent it is illustrative of this cultural context.

The search for identity has become one of the most exploited literary themes. In connection to the dramatic events of the twentieth century and their effects on the human mind, the employment of psychology (mainly Freudian psychoanalysis or the Jungian theory of collective consciousness) as a critical tool for text analysis has already proved fruitful. Trauma studies represent yet another step in merging psychology and other fields with literature. As each theory has its limits, the main danger here lies in the "over-traumatization" of stories, authors, characters, and whole social or ethnic groups. This monograph avoids such simplifications and confirms this transdisciplinary approach as a legitimate critical tool.

The application of trauma theories to the study of literature is a logical consequence of the dramatic events of the last century and of the growth of postcolonial and minority writing, be it ethnic or religious. Trauma studies can also provide a significant contribution to studies of genre, namely horror or apocalyptic stories. In Western literatures, most attention is paid to the representation of Holocaust, African American slavery and its consequences, Native American uprooting, or alienation, and the social stigmatization of gay authors.

However, this potential is exploited only partially in this collection. Even though the authors made a significant contribution to different aspects of literary renderings of trauma, they maintain the Western perspective. Moreover, British literature is considerably under-represented. These limitations are sufficiently compensated for by the illustrative choice of works and their in-depth analyses. The authors convincingly assert the connection between trauma and the formation of identity on both the individual and group levels in their respective papers, and yet their shared findings are not explicitly pointed out in the "Conclusion." On the whole, the monograph presents an authoritative point of reference for further studies or projects and proves to be a significant academic contribution to this transdisciplinary inquiry.

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