Alienation as a fictional construct in four contemporary British novels: A Literary-theoretical Study

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I hereby certify that this is thesis submitted to meet the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work, and that it has not been submitted previously at another university or faculty. I further relinquish my copyright in favour of the University of the Free State.

Burgert Adriaan Senekal

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Section A: Theory

Prologue

Marx's theory of alienation has been thoroughly addressed by various scholars (in particular Ollman, 1976), and so has Seeman's, and during the last few decades many other contributions have been made in the fields of sociology and psychology concerning alienation. However, since the focus of the proposed study is literary, no attempt will be made to contribute to these fields. The aim is to apply these recent theoretical contributions to the literature that stems from this alienated British society (and alienated individuals) in order to come to a better understanding of how alienation manifests in four contemporary British novels.

The primary question the proposed study aims to answer is: Given the post-modern condition of integration, shifting boundaries and identity formation, what forms of alienation exist in contemporary western society and the individual who inhabits it, and how does alienation manifest in contemporary British fiction amongst some of the main authors of the latter?

Primary fictional texts are drawn from contemporary British literature. Some of the most pivotal voices are studied, Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Irvin Welsh, and Pat Barker. These four authors are considered suitable to the study because they are central to the contemporary British canon, and each depicts alienation in a unique way. Since their publications are all recent, information on these authors is more limited than that pertaining to other periods and the proposed study can therefore further contribute to understanding them. One novel by each of these authors is the central focal point, but other texts by these authors are incorporated where relevant. British fiction is chosen because the volume of publications in Britain is already vast – adding everything that the rest of the world contributes in English would expand the scope of the study too widely and undermine a qualitative investigation.

This study therefore provides a detailed discussion of different perspectives on alienation within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, highlighting relations

between these perspectives from sociological and psychological viewpoints and focussing on the most recent theoretical contributions. The theoretical frame of reference is then applied to the authors in question in order to answer the question as stated earlier.

Introduction

The term "alienation" causes considerable difficulty, partly because it "is used to refer both to a personal psychological state and to a type of social relationship" (Roberts, 1987: 346). Kalekin-Fishman (1996: 97) claims, "The term *alienation* refers to objective conditions, to subjective feelings, and to orientations that discourage participation", and remarks that, "In modern sociology [...] alienation is a term which refers to the distancing of people from experiencing a crystallized totality both in the social world and in the self" (Kalekin-Fishman, 1998: 6). According to Schacht (1996: 10), classical social alienation is "the loss or absence of identification with, and participation in, the form of life characteristic of one's society". These are broad definitions, but what alienation entails is delved into more deeply in the current study.

As Dominic La Capra (cf. Selinker, 1992: 2) remarked, "A field is in constant dialogue with its founding texts". Two of the founding texts on alienation are Marx's theory of alienation, as set out in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and in *The German Ideology* (1846), and Melvin Seeman's *On the Meaning of Alienation* (1959). In writing about Marx's works, Wilden (1980: xxi) notes, "As with any text that time and place have turned in to history, these texts must necessarily be re-read and re-incorporated into the critical discourse of each succeeding generation. The Marxian texts are neither 'outdated' or (sic) the 'truth'."

Although Marx identifies three aspects of alienation, namely private property, the commodity character of labour, and the division of labour in society (Ekerwald, 1998: 17), these classifications are not as useful to the current study as Seeman's. Seeman, according to Roberts (1987: 346) "identifies powerlessness and self-estrangement with Marxian notions of alienation", and "clearly relates self-

estrangement to Marx's 'false consciousness'." Seeman, thus building on Marx's insights, provides a methodological framework more suitable to the analysis of alienation in contemporary literature, as Neal & Collas (2000), Wexler (1998), and others have found when discussing sociological trends. The "alienation test" on webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/alientest.html, for example, also uses Seeman's classifications because of their practicality. Owing to limited space, the focus in this study is therefore on Seeman's theory, which is more applicable to the current study.

Melvin Seeman was part of the surge in alienation research prominent in the middle of the twentieth century when he published his paper, *On the Meaning of Alienation*, in the *American Sociological Review* in 1959, followed by *Alienation, Membership, and Political Knowledge: A Comparative Study* in 1966. Robert Nisbet (cf. Seeman, 1959: 783) writes,

> At the present time, in all the social sciences, the various synonyms of alienation have the foremost place in studies of human relations. Investigations of the 'unattached', the 'marginal', the 'obsessive', the 'normless', and the 'isolated' individual all testify to the central place occupied by the hypothesis of alienation in contemporary social science.

This trend was continued throughout the 1960s, where disillusionment with government grew, "Following the 1968 student revolutions[1] in the United States and Europe, alienation studies proliferated, at least in the Western world" (Geyer, 1996: xi). However,

> During the 1980s, as the postwar baby boomers grew older, and perhaps more disillusioned, and willy-nilly entered the rat race, interest in alienation subsided. The concept definitely [...] became less fashionable, although a small but active international core group continued to study the subject in all its ramifications, since the problems denoted by alienation were certainly far from solved – to the contrary, even (Geyer, 1996: xii).

[1] Hambidge (1992c: 400) indicates the student protests of 1968 as a final turning point that lead to post-structuralism. The events are usually referred to collectively as the May '68 uprising, which lasted just over a month. The uprising was mostly supported from the political left, and even though it took the early form of student strikes, the students were soon joined by hundreds of thousands of workers. In the coming weeks, the French government came to the brink of collapse as support for the uprising grew. However, after the French president, De Gaulle, disbanded the National Assembly and called for elections to be held in June, the revolution petered away and De Gaulle won the election comfortably. The uprising was of course the result of dissatisfaction with the authorities, with the university, with the workplace and with government. The fact that it had no real impact caused the widespread disillusionment that provided fertile soil for a theoretical approach such as post-structuralism, which questions truth and the validity of metanarratives.

This core group was called the Research Committee on Alienation of the International Sociological Association (ISA), a non-profit organization dedicated to scientific study in the field of sociology and social sciences. They kept alienation studies alive, until the 1990s, when there was again an upsurge of interest in alienation. Three developments caused this upsurge of interest: the fall of the Soviet Union, globalization and increasing awareness of ethnic conflicts, and post-modernism. Firstly, the fall of the Soviet Union precipitated alienation interest in Eastern Europe, for two reasons (Geyer, 1996: xiii),

1. the population as a whole was finally free to express its long-repressed ethnic and political alienation, which had accumulated under Soviet rule, while
2. the existence of alienation was no longer denied and instead became a respectable object of study.

Films such as *Goodbye Lenin* and *Lilya Forever* depict post-communist society, and the problems associated with it. *Goodbye Lenin* is set in East Germany, where a son attempts to hide the fall of communism from his frail mother. Lucas Moodysson's *Lilya Forever* depicts the harsh realities of poverty and emigration in contemporary Russia, and the accompanying drug abuse and prostitution in an alienated part of society, excluded from the economic benefits of the modern Russian Federation as enjoyed by others. Alienation was denied by the communist government, as it was seen in Marxian terms that discusses alienation under capitalism. Thus, under a Marxist regime, alienation is necessarily non-existent in theory.

Secondly,

> ... though processes of globalization and internationalization tended to monopolize people's attention during the last few decades, the hundred-odd local wars fought since the end of World War II, which were increasingly covered live on worldwide TV, claimed attention for the opposing trend of regionalization and brought ethnic conflicts to the fore (*Ibid.*).

The internet, and in particular YouTube, play a significant role in highlighting these ethnical conflicts. Scenes from the war in Iraq are captured on mobile phone cameras and streamed into any house all over the world, and participants in events such as the 2007 Burmese uprising use YouTube and Facebook to create awareness of this political turmoil and its human toll.

This ties in with the third issue, post-modernism, where the trend has been towards positing increasingly eclectic worldviews because of an information overload stemming from the increased use of the media and the Internet, and the breakdown of gender, national and even personal boundaries, as well as the questioning of metanarratives and cultural norms and values. Post-modernism is an elusive term that has been used since after the Second World War within a literary or artistic context (Müller, 1992: 397), often proposed by French writers. Vandenberghe (1996: 150) writes, "Notwithstanding the appearances, post-modernism is not a French thing". Post-modernism defies a comprehensive and accurate definition, as "post-modernism is most usefully thought of as an elastic critical category with a range of applications and potential understandings" (Ward, 1997: 13). Müller (1992: 398) provides a broad outline of what post-modernism involves, "Die *Post-modernisme* gee voorkeur aan kontradiksie, onsamehangendheid, toeval, permutasie, enumerasie en 'n heterogeniteit van style wat uit verskillende genres en periodekodes geneem is" (Post-modernism gives preference to contradiction, incoherence, chance, permutation, enumeration and a heterogeneity of styles that are taken from diverse genres and period codes[2]).

Post-modernism has its roots in modernism, but differs greatly from its predecessor in its coveting of ambiguity or the rejection of singular meanings, in Linda Hutcheon's words, "post-modernism's distinctive character lies in this ... wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity" (Ward, 1997: 49). Modernism broadly describes the literary movement that reached its zenith from 1910 – 1930 (Liebenberg, 1992: 317), but like the term post-modernism, it has also been used to describe a much wider field. Schlesinger (1988: 27) writes that some modernist characteristics were the search for the mystic-eternal, universal beauty, pure form, absolute value and eternal value. Post-modernism questions the possibility of arriving at a singular meaning, the impossibility of that eternal value, pure form and universal beauty.

Post-modernism provided a theoretical frame of reference that necessitated the reinterpretation of alienation theory and questions about identity formation in

[2] Own translation

the contemporary Western world, as Geyer (1996: xiii) contends, "post-modernism emerged as an important paradigm to explain the individual's reactions to the increasingly rapid complexification and growing interdependence of international society". He also notes, "the world of simulacra and virtual reality tends to be an alienated world, for reasons that Marx and Freud could not possibly have foreseen", for "in much of the Western world, the average person is increasingly confronted, on a daily basis, with an often bewildering and overly complex environment, which promotes attitudes of apathy and withdrawal from wider social involvements" (*Ibid.*). This has meant a change in the attitude towards alienation. Geyer (1996: xiv) continues, "while 'classical' alienation research is still continuing, the stress is now, on the one hand, on describing new forms of alienation under the 'decision overload' conditions of post-modernity [...], and on the other hand on the reduction of increasingly pervasive ethnic alienation and conflict".

Two of the primary assumptions of modernism that post-modernism explode are the concepts of truth and borders. Kristeva's distinction between Zero-1 and Zero-2 Logic highlights the post-modern approach to truth and boundaries, between inside and outside. According to Müller (1992: 397), Zero-1 logic is the traditional-dialectic logic that consists of directly oppositional dualities where one component contains *the* truth or *the* essence. Zero-1 logic therefore forces distinctions such as inside and outside (such as inside the literary canon or not), and oppositions such as truth and fiction (even between autobiography and fiction), high and low culture, playfulness and earnestness, or between functional and aesthetic. Post-modernism however highlights the dissolution of boundaries and focuses our attention on binary oppositions inherent in (western) logic, more than what was done in previous ages[3]. Von Bertalanffy (1968: 202) highlights how arbitrary these boundaries can be, and how persistent, "The concept of 'nation' in the UN has been based on the 'anthropological' notion (if not on arbitrary frontiers left from the Colonial period)"[4].

[3] Questioning what is commonly accepted as truth or crossing boundaries is of course not limited to post-modernism, as this statement by Michel Servan (cf. Vos, 1902: 163) indicates, "If what Fontenelle has said be true, that history is merely a fable agreed upon by common consent, it is no less true that fable is frequently history misunderstood".

[4] A study of South African literature, for instance, will find e.g. Setswana and Tsonga writers born and residing outside the boundaries of the republic, even though these are two of the official national languages of South Africa. The boundaries between countries in particularly Africa have been drawn

Post-modernism uses Zero-2 logic, which breaks down these distinctions. Müller (1992: 397) writes that Zero-2 logic is a transgression of the laws, definition, and monologic of the Zero-1-system. For instance, the lines between functional and aesthetic, between playfulness and earnestness, are blurred by the architecture of the "Dancing House" in Prague (completed 1996). Dancing House is an office block, but the earnestness of its function does not repeat itself in the playful lines (and nickname) of the building. It belongs to deconstructivist architecture and depicts a man and a woman (Ginger Rogers and Fred Astair) dancing together. The building was funded by the Dutch bank ING, and designed by Vlado Milunic and Frank Gehry.

Dancing House, photograph by Burgert Senekal

Zero-2 logic has important consequences for literary studies: Müller (1992: 397) notes that mimesis and meaning were the two anchor points of traditional-realistic fiction, the law, the '1' of Zero-1 logic. Undermining this results in a text coming adrift. Post-modernism "replaces *either/or* thinking with *both/and* thinking," (Ward, 1997: 48), crosses boundaries, discards homologism in favour of dialogism (Müller, 1992: 399) – what the architect Charles Jencks calls univalence vs. multivalent or plural coded messages (Ward, 1997: 21). A text (building, person, literary work, etc.)

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up mostly by European colonial powers, as is illustrated vividly in the straight border between Namibia and Botswana.

can have a variety of meanings, based on e.g., the perspective the observer adopts and the context in which the text is interpreted. This results in a rejection of metanarratives[5]. Andreas Huyssen remarks, "modernism in the arts defines itself as necessarily outside of, and superior to, the rest of culture and society" (Ward, 1997: 15), but post-modernism embraces popular culture because it rejects the boundaries that separate 'good' from 'bad', popular art from high art, entertainment/trivial literature from canonized works, etc. As Müller (1992: 397) claims, post-modernism refuses to give preference to any one system. A rejection of metanarratives questions the criteria by which 'good' is judged to be so, and 'bad' to be so as well. There can no longer be works that form the centre of the literary canon, because, as Foster and Viljoen (1997: xxxii) note, questioning the validity of one all-encompassing truth leads to a question mark being put over that which is normally considered to be at the centre and considered to be the most important.

One typical topological form that exemplifies post-modernism is the Möbius-strip (Müller, 1992: 397). It is made by cutting a strip out of paper, giving it one twist, and gluing the ends together to form a circle. Then it is cut along the length, so that two circles can be expected. Instead, the result is that one is left with one large circle, because the inside and outside of the circle have become interchangeable. So the Möbius-strip is a visual representation of one of the fundamental premises of post-modernism (and post-structuralism): that the distinction inside/outside is an arbitrary, socially constructed distinction, which is unfounded.

Boundaries, in post-modern thought, are thus arbitrary and not inherent in an individual. It is this differentiation, and not the biological differences, that result in male/female alienation, as Neal & Collas (2000: 13) contend, "The basic forms of estrangement in male/female relationships derive from the process of social classification by which their borders and boundaries are drawn around what is presumed to be primary biological differences". In line with post-modernist thinking, these boundaries are disputed by Edmund Leach (1979), who "observed that such borders, boundaries, and categories do not exist in the natural world. These are

[5] "an over-arching story which can supposedly account for, explain, or comment upon the validity of all other stories, a universal or absolute set of truths which is supposed to transcend social, institutional or human limitations" (Ward, 1997: 158).

human creations for imposing order upon a world that is otherwise undifferentiated and unclassified" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 14). Neal & Collas (2000: 16) elaborate on the concept of borders:

> There are two primary meanings of the concept of *border*, each of which is relevant for the analysis of estrangement in gender relationships. In the first meaning, a border is 'a boundary,' 'a dividing line,' or 'a marker'. From this usage, a border serves to promote divisions within the social realm and to specify what is to be included in, or excluded from, any given category. The second meaning refers to a border as 'a frontier,' 'an outlying area,' 'away from the center,' 'the outer edge,' 'on the periphery'. This usage suggests the existence of both a center that is being promoted, elaborated, enhanced, and protected, and a peripheral area that is distant, remote, and outside the mainstream.

Borders/boundaries are questioned in systems theory as well, and their importance will be dealt with in this study.

Reinterpreting Seeman's theory of alienation

The world has changed considerably since Marx wrote his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *The German Ideology* (1846). For instance, the addition of the mass media (newspapers not having a comparable reach), jet aircraft and information technology have had a profound impact on the world we live in. Augusto & Helena (1996: 188) note, "Each historical moment and each society creates specific types of human being"; therefore it can be expected that the characteristics of alienation have significantly changed since Marx. Schacht (1996: 3) argues,

> Ours is a world in which monolithic societies are sustainable only by totalitarian means. The globe has shrunk, economic life has become internationalized and popular culture is following suit, tourism is everywhere, travel is routine, and great numbers of people are on the move, for reasons both good and dismaying. Successive waves in communications technology are further rapidly eroding the conditions of isolation upon which the local acculturation process has long depended.

One of the sociological papers most often cited concerning alienation is Melvin Seeman's *On the Meaning of Alienation,* published in the *American Sociological Review* in 1959. Although alienation is not a modern phenomenon, it has progressed

far beyond what Marx envisaged. Weber (cf. Wexler, 1996: 163) already noted, "the total being of man has now been alienated from the organic cycle of peasant life". The situation in which modern man finds himself, is one where man attempts to remain an individual "against all external onslaughts which reduce him to a number, makes him a gear in a machine"[6] (Degenaar, 1992a: 92). This alienated view of modern man is echoed in Von Bertalanffy's (1968: 10) statement,

> The new cybernetic world, according to the psychotherapist Ruesch (1967) is not concerned with people but with 'systems'; man becomes replaceable and expendable. [...] In somewhat harsher terms, man in the Big System is to be - and to a large extent has become - a moron, button-pusher or learned idiot, that is, highly trained in some narrow specialization but otherwise a mere part of the machine.

According to Von Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory (and Wilden's interpretation thereof), the self is dependent upon its environment for its existence, both as a biological organism and as a psychological construct. Thus, looking at the particular formation of social attachments sheds some light on the self's interaction with its environment. In studying alienation as an interpersonal phenomenon, Neal & Collas's *Intimacy and Alienation: Forms of Estrangement in Female/Male Relationships* is an invaluable resource. Deegan (Neal & Collas, 2000: vii) writes,

> [Neal and Collas] examine heterosexual intimacy as a union of strangers instead of a utopian vision of tender and sensual companionship. Sexual anomie, a sense of powerlessness, rapidly changing norms, and strident cultural wars over family values create a social context for limiting the creation and maintenance of intimacy. Divorce rates are one symptom of this alienation, but there are also many destructive and unhappy relationships that endure despite abuse, entrapment, or other forms of human angst.

Since human relations in general have changed because of changing material circumstances, so too have heterosexual relationships, as Neal & Collas (2000: ix) note, "With increasing urbanization, social relationships typically involve some combination of physical closeness and a sense of psychological distance". Georg Simmel already observed in his essay on the stranger that there is "a unity of nearness and remoteness" in every human relationship, and "conceptualized the

[6] Own translation

stranger as one who is physically close to other people while psychologically feeling 'far away'" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 3). Urban living promotes this physical closeness and psychological distance. A telling example is the London Underground, where one constantly rubs shoulders with strangers without speaking to them. In 1984, Lilian B. Rubin also described the relationships between men and women as a union of "intimate strangers" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 4). One does not have to search far to find evidence in support of the statement by Neal & Collas (2000: 6) that "The ugliness of male/female relationships has become a part of modern consciousness. [...] Metaphors reflecting negative typification of relationships between men and women abound in popular music, in mass entertainment, and in everyday patterns of speech." This ugliness of heterosexual relationships is frequently found in the media, through movies and sitcoms depicting divorce/break-ups, and in music, e.g. Kelly Clarkson's *Behind These Hazel Eyes*, which depicts another destructive break-up of a romantic relationship[7]. Hollywood movies such as *Serendipity*, *The Wedding Planner*, and *Hope Springs* (to name but three out of hundreds) have helped permeate Western culture with the myth of romantic love. Neal & Collas (2000: 4) remark,

> The contemporary idealism surrounding the heterosexual dyad becomes a charade in the mythmaking surrounding the notion of 'romantic love'. According to the idealism of the myth, true love can strike at first sight without prior social interaction; there is only one other person that is the right one; true love can overcome obstacles and conquer all.

In all fairness to the media, it is doubtful whether the media itself *created* the notion of romantic love. A look at medieval romances such as *Troilus and Criseyde* and that infamous Shakespearean drama makes it clear that romantic love is certainly not a new invention. However, the saturation of the post-modern world with images through the mass media has made it a pervasive influence in the collective psyche of contemporary Western society. These received signs influence the perception of reality; in Baudrillard's words (cf. Ward, 1997: 62), "images precede the real to the extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction". The narrator in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005: 118) remarks about certain

[7] There are literally thousands of examples that can be named; I choose Kelly Clarkson because the fact that she won the 2002 American Idol competition gives her a privileged place in popular music.

couples, "how so many of their mannerisms were copied from the television"[8]. The effect on the heterosexual dyad is, as Neal & Collas (2000: 5) state, "The love affair always begins as an illusion. Intimacy and emotionality are built around images, since the true substance of another person cannot be known initially. [...] Through wishful thinking, we tend to impute to others the qualities we want them to have in the process of building a relationship"[9].

Love has become a billion-dollar industry that forms the backbone of, amongst others, the commercial music industry and the diamond industry, and it is a common theme in literature also. In contemporary British fiction, the list is virtually endless. David Lambkin's *Plain of Darkness* (1992) and *Night Jasmine Man* (2002) deal with the issue of divorce and its destructive psychological consequences; Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* (1987) revolves around the dissolution of a marriage and its eventual repair; Martin Amis's *London Fields* (1989) depicts a cheating husband obsessed with pornography; Tim Binding's *Anthem* (2003) depicts marital and family relations in 1980s Britain, where spouses cheat on each other and the marriage and family is broken down while the Falklands War is waged in the background.

Ludwig von Bertalanffy's General System Theory is a continuation of a series of holistic approaches[10] where phenomena are not studied in isolation, but rather within a greater context (Viljoen, 1992c: 495). Itamar Even-Zohar suggested

[8] Ishiguro's characters are clones produced for harvesting organs in a literal rendition of the superficiality of contemporary society, and the narrator relates a Platonian theory, "Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life" (*Never Let Me Go*, 137). However, no one ever finds his original, his model. Ishiguro's characters are perceived to be so superficial that their art is taken away, to prove whether they even have souls (*Never Let Me Go*, 255).

[9] As the narrator of Amis's *The Rachel papers*, Charles Highway, phrases the projection of images onto reality: "In my world, reserved Italians, heterosexual hairdressers, clouds without silver linings, ignoble savages, hard-hearted whores, advantageous ill-winds, sober Irishmen, and so on, are not permitted to exist" (41).

[10] Von Bertalanffy issued his first statement on general system theory before World War II, but the issue of the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* in which it was supposed to be published was destroyed in the war (von Bertalanffy, 1969: 14). Shortly after the war, a few other publications emerged that were to be closely identified with General Systems Theory. In 1947, von Neumann and Morgenstern's *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* was published, in 1948, Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics* appeared, and in 1948, Shannon's *A Mathematical Theory of Communication* added to the general paradigm shift of which General Systems Theory was a part. Mather (cf. Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 50) states this tendency, "integrative studies would prove to be an essential part of the quest for an understanding of reality". Heylighen (2002: 22) claims that the ideas of emergence and holism were formulated around 1925 by authors such as Smuts and Whitehead.

Polysystem Theory in 1969 and 1970 (Even-Zohar, 1990: 1), but based his theory on Russian Formalism of the 1920s and Ferdinand de Saussure's insights rather than Von Bertalanffy's conception which is based on thermodynamics in particular and operates within the 'hard' sciences. Even-Zohar (1990: 9) states:

> The idea that semiotic phenomena, i.e., sign-governed human patterns of communication (such as culture, language, literature, society), could more adequately be understood and studied if regarded as systems rather than conglomerates of disparate elements has become one of the leading ideas of our time in most sciences of man. Thus, the positivistic collection of data, taken bona fide on empiricist grounds and analyzed on the basis of their material substance has been replaced by a functional approach based on the analysis of relations.

As Von Bertalanffy (1968: 11) notes, the concept of a holistic approach attempting to study interrelations is not new. However, Ackoff (cf. Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 9) contends that

> ... something new has been added . . . The tendency to study systems as an entity rather than as a conglomeration of parts is consistent with the tendency in contemporary science no longer to isolate phenomena in narrowly confined contexts, but rather to open interactions for examination and to examine larger and larger slices of nature.

Systems theory holds that the self is constituted by its relation to its environment. Not only is this true of the biological organism, but the psychological one as well. Gregory Bateson is one of the foremost psychotherapists working within a General Systems Theory and cybernetic approach. He "replaced Freud's 'vertical' theory, which provoked into the depths of the individual, by a 'horizontal' theory that focused on the nature of the patient's family system" (Vorster, 2003: 24). Bateson "redefined Psychopathology as communication distortions, faulty processing of communication signals and information deficiencies, and rejected Freud's psychodynamic model" (Vorster, 2003: 24). As Wilden (1980: 102) notes, "Our mental life, [...] is the expression of relationships; we *are* what we communicate"[11] . Bateson therefore places a greater stress on the relationships between individuals,

[11] Unless stated otherwise, italicised words in quotations are italicised in the original. This applies to this entire study.

rather than on the individual himself (as Freud and the Stimulus-Response theories[12] did). Like the biological organism, "Bateson viewed the individual as an integrated system that could not arbitrarily be subdivided. In this respect, he labelled the 'self' a 'mythological component' which was created when an artificial boundary line was drawn between a part of the system which did most of the communication and the largest system of which it was a part" (Vorster, 2003: 18).

From a Systems Theory perspective, and looking at the way in which the modern world has changed, interpersonal relations become essential if one aims to understand the 'individual'[13], since the very concept of 'self' is relationally constituted. As Gergen (cf. Augusto & Helena, 1996: 189) argues,

> ... where both the romantic and the modernist conceptions of identifiable selves begin to fray, the result may be something more than a void, an absence of self. Instead, if this tracing of the trajectory is plausible, we may be entering a new era of self-conception. In this era, self is redefined as no longer an essence in itself, but relational. In the post-modern world, selves may become the manifestations of relationship, thus placing relationships in the central position occupied by the individual self for the last several hundred years of Western history. [Thus] ... one's sense of individual autonomy gives way to a reality of immersed interdependence, in which it is relationship that constructs the self.

This 'immersed interdependence' ties in with a system's theory perspective, as well as with post-structuralist thought concerning how meaning is constituted (fabricated), and echoes Schacht's view (1996: 11),

> [I]t is undeniable that whatever sorts of selves human beings come to have are relationally constituted affairs and so inevitably will turn out differently

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[12] According to Von Bertalanffy, there are three major theoretical streams in the development of psychology. Freud's model was first replaced by the Stimulus-Response (S-R) scheme, the "dogma of immaculate perception" (Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 190), i.e. the organism as a passive receptor of stimuli, where, "behaviour, animal or human, is considered to be response to stimuli coming from outside" (Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 188).

[13] In the Middle Ages, the word *individuum* seems to have meant "indivisible from the community or unit" (Wilden, 1980: 223), and, "the noun 'self' dates from 1595, according to the *OED*, with the philosophical sense of 'ego' appearing in 1674. Similarly, the noun *moi* in French dates from the time of Montaigne, *c*. 1588" (Wilden, 1980: 223). The concept of the self as a separate unity is thus a relatively new fallacy of Western civilization. Augusto & Helena (1996: 183) elaborate on the origin of individuality, "Simmel reminds us that once the liberal system of ideas of the eighteenth century understood that what was common to all belonged to human nature, it emphasized the fiction of individuals in isolation, equal and free, and the idea of humanity in general; on the other hand, the romanticism of the nineteenth century, considering that humanity would be represented in a different way in each person, accentuated the unique character of individuality, the disparity between people, and the right to singularity."

> depending on the kinds of relations present in the particular context of which they are constituted. Because they are dynamic affairs rather than fixed permanently like sculptured forms, moreover, they depend for their shape on the kinds and patterns of relations within which they are engendered and so are affected if those relations are significantly reconfigured. As in the case of interpersonal relations, forms of social and cultural life in which one comes to be involved do make a considerable difference in the way in which one turns out. The difference it makes if significant involvements of this sort are or are not a part of one's life, however, is of a whole different kind and is vast.

This systemic approach to identity formation is essential to reinterpret Seeman's theory. Seeman's paper identifies five dimensions of alienation: *powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation,* and *self-estrangement*. These categories are useful for studying alienation (as used by e.g. Neal & Collas, 2000, Kalekin-Fishman, 1998, and Geyer, 1996), but since the world has changed since the publication of Seeman's paper, his work has to be reinterpreted.

Powerlessness

Powerlessness is the first dimension of alienation mentioned by Seeman, and refers to "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks" (Seeman, 1959: 784). Seeman argues that this is "the notion of alienation as it originated in the Marxian view of the worker's condition in capitalist society: the worker is alienated to the extent that the prerogative and means of decision are expropriated by the ruling entrepreneurs" (*Ibid.*). But Seeman takes this further than Marx; Kalekin-Fishman (1996: 97) claims, "A person suffers from alienation in the form of 'powerlessness' when she[14] is conscious of the gap between what she would like to do and what she feels capable of doing". In this sense, Sheryl Crow sings about powerlessness in *Leaving Las Vegas*, "Such a muddy line between the things you want and the things you have to do".

[14] Kalekin-Fishman uses the female personal pronoun, without suggesting that this is a gender-specific issue; 'she' in this context refers to 'an individual', any individual.

In Seeman's later article, *Alienation, Membership, and Political Knowledge: A Comparative Study* (1966: 354), he argues the value of the insights of the psychologist Julian Rotter (1966), regarding social learning theory,

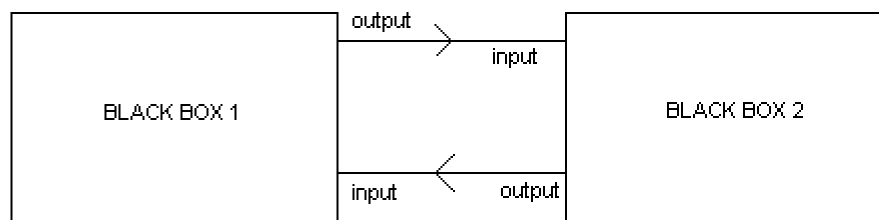
> …which uses both expectancy and reinforcement constructs, [and] holds principally that behaviour is a function of (1) the expectancy, or probability held by an individual, that a particular behaviour will, in a given situation, have a successful outcome, and (2) the value of that outcome - i.e., the preference (or "reinforcement value") that the individual assigns to the reward or goal in question.

Rotter distinguishes between *internal control* and *external control*, which "points to differences (among persons or situations) in the degree to which success or failure is attributable to external factors (e.g. luck, chance, or powerful others), as against success or failure that is seen as the outcome of one's personal skills or characteristics" (Seeman, 1966: 355; see also Neal & Collas, 2000: 20). Rotter's social learning theory thus feels a direct affinity with Seeman's theory.

An increase in powerlessness in the post-modern world can be expected, as Giddens (cf. Halman, 1998: 100) argues, "In contrast to the traditional world, it is supposed, where the individual was substantially in control of many of the influences shaping his life, in modern societies that control has passed to external agencies". However, one must bear in mind that traditional societies placed a greater belief in God/gods, who after all is/are said to control the destinies of mortals. A belief in fate was common; in *Beowulf,* it is written (line 455): "Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel" (Jack, 1994: 55) ("Fate goes ever as fate must") (trans. Heaney, 1999: 16). Furthermore, democracy and equal opportunities, the abolition of the slave trade, the modern judiciary system, etc., have given more power to individuals, thus refuting the argument that the individual was more in control of his environment in former times. However, the *ways* in which the individual controls his environment (or cannot control it) have changed considerably, as Halman (1998: 100) reminds us, "Although this decline of tradition has increased the scope for independent actions, it is often assumed that modern individuals are more powerless than people in traditional societies". Powerlessness should be discussed in terms of what currently leads to it, rather than in terms of whether or not the individual has more or less control now than previously. For the individual in the post-modern world, *powerless*

refers to the fact that human beings, "become dominated by an external rhythm and, instead of regulating their own time, are made into its victims. They no longer see themselves as building their life and their world. Rather, they feel susceptible to threats whose origins they cannot detect, and whose development they cannot control" (Augusto & Helena, 1996: 188). Since the post-modern world differs so much from the world that produced Marx and even Seeman, Geyer (1996: xxiii) remarks, "a new type of powerlessness has emerged, where the core problem is no longer being unfree but rather being unable to select from among an overchoice of alternatives for action, whose consequences one often cannot even fathom."

In cybernetic terms, consequences involve feedback (positive or negative), which can be defined as "the homeostatic maintenance of a characteristic state or the seeking of a goal, based upon circular causal chains and mechanisms monitoring back information on deviations from the state to be maintained or the goal to be reached" (Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 46). In sociological terms, accurate feedback allows a change in the actions that need to be taken in order to reach the desired goal. A sender (the individual) and receiver (his social and material environment) can be viewed in terms of two black boxes:



Black boxes

Wilden (1980: 96) writes:

> Feedback compares the output of the black box with its input and adjusts the output accordingly. [...] Since both black boxes have their own characteristics and since there are many levels of possible input and output, the relationships between these two *loci* in a human context are extraordinarily complicated. However, in theoretical terms, the dependence of one black box upon the other for its own level of output is clear, since its output is viewed in relation to the other's output, and adjusted accordingly.

Feedback thus regulates the open system, where "the input received from the

environment will be used to modify the output which the system communicates to it. The environment's reaction will be a function of this output and will consequently communicate a modified input to the system, and so on" (Wilden, 1980: 361). For instance, Rivers's psychiatric sessions with Sassoon in Barker's *Regeneration* (15) involve input and output:

> 'I'm quite sure you're not [mad]. As a matter of fact I don't even think you've got a war neurosis.'
>
> Sassoon digested this. 'What have I got, then?'
>
> 'You seem to have a very powerful *anti*-war neurosis.'
>
> They looked at each other and laughed. Rivers said, 'You realize, don't you, that it's my duty to ... to try to change that? I can't pretend to be neutral'.
>
> Sassoon's glance took in both of their uniforms. 'No, of course not'.

The output from Rivers is the input for Sassoon, which causes a reaction, and then Sassoon's output becomes River's input again. Sassoon's output is coloured by Rivers's; if Rivers had said something different, Sassoon would have replied differently. The presence of their uniforms indicates the input from the environment, introducing the constraints of the wider world on their relationship, which necessitates a response within particular parameters.

Geyer (1996: xxiii) contends that the post-modern problem of powerlessness is one of delayed feedback, since "The psychologically normal learning situation, which progressively disappears as mediation increases, is for the individual to *plan an action, execute it, and be confronted with its positive or negative consequences*" . However "post-modern society treats people worse than dogs, who at least do not suffer from *postponed* punishment" (*Ibid.*). The world has become so complex that the causal link between action and outcome becomes obscured; feedback is severely delayed. Geyer (1996: xxiv) writes,

> The more complex one's environment, the later one is confronted with the latent, and often unintended, consequences of one's actions. Consequently, in view of this causality-obscuring time lag, both the 'rewards' and 'punishments' for one's actions increasingly tend to be viewed as random, often with apathy and alienation as a result.

An example of this is the HIV support group in Welsh's *Trainspotting* (Bad Blood). Dave, along with two other women, are "neither homosexuals nor junkies" (*T*, 241), yet they were infected with HIV. Dave started seeing a girl, who had been raped,

and found out she was HIV positive after having sex with her (she did not know herself). As a result, his new girlfriend, Donna, leaves him because he was now infected as well.

Seeman (1966) sets out to study powerlessness amongst various groups, in particular the workplace and the correctional facility. In Rotter's terms, Seeman's conclusion is that interest in gaining knowledge that would aid control is adversely affected by a belief in *external control*. For instance, people interviewed who did not believe they had an impact in politics, had little interest in it. Seeman (1966: 355) incorporates mass theory and social learning theory in interpreting his findings:

> It is commonplace for mass theorists similarly to argue that the bureaucratized and isolated individual in contemporary society becomes convinced of his own powerlessness and, as a result, turns his attention away from control-relevant learning; he becomes apathetic and uninformed in political affairs and generally inattentive to knowledge that bears importantly upon his performance. Thus, mass society theory and social learning theory agree in proposing that those who differ in powerlessness should also differ in their learning.

Seeman compares his findings with similar studies and claims that "The principles involved […] are shown to hold cross-culturally and to hold across varied learning situations (health, politics, and reformatory knowledge)", but warns against "making predictions about *any* knowledge or *any* interest, or *any* disaffection" (Seeman, 1966: 367), since, "the data do not reflect a *generalized* withdrawal of interest on the part of the alienated workers. When relatively less control-relevant affairs are being rated (e.g. the worker's interest in local events or in discussing his work), the organizational differences are considerably muted" (Seeman, 1966: 361). This particular aspect of powerlessness has bearing on contemporary British fiction. In Welsh's *Trainspotting*, the alienated characters rant about being "colonised by wankers" (78), but show no interest in finding ways of becoming involved in politics and thus gaining political autonomy. They show no knowledge or insight about Scotland's predicament, their particular situation, and just rely on the media for their information. Although it is said that Scotland has eight percent of the UK's population but sixteen percent of the UK's HIV cases (*Trainspotting*, 193), partly

because of needle sharing, Tommy still contracts HIV this way. Knowing and acting on this control-relevant information, could have saved his life, but as Renton puts it when he speaks about heroin addiction, "How many shots does it take before the concept ay choice becomes obsolete?" (*T*, 174).

In literature, the antihero is a depiction of powerlessness. The antihero experiences his role and is usually characterised as a victim to whom everything happens (Johl, 1992a: 14). For instance, Querry in Graham Greene's *A Burnt-Out Case* is such a character to whom everything happens, and the narrative is of the type that Johl (1992a: 14) describes as centripetal, by which is meant that the passive nature of the protagonist necessitates that action be forced upon him by marginal characters. Querry seeks to be left alone, to be free from the limelight he found himself in, but does not even have a direct hand in the circumstances that cause his death. Samson Young, the narrator in Martin Amis's *London Fields*, exclaims, "I'm not a contender in all this. I'm – disinterested" (*LF*, 60). Yet he becomes the murderer as circumstances draw him into the plot, and he remarks, "I should have understood that a cross has four points. Not three" (*LF*, 466), i.e., he should have known that he was always a contender, always drawn in whether or not he wished to participate.

In Ian McEwan's *A Child in Time*, Stephen's life is irrevocably changed when his daughter is abducted, leading to the dissolution of his marriage. All his efforts to find her are futile, and his efforts to console his wife are too. He cannot even control his thoughts: "He was the victim, not the progenitor, of his thoughts. They washed over him most effectively when he offered them a drink, or when he was tired, or waking from deep sleep" (*CiT*, 148). His tennis instructor phrases it succinctly, "You're passive. You're mentally enfeebled. You wait for things to happen, you stand there hoping they're going to go your way. [...] You're not all here" (*CiT*, 173).

Meaninglessness

Meaninglessness refers to "the individual's sense of understanding events in which he is engaged" (Seeman, 1959: 786). Chowers (2004: 60) calls humans *homo-*

hermeneut, "beings that require a meaningful existence", for without some form of meaning it becomes impossible for people to keep on living. Weber (cf. Chowers, 2004: 69) even defines the personality as "a concept which entails a constant and intrinsic relation to certain ultimate 'values' or 'meanings' of life, 'values' and 'meanings' which are forged into purposes and thereby translate into relational-teleological action".

Seeman (1959: 786) argues that meaninglessness occurs when "the individual is unclear as to what he ought to believe - when the individual's minimum standards for clarity in decision making are not met". The post-modern world presents the individual with a vastly confusing world of opposing views, bewildering options and even a history that seems to be constantly rewritten. Seeman (1959: 786) writes that

> [Meaninglessness] is characterized by a low expectancy that satisfactory predictions about the future outcomes of behaviour can be made. Put more simply, where the first meaning of alienation refers to the sensed ability to control outcomes, this second meaning refers essentially to the sensed ability to predict behavioural outcomes.

As such, it is directly linked to control as discussed under *powerlessness* (particularly the delayed feedback discussed by Geyer), as Seeman (*Ibid.*) argues, "the view that one lives in an intelligible world might be a prerequisite to expectancies for control; and the unintelligibility of complex affairs is presumably conducive to the development of high expectancies for external control (that is, high powerlessness)". With accurate and trustworthy information, decisions can be made confidently and it is much easier to believe that one has control. In the absence of such accurate information, or in the perceived absence of such information, control is surrendered. Rose Weitz (cf. Neal & Collas, 2000: 83) sees uncertainty as existing "whenever people lack a cognitive framework for understanding their situations and thus feel that they cannot predict the outcome of their behaviour". As with powerlessness, meaninglessness is highly subjective and yet no human being will be able to foresee a vast array of outcomes.

In literature, Ian McEwan's *Amsterdam* depicts how difficult it can be to predict the outcomes of one's actions. Vernon Halliday (a newspaper editor)

publishes incriminating photos of the Foreign Secretary, Julian Garmony, in part to increase circulation of the newspaper and in part to attack Garmony. He ends up losing his job as editor, but Garmony's approval ratings soar. To make matters worse, the incident destroys his relationship with his best friend, Clive Linley, and even leads to his death. This complex environment of political spin and media attention vying for public opinion is precisely a depiction of meaninglessness where outcomes are delayed and unpredictable.

Meaningless further relates to Existentialism, which is a "philosophical viewpoint in which man is confronted with the absurdity of life to which meaning can only be given if man succeeds in creating it himself"[15] (Degenaar, 1992a: 91). Renton in Welsh's *Trainspotting* (90), however, has no interest in giving life meaning when he says:

> Life's boring and futile. We start oaf wi high hopes, then we bottle it. We realise that we're aw gaunnae die, withoot really findin oot the big answers. We develop aw they long-winded ideas which jist interpret the reality ay oor lives in different weys, withoot really extending oor body ay worthwhile knowledge, about the big things, the real things. Basically, we live a short, disappointing life; and then we die. We fill up oor live wi shite, things like careers and relationships tae delude oorsels that it isnae aw totally pointless.

The following excerpt from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1965: 21) also illustrates such a view:

> Vladimir: Question of temperament.
> Estragon: Of character.
> Vladimir: Nothing you can do about it.
> Estragon: No use struggling.
> Vladimir: One is what one is.
> Estragon: No use wriggling.
> Vladimir: The essential doesn't change.
> Estragon: Nothing to be done.

As Degenaar (1992a: 91) relates, the historical background of Existentialism is the nineteenth century realisation that the solid reference point for meaning in a person's life is diminishing. This is the collapse of the transcendent second world which was created by Plato's Idealism and Christianity and which has remained for 2500 years, the 1 in Kristeva's Zero-1 logic. Because meaning was tied to this second

[15] Own translation

world, the collapse of it leads to experiencing meaninglessness and nihilism.

It is, however, not only the collapse of certainties that humankind experienced before the two world wars that contributed to meaninglessness, but also the information overload that followed it. The Internet is the most obvious example. A Google search of the word "alienation" on 12 March 2007 delivered about 8,910,000 results. Finding the information one is looking for becomes problematic. The Internet was originally designed as a medium for the transmission of scientific data by a Swiss physicist at the European Center for Particle Research (David, 1998: 203), but it was found to have commercial value as well and subsequently expanded. Now almost every household in the Western world has access to the Internet, and it is used to transmit much more than scientific data[16]. Geyer (1996: xxiii) states the post-modern manifestation of meaninglessness,

> With the accelerating throughput of information [...] meaningless is not a matter anymore of whether one can assign meaning to incoming information, but of whether one can develop adequate new scanning mechanisms to gather the goal-relevant information one needs, as well as more efficient selection procedures to prevent being overburdened by the information one does not need, but is bombarded with on a regular basis.

The post-modern world has never been as connected as it is now, and finding information is easier than it has ever been. It is clearly not a problem of the absence of information,

> It is one's image of the world that has become fragmented, owing to the overload of information with which one is confronted as a result of a horizon-widening process set in motion by increased communication and the overload of possibilities from which one can barely choose using the antediluvian selection mechanisms still promoted by much of present-day education (Geyer, 1996: xxv).

Morgado (2002: 252) highlights how this relates to external control, bringing this aspect of alienation in direct relation with McEwan's *The Child in Time*: "The physical and symbolical notion of the disappearance of children and of childhood stands for the apparent contemporary inability to calculate risk and therefore control human activity." In a world with a bewildering array of possibilities and an unknowable number of risks and rewards, both immediate and delayed, any number of fates can

[16] Christine Brooke-Rose, in *Life, End of*, says that it is "rapidly becoming a World Wide Wank" (64).

befall a child who grows up in the Western world. Acquiring sufficient goal-relevant information becomes problematic in complex post-modern society, and the individual's loss of faith in his ability to predict outcomes is embodied in a text such as *The Child in Time.* Morgado highlights *external control* by arguing that the disappearing child can be seen as "a means of representing the future not only as unknowable but also as problematic and insecure".

Meaninglessness has further aspects. A major manifestation of meaninglessness is in heterosexual relationships, where the media abounds with images of men and women failing to understand each other. Wilden (1980: 296) defines gender roles in cybernetic terminology:

> In our culture, men are primarily viewed as digital. That is to say, they are expected to exemplify the so-called masculine traits: logic, rationality, intellect; manipulative, objective, and instrumental knowledge; being-in-relation-to-objects-in-the-world; and so on. Women, on the other hand, are primarily viewed as analog. They are expected to exemplify the so-called feminine traits: emotion, irrationality, feeling, subjective knowledge, person-oriented knowledge, life-in-relation-to-men, and, above all, *being-in-relation-to-relation* .

The myth of gender roles contends that these distinctions have a biological basis, e.g. the feminine nurturing side that is supposed to be a "motherly" but not a "fatherly" instinct. Stephen's trip to the toy store in McEwan's *The Child in Time* indicates how early gender roles are imposed on children, "One end of the store was dominated by the khaki of combat drill and vehicle camouflage, and the riveted silver of heavily armed spaceships, the other by the pale pastels of baby wear and the shining white of miniature household appliances" (*CiT*, 138). Girls play with pushchairs, dolls that wet themselves, or teacups, toy ovens, etc., indicating their future roles as mothers, hostesses, etc. According to Keith Talent in Martin Amis's *London Fields*, "Babies, infants, little human beings: they're a skirt thing. The only blokes who love babies are transvestites, hormone-cases, sex-maniacs" (*LF*, 80). Boys play with construction toys, toy cars, toy guns, etc., teaching them the roles of upholding civilisation, embarking on adventure (such as pirates and explorers), and providing physical security (which will later be translated into financial security).

Although Marija Gimbutas' palaeoanthropological work on Neolithic mythology in pre-Indo-European society has given feminists a straw to clutch at (see *The Living Goddesses*, 1999), misreading her work and inverting the order does nothing for the breaking down of these distinctions. Post-colonialism and feminism in particular have attempted to right the wrongs of the past by simply inverting the status quo, "the politics of identity have also failed to move beyond these dualisms and instead has merely valorized and defended the devalued member of the binary set, thus inverting rather than subverting or transcending binary oppositions" (Langman & Scatamburlo, 1996: 131).

These gender roles involve focusing on some aspects of the self, at the cost of other aspects, as Wilden (1980: 296) acknowledges, "Real people can only fit these images by denying or disavowing a part of their analog-and-digital humanity". The question is one of defining what it entails to be a man or woman, of arbitrarily drawing boundaries based on social constructs. Post-modernism and post-structuralism highlight the arbitrary nature of these boundaries[17].

Canale (cf. Richards and Schmidt, 1983: 4) contends, "authentic communication involves a 'reduction of uncertainty' on behalf of the participants"; as both parties share information, they become more certain of the other's viewpoint, intentions, etc. Richards and Schmidt (1983: 122) recognize that

> ... conversation is more than a series of exchanges; it consists of exchanges which are initiated and interpreted according to intuitively understood and socially acquired rules and norms of conversational cooperation, which can in turn be manipulated to create a wide range of meanings beyond the level expressed directly by the utterances in the conversation themselves[18].

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[17] Although post-modernism and post-structuralism can certainly not be used interchangeably, Hassan (cf. Müller, 1992: 398) has identified common denominators linking these two concepts: indeterminacy, fragmentation, decanonization, denial of closure, unity and the self ("self-lessness, depth-lessness"), and the denial of representation ("the unrepresentable unrepresentable"). It is important to bear in mind that post-structuralism emerged and functions within a general intellectual context, and that context is the post-modern world. Langman & Scatamburlo (1996: 127) write,

> In recent decades, a proliferation of new theoretical discourses have sought to contest, deconstruct, decenter, and otherwise disrupt the epistemological and ontological presuppositions bequeathed to us by the project of Western Enlightenment. Various *post-al* trajectories have, despite their differences, converged to some extent, to (i) reject totalizing, universalizing, 'master' narratives, (ii) repudiate modern theory's search for foundations of knowledge and its apodictic truth claims and, (iii) renounce the rational, autonomous, essentialist Cartesian subject of bourgeois liberal humanism.

[18] Richards and Schmidt (1983: 126) mention that Labov and Fanshel (1977) do not see conversation as a chain of utterances, but rather "a matrix of utterances and actions bound together by a web of

The following exchange from Martin Amis's *London Fields* (147) illustrates such a breakdown in communication between husband and wife, as their relationship becomes, "well – you wouldn't say paramilitary. You'd say military" (*LF*, 31):

> "What are those pills you're taking? Oh. Yeast."
> "What?"
> "Yeast."
> "What about it?"
> "Nothing."
> "What are you talking about?"
> "Sorry."
> "Christ."

As illustrated by De Saussure, meaning is arbitrarily assigned to the sign within a social context (and at a specific time, as Even-Zohar, 1990: 10 notes). Any process of signification occurs in reference to the cultural norms governing signification, which is why much meaning is lost in intercultural communication. Concepts are interpreted in different ways, differing ideas exist about what is right and wrong, good and evil, etc., and even humorous references are not understood.

In order for there to be some understanding, there needs to be a shared code (e.g. English vocabulary); the more similar the code, the easier communication is bound to be. The less similar, the more frequently communication gaps are bound to occur. In *The Rachel Papers* by Martin Amis, Charles highlights how the initiated can interpret a code. He contracts a sexually transmitted disease, and notices a sign on the mantelpiece, saying, "For the love of God don't let him touch you. He has got an unusually revolting disease". However, the notice referred to pills with the label, "Flagyll. One to be taken four times daily". For someone familiar with sexually transmitted diseases (like Charles), the instructions can be interpreted differently.

It is therefore understandable that, since "Dating relationships are inherently unstable" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 43), a stabilising factor such as a shared cultural background can have the effect that "relationships that develop into durable ones are disproportionately based on homophily (the principle of similarity)" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 41). The reason for this is straightforward:

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understandings and reactions".

> The lack of similarity in social backgrounds makes everyday communications difficult. Many of the more subtle forms of communication are not clearly understood, and empathy for each other becomes difficult. The primary reason for instability among heterogeneous couples derives from the conflicts that surface in everyday interactions. Clashing perceptions, values, and behaviour patterns frequently produce such high levels of stress that the relationship is terminated (Neal & Collas, 2000: 41).

Culturally sanctioned borders defining gender roles therefore lead to differing codes, which exacerbates communication breakdown and interpersonal estrangement. Meaninglessness will thus increase if people do not share overlapping codes, and this could result in a communication breakdown. Meaninglessness can, however, not be comprehended without an understanding of how meaning is created. Structuralism and post-structuralism provide a few perspectives on how the superficiality of meaning in the post-modern world operates.

Like post-modernism, post-structuralism [19] is not a definable and homogenous approach, as "there will never be, and can never be, any definitive 'theory of post-structuralism'. Instead it consists of a perpetual detour towards a truth that has lost any status or finality" (Young, 1981: 6). Assigning the name "post-structuralism" implies the opposite – that it is a unified school of thought that can be grouped under one term. Rather it is a collection of insights, which "disallow[s] any denominative, unified or 'proper' definition of itself" (Young, 1981: 8). Young (*Ibid.*) provides some idea of what it encompasses, "Broadly [...] it involves a critique of metaphysics (of the concepts of causality, of identity, of the subject, and of truth), of the theory of the sign, and the acknowledgement and incorporation of the psychoanalytic modes of thought." Du Plooy (1992d: 368) notes the relevance of post-structuralism for literary studies:

[19] As the label implies, post-structuralism has its roots in structuralism, which was founded by the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913). His views were published posthumously by his students as *Cours De Linguistique Générale* (*Course in General Linguistics*) in 1915. The central figures of post-structuralism are mainly French also (cf. Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 257): Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. Hambidge (1992c: 400) adds Pierre Macherey, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, and Herbert Marcuse to this list. Roland Barthes is an ambiguous figure whose views were mainly structuralist at the beginning of his career, but with *S/Z* he altered earlier viewpoints and should also be added to a list of post-structuralists. The so-called Yale Critics represent the American branch of post-structuralism: Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, J. Hillis Miller, and Geoffrey Hartman (cf. Du Plooy and Viljoen, 1992: 31), and Barbara Johnson.

> Volgens die strukturalistiese en post-strukturalistiese teorieë is die teks nie meer dokument of monument nie, maar teken, en die hele kwessie van betekenis (as signifikasie) en sin kom a.g.v. die arbitrêre aard van die verhouding tussen betekenaar en betekende, in die brandpunt van literêre diskussies te staan.
>
> (According to structuralist and post-structuralist theories, the text is no longer a document or monument, but a sign, and the whole question of meaning (as signification) and purpose takes up a central place in literary discussion because of the arbitrary nature of the relation between signifier and signified[20]).

According to Young (1981: 15), Derrida "produces a critique of Saussure's theory of the sign by pushing Saussure's formulation of difference to its limits". He uses structuralist theory not only by questioning the linguistic sign, but the nature of the signifier itself, for, as Currie (cf. Bradford, 1996: 548) remarks, "the only real problem with [the structuralist] account of the sign is that it does not go far enough in pursuit of its own insight". Questioning the sign in Derridian terms is an attack on teleology, an attack on concepts such as *structure*, *interdependence*, *essence,* and *meaning*, which are brought to the text by the reader (Hambidge, 1992c: 400), and which are not inherent in it, as the structuralists sought to discover. Post-structuralism "involves a shift from meaning to staging, or from the signified to the signifier" (Young, 1981: 8). One key issue of post-structuralism is the critique of the sign and the denial of finality and homogeneity of meaning. Barthes (cf. Harari, 1979: 38) writes that "the sign itself must be shaken: it is not a question of revealing the (latent) meaning of an utterance, of a trait, or of a narrative, but of fissuring the very representation of meaning; not to change or purify the symbols but to challenge the symbolic itself."

Saussure named the "science that studies the life of signs within society", *semiology* (cf. Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 60), and Charles Pierce would later name his science of the sign *semiotics*. Du Plooy (1992e: 473) defines the latter as "die wetenskap wat op 'n sistematiese wyse 'n studie maak van tekens, tekensisteme en betekenisprosesse" (the science that systematically studies signs, sign-systems and meaning-processes). Wilden (1980: 32) provides an interesting insight into the

[20] Own translation

etymology of both terms, *semiology* and *semiotics*:

> Besides its legal sense of 'pact' or 'contract', the word *sumbolon* is probably the equivalent to the Latin *tessera* - the two halves of a broken potsherd whose fitting together served as a token of recognition or password in the early mystery religions. Like the verb *sumballo*, the etymological source of the word symbol is that which implies a *link* .

This implied link between two separate concepts is also evident in Mukařovský's (cf. Du Plooy, 1992f: 477) description of a sign as "een zintuiglijk waarneembare realiteit, die betrekking heeft op een andere realiteit en deze moet oproepen" (a tangible reality that has bearing upon another reality and that attempts to call the other reality to mind[21]). How that link functions is an important question the structuralists and post-structuralists aimed to answer. A major insight of the structuralists (which was expanded by the post-structuralists) is that, as Barthes (cf. Young, 1981: 33) notes, "the sign is a historical concept, an analytic (and even ideological) artefact". This key issue puts post-structuralism in a position comparable to Von Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory and Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory. The sign is relationally constituted.

The line between structuralism[22] and post-structuralism is vague at best, since one does not simply follow the other. Rather they complement and run alongside each other in the latter half of the twentieth century. Venter (1992: 511) proposes that the distinction between the two lies in the unity of the literary text and literary system propagated by the structuralist viewpoint, against the plurality sought by the post-structuralists, between the enclosing of the literary field

[21] Own translation

[22] Although Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours De Linguistique Générale* was initially conceived as an approach to linguistics, the structuralist approach provided a methodology that was applied in the diverse fields of literary criticism, anthropology (noticeably through Lévi-Strauss), mythology (Roland Barthes), sociology, and philosophy. Teresa Ebert has termed approaches to social theory "concerned almost exclusively with signs, signification, texts, and the discursive as *ludic* post-modernism" (Langman & Scatamburlo, 1996: 128). Like post-modernism and post-structuralism, the multidisciplinary character of structuralism makes a comprehensive definition of the movement dangerous, and seeing it as a homogenous field would not be scientifically accurate. However, even though structuralism cannot be considered a homogenous field, structuralist common denominators can be identified (Harari, 1979: 27):

> 1) The rejection of the concept of the 'full subject' for the benefit of that of structure.
> 2) The loss of pertinence of the traditional form/content division insofar as for all structuralist theorists content derives its reality from its structure.
> 3) At the methodological level, a stress on codification and systemization.

propagated by the structuralists, versus the breaking down of boundaries proposed by the post-structuralists.

Structuralism, as envisaged by Ferdinand de Saussure, does not study meaning - it studies the way in which meaning is created. Saussure's concern is with how *langue*[23] functions, and in so doing, he identifies the linguistic *sign*, the nature of which is summarized by Currie (cf. Bradford, 1996: 547):

> (a) It is a two-sided entity which consists of a signifier (sound-image) and a signified (a concept to which it refers), not a name and a thing;
> (b) The relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary, 'united in the brain by an associative bond';
> (c) The sign has no substantive content but generates meaning through the system in which it is differentiated from all other signs.

Saussure (2004: 59) states that language "exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community". Although it seems natural to think of a car when the word *car* is heard, it is a taught relation, not an inherent one - the linguistic sign "has no direct reference to the real" (Young, 1981: 2)[24]. There is nothing in the *signifier* itself to connect it with the *signified*; in order to equate the sound-image with the concept, speakers of a language must be taught that there is a relation between these two terms. Bennett (1979: 79) notes, "The sign, in its actual and concrete usage, is thus always socially formed. Its actual use and meaning, in the case of language, is reciprocally determined by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant".

The linguistic sign does not link a thing and a name, according to Du Plooy (1992f: 476), but a concept with an acoustic image. Neither is the *signifier* ever merely a juxtaposition of sounds, Saussure (2004: 61) says it "is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses".

Point (c) in the list mentioned by Currie is particularly interesting from a

[23] Saussure distinguishes between *langue* and *parole*, defining *langue* as "the system of any particular language (its social codes, rules, norms) which gives meaning to individual communications" and *parole* as, "the act of utilization of the system, the individual act of language as executed by a particular speaker" (Young, 1981: 2). Brøndal (cf. Barthes, 1967: 15) describes the distinction in the following way: "A language is a purely abstract entity, a norm which stands above individuals, a set of essential types, which speech actualizes in an infinite variety of ways".

[24] An obvious problem is onomatopoeia, but even here, the signifier is a fabricated representation, not an exact copy of a signified.

General Systems Theory perspective. Saussure (2004: 66) writes, "language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others" and adds that values are always composed

> 1. Of a *dissimilar* thing that can be *exchanged* for the thing of which the value is to be determined; and
> 2. Of *similar* things that can be *compared* with the thing of which the value is to be determined.

A word can be exchanged for something dissimilar - a thought, idea, concept - or it can be compared with a similar thing - a different word. If signs had content - if words expressed pre-existing ideas - he suggests all languages would have an equivalent for the same idea (which is not the case). He claims, "language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system" (2004: 70). Rather the content of the sign is "really fixed only by the concurrence of everything that exists outside it" (Saussure, 2004: 67).

If the relation between *signifier* and *signified* is arbitrary, a specific signifier is assigned to a specific signified because of its non-coincidence with other signifiers. In other words, the signifier *car* relates to the signified car because *cat, cap, tar, par*, etc. do *not* relate to the signified four-wheeled vehicle. The sign thus has meaning not because it *has* meaning, but because of its relation to other signs as governed by the above mentioned rules of value exchange: "signs function [...] not through their intrinsic value but through their relative position" (Saussure, 2004: 68). These two governing principles can be called *identity* and *alterity* - an element of similarity and an element of difference. Meaning is thus a product of *difference*, "whatever distinguishes one sign from the others constitutes it" (Saussure, 2004: 70). In other words, meaning is *relational*.

If meaning is therefore constructed within this code system, it follows that different codes will lead to different meanings, furthering alienation in the sense that people attach different meanings to specific actions and cannot generate meaning from another's actions.

Normlessness

Normlessness or anomie (a term from Durkheim) "denotes the situation in which the social norms regulating individual conduct have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behaviour" (Seeman, 1959: 787). Here the contemporary world is notorious: in the United Kingdom[25], sexual promiscuity, youth violence, and the binge drinking culture, are all familiar examples. Society is perceived to be as immoral as it can be. Zurbrugg's statement (cf. Schlesinger, 1988: 27) is indicative of this stance, "The late twentieth century is an apocalyptic age in which all cultural practices have become superficial, weightless, static, vacuously objective, vacuously subjective, or vacuously obscene." Keith Talent in Amis's *London Fields* illustrates Zurbrugg's statement vividly, as his relationships are superficial, and his value-system is mostly television-based. Keith is a connoisseur of pornography; after he watches Nicola's pornographic film, the narrator notes, "'That', said Keith, not with yearning so much as with professional sincerity, 'that is the real thing'"(*LF*, 268). Kalekin-Fishman (1996: 97) remarks,

> Anomie, or normlessness, the bewilderment that may accompany a rapid change in position or status, is a type of alienation with which people in modern society often have to cope [...]. Paradoxically, however, the opposite of normlessness is a slavish commitment to conventional means to achieve conventional goals, which is also a sign of alienated affect.

The common perception is that normlessness abounds in male/female relationships (and homosexual relationships), that "the yoke of marriage" (Carter, 2006: 18) has been substituted by living together, and that family life is now considered less important than career opportunities. In the UK, people frequently refer to "my partner" instead of "husband" or "wife", indicating that marriage is no longer essential for cohabiting arrangements. Mayer (2008: 33) states that marriage rates are down to a 146-year low in the UK. In the post-modern world, with changing gender roles and material circumstances,

> Normlessness derives partly from conditions of complexity and conflict in

[25] Mayer (2008: 30-36) suggests that "British youth is in crisis", citing statistics that prove the youth in the UK are at the forefront of degeneration in the western world regarding alcohol abuse, drug abuse, premarital sex, and violent assault.

> which individuals become unclear about the composition and enforcement of social norms. Sudden and abrupt changes occur in life conditions, and the norms that usually operate may no longer seem adequate as guidelines for conduct (Neal & Collas, 2000: 122).

The daily life of people has changed considerably since the turn of the century. The majority of the population in Western countries[26] now live in urban areas; travel has developed from the very first motor vehicles to regular air travel[27], communication has changed from primitive switchboard telephones to the Internet. The rapid spread of information, the ease at which national boundaries are crossed, the total change in the daily routine, and interaction with others has had a profound impact on social relations. Macey (1996: 108) explains the situation,

> In contemporary Western Europe, the impact of globalization, accompanied by rapid technological change and a communications revolution, has led to the intensification of competitive pressures. This has resulted in increased demands for flexibility of sites of production, organizational structures, and the utilization of labour [...]. Because mass-produced goods and services can be provided more cheaply in the newly industrialized countries, there has been a shift in the EU away from manufacturing industry and toward the development of consumer industries geared to meeting cultural and symbolic needs. The former rested heavily on unskilled labour, while the latter demands a highly skilled and much reduced work force, an obvious outcome of which is increased unemployment.

This social change has profound implications for male/female relationships[28]:

> We live in a time in which a great deal of social experimentation is taking place in the sexual domain. The experimentation grows, in part, out of the long time interval between biological maturation and entry into the labour force and marriage. The 'sexual revolution' among the youth of the nation reflects an increase in sexual permissiveness, a psychological separation of

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[26] Van Coller (2008) argues the importance of urbanisation in Afrikaans literature as well.

[27] Space travel is irrelevant for the vast majority of the population.

[28] According to David Popenoe, co-director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University, "Later marriage is very strongly associated with higher levels of education" (yourweddingplace.com). It is no longer sufficient to leave school at 16, or even 18, since financial security demands at least degree-level education in a world where competition has increased considerably. With a gap year factored in, and a year or two failed at university, it is not unusual for the would-be professional to first start earning at around age 25. Student loans then have to be repaid before marriage can be considered, explaining why the median age for marriage has risen considerably. In the last decade, the median age for marriage in the US has increased by one year to 26.7 years for men and 25.1 for women (*Ibid*.). According to Baliga and Goyal's paper, *Education and Marriage Age* (1996), "educated men and women marry late while their less educated cohorts marry at an early age" (econpapers.repec.org). The reasons are purely financial: less educated people are forced into cohabitation earlier than more educated young people are, for it allows the sharing of expenses.

> the pleasures of sex from biological reproduction, and an unwillingness to defer gratification (Neal & Collas, 2000: 12).

This "psychological separation of the pleasures of sex from biological reproduction" is further complicated by the media, as Neal & Collas (2000: 8) recognise, "The modern cultural apparatus promotes materialistic values and tends to emphasize the pleasure principle. Mass entertainment, for example, is saturated with themes of sexuality and the grief and pleasure to be derived therefrom".

The most obvious separation of sex from intimacy is found in the rapid expansion of the pornography industry, which has also been fuelled by the Internet. Neal & Collas (2000: 54) note, "Pornography promotes an emphasis upon impersonal sex, the view of a partner as a sex object, and the social acceptability of having a succession of temporary sexual partners". The sexual partner becomes an object, consisting of "breast and belly, of shank and haunch" (*London Fields*, 165). As the character, Marion, states about one of her relationships in Lambkin's *The Hanging Tree* (1995: 44), "I wasn't a person, just three holes and a sort of attractive personality". Chowers[29] (2004: 84) notes, "Since the Medieval period, sexual relations in the Occident have gradually transcended their reproductive and physical functions, and turned into an erotic bond 'raised into the sphere of conscious enjoyment'".

Lucas Moodysson's film, *A Hole in my Heart*, depicts the pornography industry in its impersonal reality, where the emphasis is on pleasure and physical performance with no regard for biological reproduction or emotional intimacy. The film serves as an example of what Neal & Collas (2000: 53) refer to when they remark, "in the contemporary culture of courtship, feelings of intimacy and sexual performances have become psychologically separated". When Keith Talent in Amis's *London Fields* looks at birds playing in a pool, he sees the scene in pornographic terms and remarks, "It's like birds playing in a pool," which prompts Nicola to ask, "*Like* birds playing in a pool, Keith?" To this, Keith replies, "You know. Girls. Playing

[29] Chowers (2004: 84) sees the emphasis on sexual gratification as a result of the modern condition, "In an age where instrumental and formal rationality reign, the erotic sphere becomes an essential refuge. Erotic relations, in fact, offer 'the specific sensation of an *innerworldly salvation* from rationalization'"

in a swimming-pool" (*LF*, 128).

With reference to religion, Ollman (1976: 223) gives Marx's view, "Through religious activity, the individual's potential for controlling nature is transferred to god, which, in turn, reduces the actual control he is able to exercise". However, the twentieth century saw an increased secularization[30], as the waiter exclaims in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (cf. Wilson, 2001: 36), "Hail nothing, full of nothing, nothing is with thee". The onus rests on the individual to create his own norms, since "Religion is no longer influential as the grand narrative that provides the ground of moral theories, moral views, and actions" (Halman, 1998: 102). This process is referred to as individualization, which is "the process by which increasingly the individual has gained freedom and autonomy. The individual not only has become more independent of the churches, but from other social institutions as well. The individual can make more personal choices in far more life situations than before" (Halman, 1998: 100).

It would seem that, in Western countries, tradition has lost its authoritativeness[31], and this has resulted, as Himmelfarb (cf. Halman, 1998: 100) argues, in "a condition of the most profound and serious moral meaninglessness. What has resulted is the rise of the kind of terror mixed with the most extreme selfishness". Modernization was, according to Inglehart (cf. Halman, 1998: 101), "a transfer of authority from family and religious institutions to political institutions"; post-modernization denotes a shift of authority "away from *both* religion and the state to the individual". The result is that "an increasing number of people will select their values 'a la carte'" (Halman, 1998: 103). But whereas the common perception is that the individual makes immoral judgements, Halman's study (1998: 100) found quite the opposite,

Most people in the countries of the Western world appear rather strict in

[30] Secularization "denotes the development by which the former influential role of the churches on everyday life diminishes significantly. People do not anymore accept as taken for granted the moral and behavioural guidance of the churches" (Halman, 1998: 99).

[31] However, as Thompson (cf. Wexler, 1998: 73) argues, "The various social processes that have been held to characterize modernization and modernity can themselves generate countervailing tendencies - secularization provokes sacralizing reactions". This is seen in the increased emphasis on spiritualism, e.g. the Christian Revival Church, Scientology and Neo-Paganism. Augusto & Helena (1996: 191) also note, "the need for supernatural protection is resurging". David Koresh's Branch Davidians is probably the most infamous example of 'sacrilization' in the last twenty years.

> their moral convictions. An ethos of 'anything goes' seems not to be the dominant ethos in contemporary Europe. Our analysis substantiated the idea expressed by, for example, Zygmunt Bauman (1995), that morality as such is not on the decline, but that the sources of morality are switching from those imposed by traditional institutional religiosity to personal convictions.

Furthermore, Halman's (1998) study disproves the common perception that the importance of the traditional family structure has eroded, "The data we have analyzed indicates that traditional views are remarkably alive, even in those countries which are commonly regarded as the forerunners of modernity and demographic transformations: the Scandinavian countries" (1998: 108). It is true that traditional roles have changed in Europe and the Western world, but they have far from disappeared,

> The idea that family has decreased in importance due to the process of individualization can not be substantiated from the survey data we have at our disposal. Even in countries where the demographic changes seem to reveal the disappearance of traditional family life, a traditional family pattern has not vanished at all. Large majorities of the populations in Europe not only regard family as very important, they also share almost unanimously the view that an emphasis on the family in the near future would be a good development (Halman, 1998: 108).

Films such as Lucas Moodysson's *Together* (original Swedish version released as *Tillsammans*) depict the importance of family life that is still part of Western consciousness. Although the film is set in Sweden in 1975, it is a contemporary film, which was released in the UK in 2001. One of the central storylines is the breakup of a marriage, and its eventual repair, and the overall theme is one of solidarity of the family and the community, based on mutual respect. Halman concludes, "Normlessness does not seem to be widespread and as we have seen, people seem to be rather content with traditional family life[32]. [...] as such we think we cannot find strong evidence for feelings of uneasiness, normlessness, meaninglessness, and other signs of alienation" (Halman, 1998: 119). One element that has changed, is the stigma attached to divorce, since "the indissoluble marriage bond has disappeared as

[32] Mayer (2008: 32) argues the opposite for British youth, noting that "English girls are the most sexually active in Europe. More of them are having sex aged 15 or younger [40%], and more than 15% fail to use contraception when they do – which means that Britain has high rates of both teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases".

a social norm" (Halman, 1998: 110).

There is therefore a clear conflict of interest in the modern Western world between romantic ideals propagating "love at first sight" on the one hand, and sexual promiscuity on the other. With both images propagated by the media, it is probable that both approaches will exist side by side in the individual, thereby complicating the matter even further. It is perhaps safe to say that, amidst this duel, the one thing that has certainly disappeared is the surety of permanence. It is not that traditional norms have disappeared altogether, only that norms have changed.

Seeman (1959: 788) identifies a further aspect of anomie, "The anomic situation [...] may be defined as one in which there is a *high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviours are required to achieve given goals*". This relates directly to male/female relationships, where, "normlessness is prevalent and common in a dual set of socially unapproved means: one consists of the deliberate use of misrepresentation and deception; the other, of the use of force and coercion to get one's way" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 21). Deliberate misrepresentation is commonly known in the dating scene, so much so that it is actually expected to some extent. From wearing specific clothes to selecting specific topics of conversation, the aim is to create an image of oneself – the self becomes a commodity that has to be sold. The relationship begins with false premises, where inferences are made about the other:

> Part of the problems in marriage grows out of the idealization that characterizes dating couples. In moving toward a sense of closeness, individuals tend to see what they want to see. Perceptions are filtered through dreams and fantasies. One of the basic reality shocks in marriage, then, is the discovery of qualities and attributes of the other person that were not known previously. In interactions behind the closed doors family life, the masks and facades are removed, and previously concealed layers of reality are exposed (Neal & Collas, 2000: 47).

Marriage is a revelation that shatters the illusion of courtship. Of course, this misrepresentation does not end in the initial dating phase but continues throughout the relationship. The use of force and coercion is also familiar, from the most brutal

end (rape[33]) to more acceptable bribes and emotional blackmail ("You will do this if you love me") and manipulation.

Keith Talent in Amis's *London Fields* is a typical example of a man who is ruled by nothing but his own will and desires. He has no regard for family, e.g. he only confronts a 'social worker' after she 'insulted' his dog, but let it go when his house, wife and child were scrutinised. The following exchange with a female character, Nicola, illustrates his attitude towards marriage and the 'nuclear family' (*LF*, 129):

> "You're married."
> "Not really. Put it like this. My wife thinks she is. But me I'm not so sure."
> "Children?"
> "No. Well, yeah, I got a little girl. She's not even one yet".

Begbie in Welsh's *Trainspotting* is hardly more dedicated to his role of father (p. 112):

> Fucked if ah'm gaunnae stey wi that fuckin June eftir the bairn's here. N that cunt's deid if she's made us hurt that fuckin bairn. Ivir since she's been huvin that bairn, she thinks she kin git fuckin lippy wi us. Nae cunt gits fuckin lippy wi me, bairn or no fuckin bairn.

Social isolation

Social isolation refers to "The feeling of being segregated from one's community" (Kalekin-Fishman, 1996: 97). Farrar (2001: 7) suggests that the concept 'community',

> ... is one of the foundational social imaginaries of human society. It is the figure, the image, the form from which we construct our yearning for a meaningful, humane, and just social existence [...]. 'Community', in this sense of the word, is the opposite of the alienation that Marx identified as the actual existence of the human being under capitalism, the opposite of what Durkheim identified as anomie, the opposite of Weber's iron cage.

It is from the community that meaning is constructed, and therefore social isolation will lead to powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness. As explained previously in this study, the very foundation of the self (even the very concept of the self), thinking patterns and language are all constructed through interaction with the community, as Chowers (2004: 4) notes,

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[33] It is notoriously difficult to prove or define rape within a marriage or long-term relationship, but as Warsaw (1988) and Schur (1984) indicates (cf. Neal & Collas, 2000: 54), it certainly happens.

> ... the physical, emotional, and mental attributes of a person are shaped through family interactions, occupational activities, linguistic interaction, and the like – where juridical bulwarks are, for the most part, irrelevant. The liberal faith in the human capacity for an autonomous choice of the good life and for rational deliberation in matter of values is a mere promise; whether it is fulfilled or not hinges on our experiences in a specific reality, which may encompass everything from the instrumental rationality permeating the offices we inhabit during the day to our tendency to equate truth with the statistical findings we find in the evening newspaper.

Ulvinen (1998: 247) defines culture as "a system of meanings that exists, is mediated, and reproduced through individual, subjective actors". Ekerwald's definition (1998: 16) functions along similar lines, noting that

> ... culture is the sum of attitudes belonging to a certain social group where attitude in turn is defined as an inclination or disposition to think, view, and act in certain ways towards relevant objects. This definition emphasizes emotional aspects, within the trinity of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural facets of culture.

Since culture thus provides the framework from which meaning is created, "experiences are always contextual, immediately connected to the interpretation of the world around us" (Ulvinen, 1998: 247). Contextuality then refers "both to the frame of being in the world, and to the conditions for intentional acting in the world. Therefore the term 'context' refers to a social meaning structure, the semantic relationship between an individual and her/ his being in the world (*Ibid.*). In this sense, the terms culture and community can be used in similar ways if culture is defined in Ulvinen's terms, and community is defined in Farrar's terms. As such, culture implies borders/boundaries, which in turn imply an inside/outside distinction and a centre/periphery distinction (cf. Neal & Collas on borders, 2000: 14). This aids our understanding of alienation in terms of social isolation, as Ulvinen (1998: 248) argues,

> The cultural context on which an individual acts always means being 'inside'. Each cultural context is also composed of the presumptions of 'peripheral' and 'core' areas of the walk of life in question. The assumption of being inside signifies that being outside (socially excluded) and being on the fringe is a contextual possibility for each human being. Only permanent marginality produces the possibility of being outside; in alienation and in social exclusion. The terms of otherness and marginality as well as social exclusion or alienation describe the sociological but proportionately traceable

> phenomena of social life. The question then is always one of an individual's being (acting, experiencing) outside *in relation to* being inside in a certain cultural context.

Thus, there has to be a link between the individual and the culture from which he/she is alienated; Georg Simmel (cf. Neal & Collas, 2000: 95) describes isolation as "the unity of nearness and remoteness". "Alienation starts with an individual manoeuvred into a marginal position in relation to what is seen as normal and human" (Ulvinen, 1998: 261). The will to belong to some form of community is part of being human. However, Neal & Collas (2000: 114) note that the modern world provides a fertile landscape for isolation,

> While social isolation is typically experienced as a form of personal stress, its sources are deeply embedded in the social organization of the modern world. With increased isolation and atomization[34], much of our daily interactions are with those who are strangers to us and with whom we lack any ongoing social relationships.

For Seeman (1959: 788), social isolation "is most common in descriptions of the intellectual role, where writers refer to the detachment of the intellectual from popular cultural standards". Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* describes the outsider figure in literature as socially isolated, citing Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* as an example of such an intellectual outsider. He calls *Steppenwolf* "one of the most penetrating and exhaustive studies of the Outsider ever written" (Wilson, 2001: 57). Harry Haller is a jaded intellectual searching for something to make himself whole again, who is described as,

> Ein zu uns, in die Städte und ins Herdenleben verirrter Steppenwolf – schlagender konnte kein andres Bild ihn zeigen, seine scheue Vereinsamung, seine Wildheit, seine Unruhe, sein Heimwee und seine Heimatlosigkeit (Hesse, 1997: 23).
>
> (A wolf of the Steppes that had lost its way and strayed into the towns and the life of the herd, a more striking image could not be found for his shy loneliness, his savagery, his restlessness, his homesickness, his homelessness)

[34] With "atomization" Neal & Collas (2000: 115) intend, "the detachment and discreteness of individuals as they go their separate ways. Under these circumstances, individuals lack a common sense of group identity, belonging, or community. [...] Under conditions of atomization, individuals are unable to identify with the activities of those around them. They feel they do not belong, they are blocked from the rewards shared by others, the gap between their personal needs and those of others is great, and a sense of connection is lacking".

(trans. Creighton, 1965: 22).

The *antihero* (a term from Chandler), is an umbrella term under which Johl (1992a: 13) includes the fool, the clown, the criminal, the eccentric, the outsider, the scapegoat, the sinner, the rebel without a cause, and the hero in the dustbin. All of these literary figures can be considered socially isolated. Johl (1992a: 14) writes that the antihero intentionally distances himself from society as a defensive strategy to protect his position and integrity. Querry in Graham Greene's *A Burnt-Out Case* comes to mind again, fleeing to Africa to escape the life of fame where he had lived. Querry "introduced himself, speaking in an accent which Colin could not place as French or Flemish any more than he could immediately identify the nationality of the name" (2004: 12), confirming his position as outsider who does not belong anywhere. Bisschoff (1992c: 50) notes that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the outsider is that he belongs nowhere, he does not fit into any group or family. And when he is taken into a group, it is nearly always against his wishes and only a temporary situation. Stephen in Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* develops into an outsider as well, after losing his daughter. Once he boarded a train, and "He walked the length of every carriage looking for the most secluded seat. A disruptive minority of humankind regarded journeys, even short ones, as the occasion for pleasant encounters" (*CiT*, 51).

Bisschoff (1992c: 50) contends that this literary issue has its roots in reality, that the outsider as a literary figure is a manifestation of man's increasing isolation in a mechanised world and a decrease in communication with others. Social estrangement is however not confined to an intellectual distance, which the romantic image of the poet promotes, or the modernist view of the writer in the ivory tower. As illustrated by (post-)structuralist[35] and systemic theories of identity formation, the self cannot be *completely* isolated; rather is the self dis-connected, in the sense that the connection is malfunctioning compared to others, but still very real. "The alienated in the isolation sense are those who, like the intellectual, *assign low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society*" (Seeman, 1959: 788) . As Neal & Collas (2000: 95) agree, isolation is not

[35] The line between structuralism and post-structuralism is vague at best.

confined to the intellectual ivory tower, but is also experienced in

> ... the feeling of being separated or cut off from the type of rewards and lifestyles that prevail within one's own society, the yearning for an authentic relatedness to others that goes unfulfilled, and the perception of being a solitary individual, alone and apart from others, yet needing to be wanted by others.

Low-income communities or religious minorities may feel separated from mainstream society, leading to backlashes such as the civil unrest which occurred in French cities in October 2005. The fact that the riots subsequently spread to Belgium, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, Spain, Greece, and Switzerland, illustrates that not only did these communities feel segregated from mainstream society, but also that they found a community in their isolation; they regarded themselves as kindred spirits. Renton's famous speech from *Trainspotting* (ironically later printed on the t-shirt), illustrates this lack of identification and simultaneous dis-identification:

> The fact is that ye jist simply choose tae reject whit they huv tae offer. Choose us. Choose life. Choose morgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fuckin junk food intae yir mooth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yersel in a home, a total fuckin embarassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye've produced. Choose life. Well, ah choose not tae choose life (*Trainspotting*, 187)

The problem of the inability of a small community to integrate with the larger culture has been exacerbated by increasing migrancy following the Second World War, where a migrant labour force was drawn from British colonies and ex-colonies in response to post-war labour shortages, "and as such they, unlike aliens and foreign workers, possessed legal, political and social rights on the same terms as the indigenous population" (Allen, 1998: 327). More recently, the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening of borders within the EU have led to a new influx of migrants, particularly from Eastern European countries to their more well off neighbours. Castles and Miller (cf. Christie, 1997: 1) have argued, "international migration has never been as pervasive, or as socio-economically and politically significant, as it is today. Never before has international migration seemed so pertinent to national security and so connected to conflict and disorder on a global scale".

This has an obvious effect on the individual. Ahponen (1996: 178) calls the migrant 'rootless' because he remains tied to his past and is not readily integrated into his present state. With increasing international migration, this rootlessness is only bound to increase.

Social isolation can also occur in heterosexual relationships, and indeed the institution of marriage can sometimes be the *cause* of isolation, as Neal & Collas (2000: 113) argue,

> In the formation of a heterosexual relationship, boundaries are drawn around the couple as a social unit. These boundaries are frequently defined as exclusive and delineate the framework in which basic gratification and emotional needs can be fulfilled. Such a process is inherent in the development of intimate bonds. Friendship ties weaken as a woman and a man become increasingly self-centered in building an intimate relationship. The problem for the individual is that needs and desires are generated that cannot be fulfilled exclusively within small and intimate groups. In the final analysis, the couple is not a self-contained unit in which all of the wants and desires of the individuals can be fulfilled.

Therefore, "individuals who are moderately involved in communal activities report the highest levels of satisfaction with their marriages" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 116). Forming durable, close attachments is essential,

> To prevent our lives from breaking into fragments and becoming meaningless, we work to develop stable and durable attachments. Lack of commitments, including the severance of social ties, is frequently accompanied by intense feelings of depression and despair. When we are unable to share in the activities of others, we often resort to feelings that we must rely exclusively on our own resources; we feel excluded from opportunities for enjoying the many rewards that membership and belonging may provide (Neal & Collas, 2000: 143).

Examples of social isolation are frequently found in literature. For instance, the narrator in Zoë Strachan's *Negative Space* tells us, "Although he was still doing most of the talking it was enough to have some sensation of we instead of me, some link however tenuous with another human being" (2003: 42). Later, she tells us, "On my breaks I sat there stonily silent, chewing in my thumb nail, setting up an invisible force field around myself" (2003: 65). The narrator goes through the grieving process, similar to what Neal & Collas (2000: 22) refer to when stating, "Social isolation may also surface in the forms of loneliness that accompany the severance

of social attachments", since her brother had recently passed away. In a nightclub she remarks, "Suddenly it seemed that I had no connection with these people, my friends and acquaintances, I had no interest in them" (2003: 105).

Self-estrangement

Moving to a more individual form of alienation, Seeman's last dimension is that of self-estrangement. This is "the psychological state of denying one's own interests – of seeking out extrinsically satisfying, rather than intrinsically satisfying, activities [...]"(Kalekin-Fishman, 1996: 97).

Neal & Collas omit self-estrangement from their discussion, for two reasons. Firstly, they argue (2000: 22) that self-estrangement is derived from the other forms of alienation, as Seeman's (1959: 789) citation of C. Wright Mills illustrates, "Men are estranged from one another as each secretly tries to make an instrument of the other, and in time a full circle is made: One makes an instrument of himself and is estranged from it also". Secondly, Neal & Collas refrain from discussing the fifth dimension "in part from the conceptual difficulty of specifying the nature of the 'self' from which one may be estranged". Seeman admits, "what is being postulated here is some ideal human condition from which the individual is estranged" (Seeman, 1959: 790). This ideal condition is, however, a theoretical construct at best. As Geyer (1996: xxvi) contends, "The age-old and, for many, frustrating question 'Who am I?' cannot be answered anymore, although many still try; or rather, it should be answered differently from one day to the next, and especially from one context to another".

At the heart of the problematic of self-estrangement is the problem of identification with others. As postulated in this study, the self can only exist in relation to its environment, and thus a mis-identification with the environment can lead to self-estrangement. Schacht (1996: 1) voices this problematic early on in his study,

> The materials and means of attaining an identity can only be found outside oneself, in the social and cultural dimensions of one's environing world above all, and they must be internalized through relations of involvement in this

> common domain. One's ability to affirm as well as attain any such identity, moreover, is bound up with relations with others by which it is acknowledged. Yet it is no identity at all if it is not different from other discernible identities one might have and others do have; and one's ability to affirm it requires that one find some way of valorising this difference.

The idea of the autonomous self is vigorously attacked by the constructionist viewpoint, as voiced by Gergen (1996: 121),

> ... in much constructionist writing there simply is no sense of self outside the cultural matrix [...]. That we identify single selves at all – that we attribute to them emotions, intention, logical thought and the like – is entirely a byproduct of cultural relations. There is no pure object or process of mind, no possibility of identifying a logos behind language, because the very language of the culture is constitutive of the self. [...] if all that is internal is an installation of the social, then there is no action that can reflect a state of pure agency. There would be no means by which we could distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic act, for all actions would be inauthentic by virtue of their origins in the artificial tissues of the social. Some actions might be indexed as more expressive of self than others, but this sense of 'true expression' would ultimately be deceiving. What is 'true' is simply more rooted in convention and thus, from the traditional standpoint, all the more alienated.

Using the post-structuralist view postulated by Derrida, the idea of the self can be attacked even further,

> From the more radical writings of Foucault and the social constructionists the critique of authenticity is more brutal: there simply is no inner world that is – or is not – expressed in external action. The inner world is an attributed world, a construction of the self employed in the marketplace of daily affairs. In this case the entire dualistic premise that guides traditional alienation theory is thrown into question. This position is pursued most vigorously, perhaps, in Derrida's critique of what he sees as the logocentric tradition in human letters. For Derrida, all texts are self-referring; they gain their meaning by virtue of their relationship to other texts. To extend the logic to human action, one's words and deeds are not rendered meaningful by virtue of their relationship with a psychological interior. Rather, their meaning is derived from their relationship with other words and deeds (Gergen, 1996: 121).

A relational approach is characteristic of (post-)structuralist approaches, e.g. Derrida's theory of the supplement, which follows from the theory of *différance*. The concept of *différance* is one of Derrida's key insights. The term is coined as a

homophonic pun on Saussure's *difference*, and is derived from the verb *différer,* meaning "to put off", "to defer", "to delay" (Wilden, 1980: 398). Wilden (*Ibid.*) writes that "*Différance*, with an 'a', is the 'after the event' of the post-script (*Nachträglichkeit*), a relation of 'postponement'." Hambidge (1992a, 68) states that *différance* implies 'to differ' in the Saussurain sense of the word, and 'to defer'[36].

In order to define one concept (a *sign*), one is forced to make use of other signs. Currie (cf. Bradford, 1996: 548) writes that, "when we encounter language we encounter only the signifier. When we try to explain the meaning of the signifier we can do so only with reference to other signifiers. In short, there is no such thing as a signified"[37]. A sign therefore refers infinitely to other signs without ever reaching a core, without ever reaching that which was supposedly referred to in the first place. Searching for the underlying meaning behind the signs can be likened to a centreless[38] matreska.

Barthes (cf. Harari, 1979: 75) makes the following distinction between a text and a work: "the work is held in the hand, the text is held in language: it exists only as discourse"[39]. The work is thus the material object which is subject to Newtonian laws (gravity, momentum, etc.), the text not. In this definition of a text (any text, even the self), meaning is infinitely postponed, because a sign refers to other signs

[36] Furthermore, the spelling of *différance* with an 'a' illustrates Derrida's preference of writing above speech as the 'a' can only be distinguished in written form. Traditional philosophy has always considered spoken language to be more original than written language, because written language is effectively signs (letters combined into words) made from signs (verbal signs) - and indeed spoken language pre-empts written language from a historical point of view. By coining the term *différance*, Derrida subverts the prominence of spoken language since the term can only be identified as "not difference" when it is written. He thus questions the idea that spoken language is closer to "an original" than written language, since there is no such original.

[37] The familiar example of a dictionary illustrates this: dictionaries often do not clarify meaning at all, such as in Bosman, Van der Merwe and Hiemstra's 1984 bilingual dictionary, which e.g. translates the English *eczema* with the Afrikaans word *ekseem*. One has then to refer to another dictionary, which will explain the word by using other words. If those words are also unfamiliar, they will have to be looked up, and so forth.

[38] MS Word spell checker denies the existence of this word, as if there always has to be a centre according to the English language (and Microsoft's interpretation thereof).

[39] According to Mukařovský (cf. Bisschoff, 1992a: 15), the text differs from the book, "want het komt voor dat het uiterlijk aanzien van een materieel werk volkomen veranderen, wanneer het in een andere tijd en ruimte gesitueerd wordt" (it happens that the interpretation of a material text changes completely, when it is placed in a different time and space) (own translation). Mukařovský also makes a distinction between artefact and aesthetic object (cf. Du Plooy and Viljoen, 1992: 29), similar to Barthes's distinction between *work* and *text*, the artefact being the concrete material artistic object, whereas the aesthetic object is the realisation of the artefact in a specific experience by a specific individual. Mukařovský (cf. Du Plooy, 1992f: 477) then sees the literary work "not only as made-up of signs, but also as a sign in itself".

and not to anything outside the linguistic system. Derrida's (cf. Young, 1981:29) remark of a text being "a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself" should be understood in terms of this characteristic of language: the signs, which constitute a text, refer endlessly to other signs outside the text; therefore, the text does not exist only from cover to cover. As Barthes (cf. Young, 1981: 39) adds, "any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognizable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture. Any text is a new tissue of past citations".

This takes the concept of *intertextuality* much further than literary influences or references to other writers. Intertextuality in this post-structuralist sense refers to the discourse of a text with its linguistic environment, the community, and the language in which it is created. Note the use of the present tense here – the text is constantly created, not simply written by an author at a particular moment in time. Du Plooy and Viljoen (1992: 30) state that *différance* means that meaning is infinitely postponed, and because of an infinite number of differences from other signs and texts, will always remain relative and uncertain. Meaning is therefore temporally and spatially relative and to a great extent impossible to arrive at conclusively.

This is not merely another guise for historical materialism and does not merely say that a text should be understood within context. This reference to the traces of a text is akin to General Systems Theory, as Viljoen (1992c: 497) remarks, "It is now clear that the boundaries of literary systems should be drawn in such a way that they include the text, its producer and recipient, plus the norms, postulates or conceptual frameworks wherein production and reception takes place"[40]. Rivkin and Ryan (2004: 258) state, "ideas and things are like signs in language; there are no identities, only differences". An idea exists only insofar as it differs from other ideas; Hegel (cf. Wilden, 1980: 465) even wrote, "man exists only in so far as he is opposed". If I have to explain a concept such as *self*, I will have to make use of other concepts (*trustworthy* and *dependable, attractive, pleasant, honourable* etc.) to explain the concept. Thus, what we know as *self* is so because of its relation to other concepts - *self* is a sign and the sign only has meaning because it differs from other signs. Van

[40] Own translation

Straaten (2005: 14)[41] argues, "Where the establishing of identity is concerned, structuralist theory would suggest that the identity of an entity is revealed when we look at the entity in relation to other entities, rather than looking at the entity in isolation".

Vattimo (cf. Ahponen, 1996: 174) states, "the only world that can ever be known is a world of difference". This has particular significance for theories of identity formation if *différance* is "a simultaneous process of deferment in time and difference in space" (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 258). Derrida thus adds a spatial element to the term, although it is still a question of difference in the sense of "not being the same": "to be 'present', a present moment presupposes its difference from other presents" (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 258). Derrida (2004: 287) remarks, "Différance is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be 'present', appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element". Hahn (cf. Van Straaten, 2005: 17) notes that *différance* "has formal requirements for the production of language":

1. all significative marks signify by their difference from other significative marks rather than by their likeness to or by association with phenomena, so that their differing (spacing) is prior to their significative possibilities or functions; and
2. the "presence" of meaning is an always deferred phenomenon as each link in a significative chain, each mark, takes its meaning only in the unfolding of other oppositional marks that never fully explicate themselves by always referring beyond to what is not made present in discourse.

Différance is therefore an epistemological theory, based on Saussure's formulation of *difference* to which a spatial element, "to defer", has been added. Being anti-essentialist, it questions the workings of epistemology and shows how truth can never be discovered underneath appearances – meaning is a matter of surface

[41] In Van Straaten's study (2005: 35), entitled *Equivocations of Power: an Investigation of the Post-Colonial Crisis of Identity in Four Winners of the CNA Literary Award*, she aims to demonstrate that "the impossibility of the pure self, the inevitable contamination of the self by the other, not only has implication for the way we think about the construct of identity, but also the way we think about power, given that authority and power are vested in and depend largely on the position we occupy on the dialectical scale".

without substance.

In the literary text, there is no *ergon* without the *parergon*[42]. There can never be a text (*ergon*) if there is no context (*parergon*), since the meaning of the sign is constituted by its difference from other signs within the linguistic system, which form the *parergon*. The self is a text, just as the literary work is a text also. The *parergon* is the supplement, which is *outside*, as Derrida (cf. Harari, 1979: 33) states:

> The concept of the supplement ... harbours within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence... But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory (*suppléant*) and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place (tient-lieu)*. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. This second signification of the supplement cannot be separated from the first ... Each of the two significations is (in turn) effaced or becomes discreetly vague in the presence of the other. But their common function is shown in this: whether it adds or substitutes itself, the supplement is *exterior* outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it.

If the supplement supplements, it indicates a loss of presence. Therefore, if the self must be supplemented by the social environment (not to mention the biological environment), it indicates an absence in the self. In short, there is no origin to be supplemented – only the supplement itself. Rivkin and Ryan (2004: 259) make the following comment on supplementation:

> [N]o presence or substance of an object or of an idea is complete in itself. Each presence requires supplementation by something else to which it refers or relates and from which it differs. [...] if one tries to grasp the presence of something, one encounters a difference, not something substantial. One term, an other, slips in through a differential relation and takes the place of the first. As a result, one must say that there is no 'first'. The second term takes its place immediately because the 'first' depends on its difference from the second to 'be' anything.

[42] Johnson (1981: 226) mentions the *parergon*, a word taken by Derrida from Immanuel Kant, which is "the supplement to the 'ergon' (work) - against, beside, above and beyond it". In the visual arts, this would signify the frame. In terms of identity formation, the self is the *ergon* and the society he/she lives in the *parergon* – framing the self as it were.

Only in the event of an absence (partial or total) is it necessary to supplement, thus supplementation indicates loss (partial or total) of presence. There is no self without the social environment, as Schacht (1996: 6) notes: "all human identity or selfhood that is not merely physiological[43] is grounded in (if not simply a function of) relations of involvement in one's environing world, ranging from activities involving objects to interactions with others, participation in sociocultural forms of life, and operation in symbol systems."

Langman & Scatamburlo (1996: 130) argue, "Post-modern insights have astutely criticised essentialism[44] – a presumed existence of inherent forms of selfhood – and have noted that subjects are historical products created in and through a variety of ideologically based discursive and disciplinary practices." Identity is rather formed within an environment, and "social life is characterized by the circulation and exchange of forms [or signs] to which convention has given meaning" (Ward, 1997: 83). And signs, as previously illustrated, derive their meaning based on common consent; there is no relation between the sign and its meaning. The system of expression – hairstyles, clothing, music, friends, etc. – supplements the identity and replaces it like the supplement supplements. These cultural signs serve to draw boundaries between *us* and *them*, in other words, to enhance coherence by creating identity in opposition:

> In creating categories, members are separated from nonmembers, insiders from outsiders, comrades from strangers, friends from enemies, and 'those who are with us from those who are against us'. The bases for such classifications are grounded in tradition, in historical precedent, and in established ways of doing things. As such, borders are selective, arbitrary, and conventional. They are, in effect, socially constructed forms of reality that become reified and endowed with objective, factual quantities (Neal & Collas, 2000: 17).

For instance, Arens (cf. Favazza, 1996: 57) writes in *The Man-Eating Myth* (1979) that the exotic image of cannibalism has been embraced by modern civilization in "a never-ending search for the primitive in order to give meaning to the concept of

[43] Schacht does not mention it here, but even the physiological depends on the environment, as argued by Von Bertalanffy (1969).
[44] The anti-essentialist view of the construction of identity is the "opposition to the idea that people have a timeless, universal core which ultimately explains their actions" (Ward, 1997: 123).

civilization".

In the twenty-first century world, the media is the main transmitter of images. The system of expression - hairstyles, clothing, music, peer group, etc. - supplements the identity and replaces it. These images are endowed with cultural values and control the way reality is perceived: "we can experience the world only through a kind of filter of preconceptions and expectations fabricated in advance by a culture swamped by images" (Ward, 1997: 60). For instance, how much of the phrase "I love you" is infected with the image the media has portrayed, with the countless times this phrase was heard on soaps, movies, in pop songs, or advertisements? Saying it to someone necessarily carries the *traces* of those past incidents (and the future occurrences), determining the way it is said, the context in which it is said, and the meaning one attaches to it. Is it then still authentic? If a character on Big Brother says it to someone, is it then still depicting reality, i.e. Reality TV? Or is it the fictional mass media that has saturated Western culture so completely that the media has become indistinguishable from "real life"? In other words, the media has become self-referential, as Ward (1997: 66) phrases it, "reference can only be to simulation and not to some pure, unadulterated reality". If the phrase "I love you" occurs in Reality TV, it will make reference to fictional instances – not to "real life", regardless of what it pretends. Baudrillard (cf. Ward, 1997: 62) writes, "images precede the real to the extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction." This echoes the earlier discussion on texts endlessly referring to what lies outside the covers of a book, deferring the presence of the signified. Gouws (cf. Schlesinger, 1988: 208) states that representation is a problem for deconstruction, because language can no longer be seen as reflecting reality, and there no longer exists anything outside language to which the signifiant refers – everything exists in and through language, and is constituted by language.

The effect is, in Baudrillard's (cf. Ward, 1997: 59) words, "the image 'bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum'"[45]. Angela Carter, in *The Lady of the House of Love* (*The Bloody Chamber*, 2006: 108) describes a character

[45] The term 'simulacrum' refers to "phenomena such as life-style models that bear little relation to actual social existence but which are produced and reproduced throughout the media and in particular the entertainment industry" (Mengham, 1999: 8).

as "a cave full of echoes, she is a system of repetitions, she is a closed circuit." Baudrillard's statement applies to the entire concept of "self" – not just to a single phrase uttered by the self. The self is defined in terms of what one does for a living, what one wears, what food one eats, one's religion, one's opinions, etc. All these are coloured by the images inherited from the media, from talk shows, sitcoms, movies, popular music, etc. But where these were supposed to be expressions of the self, they become constitutive of the self. The decision to eat only vegetables may be an expression of one's opinions, but also becomes part of who one is – a vegetarian (even given a name; one is a *something*). It is a way of expressing oneself, but more importantly, of defining oneself in opposition to others by making a clear distinction between *us* and *them*. As Van Straaten (2005: 14) writes, "when discussing identity, one could say that a structure, particularly one consisting of binary oppositions, allows one to define the self by means of comparison or the establishing of similarity to and difference from others".

Images help form the codes by which we judge ourselves and others, the codes that attach a particular value to a diet, a pair of shoes, a car, or living in a particular neighbourhood. Scholes (cf. Ohlhoff, 1992: 221) remarks,

> Whenever we 'make sense' of an event it is because we posses a system of thought, a code, that enables us to do so ... Human languages are the most developed instances of coding that we know, but codes exist that are sublinguistic (facial expressions, for instance). Interpretation of complex human utterances involves the appropriate use of a number of codes simultaneously.

This cultural valuation of the sign is essential to the understanding of structuralist and post-structuralist theories of identity formation, since the sign only gathers meaning within a context. Identity (and reality) is not something to be discovered, depicted or expressed; the signs used to "depict or express" identity are the very signs which constitute it. Deleuze (cf. Harari, 1979: 53) writes, "meaning is never principle or origin, it is product. It is not something to be discovered, restored, or reused, it is something to be produced by new mechanisms". The image supplements and becomes the individual, deferring the presence of any signified or "essence" that might have been.

It is for this reason that Neal & Collas avoid Seeman's final aspect of

alienation, for the perceptions surrounding identity formation have changed significantly since Seeman published his writings on the subject. This rethinking of identity has a direct implication for alienation research, as Gergen (1996: 122) argues,

> Traditional alienation literature often posits the individual as separate from the social – as either cut away from a necessary lodgement or buried within a social sphere that prevents self realization. However, as much of the literature on the autonomous self suggests, this view is deeply flawed. As outlined here, this view is effectively replaced by one in which the individual is inherently a social agent. To the extent that the world is meaningful at all, the individual is a culturally interpolated being.

Gergen (1996: 125) argues that the very concept of alienation should therefore be rethought, "the traditional view of self versus society is deeply problematic and should be replaced by a conception of the self as always already immersed in relatedness. On this account, the individual's lament of 'not belonging' is partially a byproduct of traditional discourses themselves".

Since this systemic/constructionist/post-structuralist view of the self is postulated in the current study, it would be pointless to analyse contemporary British fiction in terms of self-estrangement.

Section B: The Contemporary British Novel

Introduction to contextualisation: Systems and literature

> Information without context is noise.
> Anthony Wilden (1980: 11)

As Whorf indicates, observation is greatly influenced by language. Fearing (cf. Von Bertalanffy, 1968: 222) sums up Whorf's hypothesis:

> [T]he commonly held belief that the cognitive processes of all human beings possess a common logical structure which operates prior to and independently of communication through language, is erroneous. It is Whorf's view that the linguistic patterns themselves determine what the individual perceives in this world and how he thinks about it. Since these patterns vary widely, the modes of thinking and perceiving in groups utilizing different linguistic systems will result in basically different world views.

Post-structuralist theory sees the role of the reader in terms of codification and, like an open system, a code that interacts with other codes, as De Jong (1992: 250) contends,

post-structuralist theory sees the role of the reader as linking the textual with other codes. The reader is the site of intertextuality and multicodification because he is himself a text or code. The text is no longer seen as something that is filled in with meaning or structured by the reader, but something to which codes are added.

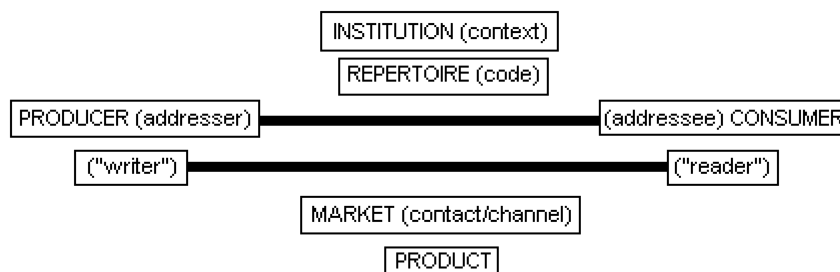
Mukařovský (cf. Rossouw, 1992: 428) describes a work of art in terms of a sign, indicating that it gathers meaning in a similar way to the functions of a Saussurian sign, "The work of art manifests itself as a sign in its inner structure, in its relation to reality, and also in its relation to society, to its creator and to its recipients".

Reception theory also sees the text as a sign which functions within a specific historical communicative system, and accentuates the active role played by the reader in the creation of meaning, as Rossouw (1992: 427) argues, it is not a

question of passively receiving the literary text, but of reproduction, conversion, adapting, assimilation and concretising the text by the reader.

Rossouw (1992: 427) explains Mukařovský's distinction between artefact and aesthetic object, arguing that the distinction lies in that the artefact is the material aesthetical object which is fixed, e.g. the printed letters on the page. The aesthetic object is how it manifests in the experience of the reader. The process by which the artefact is converted into the aesthetic object is called concretization (*Ibid.*). The artefact itself exists within a material system where its production is influenced by technological factors (e.g., the introduction of the printing press in England in the 15th century), economic factors, political factors (e.g., political instability in Africa reducing the number of texts that can be produced while a civil war is being fought), etc. The aesthetic object is influenced by the linguistic code, ideological frame of reference, etc.

Even-Zohar (1990: 31) has drawn up a model of some of the literary systems involved in the production of a text, based on Roman Jacobson's model, and can be presented diagrammatically as such (with Jacobson's terms in brackets):



Even-Zohar (1990: 34) explains his model,

> Thus, a CONSUMER may 'consume' a PRODUCT produced by a PRODUCER, but in order for the 'product' (such as 'text') to be generated, a common REPERTOIRE must exist, whose usability is determined by some INSTITUTION. A MARKET must exist where such goods can be transmitted. None of the factors enumerated can be described to function in isolation, and the kind of relations that may be detected run across all possible axes of the scheme.

These insights will be elaborated in this section. The interaction between these elements is essential in the understanding of how the text functions. Bearing in mind Whorf's hypothesis, deciding where the *repertoire* ends and the *consumer* begins, or where the *institution* ends and the *repertoire* begins, etc., is an act of punctuation. Punctuation is "a term indicating a particular angle, or view, which is taken by an individual and from which position a message is interpreted" (Vorster, 2003: 9). Wilden (1980: 111) writes, "to call any system open or closed, or to call it informational or energetic, or to call the observer a participator, are all acts of punctuation, if at a more abstract level than the punctuation which occurs in the 'observation' itself". This is worth bearing in mind, for these boundaries between systems are all arbitrarily assigned, as Wilden (1980: 111) notes, "The relation of 'text' and 'context' is one of punctuation, for it involves the problem of boundaries". Yet boundaries are essential for any scientific study, "Given the omnipresent nature of contextual relations, it is obvious that all theories of relationship require a certain artificial closure" (Wilden, 1980: 114).

The applicability of systems theory to the study of literature is highlighted by Venter (2002: 36), "Literatuur kan as 'n sisteem benader word omdat dit bestaan uit verskillende entiteite wat in relasie staan tot ander entiteite, naamlik tot die entiteite binne 'n teks; tot ander entiteite in die literêre sisteem en tot entiteite in die alledaagse werklikheid" (Literature can be approached as a system because it consists of different entities that stand in relation to other entities, namely to the entities within a text; to other entities in the literary system and to entities in everyday reality) (own translation).

According to Harari (1979: 78), a literary work finds itself in a process of filiation, which is postulated by three things,

1. a *determination* of the work by the outside world,
2. a *consecution* of works among themselves, and
3. an *allocation* of the work to its author.

Harari and Venter's conceptions about the relations of texts to their environments therefore agree on two points, namely a) a text communicates with the physical world in which it is created, and b) a text communicates with other texts within a literary system.

For the sake of simplicity, Harari's third point can be seen as part of the communication with the physical world in which it is created, since its allocation to a specific material author influences its understanding to some extent[46]. Venter sees the entities (internal systems) within a text in a similar way to the views contained in Wilden's comment (1980: 96, see above) about the two black boxes containing black boxes within them. This researcher therefore follows Venter's three systemic levels, namely internal systems, the literary system, and the socio-historical system. Malan (1992: 187) groups the socio-historical together with the literary system, saying that "Die buiteteks kan sowel nie-literêr (histories, sosiaal, kultureel) as literêr wees" (the outside text can be non-literary (historical, social, cultural) or literary[47]). In this researcher's view, the present study however favours Venter's tripartite distinction.

1. Internal systems

In the process of reading a text, the reader builds up a picture of what the text is and what it will become. With every passing chapter, the addition of new information influences the understanding of that which came before, as De Jong (1992: 249) argues,

> Volgens die fenomenologiese model verwerk die leser spontaan en passief teksdata wat geredelik herleibaar is tot vir hom bekende betekenissisteme of kodes, totdat die kodes deur tekstuele vervlegting onderbreek word en hy tot aktiewe betekenisvorming gedwing word, en so by die teksvorming betrek word. Elke nuwe betekenisvorming wysig die reeds gelese en geïnterpreteerde teks wat as geheue in die leser aanwesig is en skep verwagtings t.o.v. die daaropvolgende nie-gelese teks.
>
> (According to the phenomenological model, the reader spontaneously and passively converts text data into what is for him familiar meaning systems or codes, until the codes are interrupted by textual interlacement and he is forced into active meaning creation, and so drawn into the creation of the text. Every new meaning creation adjusts the already read and interpreted text that is present in the reader as memory and creates expectancies in terms of the upcoming unread text)[48].

[46] For instance, noting that John Banville won the Man Booker Prize in 2005 for *The Sea*, creates an expectation of the text that an unknown author cannot expect.
[47] Own translation.
[48] Own translation.

For instance, in David Lambkin's *Night Jasmine Man*, the book opens with a sniper's description of his target and her company, but he shoots only the driver of the vehicle. This creates the expectation that the scene will be explained, and that the target will play a central role in the novel. As the story progresses, more information becomes known, leading the reader to re-evaluate his earlier perception of the incident.

2. The literary system

Any text functions within a literary system, which Even-Zohar (1990: 37) calls "the institution". Under this term, he includes

> …at least part of the producers, "critics" (in whatever form), publishing houses, periodicals, clubs, groups of writers, government bodies (like ministerial offices and academies), educational institutions (schools of whatever level, including universities), the mass media in all its facets, and more. […] This includes not only overt merchandise-exchange institutions like bookshops, book clubs, or libraries, but also all factors participating in the semiotic ("symbolic") exchange involving these, and with other linked activities.

All of these serve to provide the reader with a code or a system of symbols, which informs the reading of the text. Malan (1992: 187) notes that, "Die literêre teks is nl. soos 'n 'mosaïek van sitate' opgebou waarin 'n onbeperkte aantal vroeëre en tydgenootlike tekste opgeneem en verwerk is" (the literary text is constructed like a 'mosaic of citations' in which an unlimited number of earlier and contemporary texts are taken up and processed[49]). Even-Zohar (1990: 36) states that we

> …simply consume a certain quantity of literary fragments, digested and transmitted by various agents of culture and made an integral part of daily discourse. Fragments of old narratives, idioms and allusions, parables and stock language, all, and many more, constitute the living repertoire stored in the warehouse of our culture.

As postulated throughout this study, meaning is constituted by the context. Wilden

[49] Own translation.

(1980: 219) states, "Without the reciprocity of the code, the message is received as 'noise'"; in order for a message to be interpreted correctly, the sender and receiver must share a common code, as the following cartoon by Gary Larson illustrates (www.go.to/funpic),

Moses parting his hair

Without knowledge of the Bible and Moses' trek through the Red Sea, the picture makes no sense. The same applies to literature, which is after all only a specific instance of communication, as Anderson (Schlesinger, 1988: 198) states: "Reading is a process in which information from the text and knowledge possessed by the reader act together to produce meaning." Venter (2002: 36) argues,

> For literary communication to succeed a sender (writer) and receiver (reader) are required. Both these agents use a code to interpret the message. The greater the similarity or overlapping of codes (or conventions) between sender and receiver, the more the interpreted message will correspond to the intended message. Meaning creation and intelligibility are therefore,

amongst other things, reliant on codes or conventions[50].

According to De Jong (1992: 249), a reader invests a real situation within a text by connecting meaning systems from a historical and cultural reality with the text. Van Boheemen (cf. Malan, 1992: 187) adds, "De tekst is namelijk niet betekenisvol omdat zij een bepaalde structuur bezit, maar ... omdat de tekst zich verhoudt tot andere teksten en hun betekenissen binnen een systeem. De betekenis van de tekst is het resultaat van verschil én overeenkomst met andere teksten" (The text is not meaningful because it has a specific structure, but because the text is related to other texts and their meanings within a system. The meaning of the text is the result of difference and similarity with other texts[51]).

This relationship with other texts not only influences the specific understanding of the text, but it is also what defines a text as literary or not. Jurij Tynyanov (Bennett, 1979: 57) writes that whether or not a text is considered literary depends on its "differential quality, that is, on its relationship with both literary and extra-literary orders". Bennett (1979: 59) adds,

> Literariness resides, not in the text, but in the relations of *intertextuality* inscribed within and between texts. It is not a 'thing', an essence which the text possesses, but a function which the text fulfils. And whether or not a particular text fulfils this function depends, in part, *on determinations which are situated outside and independently of that text* .

Tynyanov sees a literary work as a hierarchical system of forms and norms, with literary change as a conflict between different systems. In every system, he sees one or more dominant entities, which regulate the structure of the system. The system changes through the attrition of the dominant entities and its subsequent replacement by less dominant entities (Viljoen, 1992c: 495). For this reason, Shukman (cf. Malan, 1992: 188) noted, "The work of literature should be seen, indeed can only be seen, in terms of the norms, traditions and expectations that inform it". As such, Even-Zohar (1990: 25) writes that the canon has a centre, which is in constant dialogue with the periphery:

[50] Own translation
[51] Own translation.

> [P]eripheral properties are likely to penetrate the centre once the capacity of the centre (i.e., the repertoire of the centre) to fulfil certain functions has been weakened (Šklovskij's second law). […] [I]nterference often takes place via peripheries. When this process is ignored, there is simply no explanation for the appearance and function of new items in the repertoire. Semiliterary texts, translated literature, children's literature - all those strata neglected in current literary studies – are indispensable objects of study for an adequate understanding of how and why transfers occur, within systems as well as among them.

Hans Robert Jauss's conception of the horizon of expectation is closely related to views propagated by Tynyanov and Even-Zohar. Jauss took the term horizon of expectation from the sociologist Karl Mannheim (Rossouw, 1992: 427). By this term he refers to the expectation that the reader has of a text in terms of

1. the relevant genre norms that he is familiar with,
2. his knowledge and experience of already read texts from the same period; and
3. the opposition between text and reality, i.e. the distinction between the poetic and practical function of language.

He distinguishes between two main horizons of expectation (cf. Rossouw, 1992: 428), the one contained within the system of the work itself and the one brought to the text by the reader. The former recalls what was said under the previous section, *Internal systems*, and the expectations built up as the text is read. The latter refers to what Malan (1992: 197) calls the "buiteteks" (external text) and recalls the statement by Umberto Eco (cf. Ohlhoff, 1992: 223), "Every character (or situation) of a novel is immediately endowed with properties that the text does not directly manifest and that the reader has been 'programmed' to borrow from the treasury of intertextuality". In every story, another tale is present. This makes most Hollywood films (in particular romantic comedies and action movies) incredibly predictable, where the ending can often be forecast within the first five minutes. McCormick (Schlesinger, 1988: 23) writes, "historical and cultural awareness influence [the reader's] understanding of literary and linguistic conventions," and the better a specific genre is known, the more predictable a story can become since the horizon of expectation is so much better ingrained in the mind of the reader (viewer).

As with Tynyanov, the emphasis is on innovation; for Tynyanov the dominant

entities are worn away and replaced by less dominant ones, for Jauss the horizon of expectation has to be transgressed. According to Jauss (cf. Rossouw, 1992: 428), it is important for the literary or aesthetic value of a text that there be a distance between the structure of the text and the horizon of expectation of the reader (or group of readers) at the time a text is published.

Jauss's view clearly echoes the view of the Russian Formalists; Rivkin and Ryan (2004: 5) summarise the Formalist conception of *ostranenija*: "For literature to be literature, it must constantly defamiliarize the familiar, constantly evolve new procedures for story-telling or poetry-making". Viktor Šklovskij (cf. Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 16) writes,

> ... art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.

As such, a text that does not break through the horizon of expectation is not "defamiliarizing the familiar", and in the view of the Russian Formalists or Jauss, is not a *literary* text. Rossouw (1992: 428) claims that, if there is no significant distance between the structure of the text and the horizon of expectation of the reader(s), then the particular text comes closer to popular literature. For evaluation, therefore, the interaction of a text with its literary system is essential if it is to be canonized, considered for literary prizes, and so forth. Evaluation thus depends on how a text differs from the other texts within a given system. As Fokkema & Kunne-Ibsch (cf. Du Plooy, 1992g: 567) argue, "The aesthetic function is the force that creates the aesthetic value. [...] Aesthetic value is not a static concept, but a process, that evolves against the background of the actual artistic tradition and in relation to the ever-changing cultural and social context".

Even-Zohar (1990: 90) claims that innovation has only recently become a necessary quality of "good" or "proper" literature, as part of a more general socio-cultural ideology:

> The principle of domination by innovation, popularly believed to be an inherent feature of such activities as literature, is relatively recent, as it was

> introduced by the Romantic Age in correlation with the changing *socio-cultural* norms of the time. Since it then became apparent that, in any field of social activity, one could gain power and control (position, influence, income) by offering novelties rather than by demonstrating proficiency in mastering a time-honoured repertoire, literature managed to be among the very first semiotic activities not only to conform to the new ideology, but to participate in its very formulation and propagation.

Defining 'contemporary'

Any classification system, any attempt to periodise literary works, is an act of punctuation, where punctuation is "a term indicating a particular angle, or view, which is taken by an individual and from which position a message is interpreted" (Vorster, 2003: 9). It is worth bearing this in mind, since the classification "contemporary" is partly arbitrary, however useful.

Harvey (1999: 79) says that the publication of *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) by the American novelist Thomas Pynchon signalled the start of the 'contemporary' period in international fiction. Harvey (1999: 80) writes, "it is a novel that can sum up the whole new launch of fantastic exuberant, fabulatory fiction that came in the late 1960s and early 1970s". He bases his distinction between literature written before *Gravity's Rainbow* and thereafter on the particular depiction of the movement of time and space that the novel portrays, similar to the movement of a camera from scene to scene. According to him, the novel was published within a context of new literary publications that differed markedly from what had come before[52]. Even though Harvey refers to the international literary scene, it has bearing upon the British literary scene as well, since "It was during the 1970s that British fiction began to interact more regularly with the modes of foreign (chiefly French, Eastern European and Latin American) writing practices" (Mengham, 1999: 1). International trends were echoed in British fiction, for reasons that Schacht (1996: 3) notes,

> The globe has shrunk, economic life has become internationalized and

[52] This is, incidentally, also the year that saw the publication of Martin Amis's *The Rachel Papers*.

> popular culture is following suit, tourism is everywhere, travel is routine, and great numbers of people are on the move, for reasons both good and dismaying. Successive waves in communications technology are further rapidly eroding the conditions of isolation upon which the local acculturation process has long depended.

According to a Dutch satirical TV program,

> The Internet furthers international contacts among people of different persuasions and cultures, thus leading to international understanding and mutual feelings of solidarity and brotherhood. This is clearly proven by the fact that in nations with relatively few Internet connections – such as, for example, Bosnia and Rwanda – people have nothing better to do than bash each other's skulls (Geyer, 1996: xiii).

The availability of air travel, communications and information technology, as well as the increased migrations of peoples, saw the easier distribution of ideas that made the British novel more 'international'. On the other hand, political developments in Britain (as discussed in the following section) provided the material for a more 'British' literature, such as the issue of the emerging 'underclass' as depicted by Irvine Welsh, and the entrepreneurial spirit of characters such as Keith Talent in Martin Amis's *London Fields* (although his exploits are rather twisted and immoral). It is against the backdrop of political developments in Britain that Childs (2005: 9) argues, referring to the 1980s, "It is a striking phenomenon that the most politically repressive decade in post-war British history should also be the one in which fiction was believed to have undergone a renaissance". A new group of novelists emerged in the 1970s in Britain, who had not experienced the Second World War at first hand, who grew up with "a decreasing division between 'high' and popular culture, with an awareness of the literary tradition alongside the new experiences that ranged from television and rock music to the Welfare State and the Cold War" (Childs, 2005: 3).

The 1983 Book Marketing Council's list of the "Best Twenty Young British Novelists" included Pat Barker, Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, Graham Swift, Julian Barnes, and Kazuo Ishiguro (Childs, 2005: 1). In 1993, the editor of *Granta*, Bill Buford, produced a new list with the help of A. S. Byatt, Salman Rushdie, and John Mitchinson of Waterstone's booksellers. A new list was compiled by *Granta* in 2003, and this is a comparison of the authors included in all three (Childs,

2005: 3):

1983	**1993**	**2003**
Martin Amis	Iain Banks	Monica Ali
Pat Barker	Louis de Bernières	Nicola Barker
Julian Barnes	Anne Billson	Rachel Cusk
Ursula Bentley	Tibor Fischer	Susan Elderkin
William Boyd	Esther Freud	Peter Ho Davies
Buchi Emecheta	Alan Hollinghurst	Philip Hensher
Maggie Gee	Kazuo Ishiguro	A. L. Kennedy
Kazuo Ishiguro	A. L. Kennedy	Hari Kunzru
Alan Judd	Philip Kerr	Toby Litt
Adam Marsh-Jones	Hanif Kureishi	David Mitchell
Ian McEwan	Adam Lively	Andrew O'Hagan
Shiva Naipaul	Adam Marsh-Jones	David peace
Philip Norman	Candia McWilliam	Dan Rhodes
Christopher Priest	Lawrence Norfolk	Ben Rice
Salman Rushdie	Ben Okri	Rachel Seiffert
Lisa de Terán	Caryl Philips	Zadie Smith
Clive Sinclair	Will Self	Adam Thwirlwell
Graham Swift	Nicolas Shakespeare	Alan Warner
Rose Tremain	Helen Simpson	Sarah Waters
A. N. Wilson	Jeanette Winterson	Robert McLiam Wilson

An enormous amount of fiction is published in Britain every year, "The number of works of fiction published each year doubled between 1950 and 1990; currently, 100 new British novels are released each week" (Childs, 2005: 3). Isolating a few novelists thus poses considerable difficulties, and "Any selection of contemporary novelists is likely to be partial and in some ways arbitrary" (Childs, 2005: 19). The

following is a comparison between the authors discussed by Childs (2005) in *Contemporary novelists: British fiction since 1970*, and Lane, Mengham and Tew (2003) in *Contemporary British fiction*. The British authors discussed by Mengham (1999) in *An introduction to contemporary fiction: International writing since 1970* have also been included, although he deals with English authors who are not necessarily British, such as the American writer Don DeLillo.

Childs	**Lane et al.**	**Mengham**
Martin Amis	Martin Amis	Martin Amis
Pat Barker	Pat Barker	
Julian Barnes		
Angela Carter	Angela Carter	
Kazuo Ishiguro	Kazuo Ishiguro	
Hanif Kureishi	Hanif Kureishi	
Ian McEwan		Ian McEwan
Salman Rushdie	Salman Rushdie	Salman Rushdie
Zadie Smith	Zadie Smith	
Graham Swift	Graham Swift	Graham Swift
Irvine Welsh	Irvine Welsh	
Jeanette Winterson	Jeanette Winterson	Jeanette Winterson
	Jim Crace	
	Ian Sinclair	
	Will Self	
	A. L. Kennedy	
	James Kelman	
	Caryl Philips	
		William Burroughs

It is clear from this comparison that deciding which authors are the most important is an arbitrary process. However, there is some overlap and indeed all three texts deal with Amis, Rushdie, Swift, and Winterson. Even though Wheeler (1999: 27) calls

Christine Brooke-Rose "Britain's most important experimental novelist of the late twentieth century", her absence from the *Granta* lists and her omission by Childs and Lane et al. suggests that she is a victim of this arbitrary selection process. Childs chooses authors born between 1940 and 1950 (with the exception of Zadie Smith), but who made their proper debut in the 1970s. Other important writers producing key works after 1970, such as William Golding, Iris Murdoch, and Anthony Burgess, published a first novel in the 1950s and therefore belong to an older generation (Childs, 2005: 19). This would immediately disqualify Brooke-Rose, since her debut was made in the 1950s. The same applies to William Burroughs, who published his first full-fledged work, *Junkie*, in 1953, followed by *The Naked Lunch* in 1959. In general, it can thus be said that 'contemporary' fiction refers to fiction after 1970, but which authors are included depends on the methodology employed by the researcher.

This researcher follows Childs (2005), since his methodology fits the *Granta* lists and the authors he studies overlap with those discussed by other scholars, legitimizing his selection. It seems sensible to discuss only new authors who did not produce works from an earlier period; this avoids ambiguities where otherwise part of their oeuvre may belong to the 'modern' (preceding) period, and another part to contemporary literature. Unfortunately, it is neither possible to discuss *all* the foremost contemporary novelists here, nor to discuss them in complete detail, since each author has a substantial oeuvre by himself. Some specialist works will be referred to for potential further reading, such as David Malcolm's *Understanding Ian McEwan* (2002).

One of the major differences between 'modern' and 'contemporary' fiction is the link with capitalism and consumer culture, as accentuated by Lodge (cf. Childs, 2005: 17),

> It is a commonplace that the literary novel acquired a new commercial significance in the 1980s, and it is no coincidence that it was a decade dedicated to Enterprise culture and the deregulation and internationalisation of high finance. ... Prestigious literary writers became valuable assets, like brand names in the commodity market, worth far more than the income they actually generated. ... The literary bestseller was born, a concept that would have seemed a contradiction in terms to F. R. and Q. D. Leavis.

Martin Amis's conflict with the media in 1995 illustrated the celebrity nature of the contemporary author, where Amis's financial issues and even dental bills were discussed in the media (Childs, 2005: 37). The notorious 'Salman Rushdie Affair' also brought the celebrity author into the limelight of the media, and even brought book burning to the streets of England. Lodge (cf. Childs, 2005: 17) explains the modern situation,

> Acceptance for publication is only the beginning of a campaign involving sales and marketing departments, design teams, bookshop tours, interviews, production schedules, and an eye on the movie rights as much as the calendar of book prizes. The Death of the author in the academy coincided with the birth of the modern literary celebrity in the media. While some writers recoil from this whole process, few manage to avoid it entirely, and the creative writer, a term which itself now smacks of institutionalisation, creative writing commonly being a course rather than a solitary activity, is encouraged to consider themselves as 'professionals in a business partnership with their publishers'.

A major factor in contemporary fiction, from an economical point of view, is the literary award. Richard Todd (cf. Gilbert, 1999: 219) states,

> Whatever the truth of claims that by the mid 1980s a Booker winner might expect up to 80,000 extra hardback sales as a direct result of the prize itself, the point such claims illustrate is the fact that at some stage between the late 1970s and the mid 1980s the Booker laureate's dividends, direct or indirect, came dramatically to exceed the monetary value of the prize itself.

Literary awards mean more sales because it recommends to readers what is 'good' and what not, further putting the literary work in the context of business and capitalism. One example, however, of a Booker flop was James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994), which did not sell as many copies as hoped for.

Defining 'British'

Childs (2005: 22) notes that Benedict Anderson

> ... has argued that print capitalism, Protestantism, and vernacular languages allowed the 'imagining' of the modern nation, and remembering that national fiction is an imagined rather than an empirical phenomenon, reinforced by capitalism and the state infrastructure, is important in trying to describe the

British novel.

As with the classification 'contemporary', what is considered 'British' is an act of punctuation. Simply put, "On one level 'British' fiction is simply a matter of passports and residency, just as it is one of language" (Childs, 2005: 20). For instance: David Mitchell is in a sense not a British writer because he has spent considerable time in Japan and thus did not make his career in Britain (this was the criteria used by Merritt Moseley in *British Novelists since 1960*) (Childs, 2005: 20). Martin Amis has spent two and a half years in Uruguay, but has made his career in Britain and is thus considered 'British'. W. G. Sebald was not born in Britain, was a permanent British resident since 1970, but did not write in English and can therefore not be considered a 'British' author. In order to be considered 'British', an author need not be born in Britain – Joan Brady was born in California, but relocated to Britain and won the Whitbread novel award (now the Costa Book Award[53]), which is open to British writers only (*Ibid.*). Childs (2005) does not include Irish writers such as Brian Moore, Roddy Doyle, Patrick McCabe, William Trevor and John Banville, because "they are more than worth a separate book and the resurgence of Irish literature in recent decades has made for a distinctive literary scene with [...] different if parallel concerns" (Childs, 2005: 20). It is this researcher's suspicion that, in the future, with the resurging Scottish literature and with looming Scottish independence, Scottish writers such as Irvine Welsh, Alasdair Gray, Janice Galloway, Iain Banks, Alan Warner, A. L. Kennedy, Zoë Strachan and Booker prize winner (1994) James Kelman may be excluded from British fiction on similar grounds in the future.

In *Concepts of Criticism* (1963), René Wellek (cf. Schutte, 1992: 373) defines the literary period as, "a regulative concept, a system of norms dominating a specific time, whose rise and eventual decline it would be possible to trace and which we can set clearly apart from the norms of the periods that precede and follow it." Wellek is of the opinion that a period is neither a metaphysical entity nor a mere name (*Ibid.*), i.e. somewhere between an arbitrary endeavour of defining boundaries and a clearly defined system. In forming distinctions between literary periods, according to Schutte (*Ibid.*), it is not easy to separate one period precisely from what came before

[53] In 2006, Costa Coffee (a franchise coffee shop) took over sponsorship of the Whitbread Awards.

or after, because even though a dominant system of norms may be present in one system, they may also be present in others to some extent.

The literary period can be seen as an open system, interacting with other literary systems, in chronological terms both horizontally (contemporary literary systems of other nations) and vertically (earlier periods, and bearing the traces of future periods). Of course, the literary system also interacts with other systems, e.g. the socio-economic or political.

Part of the process of defining periods, is the generation-issue. A new generation of writers emerges, and "Die vernuwing wat deur hierdie skrywers meegebring word, kan as epogmakend beskryf word; so 'n generasie druk duidelik sy stempel af op die periode waarbinne hulle optree" (*Ibid.*) (the innovation which comes with these writers, can be described as epoch-making; such a generation puts its stamp clearly on the period they function in[54]). This is the basis of the distinction drawn by Childs (2005), where the date of birth of the authors along with the date of his/her first publication is used to define the 'contemporary' generation. Any unity that there may be in the writings of a specific generation, should be explained by, in Kamerbeek's words (cf. Schutte, 1992: 373), "eenheid door gemeenschap van situatie" (unity through common situation)[55], i.e. the economic, political, personal, and literary situations that inform their writing. Here the setting in Thatcherite (and Blairite) Britain provides a common basis for contemporary British novelists, along with the information revolution of the post-modern world that promotes information exchange between national literatures. However, since these contemporary novelists come from vastly different backgrounds, it comes as no surprise that their styles and views differ immensely. In line with post-structuralist thought and the post-modern context, there is no homogeneity of styles that binds all contemporary British works together. David Lodge, in *The Practice of Writing*, considers pluralism one of the defining characteristics of contemporary British fiction. He writes (cf. Childs, 2005: 17), "The astonishing variety of styles on offer today, as if an aesthetic supermarket, includes traditional as well as innovative styles, minimalism as well as excess, nostalgia as well as prophecy". This is sometimes as

[54] Own translation.
[55] Own translation

close as the researcher comes to identifying common denominators in contemporary novelists.

The classification "Contemporary British Fiction", as discussed in this section, is thus based on timelines, passports and language, rather than intrinsic traits found in the works themselves. This approach, which does not seek to identify common characteristics present in the works themselves, avoids emphasising some aspects of a novel while neglecting others, and otherwise it avoids forcing the illusion of homogeneity upon the works themselves, which they do not have. "Contemporary British Fiction" is definitely not a school of writing (if ever there existed such a thing), just authors grouped together in a specific time and place. Similarly, it is not this researcher's contention that alienation is a defining characteristic of contemporary British fiction; only that it is manifested in this period as it is in other periods and in the literary systems of other nations. The research proposal at the beginning of this study stated, Given the post-modern condition of integration, shifting boundaries and identity formation, what forms of alienation exist in contemporary western society and the individual who inhabits it and why, and how does alienation manifest itself in contemporary British fiction amongst some of the main authors of the latter? Thus, the aim is not to identify the 'four main authors of contemporary British fiction', nor is it to insinuate that it is a particular characteristic of this period.

The contemporary British novel

Bearing in mind what was said in the previous section, some common characteristics do emerge in contemporary British fiction. One of the key features of contemporary British fiction is that,

> ...the majority of novels published in the early twenty-first century are likely to be written in the first person. Belief in the appropriateness of the narratorial hierarchy of discourse declined over the last century and many novelists now seem to prefer to render one consciousness or narrator in the first person, rather than write in the omniscient third person, which is a way of rendering the world that they might see as antithetical to everyday experience (Childs, 2005: 13).

This is in line with the general post-modernist questioning of metanarratives and objectivity, since the book becomes only a personal perspective, rather than suggesting that it is 'the truth'. Examples can be endless, for instance Zoë Strachan's *Negative Space* (shortlisted for the Saltire Scottish First Book of the Year Award and published in 2002), as well as the 2005 Man Booker prize winner, Irish writer John Banville's *The Sea*. The main advantage of the first-person narration is that it "creates an illusion of unmediated intimacy which the third-person perspective is obliged to forgo or insinuate by other means" (Ryan, 1999: 213). A first person narration is more personal and draws the reader into the text more effectively than the third-person narration can, making for a more enjoyable/intense reading experience.

Another trend, which follows from the first-person narrations, is what Childs (2005: 13) calls 'life writing',

> The first person narrator has very commonly been an individual in many ways similar to the author. Such books use the autobiographical mode and are written in a meditative, confessional style, while their authors often seek neither to equate the narrator with themselves nor to pretend that the narrator is simply a fictional character).

Wheeler (1999: 19) refers to "mock-autobiographical fiction", saying that, as a post-modernist trend, "authors mixed themselves into their texts". Examples are Amis's *Experience* (2000) Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1992), Kureishi's *Intimacy* (1998), and Brooke-Rose's *Life, End of* (2006). In *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie, the character Saleem Sinai is born in the same year and city as the author, and in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), the narrator shares her first name and sexual orientation with the author (Whomald, 1999: 189). In David Lambkin's *Plain of Darkness* (1992), the narrator shares a love of Beethoven with the author, calling his Labrador Ludwig, as well as an interest in cooking and a shared profession (advertising). In *The Child in Time*, McEwan's main character is a writer of children's fiction (as is McEwan), and in *Saturday*, Henry lives in a part of Central London where McEwan himself lived. This is by no means restricted to British writing; the American author Philip Roth, in *Operation Shylock* (1993), names a character after himself. In *My Life as a Man* (1974), Roth "created three different

versions of a writer/character, who gets inextricably mixed up with Roth" (Wheeler, 1999: 19). Wheeler (*Ibid.*) says that "one of the most revolutionary and politicized aspects of art is its ability to show the reader that, when you stop separating literature and reality, you begin to be able to act in more imaginative ways than your prior accounts allowed". This is a familiar trait of post-modernist fiction, which questions the boundaries between fact and fiction, giving rise to the term 'faction'.

Furthermore, "fiction over the last 35 years has also eschewed the novel's traditional attempt to render depth, preferring to tell a story, which, instead of seeking to offer truth, deep meaning, or philosophical belief, depicts particular aspects of the modern world refracted through the life experience of individuals" (Childs, 2005: 14). This view contrasts sharply with authors such as David Lambkin, Etienne Leroux and Alexander Strachan[56] who lace their texts with different levels of meaning like a palimpsest, incorporating alchemical and cabbalistic layers in a contemporary setting.

A good contemporary British example is Tim Binding's *Anthem* (2003), depicting the lives of four households during the build-up and aftermath of the Falklands War (1982) on a street called Anglefield Road. Binding weaves historical facts into the text, such as the voyage by the civilian cruise ship, the *Canberra*, to the Falklands, and the 1987 fire at King's Cross St Pancras station in London, personalising these experiences through his characters. Although British patriotism is part of the text, it is by no means the general theme, and rather aims to individualize the war than to condone/condemn it.

Childs (2005: 20) sums up themes present in contemporary British fiction,

> Alongside the perennial trinity of sex, love, and death, some themes recur across their work: war, apocalyptic cities, queer and gender identities, the family in crisis, serial killers, childhood, new ethics, and American influences. Youth subculture has been a constant subject, as has the individual's relation to history and heritage. Fabulation and dirty realism have existed side-by-side, and the dominant mode has accentuated irony and first-person narrative.

An issue that soon grabs one's attention when looking at contemporary British

[56] Leroux and Strachan are Afrikaans novelists; Lambkin is English and depending on the requirements for 'British', can be considered British.

fiction is that "a remarkable amount of British fiction concerns the past, just as it is true that a great deal concerns other countries" (Childs, 2005: 21). Mengham (2003: 1) also notes, "It is one of the central paradoxes of contemporary British fiction that much of it – much of the best of it – is concerned with other times and other places". For instance, Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy is set at the time of the First World War, and Martin Amis's *House of Meetings* is set in post-war Russia. It is not simply a matter of historical fiction, as Mengham (1999: 3) contends, "Whereas historical fiction in the nineteenth century frequently was associated with the formation of national identity, in the contemporary scene it has been used as a means of practising an archaeology of the imagination". This phenomenon forms a major contrast with the contemporary American novel, since "comparatively little of it, outside of subgenres such as ladlit and chicklit, seems to be set in contemporary Britain" (Childs, 2005: 21). One of the many exceptions, though, is Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, which is set in London in March 2003, before the invasion of Iraq, and the fiction of Irvine Welsh, which tends to be set in the contemporary urban environment of Leith in Edinburgh. Amis's *London Fields* is also set in a contemporary setting and in fact, Barker's *Regeneration* is the only primary text in the current study that is a historical novel.

3. The socio-historical system

The literary text is constituted by its linguistic environment, as much as a living organism is dependent upon its environment for its very existence. As such, the shifts of meaning found in every linguistic sign will influence the interpretation of the text. For instance, the linguistic environment in which *Beowulf* was produced was so different from the current environment, that a modern English speaker finds it virtually impossible to understand the text without translation. Line 2247 reads, "Heald þu nu, hruse, nu hæleð ne m[o]st*o*n"(Jack, 1994: 159), which is utterly unintelligible to a modern reader. It goes without saying that this was intelligible to speakers of English at the time. Time and place influence semantics: *pants* are something entirely different in England and the USA, and to be *gay* in 1908 is not the

same as being *gay* in 2008. The linguistic system is thus a necessary element in ensuring the correct interpretation of a text.

Furthermore, as Whorf also illustrated, "The idea that language is neutral denies that writing always sets up particular constructions of reality, and that these constructions are always tied in to history, society and politics" (Ward, 1997: 102). Language carries an ideological element, created in the linguistic context and brought to the text by the reader. As Schmidt (cf. Venter, 2002: 58) argues,

> Perhaps the meaning of a word is the set of its acceptable uses in communication, i.e. in culture(s) [...]. Like reality [...], meaning, too, is not mine or yours, but our culture is in you and me. It results from the empirically conditioned operation of systems; but it is system-dependent and therefore continually changing.

Apart from a linguistic system, literature exists in the material world, a world where social entities within its socio-cultural system - gatekeepers (publishers, editors, critics, etc.) - play a marked role in the reception of a given work. On the cover of Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, a reviewer from the *Observer* is quoted as describing the text as "dazzling ... profound and urgent". The back cover quotes the *Sunday Times*, calling McEwan "the supreme novelist of his generation". Gatekeepers of course function within their own systems, for "There is no meaning - not even 'noise' - without context, and no theory can occur outside the context" (Wilden, 1980: 115). The advertising industry necessarily plays a vital role in the reception of the work, combining with critics to advertise on posters in the Underground, on busses and bus stations, etc. All the hype creates an expectancy around the text, which may or may not be fulfilled, but one is more likely to interpret a text in a positive way if one approaches it with a positive preconception. Wilden's (1980: 5) note on Jacques Lacan's *Écrits* (1966) illustrates the subjectivity of the reading experience, saying that it reads "more like a 'schizophrenic discourse' - or like poetry, or nonsense, depending on your prejudice and your tendencies towards positive or negative transference - than anything else".

The financial climate in which a text is published further influences the reception of that work. For instance, the institution of the Congestion Charge in London and better public transport has led to more people commuting to work by

train, and from casual observation, this researcher has noted a substantial number of passengers passing the time by reading. Post-war immigration into the United Kingdom, European Union membership, soaring birth-rates (in part also due to government subsidies), increased life expectancy, and the overhaul of the National Health Service, have further increased the population in the United Kingdom. This, along with the educational reforms that increase literacy, led to a much larger reading public. The higher demand is necessarily likely to be met with a larger supply. It could therefore be very likely that these factors have a substantial bearing on the fact that "The number of works of fiction published each year doubled between 1950 and 1990; currently, 100 new British novels are released each week" (Childs, 2005: 3). Octavio Paz (cf. Brink, 1992: 40) realised this dependency when he remarked, "The poem, a being of words, goes beyond words, and history does not deplete its meaning; but the poem would have no meaning – or even an existence – without history, without the community that nourishes it and is nourished by it."

Historical context of contemporary British fiction

Post-War politics in Britain have been referred to as 'consensus politics', since there was not much difference between policies propagated by Labour or Conservatives. From the 1950s onwards, the Conservative Party broadly accepted policies associated with labour, such as nationalization and the development of the Welfare State. Britain changed much during the 1970s, as Brooke & Cameron (1996: 639) argue,

> ...the sense of decline that has pervaded much of British history through most of this century became far more acute in the 1970s. In an immediate sense, the seventies and early 1980s were marked by crisis: from the 1972 miners' strike to the IMF loan of 1976, through the "Winter of Discontent" in 1978-79, and inner city riots in the summer of 1981. Inevitably, such crisis was accompanied by the dissembling of the political order, of which the social democratic or liberal capitalist post-war consensus was the most obvious victim, with Thatcherism on the right and Bennism on the left, and by a heightened sense of social disorder, whether over race relations, industrial disputes, or the unity of the United Kingdom itself.

In 1979 Margaret Thatcher was elected as new leader of the Tories (serving until

1990), and "Her years in power saw radical reforms that sought forcefully to express Britain's transition from a prevailing atmosphere of consensus to the radically new mood in which there was a clear division between political left and right" (Childs, 2005: 4). After repeated clashes with unions (particularly the National Union of Mine Workers), "The Tory party [...] moved away from 'One Nation' Conservatism towards a set of policies aimed at promoting business, consumerism, and the interests of those who aspired to be 'upwardly mobile'[57]" (Childs, 2005: 4). The objectives were the privatization of national industries, the regulation of the teaching and health professions, and a curtailment of union power (Childs, 2005: 5). Kirk (1999: 605) remarks, "the New Right attempted to readdress and redefine citizens simply as consumers (rather than producers) existing on some imagined axis of equivalence." This is commonly referred to as 'Thatcherism' and was a general power shift away from bureaucrats and the trade unions, towards individual consumers and the free market economy. Keith Talent in Martin Amis's *London Fields* exploits this entrepreneurial spirit, referring to his criminal activities as "Trying, in my own way, to establish a small business. Escape the poverty trap" (*LF*, 442). Thatcher's reforms benefited business, but failed to eradicate the class system in Britain[58], and aggravated unemployment, which rose to 3.5million whereas pre-1979 unemployment never rose above 1.5million. This led to what was referred to as an 'underclass' in the 1980s, "cut off from consumer society, poor and sceptical of the authorities" (Childs, 2005: 7). The percentage of the population living on the lowest rate of social security benefits rose from 6% in 1979 to 19% in the mid-1990s (*Ibid.*), and this was accompanied by urban riots such as the infamous Brixton riots of 1981, 1985, 1987, and 1995.

Childs (2005: 7) claims that "the difference between pre- and post-Thatcher Britain can be seen in terms of legislation regarding women's rights, childbirth, marriage, and sexuality." Before Thatcherite Britain, key reforms were: The Abortion Act of 1967, legalizing the termination of pregnancies; the Sexual Offences Act of the same year that decriminalized homosexuality; the Divorce Reform Act in 1969,

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[57] In Welsh's *Trainspotting*, Sick Boy refers to himself as "a dynamic young man, upwardly mobile and thrusting, thrusting, thrusting" (*T*, 30).

[58] As depicted in the differences between Guy Clinch and Keith Talent in Amis's *London Fields.*

"making divorce available through mutual consent"; and the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, which banned discrimination against women in education and in the work place. However, the new Tory emphasis on 'family values' was articulated by Thatcher herself (cf. Childs, 2005: 4), "We are reaping what was sown in the 1960s ... The fashionable theories and permissive claptrap set the scene for a society in which the old virtues of discipline and self-restraint were denigrated". The result was that "comparatively regressive" steps were taken: Clause 28 in 1987 outlawed positive images of homosexuality, and in 1993, the Child Support Agency was founded to pursue child maintenance. Morgado (2002: 251) notes that Thatcher's and Major's governments, "denounced the dysfunctional family as causing the violent or deviant behaviours of children with ensuing legislation" (the 'Young Offenders Act' of 1982, the 'Education Reform Act' of 1988, 'The Child Support Act' of 1993 and the 'Education Act' of 1993). Conservative rhetoric reflected a sense of threat from what Thatcher called the "enemies within" (Brooke & Cameron, 1996: 640). For instance, in 1987 Thatcher spoke of the danger of progressive education in inner-city schools:

> Children who needed to count and multiply were learning anti-racist mathematics – whatever that might be. Children who needed to be able to express themselves in clear English were being taught political slogans. Children who needed to be taught to respect traditional moral values were being taught that they had an inalienable right to be gay (*Ibid.*).

Centralization was also further pursued: In 1994, the Police Act put the police under the control of the Home Secretary, schools started operating under the National Curriculum, and regional health authorities were abolished and replaced with the National Health Service (NHS) under the control of the Health Secretary (Childs, 2005: 8). Brooke & Cameron (1996: 639) contend, "The work of the Thatcher governments between 1979 and 1990 was, in particular, bathed in the light of national revival in the foreign and domestic spheres. Their brief was to recover and reassert authority". This is depicted in McEwan's *The Child in Time* where the *Authorised Childcare Handbook*, an authoritative and sometimes brutal instruction manual on child-rearing (one chapter reads: "A Sound Smack Saves Nine" *CiT*, 177), is ultimately compiled by the Prime Minister, "the nation's parent" (*CiT*, 88). In McEwan's text (published 1987), the state even regulates begging, and tries to control the ever-

independent youth.

One event that defined Thatcherite Britain was the Falklands War, as the Iraq War will define Blairite England in future. Allusions are made to this war in Welsh's *Trainspotting*, where Johnny Swan pretends to have lost his leg in the conflict in order to beg for money for more drugs. Tim Binding's *Anthem* (2003) is a treatise on the nationalising effect this war had, which instilled patriotism in British society. Binding argues, "Britain became a player again. A broken prime minister was transformed into Boadicea[59], ready to cut down her enemies, wherever they might spring from. We became an island again – our oldest ally, the sea, the means of our victory. And all this accomplished on the backs of two thousand young men".

Tony Blair took over leadership of the Labour Party in 1994, and started promoting 'New Labour'. One of the first changes in Labour Policy was the revision of Clause 4 of its constitution, which "ended Labour's historic commitment to state ownership" (Childs, 2005: 6) – thus bringing Labour closer to the Tory position. The Labour Party came to power after the 1997 elections on a policy of 'education education education' and by promoting a classless society. Critics claim that New Labour puts 'spin' on policies and seldom helps the 'underclass'. Blair's policies on 'anti-social behaviour', 'being tough on crime' and 'the war against terror' have further taken New Labour towards the right. As Heather, a character in Irvine Welsh's *The Undefeated* (2004: 190), exclaims, "Tony Blair Labour. Which is the same as Tory, only Major's[60] probably further left than Blair." At the time of compiling this study, Blair left power and was succeeded by Gordon Brown, whereas the new Tory leader, David Cameron, is widely perceived to resemble the charismatic Blair. Tory policies have also changed slightly to the left, with the new Tory icon being a green tree (environmental concern is a key policy promoted by Cameron). The line between Tory and Labour is as vague as it has not been in a long time.

[59] Queen of the Iceni tribe who led a revolt against the Roman occupation around 60 AD. Her statue stands in front of the parliament buildings in London. For a brief discussion of her history, see Senekal part II, 2005: 45-46.

[60] John Major, Thatcher's successor.

Contemporary Authors

Year	**Martin Amis**	**Ian McEwan**	**Irvine Welsh**	**Pat Barker**
1973	*The Rachel Papers*			
1974	*Dead Babies*			
1975		*First Love, last rites*		
1976				
1977				
1978	*Success*	*In between the sheets The cement garden*		
1979				
1980				
1981	*Other people: a mystery story*	*The comfort of strangers*		
1982	*Invasion of the Space Invaders*			*Union Street*
1983				
1984	*Money: a suicide note*			*Blow your house down*
1985				
1986	*The Moronic Inferno: And Other Visits to America*			*The Century's daughter (Liza's England)*
1987	*Einstein's Monsters*	*The Child in Time*		
1988				

1989	*London Fields*			
1990		*The Innocent*		
1991	*Time's arrow: Or the Nature of the Offence*			*Regeneration*
1992		*Black dogs*		
1993	*Visiting Mrs Nabokov: And Other Excursions*		*Trainspotting*	*The eye in the door*
1994	*Two Stories*		*The acid house*	
1995	*The information* *God's Dice*		*Marabou Stork Nightmares*	*The ghost road*
1996			*Ecstasy: Three tales of chemical romance*	
1997	*Night train*	*Enduring love*		
1998	*Heavy Water: And Other Stories* *State of England: And Other Stories*	*Amsterdam*	*Filth*	*Another World*
1999	*Heavy water* *Amis Omnibus*			
2000	*The Fiction of Martin Amis* *Experience*			
2001	*The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews 1971-2000*	*Atonement*	*Glue*	*Border crossing*
2002	*Koba the Dread: Laughter and the*		*Porno*	

	Twenty Million			
2003	*Yellow dog*			*Double vision*
2004				
2005		*Saturday*		
2006	*House of Meetings*		*The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs*	
2007	*The Pregnant Widow*	*On Chesil Beach*	*If You Liked School You'll Love Work*	

The relation between literature and reality

A major question remains unanswered: what is the nature of the relation between the text and reality? In other words, is the text a reflection of reality, part reality and part fiction, or only fiction? This relationship has been studied extensively during the history of literary theory since Aristotle, but no theory has ever presented a definitive answer. For instance, Nordal (cf. Senekal, 2005: 84) claims, "fiction may be imbued with a truth to life which is equal if not superior in value to any factual truth." Marxism has various views, and post-modernism has effectively broken down the boundary between fact and fiction with theories of Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, and others.

Rivkin and Ryan (2004: 3) argue that, "Literature is not a window for looking at sociological themes or philosophic ideas or biographical information; rather, it is a mural or wall painting, something with a palpability of its own which arrests the eye and merits study". This is the Formalist's viewpoint, but indeed, from a General Systems Theory perspective, it can be argued that the literary text can and should be punctuated in such a way to distinguish it from other open systems. For instance, even though the literary text functions within the linguistic system, it would be foolish not to distinguish it from the language itself, but it is clear that the linguistic system has a definite bearing on the literary text. As Wilden (1980: 402) argues, "All open systems are necessarily related to other open systems and to their own

subsystems, as well as to the differing levels of organization 'within' themselves as systems". Van Coller (2008[61]) emphasises this interaction between 'real' world and literary text, claiming that Foucault, Jameson, and Ankersmit "point out that the content of experience an individual finds presented to himself is never 'pure'; it comes structured and filtered through an *episteme*, a web of inculcated mental, cultural assumptions that are historically determined and historically identifiable".

If the literary text is seen as an open system, it can only exist because of its interaction with its environment. But open systems do not exist purely because of a simple causal link between one open system (e.g. the 'real world') and another: open systems function within a network of open systems (e.g. the literary system), and punctuation can further dissect the open system into a collection of open systems within itself, e.g. internal systems. The open system therefore takes information from its environment, but also passes information to its environment. In other words, this means that the literary text will necessarily be influenced by its environment, but that the 'real' world, on the other hand, will also be influenced by the literary text (as the Salman Rushdie affair illustrated). It is thus not a question of representation, but of the mutual exchange of information, through the medium of the reader, who brings his own frame of reference to bear on the text.

It can therefore be expected that issues that concern sociologists and writers in the late twentieth century (such as alienation) will manifest themselves in literature. But a literary text cannot be seen as a clear mirror of general sociological conditions; it will only bear the traces of e.g. alienation. The characters in a literary text are therefore neither depictions of 'real' people, nor purely fictitious – they exist in a linguistic, artistic, and cultural system, and they will bear the traces of these systems with which they interact.

[61] Page numbers unavailable as the article has not been printed at the time this study is submitted.

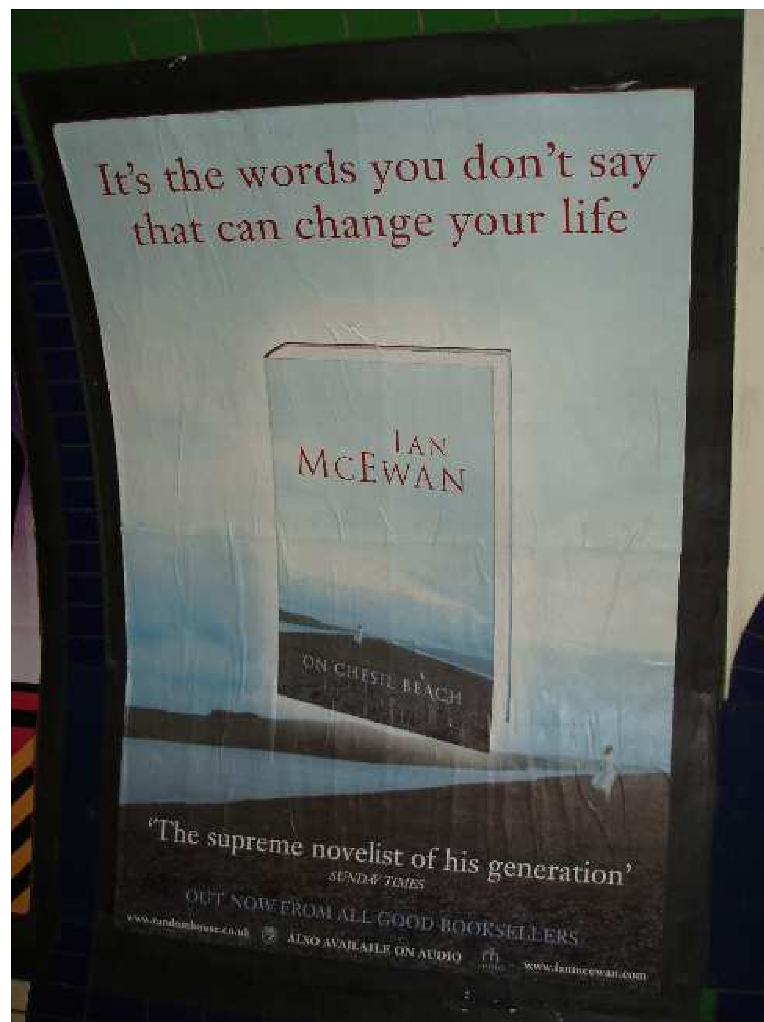
Section C: A Perspective on Alienation in the Works of Four Contemporary British Authors

Alienation in *The Child in Time* by Ian McEwan

Introduction

When Tony Blair left office at No 10 Downing Street in 2007, the Channel 4 newsreader John Snow held an in-studio interview with Ian McEwan over the Blairite years. This illustrated his importance within contemporary Britain, as the fact that his works are engaged with society identifies him as a spokesperson of Blairite Britain. His works are woven into the fabric of British society and he has been recognised for his contribution by the award of a CBE in 2000. Amongst other issues, McEwan's writings address two key features of the Blair government: *The Child in Time* deals with education (the policy on which Blair came to power was "education education education"), and *Saturday* deals with the war in Iraq. Even though *The Child in Time* was written under Thatcher, the welfare state and nanny state that became part of Blair's government as well features prominently throughout the text. On the other hand, works such as *Amsterdam* depict a world reminiscent of Tory sleaze that characterized the last years of conservative rule.

Graduating from the creative writing course lead by Malcolm Bradbury and Angus Wilson at the University of East Anglia (a course taken by Kazuo Ishiguro as well), McEwan furthermore occupies a privileged position in the literary system. To date, he has written ten novels, as well as short stories, screenplays, children's fiction and plays. Matthews (2002: www.contemporarywriters.com) regards him as "at the forefront of contemporary British writing", along with Graham Swift, Julian Barnes and Martin Amis. *The Times* (opening page in McEwan's *Saturday*) says McEwan "may now be the best novelist in Britain", and as the promotional poster in Piccadilly Circus Underground Station states, he is "the supreme novelist of his generation":



Promotional poster for *On Chesil Beach*, Piccadilly Circus Underground station, London. Photo: Burgert Senekal

His first few novels established him as

> ... a novelist obsessed with the perverted, the depraved and the macabre, an inscrutable voyeur who describes abjection and obscenity with chilling detachment. His characters and their quandaries are dissected with the clinical precision of a pathologist, and in a prose style equally appropriate to that profession. The idiom is deliberate, exact and impersonal, purged of emotive resonance and immune to empathy or agitation. It is not so much McEwan's soft spot for the gruesome that has fostered the antipathy of his detractors as his freezing of his moral faculties and his refusal to react as decency demands to the shocking scenes staged by his own morbid imagination (Ryan, 1999: 203).

However, from the publication of *The Child in Time* (1987), he has moved away from this approach, in his own words, of "the chronicler of comically exaggerated psychopathic states of mind or of adolescent anxiety, snot and pimples" (cf. Ryan,

1999: 205). In an interview conducted by Rosa González Casademont and published in 1992 (cf. Ryan, 1999: 205), McEwan complains,

> Once this set of expectations is set up around my work, people read it in this way. And even when, as in *The Child in Time*, there isn't this element, than *all* people write about is the absence of it. So, yes, I have a problem with my reputation and I give readings to try to oppose it, because I think my work is not a monochrome of violence and horror.

The Child in Time is thus one of his central works, receiving the Whitbread Novel Award in 1987 and the Prix Fémina Etranger (France) in 1993. 'The couple in crisis' is a familiar theme of McEwan's as seen in *On Chesil Beach*, *Enduring Love*, *The Comfort of Strangers,* and *The Child in Time*. Because there is some overlap in material and themes, other works of McEwan will be dealt with when necessary while looking at how alienation manifests in *The Child in Time*.

The Child in Time

> The post-modern family and society are predicated upon the fear of the disappearance of the child and on the terrifying absence of the child, symbolized either by the death of children or their abduction. The disappearance of childhood as we know it is the larger issue. The disappearance of particular children, which the media have institutionalized[62], translates a painful event for parents into a cultural scenario of crisis and panic. This scenario is marked by absence, by the lack of a stable meaning of the child, and more terrifying the pressure on the boundaries that separate adults from their children-others.
>
> Margarida Morgado, 2002: 251)

McEwan's third novel, *The Child in Time* (1987), continues the theme addressed in *The Comfort of Strangers* of 'a couple in crisis', and refers to childhood like other McEwan novels (particularly *The Cement Garden* and *Black Dogs*). It depicts the individual consequences of loss and its effect on a heterosexual relationship, whilst exploring the concepts of time and innocence. The novel's themes are "uncontrollable life-factors and the social construction of gender" (Childs, 2005: 175), and "The complexities of life and its unpredictability are at all points in the novel represented by the theme of time, which takes each person out of an unalterable past, through a known stable moment of the present into an uncertain, contingent

[62] Compare the media attention paid to the disappearance of Madeleine McCann in 2007.

future" (*Ibid*.). Morgado (2002: 246) argues that *The Child in Time* "draws the child and childhood at a crossroads of discourses and meanings, seeking ultimately to dismember the image of child as innocent and as a symbol for progress". How this is done, will be shown in this section.

The Child in Time is initially set "during the 'last decent summer' of the 1990s, in a London of beggars licensed by the government and schools offered for sale to private investors" (Childs, 2005: 163). Stephen Lewis is an accidental writer of children's fiction: his manuscript ended up on the wrong desk and the publisher, Charles Darke, fell in love with it. "It was his intention to write of his travels, in a novel called *Hashish* [...] But the opening chapter stubbornly refused to end" (*CiT*, 26), and he ended up calling it *Lemonade*. This opening chapter dealt with one summer holiday spent with two cousins in his eleventh year, "a novel of short trousers and short hair for the boys, and Alice bands and frocks tucked onto knickers for the girls" (*CiT*, 26). Charles says, "This book is not for children, it's for a child, and that child is you. *Lemonade* is a message from you to a previous self which will never cease to exist" (*CiT*, 31), and claims this is why the book was so successful. Charles's statement is underscored by the fact that Stephen, as an adult, had attempted to write an adult novel, but the child-like part of the novel, like childhood, had refused to end. Charles argues, "the greatest so-called children's books were precisely those that spoke to both children and adults, to the incipient adult within the child, to the forgotten child within the adult" (*CiT*, 29). As the novel progresses, Charles searches for his lost 'inner child', while Stephen searches for his own lost child. When Charles suffers his breakdown, which sees him transformed into a child for a second time, *Lemonade* features again: Charles' wife, Thelma, claims, "Your book *Lemonade* was very important to him. He said it was one part of himself addressing the other" (*CiT*, 222). This theme of the 'child within the adult' will be dealt with at length.

The event that dominates *The Child in Time* is the disappearance of Stephen's three-year-old daughter, Kate. One morning, Stephen leaves his wife, Julie, to do shopping in a local supermarket, taking Kate along. Here an unknown person abducts her, and the novel tracks his search for her and the effect it has on his marriage. At the time, "They had been married six years, a time of slow, fine adjustments to the jostling principles of physical pleasure, domestic duty and the

necessity of solitude. Neglect of one led to diminishment or chaos in the others" (*CiT*, 9). This event was to alter their relationship irrevocably. At first, Stephen sets off in search of his daughter, but as the novel progresses, he loses faith in his ability to find her and his powerlessness is exposed. Morgado (2002: 253) believes that "The narrative representations of child disappearances ultimately call for the transformation of existing conditions and for new possibilities to be envisaged, emerging out of a sense of utter powerlessness and disillusionment". Modern man's helplessness (powerlessness) can hardly be conveyed more vividly than in Stephen's desperate needle-in-a-haystack search for Kate, which amounts to absolutely nothing. Morgado (2002: 244) sees this as emblematic of the post-modern age, a symbol that serves as a monument to perceptions of man's position in the contemporary world: "One could almost argue that child disappearance (the disappearance of children from the home and the disappearance of childhood) constitutes a hegemonic social and cultural construction of the late twentieth century and a dominant structure of feeling."

Parallel to his search for his daughter is his involvement in writing *The Authorised Childcare Handbook* for the government, which he does listlessly whilst daydreaming about his wife and daughter, as the narrator relates, "A roomful of people did not lessen his introspection, as he had hoped, so much as intensify it and give it structure" (*CiT*, 5). He has a similar problem at home, where "he lacked the concentration for sustained thought. He daydreamed in fragments, without control, almost without consciousness" (*CiT*, 6). *The Authorised Childcare Handbook* is intended to be the definitive guide to child rearing, and is (supposed to be) compiled by a panel of various experts on the subject.

His original publisher, Charles, made his way into politics and befriended the Prime Minister, and partially because of this, Stephen ended up on the panel compiling the handbook. However, it emerges that the Prime Minister and Charles already wrote the book, or 'The Book' as it is called (*CiT*, 198), without consulting the expert panel. Stephen is given a copy by another panel member, Morley (*CiT*, 176), four months before the committee was supposed to complete its work. Morley had come by a copy through a fortuitous accident, as he has a civil servant contact who acquired the manuscript after a break-in. Stephen makes a copy for a newspaper

(*CiT*, 179), and it surfaces in the press. The Prime Minister denies the existence of this manuscript, until quotations start to appear in newspapers. This political scandal is handled deftly by the Prime Minister in a way reminiscent of Garmony's handling of the photos in *Amsterdam*, sharing the right amount of information in the right way to gain public support. The manuscript is printed and sent to all major newspapers, asking them for reviews. In a milieu where adults are afraid of teenagers[63], a harsh disciplinary text such as The Book is well received (one chapter reads, "A Sound Smack Saves Nine" *CiT*, 177) and he/she[64] comes out stronger than before. "It was tidy work, impressive" (*CiT*, 200); as in *Amsterdam,* "Complicated channels ran between truth and lying" (*Ibid.*). *The Child in Time* foregrounds political spin and the manipulation of the media: "in public life the adept survivors navigated with sure instincts while retaining a large measure of dignity. Only occasionally, as a consequence of tactical error, was it necessary to lie significantly, or tell an important truth. Mostly it was sure-footed scampering between the two extremes". Morgado (2002: 251) writes that in *The Child in Time* "The sense of threat that accompanies criminal and undisciplined or untutored children, their disappearance as 'children' and their re-emergence as monsters or victims of a ruthless society is counterbalanced by the nostalgia for a lost category of the innocent, pure, passive, and dependent child." This tension is illustrated by Stephen's realisation, after hearing how the Prime Minister manoeuvred him/herself out of this potential scandal: "[he] marvelled at his own innocence. This was one of those times when he felt he had not quite grown up, he knew so little about how things really worked" (*CiT*, 200). Over the course of but a couple of pages, the image of children is thus presented as both demonic and angelic.

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[63] Mayer (2008: 31) quotes a police officer advising local residents after a spate of attacks in Central London, saying, "Don't go out unless you have to". Although there are twenty years between Mayer and *The Child in Time*, Mayer (2008: 33) argues, "The British have a long propensity to recoil in horror from their children – whether they be Teddy boys in the 1950s, mods and rockers in the '60s, skinheads in the '70s or just a bunch of boisterous teens making a lot of noise but little real mischief".

[64] The gender of the PM is never entirely clear, although 'she' may be vaguely suggested. He/she has a romantic interest in Charles, the novel was written when Thatcher was PM and the Tory's are "in power and likely to remain so" (*CiT*, 36), but no explicit evidence is given that a female PM is involved.

This attack on Tory irregularities is found in another of McEwan's novels. *Amsterdam*[65] (1998), which won the Man Booker prize, centres around three men, Clive Linley (a composer), Vernon Halliday (a newspaper editor), and Julian Garmony (Foreign Secretary), who attend the funeral of a woman, Molly Lane, with whom they all had a sexual relationship at one time or another. Molly's husband sells incriminating pictures of Garmony to Vernon, Vernon and Clive get into an argument over the publication of these pictures, and in a bizarre twist Vernon loses his job after driving up sales with the publication of these pictures. Meanwhile, Clive is supposed to compose a piece for public performance, but through Vernon's involvement, fails to deliver anything spectacular. In the aftermath of Vernon's dismissal and Clive's failure, they both set out to Amsterdam in a plot to take revenge on each other.

Kate's disappearance exposes Stephen and Julie's marriage, to use Rubin's term, as a unity of "intimate strangers" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 4). At first, they move closer together in their grief: "Stephen and Julie had clung to one another, sharing dazed rhetorical questions, awake in bed all night, theorizing hopefully one moment, despairing the next" (*CiT*, 20). Note how they share *rhetorical questions* and *theories*, without attaining answers or substantive, definitive conclusions. Final truth is elusive, as Derrida's theory of *différance* argues, and uncertainty creates powerlessness in Seeman's sense, as "in some important degree, the view that one lives in an intelligible world may be a prerequisite to expectancies for control" (Seeman, 1959: 786).

However, following the underscoring of uncertainty, the narrator's next statement embodies the irony of the novel, as truth is claimed, "But that was before time, the heartless accumulation of days, had clarified the absolute, bitter truth. Silence drifted in and thickened" (*CiT*, 20). This 'bitter truth' is the unavoidable fact that Kate is no longer with them, and this truth drives a wedge between the couple.

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[65] *Amsterdam* is set in 1996, and "suggests that a nanny state has fostered selfish children and that the politics of sleaze and greed that characterized nearly 20 years of Conservative government were the result" (Childs, 2005: 166). This criticism of Thatcherite Britain is McEwan's first satirical work, but despite the Booker award, Childs (2005: 167) calls it "below McEwan's best". Matthews (2002: www.contemporarywriters.com) describes it, "Its flavour is a sort of 'McEwan-Lite': the approval of the Booker jury seemed, in effect, to signal the domestication of the artist formerly known as 'Ian MacAbre'".

However, Kate's traces are all around them, embedded in the narrative, as she is embedded in the memories of characters and even in the title. Most of the action in the novel revolves around Kate: On the opening page, Stephen is watching for "a five-year-old-girl. It was more than a habit, for a habit could be broken" (*CiT*, 1), and on the final page (*CiT*, 245), Julie gives birth to Kate's replacement, who bears the trace of her predecessor. Stephen's thoughts are mostly on Kate and the aftermath of her disappearance, "loss was his subject" (*CiT*, 7). When Stephen looks at his parents' faces "it was not the effects of age he saw so much as the devastation of Kate's disappearance" (*CiT*, 95); whenever he and Julie try to get close to each other, "The lost child was between them again" (*CiT*, 69). Early on, the narrator states, "Kate's growing up had become the essence of time itself"[66] (*CiT*, 2), and that "Without the fantasy of her continued existence he was lost, time would stop" (*Ibid.*). However, time *does* move forward – "nothing could stop the sinewy clock". "Two and a half years on, it still made him uneasy to be away when Kate, or someone who knew where she was, might come to the flat" (*CiT*, 131) and "Almost three years on [Stephen is] still stuck, still trapped in the dark, enfolded with his loss, shaped by it" (*CiT*, 141). This refutes the narrator's statement that "the heartless accumulation of days, had clarified the absolute, bitter truth" (*CiT*, 20), since if time would stop without Kate's continued existence, and has not stopped, she must have continued to exist. In a material sense, she is no longer with them, but she is kept alive in their memories and actions, as Julie's father is "kept alive in family mythology" (*CiT*, 150). Their "truth" is thus a fabricated truth that drives the couple apart, a fantasy elevated to the position of truth. Nietzsche (cf. 2004: 268) asks, "Are the axioms of logic adequate to reality or are they a means and measure for us to *create* reality, the concept 'reality', for ourselves?". By incorporating this contradiction, the narrator highlights the characters' susceptibility to fabrication.

Gender roles are further fabricated truths that wedge the couple apart. Stephen "ate standing up in sandwich bars, anxious not to lose time, reluctant to sit down and listen to his thoughts" (*CiT*, 21), as he "anaesthetised himself with activity" (*CiT*, 20) by walking the streets, putting up posters and continuing his search in any

[66] For a further discussion on the use of *time*, see below.

way possible. In contrast to this, Julie sat at home, immobilized in front of the fire, and thus the couple start to drift apart:

> They moved like figures in a quagmire, with no strength for confrontation. Suddenly their sorrows were separate, insular, incommunicable. They went their different ways, he with his lists and daily trudging, she in her armchair, lost to deep, private grief. Now there was no mutual consolation, no touching, no love. Their old intimacy, their habitual assumption that they were on the same side, was dead (*CiT*, 20).

This relates to what Seeman discussed as meaninglessness - "the individual's sense of understanding events in which he is engaged" (Seeman, 1959: 786). Since meaning is constructed from a specific point of view, never being "principle or origin"[67], internalised gender roles influence the way in which meaning is created. The importance of gender roles is epitomised by Stephen's trip to the toy store to buy a birthday present for Kate in her absence. Here, "one end of the store was dominated by the khaki of combat drill and vehicle camouflage, and the riveted silver of heavily armed spaceships, the other by the pale pastels of baby wear and the shining white of miniature household appliances" (*CiT*, 138). He buys Kate a two-way radio for her sixth birthday, and recognises it as "a machine to encourage proximity. It belonged to the plan" (*CiT*, 140). These toys emphasise how differently the two genders often view reality: the activity of the traditional male role is enshrined in the military and space exploration toys, and echoed by Stephen's frantic search for Kate. In stark contrast, the (relative) inactivity of the traditional female role is enshrined in the raising of children and cooking for a husband returning from the world, and echoed in Julie's passivity where she sits in her armchair[68]. Since the different genders grow up with these toys – with these roles bestowed upon them – there is a lack of a comprehensively overlapping code from which meaning can be constructed. As with intercultural communication[69], the less overlap there is with

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[67] Deleuze (cf. Harari, 1979: 53)

[68] This is from the traditional male perspective, but it is recognised that being a traditional housewife is also work.

[69] A study carried out at the University of Haifa attempted to look at Palestinian and Israeli perceptions of identity. The core concerns of this study are summed up by Kalekin-Fishman (1998: 51),

> Different emphasis led the members of each ethnic group to understand the term 'identity' differently. At the workshop session with the group leaders asked participants to describe their 'identities', the Jews described themselves in terms of personal traits. They attributed

codes, the greater the chance for miscommunication. Von Bertalanffy (1968: 217) would call this a "conflict between symbolic universes, or loss of value orientation and experience of meaninglessness in the individual". Morgado (2002: 253) states, "The disappearance of a child stands thus, in modern social life, as a fateful moment, when things are wrenched out of joint suddenly and unpredictably. It threatens stability, human faith in action, it imposes grief and penalties on the adults in charge, and, ultimately, it demands a change of habits or a readjustment of projects".

Julie assigns a different meaning to Stephen's actions than he does himself, "He suspected – and it turned out later he was correct – that she took his efforts to be a typically masculine evasion, an attempt to mask feelings behind displays of competence and organisation and physical effort" (*CiT*, 21). Stephen thus acts within the male paradigm embodied by the toys: action, organisation, finding rational solutions. However, since his actions are futile and a conclusive solution or answer cannot be found, Julie sees these attempts as only "displays of competence" and "masculine evasion". Masking his feelings behind activity - "anaesthetis[ing] himself with activity" - irritates her, whereas he would in all probability argue that he was trying to find his daughter. Stephen, in turn, misinterprets Julie's actions. Julie even takes special leave from college to grieve (*CiT*, 20), while Stephen sets "out each day shortly after the late winter dawn" (*Ibid.*). As he came home one day, he found Kate's possessions packed in plastic sacks, indicating that she was trying to accept the loss, which he "took to be a feminine self-destructiveness, a wilful defeatism" (*CiT*, 20). She doubtless sees her actions (or inactions) as a normal mourning phase. These misinterpretations of each other's actions ferment, and "unspoken resentments began to grow" (*CiT*, 21). Stephen believes that there is a fundamental difference in how the two genders deal with change, although he emphasises how constructed these views are:

> Past a certain age, men froze into place, they tended to believe that, even in adversity, they were somehow at one with their fates. They were who they

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to themselves qualities such as kindness, consideration, helpfulness, friendliness, curiosity, intelligence, and so on. The Arab students, on the other hand, described themselves in terms of their collective affiliations: kinship, religion, ethnicity, and political party loyalty. Contrary to the intentions of the facilitators, this endeavour led to mutual reproach rather than mutual respect. The Palestinians accused the Jews of arrogance and snobbishness; they in turn charged the Arabs with stereotypical thinking.

> thought they were. Despite what they said, men believed in what they did and they stuck at it. This was a weakness and a strength. Whether they were scrambling to get out of trenches to be killed in their thousands, or doing the firing themselves, or putting the final touches to a cycle of symphonies, it only rarely occurred to them, or occurred only to the rare ones among them, that they might just as well be doing something else (CiT, 56)

On Chesil Beach (2007) – McEwan's latest work – explores this miscommunication in greater depth. It is set in June 1962, on the wedding night of Edward and Florence, who stay in a hotel overlooking Chesil Beach on the Dorset coast. The personal narrator, writing through Edward and Florence's perspectives intermittently, focuses on the by now familiar theme in McEwan's writings of the 'couple in crisis', depicting how differently the two characters interpret each other's actions and, as the promotional poster for the book phrases it, how "it's the words you don't say that can change your life". In particular, it deals with how differently a situation can be interpreted from two opposing viewpoints – in this case sexual relations within the heterosexual dyad. Florence, a virgin (as is Edward, despite what Florence believes), experiences a "visceral dread, a helpless disgust as palpable as seasickness" (*OCB*, 7) as she anticipates their wedding night. She had read a handbook on the subject to prepare her for sexual intercourse, but she only encountered words and phrases that "almost made her gag" (*OCB*, 8). The thought of having sexual intercourse disgusts her, and the narrator says, "Sex with Edward could not be the summation of her joy, but was the price she must pay for it" (*OCB*, 9). For fear of losing him, she kept quiet about this, for she was certain that she wanted to spend the rest of her life with him. Their courtship had been "a pavane, a stately unfolding, bound by protocols never agreed or voiced, but generally observed"[70] (*OCB*, 21). Misinterpretations abound on their wedding night, since sex is a taboo subject. When he places his hand on her inner thigh and her muscle convulses, the narrator (through Florence's perspective) notes that he misinterprets it as a sign of eagerness (*OCB*, 85), but from Edward's perspective he recognises that he does not have enough information to ascertain that it was not nerves (*OCB*, 89). As the night progresses, analepses tell of how she

[70] The narrator notes the exact date he was allowed to touch her naked breasts (19 December), indicating that it was a momentous event, and noting that by then it had been three months since he had first seen them (*OCB*, 22). He could only kiss them in February, "though not her nipples, which he grazed with his lips once, in May" (*Ibid*.).

had progressed in overcoming her revulsion, and she even gains enough confidence to touch his penis. He ejaculates prematurely, and in her renewed revulsion, she storms out the room and runs down the beach. He chases after her, an argument ensues, and the marriage terminates. If she had been direct with him about her fears from the beginning, he would have been able to help her move beyond her revulsion[71], and he would have been willing to help her (and she to be helped[72]), for throughout the novel it is clear that they love and respect each other.

However, their Englishness dictated that this had been a taboo topic, and in the heat of the ensuing argument, reconciliation was impossible, and he even states his love for her in the past tense (*OCB*, 150). If each one had been more aware of what sexual intercourse is and how the other's body functions, there would also have been greater understanding. However, "they lived in a time when a conversation about sexual difficulties was plainly impossible" (*OCB,* 3), and therefore, such information was hard to come by, "And what stood in their way? Their personalities and pasts, their ignorance and fear, timidity, squeamishness, lack of entitlement or experience or easy manners, then the tail end of a religious prohibition, their Englishness and class, and history itself" (*OCB*, 96).

Cultural constraints and the lack of communication (and lack of goal-relevant information) caused by it, thus resulted in the destruction of the relationship. In this sense, *On Chesil Beach* manifests Seeman's modernist idea of meaningless, "the individual's sense of understanding events in which he is engaged" (Seeman, 1959: 786), rather than Geyer's (1996: xxiii) postmodernist manifestation of meaninglessness[73]. *On Chesil Beach* thus differs markedly from *The Child in Time* in the way that it employs meaninglessness to drive a wedge between a couple. In *On Chesil Beach*, it is the lack of information caused by cultural constraints that restrain the free exchange of goal-relevant information, whereas in *The Child in Time* the cultural frame of reference which supposedly generates meaning, generates

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[71] The fact that she is momentarily aroused as he inadvertently strokes one of her pubic hairs (*OCB*, 87), indicates that she is not frigid, as he calls her (*OCB*, 156).

[72] The term 'helped' is suitable here because she "suspected that there was something profoundly wrong with her" (*OCB*, 8). *She* classifies herself as abnormal, indicating that society would agree.

[73] "With the accelerating throughput of information [...] meaningless is not a matter anymore of whether one can assign meaning to incoming information, but of whether one can develop adequate new scanning mechanisms to gather the goal-relevant information one needs".

conflicting meanings. Neal & Collas (2000: 14) note the importance of the social world,

> It is clear that there is an objective reality outside of our heads that exists independently of our perceptions of it. Yet, the human problem is that of dealing, in some way or another, with the realities socially constructed to serve as guidelines for everyday life. Selectivity and errors in the perceptual process stem from the cultural blinders imposed upon us.

As a result of meaninglessness, Stephen experiences isolation in *The Child in Time*, Seeman's fourth aspect of alienation:

> [Isolation] is also experienced in the sense of estrangement from activities in which one is engaged; the feeling of being separated or cut off from the type of rewards and lifestyles that prevail within one's own society, the yearning for an authentic relatedness to others that goes unfulfilled, and the perception of being a solitary individual, alone and apart from others, yet needing to be wanted by others (Neal & Collas, 2000: 95).

Regarding the heterosexual dyad, Julie and Stephen, "had no need of comfort from one another, or advice. Their loss had set them on separate paths" (*CiT*, 54) and "Being together heightened their sense of loss" (*Ibid.*). After meeting up again, "They kept in touch with occasional postcards and met once or twice in restaurants in central London where nothing much was said. If there was love it was buried beyond their reach" (*CiT*, 55). Circumstances turn Stephen into an outsider, and despite his efforts, despite the fact that "he did not want to lose his place in her story" (*CiT*, 56), they drift further apart as the novel progresses, because "The lost child was between them again" (*CiT*, 69).

Another novel by McEwan that has a marriage in crisis as a focal point is *Enduring Love* (1997). *Enduring Love* is "less a reflection on love's endurance than on an individual's endurance of unwanted, uncompromising love" (Childs, 2005: 166). Following an incident where a hot air balloon nearly flies off with only a child on board, a doctor falls to his death, and Jed Perry fixates on the narrator, Joe Rose. It is never quite clear up until the end whether Perry is actually stalking Joe, or if Joe is simply fabricating the story (as his partner Clarissa believes),

> Through these doubts and interpretations, *Enduring Love* develops as a novel about the different narratives, theories, and beliefs people use to interpret events in their lives. [...] it is in many ways a compelling and chilling study of

> an individual who has to endure a love as threatening and predatory as the incarnations of evil in *Black Dogs* (Childs, 2005: 166).

For instance, the doctor's wife fabricates the story that her husband was having an affair and that he was out in the field to go picnicking with his lover, based on some items she found in his car afterwards. 'The couple in crisis' is again a theme of McEwan's, however in *Enduring Love*, unlike in *The Child in Time*, it is not the initial event that wedges the couple apart, but rather subsequent events (Childs, 2005: 176). Joe lives with the guilt of allowing the doctor to die for no reason (the boy landed unscathed in a field), and Jed's stalking, much like Stephen in *The Child in Time* lives with the guilt of losing his only child and his handling of the situation afterwards. In the end, the three characters in *Enduring Love* are like "two atoms of hydrogen, one of oxygen, bound together by a mysterious powerful force" (*Enduring Love*, 225). McEwan says, "[a] polarity that fascinates me is of men and women, their mutual dependency, fear and love, and the play of power between them" (www.contemporarywriters.com).

Time is a meaningful and binding motif in *The Child in Time*; on the first page the narrator notes the subjectivity of time as Stephen observes motorists stuck in traffic, "The steady forward press of the pavement crowds must have conveyed to them a sense of relative motion, of drifting slowly backwards" (*CiT*, 1). Time is inextricably linked to Kate: "Kate's growing up had become the essence of time itself" (*CiT*, 2) and "Without the fantasy of her continued existence he was lost, time would stop" (*Ibid.*). Cutting Kate from his life thus involves disrupting time itself, as is prefigured the moment he exits the supermarket without her: After giving his testimony, "without any apparent interval, any connecting events, he was outside the supermarket" (*CiT*, 16). However, as stated earlier in this study, Kate is far from absent in this story (and in Stephen's story) – lurking in almost every sentence.

"Unable to let go of Kate as spirit, as existence by his side, Stephen plays with scientific theories and education policies of the child and with notions of non-linear time, of parallel dimensions of time and space where past and present and possibilities of being unfold" (Morgado, 2002: 247)

Time is often described as subjective, as indicated by Ingarden's (cf. Keuris,

1992: 543) distinctions:

1. homogenous, 'empty' physicomathematically determined world time;
2. concrete intuitively apprehendable intersubjective time, in which we all live collectively; and
3. strictly subjective time.

Von Bertalanffy argues that the subjectivity of perception goes far beyond "different world views" and "cultural experiences", noting that, "Cognition is dependent, firstly, on the psycho-physical organization of man" (1968: 227). Jacob von Uexküll introduced the notion of the *instant* as the smallest unit of perceived time (Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 229) through his theory of *Umwelt-Lehre*. This correlates with Ingarden's *concrete intuitively apprehendable intersubjective time*. For man, the instant is about ⅟18 sec., i.e., "impressions shorter than this duration are not perceived separately but fuse". Thus, the physiological makeup of *Homo sapiens* prohibits the perception of smaller instances. But "It appears that the duration of the instant depends not on conditions in the sense organs but rather in the central nervous system, for it is the same for different sense organs" (Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 229). The duration of the instant varies in different species: there are "slow-motion-picture animals" (von Uexküll) that perceive a greater number of impressions per second than man, and "rapid motion-picture animals" who cannot perceive instances as small as ⅟18 sec. An example of a "slow-motion-picture animal" is the fighting fish (*Betta*), which "does not recognize its image in a mirror if, by a mechanical device, it is presented 18 times per second. It has to be presented at least 30 times per second; then the fish attacks his imaginary opponent". Since "slow-motion-picture animals" perceive a larger number of impressions than man does, per unit of astronomical time, time is decelerated. Conversely, a snail is a "rapid motion-picture animal", which "crawls on a vibrating stick if it approaches four times per second, i.e., a stick vibrating four times per second appears to rest to the snail".

Von Bertalanffy also notes how space is as subjectively experienced by the human central nervous system as time is, and argues, "Every animal is surrounded, as by a soap bubble, by its specific ambient" (Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 228). In other words, every organism experiences the world through its specific sensory organs and

nervous system, constructing its own idea of what reality is[74]. Von Bertalanffy (1968: 239) remarks that

> According to [von Uexküll], the world of human experience and knowledge is one of the innumerable ambients of the organisms, in no way singular as compared to that of the sea urchin, the fly or the dog. Even the world of physics, from the electrons and atoms up to galaxies, is a merely human product, dependent upon the psychophysical organization of the human species.

Von Uexküll's thesis is that the psychophysical organization of *Homo sapiens* determines our perception of reality. However, there is a second, further determinant. As Schmidt (cf. Schlesinger, 1988: 104) contends, "Whatever we (as observers) call reality is a construct in the cognitive domain of autopoetic systems. This construct is determined by the biological equipment of the system and by the process of socialization in which the conventions and criteria for constructing and evaluating reality are internalized." Even though linguistic and cultural factors will not change the potentialities of sensory experience, they will, however, change apperception, i.e., "which features of experienced reality are focused and emphasized, and which are underplayed" (Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 235). For "the categories of cognition depend, first, on biological factors, and secondly, on cultural factors" (*Ibid.*). Whorf (cf. Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 225) even goes so far as to claim, "Newtonian space, time and matter are no intuitions. They are recepts from culture and language".

Since the 'normal' human experience correlates with Ingarden's second classification – *concrete intuitively apprehendable intersubjective time* – the main concern of *The Child in Time* is with Ingarden's third classification: *strictly subjective time*. For instance, when Morley shows Stephen the manuscript he acquired, he

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[74] This is not to say that perception bears no relation to reality, which Von Bertalanffy (1968: 239) rightly notes,

> ... the organism has to react to stimuli coming from outside, according to its innate psychophysical equipment. There is a latitude in what is picked up as a stimulus, signal and characteristic in Uexküll's sense. However, its perception must allow the animal to find its way in the world. This would be impossible if the categories of experience, such as space, time, substance, causality, were entirely deceptive. The categories of experience have arisen in biological evolution, and have continually to justify themselves in the struggle for existence. If they would not, in some way, correspond to reality, appropriate reaction would be impossible, and such organism would quickly be eliminated by selection.

trips on the stairs and later claims, "I remember going down, and I remember picking myself up, but there was some time in between, I'm sure of it" (*CiT*, 175). Strictly subjective time is most clearly illustrated during the car accident in Chapter 5. Stephen drives a hired car on his way to Suffolk, when a lorry's tire bursts before overturning. When this happens, he is travelling behind the lorry, and "the rapidity of events was accommodated by the slowing of time" (*CiT*, 100). The lorry is described as overturning "lazily, tentatively". Then Stephen has to drive through a six-foot gap left between the overturned lorry and a road sign. His planning of this feat and farewell to Julie and Kate are described, even though, in *concrete intuitively apprehendable intersubjective time*, it takes "less than half a second" (*CiT*, 101). Then, suddenly, he comes to a stop, "with his door handle and wing mirror scattered across the road fifty feet behind". The entire experience, from the tire bursting to coming to a stop, "had lasted no longer than five seconds" (*CiT*, 102). He rescues the man (Joe) from the wreckage (who, remarkably, only sprained his wrist), and as they drive off, Joe believes that he was trapped in the wreckage for two or three hours, but Stephen claims it was only for ten minutes (*CiT*, 107). Joe (*Ibid.*) has a theory as to why they each have a different take on how long the event took: "I was inside [gaol] once for almost two years. Nothing to do, nothing happening, every fucking day the same. And you know what? It went in a flash, my time. It was all over before I knew I was there. So it stands to reason. If a lot happens quickly it's going to seem like a long time." Since Joe was immobilised in the wreckage, it *felt* longer to him than to Stephen, who was first writing as Joe dictated his farewell notes and then planning Joe's rescue, in other words, Stephen had a lot to do, which Joe had not. However, during the actual accident, both experienced a slowing of time, since a lot was going on in rapid succession.

By highlighting instances where *strictly subjective time* occurs, rather than *concrete intuitively apprehendable intersubjective time*, Stephen (and by extension, people) is depicted as an outsider. If the 'normal' manner in which time is perceived is a shared time, then experiencing time in an individual manner illustrates a break with society in general. The fact that it is not only Stephen who experience time in this manner, suggests that the narrator regards all people as 'intimate strangers'.

Concerning alienation, time functions as an external control, something that drives Stephen and Julie apart when "time, the heartless accumulation of days, had clarified the absolute, bitter truth" after which "Silence drifted in and thickened" (*CiT*, 20). Like a god, "time [...] monomaniacally forbids second chances" (*CiT*, 9), and when Stephen considers that he may have belonged to the rootless, "time had fixed him in his place" (*CiT*, 110). Time thus assumes a godlike role, providing the external control that strips Stephen of his power. In this sense, Stephen's belief in linear time is thoroughly Western. Marija Gimbutas (1999) argues that an androcratic (male-dominated) society, which she identifies as the Kurgan culture from the Russian Steppes, moved into Europe during the Neolithic, supplanting the gynocentric pre-Indo-European societies that flourished before (and is remembered by figurines such as the famous Venus of Willendorf)[75]. Kurgan society was dominated by the ideology of a warrior-elite, and was characterised by "sexual inequality, militaristic violence, dualistic thinking and a fundamental belief in linear continuity (all features of our own civilisation)" (Rudgley, 1999: 18). Throughout most of *The Child in Time*, Stephen is bound by this Western notion of linear, progressive time. However, in the magic-realist scene[76], Stephen stands outside the pub, The Bell, shortly after his conception, where his parents are discussing the option of aborting him[77]. The focus is therefore on the same two motifs found in the title: children, and time. Time's linearity is undermined. Thelma is his guide – a female, scientific and modern Virgil – a physicist who speaks of "eigenfunctions and Hermitian operators, Brownian motion, quantum potential, the Poisson bracket and the Schwarz inequality" (*CiT*, 129). Thelma claims that science (in particular quantum mechanics) is feminising physics and has formulated her own theory on the nature of time in a more 'feminine', non-linear vein.

Apart from but connected to time, another binding motif is language, such as

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[75] Renfrew (1989) disputes the Kurgan hypothesis and proposes a gradual agriculturally-based expansion from Anatolia (Turkey), rather than the violent conquest propagated by Gimbutas.

[76] In *Saturday* (2005), the character Henry reflects on his daughter's choice of authors to study, referring to magic-realist authors as "magic midget drummers" (68), and noting, "One visionary saw through a pub window his parents as they had been some weeks after his conception, discussing the possibility of aborting him" (*Saturday*, 67). This, of course, refers to the magic-realist scene in *The Child in Time*.

[77] This scene also (literally) sets Stephen up as an outsider; when looking at his parents' conversation, the narrator calls him "an intruder" (*CiT*, 60).

when it is noted that, "Kate was at an age when her burgeoning language and the ideas it unravelled gave her nightmares" (*CiT*, 8). Literacy is the subject of much of the discussion of the committee responsible for compiling *The Authorised Childcare Handbook*, and the effect language acquisition has on shaping the mind is also noted, "Stephen sometimes wondered whether [Charles] had finally succumbed to the opinions he had effortlessly assumed" (*CiT*, 39). But time is also connected to language; not least by the observance of his wife when Stephen returns from the supermarket: "Stephen gazed down on his wife and certain stock phrases – a devoted mother, passionately attached to her child, a loving parent – seemed to swell with fresh meaning; these were useful, decent phrases [...] tested by time" (*CiT*, 17). Mendilow (cf. Keuris, 1992: 544) notes that, "Language then is a medium consisting of consecutive units constituting a forward-moving linear form of expression that is subject to the three characteristics of time – transcience (sic), sequence and irreversibility". Language has a magical quality in *The Child in Time*. After Stephen "heard himself pronounce the word 'stolen'" (*CiT*, 14), the narrator says, "As if summoned by the word he had spoken, a white police car spattered with mud cruised to a halt at the curb" (*Ibid.*). Words assume a life of their own, "The word 'alone' took a long time to subside" (*CiT*, 131). When regretting his decision to leave his wife in bed and take Kate with him to do the shopping, Stephen also realises that "time – not necessarily as it is, for who knows that, but as thought has constituted it – monomaniacally forbids second chances" (*CiT*, 9). As discussed earlier in this study, (post-)structuralist theory views reality as constructed in and through language. Since time is part of reality, Stephen's realisation is therefore a link between time and language, similar to Mendilow's comment.

Thermodynamics – the study of the effect of heat transfer on objects (Bar-Yam, 1997: 58) – has a view of time which is particularly suited to a conception of it that incorporates irreversibility, transience and sequence. The Second Law of Thermodynamics[78] states that entropy will increase in a closed system because of

[78] Von Bertalanffy phrases the Second Law in this way: "in a closed system, a certain quantity, called entropy, must increase to a maximum, and eventually the process comes to stop as a state of equilibrium" (Bertalanffy, 1969: 39). Clausius's 1854 formulation (cf. Jones, 1973: 30) is much simpler: "Heat cannot of itself, without the intervention of any external agency, pass from a colder to a hotter body." Tonnelat (1982: 204) proposes a law that contains the Second Law: "Every isolated system

irreversible processes within the system. Entropy can be connected with disorder[79], and in thermodynamics in particular, it involves the dissipation of heat from a source high in heat to a surrounding environment that is low in heat. Maximum entropy means total dissipation of heat. Even though the Second Law only applies to closed systems, and the human being (biologically, psychologically, semiotically[80]) is an open system, entropy remains an integral part of the system. Non-equilibrium thermodynamics proposes a similar approach to Bertalanffy's 'steady-state'[81], and "has shown its applicability in a wide variety of different situations pertaining to fields such as physics, chemistry, biology, and engineering". Vilar and Rubi (2001: 11081) write, "There is [...] a natural extension of thermodynamics to systems away from but close to equilibrium. It is based on the local equilibrium hypothesis, which assumes that a system can be viewed as formed of subsystems where the rules of equilibrium thermodynamics apply. Because of the usual disparity between macroscopic and microscopic scales, most systems fall into this category". Wiley and Brooks (1983: 209) argue that non-equilibrium thermodynamics is essential to the study of biological systems and evolutions, as "*any* valid theory of evolution must have as its teleomatic basis non-equilibrium thermodynamics".

Irreversible processes are characteristic of open systems as well as closed systems, and the effect is that, in open systems, there is "not only the production of entropy due to irreversible processes, but also import of entropy which may well be negative" (Bertalanffy, 1969: 41). Wicken (1983: 439) writes, "All processes are ultimately entropic, the question being only whether such processes have an entropy-reducing or entropy-increasing effect on the limited system under consideration, such as an organism". In a closed system, entropy always increases according to the Clausius equation: $dS \geq 0$. However, in an open system, Prigogine's equation applies: $dS = d_eS + d_iS$ (Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 144). d_eS denotes the change of entropy by import, whereas d_iS indicates the internal production of entropy within

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tends toward successive equilibrium states of increasing realizabilities", also indicating that it only applies to *closed* systems.

[79] e.g. by Arnheim (1973), Tonnelat (1982), and Heylighen (2002).

[80] Wilden (1980: 36) states, "All systems involving or simulating life or mind are open systems, because they are necessarily in communication with another 'system' or 'environment'".

[81] Von Bertalanffy (1969: 191) claims life is the maintenance of 'disequilibria', i.e. not equilibrium but rather a 'steady-state', by constant input-output relations with the environment through the production of entropy and the introduction of negentropy (negative entropy)

the system through irreversible processes. d_iS is always positive according to the second principle of thermodynamics, but d_eS can be positive or negative (negentropy). Schrödinger (*ibid.*) states that "the organism feeds on negative entropy", meaning that it is only the negentropic input that counters the second principle which would otherwise inevitably lead to death[82].

Eddington's statement (cf. Von Bertalanffy, 1969: 151) that entropy is "the arrow of time", since it is the irreversible processes, expressed by entropy, which gives time direction, links entropy with the above-mentioned comment by Mendilow. Eddington claims, "Without entropy, i.e., in a universe of completely reversible processes, there would be no difference between past and future" (*Ibid.*). Eddington and Mendilow therefore see time in the same manner as Gimbutas's Kurgan culture, and Stephen and the narrator in *The Child in Time*: irreversible, linear, progressive. When Stephen walks along an empty field (*CiT*, 53) on his way to see Julie, "He was marching across a void. All sense of progress, and therefore all sense of time, disappeared". This statement therefore undermines (patriarchal) Western culture and science, as Thelma does as well.

Gender roles and the roles of adults and children are familiar issues in McEwan's writings, and he showcases in particular how these roles can be interchangeable or manipulated. As Morgado (2002: 249) remarks, "The idea of 'family', like that of 'the child', is produced and circulated through discourses and cultural sensibilities as well as through subject areas (e.g. history, sociology, literature, psychology, medicine, politics). It is fluid and economically determined."

In the second short story in McEwan's debut publication, *First Love, Last Rites* (1975) – *Homemade* – a narrator in his early teens, whose "blood having drained from brain to groin, literally, one might say, from sense to sensibility" (*Homemade*, 36), has his first sexual experience with his younger sister. This is done through a role-playing game, Mummies and Daddies, where they assume the roles of husband and wife: "She fetched prams, dolls, stoves, fridges, cots, teacups, a washing

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[82] Although Tonnelat (1982: 205) has a different view regarding the entropic processes in living systems, his conclusion is that "The functioning of all living beings is thus entirely consistent with the laws of thermodynamics".

machine and a kennel from her room and set them up around me in a flutter of organisational zeal" (*Homemade*, 38). At the conclusion of the game, the narrator says to his 'wife': "Connie, we're leaving out one of the most important things that Mummies and Daddies do together [...] They fuck together" (*Ibid.*). He then instructs her on how it is done, and has sexual intercourse with her, while she never ceases to believe that it is part of the role-playing game ("she was at Mummies and Daddies and controlling the game again," *Homemade,* 42). In *The Cement Garden* (1978), children again assume the roles of adults, and some of the central themes discussed are "the natural/unnatural taboo against incest, the modern city as concrete jungle, and culture's thin veneer over nature" (Childs, 2005: 170), "McEwan's novel is concerned with questioning the ways in which the lines between right and wrong, nature and culture, the social and the personal, are precariously and almost arbitrarily drawn, as well as the senses in which ordinary life is fashioned by fantasies, dreams, and role-playing" (*Ibid.*).

In *The Child in Time,* children keep playing at being adults. Early on, the narrator refers to adults as 'ex-children" (*CiT*, 2). However, in *The Child in Time* adults mostly play at being children. This theme is illustrated by the commission responsible for compiling *The Authorised Childcare Handbook*, the fact that Stephen is a writer of children's fiction, Charles's breakdown which causes him to regress to a childlike state, the prevalence of Kate even in her absence, and by tying childhood to the theme of time. For instance, it is written that "Charles was [Thelma's] difficult child" (*CiT*, 40), Stephen mistakes Charles for a boy (*CiT*, 115), Charles's reprimand (*CiT*, 120) sounds childlike, "Your right, stupid", and Charles even stays up late for Stephen (*CiT*, 125), like a child would stay up specially for a visiting adult relative. Stephen calls military vehicles "faithful reproductions of his Dinky toys" (*CiT*, 76) – echoing the idea that adults are "ex-children" and that childhood is not, as *The Authorised Childcare Handbook* claims, something to be outgrown. According to it, childhood is like a disease, "from which growing up is the slow and difficult recovery" (*CiT*, 197).

The basic meaning behind the motif of childhood is captured in the following statement: "When Stephen looked at his parents' faces it was not the effects of age he saw so much as the devastation of Kate's disappearance" (*CiT*, 95). Growing up is

a state of becoming an 'ex-child' through the linear progression of time, not by losing the former childlike state but by disavowing it (as embodied specifically by Charles), much like gender roles involve highlighting aspects of the personality at the expense of others. E.g., Wilden's (1980: 296) comment on digital vs. analog traits assigned to the two genders: "Real people can only fit these images by denying or disavowing a part of their analog-and-digital humanity". The child always remains in the psyche – much like Kate herself. Childhood and adulthood are roles assigned to individuals, roles that affect the interpretation of the world in the same way as gender roles affect interpretation. The fact that roles can be reversed is not only depicted through Charles's regression in the countryside, but even when Stephen takes part in a classroom activity where he mistakes another girl for Kate (*CiT*, 158). Here the teacher sits him down in class and instructs him to raise his hand when he has a question, and hands him a fistful of crayons. He draws his house with these, and as he shifts in his seat it squeaks, prompting the teacher to say, "Someone has the fidgets" – like she would say to a child (*CiT*, 159). And when he visits his parents, he assumes the role of parent while they become children, "It was barely nine-thirty when Stephen, having cleared away the tea things and the beer glasses, turned off the lights and slipped quietly out of the house in which his parents were sleeping" (*CiT*, 196).

Another aspect addressed in the sentence, "When Stephen looked at his parents' faces it was not the effects of age he saw so much as the devastation of Kate's disappearance" (*CiT*, 95), is how time affects growing up. The sentence can be read literally, noting how the loss of Kate has made Stephen's parents seem older, more than the actual years they have lived. However, bearing in mind that much of the novel deals with the loss of childhood itself, Kate becomes a monument to the child within the adult. Then the sentence can be read to mean that the loss of their 'inner children' make them seem old, made the process progressive, irreversible, and linear. Childhood is connected with experiencing non-linear time, which does not progress and is not connected to time in the thermodynamic, progressive, androcratic sense. According to Thelma, Charles

> ...wanted the security of childhood, the powerlessness, the obedience, and also the freedom that goes with it, freedom from money, decisions, plans,

> demands. He used to say he wanted to escape from time, from appointments, schedules, deadlines. Childhood to him was timelessness, he talked about it as though it were a mystical state (*CiT*, 222).

If the natural development of a system is towards increasing entropy[83] - the indicator of linear, progressive time – it implies an initial state of zero entropy, which, in terms of *The Child in Time*, would mean zero time and absolute childhood (order, innocence, The Garden of Eden, etc.). This view is paralleled in contemporary physics:

> A central goal of today's physics, in fact, is to show that at its very beginning, the universe was ordered and unified. But this unity didn't last for long. Just instants after the Big Bang, as the explosion cooled and it's contents scattered, the cosmos' forces and matter differentiated. The universe fell from a state of perfect grace into its current complexity, in a cosmic parallel to Adam and Eve[84] (Harrell, 2008: 48).

However, since thermodynamics calls entropy the result of irreversible processes – and indeed "nothing [can] stop the sinewy clock" (*CiT*, 2) – Charles's adoption of the role of child is unsustainably fabricated. Charles is reminiscent of Jeremy, an orphan, in *Black Dogs* (1992), who "has spent his life striving to regain his childhood innocence before the death of his parents when he was eight years old" (Childs, 2005: 164)[85]. There can never be a complete return to innocence, and the child is irretrievable, although traces always remain, like Kate's double (153-168), and the child in Stephen's novel. Traces of the latter are still present in the fact that he remained friends with Charles, his original publisher, he sits on the committee as an expert on children (because he is a children's book author), and the fact that *Lemonade* played such a large part in Charles's regression.

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[83] In evolutionary terms, entropy refers to genetic deviations and differentiations, rather than heat transfer. Thermodynamics provide a frame of reference that is adaptable to other disciplines beyond physics.

[84] Harrell's invocation of this Biblical event also brings the Tower of Babel to mind, a 'linguistic Big Bang' that initiated differentiation (entropy) along linguistic lines, recalling Mendilow's comments on language (see above).

[85] *Black Dogs* addresses different issues however, as it is "at heart a meditation on the nature of moral forces. The book uses the dogs of its title (who have supposedly been trained by the Gestapo not only to attack but to rape) as an emblem or manifestation of a primal evil that will periodically surface in Europe" (Childs, 2005: 165).

As the concept of truth is undermined when Kate's disappearance is claimed (see above), so the linear progression of time is undermined when Stephen accepts the role of unborn child looking in at his parents at The Bell. Thelma's statement that quantum mechanics feminise physics (*CiT*, 43) can therefore be read as linked with this magic-realist moment when considering this discussion around Indo-European conceptions of time.

As was stated earlier, *The Authorised Childcare Handbook* (*CiT*, 133) was actually written by Charles and the Prime Minister, who is called "the nation's parent" (*CiT*, 88). As such, it is very authoritative, promoting corporal punishment and even normlessness: "Incentives, after all, form the basis of our economic structure and necessarily shape our morality; there is no reason on earth why a well-behaved child should not have an ulterior motive". The idea is that the child is part of a family, and the family functions like a child in greater society with the PM as parent (the so-called 'nanny state'). Of Stephen's upbringing on military bases, the narrator says, "Just as his little family enclosed him with its fierce, possessive love, so the RAF enclosed their family" (*CiT*, 77). At the heart of this view is the individual's need to belong to some form of community, in whichever way applicable. For years, Stephen "had convinced himself he belonged at heart with the rootless, that having money was a merry accident, that he could be back on the road any day with all his stuff in one bag. But time had fixed him in his place" (*CiT*, 110). At the supermarket, he notes that two groups of people shop there, identifiable by the items they buy (*CiT*, 10), and on the beach, "the officers and their families sat at one end, the airmen, sergeants and warrant-officers included, at the other" (*CiT*, 77). As R. D. Laing (1990: 26) remarks,

> Personal relatedness can exist only between beings who are separate but who are not isolates. We are not isolates and we are not parts of the same physical body. Here we have the paradox, the potentially tragic paradox, that our relatedness to others is an essential aspect of our *being*, as is our separateness, but any particular person is not a necessary part of our being .

Reinstating the bond between himself and his wife thus becomes a necessity for dealing with Kate's loss, for creating meaning again. But "Cohesion develops out of

disclosing information and sharing secrets about oneself, trusting the other person, believing that the other person is honourable and benevolent, and viewing his or her intentions as favourable" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 142). Stephen and Julie's inability to share in the loss thus has to be addressed, and Kate has to be confronted (or the absence of Kate). "Free, open, and supportive communication is the primary glue in the bonding process" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 35). The lack thereof, as illustrated in *On Chesil Beach*, dissolves the bond.

After Thelma phones and asks him to come over immediately (*CiT*, 202), without telling him what the emergency is, Stephen "used three separate keys to lock his front door" (*CiT*, 211), he then "took the stairs three at a time" to get to the station, where "serious drinkers were three deep at the bar" of the pub. Bearing in mind Hans Robert Jauss's conception of the horizon of expectation[86], there is an expectation contained within the work itself, which is built up as the text is read. This repetition of the number three[87] within such a short space, creates the sense that three will be an important number in the following pages. At the same station, Stephen finds a girl, who had begged money off him before, dead. When he reaches Thelma, she takes him to see Charles, who turns out to be "his second corpse of the day" (*CiT*, 217) as he lies in the snow. With the recent repetition of the number three, the reader then expects a third corpse.

We only find the third corpse early the next morning, as he reaches Julie and they talk about Kate. The third corpse is thus metaphysical; note the reiteration of the number three: "It was then, *three* years late, that they began to cry together at last for the lost, irreplaceable child who would not grow older for them, whose

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[86] Jauss distinguishes between two main horizons of expectation (cf. Rossouw, 1992: 428), the one contained within the system of the work itself, and the one brought to the text by the reader. The repetition of the number 'three' in *The Child in Time* relates to the first horizon of expectation. In the process of reading a text, the reader builds up a picture of what the text is and what it will become. With every passing chapter, the addition of new information influences the understanding of that which came before, as De Jong (1992: 249) argues,

> According to the phenomenological model, the reader spontaneously and passively converts text data into what is for him familiar meaning systems or codes, until the codes are interrupted by textual interlacement and he is forced into active meaning creation, and so drawn into the creation of the text. Every new meaning creation adjusts the already read and interpreted text that is present in the reader as memory and creates expectancies in terms of the upcoming unread text (own translation).

[87] It also takes Stephen three months to write *Lemonade* (*CiT*, 26), and three years pass between the disappearance of Kate and the couple's reconciliation.

characteristic look and movement could never be dispelled by time" (*CiT*, 239) (own emphasis). This recollects Stephen's earlier recognition, that "he could learn not to love [Julie], just so long as he could see her from time to time and be reminded that she was mortal". Part of why Stephen found it so difficult to deal with Kate's disappearance is that she was growing up out of his sight, and he would always see her as more than mortal. Now, by facing the loss together, they can achieve closure. The Zeigarnik effect "refers to the 'completion tendency' in human affairs. We tend to remember more vividly uncompleted tasks than the ones we have completed" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 62). Completing the grieving process is thus a necessity for moving on.

The symbol of their reunification is the birth of their second child. During Stephen's last visit to Julie, nine months before, they had conceived her, but Julie did not notify him. Prolepses prepare the reader for Julie's pregnancies, but Stephen is unaware until he very nearly reaches her. Firstly, after taking care of Charle's body, Julie phones him at Thelma's. As she hands him the phone, she smiles a broad but unintelligible smile. He leaves and convinces a railway worker to take him there, because of transport difficulties, and after telling him (Edward) about Julie, the worker asks:

> 'When did you last see her then?' The driver stressed the pronoun, as if he knew the women in question.
> 'Last June'.
> 'The man grimaced and said, 'That figures.' (*CiT*, 231)

After the driver drops him off, he sees a young couple pushing bicycles in the rain (*CiT*, 234), which recalls the moment he saw his parents in The Bell, making the reader aware that an impending birth is forthcoming. Being on familiar ground, he passes The Bell and has an epiphany: "It was then that he understood that his experience there had not only been reciprocal with his parents', it had been a continuation, a kind of repetition. He had a premonition, followed instantly by a certainty, borne out by Thelma's smile and Edward's instant understanding of the months" (CiT, 235). As he now expected, he finds Julie pregnant, and tells her about riding in the cab on the train. She calls this his "boyhood dream" (*CiT*, 236), indicating that the trace of childhood – the child epitomised by Kate – is getting

stronger. They talk, sharing their feelings of the last three years – "Free, open, and supportive communication" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 35), "It was then, three years late, that they began to cry together at last for the lost, irreplaceable child who would not grow older for them, whose characteristic look and movement could never be dispelled by time" (*CiT*, 239). This suggests that their connection is ultimately recaptured. The alienation both had suffered, powerlessness in the face of Kate's disappearance, meaninglessness in their inability to understand each other's ways of dealing with the loss, and social isolation as they became estranged, is resolved. However, the child remains removed from time in their eyes, inalienable by time, like the argument of the tenacity of the inner child to remain present in absence suggests.

In a final symbolic act, she goes into labour and he delivers the baby. The narrator does not give the gender of the baby, for that is irrelevant. The child symbolises innocence, no matter whether it is a boy or a girl. However, bearing in mind Charles's failed attempt at regaining innocence, this could rather be read as retaining the trace of the child while progress remains. This child is therefore not a complete reversion to innocence, nor a complete loss of innocence, but an Aristotelian 'Golden Mean'.

Alienation in *London Fields* by Martin Amis

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet,
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
In every Infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry,
Every blackening church appalls,
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear,
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born Infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

London - William Blake
(in Ferguson et al, 1996: 682)

Introduction

Kiernan Ryan (1999: 203) calls Martin Amis and Ian McEwan, "two of the most accomplished, and most controversial, writers of their generation". Both have published an impressive collection of works over the last few decades, and are highly acclaimed. Ryan (1999: 203) claims,

> Amis's notoriety stems [...] from his rapt absorption in the sordid realities of the ruthless and selfish. Greed and lechery, addiction and abuse, beat out the deep, recurrent rhythms of his fiction. His narratives habitually revolve around insufferable egotists and moronic dupes, heartless bastards and their helpless prey, tangled up in lethal webs of mutual manipulation and psychological torment.

In general, Amis "seems to delight in investing the subhuman and vicious, the mean and degenerate, with a charismatic energy and turbo-charged eloquence which sanction and protract their modern sway" (Ryan, 1999: 204). For instance, in his

debut novel, *The Rachel Papers* – which won the Somerset Maugham Award – the narrator, Charles Highway, is a nineteen-year-old man who wants to have sex with an older woman before he turns twenty. He is promiscuous and says, "The teenager may be spontaneous, doglike, etc., but it's generally only another name on the list, only another notch on the cock" (*RP,* 22). Charles finds and pursues Rachel Noyes, only to leave her when a condom breaks, convinced that he has made her pregnant.

Mathews (2004: www.contemporarywriters.com) argues the importance of Amis,

> The early career as a literary journalist soon gave way to recognition as a cult-ish novelist producing a series of funny, dark, perverse tales of youth in the city (*The Rachel Papers*, 1973; *Dead Babies*, 1975; *Other People: A Mystery Story*, 1981). This status shifted dramatically with the triptych of bravura novels of the late 1970s and 1980s – *Success*, *Money: A Suicide Note*, and *London Fields* – which captured the chaos and energy of the Thatcherite period[88], and cemented Amis's reputation as a foremost chronicler of contemporary London.

London Fields makes many references to Thatcherite England and growing poverty: "On the street the poor rock and sway, like burying parties. All their eyes are ice" (*LF*, 118). After Sampson and Nicola have sex, they walk through a bleak landscape: "hand in hand and arm in arm we totter, through communal fantasy and sorrow, through London Fields" (*LF*, 391), much like lovers, *like* lovers, for love is dead. Amis's London is far from a rural setting, and this scene only serves to emphasise the chaos and decay (physical and moral) that London has become and highlights the individual's position in an urbanised setting. When Potgieter (cf. Van Coller, 2008) describes the metropolis as "the meeting-place of evils and of those in pursuit of evil," he shares this gloomy view on the modern city with Amis. Brooke & Cameron (1996: 649) write, "Indeed, the only escapes from this urban chaos are towards another urban chaos, New York, and in the bitter irony of the novel's pastoral title". Amis's debut novel, *The Rachel papers*, calls London 'Fat City', "where people go in order to come back from it sadder and wiser," like William Blake[89] would ("and mark

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[88] The narrator in *London Fields* (36) remarks, "Really the thing about life here was its incredible rapidity, with people growing up and getting old in the space of a single week. [...] time was a tube train with the driver slumped heavy over the lever, flashing through station after station".

[89] Charles in *The Rachel Papers* (75) declares, "I really quite like Blake – and not just for the fucks he had got me, either". In *London Fields* (401), Samson describes Nicola's breasts as "in fearful

in every face I meet, marks of weakness, marks of woe" – *London*). London is described like a pub: "the smoke and the builder's dust, the toilet tang, the streets like a terrible carpet" (*LF*, 3).

Because Amis is "principally seen as a stylist and a satirist; his books are often more praised for their use of language than for their subject matter" (Childs, 2005: 35). Style is an important element in Amis's works, in following Nabokov, whom Amis quotes in *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews 1971-2000* (cf. Childs, 2005: 35), "The subject may be crude and repulsive. Its expression is artistically modulated and balanced. This is style. This is art. This is the only thing that really matters in books". Amis's use of language is unique and striking. For instance, in *London Fields*, Chapter 22: Horrorday, the day of the "eclipse, innit" (*LF*, 444) – when the nuclear bomb is supposed to explode over Marble Arch in London – begins with an ashtray falling on Keith, in a way reminiscent of a nuclear explosion: "The first three events – light, sound, and impact – were all but instantaneous. First, the eye opened to the scalding bulb of the foundered standard lamp; next, the rushing report of some lofted cherrybomb or megabanger; and then the brisk descent of the crammed glass ashtray" (*LF*, 437). Keith checks the time on the *horrorclock*, swears through *horrordust*, hits his *horrortoe* against part of the bed, while getting dressed a *horrornail* keeps snagging on his clothes, and eventually his scrotum is seized in his *horrorzip*. Later on in the *horrorday*, arrives home: "On the way to the lift his gait changed from its accustomed boxy shuffle to the sudden dance of a paddler entering a cold sea. His right foot, deep in horrorturd" (*LF*, 446).

Childs (2005: 36) calls the early novels, up to and including *Other People*, "apprentice work", because they still clearly show the influence of writers such as Angus Wilson, Pritchett, Borges, and Nabokov. However, from the beginning Amis displayed his "mordant wit and linguistic exuberance" (Rennison, 2005: 7). For instance, in *London Fields* the narrator remarks, "I think it was Montherlant who said that happiness writes white: it doesn't show up on the page. We all know this. The letter with the foreign postmark that tells of good weather, pleasant food and comfortable accommodation isn't nearly as much fun to read, or to write, as the

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symmetry", recalling *The Tyger* by Blake (cf. Ferguson et al., 1996: 680): "What immortal hand or eye could frame thy fearful symmetry?"

letter that tells of rotting chalets, dysentery and drizzle" (*LF*, 23). In *The Rachel Papers*, Charles argues, "nice things are dull, and nasty things are funny. The nastier a thing is, the funnier it gets" (*RP*, 88). He describes a sexual encounter,

> Fifteen, maybe twenty minutes trying not to come, with a beady dread of what was going to happen when I did; a decent (i.e. perceptible) orgasm; a further two or three minutes in garrotted detumescence. Cock attains regulation minimum and is supplanted by well-manicured thumb; Gloria has another ... five? Orgasms; and so it ends (*RP*, 23).

In time, Charles leaves Gloria for Rachel, but stays in contact with Gloria. After having sex with Gloria early one evening, Rachel visits him (having been with him in the afternoon). When she wants to have sex with him as well, he digs through the wastepaper basket in search of a used condom:

> My fingers curled around the Gloria-moistened trojan, flicked it aside, and burrowed deeper into the pool of tissue, banana skin and cigarette ash, until it found the one used that afternoon on Rachel herself. I have my standards, thank you. True, Gloria's would have been nicer, because Rachel's was much dirtier and danker and *colder* than hers. All the same that would have been, well, vulgar – and an insult to a fine girl (*RP*, 200).

In *London Fields* (212), the narrator describes Guy's morning cereal:

> He could digest his MegaBran because, (or so he often thought) the thick, dark, all-fibre cereal was precisely one stage away from human shit in the first place. MegaBran was on a chemical knife-edge between cereal and human shit. Guy wondered whether MegaBran shouldn't rename itself HumanShit: the lettering could be done wavily and mistily, to suggest an imminently dawning reality. One drop of saliva was all MegaBran needed.

Amis's best-known novels are *Money*, *London Fields*, *Time's Arrow*, and *The Information*. Childs (2005: 36) comments that "The characters of Amis's post-modernist novels are [...] alienated and usually socially marginalized", and addicted to excess, particularly to alcohol and tobacco. In *The Information* (cf. Childs, 2005: 39), Richard Tull is "approaching the point where smoking and drinking were *all* he liked to do". Keith Talent in *London Fields* is obsessed with pornography and darts. The following section therefore focuses on how Seeman's conception of alienation manifests in *London Fields*, where, "in a way, everything goes back to darts. If you think about it, the whole world is darts" (*LF*, 396).

London Fields

London Fields is an area of Hackney in North East London, voted to be the worst place to live in the UK in 2006. However, the book is not set here; most of the action takes place around Portobello Road in West London. Photo Burgert Senekal.

London Fields is a "state-of-the-nation novel, a murder mystery, an anti-love story, and a satire, [...] a post-modernist apocalyptic take on the millennium's finale" (Childs, 2005: 46). It is set in 2000[90], against the backdrop of nuclear holocaust ("with London like a bull's-eye in the centre of the board," *LF*, 16) and climate change, where the weather "if we can still call it that" (*LF*, 14) is so erratic that it has become main news, usurping the normal news, even spawning "X-rated weather reports" (*LF*, 369). Winds "tear through the city, they tear through the island, as if softening it up for an exponentially greater violence," (*LF*, 43) and there is even a Hurricane Keith (*LF*, 338), deservedly named after one of the main characters. Keith Talent sums up the weather situation, "*El Niño* innit" (*LF*, 103). In this erratic world, "The only continuity [...] is the knowledge of imminent catastrophe and death, the unexplained

[90] Nicola is said to have been fourteen at the death of the Shah of Iran, and since he died in 1980 and she is thirty-four (turning thirty-five), the novel has to be set in 2000.

threat which hangs over London" (Brooke & Cameron, 1996: 648). This coming catastrophe is the impending nuclear holocaust, said to come on the day of the eclipse[91], 5 November (*LF*, 394). On that day, "as the Chancellor made his speech in Bonn, two very big and very dirty nuclear weapons would be detonated, one over the Palace of Culture in Warsaw, one over Marble Arch." However, there is no nuclear holocaust on 5 November, apart from Nicola's death and the eclipse.

Samson, the narrator, recognises that the world intrudes on his story: "Sometimes I wonder whether I can keep the world situation out of the novel: the crisis, now sometimes called the Crisis [...]. Maybe it's like the weather. Maybe you can't keep it out" (*LF*, 64). The increasing chaos is first alluded to in the Note, where M. A. (Martin Amis? Mark Asprey?) claims to have toyed with the title *Time's Arrow*, an allusion to Eddington's comment[92] that entropy is the arrow of time (see section on *The Child in Time*). Later, Samson remarks, "Entropy, time's arrow – ravenous disorder" (*LF*, 239). This increasing disorder is highlighted in the microcosm of Guy Clinch's house: "The other thing the house used up was *order*. Each day the double fronted dishwasher, the water softener, the carrot peeler, the pasta patterner got closer and closer to machine death, hurtling towards chaos. Each day the cleaning lady went home tireder, older, iller. A citadel of order, the house hurried along much entropy elsewhere" (*LF*, 276). In the event of nuclear disaster, "His house, the thrumming edifice of negative entropy, would be ordinary chaos in an instant" (*LF*, 276). The importation of negative entropy, in the sense of non-equilibrium thermodynamics, sustains the 'steady-state'. In this case, negentropy occurs in the form of cleaners, Guy's continuous financial input, and the army of professionals working to keep the house (and its inhabitants) in their threatened but steady state.

In a sense, *Einstein's Monsters* (1987) prefigures *London Fields* (1989), for both address the issue of nuclear destruction. *Einstein's Monsters* is a collection of five short stories set in the aftermath of nuclear destruction, whereas *London Fields* builds up to an impending nuclear disaster that never occurs. According to Ryan (1999: 209), *London Fields*,

[91] Nicola's birthday, Guy Fawkes Day.
[92] Cf. Von Bertalanffy (1969: 151)

> ... unmasks the deadly reciprocity of domestic violence and the atomic violence escalating in the international public sphere: the two realms feed off each other in a suicidal mockery of symbiosis. Guided only by the obscene plausibility of its thesis, *London Fields* tracks the fearful symmetries that link pornography, TV addiction and child abuse, and these in turn with nuclear targeting and the emergence of the dartboard as the supreme icon of yob[93] culture and symbol of the evolutionary triumph of Tabloid Man on his junk diet of simulated sex and death.

The world of *London Fields* is one where experience has become mediated, "Guy had grown up in the age of mediated atrocity" (*LF*, 214), saturated by the media. Human relations have become superficial, as depicted by the central characters and stated by the narrator, "Only babies frown and flinch. The rest of us just fake with our fake faces. [...] Soon the sneeze and the yawn will be mostly for show. Even the twitch. [...] Most of us have lost our laughs and now make do with false ones" (*LF*, 241). Even the car has simulated damage: "fool-the-eye dent-marks, a removable toupeé of rust on the hood, and adhesive key-scratches all over the paintwork". It is a world where the media has saturated the psyche and consumer culture has eroded society. This emphasis is stated early on in the novel, "Television was the great shopfront, lightly electrified, up against which Keith crushed his nose" (*LF*, 8); even Keith's "eyes were television" (*LF*, 9). After Samson, the narrator, first meets Keith, the latter gives him a brochure of the colognes he sells (including Scandal, Outrage, Mirage, Disguise, Duplicity and Sting), and the two middle pages of the brochure are blank, indicating that there is no centre, no substance.

Money: A suicide Note (1984) ties in with *London Fields*, and is set "against a backdrop of urban riots and royal weddings, British pubs and Californian saunas, Thatcherism and Reaganomics" (Childs, 2005: 43). It is a story about greed and emptiness in contemporary consumer culture (emphasised by Self's trips across the Atlantic), where all Self's relationships are defined by money, "Money is always involved" (*Money*, 19). Rennison (2005: 8) calls *Money*, "the archetypal 1980s novel", as it centres on the promotion of Thatcherism's consumer culture and globalization (i.e. Americanization). In *London Fields*, the narrator remarks:

[93] The word 'yob' denotes a ruffian/criminal.

> Go back far enough and all money stinks, is dirty, roils the juices of the jaw. Was there any clean money on earth? Had there ever been any? No. Categorically. Even the money paid to the most passionate nurses, the dreamiest artists, freshly printed, very dry, and shallowly embossed to the finger tips, had its origins in some bastardy on the sweatshop floor (*LF*, 255).

London Fields is "very much a black comedy, rather than a dour meditation on the present, or a macabre exercise in the detective genre" (Brooke & Cameron, 1996: 648). It is a metanovel, as described by McDermott (Hambidge, 1992b: 293):

> The novel is experienced as a process of reading and writing, and its formal unity, while being directed to a perfected end, is a unity of process. Which is to say, that as the reader in his reading develops a cumulative awareness of the formal beauty and of the meaning of the novel, this awareness is fully realised only in the end. Process and self-conscious fictiveness are features of the modern metanovel.

Hambidge (*Ibid*.) names Etienne Leroux's *18-44* (1967) and Vladimir Nabokov's *Transparent Things*[94] (1972) as examples of the metanovel, arguing that there are different forms of this genre. *London Fields* would be described as a novel-within-a-novel, where the first-person narrator experiences and describes events (*Ibid*.). In its purest form, as in *Transparent Things*, it is impossible to distinguish between the narrator's account of what happens and what actually happens. *London Fields* is written and simultaneously narrated by Samson Young, although not created by him. He narrates scenes in turn from every character's perspective, and states ironically, "Boy, am I a reliable narrator" (*LF*, 162). However, he admits that his narration of Analiese was not accurate (*LF*, 368), which questions his sincerity. Every chapter is concluded with a section on where he is in his life, and what he thinks of what he has just written, believing himself to be "just an observer. Or a listener" (*LF*, 62)", or claiming to be "a civilian. I'm immune" (*LF*, 119). His 'fly in the web' image underscores his powerlessness and the fact that he is more than an observer: "If London is a spider's web, then where do I fit in? Maybe I'm the fly. I'm the fly" (*LF*, 3). This is further highlighted by the mentioning of Heisenberg's principle "that an observed system inevitably interacts with its observer" (*LF*, 181), prefiguring that it will be he himself who commits the murder.

[94] This novel is quoted in *London Fields* (303): "Night is always a giant but this one was terrible".

His text is supposed to be a documentary of the actual events, with very little fiction: "I think I am less a novelist than a queasy cleric, taking down the minutes of real life. Technically speaking, I am also, I suppose, an accessory before the fact, but to hell with all that for now" (*LF*, 3). The narrator claims that his narrative echoes the formlessness of reality: "Perhaps because of their addiction to form, writers always lag behind the contemporary formlessness. They write about an old reality, in a language that's even older" (*LF*: 238). The world depicted in *London Fields* is no longer coherent, and entirely superficial – an embodiment of the post-modern simulacra, epistemological uncertainty[95] and even teleologic uncertainty, where metanaratives are not even questioned – they are absent. Later Samson remarks, "The form itself is my enemy. All this damned romance. In fiction (rightly so called), people become coherent and intelligible – and they aren't like that" (*LF*: 240). He claims that his narrative is a documentary, "people are going to imagine that I actually sat down and made all this stuff up" (*LF,* 302).

On 5 November, a woman named Nicola Six will be murdered, and she works to orchestrate her own death: "The girl will die. It's what she always wanted. You can't stop people, once they *start*. You can't stop people, once they *start creating*" (*LF*, 1). She is said to be clairvoyant, and "The diary she kept was therefore just the chronicle of a death foretold" (*LF*, 17). She knows how she will be murdered: "The car, the grunt of its brakes, the door swinging open and the murderer (his face in shadow, the car-tool on his lap, one hand extended the seize her hair) saying, *Get in. Get* in... And in she climbed" (*LF*, 18). This passage is repeated on p 465, not in the precise words but with the precise details, rendering her prophesy accurate. All three male characters (Samson Young, Keith Talent, and Guy Clinch) are named at some point as her murderer, but Samson says that the story is "Not a whodunit. More a whydoit" (*LF*, 3). She has sex with all three, and their lives are irrevocably changed by her presence. She demolishes both Guy and Keith's marriages (although neither were stable or perfect before she appeared), and Samson commits suicide. The novel traces the events that lead to her death and the accompanying

[95] The narrator in Lambkin's *The Hanging Tree* (1995: 6) remarks, "At the time I still had faith, I still believed in truth. I see now how naive I was."

catastrophes, whilst simultaneously narrating the lives of Guy and Keith, while Samson provides glimpses of his own life throughout.

The action centres on a fictional pub[96] called the Black Cross on Portobello Road in West London, which symbolises the four characters forming the corners of a cross and intersecting at the pub. Samson says, "The Black Cross. A good name, I always thought, sent my way by reality. The cross, darkly cruciform, the meeting place of Nicola and Keith and Guy. A cross has three points. Depending on how you look at it, though, it might be said to have four" (*LF*, 209), which includes himself.

Keith Talent's "own life parallels the world around him: chaotic, illogical, ugly, and often incomprehensible, even to himself" (Brooke & Cameron, 1996: 648). His life is described in terms of television: "Keith's life is now doubly compressed, condensed – and therefore speeded up. His life is on fast-forward, picture-search" (*LF*, 135). He is a petty criminal who lacks both conscience and any sense of morality (apart from despising paedophiles and honouring the 'discipline' of darts). He is a cheat, who makes his living by cheating other people, and cheating the government. He cheats on his wife with many other women, and even cheats the wind (*LF*, 180). Keith exploits Thatcherite England's consumer culture with its emphasis on entrepreneurial spirit, selling fake colognes called Scandal and Outrage, "he cheated people with non-pornographic pornography", and playing cards. Samson describes him, "Keith wasn't the sort of bloke who disapproved of people who had a lot of money. He liked there to be people who had a lot of money, so that he could cheat them out of it. Keith was sorry, but he wouldn't want to live in the kind of society where nobody was worth burgling" (*LF*, 45). One problem is that the competition is growing, "Unquestionably you could still earn a decent living at it, at cheating. Yet no-one seemed to have thought through the implications of a world in which *everyone* cheated" (*LF*, 113). In order to survive in a competitive capitalist culture, such as Thatcherite Britain, "Keith would have to cheat more, cheat sooner and cheat harder than the next guy, and generally expand *the whole concept of cheating*" (*Ibid.*).

[96] This was confirmed when a search of Portobello Road was conducted by this researcher in June 2006. A local barman claimed that there had never been such a pub in the area.

Samson says, "Keith Talent was a bad guy. Keith Talent was a very bad guy. You might even say that he was the worst guy" (*LF*, 4), and calls him "the murderer" (*LF*, 3). However, he soon changes his mind; "He never had what it took to be a murderer, not on his own. He needed his murderee" (*LF*, 6).

Keith's marriage to Kath is a parody of a marriage: he cheats on her with a variety of women, and even says, "You fucky Nefner[97] that's who I'm like" (*LF*, 376). When Nicola asks Keith about his family, he seems indifferent of both his role as husband and father:

> "You're married."
> "Not really. Put it like this. My wife thinks she is. But me I'm not so sure."
> "Children?"
> "No. Well, yeah, I got a little girl. She's not even one yet" (*LF*, 129).

Keith routinely abuses his wife: when Kath was pregnant, "Keith had welcomed the pregnancy: it was, he liked to joke, quite a handy new way of putting his wife in hospital" (*LF*, 6). When she decides to call the child Kim, he reacts aggressively, but "After a few days, whenever Kath cautiously addressed the baby as 'Kim', Keith no longer swore at his wife or slammed her up against the wall with any conviction. 'Kim', after all, was the name of one of Keith's heroes, one of Keith's gods"[98] (*LF*, 7). When he infects her with urethritis, a sexually transmitted disease, he is "obliged to inaccurately deny that he had given Kath non-specific urethritis" (*LF*, 106). He had contracted it from one of his lovers, Peggy Obbs, who had contracted it from someone else while cheating on *him*. As he beats her up for it, her brother comes over to her house, finds Keith beating his sister, and beats up Keith. However, when Keith explains *why* he is beating up Peggy, her brother joins in, and both thrash her. But "after that was over, things got a little unpleasant" as he comes home to find Kath aware of what her illness is. He "denied it hotly, indignantly, and inaccurately", like a politician would, until she eventually keeps quiet about it.

This is an example of how "The ugliness of male/female relationships has become a part of modern consciousness" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 6). As Charles remarks in *The Rachel Papers,* "We have got into the habit of going further and

[97] Hugh Marston Hefner is the founder of Playboy Magazine.
[98] This refers to Kim Twemlow, a fictional professional darts player.

further beyond the happy-ever-more promise: relationships in decay, aftermaths" (*RP*, 147). Keith writes in his diary, which logs "his intimate thoughts, most (but not all) of them darts-related"[99] (*LF*, 177): "Got to stop hurting K. No good just takeing (sic) it out on the Baby" (*LF*, 370). Kim, the baby, is being abused, and Samson's discovery of this diary inscription shocks him. However, Samson later finds out that "*K* wasn't Kim. *K* was Kath. But Keith couldn't stop. And Kath couldn't stop" (*LF*, 454). Abuse thus leads to further abuse: Keith abuses Kath, and Kath abuses Kim. Kath eventually leaves the baby in Samson's care, because she "had resisted the force of her own powerlessness, this time" (*LF*, 454). Abuse acts like a drug in the Talent household. Richard Gelles and Murray Straus (cf. Neal & Collas, 2000: 64) note, "With the exception of the police and the military, the family is perhaps the most violent social group, and the home is the most violent setting in our society. A person is more likely to be hit or killed in his or her home by another family member than anywhere else or by anyone else". *London Fields* elevates domestic violence to the point of absurdity, both in the Talent household, and the Clinch household (see below).

Keith and Kath are powerless to stop their abuse, or perceive themselves to be so, as Keith is powerless before pornography and television. Television 'nukes' him, like Nicola who acts out a live pornographic film for him. He has no real involvement with the upbringing of Kim, as he says, "Babies, infants, little human beings: they're a skirt thing. The only blokes who love babies are transvestites, hormone-cases, sex-maniacs" (*LF*, 80). When Kath asks him to give the bottle to Kim when he comes home from the pub, he replies, "Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies" (*LF*, 316). He is constantly drunk, but sees it as a job requirement: "the darter has to drink. Has to. To loosen the throwing arm. Part of his job" (*LF*, 174). One of his favourite drinks is called *porno*, which is "dead cheap, cause it's been nicked *twice*" (*LF*, 191) .

At the Black Cross, Keith meets Nicola Six, the murderee, an actress who is "tall, dark, and thirty-four" (*LF*, 15), and every man's desire. Even her mouth testifies to the fact that "character is destiny" (*LF*, 21), as her mother had always said it is "a

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[99] For example, one inscription reads: "You cuold (sic) have a house so big you could have sevral (sic) dart board areas in it, not just won (sic). With a little light on top" (*LF*, 177).

whore's mouth" (*LF*, 18). There is an element of horror to her, as "her teeth had a shadowy lustre, slanting inwards, as if to balance the breadth of the lips, or just through the suction of the devouring soul" (*LF*, 17). To complement this succubus-image, the narrator remarks, "*That's what I am*, she used to whisper to herself after sex. *A black hole. Nothing can escape from me*" (*LF*, 67). She is the embodiment of evil, and like the succubus, uses sex to attain her goals. Nicola's goal is to be murdered, and she manipulates the other points of the cross to that end. She is the catalyst: "imagine the atomic cloud as an inverted phallus, and Nicola's loins as ground zero" (*LF*, 195); a "performing artist, nothing more, a guest star directed by the patterning of spacetime, and there it was. It was written" (*LF*, 203). Her death is certain, but the reader is never entirely certain who will be responsible for it, or, more importantly, *why* she will die. When she fakes tears with glycerine, its other uses are listed and link her with catastrophe: "used as an ointment, a drug component, a sexual lubricant, an element of high explosives" (*LF*, 203). Nicola claims that the etymology of the bikini can be traced to Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands, where nuclear tests were conducted in the middle of the century (*LF*, 127), linking sexuality with destruction. Throughout the novel, she is linked with the nuclear bomb, as can be seen where she tells Guy that her Cambodian friend, was called En Lah Gai, "I called her Enola. Enola Gay[100]" (*LF*, 124). She becomes the nuclear holocaust on 5 November, since all three males who were involved with her have their lives ruined. Perhaps this is her function in the novel: to stand as symbol of superficiality and illustrate how superficial identities and superficial sexual relations do much more damage than a nuclear bomb would.

Nicola is a symbol of superficiality, boasting a closet full of outfits to suit every male fantasy, and willing to act anything out – "Always the simulacrum, never the real thing" (*LF*, 131). She teases Keith with pornographic films, acting out male fantasies for him: "With her hair freed and a third of each breast showing and no smile on her business face, she hoped to resemble a Monaco madame after a hard week in her first tax year of semiretirement, or something like that, as seen on TV" (*LF*, 267). The last phrase, "as seen on TV," is of course a standard advertising slogan.

[100] The name of the bomber that dropped the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima.

When she finally has sex with Keith, he first cannot get an erection (he blames it on "Pressures of darts"), but Nicola recognises that it is more likely "a little difficulty switching from one medium to another" (*LF*, 429), i.e. from television to 'reality'. Keith's mind has been saturated with pornography, as he experiences life through television in an overt rendition of Baudrillard's simulacra. When Keith looks at birds playing in a pool, he does not even see the birds (the feathered kind). He notes, "It's like birds playing in a pool," which prompts Nicola to ask, "*Like* birds playing in a pool, Keith?" To this, Keith replies, "You know. Girls. Playing in a swimming-pool" (*LF*, 128). Even nature is perceived "through a kind of filter of preconceptions and expectations fabricated in advance by a culture swamped by images" (Ward, 1997: 60), and those images are violent and/or sexual in Keith's mind.

In this way, Keith in particular exemplifies contemporary Western civilization in amplification, for "in the contemporary culture of courtship, feelings of intimacy and sexual performances have become psychologically separated" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 53): "The modern cultural apparatus promotes materialistic values and tends to emphasize the pleasure principle. Mass entertainment, for example, is saturated with themes of sexuality and the grief and pleasure to be derived therefrom" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 8). It is Keith's 'hobby' to find these themes of sexuality. When he struggles to name his hobbies on an entry form for the Duoshare Sparrow Masters, a "knockout interpub darts competition," (*LF*, 54) he cannot put down 'darts', because "darts was work". Neither can he put 'birds', because he feared it might get back to Kath. So "in the end he searched his soul for the last time, white-knuckled his grip on the biro, and put *TV*"[101] (*LF*, 54):

> It was no less than the truth. He watched a very great deal of TV, always had done, years and years of it, aeons of TV. Boy, did Keith burn that tube. And that tube burnt him, nuked him, its cathodes crackling like cancer. 'TV', he thought, or 'Modern reality' or 'The world'. It was the world of TV that told him what the world was.

[101] Even before Reality TV, Amis depicted a world where TV *is* reality. In *Money* (cf. Childs, 2005: 39), John Self, for whom "watching television is one of my main interests, one of my chief skills", remarks,

> Television is cretinizing me – I can feel it. Soon I'll be like the TV artists. You know the people I mean. Girls who subliminally model themselves on kid-show presenters, full of faulty melody and joy, Melody and Joy. Men whose manners show newscasters interference, soap stains, film smears. Or the cretinized, those who talk on busses and streets as if TV were real.

This mediated reality extends to his knowledge of Guy, for "All he knew about Guy he got from TV" (*LF*, 110). Indeed, TV is not just a simple pastime for Keith, who records six hours of television and then watches the tapes,

> ... he could no longer bear to watch television at the normal speed, unmediated by the remote and by the tyranny of his own fag-browned thumb. Pause. SloMo. Picture Search. What he was after was images of sex, violence and sometimes money. [...] Had to keep your wits about you. He could spot a pinup on a garage wall in Superfastforward. Then Rewind, SloMo, Freeze Frame. A young dancer slowly disrobing before a mirror; and old cop getting it in the chest with both barrels; an American house. Best were the scenes that combined all three motifs (*LF*, 165).

However, Keith is not the only character who experiences reality through television. When Analiese, one of Keith's lovers, met him, she mistook him for Rick Purist, "of TV quiz show fame" (*LF*, 49), he did not deny being Rick, and "Thus the opening, tone-setting phoneme of their relationship – his slurred 'yeah' – was an outright lie" (*LF*, 49). Of course she was angry when she found out he was not Rick, but eventually "she forgot and forgave, and invented new fictions for him: Keith as fly-by-night, as man with no name, a crossword of aliases, a Proteus and a Pimpernel" (*LF*, 50). This illustrates to absurdity that "The love affair always begins as an illusion. Intimacy and emotionality are built around images, since the true substance of another person cannot be known initially. [...] Through wishful thinking, we tend to impute to others the qualities we want them to have in the process of building a relationship" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 5), although it is doubtful if words like 'love' and 'relationship' could be used to refer to Keith Talent. Extraordinarily, Keith eventually surprises Analiese in bed with the actual Rick Purist, and finds that he actually does resemble Rick: "He'd seen Rick on the telly! It was one of the strangest moments in Keith's strange life" (*LF*, 50). Even his marriage to Kath is based on such an illusion; when he met her five years before her "eyebrows [looked] rurally pale, the hair in its innocent russet. Now she looked to Keith like a figure glimpsed at dawn through a rainy windscreen" (*LF*, 108).

Keith's life is changed by the promise of being on the other side of the TV screen for his darts 'achievements',

> I see you, Keith, as a young boy in the street with your face crushed up against the glass. But it's not a shop window. It's a TV screen. We're talking

> TV stardom here, Keith. Behind the screen is where you've got to get to. That's where all the other stuff is – all the stuff you want. Let me take you there, Keith. Let me take you to the other side.

Predictably, it is darts that will take Keith to the other side of the screen, since "everything goes back to darts" (*LF*, 396). Keith is of course excited about being "On TV innit. TV. TV ..." (*LF*, 54). But because Keith sees TV as being reality ("When Keith goes to a football match, that misery of stringer's clichés *is what he actually sees*," *LF*, 98), this creates a problem: "He was actually in great difficulty here. Himself on TV: he couldn't work out how the two worlds overlapped" (*LF*, 417). Kristeva's distinction between Zero-1 and Zero-2 Logic sheds light on Keith's conundrum. In modernist Zero-1 logic, two opposite entities are found where one is the truth or essence (Müller, 1992: 397) by which the other is measured. In this case, reality would be compared with fiction (television). The '1' is the law or definition which regulates logic. Post-modern Zero-2 logic undermines this distinction, arguing instead that there is no law, no substance to compare the other to. Zero-2 logic "refuses to legitimise any one system[102]" (*Ibid.*); in this case Zero-2 Logic, like Keith, denies the validity of the claim of 'reality'. Fiction then has nothing to compare and contrast with, and the boundaries dissolve. Since Keith's reality is already fabricated from images taken from the media, i.e. mediated reality, what can be fictional?

The television appearance is a darts contest, since darts is often linked to television (directly and conceptually, see below), "There's practically a whole channel of it, a whole network of darts" (*LF*, 116). However, everything about the TV appearance is fake; there is even a no smoking sign in what is supposed to be a pub (*LF*, 457), and the cigarette smoke is simulated (*LF*, 461). The television set is imitated, and Tony Taunton, the person in charge of filming the darts competition, remarks, "There's no *pub*. [...] All those jolly butchers and smiling grannies – that's library stuff. We use cutaways and dub the pub later" (*LF*, 457). The sound is to be put in afterwards, "that inimitable pub bustle, the whoops, the laughter, the crack of glass, even the computerised thunks of dart meeting board" (*LF*, 461).

[102] Own translation

Trish (another of Keith's lovers) believes that Keith and Nicola are "getting married like", and offers as proof the statement that: "It was on the telly" (*LF*, 458), as if that legitimises her statement. TV is here the '1' of Zero-1 Logic, but it is clear that as a law it is so counterfeit that the logic, from a reader's (if perhaps not character's) perspective, is clearly Zero-2. Trish Shirt is one of his most prominent lovers, but the basis for their relationship is no less superficial than with any of the others: "Trish had a certain quality. She was nearest" (*LF*, 52). Kath watches Keith's ninety-second biographical documentary on television before the major darts tournament, along with twenty-seven and a half million other people from around the world, while Nicola sits on his knee (*LF*, 423). The documentary claims, "As a bachelor, Keith and Nicky have as yet no plans to wed" (*LF*, 424), as the camera shows them wandering off, hand in hand. To avoid Kath seeing the documentary, Keith could have broken the television, but considered that "sacrilege" (*LF*, 425), indicating that television is a kind of religion to him (like darts). Kath watches the documentary, and refuses to let him back in the house.

In Keith's life, television is tied to pornography: "On average Keith spent about two and three hours a day in a largely fruitless quest for the sort of pornography he liked [...]. But there was a time when pornography had played an altogether more central role in his life. When he was a bachelor, Keith had done pornography the way some people did heroin" (*LF*, 295). The narrator says, "Keith knew that he had no resistance to pornography. He had it on all the time, and even that wasn't enough for him. He wanted it on *when he was asleep*. He wanted it on *when he wasn't there*" (*LF*, 295). Because Keith sees television as *real*, he thus experiences pornographic films as *real* as well. As he remarks while watching one of Nicola's pornographic films: "that is the real thing"(*LF*, 268). As Neal & Collas (2000: 54) note, "The more obvious separation of sex from intimacy is evident through the rapid growth of the pornography industry. Pornography promotes an emphasis upon impersonal sex, the view of a partner as a sex object, and the social acceptability of having a succession of temporary sexual partners." For Keith, pornography is art, "Pornography awakened all his finer responses. It wasn't just the sex. He really did think it was beautiful" (*LF*, 332), and it literally brings tears to his eyes. In *Money,* pornography "is the highest form of art, its actors self-admiring

sack-artists" (Childs, 2005: 40). In *The War Against Cliché,* Amis (cf. Childs, 2005: 40) wrote, "we inhabit the post-modern age, an age of mass suggestibility, in which image and reality strangely interact". This is what Baudrillard (cf. Ward, 1997: 62) refers to as the simulacrum, where "images precede the real to the extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction".

Lenore Tiefer (cf. Neal & Collas, 2000: 97) suggests that "sexual satisfaction grows in importance to the individual and couple as other sources of personal fulfilment and connection with others wither". The fact that Keith has many lovers is thus an indication of his social isolation, since sex is clearly an important issue to him. He has friends at the Black Cross, but no intimate friends. He has a family and many lovers, but the only creature he seems to care about is his dog, Clive. When Keith takes Kath to the hospital, "for her tube trouble" (*LF*, 393), and they hear whimpering, Kath turns to the baby, but Keith turns to the dog. As it turns out, it is Iqbala, another of his lovers, who lies locked up and forgotten in the boot of his car. Keith cannot form intimate connections with others, because "the capacity for love was extinct in him" (*LF*, 72).

D. J. Taylor (CF. Brooke & Cameron, 1996: 643) has remarked, with reference to Martin Amis, "[t]he protagonists of the immediately post-war novel might have been distinguished by their inability to lead moral lives, by their continual recourse to stylistic preference in any matter of judgement. Their late 1980s successors have even less ability to make moral choices, and consequently even less sense of possessing lives of their own". Keith's normlessness is vividly portrayed where he is identified as a rapist, but he has a different view: "Of course, Keith's rapes were to be viewed quite distinctly from those numerous occasions when, in his youth, he had been obliged to slap into line various cockteasers and icebergs (and lesbians and godbotherers). Rape was different" (*LF*, 168). When loan sharks pursue Keith, his concern is that they would break his 'darting finger': "In the old days you kicked off by threatening someone's family. None of this nonsense about starting in on a man's darting finger" (*LF*, 256). He has no insight into his character, no remorse of conscience, and still thinks of himself as "Well, dream husband innit" (*LF*, 315). The three functions of the middle finger of his right hand sketch his character vividly: it is his "courting finger", his "darting finger", and the digit used for his "Americanized

obscene gestures" (*LF*, 181) – sex, darts and television. When this precious digit is cut by broken glass after his car had been broken into (on "horrorday"), it is pornography that is used as a band-aid as he dresses the wound with a "crumpled pin-up" (*LF*, 438). This shows how pornography is all around Keith – he takes the nearest piece of paper he can find. Furthermore, with reference to Lenore Tiefer's remark (cf. Neal & Collas, 2000: 97) that "sexual satisfaction grows in importance to the individual and couple as other sources of personal fulfilment and connection with others wither", bandaging a wound with pornography is a literal rendition of how pornography is used to alleviate the emptiness in Keith's life.

The other important male character, Guy Clinch, is described as a man who "wanted for nothing and lacked everything" (*LF*, 27). He is married to Hope and they have a difficult son called Marmaduke[103]. Even in the Clinch household, CCTV dominates them as they watch Marmaduke: "They were alone tonight. But they were not alone. Marmaduke was present, in electronic form: the twin screens of the closed-circuit TV system shook and fizzed to his rage. There were twin screens in most rooms, on every floor. Sometimes the house felt like an aquarium of Marmadukes" (*LF*, 212). This child in Amis's novel is a caricature of a child, a parody of a child, and the exact opposite of childhood as conceived of in McEwan's *The Child in Time*. Children are depicted as dangerous in *London Fields*, as Samson exclaims, "I really ought to think about what I'm doing, accepting candy from strange children"[104] (*LF*, 63). Marmaduke inverts the concept of 'child abuse', reversing agency so that *he* does the abusing. He "gave no pleasure to anyone except when he was asleep. When he was asleep, you could gaze down at him and thank the Lord he wasn't awake" (*LF*, 214). Even sexually, Marmaduke is the perpetrator rather than the victim of molestation, putting his hand (or head) up Lizzyboo's skirt, or "contemplating a career in child pornography" (*LF*, 158). Hope's policy regarding the kissing of Marmaduke is bizarre: "Members of staff were allowed to kiss Marmaduke. But only Hope was allowed to French-kiss him" (*LF*, 214). After Guy and Hope are finally separated, Marmaduke strips off his clothes and gets into bed naked with

[103] Marmaduke is a newspaper comic strip about a dog.

[104] The world *of London Fields* is the same environment as described by Mayer (2008), where adults fear the young, although Marmaduke is significantly younger than the violent teens of contemporary London's streets.

Hope (*LF*, 450). Marmaduke has therefore usurped him in a literal depiction of Freud's Oedipus complex, without having to kill his father, since love and marriage are already dead and the relationship with his father is a purely biological one. In the immoral world depicted in *London Fields*, Marmaduke, unlike Oedipus, *intentionally* sleeps with his mother, and therefore has no need to blind himself, for he feels no remorse.

In contrast with Keith, however, Guy does not struggle financially and does not routinely cheat on his wife (except for one incident with her sister, Lizzyboo). Guy has money; he "had everything. In fact he had two of everything" (*LF*, 28), and is routinely referred to as from a different class, such as when Hope "patted his office cheek and smoothed his calculator brow" (*LF*, 143). They live in a large house on Lansdowne Crescent in West London, where "There was a big mirror in the kitchen, and a big kitchen in the mirror" (*LF*, 228). The narrator argues that the class system remains part of contemporary British culture,

> Class! Yes, it's still here. Terrific staying power, and against all the historical odds. [...] The class system just doesn't know when to call it a day. [...] Crawling through the iodized shithouse that used to be England, people would still be brooding about accents and cocked pinkies, about maiden names and *settee* or *sofa*, about the proper way to eat a roach in society. Come on, do you take the head off first, or start with the legs? (*LF*, 24).

Guy's contrast with Keith is vividly depicted in their use of language. Keith uses working-class expressions and slang, in particular 'innit', 'as such' and 'no danger'. When first meeting Nicola, Keith believes that she is in mourning, and sympathises: "Bereavement, innit" (*LF*, 37). His accent characterises him also: "Pressure? He fucking *phrives* on it" (*LF*, 209).

Nevertheless, Guy's marriage is a totally dysfunctional one, as "The happiest time of Guy's fifteen-year marriage had come during Hope's pregnancy, a relatively recent interlude. She had taken her fifty per cent cut in IQ with good grace, and for a while Guy had found himself dealing with an intellectual equal" (*LF*, 27). Hope married him principally for his money: "There was something about Guy that Hope liked. She liked his curly-ended fair hair, his house in the country, his shyness about his height, his house in Lansdowne Crescent, his habit of hooding his eyes against a low sun, his title, his partiality to cherries (especially ripe ones), his large private

income" (*LF*, 87). This is another example of what Seeman refers to as normlessness, "One of the major implications of normlessness for intimate relations is that individuals expect to be deceived, abused, or exploited" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 123). Guy is thus exploited and deceived by Hope, and further by Nicola who constantly creates fictions about herself, with an audience (recipient) in mind: "At this particular end of this particular century, they wanted tight bright white underwear, white underwear. They wanted the female form shaped and framed, packaged and gift-wrapped, stylized, cartoonified, and looking, for a moment at least, illusorily pure. They wanted the white lie of virginity" (*LF*, 71). She later tells Guy that she *is* a virgin (*LF*, 133). As Nicola manipulates Guy, "He didn't know that she was just a weatherwoman, with stick and chart. For him it was the real thing. He didn't know that it was just an ad" (*LF*, 413). There is a lack of goal-relevant information: Guy does not realise that she is manipulating him, for even *he* sees the world in preconceived images/inherited signs, in the same manner as Keith (although slightly less vividly). Since Guy is a 'nice guy'-type, unlike Keith, Nicola's 'damsel in distress'-image is more effective on him, and he falls in love with the image of a poor, struggling virgin. This strips their relationship of all meaning, making it as superficial as Keith's relationship with Nicola. But he is powerless to avoid her, since he does not have the critical capacity to acquire the necessary goal-relevant information to make a more constructive decision.

Neal & Collas (2000: 78) write, "Rather than accurate transmission of information, interaction is frequently designed for manipulation. Attempts are made to create conditions that, if believed by another, will enhance one's own self interests". Nicola says that she had a Cambodian friend, who was called En Lah Gai, "I called her Enola. Enola Gay" (*LF*, 124), and sends Guy off to search for her. Little Boy is described as Enola's "terrible child" (*LF*, 66). Enola Gay is the name of the airplane that dropped the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima, a bomb called Little Boy (which she identifies as Enola's child). She further misrepresents herself in order to make Guy fall in love with her, and it is a "deal" (*LF,* 465) made between Guy and Samson that makes the latter the murderer. Nicola is depicted as powerless to avoid her fate – throughout her death is certain. The narrator states that "Character is destiny" (*LF*, 21), and indeed, her self-destructive lifestyle, having "lived *care of* an

awful lot of people" (*LF*, 60), spending most of her time on acquiring outfits and men to go with them, she is a cult figure reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe or Anna Nicole Smith. These iconic women died young, as Nicola has to. She says that there is a sexual decline once you reach "the same age as Christ was at Calvary. Thereafter, no one wants to know. Because it just gets sadder" (*LF*, 294). Since she is already thirty-four, and her entire identity is embedded in the sexual, she has decided to kill herself, not directly, but by manipulating the other points of the Black Cross.

Nicola intrudes on Guy's marriage and "Every time he encountered [Hope] now he saw their past life together flash by, as if their marriage were a person fatally drowning" (*LF*, 362). Here, as with Keith's marriage, social isolation sets in as the couple drifts apart, but whereas Keith is unable to establish intimate relations with anyone, Guy establishes such a connection with Nicola, albeit based on false pretences. Guy is powerless as Nicola manipulates him, and even discloses his affair to his family at her request, despite it being an unreasonable, even absurd, thing to require of him.

However, it is not only Nicola who breaks up the marriage; his son, Marmaduke, has a direct influence as well: "The marriage was there (the breakfast being its chief sacrament), like the crockery on the awkward table, waiting to be invaded" (*LF*, 140). As Hope recovers after his birth, she "still spent much of her time in bed, with or without Marmaduke, but never with Guy" (*LF*, 29). Marmaduke is constantly ill as an infant, and the narrator remarks that "only parents and torturers and the janitors of holocausts are asked to stand the sound of so much human grief" (*LF*, 29). However, Marmaduke becomes more of a burden as he gets older and "seemed to shed his sickly self as if it were a dead skin or a useless appendage" (*LF*, 31). This new Marmaduke is much worse than the sickly infant: "Up until now, Guy and Hope's relationship, to the child and to each other, had been largely paramedical. After Marmaduke's renaissance, it became, well – you wouldn't say paramilitary. You'd say military" (*LF*, 31). Guy wonders whether Hope intentionally leaves Marmaduke's fingernails unclipped, "the better to repel him" (*LF*, 29). As a result of these scratch-marks, Guy looks like "a resolute but talentless rapist" (*Ibid.*)

As a toddler, Marmaduke starts attacking his father and the countless nannies, and Hope and Guy drift further apart, "So two of everything, except lips,

breasts, the walls of intimacy, enfolding arms, enfolding legs" (*LF*, 29). Social isolation sets in, while simultaneously Nicola builds on her affair with Guy. This is what Neal & Collas (2000: 141) refer to as 'fragmentation':

> Fragmentation refers to perceptions by men and women who are involved in an ongoing relationship that there is a widening gap between them. The psychological distance between them is getting greater. The focus in the relationship shifts from an emphasis on shared symbolism to dwelling on incompatibilities; from thinking about a joint enterprise to thoughts of irreconcilable differences; from a sense of unity to recognition of a widening abyss.

Carolyn Cowes and associates (1985) found that babies do not bring couples together if their marriages are falling apart (Neal & Collas, 2000: 103); in the Clinch household it is rather the child who *wedges* the couple apart. Their embraces become a matter of appearance only,

> With some caution he padded her twice on the knee. Their last real embrace had, in fact, been staged for that very doctor's benefit – a paramedical embrace, as part of a demonstration. At home, in the kitchen, Guy had embraced his wife while the doctor looked on. As predicted, Marmaduke dashed the length of the room and sank his teeth into Guy's calf (*LF*, 156).

He has a crisis of meaning when he tries to connect with his estranged wife, and communication breaks down:

> "What are those pills you're taking? Oh. Yeast."
> "What?"
> "Yeast."
> "What about it?"
> "Nothing."
> "What are you talking about?"
> "Sorry."
> "Christ" (*LF*, 147)

Here, he speaks only because "he felt the need to say something to her" (*Ibid.*), indicating how social isolation is manifesting in their marriage as they drift further apart.

London Fields proposes that love has become superficial, and depicts it through the disintegration of both marriages, the abuse of Keith's daughter, Kim, and the general superficiality of relationships and selves. In doing so, darts is a symbol of

superficiality, becoming synonymous with culture and heritage – "darts is what the Brits do best, in the afterglow of empire" (*LF*, 208). The narrator equates darts with Shakespeare: "the immortal baboon, locked up with a typewriter and amphetamines for a few Poincaré time-cycles, a number of aeons with more zeros than there are suns in the universe, might eventually type out the word *darts*" (*LF*, 102). Stonehenge is said to be shaped like a dartboard (*LF*, 396), and Hannibal, Boadicea (Boudicca), and even King Arthur is "said to have played a form of darts" (*LF*, 313). Therefore, "in a way, everything goes back to darts. If you think about it, the whole world is darts" (*LF*, 396).

The dart becomes Cupid's arrow when Keith sees Nicola for the first time, linking darts, love and superficiality: "The moment that Keith Talent saw Nicola Six – he dropped his third dart. And swore. The 32-gram tungsten trebler had pierced his big toe" (*LF*, 23). Darts are the symbol of culture proper, and in this instance, contain love in the same way that classical mythology delivers love. Darts supplements love in Derridian terms, but by supplementing it, replaces it. The image therefore becomes hollow, showing that there was nothing of substance to begin with. Darts is connected to love, but unlike love, it is not dying, "The death of God was possibly survivable in the end. But if love was going the same way, if love was going out with God..." (*LF*, 132). Even on the tennis court love is on the way out. Dink, the South African number seven tennis player, "says *nothing* instead of *love*. Fifteen-nothing. Nothing-thirty. Even on the tennis court love has gone; even on the tennis court love has been replaced by nothing"(*LF*, 184). Even London's pigeons are used to signify the death of love: "Pigeons have definitely seen better days. Not so long ago they were drawing Venus's chariot. Venus, goddess of beauty and sensual love" (*LF*, 101). Now, after a pigeon defecates on his head, Samson remarks, "the diet of a London pigeon being something that really doesn't bear thinking about. I mean, what the digestive system of a London pigeon considers as *waste* ..." (*LF*, 116).

Nicola is the murderee, but she herself contributes to murdering love: "the thing with her was that she had to receive this love and send it back in opposite form, not just cancelled but murdered. Character is destiny" (*LF*, 21). She destroys love by being a male fantasy, by manipulating Guy and Keith through playing porn star roles. Her centreless, rootless existence is emphasised when she is describes as having

"lived *care of* an awful lot of people" (*LF*, 60). To Guy, she says, "I'm a virgin" (*LF*, 133), and acts as if she had never seen an erection or been touched. She sets up a video camera with a monitor in her bedroom, where Keith watches them like a pornographic film. Furthermore, she provides Samson with the story he needs to write, a story about the death of love.

This situation between Keith, Nicola, Guy and Samson, "all this was on top of the crisis, or rather *beneath* the crisis, under its wing" (*LF*, 143) - impending nuclear disaster and the coming eclipse, but the former never occurs. Ultimately, it is neither Guy nor Keith who accepts the role of murderer, but rather Samson, and he remarks, "I should have understood that a cross has four points. Not three" (*LF*, 466). Nicola's destiny is fulfilled when her vision is realised:

> I flicked on the lights and the car lumbered forward. It stopped and idled. I opened the passenger door. I said, 'Get in'. My face was barred in darkness. But she could see the car-tool on my lap. 'Get *in*.' She leaned forward. 'You,' she said, with intense recognition. 'Always you...' 'Get in'. And in she climbed (*LF*, 465).

Alienation in *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh

Some of *Trainspotting*'s multimedia success. Photo Burgert Senekal

Introduction

Perhaps it is fitting that part of this study was conducted in 2007, after the Scottish National Party's election win over Labour earlier that year, marking the end of half a century of Labour Party dominance in Scotland. The failure of the 1979 referendum on Scottish independence could be seen as precipitating some of the spirit of *Trainspotting*, for as Whyte (cf. Morace, 2001: 20) notes, "in the absence of an elected political authority the task of representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved" to its writers. Of course, Welsh is not the only voice of Scottish identity; A. L. Kennedy and James Kelman are but two other examples, along with the newcomer,

Zoë Strachan. Nevertheless, because of *Trainspotting*'s success and the film adaptation's success[105], Welsh is perhaps best known to the general population.

Published in 1993 and nominated for the Scottish Arts Council Book Award in 1994, the 3,000 copies of *Trainspotting* printed upon initial publication were reprinted sixteen times and the novel had sold 150,000 by 1996 (Morace, 2001: 73) when the eponymously titled film was released. The novel went on to sell more than half a million copies. As Arlidge notes (cf. Morace, 2001: 73), it had become "the fastest-selling and most shop-lifted novel in British publishing history". The film adaptation was written by John Hodge, directed by Danny Boyle, and was released in 1996, starring Ewan McGregor (as Mark Renton) and Robert Carlyle (as Begbie), and Welsh himself appeared in the film as Danny Forrester, a minor drug dealer. The film differs greatly from the book, notably in Renton's narration, which is chosen over the combination of multiple first person narrations together with a third person narration as found in the novel, as well as the 'choose life' angle propagated by the film, which the book avoids. In the film, Renton also leaves some money to Spud, which does not happen in the book, and seems to be an attempt to make Renton a more positive character. Childs (2005: 249) remarks, "More than the novel therefore, the film assumes a moral position for its audience and aims to situate Renton within it, asserting that his theft is to facilitate his transformation into a 'good' person rather than to fuel his new life in Amsterdam". *Trainspotting* was the most successful British film of 1996 and earned $72,000 worldwide (Morace, 2001: 80). By the end of the decade, *Trainspotting* was a book, a play, a film, a spoken-word cassette, the subject of posters, t-shirts and a soundtrack (*Ibid.*). A walk along Camden Town market in North London reveals *Trainspotting* t-shirts alongside t-shirts of *A Clockwork Orange*, indicating its cult position. Publishers and booksellers even organised readings of *Trainspotting* in clubs (Morace, 2001: 76). There were even parodies of *Trainspotting*, as suggested by Brown (cf. Morace, 2001: 74) "Gritty Scottish Irvine Welsh follows up his bestselling expose of drug-culture *Trainspotting* with a hard-hitting new novel *Pottyspotting*. It's a devastating critique of Glasgow's

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[105] Even the soundtrack produced success: in 1997/1998, clubs even in South Africa were booming with Underworld's *Born Slippy* (track 13).

under-two population". On one episode of *The Family Guy*[106], Stewie – the toddler – becomes addicted to pancakes, and his withdrawal symptoms are reminiscent of Mark's episode in the film of *Trainspotting*, as the baby crawls on the ceiling while Stewie begs for just one more pancake. Because of *Trainspotting*'s multimedia success, it is this researcher's contention that the novel needs to be discussed within this wider context, whereas other discussions in this study do not require a similar treatment.

Trainspotting spawned a decade of 'lad lit', which explored contemporary masculinity, and was further exploited by writers such as Nick Hornby, John King and Tony Parsons. As Childs (2005: 241) argues,

> *Trainspotting* marked a literary shift because it created a new besteller that was distinctly Scottish as well as distinctly working-class; it dealt with a subject and with an underclass that both society and fiction had largely chosen to ignore [...]. *Trainspotting* was read in clubs and appealed to the chemical generation; it encouraged music shops to sell fiction, alerted the middle-class to another side of Edinburgh, which has the highest HIV infection rate in Britain, and reaffirmed the potential of literature to provoke moral outrage.

Irvine Welsh is thoroughly working-class, born in Leith, a suburb of Edinburgh, in 1958[107]. His father was a dockworker before becoming a carpet salesperson, while his mother worked as a waitress. It is therefore understandable that Welsh prefers the title 'cultural activist' to 'writer', engaging with a working-class male audience that does not normally read (Proctor, 2003: www.contemporarywriters.com), and this view is indeed shared by Morace (2001: 19): "Irvine Welsh is not a 'writer' in the sense that, say, Martin Amis is. Rather, Welsh is a cultural phenomenon of sociological as well as aesthetic significance".

This 'sociological significance' is particularly used to depict a Scottish, working-class identity, as is depicted in Welsh's use of the vernacular and in statements like these, from a character in *The Undefeated* (*E*, 219), "Geordies are just Scots who can't blame the English for them being fucked up, the poor cunts". In

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[106] *Love Thy Trophy*, Season 1.

[107] There seems to be some confusion about this. Rennison (2005: 182) cites 1958 as his date of birth, and notes that 1961 and 1951 have also been quoted as his date of birth. www.contemporarywriters.com also cites 1958, and Childs (2005: 237) confirms the same date. However, Morace (2001: 8) cites 1961.

The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs (104), Cunningham-Blythe remarks, "As a young man in the sixties, I became interested in politics. Particular in the national question. I wondered how it was that most of Ireland was free, while Scotland was still in servitude under the English Crown." Characters who valorise the fact that they are Scottish are usually undermined (Childs, 2005: 242), such as Cunningham-Blythe who builds a bomb to blow up the Duke of Wellington's statue at the east end of Edinburgh, but only succeeds in blowing his own penis and one of his testicles off. In *The Acid House* (17), Euan declares, "the Scots were the last oppressed colony of the British Empire. I don't really believe it though; the Scots oppress themselves by their obsession with the English". In *Trainspotting* (78) Mark Renton relates,

> Fuckin failures in a country ay failures. It's nae good blamin in oan the English fir colonizing us. Ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We can't even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by. No. We're ruled by effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation.

McArthur (cf. Morace, 2001: 74) has noted that *Braveheart* was taken by the Scottish National Party "as a whole into its party rhetoric and images of the film into its party literature", but *Trainspotting* was used only by the SNP's youth wing, for a leaflet called *Toryspotting* (Morace, 2001: 75), which quoted Renton's anti-English rant. *Trainspotting*, thus, through its identification with Scottish youth, has played a role in defining Scottish national identity, appealing to disaffected youth in a way that *Braveheart* could not. Moreover, it must be remembered that many of the people who read the SNP's leaflet, voted in the 2007 election.

Furthermore, Welsh has helped bring to light drug abuse and the problem of HIV in Scotland. Welsh's fiction often centres on drug abuse (particularly ecstasy) and is often set in his home neighbourhood of Leith, in Edinburgh. Welsh (cf. Morace, 2001: 10) states, "I began the book as a way of trying to figure out the puzzles of drug dependency and the explosion of HIV in Edinburgh". As a character in *The Undefeated* exclaims (213), "What these cunts fail tae understand is that drug and club money is not a fuckin luxury. It's a fuckin essential". Indeed, drug abuse is the catalyst for much of the action in his two central works, *Trainspotting* and *Porno.*

Highlighting this issue is one of the great achievements of Welsh, as Morace (2001: 77) notes:

> The novel that grew out of Welsh's dismay over the effects of heroin use in Edinburgh and the absence of effective public response to this use and its dire consequences (HIV in particular) resulted in a very useful and long overdue examination of the drug situation in Edinburgh, in the rest of Scotland and in all of Britain.

Scotland has the highest HIV infection rate in the UK. In *Trainspotting*, it is said that Scotland has eight percent of the UK's population but sixteen percent of the UK's HIV cases (*T*, 193). The predominance of HIV in Trainspotting thus highlights this issue and with *Trainspotting*'s commercial success, brings it to the attention of a wide, global population.

In 1994, Welsh released *The Acid House*, a collection of short stories, dealing with similar subject matter and set in and around Leith. *Marabou Stork Nightmares* was released in 1995, and is "set in the mind of a comatose hospitalized computer programmer and football fan, Roy Stang, who has tried to commit suicide out of guilt over his supposedly simulated part in a gang rape" (Childs, 2005: 238). *Glue* (2001) again used the setting of *Trainspotting* in "a long multilayered story about the lives of four friends from Edinburgh's housing schemes" (Childs, 2005: 240). Tracing the lives of these four friends, Carl Ewart, Billy Birrell, Andrew Galloway, and 'Juice' Terry Lawson, Welsh attempts "to break into a new style and work on a larger canvas" (Childs, 2005: 240), but it is familiar territory for Welsh, centring on sex, drugs, violence, and music. *Porno* (2002) is the sequel to *Trainspotting*, which was started even before the latter was published (Childs, 2005: 241). Here, "Welsh treats his subject with more humour than realism or pathos" (Childs, 2005: 250). *Porno* features many characters from *Trainspotting*, as well as Lexo from *Marabou Stork Nightmares* and 'Juice' Terry Lawson from *Glue*. In the beginning of the novel, Sick Boy is working in a strip club in London, but moves to take over his aunt's pub in Leith. Mark Renton runs a club in Amsterdam, and Begbie is released from jail after serving time for murder he committed in fury after Mark's elopement with the money in *Trainspotting*. Spud lives with Alison with their son, and intends to write a history of Leith. Nikki Fuller-Smith is a new character who becomes a porn star in

Terry Lawson's film (which is later taken over by Sick Boy). The novel ends in a similar way to *Trainspotting*, with Mark Renton again escaping Leith (this time to San Francisco) and leaving the others in the lurch.

Welsh's latest novel, *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs* (2006), continues along this vein. The novel narrates the feud between Danny Skinner, a football hooligan, and Brian Kibby, a train model enthusiast. In a bizarre twist, Danny Skinner's hangovers are passed on to Brian Kibby, along with all the long-term damage caused by alcohol and drugs. As in *Trainspotting*, violence, sex and drug abuse are rampant, "To paraphrase a great footballer: 'I spent most of it on drink, women and the horses. The rest I squandered" (*BSMC*, 15). Once again, the novel is set in Leith, "Good old sunny Leith: no place loves its bastards like a port" (*BSMC*, 14). Parallel with *Trainspotting*, death is never far, and "Sometimes [Skinner] thought he could see it on the faces of the old boys in the Leith pubs: each pint and nip seeming to bring the Grim Reaper one step closer, while fuelling delusions of immortality" (*BSMC*, 35). As the novel progresses, Brian and Danny fight an indirect war, each doing as much damage to himself as possible, so the other will suffer the consequences.

Trainspotting

Welsh's debut novel, *Trainspotting*, was published in 1993, although sections of it had been published in magazines as early as 1991. It is set in the mid-1980s in Leith, a suburb of Edinburgh, but this is not the Edinburgh that attracts tourists: "That's aw they tourist cunts ken though, the castle n Princes Street, n the High Street" (*T*, 115). Leith is "A place ay dispossessed white trash in a trash country fill ay dispossessed white trash" (*T*, 190), a poor suburb seemingly bypassed by economic growth. Characters convey a sense of being dispossessed by the English occupation, and a lack of identification with Scottish society as well. *Trainspotting* narrates loosely connected friendships in a youth subculture, interwoven with sex and heroin addiction, much like the alienated youth subculture discussed by Mayer (2008),

although set in a Scottish context. The book received strong reviews "for its blend of stark realism with a strain of black humour that varies from the uncomfortably unusual to the sharply familiar" (Childs, 2005: 237). It is a fast-paced novel, thumping along like the house music Welsh favours, creating the sense that,

> The style of the novel seemed to imitate its subject matter in that the voices and stories come thick and fast like the characters and conversations in one of the book's pubs, creating the sense of an interconnected group of friends, family, and acquaintances that the reader comes to know through a long series of adventures and micronarratives (Childs, 2005: 237).

The central characters, the "inner circle of Welsh's *Inferno*" (Morace, 2001: 52) are Francis Begbie, Sick Boy (Simon David Williams), Spud (Danny Murphy), Tommy and Mark Renton, but also include peripheral characters like Kelly, Dave (Davie) and Matty, who narrate small parts. Morace (2001: 53) notes, "One especially interesting difference between the male characters […] and the female […] has to do with naming". Female characters are given conventional names, such as Alison, Kelly, June, Sharon, Stella, Carol, Hazel, Dianne, Laura, and Gail. Male characters have more complex names and are called differently at times, e.g., Johnny Swan being called Mother Superior, Swanney or the White Swan, or Begbie referred to as Frank, Franco, The Beggar, and Francis. This is an indication of Welsh's focus on the male characters, as he also portrays them as being more complex than his female characters.

Trainspotting consists of forty-three sections, organised into seven parts, but a plot, in the conventional sense[108], is absent: stories are narrated, but provide little to sum up in terms of 'this happened and then that'. Kasia Boddy (cf. Morace, 2001: 53) has noted that "no single narrative is allowed to dominate", referring to the multiple first person narrators interspersed with a third person narrator. As such, the fragmented narrative mirrors the fragmented lives and views of the main characters, where nothing apart from drug-dependency remains stable and constant. Loosely the narrative tracks the lives of these young Leith residents through heroin addiction, rehabilitation, re-addiction, and the multiple fragmentations of relationships, each with his own perspective, but although the details of their lives

[108] Edwin Muir (Cf. Du Plooy, 1992h: 385) sums up the plot as that which "designates for everyone, not merely for the critic, the chain of events in a story and the principle which knits it together".

differ, the core themes of self-destruction and the inability to form stable relationships vibrates through every characters' narrative. The film uses Mark Renton as the main narrator, and even though his role is less prominent in the novel, he is the closest *Trainspotting* comes to having a central character.

What starkly confronts the reader is how alienated the central characters are, from mainstream society, from each other, and from the benefits of contemporary Thatcherite Britain:

> Written towards the tail end of over fifteen years of Conservative rule, [*Trainspotting*] [...] portrays a world of unemployment and social deprivation in which social and personal relations have deteriorated alongside economic decline: few of the characters have jobs, the men are almost exclusively homophobic and misogynistic, and there are very few happy or stable relationships. *Trainspotting* portrays a society in which masculinity has been stripped of its dignity to such an extent that the only outlets for male pride are violence and sexual promiscuity (Childs, 2005: 247).

Morace (2001: 34) notes that *Trainspotting* belongs to the literary genre Mikhail Bakhtin termed *grotesque realism*, but that its "realism is apparent but made to coexist with and to some degree is undermined by other stylistic features, including the novel's pervasive humour" (Morace, 2001: 29). Examples of black humour abound, for instance in the Eating Out section where Kelly takes revenge on customers she is serving by first dipping her used tampon into the "trendy tomato and orange" soup that the "rich, imperialist bastards have ordered" (*T*, 304), and continuing in the same vein with her urine and excrement. As the one character Nina realises, "laughter was about more than humour. This was about reducing tension, solidarity in the face of the grim reaper[109]" (*T*, 33). However, "*Trainspotting*'s grim comedy differs from the black humour fiction of the 1960s in which seemingly terminal despair is offset by the authors' essentially melioristic sensibility" (Morace, 2001: 31). Humour can sometimes function to facilitate catharsis, or be a way of redirecting sorrow 'in psychic defence'. In this sense, it acts as a drug: "Iggy Pop looks right at me as he sings the line: 'America takes drugs in psychic defence'; only he changes 'America' for 'Scatlin', and defines us mair

[109] Death is a pervasive motif, with Renton's younger brother Davie having died the year before, his older brother Billy killed in action in Northern Ireland, Matty's death from toxoplasmosis, and the pervasive issue of HIV (e.g. Tommy, Matty, and Dave).

accurately in a single sentence than all others have ever done..." (*T*, 75). In *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs* (89), Skinner abuses alcohol for the same reason: "The sharp edges had gone. Leith was no longer stuffed with cruel, brutish psychopaths who hated him. They had vanished, replaced by a convivial community of jaunty salt-of-the-earth types". Like a drug, humour makes reality less frightening; to laugh at the situation disarms it. David Mitchell's soiling the sheets in Traditional Sunday Breakfast (a memorable incident in the film as well, there attributed to Spud) takes the focus off of his routine alcohol and drug abuse while simultaneously highlighting it, and renders it entertaining:

> The sheets flew open and a pungent shower of skittery shite, thin alcohol sick, and vile pish splashed out across the floor. [...] Brown flecks of runny shite stained Mr Houston's glasses, face and white shirt. It sprayed across the linoleum table and his food, like he had made a mess with watery chip-chop sauce. Gail had some on her yellow blouse (*T*, 94).

Welsh "offers something more like a populist post-modern blend of William Burroughs and Quentin Tarantino" (Milne, 2003: 159). Proctor (*Ibid.*) writes,

> Welsh's writing belongs more accurately to the realm of the 'popular'. By 'popular' I am not necessarily thinking of sales figures, but of the grotesque, carnivalesque imagery for which his work has become notorious. The emphasis of his novels, short stories and screenplays is on what Carl Ewart, a character in *Glue* (2001) describes as 'tales of excreta and ejecta – shite, pish and puke'. It is no surprise that some of the central images of the film adaptation of *Trainspotting* involve unforgettably graphic acts of bodily expulsion, from the soiled sheets of Spud, to Renton's unfortunate expulsion of his own drugs down a filthy pub toilet.

Ecstasy: Three Tales of Chemical Romance (1996) was released at the same time as the film adaptation of *Trainspotting*, and continues this humouristic and shocking approach. It consists of three short novellas, *Lorraine Goes to Livingston: a Rave and Regency Romance*, *Fortune's Always Hiding: A Corporate Drug Romance*, and *The Undefeated: An Acid House Romance*. The first is a satire of romance novels, where a romance writer and stroke victim, Rebecca Navarro, learns of the pornography[110] collections of her husband, Perky, which leads her to write bestiality into her stories. Connected to this is the chat-show host necrophiliac, Freddy Royle, who secures the

[110] In *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs*, a porn film is mentioned, called *The Second Coming of Christ* (*BSMC*, 39) and *Moses and the Burning Bush* (*BSMC*, 111).

use of the mortuary by repaying National Health Service debts, and then "[thrusts] his way to a loveless paradise with a piece of dead meat" (*Lorraine Goes To Livingston*, 9). As the narrator says, "There was nothing like the sight of a stiff to give Freddy Royle a stiffy" (*Lorraine Goes To Livingston*, 8); Freddy himself remarks, "Oi loike em still [...] very, very still" (*Lorraine Goes to Livingston*, 22). At the end, Perky is hit by a car, and dies in hospital with Freddy's words in his mind, "Perky, moi ol zun. We'll take praber gare of thee..."

Given the book and film's commercial success, together with the many spin-offs (soundtracks, t-shirts etc.), it is ironic that one of the central issues of *Trainspotting* is a critique of consumerism. The narrative starts in 1988 and ends in late 1991 (Morace, 2001: 47), placing it in the wake of Thatcherite Britain and indeed overlapping with Margaret Thatcher's reign. "What Welsh [...] suggests has ruined both Scotland and England is a homogenizing consumerism allied to a general embrace of middle-class values, with its commodification of the city and Edinburgh's past" (Childs, 2005: 244). Spud is a victim of such a globalised consumerism, whose speech is peppered with American influences and whose knowledge of other cultures is acquired from soaps (*Ibid.*). Like Keith in Amis's *London Fields*, he gets most of what he knows from television, "Spud thought that it must be really crap to live in Australia. The heat, the insects, and all these dull suburban places that you see on *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*" (*T*, 292). Renton is highly critical of consumerism:

> The fact is that ye jist simply choose tae reject whit they huv tae offer. Choose us. Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fuckin junk food intae yir mooth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yersel in a home, a total fuckin embarassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye've produced. Choose life. Well, ah choose not tae choose life[111] (*T*, 187).

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[111] This attitude is highlighted in the film, and although the words were altered on the t-shirt, it conveys the same criticism:

> Choose life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose a fucking big television. Choose washing machines, cars, compact disc players and electrical tin openers, choose DIY and wondering who the fuck you are on a Sunday morning. Choose sitting on that couch watching mind-numbing spirit crushing game shows, stuffing junk food into your mouth. Choose rotting away at the end of it all, pishing your last in a miserable home, nothing more than an embarrassment to the selfish, fucked-up brats you spawned to replace yourself. Choose your future. Choose life ... But why would I want to do a thing like that?

Childs (2005: 244) argues,

> ... the characters' rejection of heritage and consumerism is largely predicated on their exclusion from its benefits, and while they opt instead for the manufactured nihilism of Iggy Pop and punk, there is evidence of a clear underlying desire for affluence and designer individualism that is economically rather than ideologically alien.

The constructionist view of the self sees the self as "fluid or plastic and powerfully and constantly affected by interaction with others" (Vorster, 2003: 88). Langman & Scatamburlo (1996: 133) agree[112] with this view, and add,

> ... selfhood is expressed in the articulation of socially based identity formations. Collectively, a group's identity is a distinctive image that includes boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and is often based on differences with other groups. However, when a group exercises domination over another, through relations of power, conquest, or colonization, it is likely to construct the Other (or others) on which are imposed denigrated identities.

Just as the boundaries of the biological entity are arbitrarily punctuated (and the same with the boundaries of the "self"), so the boundaries of the "community" are arbitrarily punctuated, using opposition and difference. Language, physical attributes, geographical location, football affiliation, and passports are used to distinguish between communities and populations. Concerning alienation, Schacht (1996: 13) makes a crucial point:

> ... one can only be said appropriately and significantly to be alienated from something to which one has been *and remains* meaningfully related, but from which one at the same time has come to be separated. Without a

[112] However, it should be noted that Langman & Scatamburlo do not *wholly* subscribe to this viewpoint, for it is reminiscent of the S-R scheme,

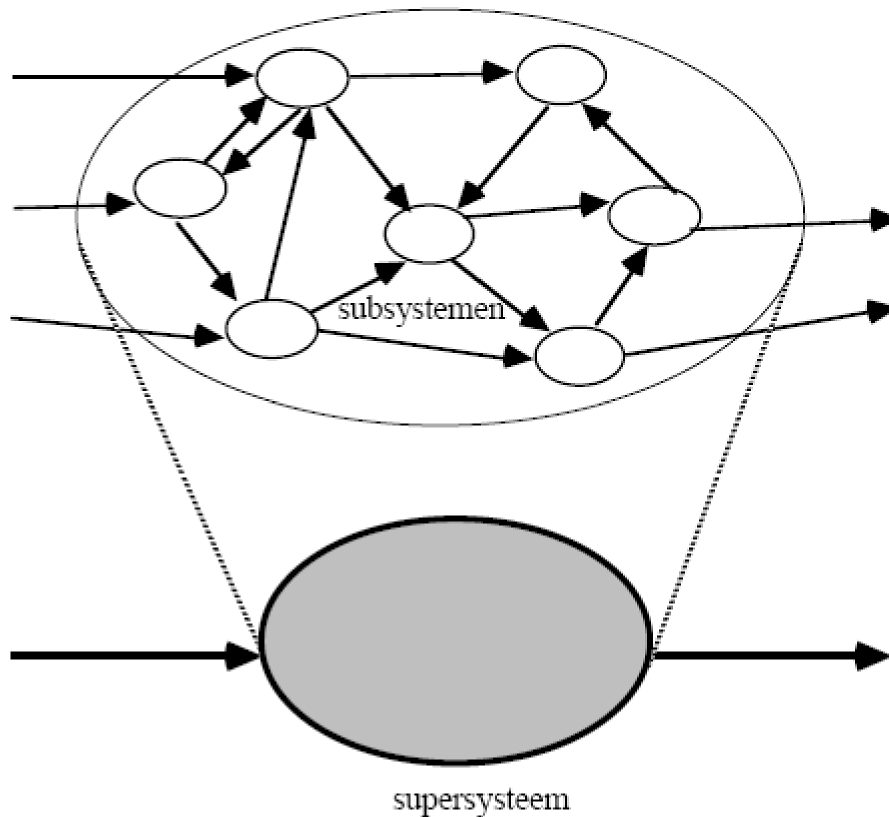
> The radical anti-essentialist position would deny any human qualities or attributes such as intentionality, reflexivity, or agency that are not social constructions based on linguistic practices. This position regards all aspects of self/subject or identity as texts inscribed on passive slates or docile bodies whose personal experiences are hardly able to mediate textuality or impact society – actual persons are quite irrelevant. In addition, anti-essentialism dismisses all those aspects of embodiedness upon which depend language, thought, and feeling, which we argue are universal qualities of humans that enable, but do not constitute any particular form of, human nature outside historical contexts. [...] Any adequate formulation of agency requires some notion of essentialism – not a totalizing form, but rather what we term *partial essentialism* – a position that, while interrogating notions of human nature as such, also acknowledges that inborn human attributes and the capacity to experience joy, pain, and so forth must necessarily be factored into discussions of agency (Langman & Scatamburlo, 1996: 134).

> persisting link of some sort, the absence of participation and identification does not suffice .

In other words, in order for Welsh's characters to be alienated from mainstream British society, they must have a pre-existing link with this society. The youth in Europe have a long history of a lack of identification with its elders, e.g. the May 1968 riots in France, the left-wing Baader-Meinhof[113] terrorist organisation, and riots in the 1980s. Welsh's characters are not only alienated from the world of their elders, but being Scottish, they are also alienated from greater British society. Furthermore, cultural changes brought about by Thatcher's Tories, in particular an emphasis in consumerism and business, require inclusion. Welsh's characters are alienated from all of these concepts, not because they reject it, but because they do not reject it.

This issue can be clarified by discussing it in terms of systems: all open systems function within other systems, interact with them, and need to be distinguished from their surrounding systems in order to enable one to study them. Heylighen (2002: 26) illustrates this relation between *subsystemen* (subsystems) and the *supersysteem* (supersystem) diagrammatically:

[113] Left-wing terrorist group more accurately known as the Red Army Faction (RAF), which developed in the climate of political discontent of 1968 and was mostly operational in the 1970s.



Wilden (1980: 402) explains, "All open systems are necessarily related to other open systems and to their own subsystems, as well as to the differing levels of organization 'within' themselves as systems". Even-Zohar (1990: 22) confirms this "system within systems" view, arguing, "any semiotic (po1y)system (such as language or literature) is just a component of a larger (po1y)system - that of 'culture', to which it is subjugated and with which it is isomorphic - and therefore correlated with this is greater whole and its other components." The characters in *Trainspotting* can be viewed as a system of interrelated elements (persons), who in turn are biological systems (neurological, vascular, lymphatic, etc.) as well as psychological, i.e. systems made up of sub-systems. Furthermore, they form an open system amongst themselves (albeit *loosely* connected), a community, which is in turn part of the larger system of Scotland's population, the English-speaking world, humanity, etcetera. In other words, systems are made up of smaller interrelated systems, which are in turn made up of interrelated systems themselves, like a matreshka. The relation of subsystems amongst themselves is crucial for its existence, as the character's relation to society is constitutive of their identities. As

Schacht (1996: 6) remarks, "all human identity or selfhood that is not merely physiological is grounded in (if not simply a function of) relations of involvement in one's environing world, ranging from activities involving objects to interactions with others, participation in sociocultural forms of life, and operation in symbol systems." The issue is thus the *identification* with consumerism, but at the same time the exclusion from it. If classical social alienation is "the loss or absence of identification with, and participation in, the form of life characteristic of one's society" (Schacht, 1996: 10), it is thus not present in *Trainspotting*, since the characters *do* identify with contemporary consumerist ideology. Sick Boy is perhaps the most closely identified with consumer culture and the entrepreneurial spirit, remarking:

> Some fucking friends I have. Spud, Second Prize, Begbie, Matty, Tommy: these punters spell L-I-M-I-T-E-D. An extremely limited company. Well, ah'm fed up to ma back teeth wi losers, no-hopers, draftpacks, schemies, junkies and the likes. I am a dynamic young man, upwardly mobile and thrusting, thrusting, thrusting ... (*T*, 30)

The issue is thus not one of *not* identifying with consumerist and commercialist culture, but rather of being excluded from the benefits it offers, since the characters live in a neighbourhood that has been left behind. This is a crucial break between classical theories of alienation and post-modern theories of it, as the link between the alienated individual and that which he is alienated from is now emphasised. Welsh's characters do not experience alienation from urban culture in Sophiatown, South Africa, for they have no link with it. On the other hand, the alienation from consumer culture in Britain is something they identify with, and can therefore be alienated from.

Sick Boy is critical of the mediated experience of television, "I fucking detest televised football. It's like shagging wi a durex oan. Safe fuckin sex, safe fuckin fitba[114], safe fuckin everything" (*T*, 42), but himself identifies with Sean Connery's James Bond: "Auld Sean and I have so many parallels" (*T*, 29), and he even tries to imitate Sean Connery's speech, saying to himself, "Call me the unsheen ashashin Mish Moneypenny" (*T*, 178). In the film, it is Renton who shoots the pit-bull in order

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[114] Football is often associated with violence. One seventeen-year-old football supporter in East London, with Spurs (Tottenham) tattooed on his forearm, has told this researcher in 2007: "What's a football game without a fight afterwards?"

to entice it to bite its owner; in the novel, it is Sick Boy himself (Deid Dugs), illustrating that he is worthy of his nickname: "They call um Sick Boy, no because he's eywis sick wi junk withdrawal, but because he's just one sick cunt" (*T*, 3). His character is a manifestation of normlessness; he has no loyalty towards his friends, as Renton notes: "The mischief-making cunt staggers through life leaving these interpersonal booby-traps fir his mates" (*T*, 12). When courting a woman (Sick Boy's real addiction), he transforms into a charming young man, presenting a false self and telling her, "I'm more of a jazz purist myself" (*T*, 335). After Renton betrays his friends and flees with the £16,000 from the drug deal, he reflects, "Sick Boy will recoup the cash; he was a born exploiter" (*T*, 342), showing Renton's confidence in Sick Boy's entrepreneurial spirit. However, Sick Boy, like Keith Talent in Amis's *London Fields*, is an exploiter rather than the type of entrepreneur the Thatcher government had in mind. He does not contribute to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), does not contribute with income taxes or payment to the NHS, and becomes a parody of the entrepreneurial spirit. The major drug deal at the end of the novel is the best example of this: seizing the opportunity to make money without drawing a salary is what Thatcherism propagated; dealing with drugs is certainly not.

Fortune's Always Hiding: A Corporate Drug Romance, one of the novelles in *Ecstasy,* is a story of revenge and corporate responsibility. It is set in East London and Bavaria and directly attacks consumer culture and multinational corporations, in particular pharmaceutical companies. Samantha Worthington, having been born without arms because of the drug Tenazadrine, teams up with a Baader-Meinhof terrorist, Andreas, to wreak revenge upon the marketer of the drug, Bruce Sturgess, and his colleagues, Barney, and Gunther Emmerich. They abduct Emmerich's baby, and eight days later, the Emmerichs receive a parcel in the post, containing the child's arms. After killing Barney, Samantha cuts Sturgess's arms off with a chainsaw that she manoeuvres with her legs. The story is full of allusions to Thatcherite Britain and the promotion of business, such as when the narrator exclaims, "its good for business; and, as Maggie herself once said, what's good for business is good for Britain; or something like that", and "I think it was old Maggie that said something about how we all got to innovate to meet new challenges. You don't do that – you end up like all them sad cunts up north crying into their beer over some bleedin

factory or mine that's shut down". Thatcherism did promote using initiative, but certainly not via criminal activity. Welsh deliberately misinterprets and misrepresents the fundamental tenets of capitalism in a critique of it, depicting the other side of capitalism in order to show how this system exploits the citizens of a country. Every positive thing said about capitalism is said tongue-in-cheek, but the irony is that none of the characters ever realise how strong their connection is with what they reject. As it is written in *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs* (233), "a real enemy becomes like a wife, a child or an elderly parent. They determine your whole fucking life and you are never free of the cunts". Throughout many of Welsh's works, and in particular in *Trainspotting*, capitalism is the enemy that determines the character's lives.

Richard Schacht (1996: 7) argues, "one must be able to affirm oneself and that, to be able to do so, one must have some sort of self to affirm – which, perforce, must be relationally constituted". Once this selfhood is constructed, associations are made with like-minded selves based on similarities, and "it is the association with particular identities that enables the attainment of certain experiences" (Langman & Scatamburlo, 1996: 133). The result is that "Regnant social groups construct their own 'self' identities and impose identities of 'otherness' on marginalized populations" (Langman & Scatamburlo, 1996: 133). In *Trainspotting*, the identification with others is not based on similarities (apart from addiction), but are rather random, dysfunctional relationships. Heroin, the double-sided "life-giving and life-taking elixir" (*T*, 10), in contrast with speed and ecstasy, is not a social drug, as Renton relates: "Whereas the piss-heid in the pub wants every cunt tae git as ootay it as he is, the real junky (as opposed tae the casual user who wants a partner-in-crime) doesnae gie a fuck aboot anybody else" (*T*, 7). Friendships become superficial, arbitrary and expedient, often based on drugs or, in the case of Begbie, just a misunderstanding. Johnny Swan observes: "Nae friends in this game. Jist associates" (*T*, 6). Renton later reflects on this: "'We are all acquaintances now'. It seems tae go beyond our personal junk circumstances; a brilliant metaphor for our times" (*T*, 11). After Tommy becomes HIV positive from sharing needles, youngsters harass or avoid him, exposing the fragile nature of their friendship: "Tommy will

become mair vulnerable tae persecution. His friends will decline in their numbers as his needs increase. The inverse, or perverse, mathematics ay life" (*T*, 316).

Relationships in *Trainspotting*, in general, are a depiction of this 'inverse mathematics of life'. Orwellian logic, as Barbara Ehrenreich pointed out (Morace, 2001: 65), makes divorce a positive thing, at least for the economy in a consumer society. For a couple that shared a house, television, washing machine, car, etc., is forced to buy another set of each after a divorce, another house, television, washing machine, car, etc. In the same inverted manner, Welsh inverts the positive and the negative in his critique of capitalism: Regarding 'Opportunistic infections' of HIV, it is said: "In our culture, it seems to invoke some admirable quality. I think of the 'opportunism' of the entrepreneur who spots a gap in the market, or that of the striker in the penalty box" (*T*, 293). 'Opportunistic infections' exploit the weaknesses of the immune system, much like the characters in *Trainspotting* exploit the welfare system, or each other. Being HIV positive is not a positive thing, and 'opportunistic' infections deplete the systems of AIDS patients and ultimately kill them. Sharing, which is normally considered a positive thing, becomes negative when it spreads HIV through needle-sharing (Morace, 2001: 65). This inversion of common sense highlights the desperate milieu of the characters, where the 'normal' world is turned upside down, as is also depicted by Begbie's unpredictability: "Ah always felt thit a slight shift in the cunt's perception ay ye wid be sufficient tae change yir status fae great mate intae persecuted victim (*T*, 75). Like with Begbie, their friendships harm them, in the same manner as HIV is spread through sharing needles or having sex. Connectedness becomes negative, inverting the normal human relational condition where meaning is derived from the connection with others. Here, identification with others leads to dysfunctional states, illness, and danger – "The inverse, or perverse, mathematics ay life" (*T*, 316) in Leith.

Cairns Craig reads Mark's freedom at the end of the novel allegorically (cf. Morace, 2001: 53). In his view, the novel reveals "a community of dependency – welfare-dependency, drug-dependency, money-dependency – which is the mirror image of the society of isolated, atomized individuals of modern capitalism". This social isolation manifests in a variety of ways. Renton's only sexual relationships are with Hazel, Dianne, and Kelly, and every one of these relationships is dysfunctional.

With Hazel, who was abused by her father (*T*, 76), it is a co-dependent relationship between two people who are not well-adjusted to the world, as Renton remarks, "The reason Hazel sticks around wi me is because she's as fucked up as me" (*T*, 76). Dianne, who is fourteen (*T*, 150), exploits him for hash (a form of cannabis) (*T*, 152) and could not provide any meaningful sense of partnership, given the age gap (although this does not deter Renton from sleeping with her). With Kelly, who aborted the baby he seems to be responsible for, he claims that he never knew she was interested in him, remarking, "Ah didnae really know much aboot women" (*T*, 13). He even has sex with Sharon, his brother's pregnant partner, after the latter's funeral. None of these attachments foster intimacy, as "feelings of intimacy and sexual performances have become psychologically separated" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 53) in *Trainspotting*. Spud and particularly Sick Boy can also be cited as examples of this, pursuing sexual relations with no accompanying intimacy. No relationship – friendship or romantic relationship – has any substance. In *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs* (94), Danny Skinner and Dougie Winchester are "related through drink"; in *Trainspotting*, the characters are 'related through junk'.

Traditional family values are not depicted in a positive way in *Trainspotting*, as Renton remarks regarding Sharon: "She was caught in this git-a-man, git-a-bairn, git-a-hoose shite that lassies git drummed intae them, and had nae real chance ay defining herself outside ay they mashed-tattie-fir-brains terms ay reference" (*T*, 220). In criticising the nuclear family, one would expect to find a suggestion for an alternative, but none is forthcoming. Their lives are never depicted as in any way better than the status quo. Furthermore, Renton suggests that there is something amiss when Sharon defines herself in terms of the norms of the status quo, but his mis-identification with the status quo is actually an identification of opposition: rejecting what capitalism and the status quo offers and defining his identity in this rejection. Neither is this depicted as in any way preferable to simply taking received norms and values – the outcomes of this lifestyle are just random self-destruction, addiction, HIV infection and drug overdose. In terms of Kalekin-Fishman's (1996: 97) remark that "the opposite of normlessness is a slavish commitment to conventional means to achieve conventional goals, which is also a sign of alienated affect,"

Renton's criticism may be valid, but he does not suggest that there is a viable alternative. Both ways are alienating, both avenues self-destructive.

Fathers are mostly absent in the novel, or worse, share Begbie's attitude to fatherhood: "It's probably no even ma fuckin bairn anywey. Besides, ah've hud bairns before, wi other lassies. Ah ken whit it's aw aboot. She thinks it's gaunnae be fuckin great whin the bairn comes, but she's in fir a fuckin shock" (*T*, 110). He even hits June while she is pregnant, and blames *her* for making him do it: "Fucked if ah'm gaunnae stey wi that fuckin June eftir the bairn's here. N that cunt's deid if she's made us hurt that fuckin bairn. Ivir since she's been huvin that bairn, she thinks she kin git fuckin lippy wi us. Nae cunt gits fuckin lippy wi me, bairn or no fuckin bairn" (*T*, 112). The nuclear family is non-existent, and so is the stability and intimacy it offers. However, as argued in the previous paragraph, the alternative – the traditional nuclear family – is not looked upon favourably either.

Fathers do not accept the traditional role of provider (or for that matter, fatherhood), and live predominantly normless lives. At Matty's funeral, it is stated: "Matty, though, had been a father in name only. The minister had irritated Shirley by describing him as such. She was the father, as well as the mother" (*T*, 295). Sick Boy is indifferent to the death of Wee Dawn, who is identified as his baby, and Renton refuses to visit Kelly after her abortion (*T*, 11*).* Even Renton's brother, Billy, mistreats his girlfriend, Sharon: "She telt us a loat ay things thit ah wanted tae hear, things ma Ma n faither never knew, and would hate tae ken. How Billy wis a cunt tae her. How he battered her oan occasions, humiliated her, n generally treated her like an exceptionally foul piece ay shite" (*T*, 221).

The third story in *Ecstasy*, *The Undefeated: An Acid House Romance*[115], is a drug-fuelled love story, set in Edinburgh, and covers much of the same territory in this respect. It is told by two narrators, Heather and Lloyd, who meet in the highs of house music. She persuades him to give up his drug habit for the sake of their relationship. Lloyd relates his position (*The Undefeated*, 160),

> I'm thirty fucking one which is possibly too old to be carrying on like this when ah could be married to a nice fat lady in a nice suburban house with

[115] The name, *Ecstasy: Three Tales of Chemical Romance* influenced the name for the band My Chemical Romance (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irvine_Welsh), indicating just some of the impact Irvine Welsh has had on popular culture..

> children and a steady job where ah have urgent reports to write informing senior management that unless certain action is taken the organisation could suffer, but it's me and Purple Haze here together, fuck sake.

This position is popularly known as Peter Pan syndrome – the reluctance to grow up. Many television characters suffer from this, e.g. Joey from *Friends* and Charlie from *Two and a Half Men*, and it is often depicted in films such as *Fight Club*, *Beautiful Girls*, *101 Reykjavik* and *Jesus' Son*. In a sense, the characters from *Trainspotting* suffer from this as well, specifically in the reluctance to accept responsibility for their actions, for their children, securing and holding a job, and forming mature relationships rather than drunken casual encounters. Living in the moment with no regard for the future or for long-term consequences is a familiar attitude in young people, but from about the age of twenty-five, settling down becomes the norm and it is no longer the standard to spend an entire night drinking, clubbing and using drugs. Renton and his 'friends' therefore reject more than merely the conservative Tory emphasis on the traditional nuclear family or the capitalist system, but adulthood as well. Here *Trainspotting* overlaps with McEwan's *The Child in Time*, for Charles's rejection of the responsibilities of adulthood are paralleled in the actions of Mark Renton and the others.

Unlike in *The Undefeated*, drugs substitute and even replace love in *Trainspotting*. Sick Boy says to the dealer, Johnny Swan (who is also called Mother Superior, instilling him with religious and parental significance), "Swanney how ah love ya" (*T*, 11), and Renton reflects: "Ah love nothing (except junk), ah hate nothing (except forces that prevent me getting any) and ah fear nothing (except not scoring)" (*T*, 21). Whereas in *London fields* darts had been the emblem of superficiality and the supplement, in Derridian terms, of love, in *Trainspotting* that position is filled by drugs. Drugs, not love, bring people together. Even sexual love is undermined when Alison exclaims: "That beats any meat injection ... that beats any fuckin cock in the world" (*T*, 9). Renton confirms this: "Ali wis right. Take yir best orgasm, multiply the feeling by twenty, and you're still fuckin miles off the pace" (*T*, 11). Renton's pursuit of Dianne is aptly named The First Shag in Ages, for it is only when he comes off heroin that he regains his interest in women: "dope and drink has fuelled Spud and Renton's post-junk libidos to a rampant extent" (*T*, 130). Heroin thus acts as a

substitute for intimacy and human connection. If sexual relations become more important as other connections wither, heroin is a second-order supplement, supplementing the supplement.

Social isolation goes further than the representation of heterosexual relationships, "There is no sense of community in the novel, other than in debased forms: sectarianism, racism, sexism, dysfunctional families, 'mind-numbing' mass media […] and the like" (Morace, 2001: 71). In Bad Blood, the AIDS support group comprises a diverse collection of homosexuals, intravenous drug users, and heterosexual people who contracted the disease. They form groups, blaming the others for spreading the disease, finding identity in opposition:

> Group meetings were generally tense affairs. The junkies resented the two homosexuals in the group. They believed that HIV originally spread into the city's drug-using community through an exploitative buftie landlord, who fucked his sick junkie tenants for the rent. Myself and two women, one the non-using partner of a junk addict, resented everyone as we were neither homosexual nor junkies (T, 241)

The narrator here is Dave (Davie), who was infected when he had sex with a girl who did not know she was HIV positive. She had been raped by another man in the support group, Alan Venters, who raped her to pass on the virus.

Spud's comparison with vampires (*T*, 263) further cements the image of their being outsiders or Others, "completely out of synchronisation with most of the other people who inhabited the tenements and lived by a rota of sleep and work". He adds, "it's good to be different" in much the same way that Renton 'chooses' not to belong to consumer culture. In this, they find a group identity, albeit with the above-mentioned frail connections:

> The group entering the pub are also driven by need. The need for more alcohol to maintain the high, or to regain it, or to fight off the onset of grim, depressive hangovers. They are also drawn by a greater need, the need to belong to each other, to hold on to whatever force has fused them together during the last few days of partying (*T*, 263)

Other people are invariably viewed as outsiders while they are in this state. As it is written in *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs* (59), "You just couldn't deal with people who *weren't* hung over, they were a hostile race; demonic predators who

wanted to rip your soul out. They smelt the weakness from you, sensed the dirtiness, the otherness of you." Despite this kind of yearning, friendships in *Trainspotting* are as loosely connected as romantic attachments, and even when Renton betrays his friends, he only feels a little guilt towards Spud, but not to any of the others (*T*, 343). Their connections amongst themselves are neither intimate nor substantive, being formed rather out of necessity, since they need money to support their assorted drug habits (Begbie being an alcoholic rather than heroin-addict, and Sick Boy being a womaniser).

Regardless of the fact that the SNP's leaflet used *Trainspotting*, and despite the use of the vernacular, there is no identification with the Scottish community either:

> Ah've never felt British, because ah'm not. It's ugly and artificial. Ah've never really felt Scottish either, though. Scotland the brave, ma arse; Scotland the shitein cunt. We'd throttle the life oot ay each other fir the privilege ay rimmin some English aristocrat's piles. Ah've never felt a fuckin thing aboot countries, other than total disgust. They should abolish the fuckin lot ay them (*T*, 228).

It can be expected that meaninglessness will manifest in the lives of the characters, since some form of community is needed in order to provide a coherent view of reality. Renton's reflections expose existential problems with the notion of meaning, which seems to be fundamentally lacking as a basis or condition for existence:

> Life's boring and futile. We start oaf wi high hopes, then we bottle it. We realise that we're aw gaunnae die, withoot really findin oot the big answers. We develop aw they long-winded ideas which jist interpret the reality ay oor lives in different weys, withoot really extending oor body ay worthwhile knowledge, about the big things, the real things. Basically, we live a short, disappointing life; and then we die. We fill up oor live wi shite, things like careers and relationships tae delude oorsels that it isnae aw totally pointless (*T*, 90)

Renton, being the most introspective of the characters, is fully aware of his shortcomings, "Ah didnae really know much aboot women. A didnae really know much aboot anything" (*T*, 13). However, he makes no effort to acquire the goal-relevant information to alter this situation. Seeman (1966: 361) argues, "those who are high in powerlessness are less interested in political activities; and this, taken

together with their low knowledge, is consistent with the theoretical argument at stake: those who are low in expectancy for control are not interested in and do not absorb control-relevant learning". Although Seeman focuses on political knowledge, having control-relevant knowledge of relationships and the opposite gender would create a similar reduction in powerlessness, as powerlessness is based on the same principles, regardless of where it manifests. Renton's lack of interest in control-relevant knowledge regarding women is therefore an indication of powerlessness.

The other characters seem to share this lack of understanding concerning their immediate environment. After Matty's funeral, "They filed out into the cold night at closing time, heading for Begbie's place with a carry-out. They'd already spent twelve hours drinking and pontificating about Matty's life and his motivations. In truth, the more reflective of them realised, all their insights pooled and processed, did little to illuminate the cruel puzzle of it all" (*T*, 299).

Powerlessness most clearly manifests itself in heroin addiction, as Renton remarks regarding Tommy: "How many shots does it take before the concept ay choice becomes obsolete?" (*T*, 174). Renton is constantly on and off heroin, and notes that "Kicking and using again is like gaun tae prison. Every time ye go to jail, the probability ay ye ever becoming free fae that kind ay life decreases. It's the same every time ye go back to smack. Ye decrease yir chances ay ever bein able tae dae withoot it" (*T*, 317). However, Renton sometimes sees powerlessness as a positive thing (*T,* 202), especially when it frees him of responsibility. As discussed earlier, this is what the popular media calls Peter Pan syndrome, the failure to grow up. Because powerlessness is here depicted as a positive thing, it only serves to underscore the alienation he manifests in relation to the norms of the status quo, as discussed in his rejection of the values of capitalism.

Trainspotting's fragmented narrative mirrors the fragmented lives and views of its characters, mired in drug addiction and socio-economic factors seemingly beyond their control. It is Seeman's concept of powerlessness that is foregrounded most clearly in this novel, although normlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation definitely manifest as well. It is thus a novel that clearly epitomizes alienated individuals in a subculture, cut off from the benefits of mainstream consumerist society as portrayed by the media, yet remaining anchored to its ideals

and norms. As *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs* (68) phrases it, "we held on to each other like orphaned baby monkeys, whose worlds were crumbling around them".

Alienation in *Regeneration* by Pat Barker

> And when he gets to heaven
> To Saint Peter he will tell
> "Just another soldier reporting, sir.
> I've served my time in hell."[116]
>
> *Guadalcanal epitaph*
> Anomymous

Introduction

Pat Barker's works "have a common theme of violence, usually but not always male in origin, but their author seems more interested in how that violence comes to affect people [...] than in what provokes aggression or brutality" (Childs, 2005: 65). Dealing with the after-effects of trauma is central to her many narratives, from her first novels about working-class women, but is particularly vivid when dealing with the First World War. Neal & Collas (2000: 61) observe,

> Under conditions of fear, high levels of adrenaline and other stress hormones are activated. These physiological reactors alter the central nervous system and result in deep imprinting of memory traces. For years afterward, fragments of the traumatic experience reappear as intrusive memories. Such disturbing memories have a driven, tenacious quality about them. The imprinted trauma not only surfaces during waking hours, but also is experienced in such sleep disorders as insomnia, startle awakenings, or terrifying nightmares.

This is a pervasive theme in Barker's *Regeneration*. Various patients are haunted by their war experiences, and as the narrative progresses, the reader learns more and more about the traumatic effects of war on individuals. As Siegfried Sassoon's poem

[116] Words from a photograph in *Time*, Vol. 162, no. 25, 29 December 2003/ 5 January 2004. On the photograph, this WWII poem is written in charcoal on a wall in Iraq as a US soldier walks by.

indicates: "the wounds in my heart are red / For I have watched them die" (*R*, 25). The narrator sketches the usual scenario:

> The typical patient, arriving at Craiglockhart, had usually been devoting considerable energy to the task of *forgetting* whatever traumatic events had precipitated his neurosis. Even if the patient recognized the attempt as hopeless, he had usually been encouraged to persist in it by friends, relatives, even by his previous medical advisors. The horrors he'd experienced, only partially repressed even by day, returned with redoubled force to haunt the nights, giving rise to that almost characteristic symptom of war neurosis: the battle nightmare (*R*, 26) .

These haunting images are designed towards achieving closure, which reflect the Zeigarnik effect in psychology. This effect "refers to the 'completion tendency' in human affairs. We tend to remember more vividly uncompleted tasks than the ones we have completed" (Neal & Collas, 2000: 62). Although, as Barker said, on receiving the Booker Prize in 1995, "The Somme is like the Holocaust[117]. It revealed things about mankind that we cannot come to terms with and cannot forget. It can never become the past" (www.contemporarywriters.com/authors). The job of the psychologist in *Regeneration*'s Craiglockhart War Hospital, Rivers, and the purpose of the novel itself, is to bring this trauma to the fore in an attempt to provide closure, with en emphasis on not casting a veil of silence over these traumatic events.

Pat Barker's novels have a tendency to explore controversial and often taboo subjects such as "prostitution, homosexuality, child rape, mental illness, pacifism, war, and murder by minors" (www.contemporarywriters.com/authors). Childs (2005: 78) contends, "In her mature novels, Barker asks for a fuller understanding of the psychological underpinnings of sexual desire and a better appreciation of the constructions and myths of femininity and masculinity in the context of a range of historical factors including nationalism, feminism, and class division." In these terms, there is some overlap between her early and later novels, with *Regeneration* taking the position as the watershed which distinguishes the former from the latter: "Collectively, Barker's novels reveal her singular gift for immersing readers in the atmospherics and pathologies of violence – whether rape, murder, trench warfare, torture, or unremitting confinement" (Nixon, 2004: 3).

[117] On the first day of the Somme, 1 July 1916, Britain suffered 20,000 killed in action (Keegan 2004: 361).

The abiding conviction of Barker's work is "the need to reverse the desensitizing effects of over-familiarity on our responses to violence and its effects" (Childs, 2005: 69). This recalls Viktor Šklovskij's (2004: 16) remarks on art that, "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged". This is precisely what Barker accomplishes, making the war *warry*[118] when the countless action movies and news bulletins have come to desensitize us (desensitization for instance depicted in films such as *Natural Born Killers*). In *London Fields*, Samson remarks on the bombardment of images of violence, "Like everybody else, Guy had little appetite for the big bad news. Like everybody else, he had supped full of horrors, over breakfast, day after day, until he was numb with it, stupid with it, and his daily paper went unread" (*LF*, 141). The effective artwork, then, breaks through this automation, and *Regeneration* depicts the horrors of war in such a way that it affects people again.

Pat Barker was born Patricia Margaret Drake in a small industrial town, Thornaby-on-Tees, in Yorkshire, England, on 8 May 1943 – a setting that was to dominate her early novels. She studied international history at the London School of Economics, before becoming a teacher (Childs, 2005: 58). However, Barker notes, "I was alienated from the academic setting, not at home in it. This is something I still feel. I've never quite belonged in any of the settings in which I superficially seem to belong" (Westman, 2001: 9). A pivotal moment in her life came while attending a creative writing course at the Arvon Foundation in the Lumb Bank in Yorkshire, under Angela Carter (Westman, 2001: 10), for it was only after this that *Union Street* (1982) was published. By this time, she was almost forty, and the novel was partly inspired by Carter's deep interest in the myths surrounding sexuality (Childs, 2005: 58). It is set in a close-knit north-eastern community ruled by a matriarchal figure and narrates seven interlinked tales of working-class women living on Union Street.

Blow Your House Down (1984) followed as a four-part narrative about a serial killer terrorizing prostitutes. The story is based on the murders of Peter Sutcliffe, the 'Yorkshire Ripper', an ex-gravedigger, who brutally murdered at least thirteen

[118] Šklovskij (2004: 16) writes, "art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*".

women (mostly prostitutes) in Yorkshire between 1975 and 1985. The title refers to the folk tale[119] of the *Three Little Pigs*, who are terrorized by a wolf but who end up eating him. Childs (2005: 69) suggests that the novel can be divided into four parts, with the first two representing the attacks on the first two prostitutes, and the third depicting their fighting back. The fourth part, Maggie's story, transcends the simple binary opposition between predator/prey. Part one centres on a single parent, Brenda, who turns to prostitution, and leads up to the murder of Kath. Part two builds up to the murder of Carol and widens the circle to include other female characters, such as Audrey, Elaine, and Jean. Part three ends with the disappearance of Jean, after she has killed a man, who may or may not be the murderer (Childs, 2005: 70). Part four narrates the story of Maggie, who, after being attacked, becomes estranged "from man" (*Blow Your House Down*, 164). The standpoint of the novel is aphoristically stated by the epigraph from Nietzsche (cf. Childs, 2005: 69), "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss the abyss also looks into you".

The Century's Daughter (1986) was republished as *Liza's England* in 1990, and traces territory similar to that explored in *Union Street* – working class women in the twentieth century. Liza was born in the first minute of 1900, and tells her story to a social worker called Steven, who assists working-class children. In the end, she is fatally assaulted by a group of youths. In *The Man Who Wasn't There* (1989), Barker "considers masculinity in the light of its representations in war films and stories" (Childs, 2005: 59). This novel prefigures the *Regeneration Trilogy* that followed.

These early works provide a backdrop to *Regeneration*, for they depict violence done to women, whereas *Regeneration* only draws a parallel between the trauma experienced by women during peacetime and that experienced by men during war, without going into much detail about what the women experience during peacetime. As Rivers identifies it:

> Pilots, though they did indeed break down, did so less frequently and usually less severely than the men who manned observation balloons. They, floating helplessly above the battlefields, unable either to avoid attack or to defend themselves effectively against it, showed the highest incidence of breakdown of any service. Even including infantry officers. This reinforced Rivers's view

[119] Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* rewrites folk tales from an adult perspective.

> that it was prolonged strain, immobility and helplessness that did the damage, and not the sudden shocks or bizarre horrors that the patients themselves were inclined to point to as the explanation for their condition. That would help to account for the greater prevalence of anxiety neuroses and hysterical disorders in women in peacetime, since their relatively more confined lives gave them fewer opportunities of reacting to stress in active and constructive ways. Any explanation of war neurosis must account for the fact that this apparently intensely masculine life of war and danger and hardship produced in men the same disorders that women suffered from in peace (*R*, 222).

This is echoed in the words of Lizzie, one of the minor female characters in *Regeneration*, "Do you know what happened on August 4th 1914? [...] I'll tell you what happened. *Peace* broke out. The only bit of peace *I*'ve ever had. No, I don't want him back. I don't want him back on leave. I don't want him back when it's all over. As far as I'm concerned the Kaiser can keep him" (*R*, 110).

Barker's father was killed in action in the Second World War, and her grandfather fought in the First World War, two wars that played an important role in her career as a writer. She remarks, "I chose the First Wold War because it's come to stand in for other wars [...] [I]t's come to stand for the pain of all wars" (Westman, 2001: 16). The casualties of the First World War were unprecedented[120] (Keegan, 2004: 365):

Britain	1,000,000
France	1,700,000
Italy	600,000
Germany	2,000,000

Regeneration marks a watershed in her career, as it allowed her to appeal to a wider audience: "Until the publication of *Regeneration* [...], Barker's work was received under the 'regional' label, with the further designations of 'women's fiction' and 'working-class' fiction" (Westman, 2001: 14). Afterwards, she became nationally and internationally renowned. Nixon (2004: 2) remarks, "*Regeneration* was to become the novel that really put her on the map. (It remains her best-selling and most widely taught work.)"

Barker has written eleven novels, namely *Union Street* (1982), *Blow Your House Down* (1984), *The Century's Daughter* (1986) (re-published as *Liza's England* in

[120] Total Russian casualties are uncounted. These figures reflect killed in action only, not wounded.

1990), *The Man Who Wasn't There* (1989), *Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993), *The Ghost Road* (1995), *Another World* (1998), *Border Crossing* (2001), *Double Vision* (2003), and *Life Class* (2007). For these novels she was amply awarded: Fawcett Society Book Prize for Union Street in 1983, Guardian Fiction Prize for The Eye in the Door in 1993, Northern Electric Special Arts Prize for The Eye in the Door in 1994, Booker Prize for Fiction for The Ghost Road in 1995, Booksellers' Association Author of the Year Award in 1996, and finally a CBE in 2000.

Regeneration was filmed in 1997, directed by Gillies MacKinnon and starring Jonathan Pryce, James Wilby, Jonny Lee Miller, Stuart Bunce, and Tanya Allen. The film did not attract much attention and is difficult to locate on DVD, so the novel remains the most likely first contact with *Regeneration* (unlike with Welsh's *Trainspotting*).

Regeneration

> Nevertheless, the power of the events that created my depression is often out of proportion to the disaster that suddenly overwhelms me. What is more, the disenchantment that I experience here and now, cruel as it may be, appears, under scrutiny, to awaken echoes of old traumas, to which I realize I have never been able to resign myself. I can thus discover antecedents to my current breakdown in a loss, death, or grief over someone or something that I once loved. The disappearance of that essential being continues to deprive me what is most worthwhile in me (Kristeva, 1989: 5).

The *Regeneration Trilogy* comprises *Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993), and *The Ghost Road* (1995). Like Etienne Leroux's *Welgevonden trilogy* (*Seven Days at the Silbersteins*, *One for the Devil*, and *The Third Eye*), the first novel is primary and her best known work. *Regeneration* is "a wide-ranging study of the effects of war on individuals in terms of responsibility and identity" (Childs, 2005: 59). The central character in the trilogy is Billy Prior, a promiscuous and bisexual soldier treated by William H. R. Rivers (1864 – 1922) at Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh, "the living museum of tics and twitches" (*R*, 206). Rivers (author of *Medicine, Magic, and Religion*) is one of the many real-life characters; others include Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen. *Regeneration* is an historical novel, with historical figures occupying the central roles. Barker (Nixon, 2004: 20) says,

> I thought of the pseudomorality of novelists, where you use a different name and then you're allowed to say anything you like about a person, whereas if you use the actual name you have the historian's responsibility to be fair. I find that despite this dreadful word "faction", I actually prefer that. You can't say something terrible about Sassoon which is not true – not that I have wanted to. You couldn't because you're using the man's name.

Barker does not put much emphasis on a particular character in *Regeneration*, which could lead to some confusion over who the main character is in this novel: "While many reviewers identify Siegfried Sassoon as the main character of *Regeneration*, Barker herself names Dr. W. H. R. Rivers" (Westman, 2001: 26).

Regeneration primarily focuses on the relationship between Rivers and Sassoon at Craiglockhart, but the other two novels focus on Rivers and Prior, who is eventually killed in action alongside Wilfred Owen in the First World War. *Regeneration*'s title refers to Rivers's interest in the regeneration of nerves after injury, and "Barker expands the study to mental damage but also brings to the fore the conflict between generations that the war made manifest" (Childs, 2005: 74). Rivers conducted experiments on nerve regeneration while working with Henry Head (*R*, 46). In one experiment, Rivers severed Head's radial nerve and sutured it, documenting regeneration over a period of five years. The suggestion is that physical nerve regeneration can be paralleled with psychological 'nerves' – also able to regenerate when the proper techniques are applied and enough time is given. The novel is mostly set at Craiglockhart "between the months of July and November of 1917" (Westman, 2001: 25), where Rivers deals with individual patients, who suffer from amnesia (too little memory) or anamnesia (too much memory) (Brannigan, 2003: 23). Second-Lieutenant Billy Prior is an example of the former, who is initially unable to speak and suggests hypnosis in an attempt to find the incident that lead to his breakdown. When it turns out to be a relatively unremarkable event (as compared to the experiences of some of the other patients), Prior is disappointed, but Rivers offers his theory of combat stress: "You're thinking of breakdown as a reaction to a single traumatic event, but it's not like that. It's more a matter of ... *erosion*. Weeks and months of stress in a situation where you can't get away from it" (*R*, 105). Burns, another patient, is an example of someone

suffering from anamnesia, who had a particularly traumatic experience that haunts him:

> He'd been thrown into the air by the explosion of a shell and had landed, head-first, on a German corpse, whose gas-filled belly had ruptured on impact. Before Burns lost consciousness, he'd had time to realize that what filled his nose and mouth was decomposing human flesh. Now, whenever he tried to eat, that taste and smell recurred. Nightly, he relived the experience, and from every nightmare he awoke vomiting (*R*, 19).

The powerlessness of characters to escape from their memories is indicated by the observation that the hallway in Craiglockhart looks like "a trench without the sky" (*R*, 17), indicating that the war has followed them to Scotland, for they carry it within themselves[121].

Siegfried Sassoon (1886 – 1967) is one of Barker's real-life characters, a published poet, and contemporary of Wilfred Owen. He explains where his name came from, "I'm called Siegfried because my mother liked Wagner. And the only thing I have in common with orthodox Jews is that I do profoundly thank God I was born a man and not a woman. If I were a woman, I'd be called Brünnhilde" (*R*, 217). This naming illustrates his role as outsider, for he is neither Jew nor Gentile, a Jew with a thoroughly German name[122]. He maintains this role throughout the novel, from his arrival at Craiglockhart, "Sassoon turned to look out of the window, hunching his shoulder against them all" (*R*, 5). He is the only patient of sound mind in a mental institution, as Rivers realises early on: "He doesn't *sound* as if he's gibbering, does he?" (*R*, 4). Later (*R*, 15), Rivers reassures Sassoon:

> 'I'm quite sure you're not [mad]. As a matter of fact I don't even think you've got a war neurosis.'
>
> Sassoon digested this. 'What have I got, then?'
>
> 'You seem to have a very powerful *anti*-war neurosis.'
>
> They looked at each other and laughed. Rivers said, 'You realize, don't you, that it's my duty to ... to try to change that? I can't pretend to be neutral'.
>
> Sassoon's glance took in both of their uniforms. 'No, of course not'.

---

[121] Paula Cole's song, *I Don't Wanna Wait*, echoes this idea when she sings about a husband and father returning from war, "And the war he saw lives inside him still".

[122] It is suggested that he left out his name on his declaration on purpose, possibly because of its German connections (*R*, 3).

Wilson (2001: 18) claims that the outsider's fundamental attitude is "non-acceptance of life, of human life lived by human beings in a human society", and this is but one example of how Sassoon manifests as an outsider. His opposition to the war is not based on religious grounds, neither is it an issue of pacifism nor simply avoiding his duty (cowardice). His declaration states, "I believe that this war, upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest" (*R*, 3)[123]. The difficulty he faces is that in refusing to do his duty, he stands to be court marshalled (and if found guilty of cowardice, being executed by firing squad). Furthermore, Sassoon thinks of the army as "probably the only place I've ever really belonged" (*R*, 36). When going into town, he feels out of place; Sassoon "hated everybody, giggling girls, portly middle-aged men, women whose eyes settled on his wound stripe like flies. Only the young soldier home on leave, staggering out of a pub, dazed and vacant-eyed, escaped his disgust" (*R*, 44). When he does eventually leave Craiglockhart, "He was feeling distinctly cheerful. Exactly the same feeling he had had aboard ship going to France, watching England slide away into the mist. No doubts, no scruples, no agonizing, just a straightforward, headlong retreat towards the front" (*R*, 248).

It is Rivers's job to return Sassoon to the front, to reintegrate him into the army, and he does so by focussing on this identification:

> "If you maintain your protest, you can expect to spend the remainder of the war in a state of Complete. Personal. Safety."
> Sassoon shifted in his seat. "I'm not responsible for other people's decisions."
> "You don't think you might find being safe while other people *die* rather difficult?"
> A flash of anger. "Nobody else in this *stinking* country seems to find it difficult. I expect I'll just learn to live with it. Like everybody else" (*R*, 36).

This is of course part of the reason why Sassoon returns to France in the end. His decision is helped by the spectral appearance of fallen comrades by his bedside, particularly Orme (*R*, 143). The importance of identification and shared experiences is highlighted by the fact that Sassoon only relates this experience after Rivers

[123] There were "some noises about breach of copyright" (Nixon, 2004: 17) because of the inclusion of this piece, as it is the original of the statement of protest against the war that Sassoon made before the House of Commons in July 1917.

discloses *his* experiences in the Solomon Islands (*R*, 188), where Rivers had seen a soul being taken across the river by the dead. When Rivers asks, "Do they look reproachful?" Sassoon replies, "No. They just look puzzled. They can't understand why I'm here" (*R*, 189). Sassoon even writes a poem about it (*R*, 189):

> When I'm asleep, dreaming and drowsed and warm,
> They come, the homeless ones, the noiseless dead.
> While the dim charging breakers of the storm
> Rumble and drone and bellow overhead,
> Out of the gloom they gather about my bed.
> They whisper to my heart; their thoughts are mine.
>
> 'Why are you here with all your watches ended?
> 'From Ypres to Frise we sought you in the line.'
> In bitter safety I awake, unfriended;
> And while the dawn begins with slashing rain
> I think of the Battalion in the mud.
> 'When are you going back to them again?
> 'Are they not still your brothers through our blood?'"

The problem is that although Sassoon identifies with the military, he cannot fully condone the way the war is conducted (as his declaration makes clear). He is very critical of the war, e.g. where Rivers notes, "Taking *unnecessary* risks is one of the first signs of war neurosis". To this, Sassoon replies, "What is an 'unnecessary risk' anyway? The maddest thing I ever did was done under orders" (*R*, 12). Rivers himself is highly critical of Western civilization in general and the war in particular (more so as his contact with Sassoon develops). In the context of his anthropological visits to the Solomon Islands, he speaks of the "*Great White God* de-throned" when he recognises that "their reactions to my society were neither more nor less valid than mine to theirs" (*R*, 242). Elsewhere, Rivers notes, "A society that devours its own young deserves no automatic or unquestioning allegiance" (*R*, 249). This questioning of metanarratives is familiar terrain in the post-modern context, since "The teleological narratives of historical progress, cultural superiority and technological prowess, which underpinned notions of European civilization, and which ultimately led to the 'Great War', produced the most savage, regressive and irrational conflict the world had yet known" (Brannigan, 2003: 21).

The irrationality of the conflict and the society sanctioning it is highlighted particularly vividly when one of Sarah Lumb's co-workers, Betty, tries to give herself an abortion, and the doctor tells her, "It's not just an inconvenience you've got in there. It's a human being". Yet, in the very next paragraph, the women are glimpsed manufacturing more munitions in "silence and bowed heads and feverishly working fingers flicking machine-gun bullets into place inside the glittering belts" (*R*, 202). Although Sarah calls her mother a war profiteer, "in a small way" (*R*, 196), she herself is profiting from the mass slaughter. Sarah "was earning ten bob before the war" (*R*, 89), but the job in the munitions factory was earning her "[f]ifty bob a week". Keegan (2004: 309) notes the importance and scale of the home front contribution:

> [I]n the week before the opening of the battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, British artillery fired 1,000,000 rounds, a total weight of some 20,000 tons of metal and explosive. The demand for quantities of that sort caused a 'shell crisis' in 1915, but the famine was staunched by a programme of emergency industrialisation in Britain and the placing of large contracts with factories working at under-capacity elsewhere.

Thus, even the women take part in "breaking the bargain", for "in trenches and dugouts and flooded shell-holes, the inheritors were dying, not one by one, while old men, and women of all ages, gathered together and sang hymns" (*R*, 149). It is thus society in general that stands accused, not just the military or the men – all take part in the killing. Chaliand (1994: 4) notes that "Modern nationalism, a new idea based on the concept of the nation-state and popular sovereignty, leads naturally to mass warfare". Chaliand (*Ibid*.) relates the importance of the First World War:

> With Napoleon began the era of what Clausewitz calls ‘absolute war’, the ‘decisive’ battle in which the aim is to exterminate the enemy’s armed forces. Gradually, armies became exclusively national affairs, and compulsory military service was introduced. The considerable advances in firepower associated with the advances of industrialization, the growing bitterness of national antagonisms, reminiscent of the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century, and the diabolization of the enemy[124] in wars of ideas made the war of the first half of the twentieth century total wars. [...] In fact, reverting to a tradition long abandoned in Europe, an attempt was made to terrorize civilian populations and destroy their morale, in addition to attacking purely military targets. Europeans emerged from World War I with a feeling of

[124] This was not always part of warfare, as the *Heimskringla* illustrates when discussing the battle of Hjörungavágr in 986 AD between Danes and Norwegians. After the battle, some of the enemy are pardoned, and intermarriage takes place (Sturluson, 1931: 144-149).

> disgust, tempered in the victors by the often bitter scent of victory, and strengthened in the defeated by a painful feeling of frustration.

Questioning metanarratives is also a recurring theme within the other works of Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy*. According to Foyles (www.foyles.co.uk), *The Eye in the Door* draws on "the history of the Pemberton Billing libel trial in which all Britain's military troubles were laid at the door of the British homosexuals[125]". *The Eye in the Door* continues the narrative from the point where Prior leaves Craiglockhart, becoming a Ministry of Munitions spy investigating a family, the Ropers, who have been linked to anti-war protests. There is a deep ambivalence within Prior, sexually (he has a girlfriend but still sleeps with men), with class, and with regard to his career. He investigates old friends, to whom he feels loyalty, but simultaneously "There were times [...] when Prior was made physically sick by the sight and sound and smell of civilians" (*The Eye in the Door*, 7). He embodies the "divisions of socialism, gender, and sexuality within a nation supposedly fighting a collective war" (Childs, 2005: 60). This duality is depicted in Sassoon as well, as he refers to his "Jekyll and Hyde performance" (*The Eye in the Door*, 229). Rivers further acknowledges, "Siegfried had always coped with the war by being two people: the anti-war poet and pacifist; the bloodthirsty, efficient company commander" (*The Eye in the Door*, 233). Rivers sees his current self as different from the one he was before the war, in Melanesia in the Pacific, "It was his Melanesian self he preferred, but his attempts to integrate that self into his way of life in England had produced nothing but frustration and misery. Perhaps, contrary to what he usually supposed, duality was the stable state; the attempt at integration, dangerous" (*The Eye in the Door*, 235).

The title *The eye in the door* refers to the surveillance world Prior is engaged in, as well as the book's concern with a world consisting of different sides, such as objector/collaborator, heterosexual/homosexual, friend/enemy, male/female, and upper/lower class (Childs, 2005: 61), as a door forms a boundary between two rooms

[125] In *Regeneration*, homosexuality is addressed via the characters of Sassoon, Graves, and Owen in particular. After Peter was arrested "[s]oliciting outside the local barracks" (*R*, 199), Robert Graves says, "since that happened my affections have been running in more normal channels" (*R*, 199). When Rivers remarks, "I don't usually include any ... intimate details," Sassoon replies, "Probably just as well. My intimate details disqualify me from military service" (*R*, 70).

or between inside and outside. *The Ghost Road* makes more frequent references to Rivers's past in Melanesia, studying the tribes of the island and drawing parallels with Europe, and Rivers is "obliged to recognize that the belief that the dead haunt the living is not simply a primitive superstition or an emotional disorder but an integral and perhaps necessary part of human responses to loss, grief, and trauma" (Childs, 2005: 61).

The folly of the strategies of the First World War is underscored by Prior's retelling of a battle in *Regeneration*:

> You blow the whistle. You climb the ladder. Then you double through a gap in the wire, lie flat, wait for everybody else to get out – those that are left, there's already a heavy toll – and then you stand up. And you start walking. *Not* at the double. Normal walking speed. [...] In a straight line. Across open country. In broad daylight. Towards a line of machine guns. [...] Oh, and of course you're being shelled all the way (*R*, 78).

To this, Rivers replies,

> 'You're describing this attack as if it were a – a slightly ridiculous event in – '
> 'Not 'slightly'. Slightly, I did not say.'
> 'All right, an *extremely* ridiculous event – in someone else's life'.
> 'Perhaps that's how it felt' (*R*, 78)

The characters' (particularly Sassoon's) questioning of the validity of the war aims and strategies is a manifestation of Seeman's notion of meaninglessness, which "refers to the individual's sense of understanding events in which he is engaged" (Seeman, 1959: 786). Rivers thinks when he finds Burns after the latter had run away in the middle of the night, "*Nothing justifies this. Nothing nothing nothing*" (*R*, 180). This crisis of meaning alienates them not only from the army, but from society at large, partly because, as mentioned earlier, it is society at large that has to bear the responsibility, not only the military. Rivers notes

> ...the two bloody bargains on which a civilization claims to be based. *The* bargain, Rivers thought, looking at Abraham and Isaac. The one on which all patriarchal societies are founded. If you, who are young and strong, will obey me, who am old and weak, even to the extent of being prepared to sacrifice your life, then in the course of time you will peacefully inherit, and be able to exact the same obedience from your sons. Only we're breaking the bargain,

> Rivers thought. All over northern France, at this very moment, in trenches and dugouts and flooded shell-holes, the inheritors were dying, not one by one, while old men, and women of all ages, gathered together and sang hymns (*R*, 149).

This alienation from patriarchal society is embodied in Rivers, who is older than his patients and "used to being adopted as a father figure" (*R*, 34). Sassoon "joked once or twice to Rivers about his being his father confessor, but only now, faced with this second abandonment, did he realize how completely Rivers had come to take his father's place" (*R*, 145). Prior picks up on this as well, first noting, "I find myself wanting to impress you. Pathetic, isn't it?" (*R*, 64), and then stating directly, "I suppose most of them turn you into Daddy, don't they?" (*R*, 65). However, John Layard, one of Rivers's previous patients, claims that he did not see Rivers as a father, but more as a male mother (*R*, 107). When Prior wants to return to the front, he sees Rivers as inhibiting his attempts, despite Rivers's claims, "You didn't *ask* for permanent home service. You were *given* it, on the basis of Eaglesham's report. *Not my report*. There's nothing in your psychological state to prevent your going back" (*R*, 210). Prior then aligns Rivers with his mother: "My mother was always pulling the other way. Trying to keep me in. [...] She wanted me in the house away from all the *nasty rough boys*. And then suddenly here *you* are ... [...]. Doing exactly the same thing. [...] Probably why I never wanted you to be *Daddy*. I'd got you lined up for a worse fate" (*R*, 210). Rivers embodies the feminization of men in the war, depicting that "One of the paradoxes of the war [...] was that this most brutal of conflicts should set up a relationship between officers and men that was ... domestic. Caring. As Layard would undoubtedly have said, maternal." As the narrator relates:

> Rivers had often been touched by the way in which young men, some of them not yet twenty, spoke about feeling like fathers to their men. Though when you looked at what they *did*. Worrying about socks, boots, blisters, food, hot drinks. And that perpetually harried expression of theirs. Rivers had only ever seen that look in one other place: in the public wards of hospitals, on the faces of women who were bringing up large families on very low incomes, women who, in their early thirties, could easily be taken for fifty or more. It was the look of people who are totally responsible for lives they have no power to save (*R*, 107).

When Prior makes a joke about his previous problems with headaches at the front, he places himself in a female role: "Headaches. [...] It's hardly a reason to stay out of the trenches, is it? '*Not tonight, Wilhelm. I've got a headache*'?" (*R*, 50). Rivers suggests that his therapy implies a sea change in how society sees itself and defines gender roles, "The change [Rivers] demanded of them – and by implication of himself – was not trivial. Fear, tenderness – these emotions were so despised that they could be admitted into consciousness only at the cost of redefining what it meant to be a man" (*R*, 48). This is a process of transformation, and as Rivers notes, "the process of transformation consists almost entirely of decay" (*R*, 184), as the patients' psyches are broken down and rebuilt. Childs (2005: 75) writes, "All kinds of repression, sexual, social, and personal, are unearthed in the novel, foregrounding the elements of the time that were unexplored by a society defending its ideals of masculinity". The format of the war also emasculates the soldiers:

> Mobilization. The Great Adventure. They'd been *mobilized* into holes in the ground so constricted they could hardly move. And the Great Adventure – the real life equivalent of all the adventure stories they'd devoured as boys – consisted of crouching in a dugout, waiting to be killed. The war that had promised so much in the way of 'manly' activity had actually delivered 'feminine' passivity, and on a scale that their mothers and sisters had scarcely known. No wonder they broke down (*R*, 107).

Prior foregrounds the meaninglessness associated with such a redefining action, for "He didn't know what to make of [Sarah], but then he was out of touch with women. They seemed to have changed so much during the war, to have expanded in all kinds of ways, whereas men over the same period had shrunk into smaller and smaller space" (*R*, 90)

Another aspect highlighted by Rivers's 'Mobilization' speech is the powerlessness the situation entails. When noting that it is the soldiers who man observation balloons who have the highest rate of psychological breakdowns, he concludes that

> ...it was prolonged strain, immobility and helplessness that did the damage, and not the sudden shocks or bizarre horrors that the patients themselves were inclined to point to as the explanation for their condition. That would help to account for the greater prevalence of anxiety neuroses and hysterical disorders in women in peacetime, since their relatively more confined lives gave them fewer opportunities of reacting to stress in active and constructive

> ways. Any explanation of war neurosis must account for the fact that this apparently intensely masculine life of war and danger and hardship produced in men the same disorders that women suffered from in peace (*R*, 222).

Anderson, another patient, highlights how powerlessness can lead to psychological breakdown. When he gives reasons for having quit medicine, Rivers asks, "You still haven't told me when you said *enough*." To which Anderson replies, "You make it sound like a decision. I don't know that lying on the floor in a pool of piss counts as a decision" (*R*, 31). Owen also remarks on the powerlessness experienced on the front,

> Sometimes when you're alone, in the trenches, I mean, at night you get the sense of something *ancient*. As if the trenches had always been there. You know one trench we held, it had skulls in the side. You looked back along and ... Like mushrooms. And do you know, it was actually *easier* to believe they were men fro Marlboro's army than to to to think they'd been alive two years ago. It's as if all other wars had somehow ... distilled themselves into this war, and that makes it something you ... almost can't challenge (*R*, 83).

When Sarah exits the hospital and stumbles upon amputees, she is also unwittingly responsible for more harm to soldiers,

> Simply by being there, by being that inconsequential, infinitely powerful creature: *a pretty girl*, she had made everything worse. Her sense of her own helplessness, her being forced to play the role of Medusa when she meant no harm, merged with the anger she was beginning to feel at their being hidden away like that (*R*, 160).

Sarah stumbles upon the hidden casualties of the war, "figures that were no longer the size and shape of adult men" (*Ibid.*). Many of them have limbs amputated, one even lost all his limbs[126]. They are hidden from sight; at the front of the hospital "their mutilations might have been seen by passers-by" (*Ibid.*). They look at her in a different manner from other patients, with a look of fear, "Fear of her looking at the empty trouser legs. Fear of her not looking at them" (*Ibid.*). Sarah is angry that they are hidden away, thinking that "If the country demanded that price, then it should

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[126] According to Lars Ulrich (2006), Metallica's song *One*, off the album *Justice for all*, was inspired by the 1971 film, *Johnny got his gun*, directed by Dalton Trumbo. It is based on the eponymously titled novel (published 1939) written by Trumbo and depicts a soldier similarly disfigured during World War I. In the film, the military officer tells the doctor: "He's the product of your profession, not mine". A remake of the film is directed by Rowan Joseph and scheduled to be released in 2008. Metallica's video ends with a group of civilians singing hymns, like in *Regeneration*: "in trenches and dugouts and flooded shell-holes, the inheritors were dying, not one by one, while old men, and women of all ages, gathered together and sang hymns" (*R*, 149).

bloody well be prepared to look at the result" (*Ibid.*). England remained in the war, sending a million young men to be killed at the front (700,000 from the British Isles, 300,000 from the colonies, Keegan, 2004: 365). Nevertheless, the reality of war was far from the imaginations of the general public (in contrast to wars like Vietnam and Iraq where images were/are boomed into every living room). Improvements in medical aid and facilities resulted in fewer deaths from sickness and a higher survival rate of wounded soldiers, but that only served to increase the number of mutilated veterans, as improvements in body armour have done in recent conflicts. The amputees brought the reality home, and had to be hidden away so the public would not be discouraged and start asking about the human cost of the war. This incident thus highlights the hypocrisy of the government and society, who ask the ultimate sacrifice, yet they do not wish to be confronted with the results[127]. Nixon (2004: 2) argues that this element of *Regeneration* is specifically relevant when reading from a post-9/11 perspective,

> Veterans comprise one-quarter of America's homeless men. In the wake of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, we can expect another wave of returning soldiers (men and women) touted as national heroes yet abandoned to the ravages of mental illness, emotional instability, physical disability, and social isolation. *Regeneration* takes up the issues of war trauma, recovery, and reintegration with a rare force that is visceral yet psychologically complex, and achieves a contemporary resonance.

As a counterweight to Rivers's 'feminine' approach, Yealland embodies the 'masculine' approach to curing patients. Yealland speaks in a "God-like tone" (*R*, 226), and Rivers accompanies him as he cures mutism in a patient called Callan. From the beginning of this episode there is a clear parallel with Prior (*R*, 226), and Rivers later acknowledges even a physical resemblance, "On the wards he'd been struck by a slight facial resemblance between Callan and Prior" (*R*, 237). But Yealland and Rivers's approaches and methods[128] differ greatly, Yealland favours

[127] Johnny Swan in Welsh's *Transpotting*, being an exploiter of the capitalist system and society, loses his leg from gangrene after injecting heroin, and pretends to be a Falklands War veteran. He begs outside Waverley Station, with a sign that reads, "Falklands Veteran – I lost my leg for my country. Please help" (*T*, 319). When a woman hands him twenty pounds after telling of her son that died there, he shows no guilt for deceiving her.

[128] Barker (Nixon, 2004: 10) mentions another method used at the time, as nonsensical and horrific:

> Another therapy which I don't deal with in the book was to put tubes of radium against the patient's skull and hold them there, because they were impressed by radium: it was this

electric shock treatment, which is so severe it borders on torture[129]. In his approach, Yealland has no sympathy with his patients, as he states, "The last thing these patients need is a sympathetic audience" (*R*, 228). He tells Callan: "Remember you must behave as becomes the hero I expect you to be [...]. A man who has been through so many battles should have a better control of himself" (*R*, 230). He even echoes Rivers's father, who had helped Rivers with his stammer, when he tells Callan, "*You must speak, but I shall not listen to anything you have to say*" (*R*, 231). Even after Callan is cured of his mutism, Yealland continues to mould him in an absurdly strict way (*R*, 233):

> Callan smiled.
> 'I do not like your smile,' Yealland said. 'I find it most objectionable. Sit down.'
> Callan sat.
> 'This will not take a moment,' Yealland said. 'Smile.'
> Callan smiled and the key electrode was applied to the side of his mouth. When he was finally permitted to stand up again, he no longer smiled.

After visiting Yealland, Rivers has a dream in which he tries to force a horse's bit into a man's mouth (*R*, 236). The symbolism is clear, but he explains it nevertheless: "*A horse's bit*. Not an electrode, not a teaspoon. A bit. An instrument of control. Obviously he and Yealland were both in the business of controlling people. Each of them fitted young men back into the role of warrior, a role they have – however unconsciously – rejected" (*R*, 238). Rivers thought that "nothing Callan could say could have been more powerful than his silence", and thus, "Rivers felt that he was witnessing the *silencing* of a human being" (*R*, 238), in the same way that he had silenced Billy Prior:

> Just as Yealland silenced the unconscious protests of *his* patients by removing the paralysis, the deafness, the blindness, the muteness that stood between

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magic thing and they had no idea of the dangers. But it glowed in the dark, so it must be doing you good. The patients actually did, to some extent, lose some of their symptoms. And the doctor, of course, who was doing all this shortly after acquired radiation sickness.

[129] Indeed, Article 17 of the Geneva Convention states: "Prisoners of war who refuse to answer may not be threatened, insulted, or exposed to any unpleasant or disadvantageous treatment of any kind" (www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/91.htm). In terms of the 1949 Geneva Convention, then, Yealland's methods would be regarded as torture if it had been carried out on Prisoners of War. Although this incident in *Regeneration* predates the Geneva Convention, it is an accusation of society that it treats its own soldiers – not even civilians – worse than it would treat prisoners of war after 1949.

> them and the war, so, in an infinitely more gentle way, *he* silenced *his* patients; for the stammerings, the nightmares, the tremors, the memory lapses, of officers were just as much unwitting protest as the grosser maladies of the men (*R*, 238).

The link between Sassoon and the others is therefore that they are all protesting against the war, and being silenced by Rivers, Yealland and others who do the same work. Barker (Nixon, 2004: 21) says that Rivers is "restoring them to something he hates. He acknowledges that he's doing what Yealland does. He's doing it more gently, and more effectively in the long term, but that's what he's doing". In this sense, Sassoon is not as socially isolated as he had thought, but he never fully realises this parallel between him and the others. Rivers's job is not only to silence Sassoon's protest, but also to rehabilitate Prior. However, as River's dream illustrates, both actions imply imposing control. In rehabilitating his patients, Rivers silences their protests, as he does with Sassoon, but by donning his uniform, Rivers is powerless to do anything else.

Sassoon highlights normlessness when he accuses commanders and politicians of only looking after themselves: "the people who're keeping this war going don't give a damn about the 'Bobbies' and the 'Tommies'. And they don't let 'gentlemanly behaviour' stand in the way either when it comes to feathering their own nests" (*R*, 198). This echoes Prior's questioning of class, being himself, like Sassoon, a mixture of different classes. The character of Billy Prior brings some of the main issues of the text to the fore, namely class, and the immorality of the war. But his relationship with Rivers is different, as Westman (2001: 50) notes, "Sassoon associates with members of the aristocracy [...] 'Second-Lieutenant Sassoon' soon becomes 'Siegfried' during his appointments with Rivers [...]. By contrast, 'Second-Lieutenant Prior' remains 'Mr Prior'." This happens because Prior is of a lower class and is not privy to the advantages available to the officer's class, but also Sassoon certainly receives preferential treatment because he is the only patient who is not deranged.

Billy Prior comes to the reader's attention while he suffers from mutism. Initially he writes on a notepad, but his speech later returns. This does not affect his hostility towards Rivers, though, "I don't think talking *helps*. It just churns things up

and makes them seem more real" (*R*, 51). When his parents visit, he loses the ability to speak once again, indicating his protest against the society he grew up in as an extension of his hostility towards the war. Prior's father is sceptical about his son's condition, and remarks, "He'd get a damn sight more sympathy from me if he had a bullet up his arse" (*R*, 57). However, the resentment is more deep-rooted than that, as he sees in Billy a denial of where he came from, "He should've stuck to his own. Except he can't, can he? That's what she's done to him. He's neither fish nor fowl" (*R*, 57). After his parents leave, Prior says, "Oh yes, he's very likeable. Outside the house. I've seen him use my mother as a football". Then tellingly, the narrator remarks, "The next breath screeched" (*R*, 61). Prior's asthma, the issue that eventually discharges him from combat service, is thus closely associated with his parents: when Rivers asks, "What was it like in France? The asthma?" Prior replies, "Better than at home" (*R*, 62).

Prior thus comes from a working-class background, but although he has risen beyond it and became an officer, it still provides him with many obstacles: "It's made perfectly clear when you arrive that some people are more welcome than others. It helps if you've been to the right school. It helps if you hunt, it helps if your shirts are the right colour. Which is a *deep* shade of khaki, by the way" (*R*, 66). He claims that the myth that class disappears in the war, is erroneous: "The only thing that really makes me angry is when people at home say that there are no class distinctions at the front. Ball-*ocks*" (*R*, 67). His position as Outsider is sketched clearly in the context of his condition:

> Mutism seems to spring from a conflict between *wanting* to say something, and knowing that if you *do* say it the consequences will be disasterous. So you resolve it by making it physically impossible for yourself to speak. And for the private soldier the consequences of speaking his mind are always going to be far worse than they would be for an officer. What you tend to get in officers is stammering. And it's not just mutism. All the physical symptoms: paralysis, blindness, deafness. They all common in private soldiers and rare in officers (*R*, 96).

Prior's critique of the officer's class[130] is relentless, e.g. he tells about The Seat, which is a training exercise where they ride around a ring on a horse, without a saddle, with their hands clasped behind their backs. Presumably, horseback-riding is part of officer's training in an attempt to instil recruits in the ideology of glory in battle (recalling the Battle of Waterloo for example), as Prior remarks, "Do you know, for the first time I realized that somewhere in the back of their ... *tiny tiny* minds they really do believe the whole thing's going to end in one big glorious *cavalry charge*" (*R*, 66). He then quotes Tennyson's poem about the infamous charge of the Light Brigade during the Crimean War: "'Stormed at with shot and shell, / Boldly they rode and well, / Into the jaws of death, / Into the mouth of hell ...' And all. That. Rubbish"[131] (*R*, 66).

Part of the problem Prior is faced with, then, is one of identification. He is "neither fish nor fowl" and cannot identify with the community of the working class or the upper class. Like Sassoon, Prior does not identify with the other inmates at Craiglockhart. Rivers asks, "Don't you have any sympathy for anybody else?" To which Prior replies, "Are you suggesting I have any for myself?" (*R*, 133). His motivation for wanting to go back to the front is also based on wanting to belong: "When all this is over, people who didn't go to France, or didn't do well in France – people of my generation, I mean – aren't going to count for anything. This is the Club to end all Clubs" (*R*, 135). However, the doctor's report denies him this. He thus manifests social isolation in not being able to integrate with a particular community, but nevertheless retaining such a connection with it that he can be said to be alienated from it. Prior seems incapable of identifying with civilians in general:

> You can't talk to anybody here. [...] Everybody's either lost somebody, or knows somebody who has. They don't want the truth. It's like letters of condolence. 'Dear Mrs Bloggs, Your son had the side of his head blown off by a shell and took five hours to die. We did manage to give him a decent Christian burial. Unfortunately that particular stretch of ground came under

[130] Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life* provides another contemporary British criticism of the officer's class. In a sketch set during the first Zulu war in 1879, officers calmly walk about and tread over the bodies of their men without any regard for their welfare. A soldier tells the commanding officer as they step over the dead and wounded, "Sorry about the mess, sir. We'll try to get that cleared up by the time you get back".

[131] This is verse 3 of the poem. The poem concludes, "When can their glory fade? / O the wild charge they made! / All the world wondered. / Honor the charge they made! / Honor the Light Brigade, / Noble six hundred!" (in Ferguson et al., 1996: 908).

> heavy bombardment the day after, so George has been back to see us five or six times since then'. They don't want that'" (*R*, 134).

He associates Sarah with "the pleasure-seeking crowds" and "was quite coldly determined to *get* her. They owed him something, all of them, and she should pay" (*R*, 128). After having sex with her, he deliberately alienates her by adopting a public school accent, because "she was only too clearly beginning to think that something had happened that mattered" (*R*, 131). In his relationship with Sarah, Prior's social isolation manifests, as Neal & Collas (2000: 97) remark,

> Emotional intimacy is both the prize and the penalty of deep involvement in a relationship with another person. It is a prize in the sense that it facilitates the sharing of the innermost parts of one's life and establishes a framework for expressing and listening to each other's thoughts and feelings, desires and doubts, joys and fears. Through emotional intimacy, individuals tend to each other's needs and try to understand and accept the uniqueness of each personality involved. But emotional involvement also contains the ingredients of vulnerability and penetration of one's ego boundaries. Difficulties and disappointment develop out of an inability of a spouse or a partner to go to the other person with a serious problem or to discuss such feelings as being depressed, nervous, or anxious.

However Prior cannot share "the innermost parts" of his life, namely his experiences of the war, with her: "Somehow if she'd known the worst parts, she couldn't have gone on being a haven for him. [...] He needed her ignorance to hide in" (*R*, 216). The war is thus a wedge between them, prohibiting emotional intimacy. In not knowing about the atrocities he has seen, she is a kind of virgin – untainted. Whereas the other patients at Craiglockhart have been initiated into the realities of the war, she is not, which means that she can never identify with him properly. There is a camaraderie between men who have fought alongside each other which she cannot share, and thus she symbolises home and civilian life for him.

As Rivers advocates and his patients illustrate, forgetting is neither psychologically healthy nor possible. Sassoon reprimands Graves, "I never forget it for a second, *and neither should you*" (*R*, 198). A follow-up novel of Barker's, *Another World* (1998) ties in with this impossibility of leaving the past in the past. The novel uses a contemporary setting to relate a Newcastle family's confrontations with history, and again uses the First World War as a reference point. The family

consists of Fran and her son Gareth, and Nick and his daughter Miranda, as well as the couple's infant son Jasper. They are haunted by the ghosts of the past in their new home, Lob's Hill, which was once the residence of the Fanshawe family (Childs, 2005: 61). While decorating the living room, the children peel away the wallpaper and discover a portrait, which shows "Victorian paterfamilias, wife and children: two sons, a daughter" (*Another World*, 40), which Miranda recognises as a portrait of their family. A recurrence of the pattern in the lives of the Fanshawe family is evident, as Miranda and Gareth both come close to killing Jasper at times. However, "Barker is not interested in suggesting that the past will be enacted again, but that its presence will remain into the future, informing and shaping interpretations of themselves and their identities" (Childs, 2005: 62). Alongside this is the story of Nick's visits to his 101-year-old grandfather, a World War I veteran who believes his cancer is the consequence of a bayonet wound.

Barker's *Regeneration* questions patriarchal society in particular, and "Far from solidifying gendered behaviour, then, Barker suggests that the extraordinary culture of war up-ends convention, even requires the exchange of some feminine qualities for the expected masculine ones" (Westman, 2001: 37). This implies a change in how meaning is constructed, and rightly identifies the First World War as a time not only of physical conflict, but ideological conflict regarding gender roles and the questioning of metanarratives as well.

The novel manifests Seeman's aspects of alienation in a variety of ways. Mainly, it is the powerlessness of men and women caught in the war and the society that fuels it which dominates the narrative, but social isolation in terms of class and the civilian/soldier distinction also play a role. Normlessness is less prevalent, but also illustrated in the (perceived) selfishness of commanders and politicians who send soldiers to their deaths in thousands, seemingly for their own gain. Meaninglessness is tied to powerlessness in that the objectives and methods of the war have been obscured, and the characters cannot identify with the justifications for the war as propagated by politicians and commanders. Since powerlessness seems to initiate war neurosis and meaninglessness is constantly accentuated (in particular in Sassoon's criticism of the war, as he is the central character), these two aspects of Seeman's conception of alienation are central to the novel.

It is proposed that soldiers had been cheated by society, the politicians, and their commanders; that the war was being fought for the personal gain of civilians and people in power, while young men were sacrificed for these gains. Society was selling out its young men. By questioning the justification for the First World War, the novel goes against the grain of contemporary British society, linking the novel with the other novels analysed in this study. Whereas the war in Iraq is widely criticised (as depicted in McEwan's *Saturday*), the common perception is that the two World Wars were justified from a British perspective[132]. *Regeneration* claims that this war was as unjustified, as were Britain's other wars, and that whereas society is supposed to protect its citizens, the war was a wholesale sacrifice of its young men for the benefit of the few. As Christine Brooke-Rose, another British novelist, phrases it in *Life, End of* (2006: 26), democracy is "that thing we ask people to die for, so that we needn't".

[132] This emerged in informal discussions with working-class British nationals in London's East End during 2005 – 2007.

Conclusion

Seeman's conception of alienation is as valid as it was when it was developed in the 1950s, but has to be reinterpreted in the post-modern world since the condition has changed along with an ever-changing society; as Marx (2004: 656) phrases it, "The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-processes". This study has attempted to situate Seeman's theory in the post-modern theoretical and cultural context, employing post-structuralist and systems theory perspectives on the individual's position in society. In doing so, this study follows Neal and Collas (2000), Kalekin-Fishman (1998), and Geyer (1996) in particular, as these focus on adapting his theory to a post-modern context within the discipline of sociology.

Seeman's classification of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement are as applicable in the post-modern context as they were when Seeman first published *On the Meaning of Alienation* (1959). However, *how* these classifications operate has changed, in particular has the conception of the self as an independent unit been undermined by the situation of the self within a larger meaning-constructing network. The conception of how meaning is constructed, in particular, requires that the context be taken into account, thus making the separate indication of *self-estrangement* difficult to maintain within the current theoretical discourse. (Post-)Structuralism and Von Betralanffy's General Systems Theory are invaluable resources in analysing how meaning is constructed.

All of the novels studied have manifested aspects of Seeman's alienation, foregrounding some and moving other aspects to the background, but the novels in general reflect the findings of alienation research by Seeman, Geyer, Neal & Collas, Kalekin-Fishman and others that alienation is as prevalent in the contemporary world as it was when Marx first identified the phenomenon, albeit in different ways.

Powerlessness involves whether or not the individual feels he is capable of controlling his circumstances. In the contemporary world, the individual is situated in a global economic and political environment, where increased complexification

and larger control-structures (e.g. the United Nations) create the impression that the individual is less likely to control his surroundings. That said, changing social norms and a political climate which emphasises human rights have given the individual more freedom to choose than was possible under colonialism, monarchies and the domination of the church in previous centuries. Powerlessness is depicted in McEwan's *The Child in Time* in terms of Stephen's inability to locate his missing daughter, a search which not only drives a wedge between himself and his wife, but also undermines the masculine norm of action. In Amis's *London Fields*, Keith is powerless in the face of the mass media and a simulacrum he lives in, as Nicola believes that she is powerless to avoid her death, noting that "character is destiny". Amis's characters are caught in a maelstrom of external happenings that determine their lives, whether it be other people, the impending nuclear disaster, or the mass media's influence on their cognitive processes. Welsh's characters in *Trainspotting* are powerless to escape their circumstances, their addictions, and the destructive co-dependent relationships (friendships and sexual relationships) they inhabit. Barker's characters in *Regeneration* are the most powerless of all, forced into a war they cannot understand or question, forced into the roles society imposes upon them, and then abandoned by that same society. It is telling that, despite characters like Keith Talent and Francis Begbie, it is only Barker's characters who are officially certified as 'insane'. River's theory of powerlessness creating neurosis therefore highlights that in this respect, Barker's novel depicts powerlessness more vividly than any of the others.

Meaninglessness refers to the individual's ability to make sense of his environment. This aspect has changed considerably since Seeman's original study, with the introduction of the internet and the expansion of the mass media (in South Africa, television was only introduced in 1976). The information age has changed meaninglessness from the inability to gather enough control-relevant information, to an overflow of information from which it is difficult to select the appropriate, applicable information for his specific circumstances. With meaning in particular being constructed within a communal network, the decline in emotional intimacy between people living in urban environments creates further problems for constructing a meaningful narrative of the individual's place within society. In

McEwan's *The Child in Time*, meaninglessness manifests specifically in terms of Stephen and Julie's inability to understand the other's gender-specific method of dealing with the loss of Kate. The roles they inhabit help construct the way in which meaning is created, and they are blind to each other's different views. In Amis's *London Fields*, there is no meaning. Meaning is always fabricated and empty, as indicated by the symbol of darts that becomes the dominant form of culture, connected with history, mythology, art, religion, and being British. It is an empty world informed solely by the mass media, where every relationship is superficial, every identity phoney, and people wallow in the soot and filth of contemporary London without ever attaining any semblance of purpose. As in *London Fields,* Welsh's *Trainspotting* mirrors a futile existence with a fragmented narrative without a certifiable plot, with characters inhabiting utterly meaningless existences. The closest *Trainspotting* ever comes to positing meaning for its central characters is in their almost religious devotion to heroin. As in *London Fields*, *Trainspotting* depicts a world where interpersonal relations have become void of intimacy and meaningless beyond the ever-present need to obtain more drugs and the money to obtain it. Barker's *Regeneration*, on the other hand, foregrounds meaninglessness by using opposition to the First World War as its central point of departure. The strategies of this war are dissected in the novel and exposed as utterly foolish, and the characters' inability to realise why they are in these circumstances is present throughout the novel. However, their voices are silenced by the authorities who 'stitch them up', so they can be sent back to the front to die for a cause they do not comprehend, Sassoon being the most prominent voice of opposition.

Normlessness has been influenced by the degradation of authority in the twentieth century, in particular the Church's loss of dominance and the resulting decline in traditional moral behaviour. In the contemporary setting, it is therefore up to the individual to construct his own norms and values, but as Halman's study (1998) found, the Western world is adapting and creating its own values. The youth, however, do not seem to share this adaptation, and Mayer (2008) indicates that normlessness is rising. It would be interesting to see whether the youth of the 'naughties' grow up to become productive members of society, as the hippies of the 1960s, the punks of the 1970s and others have seemingly done. Normlessness is not

a central aspect of McEwan's *The Child in Time*, as it depicts a relatively conservative 'nuclear' family that Margaret Thatcher herself would probably approve of. *London Fields*, on the other hand, generates the most vivid portrayal of normlessness in the novels analysed in this study. Keith Talent has no morality and no real norms or values, apart from a devotion to darts. Guy's marriage to Hope is also suspect, since the norms of a mother who French-kisses her toddler son leaves much to be desired. Nicola, like Keith, has a completely simulated self/identity and accompanying absence of norms beyond that which she considers part of her current role (such as not having sex with Guy immediately, since a 'virgin' would not). Welsh's *Trainspotting* again links up with *London Fields*, depicting characters that are so cut-off from society that traditional norms mean absolutely nothing to them. Fathers are practically reduced to sperm-donors and routinely beat their girlfriends (for there are no marriages), even the 'honour among thieves' is undermined when Renton robs his friends. *Regeneration*, like *The Child in Time*, does not foreground normlessness, although aspects of it are present in the novel. Homosexuality, the only real 'normless' condition from a conservative point of view, is always lingering under the surface, but like sexuality in Victorian novels, is never exhibited overtly. *Regeneration* rejects the meaning-system of the prevalent status quo, but normlessness is less important in the novel than other aspects of alienation.

Social isolation has been compounded by the increase in urbanisation over the course of the twentieth century. Cities tend to herd people into physical proximity, while encouraging emotional distance. There is no return to rural habitation with the world's expanding population, hence social isolation is bound to increase. This has bearing on the other aspects of alienation, as meaning and norms are constructed within a communal context, and the loss of identification with others will inevitably affect these as well. However, identification with others is part and parcel of humanity, and even the most marginalised groups band together in opposition to other groups. This is vividly depicted in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* where the main characters form a group in opposition to the ruling consumerist/capitalist culture, although their internal connections are brittle at best. Complete (or near-complete) social isolation would be a positive thing in *Trainspotting*, as the relationships formed are as destructive as could be: they lead

each other into violence, crime and drug addiction, being their own worst enemies. Social isolation is depicted in *The Child in Time* through the distance that Stephen experiences from those around him after Kate's disappearance. In *London Fields*, this aspect of alienation is overshadowed by normlessness, meaninglessness and powerlessness, but the estrangement between husband and wife is still powerfully depicted, nowhere more so than where Marmaduke strips naked and gets into bed with Hope, while Guy looks on. In *Regeneration*, social isolation manifests specifically when the soldiers return home and find that they can no longer identify with civilians. This is predicated on a bitterness, stemming from the fact that civilians are profiting from their horrific experiences. The class system is further highlighted, as it is in Barker's earlier novels, which implies inclusion and exclusion, while the main character from the trilogy, Prior, occupies a no-man's-land between classes.

Finally, this study has found that Seeman's conception of alienation, as reinterpreted by more recent scholars, is reflected in the literature stemming from the society that spawned this theoretical frame of reference. The primary question the study aimed to answer was: Given the post-modern condition of integration, shifting boundaries and identity formation, what forms of alienation exist in contemporary Western society and the individual who inhabits it, and how does alienation manifest in contemporary British fiction amongst some of the main authors of the latter? Various perspectives have been employed in attempting to come to a better understanding of alienation in the contemporary Western world, and the ways these theories manifest in four contemporary British novels have been identified.

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Summary

This study discusses Melvin Seeman's 1959 theory of alienation within a post-modern, post-structuralist and systems theory context. Seeman's five aspects of alienation, namely *powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation,* and *self-estrangement* are re-evaluated while taking into account Von Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory and interpretations thereof, Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory, post-modernism, and structuralist and post-structuralist perspectives. More recent contributions to alienation research are discussed, particularly where sociological and theoretical changes have forced a re-evaluation of his original conception. Felix Geyer (1996), Arthur G. Neal and Sara F. Collas (2000), and Devorah Kalekin-Fishman (1998) provide the crux of the discussion on the re-evaluation of Seeman's theory. It is argued, in following these researchers, that a post-modernist and systems theory approach favours a reduction of Seeman's five aspects to four by omitting *self-estrangement*, since the self is argued to be relationally constituted (by e.g. Vorster (2003), Von Bertalanffy (1969), and Wilden (1981)) and therefore self-estrangement is already contained within the other four aspects.

The re-evaluated remaining four aspects of Seeman's theory of alienation are thus applied to the chosen four novels belonging to contemporary British Fiction: Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*, Martin Amis's *London Fields*, Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* and Pat Barker's *Regeneration*. It is argued that Seeman's theory of alienation is applicable to contemporary British fiction, and thus how his theory manifests in the chosen texts is analysed. Each of the chosen novels is contextualised, bearing in mind the oeuvre of each author, the socio-historical system, and the contemporary British literary system. A short discussion of contemporary Britain is provided to situate the texts within the cultural and political milieu of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This is done in order to provide the reader with essential background information where it aids the interpretation of the texts, since all four texts engage with the socio-historical milieu

in which they were created. Barker's *Regeneration* is however a historical novel set in the First World War, so wherever necessary, the context of the novel in the early twentieth century is sketched.

The proven hypothesis of this thesis is that Seeman's sociological theory of alienation can be applied to literary texts, since the chosen novels do manifest the same characteristics that he identified within the field of sociology. It is shown how each author and each text foregrounds some aspects and backgrounds others, and how particularly powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social-isolation manifests in each text.

McEwan's *The Child in Time* highlights social isolation, in particular with the dissolution of the heterosexual dyad after the couple's child is abducted, and shows how meaningless manifests when different genders attach different meanings to actions.

Amis's *London Fields* highlights normlessness through the character of Keith Talent in particular, and obliterates meaning by making the characters' world a television-controlled simulacra, and adding the motif of darts to indicate how superficial culture has become.

Welsh's *Trainspotting* emphasises social isolation and normlessness in depicting the marginal subculture of drug-users in Leith, Edinburgh, whose relationships are as superficial and void of morality as in *London Fields*.

Barker's *Regeneration* illustrates powerlessness in particular, as it depicts soldiers returning from the trenches of the First World War who suffer from war neurosis as they are stripped of their decision-making rights. Rivers's theory of war neurosis argues that it is powerlessness that leads to war neurosis, and he links psychological symptoms to what is seen amongst the female population during peacetime, suggesting that it is powerlessness which leads to psychological breakdowns in males and females.

Alienation, in one way or another, thus is a central aspect to the main actions and imagery employed in the chosen novels. Discussing these texts from this theoretical frame of reference contributes to the understanding of some of the seminal works of contemporary British fiction.

Keywords

Alienation

Amis, Martin

Barker, Pat

Contemporary British Fiction

General Systems Theory

McEwan, Ian

Post-modernism

Post-structuralism

Seeman, Melvin

Welsh, Irvine