No Future: The Realist Impulse in Dystopian Fictions in Britain, 1973-1987

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ABSTRACT

Robert Lee Martinez II
"No Future: The Realist Impulse in Dystopian Fictions in Britain, 1973-1987"
(Under the direction of Pamela Cooper)

In "No Future: The Realist Impulse in Dystopian Fictions in Britain, 1973-1987,"
I argue that the genre of dystopian literature becomes fertile ground for British and
Commonwealth writers, musicians, and filmmakers to articulate the cultural, economic,
and social problems in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. By examining a variety of
literary, musical, and cinematic texts, this project shows that while British artists find the
traditional, science fiction-oriented dystopian genre an attractive lens through which to
view British society, the structure is ultimately too limiting to address the socio-economic
problems plaguing the country. In response to this limitation, these writers begin to
import aspects of realism and postmodern culture into the dystopian genre in order to
challenge the meaning and traditional framework of the dystopia and to reflect the new
harsh realities facing contemporary Britain. I demonstrate that as these writers examine
the dystopian features of British society, they discover the inadequacy of traditional satire
and irony to critique acts of social and sexual violence, and instead gradually turn to
representations and theories of trauma and diaspora as a way to recover character agency
and to attempt to instill in their audience a political consciousness. Ultimately, this
dissertation suggests that these new dystopian fictions of realism represent new forms of

open-ended critique that seek to move discussions of dystopia from literary genre to the

arena of public intellectual debates and political activism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My time in graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has been difficult and magical. During my eight years at UNC, I lost four family members, experienced a couple of career changes, moved around more than I would have liked, met great people who became good friends, and found the love of my life and got married. Who knew all of this would happen? I arrived in Chapel Hill in August 2000 ready to face years of hard, solitary study and living, and while some of this did happen, along with the family hardships, the small body of good friends that I met, the relationships I had with faculty, and the new-found joy I discovered in family life with my wife were the gifts that got me through a tough, strange decade.

It may be a cliché, but friends are truly a wonderful source of joy that help us get through hard times. Perhaps my closest Greenlaw companion was Bryan Sinche. We both arrived at UNC somewhat nervous and uncertain about our futures that first summer in 2000, but we soon became good friends and offered each other support, conversation, and laughter throughout our time in Chapel Hill. Even after Bryan left UNC for his first academic job at the University of Hartford in 2006, we remained in touch, and Bryan was always there to provide advice and support as I struggled to overcome family loss and push on to finish my doctorate. His friendship, guidance, and encouragement were invaluable during the job process and my last months of writing. Bryan, you are a great example of what all teachers and academics should strive to be: kind, generous, diligent,

friendly, tough, and, most of all, a true person who understands that work should not consume us or dictate to us our associations.

Marc and Pam Cohen have also been excellent friends during my time in Chapel Hill. I met Marc by chance when he observed my teaching one semester, noticed my interest in Kathryn Bigelow's films, and told me about his experience working for James Cameron in Hollywood. Soon after that, we became friends, survived French together, and offered each other constant encouragement as our dissertation writing began. When I left graduate school in 2008 to help support my mother during her illness—when times got really bad and I thought the academic route would close forever—Marc was there, always to remind me not to give up and to offer up some tough love and advice. He kept in close touch with me during that painful year of separation from my wife and home in Chapel Hill, and for that offer of friendship I cannot praise him enough. As my family life became splintered and engulfed by worry, Marc, his wife Pam, and their two children, Asher the Jedi Knight and Olivia the Great, frequently opened their home to me—whether it be to watch UNC men's basketball games (*the* addictive drug of all Chapel Hill dwellers), to go out to a movie, to have dinner together, or to celebrate occasions. This kind of warmth and generosity was another special gift I discovered in Chapel Hill, and I shall always hold this Cohen gift close to the heart.

I am proud to have excellent friends and colleagues in Julie Fann, Mary Alice Kirkpatrick, Paul Lai, Allen Young and Diana Edelman-Young, and Maura D'Amore. To my former bandmates in The Standbys (Lindsey Smith, Brian Frazelle, Andy Crank, Allen Young), you gave me much needed creative time outside of schoolwork and helped me return to my love of the drums. Thomas Taylor of the UNC music department soon

became a good friend and drum mentor who helped me focus on the craft of jazz drumming and gave me the wonderful opportunity to play for the UNC jazz combos in 2007—something I thought I would *never* see happen. My closest friend of all, Francis "Ted" Fletcher, has always been a sterling individual, trustworthy friend, and steadfast companion. An accidental meeting freshman year in college has led to a 20-year friendship of the best kind. Ted and his family have been there with me throughout all of life's bizarre tribulations, and they have always offered their home, a family meal, inclusion at Christmas time, and their love to me, without question, over the past 20 years. Without Ted's friendship and the love and support of his wonderful family, Frank and Penny Fletcher, Lydia Coiner ("Gran"), Sherry Coiner, and Jaime Harmeyer-Fletcher, I probably would not be where I am today.

My friends and colleagues back in the D.C. deserve special attention. Kate Walsh and Jake Riehm have been excellent friends for years and have opened their hearts and home to me always. My mother's best friend, Heide Pope, has been a family friend for 30 years and is my surrogate aunt. Heide was there to swing me around the kitchen when I was a silly little kid and, years later, was there to open her home to me as I helped my mother during her illness; she is a great woman and a true member of our family. My former bosses in D.C., Cynthia Battle, Isiah Dupree, and Lisa DiCarlo still stand as the greatest people to work for. Cindy welcomed me back to the Department of Education in a great time of need and demonstrated what it means to be a perfect boss: high expectations of your work and commitment, but also greatly understanding of her staff as people. My coworkers La Teata Jackson, Randy Bowman, Danielle Smith, Jennifer Ryder, Jon Utz, Lisa Howell, Jackie Cottom, Cynthia Crockett, Ora Chowbay, Yvette

Payne, and Nancy Cain were welcoming and friendly, and an excellent group to work with. I miss my time with them all, including the little things: having "satire sessions" with Jon; making mad, last dashes for the last train home with Jennifer; grabbing coffee or a much-needed Coke towards the end of a long day with Jackie and Jennifer….I miss being in the city with you all.

My intellectual support throughout my schooling has been paramount. At William & Mary, I learned how to work hard and what it meant to be an academic. Monica Potkay, Christie Burns, Barbara King, Chris McGowan, Kim Wheatley, and Paula Blank provided me with excellent role models for scholarship and teaching and inspired me to want to lead an intellectual life. I always believed that their influence and my education at W&M were the main reasons why I survived graduate school and performed well. I will never forget their excellent mentoring and support, and I will always hold my time in Williamsburg as that special, life-altering period that opened up life anew.

My committee at UNC performed a special feat: they gave their time and support to someone not studying American literature. As a member of the incredibly small contingent of twentieth-century British majors, I struggled throughout my time at UNC but was more than lucky to have Pamela Cooper, Nicholas Allen, John McGowan, Thomas Reinert, and James Thompson as the leaders of my professional development. Pam and Nicholas's belief in my work and my intelligence never wavered—even when mine did—and their encouragement sustained me through my dissertation process. In particular, my committee's strong praise of my performance at my PhD exams remains a key turning point for me: at a time when I thought I was at my mediocre best, they

showed me just how much potential I had. When academic times get rough (and they frequently do), I remember their support from those moments and realize that I can "do it." Even though I am grateful to be moving on to a new job, I will miss their support, and it pains me to know that my conversations with Pam and Nicholas may not be as frequent as before. I feel very lucky and privileged to have had great mentors and friends in Pam and Nicholas, and an overall fantastic committee that always gave me hard criticism, invested discussion, and much to think about.

My family of course stood by me all the time. My sisters, Danita Jones and Christina Browning, and my late grandmother Andrea Romero ("Nannie"), have always offered their love and support to me despite all of us being scattered across the country. My father and his wife, Bob and Linda Martinez, were very patient with me during the difficult years of college and after, and for this I thank them dearly for their understanding. My dad has always been a great provider and always maintained iron-clad belief in my academic potential, and I will remember fondly his assistance as he helped me move from Washington, D.C., to Chapel Hill that summer in 2000: we arrived late, late at night, moved into my dump apartment, and then found ourselves at Peppers grabbing a pizza while listening to the waitresses sarcastically tease each other rather loudly and watching the people next to us air-drum with great energy to the Metallica music that was blasting through the restaurant's sound system. My survival at UNC would also not have been possible without the support and love of my in-laws, Phil and Carolyn Caldwell. They have truly been a second set of parents for me, offering me love and advice, always welcoming me into their home, and ever ready to lend a helping hand. The completion of my degree has much to do with their family love and openness.

The greatest gift I received while at UNC was meeting my wife, Melissa

Caldwell. We met my first week in graduate school, in Chaucer class, and I shyly asked

her to coffee. A couple of weeks later, our first date lasted eight hours—eight wonderful

hours of conversation—and I knew I had met someone special. Her love, support, and

patience over the years have been life sustaining for me. When I have had to travel

constantly over the past couple of years, I have always noticed how much I miss her

when we are apart; she is truly my other half, and I look forward to seeing her everyday.

In 2002 we started a family by acquiring two dachshunds, Phoebe and Mia, who have

since filled our lives and our home with immeasurable joy (and messes). In 2006,

Cynthia joined our family when we rescued her and welcomed her into our home. In

2007, Tully completed our ensemble after a *very short*, failed attempt to become foster

parents for dachshunds in need. Our dachshunds are daily reminders about the goodness

in life and finding joy in simple things: cuddling, napping, and taking walks together.

Without her and our pups at my side, Heaven's knows where I would be right now. I am

lucky to have them all in my life.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Helen Martinez. During late spring

2008, she was diagnosed with late-stage cancer. She went into immediate treatment and

could not work. I left school right away, moved back to the D.C. area, worked full time,

and spent my weeks with her. We were hopeful that she would gain more time through

her treatments, but, in July 2009, she passed away. I was at a total loss what to do with

myself. My wife and I had just moved to Illinois for my wife's new job, and here I was

cut off from everything. After a difficult year of living, commuting and working long

hours, and traveling constantly between D.C. and North Carolina, all of which culminated

in the loss of my mom, I had pretty much given up on my dissertation and the idea of getting my doctorate. My mother had been the one to hold our family together for years, and now she was gone. During her last year, she always reminded me that she wanted me to finish my degree. My mother always took great pride in my academic accomplishments, and finishing my degree, I believe, really mattered to her. Months after she passed, a surprising opportunity arose to get back into college teaching. I ended up getting the job and found strength to complete my dissertation during the spring of 2010. Given the nationwide recession, the state of my life, and all of the other obstacles in front of me, I considered this turn of events to be nothing short of a miracle. I somehow knew it was my mother's way of looking over me and giving me the opportunity and courage to finish my work. It was the one thing in particular that my mother was brilliant at, and what she wanted most of all in life: to be a great mom and have a strong family. Of all the great friendships or acquaintances I have been blessed with in life, my mom has been my greatest rock of support and love, and the completion of this degree stands as a tribute to her inspiration and power. Her willingness to give to and work for others is a virtue that I will always try to aspire to. Mom, you are always with me, and I will always be with you. We did it!

For my mother, Helen A. Martinez (1947-2009)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

xiv

Introduction: Rethinking Dystopia in Post-1970 Britain and Beyond:
Dystopian Fiction as Critical Realism

> This is your chance to build a new Jerusalem.
>   - Barbara Castle, Labour MP[1]

> The Labour Party had promised so much after the
> war, and done so little for the working-class, that
> the working-class were confused about even
> themselves, and didn't even understand what
> 'working-class' meant anymore….England was in a
> state of social upheaval. They were very, very
> different times. Total social chaos. There was
> rioting all over the place. Strikes on every kind of
> amenity you could think of. TV channels would go
> on and off randomly. People were fed up with old
> way—the old way was clearly not working. You're
> told at school, you're told at the job centre, you're
> told by everyone that you don't stand a chance.
> And if you just accept your lot and get on with it.
> That's where you're going to get social strife, hate
> and war, and race hate. When you feel powerless,
> you will grab any power you can to retain some
> kind of self-respect.
>   - John Lydon (a.k.a. Johnny Rotten)[2]

> It was cold and miserable. No one had any jobs.
> You couldn't get a job—everyone was on the dole.
> If you weren't born into money, then you might as
> well kiss your fucking life goodbye. You weren't
> going to amount to anything.
>   - Steve Jones[3]

The post-World War II era in Britain was not only a time of difficult recovery but

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[1] Arthur Marwick, *Britain Sine 1945* (London: Penguin, 2003) 145.

[2] Julien Temple, *The Filth and the Fury: A Sex Pistols Film* (New Line Films / Sunset Home Visual
Entertainment, 2000).

[3] Temple, *The Filth and the Fury*.

also one of great hope for a better future. The Labour government's landslide win after

the war signaled a social revolution led by Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee, one

that aimed at improving the lives of all British people. In "Let Us Face the Future: A

Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation" (1945), Attlee's party

presented a utopic vision for the country:

> The nation wants food, work and homes. It wants more than that—it
> wants good food in plenty, useful work for all, and comfortable, labour-
> saving homes that take full advantage of the resources of modern science
> and productive industry. It wants a high and rising standard of living,
> security for all against a rainy day, an educational system that will give
> every boy and girl a chance to develop the best that is in them….
>
> The Labour Party stands for freedom—for freedom of worship, freedom
> of speech, freedom of the Press. The Labour Party will see to it that we
> keep and enlarge these freedoms, and that we enjoy again the personal
> civil liberties we have, of our own free will, sacrificed to win the war.[4]

Attlee's government enacted sweeping social changes to bring about just reform, mainly

through the nationalization of industries and public utilities and through decolonization.[5]

New housing was devised for Britain's rapidly growing population, with housing estates

and tower block apartments eventually springing up all over the country. Such housing

estates were considered a revolution in social planning for Britain's growing society,[6] and

Barbara Castle's vision of a "new Jerusalem" embodied in the newly developed housing

estates in Kirby, near Liverpool, in the 1960s projected an unmistakable utopian hope for

Britain and its working-class as both entered the second-half of the twentieth century.

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[4] "Let Us Face the Future: A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation," 1945,
Internet Modern History Sourcebook, Web, 23 May 2010.

[5] Perhaps the biggest social change enacted by Attlee was the creation of the National Health Service
(NHS). Other major entities to be nationalized between 1945 and 1951 included The Bank of England,
civil aviation, coal mining, railways, electricity and gas, and the steel industry.

[6] For a full discussion of the tower block and housing estate revolution, see Miles Glendinning, *Tower
Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland* (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 1994).

Such optimistic hopes quickly dissipated, however. As British historian Arthur

Marwick informs us, the housing estate at Kirby was "later to become a paradigm of

dereliction and vandalism."[7] At the heart of these conditions of waste was a growing

absence of community. Growing up in the midst of these supposed utopian social

transformations in Northwest Britain, Joy Division guitarist Bernard Sumner recalls how

the new housing estates actually decimated communities and created a new life

expectancy of deprivation:

> …the whole neighborhood that I'd grown up in was completely decimated
> in the mid 1960s. I was born and raised in Lower Broughton in Salford:
> the River Irwell was about 100 yards away and it stank. At the end of our
> street was a huge chemical factory: where I used to live is just oil drums
> filled with chemicals.
>   There was a huge sense of community where we lived. I remember the
> summer holidays when I was a kid: we could stay up late and play in the
> street, and 12 o'clock at night there would be old ladies outside the
> houses, talking to each other. I guess what happened in the 1960s was that
> someone at the council decided that it wasn't very healthy, and something
> had to go, and unfortunately it was my neighborhood that went. We were
> moved over the river into a towerblock. At the time I thought it was
> fantastic: now of course I realise it was an absolute disaster.
>
> …The place where I used to live, where I had my happiest memories, all
> that had gone. All that was left was a chemical factory. I realised then
> that I could never go back to that happiness.[8]

Such disillusionment laid the foundations for the 1970s and would color British life for

the worse for the next two decades. As the comments on British life by Sex Pistols'

members John Lydon and Steve Jones show, the optimism generated by Labour in the

decades following the war was falling enormously short of the mark. Life was not

improving; the "new Jerusalem" was looking more and more like a new Babylon. Lydon

and Jones's recollection of life in the Seventies provides the outlines for what I consider a

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[7] Marwick, *Britain Since 1945*, 145.

[8] Jon Savage, "Good Evening, We're Joy Division," *Joy Division: Heart & Soul* (Rhino, 1997) CD.

critical dystopian moment in British history, one in which several artistic rebellions occurred to find a new way to express outrage at the declining economic and social standards in everyday British life.

I. Theorizing the Present as Dystopian

The period of 1973-1987, beginning with the OPEC Oil Embargo and ending with the thawing of the Cold War, represents a real-life dystopia in Britain due to a unique and powerful combination of socio-economic problems that brought the country to its knees. The actions of Harold Wilson's Labour government of the late 1960s were the first harbinger of bad times to come. His government's promise to address growing economic concerns and to reestablish Attlee's promise of full employment took shape most notably in the form of Employment Secretary Barbara Castle's famous White Paper, "In Place of Strife" (1969). Castle argued that the Labour Party's solution to unemployment and economic stagnation was to establish a set of legal restrictions on the rights of workers to strike. Labour failed to galvanize both the economy and wider party support for the measure because the trade unions targeted in the paper were also Labour's main source of political support and funding.[9] This problematic relationship between the workers and the government continued well into Edward Heath's Tory government and perhaps reached its nadir with the National Union of Miners's (NUM) strike in 1972, which brought the work week in Britain to a mere three days. The ultimate economic blow, however, came in the form of the OPEC Oil Embargo of 1973. The Arab stranglehold of oil flow to Britain and the West, done in retaliation for Britain's support of the U.S. and

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[9] Michael Lynch, *An Introduction to Modern British History 1900-1999* (Hodder & Stoughton: London, 2001) 161.

Israel in the Yom Kippur War, severely paralyzed the economy and raised inflation drastically. This immediate crippling history of labor strikes and inflation not only led to Heath's dismissal but it also outlined the larger ruins of a troubled decade. As Arthur Marwick notes,

> At the end of 1973 and the beginning of 1974 press, television, and political platforms were dominated by the question 'Is Britain ungovernable?'. The year 1974 was indeed unprecedented for violent death on the British mainland; that fact, taken along with the miners' strike of 1973-4, the gathering race problem, and the apparent strength of Scottish and Welsh separatism, did suggest that perhaps traditional British social cohesion was breaking down at last.[10]

A significant incident that added pressure to such a state of affairs was the Bloody Sunday massacre of civilians in Derry, Northern Ireland, on January 30, 1972, by British soldiers. As a result, the militancy of the IRA increased throughout 1973 and 1974, as evinced by the attacks on British civilians and soldiers at the Tower of London and at pub bombings near army barracks in Guildford and Woolwich, culminating in the "horrific pub holocaust" of November 1974.[11]

By the end of the decade, Britain had witnessed continued IRA violence, rising racial tensions fomented by the white supremacist logic of the National Front, and increased strikes that led to piles of uncollected trash in London streets, unburied bodies in Liverpool morgues, and collapsing healthcare service due to striking nurses. Arthur Marwick locates the social and economic failure of Britain with a similar set of markers:

> Edward Heath's failed confrontation with the miners in 1973-4; IRA terror attacks (involving in 1977 the death of a distinguished surgeon, and in 1979 of a leading Conservative politician, Airey Neave); the abandonment by public workers of older civic restraints upon their right to strike

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[10] Marwick, *Britain Since 1945*, 184.

[11] Marwick, *Britain Since 1945*, 184-85. Twenty-one people were killed in the November pub attack with 162 injured.

> (putting patients' lives in danger, for instance); the activities of the National Front; the counter-activities, and involvement in strikes, of Trotskyist groups;…and the increasing use at demonstrations of the Metropolitan Police Special Patrol Group.[12]

The time became known, according to the British press, as "the winter of discontent,"[13] with the press and public acknowledging that Britain was indeed "the sick man of Europe."[14] The sickness of Britain only increased during the 1980s as Margaret Thatcher's conservative revolution witnessed growing racial tensions,[15] increased unemployment that skyrocketed to over 3 million in 1982 (a phenomenon known as "Maggie's Millions"),[16] the tragedy of the Falklands War, and the heightening of nuclear tensions.[17]

With these various problematic historical conditions in mind, it is hard to accept Tom Moylan's claim that the 1960s and 1970s represented a time of great social and political protest that spurred an outpouring of utopian thought and writing. Moylan states, "the 1960s and 1970s, however, was a time of such overt opposition, such serious challenges to the ruling order in the United States, Europe, and around the globe in a myriad of liberation movements that dystopian expression took a back seat to a revival of

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[12] Marwick, *Britain Since 1945*, 186.

[13] Lynch, *Introduction*, 167.

[14] Lynch, *Introduction*, 159.

[15] Race riots abounded as unemployment soared during the conservative business revolution of modernization of industries. (Often with the aid of the National Front, labor disputes involved racial dimensions.) The most notable race riots occurred in Southall, Middlesex, in 1979; Brixton, London, in 1981; and Toxteth, Liverpool, in 1981, during Thatcher's first years in office. See "1982: UK Unemployment Tops Three Million," *On This Day, 1950-2005*, 26 January 1982. Web. 13 May 2010.
[16] In January 1982, unemployment reached 3,070,621 and was the worst unemployment record in Britain since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The worst-affected areas were in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and the Northeast and Northwest of England, a fact noted by the two Pat Barker novels studied in this dissertation, *Union Street* (1982) and *Blow Your House Down* (1984). For the statistics, see "1982: UK Unemployment Tops Three Million," *On This Day, 1950-2005*, 26 January 1982. Web. 13 May 2010.
[17] The hysteria concerning nuclear war was registered poignantly by Mick Jackson's *Threads* (September 1984), a docu-drama aired on TV in 1984 that viscerally imagines nuclear holocaust in Britain.

utopian writing that was the first outpouring of hopeful counterworlds since the previous century."[18] In reality, Britain's racial tensions, economic depression, political failures, and social chaos emphatically showed the country as a dystopian community, and many of Britain's writers, filmmakers, and musicians began to infuse their art with representations of the "sick state" to create a stronger political critique of the many flaws and injustices eroding British society. In fact, many of the bleak images of the iconic British dystopia, George Orwell's *1984*—the filthy streets, the poor housing, the loss of personal freedom, the redundancy of work and growing signs of poverty—had come to fruition during the historical time frame I have demarcated here. It is precisely this state of affairs that galvanized a new generation of artists and shaped what I call the new dystopian fiction of realism that appeared throughout the 1970s and well into the 1980s.

Given these pressing social, economic, and racial problems, certain British and Commonwealth writers of the 1970s and 1980s begin to examine and critique the state of Britain and its legacy, and in the process rethink the purpose of dystopian fiction. Specifically, I look at how writers like J. G. Ballard, Martin Amis, Pat Barker, and Michelle Cliff examine problems of freedom and identity within the post-Sixties environment of sexual and social liberation. Each of these writers addresses various aspects of this deteriorating climate in Britain and its former colonies by exposing methods of political control (most notably in the form of patriarchy, racism, and postcolonial economic control). They frame this collapsed society and these methods of control within the larger context of postmodern culture (e.g., media saturation,

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[18] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000) xiv.

technological advancement),[19] thereby revealing how key features of postmodern life contribute to the dystopian designs of Britain and the former colonies. Perhaps surprisingly, the main method chosen by these writers to portray and critique postwar, postmodern British society is not a playful postmodern aesthetic of ruptured narrative structures, intellectual pranks, or shifting character subjectivities. Rather, I suggest that these writers place realism at center stage to emphasize more clearly the present as dystopia, which in turn strengthens the urgency of the socio-sexual problems they see plaguing society and charges the political message of their texts. Though each of the authors under examination here do indeed exhibit features of a postmodern aesthetics, it is their devotion to realism and realist detail that gives their work searing power to shock us into a new consciousness about the socio-sexual and political designs of our everyday lives.

II. Refiguring Dystopian Fiction

This dissertation primarily uses the evidence of such writers and the experience of the troubled decades of the 1970s and 1980s to challenge our understanding of the dystopian genre and, more importantly, of history. For most critics of the dystopian genre, the idea of the dystopia remains in the domain of science fiction or fantastical futures. Many recent studies either examine developments solely within the sphere of

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[19] I define postmodern culture in this dissertation more broadly as embodying the controlling Enlightenment characteristics of Adorno and Horkheimer's Culture Industry, Marshall McLuhan's reassessment of contemporary, postwar life as one embedded in media and technology, and Sven Birkerts's argument that such media and technology work in concert to enhance the Culture Industry's control of individual consciousness and agency. My first chapter on J. G. Ballard discusses the importance of McLuhan and Birkerts at greater length.

science fiction[20] or, as with many recent studies of satire, isolate their focus on American texts.[21] Darko Suvin provides a definition of science fiction that in many ways informs common understandings of dystopian fiction: "a literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the *presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment.*"[22] The work of Keith Booker and Erika Gottlieb offer some of the best attempts to move dystopias away from science fiction-oriented critiques and towards more of a notion of social criticism of present-day circumstances, though a reliance on the science fiction tendency towards futuristic models remains in their work. For example, Keith Booker argues for the need to understand dystopian literature as a kind of leftist, social critique, but still claims that the "principal technique of dystopian

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[20] Richard A. Slaughter's *Futures Beyond Dystopia: Creating Social Foresight* (London: Routledge, 2004) proposes the idea of "Future Studies," which is the exploration of dystopias through the model of future landscapes. Slaughter argues for the need to create "social foresight" through considerations of dystopia, but his analytical framework remains largely in the old paradigm of science fiction sources or speculative imagination, which will give passage to a "grammar" of future possibilities. Tom Moylan's *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000) sees dystopias as "social 'elsewheres'" (xiii) and mainly limits its focus to the framework of the science fiction genre. Interestingly, Moylan notes the dystopian relevance of present-day historical material of capitalist economic control, conservative political power, and a "cultural shift to the right during the 1980s and 1990s," but he keeps his analysis largely focused on how sf (science fiction) writers have dealt with such historical moments. He does note the dystopian impulse of J. G. Ballard's works, but excludes Ballard from his conception of the dystopia: "Others, however, have worked loosely with the spirit of the dystopia and produced tales of social nightmares that cannot be reduced to the strict parameters of dystopian narrative even though they share the basic perspective; here the works of J. G. Ballard, John Brunner, and Philip K. Dick offer excellent examples" (168).

[21] Jaap Verheul's collection, *Dreams of Paradise, Visions of Apocalypse* (2004), performs a historical sweep of utopian and dystopian impulses or reflections specific to American culture. See Jaap Verheul (ed.), *Dreams of Paradise, Visions of Apocalypse: Utopia and Dystopia in American Culture* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2004). Similarly, Mark Featherstone's *Tocqueville's Virus: Utopia and Dystopia in Western Social and Political Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2008) examines Alexis de Tocqueville's idea of the "virus" in Western social and political thought in contemporary America. Stanford M. Lyman's *Roads to Dystopia: Sociological Essays on the Postmodern Condition* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001) examines the dystopia in the context of Jewish Studies, with some focus on American, Japanese, and Soviet works.

[22] Darko Suvin, *Positions and Suppositions in Science Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1988) 37 (italics original).

fiction is defamiliarization: by focusing their critiques of society on spatially or

temporally distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic

social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered

natural and inevitable."[23] Booker describes the traditional understanding of almost all

dystopian works as a critique of some aspect of the present through a futuristic

exaggeration of certain present-day social or political tendencies. He claims, "Indeed,

dystopian fictions are typically set in place or times far distant from the author's own, but

it is usually clear that the real referents of dystopian fictions are generally quite concrete

and near-at-hand."[24] While Booker's definition of dystopian literature pushes us closer to

a model of the present day, it still has much in common with Suvin's construction of

science fiction.

Erika Gottlieb clings to a similar view of dystopian fiction, seeing the "writer of

dystopian fiction [as offering] in each novel a warning against a future that could and

should still be avoided by the Ideal Reader's generation."[25] She nuances her analysis of

dystopian works by focusing on Western and Eastern European texts, though, and

identifies the central concern of dystopian thought as political totalitarianism—

specifically, dictatorships. In *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and*

Trial, Gottlieb argues that the dystopian genre is about portraying "the dictatorship of a

hell on earth, the 'worst of all possible worlds'…"[26] Her vision of "the modern dystopian

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[23] M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994) 19.

[24] Booker, *Dystopian Impulse*, 19.

[25] Erika Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001) 16.

[26] Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West*, 3.

narrative puts the protagonist on an ultimate trial where his fate will be decided in confrontation with the Bad Angel in his secular incarnation as the Grand Inquisitor, high priest of the state religion and God-like ruler of totalitarian dictatorship."[27] Gottlieb clearly understands the importance of the dystopian narrative—that is, to present a "hellscape from which the inhabitants can no longer return, so that we realize what the flaws of our own society may lead to for the next generations unless we try to eradicate these flaws today."[28] But her "hellscape" suggests a setting of displacement or estrangement for the reader—it serves as a premonition. Not only is her reading of the dystopian genre still borrowing from the science fiction framework, but her theorizing of the genre at large is also limited by her textual focus on texts obsessed with recognizable dictatorial rulers, whether historically real or imagined.

The closest Gottlieb comes to expanding our reading of dystopian thought to texts of realism or to dealing with the immediate present is when she concedes that Central and Eastern European works often do not need to envision a terrible, oppressive future given their experience of actual political draconian systems: "if we take a look at works of political criticism produced in Eastern and Central Europe commenting on the injustice rampant in the writer's own society during periods of dictatorship and terror, these works are still clearly expressive of the dystopian impulse, although they deal with the writer's own society 'as is.'"[29] Despite this acknowledgment of lived dystopian experience, Gottlieb remains faithful to a reading of the dystopia that is not only very traditional but also narrowly focused on specific political models. It seems that without the specific

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[27] Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West*, 4.

[28] Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West*, 4.

[29] Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West*, 5.

political outlines of dictatorships, understanding the dystopia as an "as is" critique is unthinkable.

What is surprising about Gottlieb's and Booker's astute analyses of the dystopian genre, however, is their theoretical acknowledgment of key thinkers and critics of postwar society that enable us to expand our understanding of dystopian thought to present-day circumstances. Gottlieb acknowledges that if "we listen to postmodern criticism, relying on thinkers like Foucault, for example, any society functioning at the present time (or possibly at any other time as well) could be regarded as such a 'bad place.'"[30] Booker expands this view, arguing, "dystopian fiction is more like the projects of social and cultural critics like Nietzsche, Freud, Bakhtin, Adorno, Foucault, Habermas, and many others."[31] However, Booker does not alter his view of dystopian fiction to include the idea of texts critiquing the present by portraying the present, and Gottlieb ultimately "believe[s] that the postmodern critic's overly broad use of the notion of dystopia is counterproductive to a clear definition of what is unique about dystopian thought or dystopian fiction."[32]

The chief significance of such cultural critics is not only their elucidation of traditional dystopian texts. Such critics, especially those of the postwar era—Adorno and Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse—enable us to see how realist fictions depicting depressed aspects of postwar life or oppressive features of democratic, capitalist societies do indeed possess the trappings of dystopias. In particular, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* provides an excellent framework for

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[30] Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West*, 5.

[31] Booker, *Dystopian Impulse*, 19.

[32] Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West*, 5.

understanding how postwar life can be seen as dystopian. They establish this vision by discussing the Enlightenment as the ultimate designer of twentieth-century historical horrors. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the philosophical dependency on rationality does not guarantee scientific and moral progress, as previously thought. Rather, Enlightenment rationality encourages a kind of epistemological imperialism: the object or subject studied is there to be dominated, deciphered, and ultimately mastered: "What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts."[33] This path of domination, under the guise of epistemological research, clearly leads to the creation of a dystopic world order—a point clearly suggested when Adorno and Horkheimer declare, "For enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion…Enlightenment is totalitarian."[34]

This emphasis on control and mastery contributes to how I define postmodern society in the postwar period. In the fictions I investigate here, this air of totalitarianism is achieved not necessarily through political means—there are no Big Brother demigods presiding over British society—but through postmodern technological and social ones. In the novels of Ballard, Amis, Barker, and Cliff, the presence of technology is made abundantly clear in the form of commercialism (advertising, commodity culture), urbanization (derelict cities and the larger derelict wanderings of the diaspora), and media (most importantly, the TV). As Sven Birkerts has noted, the hallmark features of postmodern society in the postwar era are technological in nature but metamorphose

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[33] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 2.

[34] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, 3-4.

easily into social forms that disrupt the psyche of the subject.[35] These forces are

omnipresent and act to compromise the individual's agency in a variety of ways.

Birkerts's postmodern culture and the authors I study accurately capture the essence of

Adorno and Horkheimer's "Culture Industry." Ballard and Amis both obsess over the

commodified landscape of Britain, literally dramatizing how Adorno and Horkheimer see

"film, radio, and magazines form a system."[36] This system is one of control—a kind of

technological lubrication that informs the social interactions of characters in a prescribed

way. In fact the emphasis on cityscapes and towns in each of the novelists under study

here marries well with Adorno and Horkheimer's view of the totalitarian postwar living

space in the Culture Industry: "But the town-planning projects, which are supposed to

perpetuate individuals as autonomous units in hygienic small apartments, subjugate them

only more completely to their adversary, the total power of capital."[37] Under the pressure

of such a postmodern consumer culture,[38] Ballard's and Amis's characters transform into

monsters that reek violence in their pursuit of dominating their preformed urges.

Barker's and Cliff's protagonists struggle with the stifling effects of economic oppression

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[35] In "Postmodernism: Bumper-Sticker Culture," Birkerts ruminates on the question of the postmodern in the post-WW II era and defines the atomic age, the transition from mechanization to information processing, and the dominating presence of the TV and advertising as the triumvirate of manipulating forces that "have dealt a tremendous blow to the concept of self-reliant individualism," and which have "eroded the habits" of the subject's psyche and "implanted other" habits. See Birkerts, "Postmodernism: Bumper-Sticker Culture," *American Energies: Essays on Fiction* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1992) 21-23.

[36] Adorno and Horkheimer 94.

[37] Adorno and Horkheimer 94.

[38] Daniela Daniele's description of postmodern culture also includes this mixing of Culture Industry control and technology. She identifies consumerism and information overload as key disruptors of linear space and time, and specifically states, "[t]he rise of the information society, immigration from ex-colonies to the Western world and the consequent circulation of mysterious, new codes in the city have led to a catastrophe in discourse and a renewed reflection on the city as a displacing technological landscape." See Daniela Daniele, *The Woman of the Crowd: Urban Displacement and Failed Encounters in Surrealist and Postmodern Writing* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000) 17.

that restrict their identities and force them into the experience of violence, both physical and psychological.

III. Disrupting Dystopia with Dystopia: The Challenge of Realism

In *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson claims, "literary realism is a trick and a deceit, which has to collapse as soon as the idea of fiction dawns on its reader."[39] Despite the deceit of displacing present concerns into futurist spaces, Jameson views science fiction as the important literary genre that can defamiliarize the "allegedly real world."[40] I argue that literary realism performs precisely the opposite function for writers and artists in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. They reject the need for science fiction futurism or prognostication and embrace realism as *the* weapon that can more clearly stress and identify the dystopian designs of modern-day society. By doing so, artists and novelists redefine dystopian literature as a tool of realism that can dismantle the dystopias of the real world. My methodology here borrows from Adorno's critique of realist writing. Adorno sees realist writing as a product of the culture industry. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that all popular art—films, radio, soap operas, pop songs—represents the designs of the cultural machine: "Films and radio no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce."[41] They view the details of film's imitation of reality as "ready-made clichés, to be used here and there as

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[39] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005) 399.

[40] Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 399.

[41] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, 95.

desired and always completely defined by the purpose they serve within the schema."[42]

In short, an art used in the mimesis of reality is trash that merely reinforces the ideals of

those in control of capital—a totalitarian tool. Such mimetic art is thus always

compromised by the Culture Industry. When critiquing Lukác's conception of art,

Adorno states that realist art cannot provide the kind of knowledge or critique to combat

the forces of totalitarian control: "Art does not provide knowledge of reality by reflecting

it photographically or 'from a particular perspective' but by revealing whatever is veiled

by the empirical form assumed by reality."[43]

       Similar to Jameson's criticism of literary realism, Adorno argues that the kind of

writing or art needed to depict reality is modernist experimentalist writing, which can

fracture this false version of the real and unveil the true nature of reality. The example

Adorno provides of such a successful, truth-bearing art is the writing of Franz Kafka and

Samuel Beckett. Kafka and Beckett "deal with a highly concrete historical reality: the

abdication of the subject."[44] Adorno explains,

> Kafka's prose and Beckett's plays, or the truly monstrous novel *The Unnameable*, have an effect by comparison with which officially committed works look like pantomimes. Kafka and Beckett arouse the fear which existentialism merely talks about. By dismantling appearance, they explode from within the art which committed proclamation subjugates from without, and hence only in appearance. The inescapability of their work compels the change of attitude which committed works merely demand."[45]

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[42] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, 98.

[43] Theodor Adorno, et al, *Aesthetics and Politics* (New York: Verso, 2007) 162.

[44] Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*, 190.

[45] Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*, 191.

As Pam Morris notes, "By 'committed works' Adorno largely means traditional realist forms of writing"[46]—i.e., uncritical works that uphold the Culture Industry, or at worst trash fiction. Morris states that, for Adorno, "realist art…accepts 'the façade of reality at face-value' whereas in the work of Kafka 'the space-time of "empirical realism" is exploded through small acts of sabotage, like perspective in contemporary painting'."[47] Adorno claims that only works of the "highest rank,"[48] like those of Kafka or Beckett, are able to actualize existential dread and ultimately cope with themes of the post-Auschwitz world. In contrast, Adorno thinks that works "of less than the highest rank are also willingly absorbed as contributions to clearing up the past. When genocide becomes part of the cultural heritage in the themes of committed literature, it becomes easier to continue to play along with the culture which gave birth to murder."[49] The tradition of realist writing, then, upholds the dystopian designs of the real world and does nothing to subvert its existence or disrupt its murderous forces.

What Adorno possibly misunderstands, however, is that such high art becomes drastically more inaccessible to a society under the spell of dystopian forms of cultural control, whether driven by governmental means or consumer markets. An individual subdued to accept banal, formula-driven forms of art has a greater chance of experiencing utter bewilderment and boredom when confronted with high art or sophisticated writing that makes use of complex metaphor, parody, or irony. Morrissey, the lead singer of the British band The Smiths and a very prominent social figure in and critic of Britain during

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[46] Pam Morris, *Realism* (London: Routledge, 2003) 20.

[47] Adorno in Morris, *Realism*, 20.

[48] Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*, 189.

[49] Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*, 189.

the 1980s, articulates this loss of interest in high art during an interview with Granada

Report's Tony Wilson in 1985:

> Wilson: "What right does the fact that you are a popular and successful pop star give you to comment on political and local events?"
>
> Morrissey: "Well, I feel that if popular singers don't say these things, who does? We can't have any faith in playwrights anymore; we can't have any faith in film stars. Young people don't care about those things—they're dying arts. And if you say, 'What right do you have?', the implication there to me is that popular music is quite a low art, it should be hidden, it can be there, but let's not say anything terribly important. Let's just, you know, make disco records or whatever. So, I really feel that we do have an obligation, and I know that people respect it, and they want it, and it's working to great effect."[50]

Morrissey's assessment of British youth culture not only stresses the waning effect of

traditional forms of accepted art (plays, films) but also attacks the elitist distinction

between high and low forms of art. The socially conscious and politically minded lyrics

of Smiths songs (which range in theme from isolation and loneliness, to anti-Thatcher

sentiments, to homosexual love) stand as a counter example of how an art form that

Adorno would see as compromised and programmed by the Culture Industry actually

rears its head in protest and works to dismantle authoritative narratives of reality. The

very mass popularity of the pop song makes it a more convenient vehicle for subversive

ideas, not dissemination of standardized political thought or consumer dreams.

The use of more complex artistic literary tools presents us with a possibly more

pressing problem than just youth culture boredom. Adorno's hope in high art confronts

not only apathy but also misreading. We see the threat of such misreading when

considering critiques of race and cultural identity in the context of a postmodern society

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[50] "The Smiths," Granada Reports, 1985. YouTube. Web. 12 May 2008.

dominated by the Culture Industry.[51] Celeste Olalquiaga argues that diasporic Latino

minority groups in and outside of the U.S. use sophisticated parody to combat the

imprisoning effects of market-driven cultural stereotypes in mega-cities: "…there is a

tendency in Latin America and in some Latino groups in the United States to turn inside

out the Latin American stereotypes produced by the United States and the postindustrial

iconography thought to be primarily from the First World."[52] Olalquiaga cites a variety

of parodist projects aimed at producing such satirical critique—from Brazil's

Tupinicópolis (1987), a samba that "carnivalized both the perception of Latin America as

'primitive' and the glamour and distance of high tech"[53] Hollywood pop, to San Diego's

Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo, which is a "multidisciplinary group of

Chicano, Mexican, and American artists who work to subvert the images of the border

region that have been created by the media."[54] However, the potential problem with

complex parodic art is that a mass audience trained and raised on racial stereotypes runs

an incredibly strong risk of not being able to read such parody as critique. In essence, the

subversive effect of this parodic performance of stereotypes may fail as a mainstream

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[51] My analysis of Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) in Chapter Four tackles this very
problem. Cliff presents the diaspora as a dystopia of Culture Industry effects: Jamaica, the U.S., and
Britain all bear signs of societies that market race for profit while encouraging economic and educational
restrictions that promote racist exclusion. Cliff uses realism to stress the realities of racist physical and
psychological violence in the diasporic space rather than suggesting that performances of parody in
diasporic spaces can produce political and social critique.

[52] Celeste Olalquiaga, *Megalopolis: Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities* (Minneapolis: University of
Minnesota Press, 1992) 82.

[53] Olalquiaga, *Megalopolis*, 83.

[54] Olalquiaga, *Megalopolis*, 89.

audience laughs *at* the performance or images rather than laughs *with* the performers and artists, which would signify a political laughter that satirizes racial stereotypes.[55]

Indeed, the authors under study here present us with societies that are dominated by the postmodern Culture Industry: they are prisoners to global politics, market forces, and the effects of consumerism. In Ballard's *Crash* and Amis's *Dead Babies*, characters are duped by commodity culture, drugs, and simulation, and an immersion in such a world encourages the continuation of ignorance and violence; in Barker's Britain, people suffer exhaustedly from poverty and male violence; and in Cliff's vision of the diaspora, simulation and the commodification of cultural identity overshadow life and promote racism. If this combined vision of Britain during the 1970s and 1980s suffers so keenly from a lack of critical awareness, then how is a high, complex art going to be able to reach the very mass culture that needs awakening? Philip Larkin grasps this problem perfectly when he describes the failure of high modernist art to reach a wider audience:

> What I do feel a bit rebellious about is that poetry seems to have got into the hands of a critical industry which is concerned with culture in the abstract, and this I do rather lay at the door of Eliot and Pound…I think a lot of this myth-kitty business has grown out of that, *because first of all you have to be terribly educated, you have to read everything to know these things*, and secondly you've got somehow to work them in to show that you are working them in. But to me the whole of the ancient world, the whole of classical and biblical mythology means very little, and I think that using them today not only fills poems full of dead spots but dodges the writer's duty to be original.[56]

Adorno's championed effectiveness of high art requires a similar extensive educational training and sophisticated skills set; it is arguably only with such elitist tools that his idea

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[55] This is precisely the scenario presented by Michelle Cliff in *No Telephone to Heaven*. I argue that Cliff's social realist dramatization and critique of the diaspora as dystopian offers us a clearer way to formulate a cultural identity that may protest racial injustice more effectively.

[56] Philip Larkin and Ian Hamilton, "Four Conversations," *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, Second Edition,* Eds. Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988) 1057 (italics added).

of high art as revolutionary can be achieved. Without such training, the probability of Adorno's version of art to achieve political and social change is rendered more and more useless.

What is necessary to fight dystopian cultural systems is a reversal of Adorno's thoughts on realist writing. In order to break a system of control, I suggest that appropriating realist writing to comment on sexual violence and racial inequalities becomes a more effective tool than the defamiliarizing high art of Kafka, to borrow Adorno's example. In short, using strategies of realist writing can defamiliarize sexual interactions and social interactions to greater effect (than either science fiction or modernist high art) because realist writing offers an already recognizable form of expression to a mass audience. In this respect, the thought of Herbert Marcuse is crucial to formulating a challenge to entrenched systems of dystopian control in society. In "Repressive Tolerance," Marcuse argues that Western capitalist societies exhibit dystopian features of control under the guise of liberal policies. He states that a society of tolerance fails to achieve such freedom for all members of society because it does not acknowledge the already existing and historically inherited status quo that causes certain minority groups to be ostracized from sources of political and economic power. As David Macey notes, "tolerance comes to mean a refusal to take sides which makes it impossible to challenge the machinery of discrimination against minority groups or society's victims."[57] Marcuse's theory of "repressive tolerance" argues for a restriction to be placed on such conservative, status quo expression and thinking in order that repressed groups' voices can be heard to a greater degree and thus actually achieve a balance of political and economic power.

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[57] David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin, 2000) 328.

One key method Marcuse suggests can drive towards this restructured balance of society is the idea of rupture. Marcuse writes,

> For the facts are never given immediately and never accessible immediately; they are established, 'mediated' by those who made them; the truth, 'the whole truth' surpasses these facts and requires the rupture with their appearance. This rupture—prerequisite and token of all freedom of thought and of speech—cannot be accomplished within the established framework of abstract tolerance and spurious objectivity because these are precisely the factors which precondition the mind against the rupture.[58]

I believe that the use of realist writing that graphically and emphatically exposes inequality, violence, and socio-sexual injustice functions in the spirit of Marcuse's notion of rupture. This realist rupture can deconstruct the established framework of control from the inside out. For example, when analyzing the effects that mass commercialization and technology has had on sexuality in *Crash*, Ballard is able to decode sexual interactions in a realist, clinical prose to explain the new emergence of a sexuality that has been robbed of affect. Ballard's narrator watches the TV scientist, Vaughan, collect and sexualize images of car crash victims:

> I watched Vaughan close the album, wondering why I was unable to rouse myself into at least a parade of anger, remonstrate with him for this intrusion into my life. But Vaughan's detachment from any emotion or concern had already had its effect. Perhaps some latent homo-erotic element had been brought to the surface of my mind by his photographs of violence and sexuality. The deformed body of the crippled young woman, like the deformed bodies of the crashed automobiles, revealed the possibilities of an entirely new sexuality. Vaughan had articulated my needs for some positive response to my crash.
> I looked down at Vaughan's long thighs and hard buttocks. However carnal an act of sodomy with Vaughan would have seemed, the erotic dimension was absent. Yet this absence made a sexual act with Vaughan entirely possible. The placing of my penis in his rectum as we lay

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[58] Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr., and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 99.

together in the rear seat of his car would be an event as stylized and abstracted as those recorded in Vaughan's photographs.[59]

Here the clinical language of pornography—a perfect example of what Adorno would see as trash fiction, which would serve the needs of the culture industry—is turned on its head to invoke a purposefully non-pornographic response. Ballard's description aims to shock the reader into some new (and disturbing) awareness. This appropriated form of realism, then, resuscitates and recovers realist writing from the clutches of the Cultural Industry or enslaving political rhetoric and in turn acts to dismantle the very negative realities that such clear language had previously been used to uphold.

In order to awaken their readers to the present-day problems of violence's aestheticization, rampant male misogyny, economic injustice and poverty, and cultural racism, Ballard, Amis, Barker, and Cliff purposefully use aspects of realism as "acts of sabotage," to borrow Adorno's words, to explode our existing notion of reality and shock readers into a new understanding of the very reality that they take for granted.[60] Chapter One begins this exploration of re-identifying dystopia as a fiction of the present by examining J. G. Ballard's vision of Britain in *Crash* (1973) as a "State of the Nation" novel. Ballard presents a Britain overrun by the forces of postmodern simulation and modern technology that produce a society of individuals who learn a new aesthetics of sexual violence. I argue that Ballard's clinical description of these new sexual

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[59] J. G. Ballard, *Crash* (New York: Noonday Press, 1996) 102-103.

[60] Pam Morris follows my line of argument and argues that Adorno's view of realist writing "undermines the validity of claims that have been central to the long political tradition of realist writing—that powerful depiction of suffering and injustice can act as a vehicle for social reform and change." Morris cites protest fiction such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851) and the novels of Charles Dickens (perhaps most notably *Hard Times* [1853]) as works that shocked "public conscience into more progressive attitudes." See Morris, *Realism* (London: Routledge, 2003) 21. For a more current example in Britain, Ken Loach's film, *Cathy Come Home* (1966), succeeded in using documentary-style realism to arouse public sentiment about homelessness, which soon ignited debates in Parliament and saw the creation of the charity, Shelter.

perversions does more than shock his readers into an awareness of Britain's present socio-sexual demise—it actually forces us to realize that the cautionary tools of satire and irony are no longer a match for the aggressive sexuality unleashed by postmodern culture. In effect, the realist scatology of *Crash* announces the death of traditional Juvenalian satire and suggests that our modes of critique and ethics of representation are being outpaced by contemporary forms of violence.

Chapter Two builds on this problem of violence and critique by analyzing Martin Amis's *Dead Babies* (1975) as a literal novelistic response to Ballard's text. I discuss Amis's review of *Crash* (which he wrote while working as an editor at the *Times Literary Supplement*) as motivation for creating his vision of a Britain similar to Ballard's—one dominated by thrill seekers and radical leftists of the sexual revolution culture of the Seventies who are ready to explore any kind of sexual act or violence as a source of liberation, no matter what the social consequences. Amis uses his version of dystopian postmodern culture and Ballardian sexual excess and violence to deconstruct the position held by George Orwell's *1984* (1948) and Deleuze and Guattari's argument in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) that desire is a subversive act that can combat totalitarian or fascist impulses in society. While overturning this old antidote for dystopian societies and heeding Ballard's warning about problems with critique, Amis seeks to find a new cure in Menippean satire. By openly identifying *Dead Babies* as a Menippean satire, Amis attempts to apply the most hybrid and all-encompassing form of traditional satire as an experiment to contain what he sees as the new morality of sexual depravity and gratuitous violence. In this respect, *Dead Babies* becomes a sort of laboratory novel: it obsesses over both the scatological style and cultural violence unleashed by *Crash* and a decade of

greed and political violence. Ultimately, I suggest that Amis fails to contain the violent obscenity of his postmodern culture with the Menippean form and, similar to *Crash*, the novel purposefully leaves us in a dystopian Britain of unending violence and murder.

Chapter Three addresses the problem of satire, irony, and cultural violence by investigating trauma as a possible new mode of critique to handle socio-sexual violence. Pat Barker's *Union Street* (1982) offers a feminist account of the various forms of violence suffered by women in the North of England during the 1970s, but does so without the lens of satire. Her realist, documentary-style depictions of rape, poverty, abortion, and abandonment create an encounter between reader and text that emphasizes the physical and psychological trauma of her characters. Her narrative corrects the chauvinism of Ballard and Amis's dystopian visions by refusing to make her women voiceless objects of male abuse. She reverses the stigma that pits women as victims and refocuses our attention to the larger power systems of patriarchy that constrict the lives of women to begin with. Using Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma and Laura Mulvey's theory of the gaze, I argue that Barker successfully encourages her reader to inhabit a feminine perspective that enables a voice to be created for the trauma her women suffer. In line with this idea of recovery, I claim that Barker's second novel, *Blow Your House Down* (1984), portrays the North of Britain as a living dystopic moment during the Yorkshire Ripper murders of 1975-1981. Her gritty, documentary-style realism provides a revised social history of the Ripper murders that politicizes the trauma suffered by women and indicts a wider, insidious culture of male cruelty and social indolence. At the same time, Barker uses this revised social history to meditate on the question of violence, and whether violence can be used by women to fight the culture of male cruelty and

violence. I discuss Herbert Marcuse's progressive stance on minority groups and the use of revolutionary violence within oppressive capitalist societies to argue how Barker sees the very use of violence as a dystopian gesture. By re-presenting this history as dystopian, Barker gives us a much-needed feminist reading of Britain's troubled North and reclaims the lives of women attacked and murdered by the Ripper, specifically those working-class women and prostitutes who were frequently neglected by the Yorkshire Police and beaten by male clients.

My final chapter on Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) targets the problem of racism and cultural identity in Britain and the wider diasporic space of the Commonwealth and the United States. I argue that Cliff's novel counters the utopian impulse in theories of diaspora offered by critics like Arjun Appadurai, Gautum Premnath, and Stuart Hall, and instead reimagines the diasporic space as a dystopian journey that leads her protagonist, Clare Savage, to the discovery of political agency in the space of her native homeland. Appadurai, Premnath, and Hall all suggest that such a return to the colonial home is impossible; the diaspora offers the postcolonial subject the likelihood of creating and performing new identities that do not trap the subject between the binary spaces of home and away, belonging and not belonging. Cliff's novel, however, seems to value this binary paradigm and presses us to see how a return to a subject's cultural homeland is necessary to form an authentic connection to one's culture and past. Her use of realism clearly demonstrates how debilitating the racism and violence that Clare encounters in the diasporic spaces of the U.S. and Britain is to her ability to find identity. It is only with this refiguring of diasporic theory, which leads to

the rehabitation of home, that the postcolonial subject finds political agency to fight the neocolonizing, dystopian forces of Britain and the wider West.

IV. The New Dystopian Power: From Envisioning to Action

By the examining the bleak times of the 1970s and 1980s in Britain and the outgrowth of powerfully negative fictions from this period, we can easily take critics and historians of dystopian fiction to task for their neglect of this unique body of work. I remind the reader again of Erika Gottlieb's claim "that the postmodern critic's overly broad use of the notion of dystopia is counterproductive to a clear definition of what is unique about dystopian thought or dystopian fiction."[61] The simple question to raise is, How in the world does broadening our understanding of dystopian fiction through the lens of postmodern culture become counterproductive? If anything, Adorno and Horkheimer's and Marcuse's theories of society during the contemporary period of the late twentieth century enable us to see our times more clearly as dystopian cultures that are littered with abuses of human rights. If the overall goal of dystopian fictions is to raise immediate awareness about certain present-day human or technological tendencies that could go awry in the near future, then revising our understanding of dystopian fiction to include works of realism or social realism written during oppressive contemporary periods only serves to bring us closer to such an awareness. Despite the intense pessimism and brutality of Ballard, Amis, Barker, and Cliff's works, their dystopias of the present ultimately create utopian possibilities for greater political and social intelligence that can lead to immediate political and social actions. By using realism to move the idea of the dystopia from the future to the present, we stand a greater chance of

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[61] Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West*, 5.

transforming the very meaning of dystopia from an imaginary bleak speculative literary

genre to a realm of public intellectual debate and social praxis.

Chapter 1: Dystopian Visions of Britain:
Postmodern Realism and the Problem of Critique in J. G. Ballard's *Crash*

> "I reckon every generation wants the next one to make it all come better, to make it seem like there's a second chance."[62]

Graham Swift's 1996 novel, *Last Orders*, takes up the issue of British inheritance with a mixture of humor and dour nostalgia. The comic banter of his characters occurs as protagonist Jack Dodds's son and World War II-veteran friends travel from London to the coast, making a modern-day pilgrimage to fulfill their pledge to Jack and deliver his ashes to the sea. The journey turns into one of self-exploration as each character questions the choices he has made and the person he has become. As a whole, the novel functions as a subtle unveiling of the trauma of British postwar culture. Swift's narrative remark here also echoes one of the most famously failed promises in recent British political history—that of the Labour Party's postwar declaration in 1945 that prosperity and social progress would swiftly follow for all of Britain. Since this hopeful declaration was uttered, much of the fiction coming out of Britain and the Commonwealth since the 1950s has been obsessed with analyzing the shortcomings of these hopes and expectations and, as a result, the detrimental social and psychological effects on the British psyche. While this fictional inquiry has led to intense academic and literary discussions over the meaning of "Englishness" and national identity, perhaps the larger, more pointed historical query becomes: What has happened to England?

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[62] Graham Swift, *Last Orders* (New York: Vintage International, 1997) 43.

One author and social commentator who emerges to address this historical question with special intensity is J. G. Ballard. Having spent part of his childhood in a Japanese prison camp in Shanghai and started his professional writing life in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Britain's newly formed postwar society, Ballard stands as someone well equipped to envision British life and culture under duress. Ballard has reflected, "I don't think you can go through the experience of war without one's perceptions of the world being forever changed. The reassuring stage set that everyday reality in the suburban west presents to us is torn down; you see the ragged scaffolding, and then you see the truth beyond that, and it can be a frightening experience."[63] This perception fueled Ballard's early writing. He entered the British literary scene as a writer of science fiction, creating tales of ecological disaster and internal landscapes warped by psychological scars and brutal desires. Above all, Ballard's writing reveals an obsession with dystopian themes. Even early works, like *The Drowned World* (1962), present allegories of world destruction, while many of his early short stories obsessively document the psychological manipulation of the individual under the name of some kind of contemporary mad science all too clearly spawned by the horrific atomic annihilations that ended the theater of war intimately known by Ballard.

Fictions of catastrophe are hardly unique to Ballard's postwar period of the 1960s and 1970s, however. John Wyndham's *The Day of Triffids* (1951) uses the techniques of science fiction to imagine an invasion of carnivorous plants devouring English life, while further into the next decade Anthony Burgess emerges with the futuristic *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), a novel that advances upon traditional science fiction dystopias by envisioning a not-too-distant England ravaged by youth gangs and conspiratorial

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[63] David B. Livingstone, "J. G. Ballard: *Crash*: Prophet with Honour," *Spike Magazine*, Web, 2 May 2010.

government programs to brainwash social offenders. Despite this postwar lineage of science fiction-infused dystopian works, Ballard appears as a unique voice of criticism and caution in his decision to alter the landscape of dystopian fiction. Ballard describes this challenge as a growing displeasure with science fiction. As Ballard notes from a 1975 interview, "The only form of fiction which was trying to make head or tail of what was going on in our world was science-fiction….I wanted a science-fiction of the *present day*….I am not interested in imaginary alien planets."[64] This rejection of science fiction reveals Ballard's desire to achieve a realist dystopia: "I wasn't satisfied by just writing SF stories, you see. My imagination was eager to expand in all directions."[65]

Ballard arrived at this goal of realizing a new fiction of the present in the early 1970s, during a time when Britain was roundly considered the socio-economic "sick man of Europe."[66] Beginning with the experimentalist fiction, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), Ballard began to transition away from traditional dystopian allegories of other worlds by chronicling the contemporary madness brought on by the high consumerism and media saturation of advanced, post-industrial cultures of the West. In this chapter, I will argue that a seminal moment in British fiction lies with Ballard's *Crash* (1973), his first fully realized novel combining social realism with dystopian themes. In *Crash*, Ballard consciously discards the trappings of traditional, science fiction dystopias in order to create a more realistic portrait of Britain's social, sexual, and psychological decline. He specifically uses the tableaux of the car crash to envision a set of characters diseased by

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[64] John Fletcher, "J. G. Ballard," *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 207: British Novelists Since 1960, Third Series*, ed. Merritt Moseley (Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, 1999) 5 (italics added).

[65] J. G. Ballard, "From Shanghai to Shepperton," Simon Sellars, "Crash! (1971)," 10 August 2007, *Ballardian*, Web, 18 May 2010.

[66] Michael Lynch, *An Introduction to Modern British History 1900-1999* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2001) 159.

the trappings of the emerging postmodern culture of consumerism and technology.

Ballard explains,

> But if you look at the entertainment culture that people amuse themselves with, it's obvious that the car crash has a very powerful role to play in peoples' imaginations…something is happening in the imagination that tends to entangle the elements of violence and sexuality, and it's fed by this relentless flow of appealingly-violent imagery that we get in our movies. *Crash* is an attempt to follow these trends off the edge of the graph paper to the point where they meet. Basically the message is 'So you think violence is sexy? OK, this is where you're going.' I see the ultimate effect of *Crash* as cautionary, as a warning against the role of violence and sex in our entertainment culture and the way the two can become intertwined.[67]

Thus, through *Crash*'s clinical realism,[6869] Ballard inaugurates a new kind of dystopian fiction that exposes the "elements of violence and sexuality" that arise from the entertainment, media-saturated postmodern culture he sees dominating the blighted landscape of 1970's Britain. But this graphic realism also tests the uses and limits of the "cautionary" critique he claims to achieve in the novel.

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[67] Livingstone, "J. G. Ballard: *Crash*: Prophet with Honour."

[68] Francesca Guidotti counters my assignment of *Crash* as realist by situating the novel between the traditions of realism and science fiction. She argues that science fiction elicits a "different kind of reading" from the tradition of realism, claiming "The reader of a realist novel proceeds from the general (the commonplace, the *topos*) to the particular (the ideologically structured plot). The reader of SF follows the reverse path: he derives the general rules by induction and then undertakes a conjectural reconstruction of the fictional cosmos. It is clear that *Crash* cannot be inserted *tout court* in either of the two categories, because it partakes of both the former's plausibility and the latter's abstraction." However, this claim is mystifying. Ballard's use of realist detail foregrounds all of the novel's action in the commonplace aspects of everyday life. The abstractions that do occur map recognizable social and psychological space and have little to do with traditional science fiction plots or structures. See Francesca Guidotti, "Ballard and the Absent Paradigm of Science Fiction," *Textus: English Studies in Italy* Vol. XIV No. 1 (2001): 80.

[69] Ballard's realist, detailed descriptions of the various crash-related deformities in the novel are rooted in Jacob Kulowski's medical book, *Crash Injuries: The Integrated Medical Aspects of Automobile Injuries and Deaths* (1960). The use of such a text stresses the pains to which Ballard went to present a realistic world of scarred violence. See Dennis A. Foster, "J. G. Ballard's Empire of the Senses: Perversion and the Failure of Authority," *PMLA* Vol. 108 No. 3 (1993): 524.

I. Britain as Dystopia:
Crash and the Technological Transformation of Britain

While Ballard's vision of a Britain overrun by traffic jams, stains of blood, and engine coolant—of a society isolated in spiraling tower block housing structures—articulates a new realist fictional focus within the genre of the postmodern novel, the dark, cold, concrete world he creates has a deeper analog that is worth noting. If we imagine the dystopian world of Ballard's Britain as a diptych painting, then Ballard's *Crash* is the panel counterpart to E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910). Forster's work is one of the central British novels to raise the question of Britain's transformation in the early twentieth century alongside an early critique of technology and, specifically, the automobile. Though the novel is popularly known as pressing the key question of "Who shall inherit England?", it more importantly asks us to consider what is happening to all of Britain and what *kind* of Britain will be inherited.

Howards End acts as a critical link to *Crash*, for it illustrates the growing tensions within national identity in relationship to the proliferation of automobiles and city life in the early twentieth century that directly inform the generation of Ballard's characters. Forster predicts the coming crisis in national identity by meditating on the changing landscape of British fiction:

> The Earth as an artistic cult has had its day, and the literature of the near future will probably ignore the country and seek inspiration from the town. One can understand the reaction. Of Pan and the elemental forces, the public has heard a little too much—they seem Victorian, while London is Georgian—and those who care for the earth with sincerity may wait long ere the pendulum swings back to her again. Certainly London fascinates. One visualizes it as a tract of quivering grey, intelligent without purpose, and excitable without love; as a spirit that has altered before it can be chronicled; as a heart that certainly beats, but with no pulsation of humanity.[70]

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[70] E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (New York: Vintage International, 1989) 112.

The rise of the city and of industry disconnects Britain from its romanticized, pastoral

identity and places it within the uncertain future. This uncertain future for Forster is

brought on by imperialism—the fuel of the modern city and nation state. Again, Forster

is able to forecast Britain's ambiguous future climate, when the country's fate is left to

imperial forces: "But the imperialist is not what he thinks or seems. He is a destroyer.

He prepares the way for cosmopolitanism, and though his ambitions may be fulfilled, the

earth that he inherits will be grey."[71] Forster's analysis of Britain's changing identity

contextualizes the environment of Ballard's Britain: imperialism has decimated the idea

of the English pastoral and has generated world wars; in so doing it has physically and

psychically dislocated the proceeding generations of the nation. The uncertain

"greyness" of the new world order of the modern city signals the state of identity in

transition that Ballard explores in his novel.

A key ingredient to this environmental and psychological collapse in Forster's

Britain is the automobile. Forster's motor car is one of the strongest objects of critique in

the novel. The car becomes the clearest metaphor for the technological disease

overtaking nature, for the loss of the organic, and for the rise of the industrial,

commercial city environment. Forster's motor car scatters dust "through open

windows,…whiten[s] the roses and gooseberries of the wayside gardens, while a certain

proportion ha[s] entered the lungs of the villagers."[72] The car frequently sits "throbbing

[and] stinking,"[73] and produces its worst effect on the human subject by altering the

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[71] Forster 339.

[72] Forster 18.

[73] Forster 23.

mind:

> Perhaps Hertfordshire is scarcely intended for motorists. Did not a
> gentleman once motor so quickly through Westmoreland that he missed it?
> and if Westmoreland can be missed, it will fare ill with a county whose
> delicate structure particularly needs the attentive eye. Hertfordshire is
> England at its quietest, with little emphasis of river and hill; it is England
> meditative.[74]

The car is the harbinger of a technological movement soon to corrupt the psychological

state of the subject and transform the national identity of a country that bases much of its

character and heritage on its natural surroundings. This shift in identity politics—from a

tradition rooted in the countryside to one now founded in the city—signals a new mode

of experience for Forster's characters. Their ability to interpret space is radically being

redefined, as in this moment when Margaret travels in a car to Howards End: "She looked

at the scenery. It heaved and merged like porridge. Presently it congealed. They had

arrived."[75] Technology forces Margaret's faculties into a time warp, where the speed of

violence represented by the car begins to seep into both human consciousness and

physical setting, thus establishing a new experience of the world.

Forster's novel attempts to gauge the degree of social and psychological change

that threatens to decimate the romanticized stability of Britain as a countryside world.

Even as Forster's Schlegel sisters triumph in their inheritance of the countryside estate,

they still alert the reader to the dangerous future that awaits Britain:

> "I hope it will be permanent," said Helen, drifting away to other thoughts.
> "I think so. There are moments when I feel Howards End peculiarly our
> own."
> "All the same, London's creeping."
> She pointed over the meadow—over eight or nine meadows, but at the end

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[74] Forster 206.

[75] Forster 207.

of them was a red rust.[76]

The hazy rust symbolizes the lingering technological emissions of the city and the car, an airborne disease already consuming the old, pastoral life of Britain. The new life of the cosmopolitan city looms ominously in the near distance, and the infinitely sprawling roads, like the novel's Great North Road, will ultimately convey the red rust of technology to the spiritual grounds of the English countryside.

Ballard's setting in *Crash* embraces the lingering pessimism of Forster's Britain. *Crash* inherits Forster's realist dystopian vision and extends this stylistic analysis to interpret Britain in the postmodern cultural climate of the 1970s as a struggling postwar state that is fractured socially and economically. The main character, James Ballard, lives with his wife Catherine in a high-rise tower block apartment complex. For Ballard, the tower block is the hallmark of postmodern realism in Britain—a sign denoting the shift away from bankrupt industrialized towns to accommodating the post-war population surge and growing market of the new breed of worker, the professional of the computer, service-industry age. In his essay "Postmodernism: Bumper-Sticker Culture," Sven Birkerts expands upon the meaning of such cultural shifts in postwar societies in the West. He offers three key markers that signal the dawning of postmodern culture: atomic/nuclear power and warfare, the switch to information processing from industrialized mechanization, and the proliferation and impact of the television.[77] For Birkerts, each of these factors carries with it more than just a change in the physical landscape of modern society; each change also alters the psychological composition of the contemporary subject. Birkerts writes that the threat promised by atomic and nuclear

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[76] Forster 355.

[77] Sven Birkerts, "Postmodernism: Bumper-Sticker Culture," *American Energies* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1992) 21-22.

weapons infects "all of us with the anxious knowledge that minutes—*minutes*—separate us from the potential extinction of all biological life" (italics original).[78] This explosive knowledge of the ultimate end of all organic life complicates our relation to history because it locks us into a paranoid state of fearing and knowing only the now, the present moment; it makes all creation and records of life "unbearably poignant and irrelevant."[79]

Likewise, as Marshall McLuhan has noted,[80] the shift towards information processing in advanced western societies erodes the centralized place of the individual. No longer are we Fritz Lang's mechanized puppets from *Metropolis* (1927) at the center of the great machine, the central actor who controls operation and function. The computer revolution decenters the business-social model of the individual by removing him from the role of actor and reassigning him to the role of facilitator. The "depersonalizing force"[81] of information processing is "invisible," "neural," and "inscrutable"[82] to the subject, alienating the subject from his or her own supposed action.

By far the most threatening physical and psychological change for Birkerts is the advent and domination of the television. The television represents the prime image generator of the postmodern age, a media that can saturate its viewer with endless, multiplying images and meanings. With its multiplication of images, the television, Birkerts argues, has affected our notions of difference and distance: "not only has distance been breached and psychically collapsed, but the sense of *difference*, too, has

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[78] Birkerts 21.

[79] Birkerts 22.

[80] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) 7-8.

[81] Birkerts 23.

[82] Birkerts 23.

fallen away."[83] This collapse of difference and distance implies a bizarre fusion of the

image and the spectator, ultimately suggesting that the individual becomes so saturated

with media imagery that he or she is controlled by those very images. This media control

of the individual produces the prescripting of human behavior—that is, the creation of a

condition that Ballard obsesses over in *Crash*: simulation. For both Birkerts and Ballard,

life in the media-saturated West sets the stage for violent confrontation between the

world of image illusion and the actuality of concrete fact.

Ballard's creative theorizing of this confrontation echoes the concerns of Marshall

McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964). McLuhan's text is one of the first works to

make sense of media's impact on society and the self and to define the postmodern

condition during the years leading up to Ballard's publication of *Crash*. McLuhan's

assessment of this shift from mechanization to information processing stresses the

psycho-social impact on society: "What we are considering here, however, are the

psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns as they amplify or accelerate

existing processes. For the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of

scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs."[84] The significance of

technological advancements in society is not their use but simply their existence. The

explosion of TV networks (e.g., the popularization of televised broadcasts of the Vietnam

War in the 1960s) and media advertising in the postwar period by themselves alter human

consciousness and interaction; these technologies become a new layer introduced into

human reality that early postmodern writers like Ballard and Thomas Pynchon begin to

examine. This examination produces a diagnosis of a culture experiencing profound

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[83] Birkerts 22 (italics original).

[84] McLuhan 8.

symptoms of identity dislocation, social fragmentation, and, for Ballard, sexual

dysfunction. McLuhan indeed argues that "it is the medium that shapes and controls the

scale and form of human association and action,"[85] but Ballard is one of the first

landmark writers in Britain to expand this observation of McLuhan's and discover a

dystopian truth. As Brian McHale observes, "postmodernist writers are more interested

in the social and institutional consequences of technological innovation, the social

arrangements these advances give rise to, rather than in the innovations themselves,"[86]

and as proof of this claim, Ballard shows how the shape and control of technology may

not only rob the human subject of agency, but worse it may manipulate the psyche into a

new shape and form itself, a new self that finds excitement and energy in ravaging old

cultural forms and moral codes. In a Britain already suffering from collapsing traditional

socio-economic models, such an altered subject and environment provide an explosive

new threat to British life and societal stability.

The setting of *Crash* signals Ballard's introduction to the brutal realism of this

electronic, technology-laden postmodern culture. We are greeted with a new vision of

Britain—a Britain of traffic jams and massive highways, of concrete structures, of

airports and industrialized complexes.[87] Ballard's vision is rooted in the actual landscape

changes that altered Britain throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. According to

British road historian Chris Marshall,

> The political zeitgeist was about securing economic growth for as long as

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[85] McLuhan 9.

[86] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987) 66.

[87] The Special Roads Act of 1949 and the Highways Act of 1959 authorized the construction of Britain's first high-speed motorways. The six-lane highways of the M1 opened in 1959, and grew in use and popularity throughout the 1960s. See Chris Marshall, "Timeline," August 2001, CRBD, Web, 10 May 2010.

possible, and in true post-war fashion, building things using *lots of concrete* was seen as the best way to do this. Urban regeneration and diesel power for the railways was only the start. In the early 1960s a government target was set to build 1,000 miles of motorway by the end of the decade. Not only was it upheld through several changes of government, it was also achieved.[88]

Marshall also notes that the optimism of such industrial progress soon eroded with the reality of massive road construction: "At [the A40(M)] opening, the media showed the whole of Britain the stark reality of urban road construction, and it bore little resemblance to the airy, utopian pencil sketches they had been shown by the architects. Six lanes of motorway traffic now ran at first-floor level alongside otherwise pleasant Victorian homes through more than a mile of West London suburbia."[89] The technology-driven improvements to Britain's transportation system facilitated easier travel across the mainland, but they cost the public a sense of personal privacy and introduced them into a new synthetic aesthetic.

One of the first invitations to this new view of Britain occurs early in *Crash*, as Ballard provides an aerial shot of interlacing highways: "In the evening light the white concrete of the collision corridor below the flyover resembled a secret airstrip from which mysterious machines would take off into a metallized sky."[90] Ballard literalizes the technology discourse of critics like Birkerts and McLuhan with reality of Britain's landscape facelift: gone are the fading countryside manors of Waugh's disappearing England, and the lush, sexualized gardens of Lawrence's *Lady's Chatterley's Lover* that stand against Clifford's encroaching industry and moneyed culture. Now we have the

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[88] Marshall "Timeline," (italics added).

[89] Marshall "Timeline."

[90] J. G. Ballard, *Crash* (New York: Noonday Press, 1996) 18. All further references to the novel will be cited parenthetically.

technologized, superhighway structure of contemporary Britain. Ballard's characters

come under the allure of this new concrete aesthetic and haunt the streets of "airport

expressways" and "access roads of petrochemical plants" (13), the sites of "Oceanic

Terminals at the airport," "hotel mezzanine balconies," and "studio car-parks" (16). He

emphasizes the mutated nature of British life through these locations, and most

particularly through his phrase "metallized sky," which characterizes the marriage

between urban technology and the natural world. Ballard's refashioned world is a brutal

ghost alley of airports and monstrous multi-lane roads that announce the globalized

texture of contemporary Britain.

Coupled with this cold, hard-edged depiction of British life is the presence of

another indicator of postmodern culture: consumerism. Ballard sprinkles hints of

consumer culture throughout the narrative. His narrator and main character, James

Ballard, works as an executive at TV commercial studios in Shepperton, while his wife

Catherine flies with the airlines. Fitting for British urban life in the 1970s, they live in a

tower block engulfed by concrete:

> …the endless landscape of concrete and structural steel that extended from
> the motorways to the south of the airport, across its vast runways to the
> new apartment systems along Western Avenue. Our own apartment house
> at Drayton Park stood a mile to the north of the airport in a pleasant island
> of modern housing units, landscaped filling stations and supermarkets,
> shielded from the distant bulk of London by an access spur of the northern
> circular motorway which flowed past us on its elegant concrete pillars.
> (48)

Aside from the irony of the name Drayton Park,[91] we come to see the presence of

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[91] The irony of Ballard's naming here comes from its allusion to Michael Drayton's poem, *Poly-Olbion*
(1612), which is long topographical pastoral poem describing and praising the natural world, traditions, and
histories of counties in England and Wales. Ballard's concrete English landscape is noticeably lacking in
traditional pastoral features.

enclosed systems in Ballard's England.[92] James's neighborhood renders its residents

static by filling itself with consumer centers that satiate the tower block inhabitants'

needs. Even when James imagines the sexual flirtations of a couple riding in a car that

speeds along the surrounding "multi-level interchange" (17), Ballard makes sure to note

that their car "grazes the tailgate of an articulated truck loaded with colour television

sets" (17) and hurls past "advertisement hoardings" (17). These postmodern signs of

media culture gather all the more purposeful placement once we discover that one of the

victims of James's car crash is "a chemical engineer with an American foodstuffs

company" (19). The combination of these images of a landscape dominated by

technology and consumerism reveal the main target of Ballard's cautionary critique in the

novel: the dangers that await a culture of overconsumption looking for new thrills or

entertainments.[93]

The presence of hyper-consumerism casts a spell over Ballard's characters. The

mass advertisements and TV screens literally embed themselves into the psychology of

James and color his business trip to Paris before his car crash takes place. He obsesses

over "the strange tactile and geometric landscape of the airport buildings, the ribbons of

dulled aluminum and areas of imitation wood laminates" (41). Ballard's realistic

attention to detail here is telling: he clearly deromanticizes the image of British cultural

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[92] The appearance of urbanized gated housing communities or apartment and corporate business parks is a
feature of postmodern city planning that fascinates Ballard, and it is a structure over which he obsesses and
a theme he develops further in his other novels, *High-Rise* (1975), *Running Wild* (1988), *Super-Cannes*
(2000), and *Kingdom Come* (2006), to name a few. For Ballard, such planning structures colonize the
inhabitants into enclosed systems that sever them from outside realities. The realist physical settings thus
have deleterious psychological implications for the individual: simulation, gentrification, and, in *Kingdom
Come*, the suggestion that these complexes of advanced societies cultivate a new variety of capitalist
fascism.

[93] Recall here David B. Livingstone's interview with J. G. Ballard, where Ballard states, "I see the ultimate
effect of *Crash* as cautionary, as a warning against the role of violence and sex in our entertainment culture
and the way the two can become intertwined." See David B. Livingstone, "J. G. Ballard: *Crash*: Prophet
with Honour."

heritage. The idea of a Britain steeped in countryside aesthetics erodes into a landscape

rooted in the forces of consumerism and synthetics, not tradition.[94] Crucially, these

cultural conditions reorient the sensory perceptions of the subject, as we see when James

describes his Paris trip: "Even my relationship with a young mezzanine bartender had

been brought alive by the contoured lighting systems above his balding head, by the tiled

bar and his stylized uniform" (41). The stylization of this encounter functions more as a

product advertisement than as human interaction. Ballard transforms a routine bar scene

into a televised moment: the banal features of the everyday suddenly take on the

trappings of a studio caricature.

This sense of a televised reality affects Ballard's biggest concern in the novel:

sexuality. Ballard illustrates a Baudrillardian loss of the real when describing a series of

James and his wife Catherine's sexual fantasies used to achieve coitus. The couple

exaggerates real and imagined encounters of infidelity to excite each other, a game that

infects all facets of their lives:

> For years I had been able to spot Catherine's affairs within almost a few
> hours of her first sex act simply by glancing over any new physical or
> mental furniture—a sudden interest in some third-rate wine or film-maker,
> a different tack across the water of aviation politics. Often I could guess
> the name of her latest lover long before she released it at the climax of our
> sexual acts. This teasing game she and I needed to play. As we lay
> together we would describe a complete amatory encounter, from the first
> chit-chat at an airline cocktail party to the sexual act itself. The climax of
> these games was the name of the illicit partner. Held back until the last
> moment, it would always produce the most exquisite orgasms for both of
> us. There were times when I felt that these affairs took place merely to
> provide the raw material for our sexual games. (31)

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[94] Slavo Zizek has argued that it is this very notion of Britain's strong sense of historical tradition that leaves the country intact in Alfonso Cuarón's film, *Children of Men*. He claims that centuries-old traditions, mainly expressed through undocumented British common law, are strong enough to hold British society together despite the dystopic disarray of Cuarón's vision. See Alfonso Cuarón, *Children of Men* (United States: Universal Studios, 2007) DVD.

James's work in advertising has taught him to stylize reality, and these sexual games are

a natural extension of how consumerism has influenced him in return. Catherine's affairs

act like TV commercials: the couple gradually fictionalizes a series of mental images of

an actual encounter or detail in order to eroticize their physical engagement. What makes

their orgasm possible is the vicarious mediation of the image play at work. In the words

of Jean Baudrillard, the couple are "mask[ing] and pervert[ing] a basic reality"[95] and thus

producing a second-order simulacrum. James and Catherine do not find their actual

bodies stimulating; rather, they need the trappings of a kind of media advertising to

transform Catherine's transgressive acts into a new source of visual stimulus.

Ballard sharpens his method of critique of this postmodern sexuality by

appropriating the clinical detail of pornography. The vicarious sexual games produce a

hollowing of organic sensation, a loss that is clearly registered by James and Catherine's

need to create more elaborate fantasies. Echoing the familiar postmodern theme of

exhaustion, James discovers that their sexual games have exhausted heterosexual tropes

and fail to provide any excitement for Catherine. Their relationship is reduced to a

pursuit of pornographic transgressions:

> Catherine's continuing erotic interest in her secretary seemed an interest as
> much in the idea of making love to her as in the physical pleasures of the
> sex act itself. Nonetheless, these pursuits had begun to make all our
> relationships, both between ourselves and with other people, more and
> more abstract. She soon became unable to reach an orgasm without an
> elaborate fantasy of a lesbian sex-act with Karen, of her clitoris being
> tongued, nipples erected, anus caressed. These descriptions seemed to be
> a language in search of objects, or even, perhaps, the beginnings of a new
> sexuality divorced from any possible physical expression. (34-5)

This condition is the language of simulation: their relationships are abstract because

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[95] Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 196.

imagined encounters with others in different varieties of sexual situations avoid the boredom of the reality that James and Catherine sense in everyday life. Their fantasies can, on the other hand, be intensified *ad infinitum* to produce a gallery of possibilities, a whole range of sexual channels from which to choose. At the same time, Ballard employs realist detail to describe the pornography that emerges from the entertainment-seeking exploits of James and Catherine. This pornography is part of the "new sexuality" discovered by his characters: they are in pursuit, in the tradition of pornography, of ever-developing extreme acts that gradually drain the very life out of the sex act. This loss of sexual intimacy serves as part of Ballard's critique in *Crash*: it signals, what Fredric Jameson calls, the "waning of affect in postmodern culture." At this point, this unknown, mutated form of postmodern sexuality floats adrift from the real world. Long before the life-altering moment in the novel of James's car crash, then, Ballard's characters are already suffering from a psycho-sexual condition—a dislocation of identity and perception brought on by the social and physical changes in postmodern Britain. Behind the sheen of simulation, Ballard's characters and their sexuality dissolve into an empty hyper-consumerism, but it is a consuming mode of being that will soon metamorphose into a more dangerous mode of existence.

The opening structure of *Crash* purposefully saturates its characters in a concretized world of speed lanes and efficiency living. Foregrounding his Britain in both the literary dystopian realism of Forster and McLuhan's theory of media saturation, Ballard works here almost as a novelist-turned-city planner to articulate how technology and consumerism have reassigned and reconfigured the setting of Britain. Brian McHale argues that this presence of mass technology and grim dystopian themes reveals the

postmodernization of science fiction motifs in contemporary postmodern writing. He

claims, "postmodernist texts are preoccupied with the 'cartelization' of the future, the

growth of international conglomerates that threaten to displace national governments and

engulf the entire world."[96] Ballard, however, denies this science fiction framework by

showing us the "cartelization" of the present, which is under the threat of more basic,

common consumer devices. The displacement that occurs for Ballard—the manipulation

of the self and the creation of bizarre appetites—is more intimate and dangerous. It is

this transformation that turns his characters into marauders eager to engulf the world with

their sexual obsessions.

II. Tearing into the Real: Sexual Violence and Social Destruction

Part of Ballard's cautionary warning in *Crash* has been to show the simulated

behavior and sexuality brought on by the postmodern environment of Britain and its

subsequent loss of organic experience. The other half of this warning becomes apparent

with the violence of the car crash. The violence of the crash solves the sexual cravings of

his characters. The new entertainment levels sought for in the simulated sexual games of

James and Catherine become fully realized through violence. Violence provides the

ultimate entertainment and sexual release that his characters seek by enabling them to

actualize their desires and discover new sensations. Such violence reintroduces Ballard's

characters to real experience, but the entertainment value of this violence makes it a

dangerous realism. With his characters now seeking new thrills in the public, social

arena, Ballard dramatizes how the postmodern consumerist appetite can easily translate

into a new kind of agency that demands the destruction of others.

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[96] McHale 67.

The path towards violence opens with James's car crash. The crash is more than just a violent shakeup for him. The crash forces both James and Ballard's reader to confront the latent violence lurking behind the postmodern setting—a violence that thrusts both character and reader into a bizarre new reality. While traces of the culture of simulation will linger in James's world, his crash also produces a detailed, violent new realism in the text. Ballard uses this realism to stress the dangers of a postmodern identity that is formed in response to the brutal landscape of Britain. For James, this moment of realism occurs when his car crash shatters his condition of simulation: "The crash was the only real experience I had been through for years" (39). The violence of the wreck reintroduces James more concretely to the brutal world he inhabits. Significantly, it is precisely at this moment in the text that Ballard mocks the science fiction genre he practiced early in his career. After the crash, James notes: "I stared at my pale, mannequin-like face, trying to read its lines. The smooth skin almost belonged to someone in a science-fiction film, stepping out of his capsule after an immense inward journey on to the overlit soil of an unfamiliar planet" (36). James has indeed been through an immense inward journey, but the unfamiliar planet onto which James sets foot is the very real outskirts of London, finally recognized in a bizarre light. Given Ballard's previous science fiction dystopian works of the 1960s, the reference here to the genre unmistakably announces his rejection of science fiction as a form of dystopian art. The realism of James's crash challenges both the supposed loss of the real in simulation and the notion, according to Keith Booker, that dystopian fictions "are typically set in places or time far distant from the author's own."[97] Ballard emphasizes how the wild alterations

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[97] M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994) 19.

of the environment in postmodern culture are in and of themselves enough of a foreign,

unknown territory complete with dystopian warnings. Now that the crash has

resensitized James to his surroundings, Ballard can push beyond the mere existence of

simulation and probe the new psychology that James and Robert Vaughan, the car crash

scientist of the novel, possess. In effect, we are pushed beyond simulacra and into a new

postmodern realism.

The real, literal violence of James's crash awakens both a new consciousness in

him and adds a new dimension to what Ballard repeatedly terms "a new sexuality." As

James recuperates in the hospital he begins to notice alterations in his perceptions of

sexuality. While lying in bed during a visitation from his wife, Catherine, James notes, "I

thought of my last forced orgasms with Catherine, the sluggish semen urged into her

vagina by my bored pelvis. Over the profiles of her body now presided the metallized

excitements of our shared dreams of technology. The elegant aluminized air-vents in the

walls of the X-ray department beckoned as invitingly as the warmest organic orifice"

(41). The boredom of the vicarious sexual games that James and Catherine play with

each other—products of simulation—fade into the background as James's traumatized

mind begins to connect the physicality of the crash to the all-pervasive McLuhanesque

technology that engulfs Shepperton. Ballard starts to outline the complex, warped

psychology that the postmodern landscape instills in its subjects. James's absorption in a

world of technology and violence moves from simulation to actuality via his crash, and

causes a metamorphosis of his relationships to objects around him. Postmodern critic

Celeste Olalquiaga shares Ballard's concern for postmodern culture's effect on the

individual:

> Whether one likes it or not, postmodernism is a state of things. It is primarily determined by an extremely rapid and freewheeling exchange to which most responses are faltering, impulsive, and contradictory. *What is at stake is the very constitution of being—the ways we perceive ourselves and others*, the modes of experience that are available to us, the women and men whose sensibilities are shaped by urban exposure.[98]

James sheds a passive, simulation-absorbed self in the above passage and enters a new state of being, one violently thrust upon him at the behest of Britain's chaotic environment. The famous idea often heard in postmodern discussions of society that meaning flattens and loses depth, that capitalist systems create a shift "from use to exchange value"[99] becomes realized in Ballard's protagonist. James's sexual thoughts lose their meaningful significance and are reduced to an exchangeable value: function is all that matters, whether the orifice is organic or metal. This alteration in James's sexuality is one of the additional markers of Ballard's "new sexuality": it paves the way for the dangerous mixture of sex and violence.

Specifically, what is at work in Ballard's realist dystopia is a critical breakdown of boundaries—demarcations of cityscapes, relationships to objects and people, ethical responses to the environment for the modern subject. As James convalesces at home, he stares out at his world from his "anodized balcony" (48) and realizes "that the human inhabitants of this technological landscape no longer provided its sharpest pointers, its keys to the borderzones of identity" (48-49). Similar to his perplexing response to the X-ray machine, James is becoming aware of how technology's impact on the self is forcing humanity into a new space. While still being established, the human subject is decentered by the technological layout of Britain. Olalquiaga explains such a

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[98] Celeste Olalquiaga, *Megalopolis: Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) xi (italics added).

[99] Olalquiaga xvii.

psychological shift in the human subject as a result of immersion in "megalopolises," her

phrase for advance postmodern industrial societies. She terms this condition

"psychasthenia":

> Defined as a disturbance in the relation between self and surrounding
> territory, psychasthenia is a state in which the space defined by the
> coordinates of the organism's own body is confused with represented
> space. Incapable of demarcating the limits of its own body, lost in the
> immense area that circumscribes it, the psychasthenic organism proceeds
> to abandon its own identity to embrace the space beyond. It does so by
> camouflaging itself into the milieu. This simulation effects a double
> usurpation: while the organism successfully reproduces those elements it
> could not otherwise apprehend, in the process it is swallowed by them,
> vanishing as a differentiated entity.[100]

Olalquiaga sees a clear relationship between the loss of spatial boundaries and the loss of

self for the subject. By playing in a mapless space, the subject mimics its surroundings

and thus erodes its own unique status. What differs for Ballard's James, however, is that

he regains an individuated self in this new eroticized world of violence and technology.

James does not experience a complete erosion of identity; he does not become a

stereotypical postmodern character suffering from schizophrenic freeplay of fleeting

meanings.[101] Instead, he moves from simulated behavior to a consciousness that fuses his

organic self with the violence of his surroundings. The confusion of boundaries

represented by his comparison of Catherine's vagina to the air-vent in the X-ray machine

begins to develop a new concentrated self that finds excitement in violent mergers of the

human with the technological.

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[100] Olalquiaga 1-2.

[101] For example, Ballard's protagonist in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, Travis, experiences multiple identities
throughout the course of the novel, while Martin Amis's satirical novelist character, Richard Tull, in *The
Information*, writes a postmodern novel that has sixteen unreliable narrators—a clear parody of this
postmodern convention.

Ballard carefully examines James's hybrid form of psychasthenia as a confrontation with the new realism of his surroundings. The reverberations of James's crash continue to open new realizations to him: "As I drove home with Catherine from the hospital I was surprised by how much, in my eyes, the image of the car had changed, almost as if its true nature had been exposed by my accident" (49). Far from being lost in a postmodern funhouse hall of mirrors, Ballard emphasizes the sharp tactility of objects and the new relationships they carry for James. Instead of experiencing fright and fear as he reenters the blitzing traffic for the first time since his accident, James feels the exact opposite: "Leaning against the rear window of the taxi, I found myself flinching with excitement towards the traffic streams on the Western Avenue interchanges" (49). James's almost unnatural excitement confirms Fredric Jameson's suspicion about postmodern architecture's effect on the subject. In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson argues that the new city structures of postmodernity, particularly with their glass surfaces, flatten perspective into a two-dimensional realm:

> Now one would want rather to stress the way in which the glass skin repels the city outside; a repulsion for which we have analogies in those reflector sunglasses which make it impossible for your interlocutor to see your own eyes and thereby achieve a certain aggressivity towards and power over the Other. In a similar way, the glass skin achieves a peculiar and placeless dissociation of the Bonaventura from its neighborhood: it is not even an exterior, inasmuch as when you seek to look at the hotel's outer walls you cannot see the hotel itself, but only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it.[102]

Not only does the structure of the Bonaventura confound rational space, but it also transforms the environment into the kind of simulacrum that Olalquiaga envisions: the building seems eerily to blend into its surroundings invisibly through its glass walls,

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[102] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 81-82.

which in turn erects a false reality that competes with and subverts the real.

In contrast to Olalquiaga, though, Jameson does not comfortably diagnose a psychological condition to account for these spatial changes. He nervously suggests that postmodern space forces us to acknowledge that some strange alterations are happening to the subject, a feeling clearly present in *Crash*. Jameson claims,

> …we are here in the presence of something like a mutation in built space itself. My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object, unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject; we do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism.[103]

Through James Ballard and, later, Robert Vaughan, Ballard wrestles precisely with this "mutation in the subject," and James's response to his environment becomes a recharged sense of reality. Jameson's "hyperspace" translates into what I call Ballard's hard realism:[104]

> The flashing lances of afternoon light deflected from the chromium panel trim tore at my skin. The hard jazz of radiator grilles, the motion of cars moving towards London Airport along the sunlit oncoming lanes, the street furniture and route indicators—all these seemed threatening and super-real, as exciting as the accelerating pintables of a sinister amusement arcade released on to these highways. (49)

Ballard's notion of the "super-real" is not a Baudrillardian hyperreal, a world of simulated space vying for replacement of the real. Rather, Ballard takes the hardness, the plain brutality of London's landscape as the dystopian spark that ignites James's mind. James reveals here the new "perceptual equipment" that Jameson speaks of, and it is a

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[103] Jameson in Docherty 80.

[104] Martin Amis terms the writing style in *Crash* as Ballard's "hard-edge, concrete-and-steel period." See Martin Amis, "J. G. Ballard," *Visiting Mrs. Nabokov* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993) 81.

logic that finds similarity in contrast, symmetry in opposition. In one utterance, Ballard undoes the language of the pre-postmodern where such a system would be unfathomable. James's "threatening" is not fear but excitement. Indeed, the oxymoronic phrase "sinister amusement" stresses the path down which Britain now races: a world where renewed contact with the real inaugurates an enthusiastic aestheticization of violence.

Ballard illustrates this new subjecthood as James discovers a modified ethical system in response to the hard real he encounters in his post-crash world. James explores his own transformed consciousness, now framed against a renewed sensitivity to the "raised parapets and embankments of the motorways and their access roads and interchanges" (53), as his wife drives him to work: "My glimpse of an unmoving world, of the thousands of drivers sitting passively in their cars on the motorway embankments along the horizon, seemed to be a unique vision of this machine landscape, an invitation to explore the viaducts of our minds" (54). With the technologized landscape acting as a portal into the mind, we begin to see James evolving into a being that, at first, stumbles into ethical confusion. He confronts Helen Remington, the woman with whom he had the car crash, unexpectedly at the police station car lot and realizes: "I had never spoken to this tired woman, and felt that I should launch into a formal apology for her husband's death and the appalling act of violence which had involved us. At the same time, her gloved hand on the scarred chrome aroused a feeling of sharp sexual excitement" (70-71). In this moment James's old self further begins to unravel. Upon seeing Helen, he feels the expected emotions of guilt and disgust that he should, given that his crash caused her husband's death. However, he quickly complicates this response when Helen's contact with the battered car titillates him and sexualizes this supposed grief.

This ethical confusion continues as the sexualization of violence becomes more dominant in James's mind. This deepening of sexualized violence occurs under the tutelage of Dr. Robert Vaughan, Ballard's high priest of the new sexuality. As James spends more time with Vaughan, he feels a complicated mixture of repulsion and attraction:

> What most disturbed me about Vaughan was the strange stance of his thighs and hips, almost as if he were trying to force his genitals through the instrument panel of the car. I watched his thighs contracting as he gazed through the camera, buttocks forcing themselves together. Without thinking, I was suddenly tempted to reach forward and take his penis in my hands, steer its head to the luminescent dials. (89)

James's senses are rapidly being deconstructed and reconstructed by the technology of his surroundings, causing him to experience opposing urges at exactly the same moment. This crisis of perception and feeling marks James as an emerging hybrid postmodern subject that is both coerced by his environment and aggressively responding to new stimulants without regard for former moral or ethical systems. His focus increasingly turns towards a dangerous technologized sexuality, concocting new pornographic postures without regard for others. These intense, violent pornographic urges and responses slowly emerge as the new ethical system that James and other crash victims in the novel soon discover and apply to their surroundings.

What makes James's desires dangerous, in part, is his inability to account for what he senses. James starts to discover a clue to his ethical and moral confusion once Vaughan exposes him to his collection of photo albums chronicling violently injured crash victims, including his own crash:

> I watched Vaughan close the album, wondering why I was unable to rouse myself into at least a parade of anger, remonstrate with him for this intrusion into my life. But Vaughan's detachment from any emotion or

> concern had already had its effect. Perhaps some latent homo-erotic
> element had been brought to the surface of my mind by his photographs of
> violence and sexuality. The deformed body of the crippled young woman,
> like the deformed bodies of the crashed automobiles, revealed the
> possibilities of an entirely new sexuality. Vaughan had articulated my
> needs for some positive response to my crash. (102)

Once again, James cannot commit to or believe in the "proper" logical response that he should have. His failure to locate any moral rage is part of this "new sexuality"—it is a new human system that has internalized the trauma of the technological landscape and its violence, and reshaped it into an alternative form of agency. James no longer needs the vicarious fantasies of his wife, for hard, rough contact is now the sustenance his psyche craves. The violent structure of this passion is possible because it supplants old modes of feeling that no longer bear any significance, resemblance, or relevance to the postmodern currents of Britain. James articulates this loss and reassignment of purpose to sexual desire as he finds himself again mesmerized by Vaughan's body: "I looked down at Vaughan's long thighs and hard buttocks. However carnal an act of sodomy with Vaughan would have seemed, the erotic dimension was absent. Yet this absence made a sexual act with Vaughan entirely possible" (102-103). The moral boundaries of James's world have evaporated, and here perhaps we have an explanation for the nervous tone of Jameson's concern for the perceptual equipment of the human subject. Normative moral systems and codes are a basic fabric that knits society together and holds our consciousness in place; yet, in this case, the laws of romantic love and attraction no longer apply. Like a violently impacted car spinning out of control, or, in more postmodern theoretical terms, like Jean Baudrillard's "evil demon of images"[105] rapidly multiplying beyond comprehension, James's carnal interest in Vaughan is possible

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[105] See Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images* (Sydney: The Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1987) 28-31; 33.

because it lacks traditional meaning and coherence. The sensate is hollowed out by a culture driven by violent technologies that obliterate the organic or human element. The greatest irony of this moment, however, is the realization that as Ballard's characters find freedom from traditional boundaries or codes, we become clearly aware that this mode of being seeks to destroy others in order to gratify itself.

What finally changes James into this violence-seeking subject is the powerful presence of the novel's master engineer of the car crash, Dr. Robert Vaughan himself. Vaughan's character is central to Ballard's dystopian critique of contemporary British life because he represents the warped new consciousness of the postmodern world with powerful negativity. Not surprisingly, Vaughan's warped mentality exists before his auto crash, with its roots lying in the media culture of information technologies:

> …this was Vaughan, Dr Robert Vaughan, a one-time computer specialist. As one of the first of the new-style TV scientists, Vaughan had combined a high degree of personal glamour—heavy black hair over a scarred face, an American combat jacket—with an aggressive lecture-theatre manner and complete conviction in his subject matter, the application of computerized techniques to the control of all international traffic systems. (63)

Like James's career in advertising, Vaughan exists in a hyperreal world early on where images and simulations take precedence over reality. He is "[l]iterate, ambitious and adept at self-publicity," and "was saved from being no more than a pushy careerist with a Ph.D. by a strain of naïve idealism, his strange vision of the automobile and its real role in our lives" (64). In this light, Ballard draws a subtle parallel between Vaughan and Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein: both men are dashing, upstart scientists that flaunt convention in the pursuit of a vision that will supposedly transform human experience. Both doctors are corrupted by "naïve idealism," and just as Frankenstein's psychology

disintegrates once his monster seeks vengeance and justice from him, Ballard quite

pointedly uses Vaughan's car crash to turn him into his own monster:

> The whiteness of his arms and chest, and the scars that marked his skin
> like my own, gave his body an unhealthy and metallic sheen, like the worn
> vinyl of the car interior. These apparently meaningless notches on his
> skin, like the gouges of a chisel, marked the sharp embrace of a collapsing
> passenger compartment, a cuneiform of the flesh formed by shattering
> instrument dials, fractured gear levers and parking-light switches.
> Together they described an exact language of pain and sensation,
> eroticism and desire. (90)

Unlike Shelley's duality, Vaughan's body resurrects as the monster with its mechanistic

hieroglyphics. Ballard emphasizes this connection as James notes, "A gallery of scars

marked his thorax and abdomen. His right nipple had been severed and re-sectioned

incorrectly, and was permanently erect" (149). Vaughan's obsession with technology

engineers his own monstrous presence, including the surgical failure that perversely

eroticizes the violence of his crash forever in his erect nipple. Vaughan will not,

however, serve as a moral warning to James as Dr. Frankenstein does to Robert Walton;

such a paradigm would resurrect an old, normative moral system. Instead, Vaughan will

become the vehicle that will consume James's psycho-sexual metamorphosis and rush

him into maniac development.

Vaughan is the example *par excellence* in the novel of the perverse possibilities

of Ballard's marriage of technology with desire and is thus the central figure of Ballard's

dystopian warning for contemporary Britain. As Vaughan haunts the expressways

around London, purposefully looking to create violence and destruction in order to arouse

himself, James begins to learn from his destructive techniques. Acting as the driver on

these violent rides, James serves as Vaughan's sexual Jeeves, finding him prostitutes in

the airport district for his motorized sex experiments. Vaughan's interest is not in the

romantic idea of women, but in how he can abuse their bodies in concert with the

landscape and moving cars:

> As we left London Airport, heading inwards towards the city on the fast access roads, his rhythm became faster, his hands under the girl's buttocks forcing her up and down as if some scanning device in his brain was increasingly agitated by the high office blocks. At the end of the orgasm he was almost standing behind me in the car, legs outstretched, head against the rear seat, hands propping up his own buttocks as he carried the girl on his hips. (144)

In his quest for violent stimulation, Vaughan carelessly enacts violence upon these

women: they become pliable objects indistinguishable from the other technological

detritus scattered alongside the road. As Vaughan photographs more violent wrecks he

gradually attempts to bend and orchestrate these prostitutes into stylized contortions of

pain: "Using their bodies, he recapitulated the deformed anatomies of vehicle crash

victims, gently bending he arms of these girls against their shoulders, pressing their knees

against his own chest, always curious to see their reactions" (145). Vaughan's

manipulation of women is the ultimate aestheticization of violence: his "gentle"

arrangements of body parts suggests that Vaughan sees himself as a kind of sculptor of

the real, but this care is loaded with irony. In his efforts to use these women to sculpt and

simulate acts of violence, as if they were artworks of roadkill, he commits and literalizes

mounting atrocities by brutalizing their bodies. In contrast to the formulations of theories

of simulation by the likes of Olalquiaga and Baudrillard, Ballard poses a challenge to

postmodern understandings of society. The real does not truly vanish into the copy, for

the simulations in *Crash* are ultimately and frighteningly broken by a renewed presence

of the real through graphic acts of violence.

Ballard uses his realist detail to stress the power of the violence this postmodern sexuality unleashes. Instead of continuing to pursue airport prostitutes, Vaughan heads into more intimate territory by selecting James's wife as his next sex target. At first, James guesses that Vaughan is using Catherine in the same way he uses the prostitutes: "I felt that this act was a ritual devoid of ordinary sexuality, a stylized encounter between two bodies which recapitulated their sense of motion and collision…Catherine seemed still only half aware of Vaughan, holding his penis in her left hand and sliding her fingers towards his anus as if performing an act divorced from all feeling" (161). Vaughan soon abandons his attempts at forcing Catherine into painful crash simulations, however, and uses her to tear into real pain:

> Catherine cried out, a gasp of pain cut off by Vaughan's strong hand across her mouth. He sat back with her legs across his hips, slapping her with one hand as the other forced his flaccid penis into her vagina. His face was clamped in an expression of anger and distress. Sweat poured from his neck and chest, soaking the waist-band of his trousers. The blows from his hand raised blunted weals on Catherine's arms and hips. Exhausted by Vaughan, Catherine hung to the rear seat behind his head. As his penis jerked emptily into her bruised vulva, Vaughan sank back against the seat. Already he had lost interest in the whimpering young woman pulling herself into her clothes. (163-64)

Vaughan's sexual violence ultimately defies simulation: despite all the signs of stylization and media-imagery copycat behaviors that abound in the novel, especially concerning Vaughan, this sex act no longer "masks and denatures a profound reality"[106] or "masks the absence of a profound reality"[107]—it fails to be any order of simulation. Even Catherine's reaction reveals that she has been forced to abandon her simulated sexual world of vicarious pleasure. Vaughan's brutal rape has shocked her back into the

[106] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 6.

[107] Baudrillard 6 (italics original).

real. Moreover, the detailed bruises of Catherine's body remap the real and force the

reader to reenter the disheveled state of the real world violently. The negative lyricism of

Ballard's language—the metallized skies and scapes of Britain—then, bears the strongest

irony in the novel: for underneath the descriptions of the media-saturated critiques of

Shepperton lies a traumatized Britain, dying upon the wastelands of the highways.

Given the intensity of Ballard's focus on this sexual violence, it hard to accept

Jean Baudrillard's reading of Ballard's sexuality. In his reading of *Crash*, Baudrillard

states that this world of new sexual appetites and entertainments becomes a new kind of

norm: "Everything is reversed. It is the Accident that gives form to life, it is the

Accident, the insane, that is *the sex of life.*"[108] This reversal describes the new moral and

ethical system that arises from the postmodern crash: Baudrillard sees the crash as a birth

of a new kind of world order and state of being. The birth metaphor is apt for

Baudrillard's reading, for he sees this new order and selfhood in a state of infancy, free of

guilt and wholly innocent. This innocence of meaning is apparent when he claims that

the accident "is the instigator of a new mode of *nonperverse* pleasure (contrary to the

author himself, who speaks in the introduction of a new perverse logic, one must resist

the *moral* temptation of reading *Crash* as perversion)…"[109]

Elena Lamberti acknowledges Baudrillard's amoral reading of the new

postmodern order established by the car crash. Citing Baudrillard's discussion of the

"Accident" when discussing Ballard's text and Cronenberg's film version of the novel,

she states,

From the very beginning, both Ballard and Cronenberg introduce their

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[108] Baudrillard 113 (italics original).

[109] Baudrillard 113 (italics original).

audience to a world which looks like their own but is instead ruled by a different order….Characters do not progress (or "regress") from good to evil because that border does not exist any longer: despite the urban, familiar setting, characters in *Crash* share a different psychology and move according to a different, perturbing order.[110]

Lamberti seemingly agrees all too easily with Baudrillard's reading of Ballard, rather than focusing on Ballard's text. She claims that the "fertilizing event" of the crash "opens new sensorial possibilities and new cognitive paradigms," enabling those who survive accidents to be "reborn to a new life and acquire a new body that is remodeled and reshaped through the crash itself."[111] The problem with this innocent view of the post-crash being or this optimistic vision of the new, post-crash self is that both stances patently ignore the egregious violence done to individuals, particularly women.

For this reason, we cannot ignore Ballard's wording of "perverse logic" or his use of "cautionary" when he describes his response to one of the first editorial reviews of *Crash*,[112] even though the crash indeed signifies a new mode of real experience and agency. Lamberti herself acknowledges that the realism of Ballard's text "disturbs" the audience because they realize the paradox of sensing themselves and their world in Ballard's (and Cronenberg's) text while confronting the "different 'psychology'" of Ballard's violence seekers.[113] But it is precisely this paradox that produces the irony of critique in Ballard's novel. Ballard's dry tone and realist depictions of pornographic violence are inescapable to the reader, and thus create a moral framework in the text. If

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[110] Elena Lamberti, "*Crash* by J. G. Ballard and D. Cronenberg: Prosthetic Bodies and Collective Psychopathologies," *Textus: English Studies in Italy* Vol. XIII No. 1 (2000): 176.

[111] Lamberti 178.

[112] After being told, "The author of this book is beyond psychiatric help," Ballard stated, "To me this meant total artistic success. Actually, even I was rather startled when I saw the proofs. But the pornography was used for serious purposes—cautionary purposes." See Martin Amis, "J. G. Ballard," 81.

[113] Lamberti 176.

we follow Baudrillard's order to read *Crash* as "nonperverse," it robs the text of its very

intended dystopian meaning, since dystopian fictions by nature offer their readers moral

or ethical warnings about fast-approaching threats. Baudrillard's and Lamberti's

readings of *Crash* attempt to enforce the consciousness of the thrill-seeking characters

onto the reader without regard for the cautionary tone and the use of pornography in the

novel; they see *Crash* as simply an exploration in postmodern theory that experiments

with reassignments of meaning. To read *Crash* as nonperversion, however, is a dream of

the postmodern theorist's imagination where consequences do not matter. In Ballard's

realist concern for the present, moral consequences *do* matter.

III. The Failure of Critique?

Alongside Ballard's warning concerning misogynist violence, the most poignant

moral consequence of *Crash* appears most explicitly—and disturbingly—in the final

action of the narrator, James Ballard. The early ethical and moral confusion registered by

James evaporates entirely by the novel's end, after he witnesses Catherine's rape: "I saw

the interior of the motor-car as a kaleidoscope of illuminated pieces of the bodies of

women" (171). James perceives the violence and the fragmentation of the subject, but no

longer interprets this status with concern. The kaleidoscope imagery suggests a

beautification of sorts; a mesmerizing coruscation of violent dismemberment that

becomes a source of energy. He fully sheds any traces of his past self as he

acknowledges the success of Vaughan's seduction: "As obsessed with his hard body as

he himself was with the bodies of automobiles, I found myself locked into a system of

beckoning violence and excitement, made up of the motorway and traffic jams, the cars

we stole and Vaughan's discharging sexuality" (173). James's full immersion into

Vaughan's nightmare world of violence is realized as James engages in violent sex with

one of Vaughan's groupies, Gabrielle:

> As I embraced Gabrielle I visualized, as Vaughan had taught me, the accidents that might involve the famous and beautiful, the wounds upon which erotic fantasies might be erected…In these fantasies I was able at last to visualize those deaths and injuries I had always feared. I visualized my wife injured in a high-impact collision, her mouth and face destroyed, and a new and exciting orifice opened in her perineum by the splintering steering column, neither vagina nor rectum, an orifice we could dress with all our deepest affections. I visualized the injuries of film actresses and television personalities, whose bodies would flower into dozens of auxiliary orifices, points of sexual conjunction with their audiences formed by the swerving technology of the automobile. I visualized the body of my own mother, at various stages of her life, injured in a succession of accidents, fitted with orifices of ever greater abstraction and ingenuity, so that my incest with her might become more and more cerebral, allowing me at last to come to terms with her embraces and postures. I visualized the fantasies of contented paedophiliacs, hiring the deformed bodies of children injured in crashes, assuaging and irrigating their wounds with their own scarred genital organs, of elderly pederasts easing their tongues into the simulated anuses of colostomized juveniles. (179-180)

This lengthy passage arguably is the most revolting in *Crash*. It signals not only James's

complete absorption in a world that celebrates death and violence, but also intimates

powerfully the death of the narrative itself. We can perhaps make clear sense of

Ballard's self-named protagonist here. Elena Lamberti sees this self-naming as revealing

> the border between outer and inner self…that cannot be taken for granted. Also, it is a choice, which complicates the reader's approach to the narrative, as Ballard ambiguously places himself (and his reader) simultaneously inside and outside the story. Aloofness and involvement continuously blur, and horror and fascination overlap in the reader's psyche; Ballard does not guide his readers towards a clear choice, but instead opens up paths of ambiguity that readers must experiment for themselves. Therefore, to name the major character after himself becomes a way to fully embrace the exploration, to fully share the risk, which necessarily follows the investigation of yet unexplored psychological

boundaries.[114]

While Lamberti is right to suggest that this act of self-naming uncomfortably involves the reader in James's and Ballard's journey, Ballard does not leave his reader in any state of ambiguity. On the contrary, in James's perverse pursuits of incest, pedophilia, and disturbing orifices created by violent crashes, it is possible to conclude that Ballard does not so much as share this "journey" with James but rather surrenders narrative control as his alter-ego narrator becomes the new dark angel of Britain.

In this possible act of surrender—or, rather, narrative takeover—Ballard reveals the real horror of the novel. With James free to realize and actualize his perversions on the streets of Britain, the very act of critique itself is called into question. Even though obvious Juvenalian disgust and irony[115] are present in James's projected desires, we are purposefully left in the hands of a fully transformed madman[116] who intends to continue Vaughan's practice of destruction and misogyny. Ballard signals this transformation with James's fatal conclusion to the novel: "Already I knew that I was designing the elements of my own car-crash" (224). The negative, hard-edged realism of Ballard's language ultimately suggests the inadequacy of his own satire or irony[117] to contain the graphic

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[114] Lamberti 177.

[115] This irony is present when Ballard describes James's visualization of the "new and exciting orifice opened in [Catherine's] perineum by the splintering steering column, neither vagina nor rectum, an orifice *we could dress with all our deepest affections*" (179; italics added).

[116] Francesca Guidotti claims, "Unlike some of Ballard's other books, here the narrator is constantly reliable and cooperative; however, we would often prefer that it weren't so, that he proved to be a deceptive observer—a madman or a liar—in order to avoid sharing his uneasy perspective and refuse any identification with him." Ballard's James is indeed open and honest with the reader, but it is precisely this honesty that makes him more troubling than an unreliable narrator. He openly tells us what he has done and what he intends to do, and his final list of sexual desires easily reveals how he has succeeded Vaughan as the presiding sexual madman of the highways. See Guidotti 81-82.

[117] Interestingly, Ballard acknowledges the possible failure of critique in *Crash* when discussing some reader responses: "All these French *Crash*-freaks used to come out here to see me, expecting a miasma of

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violence being unleashed on the streets of Britain. Thus, it is no surprise that the final

image we are left with is one of James as a negative road warrior, presiding over a

traumatized society dying upon the wastelands of the highways.

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child-molestation and drug abuse. What they found was a suburban house full of kids and their friends,
with a big dog, and me writing a short story in the middle of it all." Despite his self-proclaimed cautionary
use of pornography, Ballard's anecdote suggests how readers fail to grasp the satiric intent of the novel and,
worse, like Vaughan and James, find excitement in the violence and pornography that is intended to shock
and incite disgust. For the anecdote, see Martin Amis, "J. G. Ballard," 77.

Chapter 2: Can Britain Be Saved?:
Menippean Satire and Violence in Martin Amis's *Dead Babies*

J. G. Ballard is not the only author to understand the early 1970s as a unique,

dystopian moment in British history. For Martin Amis, the early Seventies unleashed a

barrage of problems for Britain. The economic inflation of the Seventies forever put an

end to the freewheeling days of swinging sixties life, and the growing youth culture

movement of which he was a part began its devolution from free love utopianism to

agitated social protest and drug-induced violence. In a 2001 interview with Andrew

Pulver, Amis alludes to the OPEC Oil Embargo of 1973 as the changing moment in

postwar British life:

> It was pre-feminist, pre-inflation…The ideas and the culture of the late
> 1960s and early 1970s were the culture and ideas you get when there is
> prosperity. You could live for 10 shillings a week in London; then
> suddenly there was inflation and a cup of tea cost 10 shillings, a bus fare
> cost 10 shillings. That had an incredibly sobering effect on everyone,
> which we see to this day: yuppiedom was born then."[118]

Accompanying this economic chaos in Britain was a brand new culture of violence and

social unrest. Enoch Powell's infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech set the tone for racial

tensions to fester well into the Seventies, while the rise of militant left-wing protest

groups throughout Britain and Europe (e.g., Angry Brigade, IRA, Baader-Meinhof Gang)

inaugurated a culture of political violence that blighted everyday life. Reflecting on this

period of history, Amis acknowledges the controlling intensity of such radical politics:

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[118] Andrew Pulver, "You Lying Hippies," 23 January 2001, *The Guardian,* Web, 30 March 2010.

"It's also strange to think how left it was: how left-wing, how politicized the culture was."[119] Perhaps the most damning consequence of this politicized culture for Amis was the ironic conversion of hippie flower power to violent protest and murder. Noting the left-wing willingness to embrace violence and the hippie seer-cum-psychopathic figures like Charles Manson, Amis states: "But there was always this edge to hippiedom: the 'Pigs out!' edge, the blood of Sharon Tate on the bedroom wall."[120] This edge of violence defines the dystopian impulse underriding Britain's transition into the 1970s and beyond.

This sudden alteration of society from political and personal optimism to dystopian violence, where "the wild ideas—political and pharmaceutical—that were going around then had to be dispensed with as leisure-class fripperies,"[121] lies at the heart of Amis's second novel, *Dead Babies* (1975). Like Ballard's *Crash*, *Dead Babies* channels this strange postmodern concoction of urban decay, political unrest, and aggressive socio-sexual experimentation into a new form of dystopia overtaking Britain. And like *Crash*, Amis's novel explores the boundaries of social realism and critique in order to articulate a very present warning about the state of Britain—both in terms of the British novel and the fate of British society. Interestingly, this question of realism and representation features prominently for Ballard and Amis in the 1970s. During a 1978 symposium hosted by the *New Review* on the future of the novel, Ballard and Amis argue over the nature of realism in the British novel, a realism that they have wrestled with in their fictions portraying the chaos of the early Seventies. Despite the clear designs of

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[119] Pulver, "You Lying Hippies."

[120] Pulver, "You Lying Hippies."

[121] Pulver, "You Lying Hippies."

social realism in *Crash*, Ballard declares that "imaginative fiction" has returned and put

"a welcome end to moralizing" in the novel. He adds, "By contrast, realist fiction seems

finally to have run out of gas…It has its place, like portraiture, in a sense a branch of the

applied arts. But I believe in a fiction of the liberated and untrammeled imagination,

nothing to do with the sort of thing you put in a frame on a piano."[122] Amis's

contribution to the debate is a more accurate index of both his and Ballard's novel: "If I

try very hard, I can imagine a novel that is as tricksy, as alienated and as writerly as those

of, say, Robbe-Grillet while also providing the staid satisfactions of pace, plot and

humour with which we associate, say, Jane Austen. In a way, I imagine that this is what I

myself am trying to do."[123] This fusion of the imaginative and the realist precisely

describes the kind of unique social realism that we witness in *Crash* and *Dead Babies*: it

is a style capable of representing the bizarre contours of postmodern society (the violent

sexual and social perversions of space, objects, and beings) in a language directly related

to a recognizable social moment, ultimately achieving a dystopian fiction of the now.

In this chapter, I will discuss how Amis uses *Dead Babies* as a text not only to

build upon the new designs of realism and morality laid out by Ballard in *Crash* but also

as a companion text to attempt to address the excessively graphic sexual violence so

openly unleashed by Ballard's novel. James Diedrick is one of the very few critics to

note in some detail the artistic debt that Amis's early fiction owes to Ballard's early

fiction.[124] In particular, Diedrick argues that *Dead Babies* takes much of its concern for

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[122] "The State of Fiction: A Symposium," *New Review* 5.1 (Summer 1978): 18-19.

[123] "The State of Fiction," 18.

[124] In contrast, Gavin Keulks argues convincingly in *Father and Son: Kingsley Amis, Martin Amis, and the British Novel Since 1950* that *Dead Babies* challenges the conventional novelistic structure and satire of

expressing the warped inner worlds of its characters from Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962) and *Crash*. He notes that "Amis's detailed but distanced treatment of the grotesque extremes of sex and violence in *Dead Babies* calls to mind the clinical narrative viewpoint Ballard adopts in *Crash*,"[125] and that *Dead Babies* is "clearly determined to match Ballard's unflinching depictions of sexual perversity and violence."[126] However, I do not see Amis's treatment as "distanced," nor is he merely matching Ballardian sexual excess. *Dead Babies* embraces sexual excess and disgust just as intimately as *Crash*, but Amis appears more eager to use such close encounters to attempt a "moralizing" critique of the very moral open-endedness of postmodern society causing such graphic perversity. Amis accomplishes this moralizing critique in two ways. Firstly, he applies the theoretical framework of Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the Enlightenment to his novel to establish *Dead Babies* as a Frankfurt School attack on postmodern culture.[127] Secondly, and perhaps more importantly than his appropriation of Adorno and Horkheimer's reading of postmodern society, I will show how he uses graphic sexual violence in *Dead Babies* to critique Deleuze and Guattari's reading of sexual desire in *Anti-Oedipus* as a weapon to counter the fascist undertones affecting postmodern society. This theoretical engagement represents a key difference in Amis's attempt to rewrite the concerns of *Crash*.

Kingsley Amis's *Ending Up* (1974). See Keulks, *Father and Son: Kingsley Amis, Martin Amis, and the British Novel Since 1950* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

[125] James Diedrick, "J. G. Ballard's 'Inner Space' and the Early Fiction of Martin Amis," *Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond*, ed. Gavin Keulks (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006) 187-88.

[126] Diedrick, "'Inner Space'," 189.

[127] James Diedrick discusses *Dead Babies* as the "fictional counterpart" to Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in terms of *Dead Babies*'s satirical portrayal of postmodernity. See Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (Second edition. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004) 17.

I. *Dead Babies***: Rewriting** *Crash*

In 1973, while working as a book reviewer for *The Observer*, Martin Amis

reviewed Ballard's newest shocker, *Crash*, a novel that built upon the scatological disgust

Ballard unleashed on the British literary scene with *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970). Amis

is quick to note the novel's sibling relationship to *The Atrocity Exhibition*, specifically its

preoccupation with and continued development of the theme of perversion: "*Crash*

doesn't pontificate; here Ballard isn't out to rationalize but to actualize, to show us the

perversion from the inside. And this particular perversion needs all the actualizing it can

get: beside it, Joyce's penchant for excrement and Burroughs's interest in scaffolds seem

sadly unliberated, almost quaint."[128] Amis rightly understands Ballard's appropriation of

perverse sexuality not as "gloating [or] priapic,"[129] but rather as a vehicle for registering

the "chilling isolation of the psychopath."[130] For Amis, this perversity is the satirical tool

that Ballard employs to present Dr. Robert Vaughan, and later James Ballard (the

narrator), as distorted creatures of the realist, postmodern landscape of consumer Britain.

For all this acknowledgment, though, Amis pans *Crash* as a failed novel:

> …*Crash* remains heavily flawed: loose construction, a perfunctory way
> with minor characters, and a lot of risible overwriting make it hard not to
> see the book as just an exercise in vicious whimsy. True, the novelist
> must take from life what he can use rather than what he dare print; but Mr.
> Ballard's obsessions are too one-colour and too solemnly redeployed to
> sustain a whole book. In science fiction Ballard had a tight framework for
> his unnerving ideas; out on the lunatic fringe, he can only flail and
> shout."[131]

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[128] Martin Amis, "Auto-perversion: *Crash* by J. G. Ballard; *War* by J. M. G. le Clezlo," *The Observer*, 1 July 1973: 33.

[129] Amis, "Auto-perversion," 33.

[130] Amis, "Auto-perversion," 33.

[131] Amis, "Auto-perversion," 33.

What is interesting about Amis's critique of *Crash* is that much of what he says is directly applicable to his second novel, *Dead Babies*—a similarly scatological satire obsessed with perverse sexuality. The characters of Appleseed Rectory are somewhat quickly drawn (though possess more memorable traits and characteristics than Ballard's characters), lack a certain depth, and can be regarded as paper thin, despite their entertaining Dickensian dimensions,[132] and the redundancy of the group's violent sexual escapades and extravagant drug consumption easily tires the impatient reader.

Amis's condemnation of *Crash*, however, reveals a crucial key to deciphering what Julian Barnes has called the "concentrated disgust which *Dead Babies* contains."[133] More than a mere book review, Amis's brief essay establishes the perfect vantage point from which to analyze his own efforts to make sense of the postmodern culture of perversion that Ballard diagnosed as Britain's ailment of the 1970s. Amis's most revealing insight about *Crash* is his notation that Ballard's novel lacks the "tight framework"[134] of science fiction; that it shows the author "out on the lunatic fringe"[135]— which is, perhaps, one way of making sense of Ballard's bizarre experiment with dystopian imagery and themes in an imaginative, social realist form. Given this commentary, it appears that *Crash* made a powerful impact on Amis, enough for him to construct the raunchy satire in *Dead Babies* as the more legitimate sibling to *Crash* than its actual fictional family members, *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High-Rise* (1975). Like Ballard, Amis desires to expose British decline during this infamous decade of unrest,

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[132] John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (New York: Methuen, 1985) 17.

[133] Barnes's remark appears as part of the book jacket commentary of the first Vintage International paperback edition of *Dead Babies* (1991).

[134] Amis, "Auto-perversion," 33.

[135] Amis, "Auto-perversion," 33.

and the supposed "failure" of Ballard's fiction in Amis's eyes serves up the perfect challenge for his second novel. I will argue that Amis's combination of Menippean satire[136] and the country-house novel represents a more conservative, strategic attempt to expose, reprimand, and contain the graphic obscenity of Britain's postmodern culture. The frightening lack of closure with which Ballard leaves us at the end of *Crash* seems to declare that traditional forms of critique used to handling scabrous material, mainly Juvenalian modes of satire and irony, are outdated and not up to the task of post-atomic, post-war cultural violence. Amis's corrective goal in *Dead Babies* is, therefore, to attempt the Herculean feat of designing a new kind of satire that will be able to represent and handle such lethal filth without losing control of the very represented material. Ultimately, I will suggest that while Amis provides more successful moments of satirizing the Ballardian sexual psychopathology that plagues postmodern culture, he fails to develop fully a particularly postmodern satire of containment. *Dead Babies* thus leaves Britain in a more volatile state than Ballard's *Crash*: in the hands of Amis's Vaughan-like monster, Johnny, who is alive and actively seeking more victims to abuse and torture at the novel's end. Amis, then, uses this novel to problematize further the mode of traditional satire that Ballard's *Crash* seems clearly to signal, while suggesting the need for a new critical mode to address Britain's socio-sexual demise.

II. Amis's Appleseed Rectory:
The Country-house Tradition and the Collapse of Satiric Distance

Dead Babies tells the story of the obscene and rowdy partying of six British

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[136] Amis's interest in the Menippean form dates to 1973, when he reviewed Philip Roth's *The Breast* and declared it to be Roth's "second attempt at Menippean satire—and his second emphatic dud—in a row" (from *The Observer*, 25 March 1973, p. 36). Roth's first Menippean "dud" was *The Great American Novel*.

characters (Quentin, Celia, Andy, Diana, Giles, and Keith) and Quentin's three visiting American friends (Marvell, Skip, and Roxeanne). Quentin Villiers, the squire-esque master of the novel's country house, Appleseed Rectory, invites his American friends to join him in the English countryside for a weekend of excessive drug use and sexual experimentation. Quentin's counterpart, Andy Adorno, who terrorizes various members of the household and disciplines the surrounding area with his penchant for violence, is the focal point for much of Amis's sexual satire. The satire darkens, however, once the reader discovers that Quentin's shadowy double, named Johnny, slowly sets in motion a series of wicked pranks on the others, culminating in his extermination of his supposed friends in a final act of murderous madness.

The nature of Amis's satire in the telling and portrayal of this violence is of paramount importance. Amis clearly identifies *Dead Babies* as a Menippean satire by quoting from Menippus at the novel's outset: "…and so even when [the satirist] presents a vision of the future, his business is not prophecy; just as his subject is not tomorrow…it is today."[137] Amis's epigraph is notable for two important reasons. This banner serves to identify the novel as a blatant, purposeful experiment in the Menippean form, which reveals Amis's awareness that the Menippea may be the only satiric form capable of addressing the kind of scabrous violence unleashed by Ballard's *Crash* and found throughout *Dead Babies*. Secondly, Amis's quotation of Menippus stresses at the outset the importance of present-day realism: it seeks to overturn the classic notion that satires, in this case dystopian satires, deal only in near futures with the suggestion of present-day concern buried within. It is an emphatic statement that forces the reader to confront *Dead*

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[137] Martin Amis, *Dead Babies* (New York: Vintage International, 1991) I (ellipses and brackets original). All other references to the novel will be cited parenthetically.

Babies as a vision of the now, and not some distant Orwellian nightmare that we may avoid.

In the history of satire, the Menippean form that Amis appropriates has been variously debated. Indeed, theories of satire represent perhaps one of the most contentious and unresolved debates on literary form. While much ink has been spilt on other debatable matters of the novel (e.g., narrative voice, character formation, and the level of depth regarding psychology and interiority—all of which tend to serve as markers of the successful novel for literary theorists and historians), evolving theories of satire seem to elude literary critics and theorists. Satire is often regarded as merely a "mode" or "procedure,"[138] and, as Dustin Griffin shows, little illuminating critical work has been done on satire and its function in the novel since the heyday of the Yale and Chicago critics of the 1950s and 1960s.[139] The criticism deriving from this period and from more recent studies (e.g., Frank Seidel's *Satiric Inheritance: Rabelais to Sterne* [1979], and Frank Palmeri's *Satire in Narrative: Petronius, Swift, Gibbon, Melville, and Pynchon* [1990]) tends to address a host of familiar satiric voices, ranging from Juvenal, Horace, and Lucian to Pope, Swift, Sterne, and Thomas Pynchon, but it usually fails to come to grips with a particularly elusive form of satire that is often the most agreeable to the structure of the postmodern novel—the Menippean satire. In fact, Griffin argues that

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[138] Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994) 4.

[139] In *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (1994), Dustin Griffin argues that recent critics of satire—Michael Seidel, Frank Palmeri, and John Snyder—have not successfully moved beyond the paradigms mapped by earlier seminal critics, such as Northrop Frye, Alvin Kernan, and Mikhail Bakhtin. Furthermore, it should be noted that Seidel, Palmeri, and Snyder all base their studies on combinations of classical, Renaissance, and eighteenth-century writers from England and Europe (e.g., Petronius, Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift, Sterne) and nineteenth- and twentieth-century American writers (e.g., Twain, Melville, Pynchon), thus ignoring the rich body of twentieth-century British fiction. See Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994) 28-34.

the Menippean form rarely receives any special attention whatsoever:

> Overshadowed by the formal verse satirists, the long Menippean tradition in satire has attracted very little critical attention. Menippean writers—Lucian, Apuleius, Petronius, More, Erasmus, Rabelais, Burton, Fontenelle, and others—have always been studied for their individual achievement and have sometimes been seen as precursors of Swift. But few attempts have been made to integrate their tradition with that of formal verse satire or even to account for the special features of the Menippean genre.[140]

The Menippean form is crucial for our understanding of *Dead Babies* precisely for the special features that it contains. Northrop Frye defines the Menippea as a "satire [that] deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes. Pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approach to life as distinct from their social behavior."[141] Mikhail Bakhtin notes a similar focus of the Menippea, but he stresses the importance of realistic detail: "The organic combination of philosophical dialog, lofty symbolism, fantastic adventure and underworld naturalism is a remarkable characteristic of the Menippea."[142] James Diedrick acknowledges that *Dead Babies* is almost encyclopedic in its cataloging of Menippean characteristics, and rightly singles out the philosophical tendencies of the Enlightenment as the main philosophical idea that the novel targets.[143] Noting both the central allusion to Quentin's reading of *Rameau's Nephew* and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* via Andy Adorno's name, Diedrick argues that the Enlightenment tendency towards dominance underpins Amis's characters' destructive actions and thus implies the central

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[140] Griffin 31.

[141] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 309.

[142] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. R. William Rotsel (Ann Arbor: Ardis Press, 1973) 94.

[143] See James Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, 2004, 40-44.

intellectual focus of Amis's Menippean satire: "In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (Andy's namesake) argue that 'Enlightenment is totalitarian,' since the 'reason' it enshrined provided the means for dominating nature and other men, masking that domination under the rubric of scientific rationalism."[144]

However, one key feature of Amis's curious Menippean design has not received sufficient discussion—one that affects the nature of his satire. The realistic setting of Amis's novel is the ironically named Appleseed Rectory, a clear designation that we are inhabiting the naturalistic and symbolic world of the British country-house genre. Both Diedrick and Neil Powell have acknowledged the country house as a source of parody in *Dead Babies*. Diedrick defines this parody as "a perverse variant on the British genre of the country-house weekend novel made popular by P. G. Wodehouse,"[145] while Neil Powell locates the source of the parody differently: "The book is full of literary and other allusions: a novel of Iris Murdoch's is mentioned, reminding us that his enclosed country-house plot is a development or a perversion of a typically Murdochian world…"[146] While both assessments are informative, neither critic fully explains the significance of this parody or its relationship to the satire in the novel.

I would like to suggest that Amis's use of the country-house genre extends far beyond the influence of P. G. Wodehouse or Iris Murdoch and is meant to be more than just a parody of these authors' fictional worlds. Northrop Frye contends that the Menippean satire is a form that "can be either entirely fantastic or entirely moral," adding

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[144] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, 2004, 45. I will return to a discussion of Diedrick's use of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* later in the chapter.

[145] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, 2004, 40.

[146] Neil Powell, "What Life Is: The Novels of Martin Amis," *PN Review*, June 1981, 43.

that the "purely moral type is a serious vision of society as a single intellectual pattern, in other words a Utopia."[147] *Dead Babies* presents such a serious vision of society, but one that is clearly dystopian in both ideas and setting. Frye elaborates further that Menippean satires that expand beyond the traditional dialogue or colloquy format and even the symposium format are usually found in a "modern development [that] produces the country-house weekends in Peacock, Huxley, and their imitators in which the opinions and ideas and cultural interests expressed are as important as the love-making."[148] Amis, who attended seminars by Frye during his time at Oxford between 1968-1971,[149] appears keenly aware of Frye's theory of the Menippea that combines the satire of philosophical ideas with the country-house tradition. The specific importance of the country-house genre lies in its historical combination of expressing a "utopian longing for a good place" that often served as a site for "inspiring" the imagination of poets in the seventeenth century.[150] Kari McBride goes further to define the country house as a "symbol of good housekeeping: a moral economy wherein all classes and all peoples lived in right relationship with each other and with the rest of creation,"[151] a definition that stresses the moral component of the country house. The country house as an age-old symbol of an ordered, right-minded Britain, then, is crucial to Amis's plans in *Dead Babies*. More than just a parody of the weekend novel of manners and fueled by the socio-sexual disgust

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[147] Frye 310.

[148] Frye 310-11.

[149] Brian Finney, *Martin Amis* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 6.

[150] Paul Goetsch, "The English Country-House Novel, 1914-1945: From Ford to Waugh," *Klassiker und Strömungen des englischen Romans im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Vera and Ansgar Nunning (Trier: WVT, 2000) 16; 22.

[151] Kari McBride, *Country House Discourse in Early Modern England: A Cultural Study of Landscape and Legitimacy* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001) 1.

raised by Ballard's *Crash*, *Dead Babies* represents an incredibly purposeful and precise test of the limits of traditional satire itself. By appropriating the country-house genre, Amis tests the critical distance once afforded to writers who could launch their critiques of Britain from a safe literal and symbolic space.

This test of the genre and satire is apparent in Amis's housing his wretched characters in the country house of Appleseed Rectory. Brian Finney claims that the ironic naming of the house signals Amis's intent "on dissociating himself from the ethos and lifestyles of a generation which had allowed flower power to go to seed (hence Appleseed Rectory)."[152] A more convincing meaning for the house's name lies in Amis's deeper understanding of the country-house tradition in British literature. Appleseed Rectory is a clear allusion to Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" (1650-52), one of the classic country-house poems of seventeenth-century England.[153] "Upon Appleton House" is a significant allusion for Amis, because in the poem Amis finds a counterpart to his own age of social turmoil. This allusive parallel will establish clearly the ideological pattern of Amis's Menippean satire.

Marvell uses the country-house setting to articulate a vision of social stability amidst the cultural and political turmoil tormenting his England, the English Civil War. In the poem, Marvell uses the country home of Fairfax, the one-time general commander of the Parliamentary army, to present us with an image of political and moral stability in an England in the midst of instability. He praises well-proportioned grounds and architecture as a mirror reflection of the humility of its occupant:

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[152] Finney 39.

[153] Neil Powell very briefly notes the importance of Andrew Marvell's significance in the novel, but identifies Marvell's "The Garden" as a source of inspiration for Amis's naming of the Marvell Buzhardt character.

> But all things are composed here
> Like Nature, orderly and near:
> In which we the dimensions find
> Of that more sober age and mind
> …
> Humility alone designs
> Those short but admirable lines,
> By which, ungirt and unconstrained,
> Things greater are in less contained. (lines 25-28; 41-44)[154]

This humble, well-formed moral character stands in stark opposition to the religious and political chaos of the Civil War that has turned England's nature against itself:

> Let others tell the paradox,
> How eels now bellow in the ox;
> How horses at their tails do kick,
> Turned as they hang to leeches quick;
> How boats can over bridges sail;
> And fishes do the stables scale.
> How salmons trespassing are found;
> And pikes are taken in the pound. (lines 473-480)

Marvell's solution to this chaos is the Protestant heroism represented by Fairfax and his forefathers. This heroism appears in two ways. Firstly, Marvell shows that Fairfax's grandfather rescues his future wife, Isabel Thwaites, from Appleton House, then an abbey. The abbey represents a Catholic prison where "walls restrain the world without,/But hedge [Thwaites's and the other women's] liberty about" (lines 99-100). Secondly, in contrast to Anglican corruption and social chaos, Marvell builds on this heroism by articulating the Protestant right-mindedness of Fairfax himself:

> He would respect
> Religion, but not right neglect:
> For first religion taught him right,
> And dazzled not but cleared his sight. (lines 225-228)

Fairfax's faith and rational sight signal a sound moral and ethical foundation—one not corrupted by the "dazzling" effects of Anglican ceremony. Such foundation flows from

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[154] Andrew Marvell, *The Complete Poems*, trans. Elizabeth Story Donno (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

Fairfax's character into the grounds of the house:

> For he did, with his utmost skill,
> Ambition weed, but conscience till—
> Conscience, that heaven-nursed plant,
> Which most our earthly gardens want. (lines 353-56)

Thus, despite the nightmares unfolding around Appleton House, Marvell uses the country house to create a literary framework that affords the poet critical distance from his object of critique, which ultimately provides us with a moral system that can not only withstand the social, religious, and political chaos of England but also act as a panacea to restore nature, both in terms of the natural world and the English character, to a healthy balance.

Amis's Appleseed Rectory fails to provide any such moral balm. In fact, Amis uses this Marvellian allusion to describe a new moral system that has come to dominate postmodern British culture. In contrast to Marvell, Amis uses the country-house setting of *Dead Babies* to reassess the satiric function of the country house. This focus on setting, or the "scene of satire,"[155] as critical distance is historically crucial to formal satire, as Alvin Kernan notes in *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (particularly his chapter "A Theory of Satire"). In Kernan's view, setting foregrounds the targets of the satirist, establishes the map that the satirist's narrative will take, and usually contains the "deformed faces of depravity, stupidity, greed, venality, ignorance, and maliciousness"[156] that illustrate the verbal weaponry that the satirist typically employs. His paradigm, however, interestingly rests on a distinction between the country and the

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[155] Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) 7.

[156] Kernan 7.

city. After describing the "disorderly and crowded"[157] scene of most satire, he states: "It is no accident that most satire is set in the city, particularly in the metropolis with a polyglot people."[158] Extending this frame of satire's function, he argues that "[s]omehow the satirist seems always to come from a world of pastoral innocence and kindness: he is the prophet come down from the hills to the cities of the plain; the gawky farm-boy, shepherd, or plowman come to the big city; or the scholar, nurtured at the university, abroad in the cruel world."[159]

Amis appropriates Appleton House to truncate and deconstruct the critical distance typically afforded by formal satire and the country-house structure. Amis's country house refuses to place the satirist at a controlling distance from his subject and does not offer him any safe haven by maintaining a binary of inner versus outer space (whether that be inside versus outside the walls of Appleton House or Kernan's country versus city binary). This loss of distance enables Amis to announce the arrival of the new morality of postmodern Britain. A passage from Amis's first novel, *The Rachel Papers* (1973), provides valuable insight into how this reversal works. In *The Rachel Papers*, the first-person narrator, nineteen-year-old Charles Highway, serves as both the main object of satire and as the speaker of Amis's satirical commentary.[160] In a scene where Charles dines with two of his father's friends, Charles is asked by one of them, Sir Herbert, to settle a debate about contemporary youth—specifically, if the unconventionality of youth

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[157] Kernan 7.

[158] Kernan 8.

[159] Kernan 18.

[160] James Diedrick describes this double-voicing technique as Amis's employment of Bakhtin's theory of "skaz"—a technique that Amis develops further in his fifth novel, *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984). See Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

is nothing more than "a different sort of *conventionality*" (italics original).[161] Charles's

reply is telling:

> 'I couldn't agree more, Sir Herbert, though I confess I've never looked at it from quite that angle. It occurs to me that the analogy can be taken further—moral issues, for example. The so-called new philosophy, "permissiveness" if you like, seen from the right perspective, is only a new puritanism, whereby you're accused of being repressed or unenlightened if you happen to object to infidelity, promiscuity, and so on. You're not *allowed* to mind anything any more, and so you end up denying your instincts again—moderate possessiveness, say, or moral scrupulousness— just as the puritans would have you deny the opposite instincts.' (italics original)[162]

Through Charles, Amis articulates an ironic puritanism. Instead of the Protestant-Puritan

morality praised by Marvell in "Upon Appleton House"—a religious code that Marvell

sees as true liberty in opposition to royalist Anglicanism—Amis identifies the free love

philosophy of the sexual revolution as the new expression of liberty for the postmodern

age. This is liberty at its most radical, with no codes or rules imposed upon society.

This late Sixties/early Seventies socio-sexual philosophy of anything goes is the

main intellectual issue targeted by Amis's Menippean satire. James Diedrick hints at this

target when noting, "*Dead Babies* is about the violence and brutality that is unleashed,

even partly produced, by an age of ostensible social liberation."[163] The sexual politics of

the free love era represent radical progressive thought, a kind of progression that Diedrick

sees as an extension of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's analysis of

Enlightenment as totalitarian:

> *Dialectic of Enlightenment* argues that the 'reason' enshrined during the

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[161] Martin Amis, *The Rachel Papers* (New York: Vintage International, 1991) 130.

[162] Amis, *The Rachel Papers*, 130-31.

[163] James Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis, First Edition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) 10.

> Enlightenment as a force of liberation from superstition, as an agent of human mastery over the world of contingency, is a reductive *form* of reason, a *discourse* that is itself enslaving. Since Enlightenment 'reason' takes a specific, Eurocentric incarnation of consciousness, of thinking, as the norm, it is also racist and imperialist, seeking to impose its standards and practices onto all regions of the world."[164]

Diedrick forgets to add the most important feature of this totalitarian form of reason—its *sexist* nature. This mixture of mastery and misogyny, which spins out of control in *Crash*, becomes the ironic moral system of Amis's postmodern chapel. The opening of chapter five, entitled "Appleseed Rectory," presents us with this "new morality":

> Are we presenting characters and scenes that are somehow fanciful, tendentious, supererogatory? Not at all. Quite the contrary. The reverse is the case. By the standards that here obtain Giles and Keith could be dismissed as pathetically introverted, Quentin and Andy as complacent and somewhat fastidious, and Celia and Diana as sadly, even quaintly, inhibited. The household, indeed, considers itself a fortress for the old pieties, a stout anachronism, a bastion of the values it seems to us so notably to lack. (16-17)

The countryside setting and house's name recall Marvell's work and aesthetic, but the irony of this positioning is readily apparent. Given that Giles, Keith, Quentin, Andy, Celia, and Diana are all satirized for their copious drug use, pornography addiction, sexual promiscuity, sexual violence, and alcoholism throughout the novel, the countryside and rectory no longer signal a truly English safe haven from which the poet or satirist can operate. With the country house now invaded by the very kind of social chaos to which it should be immune, the object of satire stands to overwhelm both satirist and reader alike.

Amis begins to explore the problematic position of satire in the novel by emphasizing setting. Similar to Ballard's *Crash*, *Dead Babies* contains signs of postmodern stylistics: authorial interventions, narrative reflexivity, lack of closure, and

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[164] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, 1995, 10 (italics original).

the like.[165] However, like Ballard, Amis invests his novel with significant social realist

structures to present a more pressing image of British decline in postmodern culture. In

one of the newest studies of Martin Amis's fiction, *Father & Son: Kingsley Amis, Martin*

Amis, and the British Novel Since 1950, Gavin Keulks incorrectly claims that setting has

almost nothing to do with Amis's satire in the novel:

> To Martin, place is simply irrelevant: Appleseed Rectory, for instance, is
> barely examined, as are the grounds. Instead, his emphasis is personal and
> solipsistic, not social and communal. Inhabiting painfully solitary
> existences, finding no release in their use of sex or drugs, the characters
> reflect Martin's deterministic views of the amorality and disconnection of
> postmodern life.[166]

While Amis does indeed spend much time attacking the vices of the Appleseeders by

detailing their personal abuses of sex and drugs, the novel is, on the contrary, largely

concerned with place and the communal welfare of Britain's emerging youth culture. In

fact, Amis's narrator emphasizes a detailed description of place almost immediately at

the novel's outset, stressing its tangibility:

> These are the six that answer to our purposes, and we have taken them on
> ahead a small distance in time to Appleseed Rectory, a three-story
> structure which stands in the outskirts of the Hertfordshire village of
> Gladmoor. Gladmoor is still a village. It has survived the northern thrust
> of the London suburbs partly because of its inconvenient remoteness from
> the main intercity highways and partly because of its taxing proximity to
> the Luton Airport approach routes. Gladmoor has been conserved too,
> perhaps, by its *capacity to astonish*: straying down the one gray-brick
> road, seeing the wonky Edwardian streetlamps, the warped and splintery
> sign over the coach house, the great oaks which bend back toward the
> hills, visitors find it hard to expunge the sense of unreality, of suspension,
> which even the drumming aircraft cannot break, an aura of peace and

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[165] For general characteristics of postmodern fiction, see Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism*
(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

[166] Keulks 141.

sweetness almost as *palpable as the integrity of stone*." (19; my emphasis)

Far from "barely examin[ing]"[167] place and setting, Amis goes to pains to establish the country-house setting here in order to create a social realist image of the very Britain that will crumble in the novel. Amis delineates this setting carefully in order to dramatize Britain's demise in a far different manner from the hard realism of Ballard's city streets. The Edwardian or even Victorian visages of Britain's countryside represent a calming safety zone in contrast both to Ballard's version of Britain and satire theory's traditional dichotomy of country and city space. The palpability of this setting is thus important for Amis to show how the moral evils of postmodern culture and its psycho-sexual pathology (as represented by the Appleseeders) are omnipresent and infectious to all areas of British life, not just the Ballardian techno-scapes of the highways. Neither nostalgia for a mythic past nor the concreteness of its residue in the present will provide relief for character or satirist.

Amis debunks the dwindling sensation of this typically pure, utopian setting of Gladmoor immediately by the "bank of flowerless rhododendrons" (45) that litter the garden of Appleseed Rectory—a clear, realist detail that symbolizes the death and fatigue that lie inside this supposedly quaint town.[168] However, Amis moves beyond such simple satirical sketches to elaborate on the designs of Appleseed Rectory. The house appears amidst this setting in order for Amis to deconstruct the traditional distances of satire. The house's "off-white brick" and "monochrome" (20) features give it an almost ethereal

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[167] Keulks 141.

[168] Such detail reinforces Amis's interest in place in reference to Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," where healthy gardens abound.

quality: "It [the house] was exceptionally narrow, windowless at either end, and seen from the road it would sometimes melt back to a bodiless shimmer" (20). Amis ironically uses the detail of the house to articulate a process of erasure: both the social boundaries of British cultural space and the artistic traditions of the social realist country-house novel are purposefully called into question. Appleseed Rectory as "*a place of shifting outlines and imploded vacuums*" (20; italics original) functions as more than just an embodiment of its inhabitants' warped, solipsistic senses. The collapsing landscape warns us that Amis's concern here is not just the lurking dangers of the social liberation and drug culture of the novel and its characters' troubled, psychic worlds, but also the "outlines" of representation and very framework that hold the fabric of formal satire together.[169]

When Quentin and Celia discuss Quentin's soon-to-be-arriving American friends, Amis makes this concern over representation and genre more explicit:

> "I think I'll make them a cooked breakfast," said Celia.
> "A cooked breakfast? A 'cooked' *breakfast?* My sweet, sometimes you are too deliciously *outré*. Eating a cooked breakfast—it would be like going to bed in pajamas, or reading an English novel."
> "Darling, you're not to tease me." (10; italics original)

This parody of provincial, country-house novel humor provides an obvious postmodern self-referential critique of the novel and the dissolution of boundaries more largely. Quentin's sophisticated joke echoes the postmodern "death of the novel" cry quite familiar during this decade of deconstructionist criticism, but the joke also signifies Amis's own artistic aim for *Dead Babies*: to use the trappings of the country-house genre

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[169] Amis elaborates on and identifies his concern for the changes in novel form and genre in a 1985 interview with John Haffenden: "Among the many mysterious processes under way in this century is a breakdown of genre so that comic novels can take on quite rugged stuff…comedy is a much looser form that it once was." The same could easily be said for Amis's treatment of satire in *Dead Babies*. See John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Metheun, 1985) 19.

against itself. The action of *Dead Babies* proves that we are not in the world of a proper English novel, and that that kind of novel, and the British legacy it embodies, is no longer sufficient to handle the contours of postmodern life.

Amis purposefully includes rich descriptions of the grounds of Appleseed Rectory to illustrate the postmodern perversion of this once-utopian space. After sexually abusing Lucy Littlejohn during Friday night's opening of the Appleseeders' weekend of debauchery, Andy Adorno encounters the vampiric, sex-obsessed American, Roxeanne: "Andy snapped his fingers, jabbed one of them at her, and spun around. 'Right,' he said, starting down the stairs again, 'let's fuck'" (100). Instead of jumping right into a scene of scabrous sexuality as Amis frequently does in *Dead Babies*, he carefully chooses to set up this sexual encounter between the violent Adorno and the equally wicked Roxeanne by juxtaposing the country-house setting with its characters' attitudes:

> They hardly noticed the premonitory sheen over the horizon, the soft moisture in the air, the bluish grass that ran away from them to the garden wall, the low moon.
>
> "I'm going to fuck you," Andy pursued, making for the gate to the neighboring field, "and, kid, I'm talking about really *fucking* you, till you think you're gonna fall apart right down the middle. Baby," he said, "I'm gonna fuck you till you die. You're never gonna be fucked like you're gonna be fucked tonight. *Christ*, am I gonna fuck you. Kid, I tell you, you're in big trouble, cos the way I'm gonna lay it on you's gonna be…" (101; italics original)

The combination of Adorno's attitude with Amis's detailed idyllic setting signals a powerful sense of irony. While the field behind the house may be suggestive of Mellors's garden and the love-making that takes place there between he and Connie Chatterley, Amis seems to relish in debasing the outlines of a Lawrentian moment. What follows is a moment of controlled satire, where Andy's impotence mocks his sexual

aggression. Perhaps more interesting, though, is the sense of violence and fatigue in this juxtaposition. The peacefulness of the countryside is almost murdered by Andy's angry taunts of "fucks" (seven total), and yet this repetition of "fucks" and "gonna" instill a powerful air of fatigue and boredom in the moment. While the characters are clearly horrible, the setting attracts more interest—it is Amis's warning flag to indicate the failure of a genre, the collapse of satiric distance, and the end of a truly *English* humanism.[170] With critical distance thus eroded, Amis sets the stage to test the limits of formal satire by examining the ironically liberated sexuality of the Appleseeders.

III. The Iconography of Desire:
Sexual Desire as Fascist Violence and the Failure of Critique

Andy Adorno, Amis's most aggressively violent misogynist in *Dead Babies*, is an obvious signifier of Theodor Adorno's Culture Industry come to fruition—of the living presence of the Enlightenment's tendency to dominate others. However, despite Amis's open allusion to Adorno and Horkheimer's assessment of this problematic force in postwar Western societies, the real theoretical tenet with which Amis takes issue seems to be Deleuze and Guattari's argument about the political power of desire in such totalitarian social systems. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge the Frankfurt School reading of a postwar Western world where the seeds of fascism, dominance and control, have escaped historical, Nazi-era fascism and infected the

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[170] This use of country house or Lawrentian setting juxtapositions as objects of satire is hardly an anomaly in Amis's fictional aims. Both James Diedrick and I have noted that Amis's fiction betrays an interesting dialogic relationship with the work of D. H. Lawrence and his championing of idealized sexuality. In *Understanding Martin Amis*, Diedrick discusses at length a similar moment of Amis's parody of Lawrentian lyricism in *London Fields*. See James Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004) 25-26.

controlling capitalisms of the West. Indeed, Michel Foucault states that the most

important adversary encountered in *Anti-Oedipus* is fascism:

> the major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism…And not only
> historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini—which was able to
> mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively—but also the
> fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism
> that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and
> exploits us.[171]

When Foucault asks, "How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one

believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts,

our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism?",[172] the answer we find in Deleuze and Guattari

is desire: "If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how

small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society…desire is

revolutionary in its essence—desire, not left-wing holidays!—and no society can tolerate

a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy

being compromised."[173]   Sexual desire emanates liberating potential; it is dynamite to the

methods of control and subjugation of social, political, and religious governance. For

Deleuze and Guattari, desire is the ultimate agency of change that cannot be

compromised: "Desire does not 'want' revolution, it is revolutionary in its own right, as

thought involuntary, by wanting what it wants."[174]

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[171] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) xiii.

[172] Deleuze and Guattari xiii.

[173] Deleuze and Guattari 116.

[174] Deleuze and Guattari 116.

This conception of desire is not new to discussions of dystopian thought, however. Before *Anti-Oedipus* framed desire as a weapon against controlling systems, George Orwell established such a position in British literature in *1984* by arguing that desire is perhaps the only tool that individuals possess to combat totalitarian systems, whether in political practice or simple thought. Through the famous interaction of Winston Smith and Julia, Orwell presents us with a vision of a sexual desire that ignites the spirit of the individual and thus remains a psychic territory that cannot be claimed. Winston states as much when he claims that it is not love that he cares about, but the unfettered, unabashed *act* of desire: "That was above all what he wanted to hear. Not merely the love of one person, but the *animal instinct*, the simple undifferentiated desire: that was the force that would tear the Party to pieces" (italics added).[175] Desire appears free of ideological control for Orwell; it is a chaotic, unpredictable impulse of the self that cannot be tamed. This is why Winston and Julia's "embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act."[176] Desire is political not because it offers a new vision or system for living, but simply because it is an energetic action that is totally free.

Amis directly challenges this conception of desire through the variety of sexual actions that take place in *Dead Babies*. Interestingly, one key moment in the novel that targets desire does not feature our Frankfurt School representative, Andy Adorno, as a prime actor: it singles out Andrew Marvell's ironic namesake, Marvell Buzhardt, who argues with Quentin about the meaning of sex. When Marvell claims that the sexual liberation movement of the Seventies "separated emotion and sex" (122), Quentin offers

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[175] George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Plume, 1983) 111.

[176] Orwell 112.

marriage as proof that sex can remain emotional. Marvell, speaking as a disciple of

Ballardian postmodern culture, argues that the nature of desire has changed irrevocably:

> "But look—it can't be done, man. Forget it. The iconography of desire's
> too pervasive now. The minute you're…the minute that you're fucking
> Celia here and you start to think about something else—some model or
> screen actress that's on every billboard and magazine you look at"—he
> snapped his fingers—"you'll know that's true. You'll know it." (123)

In continuing his use of the allusion to Marvell's country-house aesthetics to break down

the function of satire, Amis uses Marvell's speech to articulate the impact of

postmodernism on desire. Contrary to Orwell's and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of

desire, Amis sees desire as something easily infected by power systems, not as something

volatile that can disrupt them. The capitalist world of mass advertisement is a new

insidious force that infiltrates the psyche and manipulates the "animal instinct" of desire

in ways unknown to the individual. Instead of acting free of controlling systems, the self

now performs a desire sanctioned by the controlling forces of market capitalism. Amis

makes it clear in an interview with Susan Morrison that desire is merely another human

element co-opted by the mediating forces of postmodern culture:

> It's part of a genuine idea about modern life—that it's so mediated that
> authentic experience is much harder to find. Authentic everything is much
> harder to find. In all sorts of behavior, even in the sack, we're thinking,
> 'How does this measure up? How will this look?' We've all got this idea
> of what it should be like—from movies, from pornography. I'm interested
> in two extremes. The first is the idea that the earth moves, this great union
> is formed, and the self is lost. That comes from D.H. Lawrence and
> Romantic poetry and is what we all devoutly hope for. The other extreme
> is sort of athletic—the hot lay, where the self is in fact not lost in the
> moment but is *masterful and dominant*. And that comes at us from
> another direction—from advertising and pornography and trash fiction
> (italics added).[177]

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[177] Susan Morrison, "The Wit and Fury of Martin Amis." *Rolling Stone*, 17 May 1990, 101.

Marvell's understanding of desire, which is freely practiced throughout the novel by the Appleseeders, illustrates the "hot lay"—a sexual desire that is patently fascist. What is additionally important about Amis's view of the fascist takeover of desire is that it acts as simulacra—it feeds off of its own mediated impulse. No genuine sexual desire can exist for Amis; rather, the performance of this desire aims always to reproduce force-fed notions of sex created by the marketing mechanisms of the capitalist state.

We see the overwhelming presence of fascist, narcissistic desire through a variety of misogynist acts in the novel. Amis immediately critiques the myth of sexual liberation by noting that "sexual tension" and subsequent expression does not emanate from characters like Quentin and Andy "so much as a mutual, agreed narcissism" (15). This desire to be masterful is put into practice most viciously by Andy. Upon learning that Lucy, one of his early girlfriends and soon-to-be Appleseeder weekend housemate, works as a call girl with friends, Andy immediately turns mock-pimp and forces prostitution on Lucy by making her have sex with his friends:

> Andy's pranking continued just as engagingly when term started at London that September, though his visits became rarer and much less virulent. Once a fortnight or so, he and his friends would club together for the necessary £20 (it was Andy who insisted on this token, not Lucy) and roll round to Pont Street for some laughs. Customarily Lucy would do an elaborate strip for them, masturbate some of them, go to bed with one or two perhaps, and ask for a few minutes with Andy. Lucy seemed to have entered into the spirit of things by this time; she cried every now and then when Andy made love to her personally, alone, but on the whole she was resigned to the status Andy kept insisting was her true one. (29)

Andy's "pranking" is his mock play at the pimp-prostitute relationship—a scenario made all the more fascist by Andy orchestrating personal comic enjoyment from Lucy's debasement. The silencing of Lucy into a "status Andy insists is her true one" represents ultimate sexual control for Andy, with him as master and Lucy as powerless object.

Later during the weekend hijinks of the Appleseeders, Andy even returns to rape for routine dominance of Lucy when Amis implies that Andy forcefully sodomizes her (99).

Even the supposed loving marriage of Quentin and Celia conceals a dynamic of dominant male desire and subjugated female status. As the weekend unfolds on Friday morning, we witness an idyllic nuptial scene of Quentin lying with Celia in bed. After waking Celia, gazing "with reverence at her breasts" (4), and exchanging "I love yous" with her, Quentin's romance turns quietly menacing: "After a few minutes Quentin rolled over onto his back. Celia's brown-maned head disappeared in its slow sacramental journey down his chest. Then, with an expression of exaggerated calm, Quentin turned to gaze at the ceiling as she wettened his stomach with her tears" (4). Amis codes this sex act with the threat of implied violence, with Celia's crying signaling that she performs fellatio against her will for fear of Quentin's response. In fact, as Diana lays in bed in the room next door listening to "Celia's yodels of appreciation increase[ing] in volume and frequency" (4), she soon notes that the "noises from the other room became more jarred and ambiguous" (4). The scene ends with Amis making it clear that what at first seemed like a session of Lawrentiana ends as a display of violent pornography: "It was *always* a frightening, rather inhuman sound, Diana thought" (4; italics added). What is worse, we are informed that such sexual aggression is just as routine for Celia as it is for Lucy.

This culture of violent narcissism infects the larger ethos of the counter-cultural youth that Amis targets, and leads to Amis's larger critique of political violence in the novel. Through *Dead Babies*'s bizarre activist group, The Conceptualists, Amis attempts to articulate the problem of critique moving to action (a kind of praxis of satire) during the revolutionary activism of the post-May '68 generation—a generation inspired by

thinkers like Adorno, Marcuse, Foucault, and Deleuze. The Conceptualists echo a variety

of militant, leftist organizations of the sixties and Seventies quite familiar to Amis:

Britain's Angry Brigade, West Germany's Kommune I and the infamous Baader-

Meinhof Gang (a.k.a. the Rote Armee Fraktion), Italy's Red Brigades, and the United

States's Weathermen Underground. The Conceptualist's intellectually based name and

the "precision and arbitrariness" (88) of their activity also suggests the intellectual

terrorism practiced by the Lettrist/Situationist movements of the 1950s and 1960s by

mimicking the artistic activism that aimed to disrupt the order of capitalist society.[178]

Amis's Conceptualists seemingly embody a variety of these groups' characteristics, most

notably the combination of intellectualism (a fact Amis comically notes by stating that

one of the qualifications for Conceptualist membership is "a humanities degree" [89])

and random, yet coordinated violence.

However, in many ways, the Conceptualists should be named the Ballard-

Meinhof Gang because Amis goes to descriptive lengths to present an anatomy of

disgusting Conceptualist "Gestures" (the name given to the group's attacks) that

obviously echo the perversions of Ballard's characters in *Crash*. When the Appleseeders

take their American friends to the Psychologic Revue for evening fun, Andy thinks he

has spotted Conceptualists in the audience and states that they are "the only ones to have

really made something out of what technology has done to sex and violence" (88). Such

an ethos pours from the pages of *Crash*. Indeed, Amis's catalog of Conceptualist

Gestures mimics the new sexuality that James Ballard embraces at the end of *Crash* when

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[178] The most obvious, famous example of such a coordinated, yet surprise "attack" critique of society occurred with the Lettrist (an early radical group that merged to create Situationist International in 1957) intervention of the Easter Sunday service at Notre Dame Cathedral on 9 April 1950, when Lettrist members, dressed as monks, delivered an anti-sermon proclaiming the death of God in the middle of the service.

Ballard the author lists a stream of perverse, violent sexual desires, which defy moral boundaries, that James wishes to pursue at the novel's close.[179] Amis's Conceptualists commit acts of violence that are random and aim to terrorize social order: they scalp "lowly civil servants…in their beds" (88); sever the Achilles' tendons of "doctors, health inspectors, social workers, charity secretaries, and Salvation Army officials" (89); spoon out eyes of "hardware shop owners" (89); stage "perverse sexual scenarios…a stylized car crash, the impacted instrument panels of either vehicle stained with semen" (89);[180] kidnap a surgeon and force him to "perform strange anal surgery on a masked patient" (89); and, most shocking of all but echoing the pedophiliac desires of Ballard's protagonist at the end of *Crash*, leave "an eighteen-month-old girl…in a ditch with severe genital injuries" (89). The point of Amis's encyclopedic presentation of Gestures is to expose the problem of revolutionary theory meeting praxis. During an era of intense social, political, sexual, and economic unrest, Amis argues that the practitioners of radical theory immediately transform the utopian impulse of such social critique into a dystopian nightmare. In attempting to disrupt "the fascism in us all,"[181] activists against social power structures repeat the very violence they claim to combat.

Mark Seem argues that Deleuze and Guattari, in particular, want a theory to end the mindless, destructive conformity of society: "Such a set of beliefs, Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate, such a herd instinct, is based on the desire to be led, the desire to have someone else legislate life. The very desire that was brought so glaringly into focus in Europe with Hitler, Mussolini, and fascism; the desire that is still at work, making us

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[179] This passage from *Crash* is discussed at the end of my first chapter.

[180] This is, of course, a blatant allusion to Ballard's *Crash*.

[181] Foucault in Deleuze and Guattari xiii.

all sick, today."[182] However, Amis's Conceptualists do not produce such liberation; they

merely signal an utter shattering of social fabric. With "their icy efficiency" (89), they

ironically parallel the well-documented exactitude of Nazi cruelty. The Conceptualists

do not use violence to establish an order (as the Nazis did), though. For Amis, the

Conceptualists are a perverse spin on Foucault's reading of *Anti-Oedipus* as a "book of

ethics" [183] that avoids a totalizing philosophy by being "informed by the seemingly

abstract notions of multiplicities."[184] Amis's Conceptualists are ironic agents of

multiplicity: they are an independent, scattered force that strikes unpredictably, but in

their effort to disrupt perceived dystopian social organization and control, they create a

new form of terror that offends and destroys for the mere sake of doing so. In other

words, their use of violence ultimately symbolizes a failure of social critique, of enacting

a satire on social problems or corruption. Recalling Adorno and Horkheimer's reading of

the Enlightenment and its applicability to modern culture, Amis's vision of the new left,

while not necessarily attempting to dominate in the manner of the Enlightenment, still

unleashes a "triumphant calamity."[185]

IV. From Satire to Anxiety

As illustrated thus far, *Dead Babies* does offer a semblance of effective satire in

its critique of violent sexuality and misguided revolutionary groups, even while such

moments of critique also allude to the very failure of achieving larger social critique. The

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[182] Seem in Deleuze and Guattari xvi.

[183] Foucault in Deleuze and Guattari xiii.

[184] Foucault in Deleuze and Guattari xii.

[185] Adorno and Horkheimer 1.

failure of Amis's own Menippean satire, however, becomes more apparent as we delve deeper into the Ballardian, postmodern sexual perversions of Appleseed Rectory that Amis attempts to rectify. Amis's previous sexual satire, his first novel *The Rachel Papers*, contains moments of crude sexual excess, but the novel appears more as a comic *bildungsroman* than a serious investigation into dystopian cultural depravity. With Ballard's *Crash* as Amis's guide, portions of *Dead Babies* become experimental attempts to handle the same shocking, volatile material that plagued Ballard's vision of Britain. James Diedrick suggests that such experimental moments in *Dead Babies* do not successfully qualify as satire because of the "uncertain control of tone at crucial moments."[186] Neil Powell builds on this concern, stating "there are passages where the ironist's or satirist's *distancing* fails entirely."[187] Powell's concern is interesting because it clearly bears the marks of a critic applying old theories of satire to a new kind of fiction grappling with a new cultural condition. Moreover, Powell's criticism fails to acknowledge that this technique of "distancing" is precisely the key feature of traditional satire that both Ballard and Amis see as inadequate to deal with the excessive perversion unleashed by the altered moral boundaries of postmodernity.

Powell does not offer examples to illustrate his concern, but there is an encyclopedic variety of scatological excess in *Dead Babies* to consider this issue of satire, tone, and control. For example, a more identifiable moment of the satirist's control of tone and distancing can be seen in Andy Adorno's aggressive sexual encounter with Roxeanne:

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[186] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, 1995, 37.

[187] Powell 44 (italics added).

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> [Andy] turned around and sneered sexily at Roxeanne, whose hair lay undisturbed by the warm wind. Our excellent Adorno was wondering whether to slap her about a bit first, or rip her T-dress off, or kick her legs out from underneath her—something casual like that—but suddenly Roxeanne skipped backward and in one double-armed action had pulled off her nightdress and was naked. (101)

The narrator intrudes in the middle of Andy's violent sexual musings and uses irony to distance the reader from Andy's thoughts and actions. "Our excellent Adorno" signals the irony, for the reader is well aware that Andy's brutal desires, as well as his general misogyny, racism, and propensity for violence, which are well documented throughout the novel, hardly make him a likeable character. Amis strengthens the irony by having the narrator mimic Andy's slang: "casual" is used as a phrase by Andy several times in the novel to express his easy acceptance of violence, drug use, and aggressive sexuality, but the narrator's tone here reverses that meaning to mock Andy's sexist behavior.

In other key moments in the novel, however, Amis's satirical attitude towards Andy clearly loses its focus. The vicious misogyny often demonstrated by Andy has more to do with Amis's literary anxiety of influence than feminist critique. We are reminded throughout the novel that Andy derives his violent, aggressive attitude towards life from contemporary American fiction. When Andy first meets Lucy Littlejohn, he spends "eight weeks talk[ing] to Lucy about politics and the American novel…" (26), and later on we learn that Andy forcefully informs the headmistress of Holland Park Comprehensive that "he would study nothing but the Modern American Novel…" (180). Andy's penchant for modern American fiction refers to the some of the key contemporary American novelists Amis was reviewing at the time of writing *Dead Babies*, writers such as William Burroughs, Norman Mailer, and Philip Roth whose

works of the sixties and early Seventies often featured male-centered sexual exploits and made a deep impression on Amis.[188]

In particular, Amis singles out Mailer as a source of contention when dealing with Andy. Once Andy discovers Lucy's call-girl routine, he begins to treat her as a prostitute in curious terms: "[he] led the tearful, bewildered Lucy upstairs, made sarcastic love to her ('I think I Mailered her, actually—up her bum'), slapped her about a bit, and stalked off, leaving his unopened pay packet on the dressing table" (29). Andy appears again the next night, this time with Quentin, and forces Lucy "at fistpoint" (29) to have sex with Quentin. Amis then adds: "Lucy was then required to perform fellatio on Andy, who from time to time offered to knock her fucking head off whether she swallowed it or not..." (29). James Diedrick argues that "When Andy Adorno justifies his sexual abuse of a woman by mimicking Norman Mailer at his most misogynistic…the words are monstrously at odds with the moral content of Andy's actions. In this passage parody drives a wedge between Andy's thoughts and those of the author and reader."[189] The problem with this reading of parody is that the satirical critique remains blatantly patriarchal: the subversive move here has more to do with Amis upstaging Mailer's macho egoism and resolving his anxiety of influence than subverting the image of male

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[188] Amis acknowledges the influence of such writers as Roth and Mailer on his early work in his introduction to *The War Against Cliché*. See Martin Amis, *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews, 1971-2000* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001) xv.

[189] James Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, 1995, 16. Interestingly, in Diedrick's second edition of *Understanding Martin Amis* (2004), he leaves out this reading of Andy's "Mailered" violence when discussing Amis's use of parody and satire.

misogyny. Parody does not alter the image of Lucy's body as the silent stage where images of male cruelty can be reproduced and ridiculed.[190]

Similarly, Amis pays special attention to the American Dr. Marvell Buzhardt, who symbolizes a dangerously freewheeling counter-cultural revolutionary of the postmodern age. Marvell represents the absolute moral nadir of the novel—a character whose crass scientific rationalism produces a destruction of spirituality:

> Look—fuck—we're agreed that life is a rat's ass and that it's no fun being yourself all the time. So why not do with your brain what you do with your body? *Fuck* all this dead babies about love, understanding, compassion—*use* drugs to kind of...cushion the consciousness, guide it, protect it, stimulate it….We have chemical authority over the psyche—so let's use it, and have a *good* time. (44; italics original)

A postgraduate at Columbia University and the author of *The Mind Lab*, Marvell champions an ideology that argues for the use of scientific progress in the most narcissistic way: the consumption of chemicals to achieve the greatest attainment of personal satisfaction regardless of the social consequences (here, the destruction of the core values that promote community: love, understanding, compassion).[191] In fact, Marvell's ideology ultimately strives for the elimination of thought. He wants the brain leveled with the body, opting for an atavistic, instinctual gratification rather than intellectual consideration and prudence. Such a stance makes Marvell, in the words of

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[190] James Miracky makes a similar argument when analyzing the representation of women in Amis's *Money*. When comparing Margaret Drabble's *The Radiant Way* and Amis's *Money*, Miracky states: "By virtue of its ideological stance as well as its subject matter, *The Radiant Way* can be considered a feminist novel in its critique of the patriarchal political and social forces of Tory-led Britain…In contrast, although *Money* lampoons the masculinist desires of the consumerist 1980s to a disparaging extreme, *it never fully escapes its own critique*. In making its protagonist a sympathetic character who apparently cannot help himself, *the novel seems to revel in the greed and misogyny it mocks…*" (Miracky 137; italics added). See James Miracky, "Hope Lost or Hyped Lust? Gendered Representations of 1980s Britain in Margaret Drabble's *The Radiant Way* and Martin Amis's *Money*," *Critique* 44.2 (Winter 2003).

[191] Not surprisingly, the healing values of love, understanding, and compassion that Amis lists here in the midst of his waste land somewhat echo the very values that T. S. Eliot presents as alternatives in "What the Thunder Said" at the ending of *The Waste Land*: Give ("Datta," l. 401), Sympathize ("Dayadhvam," l. 411), and Control ("Damyata," l. 418).

James Diedrick, the de Sade of the late twentieth century.[192] The cynicism of Amis's satire in this passage (assisted by the constant reminder of the irony present in Marvell's name, the allusion to Andrew Marvell) makes the foolishness of Marvell's stance obvious. Marvell's "science" represents the very reason why Horkheimer and Adorno condemned the Enlightenment: the development of a progressive reason that ironically has been used to dominate and enslave others.

Amis's Marvell has a more immediate analog than de Sade, however. Marvell's doctoral status, his philosophy, and his crude explorations into sexual perversity make him Amis's direct counterpart to Ballard's PhD-wielding, mad TV-scientist, Dr. Robert Vaughan from *Crash*. Both characters, through different methods, apply technological advances to the human body in such perverse ways in order to achieve some sort of new level of sexual ecstasy and mastery. Amis's approach to dealing with such a character is markedly different, though. Diedrick concludes that Marvell "is a late-twentieth-century embodiment of the same presumptuous and reductive rationalism that satire has traditionally opposed,"[193] which is equally applicable to the destructive behavior exhibited by Ballard's Vaughan. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Ballard's method of critique in *Crash* is noticeably looser and lacking in formal satirical techniques. Amis, on the other hand, does have moments where he goes to pains to execute some sense of controlled satire. For example, Marvell's description of a sex bar in California reads like something out of Ballard's *Crash*, with a noticeable difference:

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[192] James Diedrick discusses this connection to de Sade by noting that Marvell "echoes another representative of the eighteenth century, one who has gained a certain currency in the twentieth: the Marquis de Sade." In line with Horkheimer and Adorno's thinking, Diedrick claims that de Sade's "celebration of perversity was not a rejection of Enlightenment values so much as a dark variant of Enlightenment mastery over nature." See Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, 2004, 42.

[193] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, 2004, 43.

> Marvell snorted a nostrilful of blood onto the grass, wiped his nose with the back of his hand, and laughed drunkenly.
>
> "Heard about the Body Bar in Santa Barbara? No? Hell of a fuckin' place. The waiters and waitresses are nude, natch—and you get fucked there for the cover charge. But you hear the gimmicks? You can have *cunt cubes* in your drinks. I mean it. And not just flavored with cunt. Real juice in the cubes. They got...yeah, they got tit soda, cock cocktails, pit popsicles...Oh yeah, and ice cream that tastes of ass. Hell of a place."
>
> Marvell snorted a nostrilful of blood onto the grass. He wiped his nose with the back of his hand. He laughed drunkenly. (154-5; italics original)

Marvell's description teems with scabrous and pornographic energy. However, the passage reveals a moment where Amis is not necessarily complicitous in the portrayal of nastiness he so carefully describes. Amis uses simple self-parody in this passage to achieve satirical distancing. In her discussion of parody, Margaret Rose states that one of the key distinguishing features of parody for a reader to recognize are "Changes in tense, persons, or other 'sentence-grammatical' features"[194]—a signal clearly present in Amis's passage. Amis brackets Marvell's description of the body bar with a purposefully vile characterization of his bodily gestures. This simple mimicry of Amis's own text manipulates the grammatical structure (he replaces his use of commas in the first portrait of Marvell with periods in the second) to emphasize Marvell's corrupt nature and thus to undermine his view of sexuality. Furthermore, this parody adds symbolic meaning to the chapter title for this scene, "Hell of a place." Marvell uses this phrase to celebrate the vast sexual options and openness of the sex club, but the parody that subverts his enthusiasm reveals a double meaning that the club and Marvell's attitude in general represent a hell of destructive sexual degeneration for Amis.

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[194] Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, Post-modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 37.

But there are moments in *Dead Babies* where the issue of satirical distance is more complex. In particular, the "new morality" of Appleseed Rectory is put to the test when Roxeanne engages Keith in sex. Keith, the dwarfish, obese, comically disgusting fool of the household, cannot satisfy his sexual urges because of his obvious unattractiveness. However, the sexually undiscriminating Roxeanne agrees to have sex with Keith, as a way to prepare him to be raped by Marvell and Skip, and he enters a nightmare when she practices a variety of pornographic moves on him:

> *She walk fast into room, turn, take off shirt, slip down she jeans, no pants, take she breast in she hand. On bed. "Come here." He go, he kneel, she mouth over he lip. She push he back on bed, climb up front of he to kneel across he shoulder, grip he ear to press to she pubis. Straddle he lap then. Undo he shirt, skinny down he trousers next. He sit up sudden take off he boot, she lick he back and she lick he under arm. He lie down she climb onto he again for tug he hair, drive sheself up he face. She swivel full circle, bend forward. She draw he genital into she mouth and gimmick she perineum to he face so good. She urinate some. She climb down he body so lick he thigh. She get she finger, grind it to it root up he anus. He defecate some. She press she nail into he hip, drag breast up he leg, feed on his penis. He head stretch back in long silent scream.* (168-169; italics original)

The sudden use of italics and broken syntax add a quickness to Amis's prose that differentiates it from the prose of the rest of the novel, suggesting a kind of fast-forward cinematic flash of pornography. One possible reading of this intense pornography—probably the most scabrous in the novel—is that Amis's style purposefully debunks any attempt at depicting a normal encounter of quaint bourgeois romance. Keith foolishly hopes for just such a romantic encounter before he enters the bedroom with Roxeanne: "On the last flight [Keith] experienced a rush of sheer gratitude; he wanted to stop, to take her in his arms, to kiss her at length and with soft languor, and return in silence to his friends" (168). Such a reading is possible given that James Diedrick has noted

Amis's use of parody in *Dead Babies* to satirize the misguided romantic longings Keith harbors in a house of pornography.[195]

However, Diedrick also notes "Parody adopts a style in order to reverse its affective intent."[196] He argues that Amis frequently uses subcategories of Bakhtinian double-voiced speech (parody, stylization, and skaz) in his fiction[197] to present a character's attitude or behavior in one voice while satirizing the attitude or behavior in another voice. This double-voiced approach to parody mirrors Linda Hutcheon's view of postmodern parody: "parody is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies."[198] Hutcheon claims further that the complicity the author engages in does not detract from the critique, stating that postmodern parody "may indeed be complicitous with the values it inscribes as well as subverts, but the subversion is still there."[199] Amis's presentation of Keith's bedroom encounter with Roxeanne, which attempts to equal moments of Ballardian excess in *Crash*, copies hardcore pornography to exacting, nauseating detail, but it does little to suggest critique through subversion or mockery.[200] This attempt at pornographic parody merely produces ambivalence in Amis's satire, a factor that Margaret Rose argues occurs when satire and parody work together: "While parody is in general a much more ambivalent form than

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[195] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, 2004, 24.

[196] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, 2004, 24.

[197] This double-voiced speech technique appears most often in Amis's first-person satires, where Amis uses his main character both to dramatize a behavior or attitude while at the same time undermining it. His most obvious examples are Charles Highway in *The Rachel Papers* and John Self in *Money*. See Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (2004), for a full discussion.

[198] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 101.

[199] Hutcheon 106.

[200] Given Amis's clear dialogue with *Crash* throughout *Dead Babies*, the appropriation of pornographic excess in this scene perhaps suggests only the anxiety of influence with which Amis is wrestling.

satire, in that it makes its 'target' a part of its own work, when parody has been used in satire it has usually given the latter some of the ambivalence characteristic of parody, and helped to make new and multi-layered works of art from the process of satiric reduction."[201] In Amis's case, the open ambivalence that accompanies his handling of this excessive, violent pornographic material perhaps registers a certain anxiety about the loss of a norm that satire traditionally has defended (a characteristic that makes straightforward satire distinct from parody[202]).[203]

In this Appleseed Rectory bedroom, no such clear critique (in terms of Hutcheon's view of parody) is discernable: we are simply exposed to the cruder end of the hardcore pornography spectrum. Roxeanne's actions are bald hardcore porn. Given that the preceding chapter to this scene features Marvell, Roxeanne, and Skip exposing the Appleseeders to videos of bestiality, pedophilia, "people shower[ing] in urine," and a "genuine sex death" (165), Roxeanne's actions serve only as a postmodern application of media to life, revealing the crass commodification of her own sexuality. Amis's attempt at satiric parody collapses here precisely because the parody fails, as Margaret Rose would argue, to distinguish itself significantly from the pornography it portrays. We are left with the hanging image of actual disgust, which shocks and horrifies, but without a clear sense of critique. With Appleseed Rectory thus invaded by the new morality of the

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[201] Rose 83.

[202] Rose 82.

[203] Hutcheon's view of postmodern parody applies even more fittingly to the work of Kathy Acker, where Acker uses parody of pornography in such a complicitous way to stress the political dynamics of the objectification and debasement of women—Acker's strategy for subverting the porn she appropriates in order to raise feminist awareness of the lurking antifeminist tendencies in all sexual transactions. Acker's novels *Blood and Guts in High School* (1978) and *Kathy Goes to Haiti* (1978) make ample use of parody to clear feminist effect. In fact, Acker's involvement in NYC sex shows—an experience that politicized her awareness of the violent sexism of pornography—often appears as experiential material in her work.

Appleseeders, Amis's point in exposing such filth remains unclear and unfocused. In this sense, the passage above resembles Fredric Jameson's reading of postmodern parody as pastiche or blank parody:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs: it is to parody what that other interesting and historically original modern thing, the practice of a kind of blank irony, is to what Wayne Booth calls the 'stable ironies' of the eighteenth century.[204]

Indeed, Amis's satirical experiments in the novel have much in common with Wayne Booth's concept of "unstable irony," which Dustin Griffin sees as a hallmark of much contemporary satire: "though we assume an author in control of the irony, we cannot reconstruct that author's precise meaning with any confidence. In some cases we have reason to think that even satirists cannot contain the irony they have let loose."[205] The instability of such passages, then, become one way of registering the ambivalence Amis feels towards the new moral terrain being mapped out by Ballard and himself. More importantly, this ambivalence heralds the arrival of a kind of Jamesonian blank satire—one that cannot claim moral certainty and thus tries, as compensation, to offer a discomforting anxiety for the reader. The danger of this approach is that such volatile material runs the risk of being misread as straightforward pornography.[206]

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[204] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 17.

[205] Griffin 67.

[206] I remind the reader here of Ballard's anecdote about how French readers misread the pornography in *Crash*: "All these French *Crash*-freaks used to come out here to see me, expecting a miasma of child-molestation and drug-abuse. What they found was a suburban house full of kids and their friends, with a

This possible use of ambivalence/anxiety as a kind of open-ended weapon becomes a more likely possibility as a new artistic strategy, especially if we recall Margaret Rose's argument that parody combined with satire yields "new and multi-layered works of art from the process of satiric reduction."[207] Such a possibility emerges when we move past the obvious targets of disgust in the novel, Andy and Marvell, and consider the ambiguous character of Quentin. As Gavin Keulks notes, Quentin Villiers "appears initially to be the novel's most stable figure, representative of normalcy and propriety. Eventually, however, he assumes his true identity as Johnny Appleseed, the murderous Charles Manson-like figure of the group."[208] At first, Quentin does indeed represent a kind of conservative norm from which traditional satire would spring; he is an enormously handsome, classic genteel English wit: "…Quentin looked blindingly beautiful, rather Chattertonian, and definitively upper class. It gave Celia [his wife] a sweet toothache pang just to be near him" (85). He is astute and learned, and we frequently catch him "cultivating the life of the mind" (11) as he reads Diderot's Menippean masterpiece *Rameau's Nephew* (3) or Rousseau's philosophy (145). Like a good noble lord, Quentin is the "head of [Appleseed] estate…who seems to represent the quintessence of Enlightenment reason, culture, and civility."[209]

Quentin's outward perfection, however, is a kind of mirage that seduces and misleads those who meet him. He is a literal postmodern chameleon "adept at character stylization, a master of pastiche, a connoisseur of verbal self-dramatization" (38), and

big dog, and me writing a short story in the middle of it all." See Martin Amis, "J. G. Ballard," *Visiting Mrs. Nabokov* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993) 77.

[207] Rose 82.

[208] Keulks 141.

[209] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, 2004, 21.

Amis's narrator warns us that Quentin's motto is "Or so it seems—and that's all it needs to do" (41). Similar to Robert Vaughan's constant attempts in *Crash* to position his body in imitations of celebrity images, Quentin is a hall of mirrors whose performativity is not of the liberating kind. His protean personality suggests that he is of the new postmodern breed of self that lacks any kind of core. Even before his murderous Other, Johnny, emerges, we learn that Quentin's supposed faithful marriage to Celia is a sham: "Quentin divined that it would not be hard for him to take advantage of Celia. He did so. As soon as she had finished a second Green Chartreuse, Quentin took Celia straight out and married her" (159). Amis also makes it clear that Quentin has a shady past from his time spent with Marvell in America (123), and that he ran a business scam where he cheated people out of their money (200). Quentin's seductive façade is perhaps the biggest subversion of the country-house genre in the novel, since his genteel character turns out to be the biggest lie with the most violent consequences.

The question then emerges, why does Amis give Quentin such power and freedom in the novel, particularly in a novel that has taken pains to satirize viciously all vile characters and perhaps to use a satiric form to contain such violence? James Diedrick offers one suggestion:

> Finally, Quentin's calculated ruthlessness in dispatching the other characters has an eerie parallel in Amis's own attitude toward them. *Dead Babies* is full of animus and condescension toward Amis's generation, and Quentin's final burst of murderous violence is its ultimate symbolic expression. In *The Rachel Papers*, Amis seeks to exorcise his father's generation; in *Dead Babies*, he enacts a similar ritual on his own.[210]

What is telling about Diedrick's reading of Quentin's function is that he assigns—almost forces—a kind of closure to the problematic violence Amis has unleashed in the novel.

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[210] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (second edition), 47.

He reads Quentin as the satirist's ultimate tool to do away with a generation that epitomizes Adorno's cultural industry in all its worst aspects. What this reading does not acknowledge, however, is the frightening freedom that Quentin will continue to enjoy. Amis has already established Quentin's intelligence and trickery, but other subtle information about him reveals that Amis provides Quentin with the perfect escape. All of the Appleseeders, including the Americans, are killed off at the novel's end, save Quentin. When describing Quentin's dubious editorial work at *Yes*, Amis hints at the escape routes that Quentin plans for himself: "Quentin inserted formidable bylines, such as O. Seltnizt and D. R. S. M. Mainwairing, names that tended to correspond to numbered bank accounts here and abroad" (39). Just as Ballard leaves an eerily transformed James at the end of *Crash* to haunt the highways of Britain, Amis suggests that the sociopathic, postmodern monster that is Quentin easily has the means to continue his murderous rampage at will.

Finally, Quentin can hardly be seen as a device to annihilate this problematic generation. He functions more as a psychotic killer at large who delights in random violence. In creating such a character, Amis debunks the supposed control of his intrusive narrator in the novel—a narrator who seems to enjoy the humiliations he puts Keith Whitehead and Andy Adorno through at various points in the novel.[211] Both author and narrator lose control of Quentin, and Amis provides a key piece of evidence to suggest that what has truly been murdered in this novel is the satirist's control of his own subject matter.

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[211] Amis's narrator intrudes in the novel to respond to Keith's plea, "And who's doing it all to me, eh?" (146), to clarify his control over Keith's life: "Nothing personal, please understand—merely in order to serve the designs of this particular fiction" (146-47), an observation also made by Diedrick in *Understanding Martin Amis*, 2004, 41. Amis's narrator also reveals this character control when, after one of Andy Adorno's failed attempts at sex, he mockingly asks, "Hard-on trouble, Andy?" (181).

As the novel opens, Quentin is confidently reading "Diderot's *Le neveu de Rameau*," which is "nestled on his golden thighs" (3). Diedrick argues that this allusion to "one of the great Menippean satires of the eighteenth century"[212] provides an "intertextual"[213] clue to Amis's own narrative intentions in writing a Menippean satire. The important feature of this detail is that Amis references a classic satire from the golden age of satirical writing, such as the "stable moral ironies of Swift's *A Modest Proposal*,"[214] as a basis against which to compare the very instability that plagues contemporary Britain. Perhaps the most important detail of *Rameau's Nephew*, though, is its "philosophical open-endedness,"[215] a feature that marries well with the competing philosophical positions espoused by Quentin, Marvell, and Andy throughout the novel.

However, in contrast to an eighteenth-century world of supposed greater cultural certainty and moral norms (indeed Diderot's character, Moi, acts as a didactic counter to Lui's purposeful, highly contradictory nature), Amis uses Quentin's reading of Diderot to dismantle the traditional Menippean satiric structure once and for all. James Diedrick notes that the philosophical open-endedness of Diderot's text is maintained by its debating speakers: "one of the speakers is an unrepentant hedonist and hypocrite [Lui] who insists his position is the necessary outcome of the materialist philosophy on which Enlightenment reason is founded. He is opposed by a speaker [Moi] who clings to the belief that civic virtue is compatible with materialistic determinism."[216] Even though

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[212] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (second edition), 41.

[213] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (second edition), 41.

[214] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (second edition), 44.

[215] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (second edition), 44.

[216] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (second edition), 42.

such a dialogic structure reinforces an air of philosophical uncertainty, it also provides a certain voice of moral stability through the trusting voice of Moi, the defender of civic virtue. Diedrick rightly maps this structure on the brief debates held by Marvell, the voice of hedonism, and Quentin's superficial defense of gentility, which acts as a momentary defense of Diderot's model. However, Amis ultimately dissolves the dependence on Diderot's satiric structure by having Quentin embody both of Diderot's characters. Given his complex, shady past, his artful, literary lying as the editor of *Yes*, and his final act of murderous destruction, Quentin fuses the voice of moral certainty and the style of the master provocateur and shape-shifter all in one, thereby collapsing the very "philosophical open-endedness" of Amis's textual model.

Diedrick somewhat shares this complex view of Quentin, acknowledging Quentin's murderous side: "[Quentin] is finally more like de Sade than Marvell."[217] But Diedrick maintains that Quentin "has one foot *firmly* planted in the eighteenth century, symboli[zing] the historical conditions that gave rise to the Marvells of the contemporary scene"[218](italics added). Diedrick's reading of Quentin appears to maintain the Menippean model of satire: Quentin is simply a conduit of the perverse possibilities of the Enlightenment, an historical anchor linking past to present, an intertextual base stabilizing new satire with its older predecessor. Quentin's murderous nature forever wretches this footing away from both the stable moral voice of Diderot's text and the Menippean form, for he murders not only the Appleseeders but also the very model of eighteenth-century stability that he ostensibly represents. In the form of Quentin, the voice and representations of a psychotic postmodern hedonism that delights in violence

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[217] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (second edition), 45.

[218] Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (second edition), 45.

wins out. It is perhaps the clinching moment of complicity conquering critique in Amis's problematic view of postmodern satire and parody.

Amis literally dramatizes this murder of the Menippean form and Quentin's civic self with Quentin's dispatching of Diderot's text. At the novel's end, we find Quentin "on a pink chaise-lounge with Diderot's *Le neveu de Rameau* dandled on his thighs" (199)—almost the exact same image we receive of Quentin at the novel's start. However, Amis quickly notes that Quentin "wasn't reading" (199), and as Celia learns of Quentin's shady past from Marvell in the next room, Quentin lets go of the text all together to embark on his campaign of violence: "Next door, the book slid from Quentin's thighs. He made no attempt to retrieve it" (200). The loss of Diderot's text raises a final question about the effectiveness of the Menippean form. As Eugene Kirk notes, "In theme, Menippean satire was essentially concerned with right learning or right belief. That theme often called for ridicule or caricature of some sham-intellectual or theological fraud."[219] While Amis does indeed ridicule the sham-intellectualism of Marvell and Andy, the base of right learning or belief is crucially absent by the novel's end: no moral center exists. Given the cyclical presence of *Rameau's Nephew* at both the opening and closing of the novel, this act symbolizes the death of traditional satire and initiates Quentin's own chaotic, murderous rampage. The book's slippage to the floor clearly suggests that the parameters of satire and even the hybrid Menippean form itself may be no match for the intensified perversities unleashed by the newest cultural experiment of the sexual revolution.

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[219] Eugene P. Kirk, *Menippean Satire: An Annotated Catalogue of Texts and Criticism* (New York: Garland Pub., 1980) xi.

Dead Babies represents a crucial development in both the postwar British novel and postwar British culture. Despite Amis's dismissal of the novel as "contrived" and worthy of receiving "a really blistering, unfavorable review,"[220] it signals a new era of extreme dystopian realism linked to the very unique troubles of the 1970s. In its dialogue with Ballard's *Crash*, the novel attempts to announce the complex moral problems facing fiction and satire while making it clear such problems bear directly on the well being of society at large. It is at once a playfully philosophical postmodern fiction detached from the real world that constantly, and ironically, emphasizes its relevance through realist engagement to the troubled present of 1970s Britain. Rejection of closure often has prankish undertones in postmodern fiction, but *Dead Babies*'s grim ending forces the reader into a literal and figurative fear of the violence and depravity occurring in British society. In Ballard's *Crash*, we are left with James Ballard at the helm of a world of dangerously widening moral designs, where perversities become new explorations into meaning and sensation, and not aberrations rooted in societal norms. With *Dead Babies*, Amis's leaves us in a more precarious state—in the hands of a murderer eagerly awaiting his next victim.

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[220] Charles Moritz, "Martin Amis," *1990 Current Biography Yearbook* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1990) 21.

**Chapter 3: 'Like patches of trapped sky': Women, Violence, and Trauma
in Pat Barker's *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down***

> There was a cold spell towards the end of January. The women of Union Street had to cope with the problem of keeping themselves and their families warm.[221]
>
> There wasn't much she'd learned in the Depression that still made sense in the seventies. And yet. She was poorer now than she'd been then. And worse housed.[222]

In November 1966, Ken Loach released a rather unique film that glued British viewers to their television screens between late 1966 and early 1967. *Cathy Come Home* dramatized the plight of a contemporary, young working-class woman whose attempt at married family life and happiness ends in grueling poverty and homelessness. As the story unfolds, Cathy and her husband lose their jobs, are constantly evicted from poor housing, and Cathy is soon abandoned by her husband, loses her children to the state, and spirals into depression and dereliction. Loach's rejection of studio settings and use of cinema-vérité techniques (shooting in crumbling neighborhoods, presenting working-class accents and characters, using nonprofessional actors and black and white filming, interjecting narrative voiceovers with actual housing and homeless statistics) gave the British public a stark, realistic glimpse at the mounting socio-economic troubles underlying the sixties. Indeed, as Tony Pearson notes, *Cathy Come Home*

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[221] Pat Barker, *Union Street* (New York, NY: Picador USA, 1999) 219.

[222] Barker, *Union Street*, 221. All further references will be cited parenthetically.

exploded with tremendous force upon the complacent, affluent, post-Beatles culture of the "Swinging Sixties." Drawing attention, as it did, to disturbing levels of social deprivation far in excess of those claimed by government, the [TV-]play led to a public outcry, questions in Parliament, the establishment of the housing charity "Shelter," and a relaxation of policy on the dissolution of homeless families.[223]

The documentary style of the film captured the grim reality facing hundreds of thousands of British lives as they headed into a new decade.

Pat Barker's first two novels, *Union Street* (1982) and *Blow Your House Down* (1984), take up Loach's realist critique of British life and extend this analysis in new ways into the turmoil of the 1970s. As the passages above from her first novel, *Union Street*, reveal, Barker shares Loach's interest in the cold facts of economic deprivation on the lives of Britain's poorer citizens.[224] The lack of adequate housing, the inability of families to maintain personal health, and the resulting psychological pressures that dominate her characters are omnipresent themes that permeate her early novels chronicling the hardships of Britain's most brutal postwar decade. Barker intimately examines the lives of women as they struggle with bureaucratic injustice, sexual violence, dangerous working conditions, and poverty. Targeting everything from the Ministry of Social Security Act of 1966's cohabitation rule, the failure of the National Health Service to provide adequate family planning services to women, the lack of housing available to

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[223] Tony Pearson, "Ken Loach," *The Museum of Broadcast Communications* (MBC), Web. 23 April 2010. Shelter came into existence soon after the airing of *Cathy Come Home*, in December 1966. It established a nationwide charity to help support the homeless and poorly housed of Britain.

[224] Loach includes several documentary voiceovers in *Cathy Come Home* that provide statistics about the worsening living conditions facing British families. For example, he notes that in the late Sixties there were 200,000 more families than there were houses for them in the wider London area, including 1 in 10 of these houses being overcrowded. Government failures to address housing are documented as well: 39,000 families on the housing waiting list in Birmingham, 13,500 in Leeds, 19,000 in Liverpool, and 15,000 in Manchester.

poor citizens,[225] to the failure of police forces to protect women (both prostitutes and nonprostitutes) from male sexual aggression (including the brutal reign of the Yorkshire Ripper), Barker shines a disturbing light on a Britain all too willing to neglect the plight of its women.

Barker's particular interest in social history stresses the importance of her realist presentation of the 1970s in Britain. While she shares some characteristics with J. G. Ballard's and Martin Amis's versions of this turbulent decade (all three writers emphasize a world of sexual violence and social dysfunction), Barker ultimately differs in her almost exclusive use of a Loachian style of documentary social realism.[226] The blend of postmodern theoretical and culture concerns with hard realism and graphic social realism that we see in Ballard and Amis shifts to a grittier, almost dirty realism[227] in Barker's novels that she infuses with trauma in her focus on the North of Britain, on its waning industrial communities and broken families. John Brannigan acknowledges this

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[225] British historian Arthur Marwick presents this rash of social problems, which had a particularly negative effect on women. Marwick notes that unemployment benefits were especially difficult for single, divorced, or separated women to receive because of the "cohabitation rule" enforced by the Department of Health and Social Security in the late Sixties and Seventies. Any cohabitation with an able man meant that benefits would stop, thus increasing female economic dependency on men. Regarding the NHS, contraceptives became free by the middle Seventies, but the outreach between the NHS and the public on this matter made this new development ineffective. Marwick also shows how over 729,000 dwellings stood vacant for demolition and renovation by the mid-Seventies, a sizeable number being updated were for those wealthy enough to own second homes; unskilled workers and the poor were more and more being shoved off to inadequate council tenants. See Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2003) 143; 193; 194-195.

[226] Barker achieves a documentary feel in her writing by emphasizing working-class and down-and-out characters (e.g., prostitutes), working-class speech and colloquialisms, and simple yet detailed presentation of derelict neighborhoods and factory life of the North. She also frequently switches narrative voice (from either first or third person to second person) to create a kind of cinematic intimacy between her characters and readers.

[227] Ian Gregson uses the term "dirty realism" to describe the work of postmodern writers like Richard Ford and Raymond Carver, and argues that such realist writing "is not founded upon realist innocence but upon a postmodernist knowledge deployed in the cause of a renewed attention to the substantial impact *on lived experience of social and economic conditions*" (italics added). Barker's documentary realism investigates a similar impact. See Ian Gregson, *Postmodern Literature* (London: Arnold Publishers, 2004) 141.

crucial reinvestment in realism when he describes Pat Barker's novels as functioning "in part by revisioning the formal characteristics of post-war social realism to accommodate the unrepresentable trauma of twentieth-century mass warfare or post-industrial urban dereliction. This represents not so much a departure from social realism as a more complex realization of the constructed and intersubjective experience of the real."[228] While Barker experiments mildly with postmodern narrative techniques,[229] her primary concern in *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* is to depict the physical and spiritual poverty of a country fractured by economic recession, mass unemployment, and sexual violence in the starkest terms possible. Moreover, in contrast to Ballard, Amis, and even earlier writers of fiction portraying the working class,[230] Barker places an acute feminist lens on Britain's depressed world to expose the particular suffering of women and children. She thus critiques and rewrites the infamous "sick man of Europe"[231] mantel worn by Britain during the 1970s and portrays the decade as "the sick *woman* of Europe."

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[228] John Brannigan, *Pat Barker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) 5.

[229] Brannigan argues that Barker mixes social realism with experimental techniques such as nonlinear narrative, fractured time, and some stream of consciousness. Peter Hitchcock notes the Bakhtinian narrative double voicing of Barker's characters, a technique that enables both author/narrator and character to speak to create a "counterhegemonic discourse." See Brannigan, *Pat Barker*, 15; and Hitchcock, *Dialogics of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 30.

[230] Here I am thinking of writers such as Alan Sillitoe, John Braine, Beryl Bainbridge, D. H. Lawrence, and even Dickens's *Hard Times*.

[231] Historian Michael Lynch notes that the moniker "sick man of Europe" was assigned to Britain during the postwar period of 1951-1979, the years which witnessed the gradual decline of Britain's socio-economic health. These troubles culminated in 1979 when the British press used the infamous phrase "the Winter of Discontent" to describe the public-sector strikes during the winter of 1978-79 that caused disruptions in Britain's healthcare service, mortuary service, and refuse collection, not to mention rising unemployment and repeated failures of government policies. See Michael Lynch, *An Introduction to Modern British History, 1900-1999* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2001) 159; 167.

Barker presents this new version of history by emphasizing the trauma that develops from the socio-economic sickness of women and the resulting sexual violence endured by them both in and outside of the domestic space in the North of England. I apply aspects of Cathy Caruth's theories of trauma to my readings of the various forms of gendered violence (rape, spousal abuse, abandonment, poverty and illness, and mass murder) found in *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* as a way to illuminate Barker's efforts to connect her characters' problems with the reader. Caruth's notion of trauma as a "double telling" provides a pointed method by which the all-encompassing suffering of Barker's North can be channeled viscerally to an audience. Perhaps more effective than the forms of satire found in Ballard and Amis, Barker's trauma bypasses the pitfalls of unstable irony or misread parody by presenting violence and suffering nakedly. Her realistic presentation of disturbing material lacks the added stylized bravado or intellectualized meditations that mediate (or even override) the gendered violence in Ballard's and Amis's characters and narrators. Trauma, then, makes it possible for Barker to achieve a feminist, political critique in a less complicated way than satire.

This key shift in Barker's realist focus on the intimate, traumatic lives of forgotten women is, I will argue, what distinguishes her as a major and important dystopian writer of contemporary Britain. Her combination of intense social realism with traumatic representation provides us with not only a new dystopian model of the now but also a fresh way to rethink our mode of critique within dystopian landscapes. What Barker ultimately creates with her dystopian portrait of Britain is an intimate engagement between her neglected women and her readers, a union which presses for a more

118

politically aware social body by forcing her readers to inhabit the psychic and physical space of her characters.[232] In this light, her first two novels are not merely examinations of "the problems of sustaining community and identity in working-class culture in England in a post-industrial context"[233]; they are, instead, outright dystopian fictions that have evolved out of the British postwar, Orwellian dystopian tradition.

I. Restructuring Reality Through Trauma

In contrast to the cold, metallic world of Ballard's Britain and the rotting countryside that Amis's characters help to destroy, Barker's prose acts as a kind of brutal cinematic documentary in her depiction of the 1970s. Her realist foregrounding of the blighted environment of *Union Street* announces the dystopian designs of the novel. Barker creates this present-day dystopia by embedding a series of recent historical markers in her portrait of Northern Britain. Set in the early 1970s,[234] Barker alludes to the miners' strikes several times throughout the novel and illustrates the ensuing poverty resulting from the strikes. The opening lines of the novel confront us with the poverty of

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[232] Brannigan argues that *Union Street* is "an experiment in closing the gap between the authoritative voice of the omniscient narrator and the recorded language of the characters" (30). My argument goes a step further to suggest that both *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* employ simple realism, use of second-person narrative voice, and trauma to close the gap between narrator/character and *reader*. Brannigan acknowledges this key use of second person in specific reference to the murder of Kath Robson in *Blow Your House Down*, though without noting this technique's larger political import: "The use of second-person narrative brings the narratee or the implied reader into the story, and involves 'you' in witnessing the scene of Kath's death, acknowledging the eerie vitality of Kath's eyes in the moonlight" (42). I show, in contrast, the Barker uses this narrative voice frequently throughout both novels.

[233] Brannigan, *Pat Barker*, 14. Brannigan considers *Union Street* as novel belonging to the tradition of the working-class novel, not the dystopian tradition.

[234] This periodization is made clear when Barker's characters argue about housing being torn down and neighborhoods being dislocated. Alice Bell, the final character we meet in the novel, remarks, "'Bloody good houses, some of them…That's your Tory government'" (220). The Tories only held power in 1970's Britain during Edward Heath's tenure as prime minister between 1970-1974, a period marred by the Bloody Sunday incident, the National Union of Miners' strike, the three-day week, and the OPEC oil embargo.

Barker's neighborhood—a poverty that is a literalization of the dystopian grime of Orwell's Oceania: "There was a square of cardboard in the window where the glass had been smashed. During the night one corner had worked loose and scraped against the frame whenever the wind blew" (9). The tenement conditions of housing are a hazard to Union Street's inhabitants' health in more ways than one. Young Kelly Brown almost comes crashing to the ground dangerously as she "jump[s]…only just in time…over the hole in the passage where the floorboards had given way" (11). The local school reflects the culture of rioting in the early Seventies: "The windows of the school were encased in wire cages: the children threw bricks" (18-19). Engulfing the wasteland of this neighborhood is the harrowing sight of the Moor: "…the Moor, by day a sour, brick-strewn stretch of waste land covered with dog shit, newspaper and beer cans, acquired at night a mysterious and threatening immensity" (27). The Moor stands not only as an indicator of the detritus of Northern poverty, but also as a direct historical reference to the Moors Murders[235], perhaps the darkest chapter of greater Manchester history. Northern British life is thus presented as a living hell, an environment burdened by the memory of mass murder, poverty, poor housing, and the "dank, soot-laden mist" (75) of factory waste.

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[235] During July 1963- October 1965, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley kidnapped, molested, and murdered five children and buried their bodies on the Saddleworth Moor. The news of these grim acts reached the wider British public on October 22, 1965, when the couple was arrested and held in court. Interestingly, Barker's *Union Street* appeared in 1982 at the same time that Morrissey and Johnny Marr composed "Suffer Little Children," a widely and controversially popular song about the Moors Murders. Morrissey remembers the horror of the murders dominating Manchester life during the Sixties and Seventies: "Within that community, news of the crimes totally dominated all attempts at conversation for quite a few years. It was like *the* worst thing that had ever happened, and I was very, *very* aware of *everything* that occurred. Aware as a child who could have been a victim" (italics original). See Simon Goddard, *The Smiths: Songs That Save Your Life* (London: Reynolds & Hearn, 2002) 77.

This oppressive environment leaves its mark on Barker's characters and limits their freedom.[236] The nearby section of Wharfe Street houses the worst of problems: "Suicide, mental illness, crime, incest had flourished there, as though inhaled with noxious fumes from the river. Those who had lived there, whether they had loved or hated the street, did not find it easy to forget" (72-73). Iris King is such a character that struggles with her past on Wharfe Street. Iris is the neighborhood mother of Union Street; she functions like a streetwise angel to take care of the sick or help out anyone in need: "Then she mothered half the street. Kelly Brown and the Scaife children, Lisa Goddard's little lads—they all knew and loved their Iris…And she sat with women in labour. Even laid out the dead, though there wasn't as much call for that now" (179-180). Having escaped a parentless existence on Wharfe Street in "a series of boarding houses" and "brothels" (172) with usually only "a slice of bread and dripping in her hand" (172), Iris "valued her reputation in the [Union] street. She knew she was respected and her family was respected. Her reputation mattered more to her than anything else. It was the measure of her distance from Wharfe Street, the guarantee that the blackness that came from her past would never finally return" (180). Despite Iris's positive status in Union Street, she is unable to leave her Wharfe Street-past behind her. She has "the dull eyes and permanently grey skin of somebody who keeps going on cups of tea, cigarettes and adrenalin" (165). This past experience permanently scars Iris into fear for her reputation—a reputation she guards at any cost.

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[236] John Brannigan notes a similar effect in his analysis of *Union Street*, arguing that dereliction "defines the economic, psychological, cultural and geographical landscape of Barker's fiction, and serves to connect the apparently isolated instances of rape, murder, domestic violence, abandonment and sickness to the social and cultural structures of this bleak, post-industrial scene." What Brannigan does not fully acknowledge, however, is that this union of personal blight and outward, social blight signal a new realist dystopian condition emphasized through trauma. See Brannigan, *Pat Barker*, 18.

This strain of her past and fear for her reputation soon erupt within her, causing moments of egregious violence and ultimately compromising her ability to act and be seen as a positive mothering role model in the community. Upon learning that her young daughter, Brenda, is pregnant, Iris abandons her neighborly care and compassion and reverts to her fears of her reputation: "…immediately she wondered how many other people knew. Even Mrs. Bell had said something about Brenda always looking tired. She'd thought nothing of it at the time. But now she felt that perhaps the neighbors all knew, that they were laughing, sniggering behind her back" (168). Fuelled by this fear and shame, Iris punches Brenda in the mouth when Brenda refuses to name her child's father, and drags "Brenda around the [hospital] ward by her hair" (170). As this domestic violence fades and Iris regains concern for her daughter, she is able to convince Brenda into seeking an illegal abortion from Big Irene. This decision, however, forces Iris to return to her past down Wharfe Street, where Irene conducts this business. As Iris drags Brenda to Irene's place on Wharfe Street, she is confronted by the foul-smelling river and passes "the place where in the last war a bomb had fallen" and sees "herself as a small child wandering across the blitzed ground" (193). Past and present fuse for Iris—a dangerous combination that foreshadows the tragic event awaiting her. After Irene feeds Brenda something to induce the abortion, Iris is left to manage the painful labor and to witness the premature birth of Brenda's baby, born alive (196). As Iris comforts Brenda, Barker notes that "the baby clenched his fist feebly, lying on the floor of the lavatory with the *News of the World* spread over him" (197). Iris lies to Brenda, telling her " 'it was never alive, flower. It's not a *baby*, you know'" (197; italics original), while a "few yards away, on the floor of the lavatory, the rustling of the newspaper ceased" (197). Iris

122

is able to save her daughter's future, in an attempt to guard both her own reputation and perhaps to prevent her daughter's possible slide down to Wharfe Street, but at the cost of murdering her own grandson. It is one of the most shocking actions in *Union Street*, but one that Barker shows is inextricably linked to the poverty-stricken conditions of the North.

On a deeper psychological level, though, a traumatic connection is formed for Iris: there is, in the words of Cathy Caruth, "a kind of double telling"[237] that occurs between the memory of Iris's abandoned self on the violent blitzed grounds and the baby left to die alone. Iris's predicament represents Barker's own working of Caruth's description of understanding history in terms of trauma, where this "double telling" is an "oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (italics original).[238] Through Iris's complex memory, Barker fuses the trauma of the blitz—of young Iris's survival of warfare horror—with the intimate death of the child that is sacrificed to save her daughter's life. The death of Brenda's baby and its link to Iris's memory of survival creates a palpable, almost physical link to the larger traumatic wound that is postwar British history, a history that hangs over and informs Barker's depressed North.

Barker studies this connection between trauma, environment, and history more closely by examining Iris's life. No matter how hard Iris fights to escape Wharfe Street and to become the kind mother and figure that she never had, the internalized presence of

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[237] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 7.

[238] Caruth 7.

that life—of her traumatic past—cannot be shaken: "As a young woman she'd battled her way out of it. But it was no use. She was no longer in Wharfe Street but Wharfe Street was still in her. She remembered it. Knew it. Knew every brick of it" (171). Iris rewrites history: there is no concept of easy progress in her world, no matter how much she wishes for it, but rather a living past that can breathe its way into her life at a moment's notice. Barker's portrait of Iris's internal struggle prefigures Toni Morrison's theory of memory and history in *Beloved*. In Morrison's novel, Sethe explains to her daughter her concept of time, rememory, to articulate the traumatic impact of slavery on the psyche:

> 'I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.'[239]

Morrison's rememory figures time as cyclical, not linear, and as such it portrays human memory as a kind of prison house to relive and reexperience horrific moments. A witness to an atrocity never truly escapes the moment, for it lives on in the witness's mind. This theory accurately captures the trauma that Barker's characters live with. Iris cannot fully embrace and inhabit her new life on Union Street because the smells and sounds of Wharfe are always there to make the past come to life. Similar to Sethe's metaphor of the burning house, Iris lives with the image of a similar house:

> When she thought of Wharfe Street she remembered Mrs Biggs. She'd lived in the end house, the one nearest the river, and the wallpaper had peeled away and hung in strips. She'd kept herself to herself…Then her

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[239] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Plume, 1988) 35-36.

son, who was a bit not-all-there, had molested and strangled a little boy
and left his body on a rubbish tip. Then nothing that Mrs Biggs could say
or do would save her. On the night before they hanged her son, somebody
had gone and smeared dogshit all over her windows and all over her front
door. And they'd gone on doing it, too. They never let up. She went
loony in the end and had to be taken away.

…

They were going to pull it down now. That was what they said. It was all
coming down. Too late. Too late for her. (171-72)

The government demolition of the tenements on Wharfe is insignificant, for the trauma of

place has been imprinted on Iris.[240] This version of her "rememory" lies at the heart of

her depression:

> Iris, in these later years, was often depressed. A blackness would come
> over her; a blackness she linked in her mind with those early years in
> Wharfe Street. They were living in Union Street now, a big step up. And
> yet the past had never seemed so close. She would look around her at the
> home she had toiled and sweated to create and it meant nothing. She
> wanted to destroy something. Anything. Herself, if nothing else offered.
> She would go out and walk the streets for hours, aware only of the blood
> squeezing through the veins in her head. (179)

The dystopian gloom of Wharfe Street makes it impossible for Iris to see clearly and

function properly. The unprocessed grief and pain she has experienced acts as a shield

that blurs her perception and disrupts her ability to live a normal life. She is almost a

postwar version of Jacob Marley, though the chains of past actions are all too real and not

phantasms.

It is this traumatic memory that adds another layer of moral complication to the

homicide she commits to save her and her daughter's name. As the chapter closes, Iris's

oldest daughter, Sheila, visits with her infant son, whom Iris holds, placing "her hand

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[240] We must acknowledge the significance of Barker's naming here. Iris obviously puns on the biological
iris, the membrane in the eye that controls the size of the pupil and thus controls the amount of light that
reaches the retina. Iris, therefore, metaphorically represents a special kind of vision in the novel: she can
see into the hearts of others and is able to help them and is also clearly aware of the sexism committed by
men, but her witnessing of past trauma also corrupts her vision and paralyzes her spiritual growth.

underneath him, feeling the curve of his bottom warm against her palm" (201). The

family moment, however, does little to comfort Iris. The physical presence of the boy

triggers "the memory of the other child, red as raw meat, gasping its life out on the

lavatory floor" (201). Barker's imagery is a flash from horror cinema: a bloody mass that

lingers to haunt Iris "in her rare moments of silence and solitude" (201). This image

represents the intensity of the traumatic wound. Caruth articulates the complexity of this

wound and its impact on the individual:

> …the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body
> but upon the mind. But what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond
> the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of the mind—the breach in the
> mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of
> the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that…is
> experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore
> not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in
> the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.[241]

What is striking in Barker's depiction of Iris's trauma is that she shows how Iris's wound

of the mind is made tactile. The image of the dead baby does arise repeatedly for Iris, but

this psychological wound is also made flesh as she touches her living grandson. The

tactility of this double wound reveals one of the performative effects of Barker's realism:

the realist touch of this tragedy attempts to bridge not only historical time but also

boundaries between character and reader, making the violence and grief more palpable.

Caruth captures the voicing of such trauma as something "much more than a pathology,

or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out,

that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise

available."[242] Barker communicates the complexity of Iris's actions, then, through this

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[241] Caruth 3-4.

[242] Caruth 4.

fusion of representation. A complicated violent action that cannot easily be made sense of, say, in legal or social terms—for such a view would inevitably and simply designate Iris as a common murderer—becomes accessible through emotional realism. In the end, Barker shows Iris, like the other inhabitants of Union and Wharfe Street, to be a product of circumstance, fully incapable of rising out of the poverty that paralyzes the North, but not as a character deserving of judgment or derision. Iris challenges assumptions about the lives of struggling women as she walks with the wounds of her psyche ever ready to fester without warning.

Barker's traumatized women are not always clearly visible in Northern Britain, and she explores this social neglect through the curious figure of Blonde Dinah. Blonde Dinah has the paradoxical designation of the town's respected prostitute—a staple, likeable character of the neighborhood trafficking in a profession of ill repute. What is odd about Barker's portrait of her, however, is her absence from her own chapter: the Blonde Dinah section of *Union Street* really portrays and discusses the elderly George Harrison, as he navigates his way through retirement and seclusion. At first, the focus on George continues the critique that Barker offers of life in the industrial North. The dangers of factory life and the isolation of the individual are ailments that do not discriminate for Barker. George's retirement gift of a clock is rendered worthless by the physical damage factory life has done to his body: "There were afternoons when the time went so slowly that he was sure it had stopped. Time and time again he would get up and put it to his ear, but he could never hear it ticking: the blast-furnaces had seen to that" (202). Likewise, his retirement forces him into the land of the lonely. George lacks the security of his children and grandchildren, both of whom cater to his wife (203), and

eventually the "talk" of his workmates "[leaves] him behind" (203). To fight this

isolation, he finds work as a lavatory janitor—a job that only reinforces the exclusion he

already feels from his friends and family: "Once he came back from work a bit early and

heard Gladys and the two girls laughing. He stood outside the kitchen door and listened.

The idea of him cleaning out a lavatory was a huge joke, it seemed. He never let on he'd

heard, just went back to the front door and staged a second, noisier, entrance. But it hurt

all right" (204-205).

Blonde Dinah's entrance in George's life at this moment appears to provide brief

redemption for George. Encountering her one night after a visit to the pub, George is

appalled by the thought of having sex with a prostitute of her lengthy experience until he

confesses to himself the complete absence of sex in his life with Gladys: "He doubted if

they did it twice a year" (207). He suddenly develops a liking of Dinah and shares a rare

enjoyable moment with a woman—something unimaginable with his own wife: "There

was silence again, a companionable silence this time. He sniffed the air: sometimes,

standing by the river, you could smell the dawn, hours and hours before the light in the

sky changed. It was a marvelous time: all the tension, all the bitterness dissolved away

and you were left waiting, waiting for whatever life turned up" (207). This characteristic

brief glimmer of hope encountered by Barker's northerners is fully embraced by George:

he overcomes his fear of Dinah and eagerly follows her to her bedroom, developing "a

sort of intimacy" (209) along the way, and enjoys a night of sex.

This sexual experience clearly signals a spiritual and physical redemption for the

aging George. As he leaves Dinah asleep in bed, he "almost r[uns] down the stairs,

unloading guilt behind him at every step" (211). As George exits Wharfe Street, Barker's

environment again signals the symbolic import of this experience:

> The sun was shining. He stood on the steps and breathed deeply before setting off in the direction of the river. His step was jaunty. He was on the way to being his old self again: the self that would look back on this night's work with a mixture of pride, amusement, and shame.
>
> Through the few remaining chinks in his perception, the morning struck at him. Seagulls screamed and dived in the air above the river. And one detached itself from the rest to fly under the steel bridge; wings, briefly shadowed, gleamed in the restored light.
>
> The air made his lungs hurt. He remembered John Scaife who had died two months back, not much more than half his age. He was sorry for it but, remembering, stood taller. He thought of how much life there was still to live, of how much life there was inside of him. You're not dead, no, not till they nail down the lid. (211)

Despite the wasteland that is Wharfe Street—"Can't build flats [here]," remarks Dinah

earlier, "because of the chemicals in the air" (206)—George's vision of the natural world

is transformed by sex. It is a kind of rare, postwar Lawrentian moment where George

emerges as an older Mellors, reinvigorated with sexual energy against the corrupting

forces of industrialization and economic depression. Instead of dreading his return home

to Union Street, as he does throughout the Blond Dinah section of the novel, George is

now "glad to be going home" (211) in spite of the lack of companionship he has sensed

there.

This supposedly cheerful moment contains a dystopian truth, however. First,

Barker provides clues in the novel that George Harrison is not an innocently neglected

man at the hands of a spiteful wife and forgetful children. During a reminiscence of his

wife's, we learn that early in George's marriage to Gladys "he'd turned her out of doors

in her nightdress, sometimes with a baby in her arms" (217) after quarreling. George is,

in other words, like most men in *Union Street*: brutal and cold to the women they supposedly love. This knowledge, along with the last image we receive of Dinah, undercuts George's redemption: "He [George] did not think of Dinah, who stirred in her sleep and woke, aware of the empty bed" (211).

Reminding ourselves that this section of *Union Street* bears Blond Dinah's name, and not George's, we see the irony present in Barker's naming. In a Britain where women are constantly duped, abused, and traumatized by men, Barker purposefully stresses George's spiritual recovery to illustrate the erasure of the female self that lies at the heart of postwar British society. In her essay "Desire in Narrative," Teresa de Lauretis questions the theoretical structure of narrative and its effect on character, arguing that the history of narrative reveals the suppression of the feminine in preference to showcasing male desire and identity. De Lauretis states that feminist theory must perform a rereading of the "sacred texts" on narrative theory and cites Roland Barthes's interest in language, narrative, and the Oedipus as the factors that produce the informing logic of male desire in narrative development: "Pleasure and meaning move along the triple track he first outlined, and the tracking is from the point of view of Oedipus, so to speak, its movement is that of a masculine desire."[243] In this case, George's recovery of desire and identity dominates Dinah's tale and subverts Barker's system of exposing the British public to the plight of its women. What Barker communicates without the need of realist language, save the lingering sentence of Dinah waking up alone, is the sad reality of poor British women who seek prostitution as a method of survival in the harsh economic climate of the North. They are the forgotten figures of society, used quickly

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[243] Teresa de Lauretis, "Desire in Narrative," *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984) 107.

130

and repeatedly by neglectful, selfish men and ignored by a larger body politic that claims a higher moral ground. The prostitute for Barker represents *absence* in a male-dominated society: Blond Dinah is there, we see and hear her, but she is also invisible because her body and identity are mere sexual functions to the men of Union Street.

If we borrow the Oedipal designs of de Lauretis's critique of narrative, then, Blond Dinah is the Sphinx to George's Oedipus: she at first poses an unwelcome, uneasy challenge to George until he regains some adolescent vigor from his sexual conquest of her. For de Lauretis, this narrative move is a classic example of female identity inscribed in male desire: "Medusa and the Sphinx, like other ancient monsters, have survived inscribed in hero narratives, in someone else's story, not their own; so they are figures or markers of positions—places and topoi—through which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning."[244] The tragic-heroic element here is that as we celebrate one character's temporary recovery from the dystopian gloom of Wharfe Street and Union Street, Barker makes us keenly aware of Dinah's outsider status both in the community and in the story. Dinah provides the shape and context of George's recovery, not her own; she is little more than George's dirty little secret. In the end, Blonde Dinah is like de Lauretis's Sphinxian obstacle that "man encounters on the path of life, on his way to manhood, wisdom, and power; [she] must be slain or defeated so that he can go forward to fulfill his destiny—and his story. Thus we don't know, his story doesn't tell, what became of the Sphinx after the encounter with Oedipus..."[245] Blonde

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[244] de Lauretis 109.

[245] de Lauretis 110.

Dinah's brief role fades from the streets of Wharfe and Union, her life story forever

trapped in the exploits of men.[246]

The silent trauma of Blond Dinah's life—a life of sexual use at the hands of

men—roars to life in the portrait of Kelly Brown. If Blonde Dinah represents the taking

of female sexuality in the name of prostitution/commodity economics, then Kelly

Brown's rape serves as Barker's angry attack on man's raw taking of sexuality from

women and the lack of attention that such violence has received. Kelly's story is the

clearest example of Barker's use of psychological trauma as dystopian critique we

receive in the pages of *Union Street*.

Kelly Brown is the most vulnerable of characters in Barker's community of

women. As a young teen on the verge of puberty, Kelly poses a superficial confidence

about the adult world that masks serious insecurities. Living in a fatherless house, she is

desperate for attention from both her mother and the various men Mrs. Brown brings

home from the pub. Despite the usual sarcasm she reserves for her mother, Kelly's need

for love and recognition is made clear: "Kelly sniffed hungrily at the sweater she was

wearing, which held all the mingled smells of her mother's body. Though the face she

raised to her mother afterwards could not have been more hostile" (12). This need for

love is most directly connected to the absence of Kelly's father: "As always when she

was most unhappy, she started thinking about her father, imagining what it would be like

when he came back home. She was always looking for him, expecting to meet him,

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[246] Given Barker's ironic portrait of Blonde Dinah, it is interesting to note her Biblical namesake. Dinah appears in *Genesis* 34, as the daughter of Jacob and Leah who is raped by Shechem. Symbolizing one of the earliest uses of women as commodities, Shechem offers to marry Dinah so that the two men can exchange women and share land. Dinah is subsequently avenged by her brothers. Barker not only revises modern British history with Dinah's portrait but also Biblical history. She politicizes Dinah's Biblical lineage by clearly drawing the implication of prostitution from this act of violence and commodity exchange subsequently. And in contrast to Dinah's Biblical story, Barker's Dinah goes without vengeance or recognition.

though sometimes, in moments of panic and despair, she doubted if she would recognize him if she did" (19). For this reason, Kelly cannot commit to engaging the men her mother brings home, because the hope of finding a father substitute combined with the reality of abandonment is always present. Even as Mrs. Brown's current man, Arthur, jokes with Kelly, she turns "her back to the fire, guarding herself from the temptation of liking him" (14). Having just witnessed the coming and going of Wilf, her mother's last man, Kelly is conditioned to distrust men even though she craves a father figure.

Barker constructs the conditions of Kelly's poverty and home life in order to show how they make her an easy target for her attacker. After skipping school, Kelly's excitement quickly dissipates to depression—a feeling made all the more palpable by her environment: "The early excitement of nicking off from school was gone. She was lonely. The afternoon had dragged. There was a smell of decay, of life ending. Limp rags of mist hung from the furthest trees" (19). It is during this moment that she recalls the memory of her father, seeing "his warm and slightly oily brown skin and the snake on his arm that wriggled when he clenched the muscle underneath" (20). These desperate emotions blur into her current interaction with her soon-to-be attacker, who convinces Kelly to walk with him and feed the geese in the park. Despite her distrust of this stranger, Kelly's emotions distort her perception of reality. She begins to see the stranger as her father:

> With the surface of her mind she watched the long thick necks bend and sway as the birds squabbled over the bread, but deeper down she had begun telling herself stories again, fantasies whose warmth eased away the last ache of doubt. Her father had come back. It was her father behind her on the path. When she leaned still further out and felt the man's hand holding on to her skirt it was so much part of the dream that she did not bother to turn around. (22-23)

133

As John Brannigan notes, "Kelly is drawn to the man because he takes the place of her absent father, and because his gaze 'creates her,' where she has been ignored by her own mother, sister, teachers, and everyone else."[247] Even though Kelly remains aware of the man's odd presence, the trauma of her parental abandonment causes a dangerous *trompe l'oeil* that will set her on the path towards harm. Her strong need for emotional support causes her to misinterpret the intentions of others. She becomes knotted at an emotional crossroads that will soon paralyze her ability to save herself.

To stress the psychological manipulation of perception, Barker stages the beginning of Kelly's attack at the local carnival. It is no accident that Kelly finds herself at the Hall of Mirrors, watching her older neighbors being turned into "[h]ags and goblin[s], witch[es] and toad[s], vampire[s] and crow[s]" (24). The mirrors signify Kelly's loosening grasp on reality due to her rising fear. As she boards the Ghost Train in an effort to escape possible detection from the man, Kelly's eyes start to play tricks on her: "The last carriages filled quickly and there—yes, she was almost sure—there he was, dressed all in black as he had been in the park, standing out, thin and dark as an exclamation mark, against the coloured shirts and funny hats…" (25). Barker registers Kelly's fear with the image of the exclamation mark, as if purposefully using a sign of heightened alert to communicate Kelly's terror in the absence of her having the proper language to articulate the fright dominating her mind. At the same time, Kelly's fear of being watched and stalked mirrors Laura Mulvey's argument in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" about scopophilia, an act that subjects people (and, for Mulvey, specifically women) to the status of sexualized object in the controlling eyes of the (male)

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[247] Brannigan 21.

onlooker.[248] Mulvey argues that scopophilia, at the extreme, "can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms, whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other."[249] This extreme scopophilic threat is precisely what Kelly faces, though Barker extends Mulvey's threat of a sexual satisfaction that comes from watching to actual rape.

As she tries to flee the fairgrounds, Kelly's intensifying fear makes it impossible for her to distinguish actual alarm from false alarm: "She started to run again, tripped over a coil of rope and fell, not into emptiness, but into hands that caught and held her…He was fat and shiny with a black moustache…Nothing that she had feared, nothing that she had imagined, could have been more terrifying than this entirely ordinary face" (27). Kelly's terror is completely misdirected, mistaking a harmless carnival hand for the visage of the predator her mind has fashioned. The irony, of course, is that the shadowy figure dressed in black by the Ghost Train does not exist at all, and the fear of this nonexistence presence leads her right into the hands of the man from the park. At this point, Barker refocuses her emphasis on perception from Kelly to the reader and forces the reader, like Kelly, to be both a victim of and witness to Kelly's rape. Barker signals this shift as Kelly's attack begins with a slimy, clinical description of the rapist's penis: "A single mucoid eye leered at her from under the partially retracted foreskin" (33). Kelly becomes the possessed object here, watched threateningly, held symbolically at gunpoint. The image literalizes the controlling aspect of Mulvey's phallocentric gaze: "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled

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[248] See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[249] Mulvey 835.

accordingly."[250] The political significance of Mulvey's male gaze here is that it translates warped male desire into violent antifeminist action. This fantasy turns into horrifying reality for Kelly. The moment of the rape becomes a prison house for Kelly, a cell from which she cannot escape. She tries desperately to steal herself back from her rapist, as she forces him to a fish and chips shop by threatening to yell for help: "She tried to make the man look at her. She needed him. He was all she had. But he did not want to look" (36). Kelly finds her wound "deep and wordless" (36), realizing that she "would never tell anybody. Nobody would understand. It wasn't like falling down, or getting run over by a car. She *was* what had just happened to her" (36; italics original). The restaurant itself mimics her sense of imprisonment: "She looked away from him again. But it was no use: the room was lined with mirror-tiles. Wherever she looked, their eyes met…From every side his reflection leapt back at her, as the mirror-tiles filled with the fragments of his shattered face" (37). The playfully distorted faces of her friends at the Hall of Mirrors now take on a menacing reality: Kelly is trapped inside her experience, unable to escape the male gaze of her attacker.

Kelly reveals the internalization of this pain as she acts out and rebels against simple social norms. Brannigan suggests that it is Kelly's "recognition that she is condemned to dereliction which seems to enrage [her] into committing her acts of destruction."[251] While such a reading of Kelly's plight is fair, Brannigan's use of "dereliction" is tied to the larger blighted socio-economic conditions that surround Barker's characters and thus ignores the specific trauma of rape that Barker emphasizes through Kelly. It is solely the trauma of this rape that fuels her actions. As a symbolic

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[250] Mulvey 837.

[251] Brannigan 23.

form of cutting, she disfigures her looks by savagely cutting her hair: "She cut it off. You could tell she'd done it herself because it stood up all over her head in jagged spikes and chunks…She could have shaved her head, the effect it had. People took it for what it was: an act of rebellion, at once self-mutilating and aggressive. And they drew back from her because of it" (48). However, Barker conducts her own version of Carol Hanisch's feminist mantra "the personal is political" by connecting Kelly's personal, internal trauma to one of the most recognizable social traumas of Britain in the 1970s—the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland:

> The telly kept [Kelly] company on the nights her Mam and Linda were out. She watched anything rather than switch it off. Tonight, there was a programme about Northern Ireland. She settled down, expecting to be bored. But then there was this young man, this soldier, and he was lying in a sort of cot, a bed with sides to it, and he was shouting out, great bellows of rage, as he looked out through the bars at the ward where nobody came. What caught her attention was: they'd shaved all his hair off. You could see the scars where they'd dug the bullets out. His head was like a turnip. That was what they'd done to him. They'd turned him into a turnip, a violent turnip, when they shot bullets into his brain. (49-50)

As Kelly watches the endless unfolding of this soldier's trauma, she is forced in a way to repeat her own experience as she acknowledges their shared shaved heads, the violence that has been enacted upon their bodies. The soldier's pain connects her back to her pain through the image of the eye: "The camera switched to gangs of youth throwing stones. But his eyes went on watching her" (50). The violence of the soldier's gaze suggests the return of Kelly's trauma—the eye of the raping penis, the fractured stare of the rapist in the fish and chips bar. Even as she struggles to undo her traumatic event by retracing her steps the night of her attack, Kelly finds herself repeating[252] her trauma:

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[252] In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud notes that trauma suffered by World War I soldiers traps them into a kind of eternal experience of terror: "He [the soldier] is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a

As she stood on the pavement outside the fish and chip shop there had seemed to be nothing else to do but retrace her steps. As though in going back the past could be undone. She did not look back, though if she had done so she would have seen him, there, in his mirror-tiled cell, moisture still oozing out of his eyes and dripping down his face. She did not need to look back. She would carry him with her always, wherever she went, a homunculus, coiled inside her brain. (57)

Similar to the soldier's head wound, Kelly discovers that her rape has permanently shot violence into her own head for good, and through this connection between soldier and rape victim Barker shows that a personal attack against a woman becomes as large and significant as "The Troubles."

At the same time that Barker emphasizes the gaze that traps Kelly, she also continues to use eye imagery to reverse the power of the gaze and press the role of witness upon the reader. This fact emerges clearly when Mrs. Brown notices Kelly's altered physique: "The nightdress was slightly transparent. Although Kelly had nothing that you could call a bust, hardly as much as many men, her nipples seemed to demand attention. Like eyes in her chest. You couldn't avoid seeing them" (45). Barker's symbolic shift to second-person narrative voice here engages the reader directly with the awful knowledge of a presence of sexuality that has been forced upon Kelly. Kelly's breasts stare accusingly at both her mother, who has repeatedly neglected her, and at the reader/British society who, Barker implies, look the other way when such atrocities happen to women.[253] This is perhaps one of the most pointed uses of trauma as feminist

contemporary experience, instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past" (288; italics original). Kelly is caught in the same cycle as a shell-shocked soldier: she is unable to contextualize her trauma has something that has passed; it remains alive and tormenting. See Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis.* Trans. James Strachey. Ed. Angela Richards (1920. Reprint London and New York: Penguin, 1984).

[253] It is crucial to remember that the police do nothing to assist Kelly. As Mrs. Brown confides her anger and hurt to Iris King, she recalls the police asking her "what was Kelly doing wandering around at that time of night when she'd been told to come home?" (41). She reads between the lines: "The police had blamed

critique in *Union Street*, as the turning of the male gaze from Kelly outward places moral guilt on all observers. Kelly's uneasy reintegration among the neighbors on Union Street stresses this critique:

> Her nipples were bigger than they had been. It was difficult to avoid seeing them. Even the scruffy boy's tee-shirts she'd taken to wearing didn't hide them, but rather made them, by contrast, more painfully apparent. *You* looked. *You* couldn't help yourself. And raised *your* eyes. And when *you* floundered, not knowing how to express, or hide, your thoughts she didn't help at all: she let you flounder. And always there were those eyes. Cool. Amused. Hostile. Controlled. (49; italics added).

The gaze of her body—of her crime ("She *was* what had just happened to her" [36; italics original])—stares down the onlooker, including the reader. This twist of vision is a political act on Barker's part: she effectively transforms the casual observer into a participant in the rape of Kelly, the worst result of the poverty, hopelessness, and crime of Union Street. For Barker, the image of woman no longer simply "plays to and signifies male desire"[254]; Kelly's gaze and body project male violence back on to those who create it or ignore it.

The final effect of Kelly's trauma widens this political, accusatory eye on larger British society. Struggling with her new battered self, she becomes an outsider in the dank dystopia of Northern Britain: "More than ever she haunted the streets by night. She liked particularly the decaying, boarded-up streets by the river. There a whole community had been cleared away; the houses waited for the bulldozers and the demolition men to move in, but they never came" (60). Kelly's role as an outsider shines

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her for it. They hadn't said much but you could tell" (41). In essence, Kelly's rape has not happened, and instead of being an open crime, her case becomes one of victim-blaming.

[254] Mulvey 837.

a political searchlight on the destruction of community and what British society has

chosen to conveniently ignore:

> But however carefully you trod sooner or later glass crunched under your
> feet or a sagging floorboard creaked and threatened to give way, and
> instantly that hidden life revealed itself…Tramps. Drunks. As she
> became more skilful she saw them. These were not the drunks you meet
> wending a careful path home to the safety of hearth and bed. These were
> the hopeless, the abandoned, the derelict. (60-61)

John Brannigan counters such a vision of Britain and argues that *Union Street* "ultimately

finds a way of avoiding pessimism about the fate of working-class women" by offering

us a "symbolic vision of a spectral community of women" and "narrative strategies" that

"enable the reader to perceive…the intersubjective community which begins to form

from each character's apparently empathetic awareness of others."[255] However, the

power of Barker's traumatic realism complicates such an optimistic reading. Kelly's

traumatic vision here exposes the fragmentation and neglect of the North in naked

language, while the hope for such community that lingers in the novel remains symbolic

and is never truly realized in a realist moment. Kelly's trauma achieves a powerful

dystopian meaning in that she affords the reader a stark, moral confrontation with an

ailing Britain, thus heightening our awareness of a decaying nation. Brannigan does

argue for a moment of realist hope by noting the "final line of the story—'She was going

home'—which seems to recover some sense of comfort in her home, suggests that Kelly

finds in this vision some way of living with the confining conditions of her social

situation."[256] However, Kelly's trauma is formidable; she is still unable to "break out of

that room inside her head where she and The Man sat and stared at each other's

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[255] Brannigan 28.

[256] Brannigan 24.

reflections in the mirror tiles" (65). In the end, Kelly, like most of the women in *Union Street*, remains alone. She metamorphoses into a traumatized automaton that haunts the streets of Britain: "She seemed to be drying up, to be turning into a machine. Her legs, pumping up and down the cold street, had the regularity and power of pistons. And her hands, dangling out of the sleeves of her anorak, were as heavy and lifeless as tools" (64).

The project of *Union Street*, then, is more of a materialist[257] one: Barker forces the reader to experience how the material conditions of poverty and sexual violence have irrevocably altered the environment of Union, Wharfe, and other surrounding streets. In this light, Barker's *Union Street* updates the classic dystopian vision of the industrial North found in Dickens's Coketown. In Barker's Britain, however, there is very little family unity or Dickensian humor to redeem this world; and there is no Mr. Sleary to remind us that, amidst the gloom and poverty of industrial Britain, "People must be amuthed…they can't be alwayth a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning."[258]

II. Hunting Women, Destroying Community, and the Question of Violence

The sexual trauma of Kelly Brown echoes well into Barker's second dystopian novel about life in the North of Britain. Similar to *Union Street*, *Blow Your House Down* (1984) examines the present-day decay of working-class British life in the wake of the economic disasters of the early 1970s. However, with *Blow Your House Down*, Barker's retelling of contemporary British history atomizes a specific moment of horror that plagued the lives of women in Northern Britain during the late 1970s: Peter Sutcliffe's

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[257] John Brannigan acknowledges the pressing importance of the materiality of Barker's women's lives, "who can barely glimpse beyond the material deprivations of their social and gendered identities" (Brannigan 44).

[258] Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003) 45.

six-year reign of terror as the Yorkshire Ripper from 1975-1981, a period which witnessed Sutcliffe's brutal murder of 13 women throughout Yorkshire.[259] *Blow Your House Down* signals a more concentrated effort on Barker's part to perfect her skill at a literal dystopian recreation of social reality charged with feminist political import. In this novel, Barker demonstrates a keen awareness of the mass trauma that affected the lives of almost all citizens in the North, a trauma which blanketed daily life and enabled a hysteria over the Ripper murders to alter the perception of life in Northern communities from the daily, heartbreaking struggles we witness in *Union Street* into a living horror film depicting imminent death. Retired Detective Sergeant Andrew Laptew of the West Yorkshire Police, one of the lead investigators into the Yorkshire Ripper killings, even describes this atmosphere in distinct dystopian terms: "There was a great shadow over the county. I can only describe it as a gothic gloom. Women especially were terrified because, in the shadows, they imagined that this murderer was lurking."[260] Barker's recreation of this dark chapter of British history takes precisely the subject of this feminine fear and uses direct, realist language to reveal a new kind of demonic, patriarchal totalitarian system. Northern Britain of the late 1970s is, for Barker, a dystopian universe that encourages the practice of male violence at the expense of subjugated—or worse, mutilated—female life.

Barker exposes the omnipresent culture of male violence against women almost immediately as we enter the world of *Blow Your House Down*. In contrast to the brief sketch we receive of *Union Street*'s prostitute, Dinah, Barker provides the missing

[259] The figure of 13 victims comes from Sutcliffe's original police confession on 4 January 1981, though since then he has been linked to possibly 10 other assaults on women in the North.

[260] "Peter Sutcliffe," *Biography: The Yorkshire Ripper*, 2004, YouTube, Web, 25 February 2010.

personal histories of prostitutes in the North. Brenda, the main character for the first half of the novel, introduces us to the spousal abuse that plagues much of her community that eventually leads her into prostitution. Even before her marriage, her husband-to-be Brian "thought nothing of belting her if she didn't have his shirts ironed" (267). Brenda discovers that Brian and his siblings have inherited this violence from his family: "All the kids remembered how one night [Brian's father] pushed [Brian's mother] over the banister and swung her to-and-fro by the hair" (266). Brenda hopes to avoid a lifetime of married violence, thinking that their lives will "be different when we're married," but she discovers that the only difference is that Brian "hit her harder" (267). While musing about her life and Brian's family, Brenda's epiphany is that domestic violence is accepted as normal behavior: "It didn't matter what you thought about the bloke, it was just something you had to do" (265). Subservience to men and enduring their brutality is simply coming of age for women, with the irony being that female opposition to this violence is looked upon as abnormal. The dark lesson that clouds life in the North at its most intimate social core, the family and relationships, is that male violence is routine as habit.

Barker also shows through Brenda that trying to escape familial male violence and establish female independence is a virtual impossibility. Brenda is forced to move to Melbourne Terrace, the poorer and more dangerous part of town, and eventually discovers that the Social Security office is not really meant to help her. Instead of receiving monetary support right away, Brenda receives a home inspection to ensure she is not lying about her delinquent husband.[261] Barker uses the scene to link Brenda's

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[261] Barker here is critiquing the "cohabitation rule" of the Social Security Act of 1966. The Department of Health and Social Security used this rule in the late Sixties and Seventies to stop unemployment benefits to

personal violence to a larger social phenomenon: "What got [Brenda] was the hypocrisy of it all. They went on about being married, but when you got right down to it, past the white weddings and the romance and all that, what they *really* thought was: if you're getting on your back for a fella, he ought to pay. *That* was what they really thought. And where did that leave you? You might just as well be standing on a street corner in bloody Northgate—at least it'd be honest" (275; italics original). Barker clearly points out that marriage functions as sexual oppression in the larger social context. Women are mere objects of sex, with men as paying customers. Brenda's realization equates marriage to prostitution, a move that Barker uses to deconstruct the antifeminist image of prostitutes as morally compromised subhumans and to recover them as strong women fighting to survive in an economically defunct, misogynist society.

The entrenched culture of male violence against women does not exist only in marriage. Barker uses the chicken factory in Brenda's neighborhood as a multifaceted symbol to describe another training ground for the violent subjugation of women. Before fully entering prostitution, Brenda attempts to work at the factory to support her children. As she interviews for the job, she enters the wrong door at the factory and accidentally sees "a line of live chickens fastened to a conveyor belt by their legs…At the end of the line a man hit them with something to stun them and another man chopped off their heads" (278). The image is a metaphor for women in Britain's North, trapped and waiting to be attacked by men. When she tells the supervisor about her experience, his response is loaded with double meaning: "'Oh, you don't go in there…Killing's for the men'" (279). While David Waterman rightly claims "the chickens represent the passive

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single, divorced, or separated women if they were found to be living with an able man that could work. See Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, 143.

acceptance of a violent death,"[262] which is an obvious symbol for the women, he does not

acknowledge the full role played by men in this act. The supervisor unwittingly captures,

in almost motto-like format, the patriarchal ethos governing male and female relations in

Barker's Britain. Brenda has already experienced this cruelty in marriage, and she soon

understands the larger institutionalization of this violence once the fear of the Yorkshire

Ripper enters the women's lives.

Barker links the supervisor's remark to this more pressing violence in the North

when Brenda and her fellow prostitutes discuss their tactics to identify the Ripper. One

solution they debate is fleeing the North for London—an option that fellow prostitute

Maureen easily rejects. Maureen states, "'No point moving to London. If you're gunna

meet one you'll meet one anywhere'" (257). Maureen notes that the Ripper is not an

isolated phenomenon; his brand of violence can be easily encountered by prostitutes all

over Britain. Even when Brenda suggests that the recent lull in attacks may indicate the

killer has "buggered off" (258), Maureen's further analysis of this Ripper culture reveals

a helplessness that dominates the women:

> 'I wish I had a fiver for every time I've heard that…I was in Bradford, you
> know…Oh there was a lot moved out, but there was a lot more stayed.
> And they were always on: "Oh he's given it up." "He's gone away."
> "He's topped himself." Like bloody hell. And there were all sorts of
> ideas flying round. "Always get out of the car." "Never get out of the
> car." "Take the numbers." "Work in pairs." "Don't bend down." "Don't
> turn your back." "Don't suck them off." Load of rubbish. I never did any
> of it. I did start carrying a knife and then I thought well, you dozy cow,
> you're just handing him the weapon. So after that I didn't bother.' (258)

There is no system of defense for the women against any kind of potential danger, a

situation that reinforces Barker's metaphor of the chickens waiting to be slaughtered.

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[262] David Waterman, *Pat Barker and the Mediation of Social Reality* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009) 21.

What disturbs Maureen even more, however, are the men who wreak linguistic and psychological violence on the prostitutes as they tease the women about being the Ripper: "'If you listen to them every stupid little prick with a few pints inside him was the Ripper. They used to get me. I don't care what they say, a man that'll go around attacking women, well, he must have something wrong with him. But *them*. They just used to scare the shit out of you, just for the fun of it, and then they'd stand back and have a bloody good laugh'" (259; italics original). Barker's men find crass entertainment in the reality of the Ripper killings, which becomes a further extension of the culture of violence against women in Britain. Not even the hard facts of dead women's bodies alter men's attitudes towards women. Barker counters the construction of this social reality with the portrait of her women, and in the process reverses the social stigma placed on prostitutes. While she humanizes her prostitutes by examining their intelligence, fear, and suffering, she exposes the moral bankruptcy of Britain's lad culture. The derogatory social attitude that usually surrounds prostitutes is redirected at the men who seek their services. In effect, Barker dismantles an age-old double standard that locks women into a Madonna/Whore binary while men freely explore their sexuality.

The institutionalization of this misogyny does not stop at lad culture, however. Barker makes it clear that even Britain's police force encourages violence against women in their pursuit of the Ripper. This violence begins with the police harassment of Brenda and the other prostitutes, which is meant to demean the women out of their rights. As in *Union Street*, Barker employs her frequent narrative voice switch to second person to place the reader in the position of Brenda: "It was terrible, it was really humiliating, and it changed you completely. You felt as if you'd had the words 'common prostitute'

146

stamped right through you, like 'Blackpool' through a stick of rock. It was the 'common' that hurt. 'Prostitute', well, you couldn't very well deny it; but she wasn't common. They had no right to say that" (293). The police extend this deconstruction of Brenda and the other women's rights by coercing them into sex: "If there was one thing she hated more than window shoppers it was off-duty policemen turning up to claim their free fuck" (286). The police in effect commit rape on these women and leave them in no position to protest or defend themselves. What is worse, Barker argues through her characters that the surveillance tactics used by the police to catch the Ripper purposefully place prostitutes directly in harm's way. Jean, a prostitute in Brenda's circle, explains the antifeminist method behind the police's tactics: "'They're not there to stop it happening. They're just taking the car numbers so when it does happen they'll know who was in the area.' She looked round the table. 'Don't you see? That's why they're leaving us alone. They're waiting for one of us to be killed'" (333).[263] Barker's reading of police methods reveals a complete erosion of the boundaries of good and evil. From the point of view of Barker's women, the policemen are no different than the Ripper: both see women as expendable. This violence lies at the heart of Barker's dystopian vision of Britain: she sees the patriarchal culture of Northern Britain as one that allows the mass slaughter of women. Barker reminds us at this point of the imagery of the chicken factory to stress its symbolic value. As more prostitutes flood the Northgate district, we learn that "Some had come in from other towns, but when you talked to them you could understand why: it

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[263] Barker is referring to actual tactics used by Manchester and Yorkshire police during their attempts to catch the Yorkshire Ripper in the late 1970s. Jean's remark hints at the terrible irony that while more women died the police failed to act on Sutcliffe's multiple visits to prostitute districts. According to the BBC, "Police registered millions of car number plates seen in red light districts all over the north. Sutcliffe's was spotted 60 times and he was interviewed nine times before his final arrest." See "22 May 1981: Yorkshire Ripper jailed for life," *On This Day 1950-2005*, BBC News, Web, 8 March 2010.

wasn't just they knew they were safe from arrest here, it was because the number of

arrests had gone up everywhere else. They were being herded into Northgate, like into a

pen. And then watched" (369). The metaphor of the chicken factory resurfaces here to

signify that Barker's women, whether prostitute or not, live in a totalitarian world of

random (the Ripper) and systematized (spousal abuse, police abuse and neglect) mass

misogyny and violence. They are left with almost no remedy to articulate their fear or

opposition to this oppressive environment.

Barker employs two tactics of her own to attempt to counter this world of male

violence. Her first tactic is to rewrite the social history of the Ripper murders. She

accomplishes this revision by returning to her use of eye imagery and offering us a

feminist version of Sutcliffe's account of his killings. Interestingly, in Sutcliffe's own

confession statement from January 4, 1981, he expresses an anxiety about the eyes of two

of his victims, Helen Rytka and Jacquelyn Hill. While attacking Helen Rytka, Sutcliffe

states:

> She had stopped moaning but she wasn't dead. I could see her eyes
> moving. She held up her hand as though to ward off any further attack
> from me. I told her not to make any more noise and she would be alright.
> By this time I was aroused sexually so I had intercourse with her. I just
> undid my fly I spread her legs out and did it. It only took a few minutes
> before I ejaculated inside her. Her eyes appeared to be focusing on me
> when I was doing it but she just layed [sic] there limp she didn't put
> anything in to it.[264]

During his attack on his final victim, Jacqueline Hill, Sutcliffe states: "I pulled Miss

HILL's [sic] cloths [sic] off most of them I had a screwdriver on me I think it had a

yellow handle and a bent blade. I stabbed her in her lungs. Her eyes were wide open and

she seemed to be looking at me with an accusing stare. This shook me up a bit I jabbed

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[264] Peter Sutcliffe, "Confession Statement" 4 January 1981, The Yorkshire Ripper, Web, 8 March 2010:
sheet 25.

148

the screwdriver into her eye but they stayed open and I felt worse than ever." [265]

From this evidence, it appears that Barker bases the murder of Kath on these two crimes, in particular the murder of Jacqueline Hill. After Barker's Ripper sodomizes Kath and beats her unconscious, he stabs her repeatedly before being startled by Kath's eyes: "When he straightened up again her eyes were open. It shook him a bit because he was pretty certain they'd been closed. He bent over her, but there was no sign of life…He could feel her staring at him, though he kept his back turned. He kept thinking, *Why don't her eyes close?*" (309; italics original). Barker appropriates Sutcliffe's anxiety of Jacqueline Hill's gaze into the novel in order to dismantle his shocking destruction of the feminine and thus take away the power of his actions and narrative. She is able to emphasize the guilt of the Ripper and widen the sense of this culpability to the reader by focusing attention on the power of Kath's stare—a stare that lingers to haunt the Ripper and the reader long after he abandons Kath's body: "The window is boarded up, the room dark, except for five thin lines of moonlight that lie across the mattress like bars. One of them has just reached her eyes. They look so *alive you* wonder she can bear the light shining directly into them. Any moment now, you feel, her eyes will close" (310; italics added). In contrast to the brutal final image of Sutcliffe's narrative of Jacqueline Hill, Barker gives us an empowering stare to deny male control over the female body and overturns this version of history with her own. Barker transforms the scopophilic focus of the Ripper and, more generally, men—a focus, Laura Mulvey argues, preoccupied "with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious

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[265] Sutcliffe, "Confession Statement," sheets 32-33.

gaze"[266]—and drains the power of this look by stressing the tragedy and horror of Kath's glance. The dying image of Kath removes her from object status, and Barker once again employs her use of second-person narrative voice to rehumanize her presence and refocus the atrocities of men at the killer and the reader.

Barker even reworks this theory of the male gaze to deconstruct the intense male violence of the Ripper. With the gruesome details of the Ripper's post-murder defilement of Kath's body, Barker again plays with narrative voice and gives us the Ripper's subjective view of Kath:

> After a few minutes he was able to stop and look down. It wasn't enough that she was dead, he needed more. He gathered handfuls of feathers together and started shoving them inside her cunt. It wasn't easy: as fast as he pushed them inside they turned red. He had to practically stuff her with them, like stuffing a chicken, before he could get the effect he wanted: a ridiculous little white frill between her legs. (309)

John Brannigan notes the obvious extension here of the metaphor of chicken factory violence and the violence against women.[267] But he also suggests that this inside view of the killer's mind indicates the "fetishistic motives" of the Ripper, which "reveals a disturbing complex of emotions, both of his hatred for women (his violence towards her is expressed physically and verbally here) and also his veneration of an image of female sexuality as pubescent and delicate."[268] While the Ripper's misogyny is clear, this passage also demonstrates the psychic workings of the "woman as icon," according to Laura Mulvey: "Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally

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[266] Mulvey 835.

[267] Brannigan 47.

[268] Brannigan 47-48.

signified."[269] The woman as icon for Mulvey is always at first "isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualized," but, as she notes, "in psychoanalytical terms, the female figure poses a deeper problem."[270] This deeper problem is the anxiety of castration for men, and given the Ripper's fear of Kath's vagina in this scene, it appears certain that Barker constructs this image of Kath as a kind of anti-icon—one that reminds the Ripper of his inner lack of power and control. Thus, the scatological detail of this scene does not necessarily communicate or explain the "fetishistic motives" of the Ripper or really suggest his "veneration" for delicate female sexuality. Instead, Barker's scabrous imagery exposes the demented, weakened psyche of male violence as a way of reversing his controlling gaze that has lead to his sadistic actions. The feather stuffing symbolizes the Ripper's warped attempt to conceal his lack and fear of the feminine more so than his attempt to reconstruct a clean, virginal vision of female sexuality. The vile image does not fetishize Kath either, for such reading of this violence would require Kath to remain imprisoned within the perverted male gaze of a Ripper who enjoys sex and violence. What we are left with instead is an image that signifies horror and traumatizes the Ripper *and* the viewer/reader, thus reversing the controlling meaning of this violence.

The emphasis on Kath's eyes remains throughout the rest of the novel as a reminder of Barker's reversal of the male gaze. Barker develops her reworking of Kath's gaze to invoke a sense of cosmic observance and justice. As Brenda mourns the loss of Kath, we are given a portrait of her at the police mortuary:

> Her eyes are open. If you were to pull the cloth back from her face they might even shine, momentarily, catching the slight gleam of moonlight from the frosted glass above her head. She looks…not alive. Certainly

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[269] Mulvey 840.

[270] Mulvey 840.

not alive. *Present*, perhaps? Whatever it is, the effect is disturbing. Even those who work here do not readily pull back the cloth.

In life Kath Robson hated being stared at. Not in death. In death she looks ready to outstare anybody. (315; ellipses and italics original)

Barker transforms Kath's eyes into an evolving symbol: from recovering female victims from male violence to establishing a moral watch to judge this culture. Jean's observation of the billboard near the viaduct containing Kath's photograph near the viaduct literalizes this symbol:

I watched them pasting across first one eye and then the other and I thought, My God. Because her eyes, they follow you. They do, they follow you everywhere. I can be walking along with me back to her and I still them. And they've got such a funny look. You'd just think they'd taken that photo after she was dead—that's the effect it has on you. Which is mad, because you can see she's alive, and anyway dead people's eyes close. (341)

Kath's eyes hover over the scene of all the violence in the novel, the Northgate district. Her eyes function similar to Fitzgerald's billboard of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg in *The Great Gatsby*, whose eyes symbolically witness the violent death of Myrtle Wilson and possibly judge the moral failings of Gatsby and his reckless associates. However, perhaps to signal the overwhelming power of this Northern dystopia, Barker uses Jean's cynicism to weaken the effect of this judgmental gaze. As Jean ponders the billboard at length, she notes:

Underneath the photo there's an appeal for information and I think if I could laugh about anything I'd have a good belly laugh over that. I mean, who reads it? The women from the chicken factory I suppose, but it's not likely they'll know anything. Apart from them, there's the dossers underneath that little arch at the end, there's the men hanging around the toilet over there, there's the punters, and there's girls like me. A few. As I say, these days not many. Which of that lot is gunna go running to the police? You see what I mean? It's ridiculous. Not worth the paper it's printed on. Even I wouldn't go to the police unless it was forced work, and I want to catch the bastard more than most. (342)

Jean's thoughts point to a simple truth: nobody cares. If men have been shown to engage in a variety of violence against women throughout both *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* while women lack the ability to change these conditions, then Barker's major dystopian warning is that of failed social action. Orwell's fear of the ideological duping of citizens into thinking and doing whatever the state tells them in *1984* has come to full fruition in Barker's Northern dystopia.[271]

So, can we imagine social justice at all in Barker's Britain? Barker poses this question through the second tactic she uses to challenge this world of patriarchal violence: the character of Jean. Jean is *Blow Your House Down*'s counterpart to *Union Street*'s Iris: both women have lived abandoned childhoods, have endured male violence, and as a result are forceful and headstrong. Both also commit questionable acts of violence. However, Jean is the more extreme of the characters. Whereas Iris commits murder out of unplanned circumstance (the botched abortion forces her to make an on-the-spot decision not to help save her daughter's baby), Jean develops a premeditated plan of action to reject ethics and law and pursue the Ripper herself.

What Barker questions more pointedly with Jean is the possibility of violence being used by the disadvantaged against an all-encompassing system of violence. German philosopher Herbert Marcuse addresses this very concept in his 1965 essay, "Repressive Tolerance," a widely influential essay in the turbulent political times of the late 1960s and 1970s. Marcuse argues that modern Western democracies function much

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[271] It is important to note here that Barker's first two novels, which appeared in 1982 and 1984, share much in common with Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1984). Both Barker's and Atwood's novels articulate an antifeminist world where women are sexually abused and stripped of their rights, with the key difference being that Barker does not bother with science fiction displacement as Atwood does with her landscape of Gilead. This world of injustice is clearly being lived—it does not need to be envisioned.

like dystopian, oppressive states that condition and control their subjects to be obedient to

the status quo maintained by conservative governments that opposed the student left.

Aside from his radical revision of the concept of tolerance to combat the inequality

woven into the fabric of democracies, Marcuse's more controversial argument in

"Repressive Tolerance" is his seemingly open willingness to consider the use of violence

to help minority groups subjugated or silenced by those in power. He articulates this

consideration of "extralegal means" not as reckless or destructive, but as a valid option

that oppressed individuals can choose to challenge an entrenched system of control and

violence. In essence, it is a kind of quid pro quo:

> But I believe that there is a "natural right" of resistance for oppressed and
> overpowered minorities to use extralegal means if the legal ones have
> proved to be inadequate. Law and order are always and everywhere the
> law and order which protect the established hierarchy; it is nonsensical to
> invoke the absolute authority of this law and this order against those who
> suffer from it and struggle against it—not for personal advantages and
> revenge, but for their share of humanity. There is no other judge over
> them than the constituted authorities, the police, and their own conscience.
> If they use violence, they do not start a new chain of violence but try to
> break an established one. Since they will be punished, they know the risk,
> and when they are willing to take it, no third person, and least of all the
> educator and intellectual, has the right to preach them abstension.[272]

Marcuse does not see law and order as neutral concepts or systems meant to protect all

members of society. He sees them as tools fashioned by those in power *for* those in

power. It is the equivalent of a master narrative that privileges a set of meanings or a

version of history that benefits a conquering body of people while purposefully excluding

the lives and culture of the conquered. Law and order—legal authorities and the police—

cannot be relied upon by the disadvantaged for help or to address grievances. Violence

emerges as a subset of Marcuse's "extralegal means" as an option for resistance, and,

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[272] Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr., and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 116-17.

more importantly, this violence is justified by the already existing system of inequality that enacts psychological, emotional, and physical violence on the disadvantaged. This is an explosive argument since it clearly marries revolutionary theory with social praxis.

Jean acts as a kind of Marcusean test of this "extralegal means" option with her vigilantism. She, like several of the other women in Union and Wharfe Streets and the Northgate district, is an "overpowered minority": she lacks the full rights of freedom in her democratic society due to her status as a woman and a prostitute. The hierarchy of male authority dehumanizes her every moment of her life, with the most immediate threat being the Ripper. Jean is even marked by "the established hierarchy" of men and their violence: her neck bears the scar of a non-Ripper knifing attack after being raped by a client, which she flashes to people on occasion like a badge of survival. Her daily endurance of this male violence leads her to posses a lackadaisical attitude towards violence: "You might think I come back seething with hatred. Well, you'd be wrong. You expect a certain amount of violence in this job, you expect to get slapped around. Admittedly you don't expect a knife being pulled, but it happens. I just got unlucky, that's all" (356). However, her very endurance of male violence perhaps provides a clue for her own propensity for violent confrontation: "I never row with anybody if I can help it. I can't afford to, because with me it's no sooner the word than the blow" (364). Jean thus emerges as a woman ready to "break an established chain of violence," in Marcuse's words. She is not afraid to use physical violence to stand up for her rights.

However, Barker's portrayal of Jean's hunt for the Ripper casts strong doubts about the effectiveness of using extralegal means to seek justice and safety. Jean pursues this course of action by attempting to think like the Ripper in order to identify his

behavior patterns. However, as Jean and the other prostitutes celebrate Elaine's pregnancy in the Palmerston and play games at determining the child's sex, Barker reveals a special kind of trauma that haunts Jean. While playing these games, Jean suddenly envisions the Ripper attacking Elaine and ripping open the fetus to find out its sex. She attempts to rationalize this episode of imaginative violence as part of her plan to catch the Ripper: "Because for a long time, oh, about six months I suppose, before Kath died, I'd been trying to get inside his mind. It's the only way of finding him: you've got to see what he sees, you've got to know what he would do, and all the time I'd been trying, pushing against the doors of his mind. And then just as I relaxed, just when for once I wasn't thinking about him, the doors swung open, *but from the other side*" (343-44; italics original). Her rationalization fails, though, as her thoughts convey her own inability to control her mind. Jean's vigilantism colonizes her mind negatively, making her a prisoner to her own thoughts.

This state of mind alters her actions for the worse as she begins to use the very patriarchal police methods she has criticized. As she partners with Elaine on the streets, she admits: "I always took the number of any car Elaine got into, but I didn't always let the driver see me doing it" (345). The whole purpose of this buddy system is to let men know that their whereabouts are being tracked. However, Jean's actions make it clear she is more concerned with catching the Ripper than with Elaine's safety. Barker purposefully involves the reader with Jean's complicated moral stance, as she expresses no regret for putting Elaine through this ordeal:

> She knew what I was doing. There was no way Elaine could ever've put that into words, but she knew alright. I'd catch her looking at me sometimes and I'm bloody sure by the end she was more frightened of me than she was of him [the Ripper].

156

> I expect you're saying My God, how awful, but I wouldn't be in too much
> of a hurry to say that. I'm not the only one round here who goes fishing
> with live bait. (345)

Jean confidently sidesteps her moral and ethical guilt, sacrificing her friends for a
supposed greater good—i.e., formulating a method of resistance to find justice and
ultimately safety. Her address to the reader, though, cautions against any quick moral
judgment of her actions. By involving the reader in Jean's thoughts, we are reminded
of—and in some ways become complicit in—the police's immoral investigative actions
and thus of a more complex, corrupted world. On the other hand, in the process of going
outside of the social system of justice, Jean fails to achieve praxis for Marcuse's form of
resistance. Instead, she unwittingly uses the hunting methods of men and becomes the
very thing she hates. In short, Barker shows us just how paralyzing this dystopian
environment is: even as Jean tries to free herself from of a system of corruption and
control, her actions reintroduce her to this very system.

The single-mindedness of Jean's quest transforms her from a lucidly aware agent
trying to combat her corrupted society into a killer who partakes in the same kind of
violence as the Ripper. Barker constructs this transformation with a curious detail
particular to the Ripper. Before the Ripper violently rapes and murders Kath, Barker
notes that he "slipped a sweet into his mouth and sucked it…he always carried with him
little purple, violet-scented sweets to slip into his mouth if he was going to be close to
anyone" (303). This scent becomes a signature feature of his attacks, for as he attacks
Kath "there was a heavy smell of violets and decay and it seemed to be coming from his
open mouth" (308). When Jean later negotiates her next sexual transaction, her mind
becomes clouded with images of Carol and Irene, two women friends murdered by the

Ripper. Her current client is extremely nervous, and Jean's paranoid mind misreads his

actions as attempts to stage an attack. Interestingly, what ignites her suspicion that she is

with the Ripper is the smell of violets. As her client finishes a nervous pee, he reenters

the car with "the smell of violets on his breath" (377). This scent causes Jean to stab her

client in the neck, killing him almost instantly (378). Jean immediately discovers that the

known weapon of the Ripper, a knife, is not to be found in his car:

> I scoured every inch of the car, and there was no knife. And there had to
> be a knife…So where was the knife?
>
> It's true I didn't look in the boot of the car. To be honest, my nerve ran
> out. But the police'll've looked, and there's no hint in any of the papers
> that they think it's him. And I walked down Northgate tonight, and
> there's just as many vice-squad cars around as there ever was. But
> perhaps there would be. Perhaps they'd just go on as normal, waiting to
> see if there was another death. How else could they be sure?
>
> How else can I be sure?
>
> Oh, but you say, the smell. His breath smelled of violets. Yes, it did, and
> I killed him for it. Does that seem reasonable to you? (380)

What is curious about this detail of the violet candy is that this knowledge only exists

between the Ripper, Kath, and the reader—it is not a detail that the other characters learn.

At the end of this passage, Barker speaks through Jean and addresses the reader to

debunk Jean's political action and thus condemn her act of violence. Barker also uses

this narrative moment to criticize the reader's rush to judgment. The reader's knowledge

of this detail of the violet candy in some ways serves to justify Jean's act of violence: we

are convinced that she is with the Ripper in the car and become seduced into agreeing

with the murder she commits. The rhetorical question that ends this passage, however,

patently warns us of how easily violence can misguide us. Barker's message seems clear:

all that emerges from Jean's attempt to seek justice to address the culture of male

violence is more violence.

Jean's method of challenging the culture of male violence can also be seen as Barker's way to realize the problems faced by postmodern satire. The pun on the clue of the violet/violent-scented candy reveals yet again the power of Barker's dystopian environment: it signifies how Jean's immersion in a culture of violence and decay invades her mind, contaminates what she sees, and misguides her. Jean attempts to find corrective moral action for what ails her society, thus making her a symbolic satirist. However, with her perception thus compromised by the culture of male violence, Jean's ability to act becomes extraordinarily complicated. This corruption of Jean's agency—of her feminist action—personifies the postmodern satirist's problem of locating an effective method of critique, as demonstrated by my reading of Ballard's *Crash* and Amis's *Dead Babies*. In an effort to critique and right a moral corruption, Jean is corrupted by the very thing she tries to reform. Like the Ballardian and Amisian models of satire, Jean is heavily complicitous in what she critiques. In the end revolutionary violence, whether we read Jean as a symbolic form of satire or see her as Barker's physical agent fighting patriarchal culture, cannot alter Barker's dystopian North. Such actions only reinforce the traumatic realism of this dystopian reality by scarring the body and the mind. The scar on Jean's neck symbolizes this double wound: by attempting to redress the mark of male violence with her vigilante stabbing, she only compounds her own psychological pain. It is an ironic quid pro quo that resolves nothing and perhaps victimizes the victim even more.

Jean's attempt at resistance against the Ripper and the larger encoded system of male control and violence is perhaps the most important section of the novel, but John

Brannigan and Sharon Monteith both argue that the final story of the novel, Maggie's

survival of a Ripper attack, holds key significance. Maggie is not a member of Brenda

and Jean's community; she works at the chicken factory and is struck on the head by the

Ripper on the way home from a pub (389). Like Jean and many of the women in *Union

Street*, Maggie will live out her days in a hell of trauma. Despite her efforts to get on

with her life, the images of her attack and the attack on Kath (for Kath's billboard hangs

outside of the chicken factory) crowd her mind repeatedly: "These images no longer

terrified her—she had got beyond fear—but they haunted her, draining her days and

nights, sapping her will to live" (409-10). However, agreeing with Monteith's argument,

Brannigan states:

> …the focus on Maggie at the end of the novel is significant because it
> dislocates the contemporary media construction of the murders as a
> melodramatic story, and reaffirms the humanity of the women who face
> the realities of male misogynist violence. Barker shifts our attention away
> from the sensationalist narrative of the evil and monstrous, and back to the
> social structures of gender stereotypes, divisions of labour, class divisions
> and commodity fetishism.[273]

Two problems exist with this reading of the novel's ending. Maggie may reintroduce us

to the reality of male violence, sexism, and the economic dysfunction of Britain, but

Jean's first-person narrative brings us into intimate dialogue with the larger philosophical

questions Barker raises about resistance, rebellion, and responding to patriarchal evil.

More importantly, perhaps, Jean's story and the other narrative threads tied to the Ripper

do not merely replicate salacious media constructions of the murders as sensational

melodrama. As I have shown, Barker's retelling of Peter Sutcliffe's destructive reign as

the Yorkshire Ripper is a clear feminist reworking of contemporary British history—one

that seeks to recapture the voices of traumatized women and to indict Britain as a living

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[273] Brannigan 48.

160

dystopia for women.

Barker offers little resolution to the dystopian trauma that rips this culture apart. Patriarchal violence and trauma dominate the lives of women and children in the industrial North, and any attempts to redress these conditions only produces increased violence and trauma, not liberation. Her direct social realism does harness this trauma, however, in order to involve her reader more intimately with the plight of women and the disadvantaged in Britain. This traumatic realism, then, acts as Barker's siren to awake a society too eager to accept ignorance and complacency. Barker encodes this ignorance and complacency in her appropriation of Joseph Jacobs's fairy tale, "The Story of the Three Little Pigs," from which she draws her novel's title. For Barker, the violence of men is the wind that threatens to blow our houses down:

> All over the city people are hurrying to get out of the wind. A few take shelter in doorways, but most make a dash for home. Soon the streets are empty. The sign above the Palmerston's door rattles loose from its chains.
>
> Those lucky enough to be indoors draw their curtains more closely and switch their televisions on. Every window is shut fast, every door locked, and yet the wind gets in, finding here a gap between floorboards and door, there a space between window and frame. It fingers the material of the curtains, tests the pile on the carpet, as if it were asking: How strong is this? Will it last? How long before it gives?
>
> In the silence between one commercial and the next it howls and moans around the house and the people inside look up and say, 'Listen to the wind.' And turn the television up so that there will be no need. (335)

The swinging sign of the Palmerston reminds us briefly of the community that Brenda, Jean, Maureen, Elaine, the other women, and Beattie the pub owner find at the Palmerston in the midst of this dystopian world: "The Palmerston's dingy lino and balding plush seats had been there as long as anybody could remember. But to the women who used its back room the Palmerston was special" (255). However, it is worth

161

noting that the women always meet in the "back room," in the "far corner" (255), perhaps

symbolizing how the Palmerston at one and the same time represents the women's

attempt at collective identity and their invisibility in this male-dominated society.

Hidden away in the corner of the Palmerston, the women eventually become hidden from

social history itself: "[Beattie] and Brenda were probably the only two people in the room

who could remember Kath as she'd once been. She used to be pretty, Brenda thought,

and looked around for somebody else who might remember. There was nobody" (261).

Sarah Brophy even notes this failure of community when discussing *Union Street* and

Liza's England, stating that both novels "highlight [the] limitations and failures" of

women's support systems by criticizing "not just gossip but the ways in which women's

support for one another favors the status quo, reproducing the structures of power that

shape their experiences of oppression."[274] In *Blow Your House Down*, this support

system of the Palmerston is ultimately too weak to challenge the original power structure

of male dominance and violence.

This sweeping wind of violence is applicable to both *Union Street* and *Blow Your

House Down*. Barker's North is not interested in social awareness of the decay of life

around them—the poverty, the domestic violence, the mass murder of women. Her

enervated citizens withdraw from the very harsh reality they suffer from daily and choose

cheap distraction (the television) instead of paying attention to the struggling women

around them. Brenda echoes this fear of reality when she whispers to her infant son,

"Stay like this…Don't change. *Don't find out*" (313; italics original). Acknowledging

that it is already too late to avoid a world of omnipresent violence and control, Barker's

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[274] Sarah Brophy, "Working-Class Women, Labor, and the Problem of Community in *Union Street* and *Liza's England*," *Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker*, eds. Sharon Monteith, Margaretta Jolly, Nahem Yousaf, Ronald Paul (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005) 32.

realist dystopias leave it to us to change as soon as possible.

Chapter 4: Dystopian Globalization: Diasporic Identity and Political Agency in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*"

Socio-economic problems are frequently cited as the causes of Britain's spiraling turmoil from the late 1960s to the early 1980s.[275] Even popular commentary, such as found in Michael Winterbottom's film, *24 Hour Party People* (2002), locate the malaise of British culture of this era in high unemployment and the mounting strikes in the social services industry. Winterbottom's film presents a tragicomic look at the music culture evolving out of Britain's North during the economic and social depression of the Seventies and the Eighties. In one particular scene, Winterbottom includes a montage of documentary footage of strikes and protests during the performance angry punk music. While showing the familiar scenes of garbage strikes and petrol shortages, he includes footage of one reality often overlooked in popular discussions of Britain's decade of strife: a mass march of the right-wing party, the National Front, and its implications for the issue of race in Britain.

Arthur Marwick states that the British discomfort towards acknowledging class problems gradually shifted to issues of race during the Sixties: "One great irony, and perhaps a revealing one about British society, may be that while class was now being openly spoken about when it was no longer the supreme factor in social inequality that it had been in the 1930s, the well-bred reticence that once enveloped discussion of class

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[275] See Arthur Marwick, *Britain Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2003); David Childs, *Britain Since 1945: A Political History* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Jonathan Hollowell (ed.), *Britain Since 1945: Making Contemporary Britain* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002).

had now switched itself to discussion of race, just when race was becoming an especially potent cause of inequality."[276] The issue of class was already being outpaced by political violence, an omnipresent threat throughout the 1970s and 1980s in Britain, mainly in the form of the IRA. Following the massacre of civilians by the British military in Derry, Northern Ireland, on January 30, 1972, known as "Bloody Sunday," the IRA gathered strength and unleashed a campaign of terrorism both in Northern Ireland and England that claimed the lives of thousands of soldiers, politicians, and civilians alike for the next several years. During this same time, however, racial violence and discrimination became an equally pressing social problem in Britain.

The key sign of the racial troubles to come appears most clearly in Enoch Powell's infamous, xenophobic "Rivers of Blood" speech. On April 20, 1968, just weeks after the Martin Luther King Jr. assassination and ensuing riots in the U.S.,[277] Powell delivered a speech in Birmingham, England, opposing the Labour governments Race Relations Bill of 1968.[278] In this speech, he applies hyperbole to envision an inflamed Britain overrun by racial violence:

> As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see "the River Tiber foaming with much blood". That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence

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[276] Marwick 179.

[277] Powell would have undoubtedly prayed upon the fears of the British public regarding the U.S. race riots in April 1968. David Childs notes that in the days leading up to Powell's speech, the British, via the television, "were given nightly a reminder of the horrors of racial tension from the United States." See David Childs, *Britain Since 1945: A Political History* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 149.

[278] Harold Wilson's Labour government enacted two key pieces of legislation to address the mounting racial problems in postwar Britain. The Race Relations Act of 1966 created a Race Relations Board to resolve cases of discrimination based on race or color. The added Bill of 1968 went further to fight discrimination in employment and housing. See Arthur Marwick, *Britain Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2003) 132-133. David Childs notes that the National Front came existence in February 1967, to coincide with Labour's legislation to address issues of racial inequality. See David Childs, *Britain Since 1945: A Political History*, 147.

of the States itself, is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect. Indeed, it has all but come. In numerical terms, it will be of American proportions long before the end of the century.[279]

Powell uses the rioting and racial unrest in the United States to frighten his audience, a tactic that worked to great and immediate effect.[280] More importantly, he imagines a British past that is free of such an "interwoven" history of immigration and racial unrest. Powell's rhetoric completely ignores that Britain's own past—its empire and wealth—are heavily bound up in colonialism and slavery. This absence of historical memory signals the central political weapon used in Britain to oppress the black population, according to Paul Gilroy. Gilroy states that this "capacity to evacuate any historical dimension to black life remains a fundamental achievement of racist ideologies in this country," adding that seeing black as a problem "defines blacks as forever victims, objects rather than subjects, beings that feel yet lack the ability to think, and remain incapable of considered behaviour in an active mode."[281]

Writing about race in the 1980s, Gilroy's analysis comes at a key time in British history. Gilroy was one of the first critics to note the underlying racist logic of the conservative view of British nationalism just as Margaret Thatcher was attempting to reinvent the British Empire in the aftermath of the turbulent 1970s and the Falklands War of 1982. This attempted construction of nationalism, according to Houston Baker, borrowed from Powell's conservative racism to institute a popular erasure of blackness from Englishness:

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[279] Enoch Powell, *Freedom and Reality* (Kingswood: Elliot Right Way Books, 1969) 289-90.

[280] According to Arthur Marwick, a Gallup poll showed that 75 per cent of the British public was "broadly sympathetic to the sentiments expressed by Enoch Powell, [and] there were also a number of working-class demonstrations in his support." Marwick, *Britain Since 1945*, 134.

[281] Paul Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 11.

Hence, a popular conservative racism—first outlined for national consumption by Enoch Powell in the 1960s—became incorporated as "nationalism" by Thatcher and others during the 1980s. Only a historical erasure of British colonialism, imperialism, neocolonialism, and immigration policies, however, could sustain such a racist, national conception of "Englishness," even at a popular level. And it is precisely because the empire does strike back—in the voice of its formerly colonized subjects—that such silence and erasure of the past *cannot* be sustained."[282]

This reinstitution of racism and exclusion marks a key dystopian element in British life not often addressed by English writers of the period. One of the voices that does strike back from the empire, though, is Hanif Kureishi. His screenplay for *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985; directed by Stephen Frears) is perhaps of the first Thatcherite texts to examine and critique the Tory-inspired entrepreneurial impulse of the 1980s with the lingering unemployment and racism of English life. While Kureishi and Frears's film does indeed address racism, most notably in the form of Johnny's former skinhead gang friends, the film's blend of social realism with comedic melodrama make it function more as a kind of update to the kitchen-sink dramas of working-class life from the 1960s than a direct dystopian text.

However, a second work from the Thatcher era presents a more realist, dystopian aesthetic in its angry attack on the subject of race, Britain, the Commonwealth, and the larger Western world. This critique of racism, identity, and colonialism/history comes from Michelle Cliff. Cliff's novel, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), precisely engages this question of historical memory and black agency that Gilroy argues is under assault in Thatcher's Britain. *No Telephone to Heaven* addresses race and agency by examining cultural space, diasporic movement, and the concept of homeland. The novel chronicles

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[282] Houston A. Baker Jr., "Foreword," in Paul Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 5 (italics original).

the development of Clare Savage, a light-skinned Caribbean woman who struggles with racial signifiers of her past as she tries to build her own identity in the present. Clare comes from a divided background of captive Caribbean slaves (through her mother's family) and light-skinned, white landowners who owned and abused slaves (through her father's family), thus making her a symbolic embodiment of a postcolonial plight—that of being raised with a history linking her to both the colonizer and the colonized. Cliff's dramatization of Clare's situation acts as a postcolonial dystopia, whereby Clare faces oppression and exclusion both within her family and in the larger cultural arena. Clare's dystopic struggle intensifies as she is forced to leave her homeland of Jamaica by her father, and is resettled in the United States with her family during the turbulent times of the Civil Right's movement. Suffering from the disintegration of her family and struggling with racism, Clare seeks out her ancestral past and attempts to find belonging in Britain as she pursues her education. Unable to find belonging and identity, she eventually returns to Jamaica to seek both personal salvation and political action.

This journey is more than mere fiction, however; Clare's odyssey takes on greater personal meaning, with her struggles with her Jamaican ancestry and identity, as well as her difficult experiences with racism and Western education in the United States and England, being an autobiographical reflection of Cliff's own complex upbringing.[283] This personal connection to the fiction emphasizes the very real suffering and struggles of individuals who have immigrated to different countries and experienced the hardships

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[283] Like Clare Savage, Michelle Cliff was born in Jamaica and as a child migrated with her family to New York City, where she attended school. After graduating from college in the U.S., Cliff attended graduate school in art history at the Warburg Institute in London. She then continued to travel before returning to the U.S. to work in the publishing industry. See Bernth Lindfors and Reinhard Sander, eds., *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 157: Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1996) 49-58.

of having to re-identify themselves or re-establish their homes—a fact that is not often adequately addressed in the aesthetic and political arguments of theory. In short, Cliff's novel directly engages postcolonial theories of diasporic conditions with lived experience and challenges us to examine and evaluate such theories more critically. The novel's social realism and autobiographical content, therefore, make it a highly important, if not central, postcolonial text in which to investigate this question of how diasporic conditions affect the formation of the postcolonial subject's cultural identity.

The complex nature of diaspora in postcolonial theory and fiction demands a careful analysis of the term itself. While Cliff's novel references actual historical movements of the diaspora (e.g., Marcus Garvey's movement of the early twentieth century), I use the term "diasporic conditions" throughout this chapter to capture more succinctly the actual movements of the characters and the more broadly based aesthetic and political idea of the diaspora that both the novel and postcolonial theory ask us to think about. In particular, I will investigate the idea of the return to a homeland that surfaces in both novelistic and theoretical discussions of diasporic conditions. For example, Gautam Premnath has defined the problem of diasporic conditions as the virtual impossibility of postcolonial subjects being able to return to "precolonial communities, values, or shapes" once the colonizing force has exerted its presence.[284] Following this interpretation, we can view ideas of diaspora as possibly a new avenue of inquiry to free postcolonial studies from its dystopian paradigm—that of the postcolonial subject being caught between the culture of the oppressor, which will not accept the postcolonial

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[284] Gautam Premnath, "The Afterlife of National Liberation: Fanon in Diaspora," AGES Critical Speakers Series, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1 March 2002. Also, see Gautam Premnath, "Remembering Fanon, Decolonizing Diaspora," *Postcolonial Theory and Criticism*, eds. Laura Chrisman and Benita Parry (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999) 57-74.

subject as an autonomous agent, and the culture of the homeland that has been colonized and buried under colonial rule, which cannot be unearthed and recovered. The postcolonial subject's outward flight, then, may create the possibility for establishing homelands elsewhere and producing new forms of identity that will challenge the institutionalized racism of dominant Western cultures.

Cliff's novel, however, counters this concept of theorizing diasporic conditions. She rejects the idea of one or more homelands existing within diasporic movements. Her emphasis on the place of homeland—i.e., the origin and source of Clare's history and identity—offers us a critique of diasporic theories of identity. In this chapter, I will argue that Cliff inextricably links the physical and psychological place of the homeland to the creation of a stable and politically active identity for the postcolonial subject. The construction of place in the novel stresses the importance of this equation, thus offering a rejection of the theoretical space of diaspora as a site for postcolonial identity formation and political action. By relating the place of homeland to cultural identity in this way, Cliff seems subtly to resurrect a modernist[285] binary system of meaning whereby home and possession of identity are contrasted against not-being-at-home (i.e., diasporic movement) and lack of identity. This move is subtle because Cliff's novel ostensibly engages in a kind of postmodernist aesthetics that embraces cultural, thematic, and

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[285] My use of modernist here is to suggest the monolithic and often more stable structures of identity and place in the art, fiction, and architecture of modernism when compared to the frequently noted characteristics of postmodernist aesthetics, such as multiplicity, hybridity, and pastiche. Modernist models of identity are frequently founded upon binary structures of possession and loss, wholeness and emptiness, while postmodernist art tends to work at constructing multiple selves or subjectivities. In *Postmodernist Culture*, Steven Connor uses the terms "univalence" and "multivalence" to characterize this difference between modernist and postmodernist aesthetics and styles. See Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997) 80.

stylistic fluidity and hybridity,[286] which is a model that directly refutes such binary

systems of meaning and identity formation. The diasporic movements of Cliff's

characters perhaps demand a postmodernist aesthetics, for the novel presents a view of

the world that has much in common with Arjun Appadurai's analysis of contemporary

global culture:

> What is new is that this is a world in which both points of departure and
> points of arrival are in cultural flux, and thus the search for steady points
> of reference, as critical life-choices are made, can be very difficult. It is in
> this atmosphere that the invention of tradition (and of ethnicity, kinship
> and other identity-markers) can become slippery, as the search for
> certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational
> communication.[287]

The pluralizing methods of such an aesthetics more adequately addresses the protean

flow of "identity-markers" for the postcolonial subject, who actively inhabits the ever-

changing patterns of cross-cultural movement, settlement and resettlement, and

communication in our contemporary transnational culture. It is my contention that Cliff's

construction of place and identity ultimately defies this theoretical vision of diaspora, and

suggests an alternative model where identity is grounded in the place of a sacred

homeland. However, my analysis will show how the presence of a postcolonial

simulacrum in the film noir chapter at the ending of Cliff's novel complicates this

equation of identity and place, and possibly reveals an anxiety about the text's

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[286] Both Wendy Walters and Lin Knutson discuss the heterogeneous characteristics of Clare's identity and
how it suggests a postmodernist reframing of history, narrative, and identity in opposition to modernist
models. See Lin Knutson, "Michelle Cliff and the Feminization of Space: *No Telephone to Heaven* as
Female Limbo Gateway into History," *Journal of Caribbean Studies* 11.3 (Fall 1996/Spring 1997): 276-
300; and Wendy Walters, "Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*: Diasporic Displacement and the
Feminization of the Landscape," *Borders, Exiles, Diasporas*, eds. Elazar Barkan and Marie-Denise Shelton
(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 217-233.

[287] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in Patrick Williams
and Laura Chrisman (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia
University Press, 1994) 335.

assumption that the habitation and repossession of home translates into political agency for the postcolonial subject.

I. Contesting Identity and Diaspora

The transnational journeys of Clare Savage force us to confront the central importance of diaspora and its relationship to identity formation. The relationship of diaspora to identity has been perceptively analyzed by many postcolonial scholars, in particular by Arjun Appadurai, Gautam Premnath, and Stuart Hall. The work of Appadurai, Premnath, and Hall are all relevant to the study of Cliff's novel because each writer emphasizes the intricacies of identity formation that the postcolonial subject experiences in global space, and how this space creates problems for binary models of space involving the homeland versus the global world (i.e., the center versus the periphery of the outside world). In "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," Arjun Appadurai argues that the ever-shifting nature of our global cultural economy calls for a more pluralistic consideration of diasporic culture: "The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those which might account for multiple centers and peripheries)."[288] The rapid, constant transformations in global capital and worldwide political structures, and the resulting effects such changes have on both immigrant settlement and resettlement across the globe and ideas of nationality, press the need for thinking about cultural identity in terms of fluidity: "And as international capital shifts its needs, as production and technology generate different needs, as nation-states shift their policies on refugee populations, these

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[288] Appadurai 328.

moving groups can never afford to let their imaginations rest too long, even if they wish to."[289] Appadurai's point seems to be that the actual and imaginary terrains of these "ethnoscapes," as he identifies them, produce fluid, constantly changing cultural identities for those peoples in diasporic conditions. Such global alterations necessitate a rejection of models that ground cultural identity in the place of an ethnic homeland, for such a construction inevitably arranges the place of home as the center of an authentic identity and the diasporic space as the alienated periphery where identity is fragmented or perhaps lost for the postcolonial subject. This model ignores the very real ways in which diaspora can be a site for identity formations that challenge these hegemonic notions of ethnicity and place that often relegate the postcolonial subject back to monolithic selfhood on the one hand and vacuous positions of Otherness on the other.

Gautam Premnath shares Appadurai's interest in theorizing the new global space of diaspora to refigure postcolonial identity, but he stresses that a reconsideration of national consciousness over territorial nationalisms and nation-states produces a more feasible model of postcolonial identity formation. Premnath argues for a "transnational logics"[290] that avoids the pitfalls of metropolis-periphery models of identity formation. This logic comes to be seen as a "principle of mutual recognition being realized in the new national community, in which the roles of leaders and led are interchangeable."[291] Such a fluid interchangeability of identity roles within the new national community enables the postcolonial subject to not rely solely on territorial identifications of

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[289] Appadurai 329.

[290] Gautam Premnath, "Remembering Fanon, Decolonizing Diaspora," *Essays and Studies 1999: Postcolonial Theory and Criticism*, eds. Laura Chrisman and Benita Parry (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000) 58.

[291] Premnath 66.

community, home, and space, which would reproduce the same binary models of identity formation. The new sense of autonomy that this diasporic logic affords the postcolonial subject empowers her or him to retrieve "traditions of resistance"[292] from past binary, center-periphery models and to use this consciousness within the new communal space of the global to challenge "new forms of imperialism."[293] The result is a reformed cultural identity and political agency based in the fluid exchanges of the diasporic community, and not in the place of the homeland or in response to the place of the dominant metropolitan city.

Stuart Hall builds on Appadurai's and Premnath's models of place and cultural identity in diaspora more directly in his essay, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora."[294] Hall specifically examines Caribbean culture's response to diaspora and identifies two key ways of considering cultural identity. He describes the first approach as an act of recovery:

> The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves,' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people,' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history…It is this identity which a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express through cinematic representation.[295]

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[292] Premnath 59.

[293] Premnath 59. While Premnath's argument is appealing, very few examples are offered in his article to illustrate his abstract theory more fully. This paper is thus an attempt to illuminate and challenge his ideas by analyzing Cliff's novel as a response to the issues he raises.

[294] Given Hall's specific focus on both Caribbean culture and the dynamics of cultural identity in diaspora, much of my analysis of Cliff's novel is in dialogue with his ideas.

[295] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1997) 110-111.

This form of cultural identity posits the existence of a stable, essentialized identity, history, and culture to which all subjects of a particular postcolonial location can ascribe. Hall exposes how this model of postcolonial subjectivity is monolithic, is embedded in tradition, and awaits recovery after the excavation of the cultural wasteland is complete. However, he goes on to ask if such an identity can be recovered: "Or is a quite different practice entailed—not the rediscovery but the *production* of identity. Not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the *re-telling* of the past?"[296] This question introduces Hall's second formulation of cultural identity:

> Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'…Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo *constant transformation*. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power.[297]

Hall's second definition of cultural identity in diaspora—the option he prefers in the essay—is clearly informed by poststructuralist thought in its insistence that identity is always already in the play of language and signification; it is something always in flux, always being performed. His diaspora sets up cultural identity as "[n]ot an essence but a *positioning*,"[298] meaning that the migration of people is the ultimate example of the "constant transformation" that makes identity a cultural process, not a fixed category. Positioning acknowledges the biases and perspectives that inform constructions of cultural identity, thus making identity a political choice, and not an innocent object or concept to be found. The implication of Hall's analysis is that the diasporic condition is

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[296] Hall 111 (italics original).

[297] Hall 112 (italics added).

[298] Hall 113 (italics original).

not simply an exile into oblivion, nor does it establish cultural identity as "a fixed origin

to which we can make some final and absolute Return."[299] Rather, the diaspora can be

seen as an opportunity to embrace displacement, and the mixture of cultures and

perspectives it entails, in order to develop a politically oriented subjectivity that can

create new possibilities for cultural identity to challenge conservative notions of race that

bind postcolonial subjects into what Gilroy would call "objecthood" rather than selfhood.

Such a performative identity would allow the postcolonial subject to develop an active

agency to counter the limiting binary trap of the oppressor-oppressed, center-periphery

paradigms. In short, a diasporic experiential model arises uniquely distinct from the

dystopian frame of self-other. Such a positioning also offers the postcolonial subject new

strategies to challenge restrictive, oppressive notions of home, ethnicity, and cultural

difference.

Ultimately, these three theoretical models of cultural identity in diasporic

conditions collide with Cliff's formulation of Clare's identity in diaspora. Stuart Hall's

definition of diaspora in particular demarcates a clear distinction between Cliff's analysis

of identity and the theoretical desire for models of cultural identity that favor the

poststructuralist characteristics of hybridity and fluidity:

> I use this term here metaphorically, not literally; diaspora does not refer us
> to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to
> some *sacred homeland* to which they must at all costs return, even if it
> means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, the imperialising,
> the hegemonising, form of 'ethnicity'…The diaspora experience as I
> intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of
> a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity'
> which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*.

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[299] Hall 113.

> Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.[300]

At first, this vision of hybridity—of a cultural identity that is ever producing and reproducing in diasporic conditions—bears superficial resemblance to Cliff's analysis of postcolonial identity in her novel. *No Telephone to Heaven* is very much about the attempt to retell the past and presents us with the diasporic Clare and other characters who represent "positional," unfixed identities (the ambiguously gendered Harry/Harriet being perhaps the clearest example of such an identity that refutes binary logics in the novel). The structure of the novel itself reveals characteristics of Hall's "diaspora aesthetic"[301]: the hybrid characteristics of blending cultures and styles in Caribbean food, music, and language mirror the vast range of influence of cultural forms and texts— novel, poetry, myths, allusions to the intellectual and art historical worlds of the United States, England, and Jamaica—that compete throughout Cliff's novel create a hybrid, nonlinear narrative about contemporary Jamaican culture and identity. Cliff even seems to embody this philosophical approach by embedding a key to deciphering the novel in the heart of the text. When analyzing Clare's consciousness in the present action of the novel, during her journey to the film set with her fellow rebels, Cliff writes a compact, powerful sentence that has much in common with Hall's formulation: "To create if not to find."[302] The emphasis of the performative "to create" suggests that the central message of the novel is that Clare uses her diasporic experience to formulate a new cultural identity and to offer us a politically charged agency that can resist Western imperialism

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[300] Hall 119-120 (first italics added).

[301] Hall 120.

[302] Michelle Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* (New York: Vintage International, 1989) 91. All other references to Cliff's text will be cited parenthetically.

and racism and allow for the diversity of a Jamaican history free of Britain's colonizing past. However, I would argue Cliff's use of the conditional here also places strong emphasis on an act of recovery, suggesting the utter importance of the place of the homeland and the identity that can be found there. It is within this framework that Cliff does not fully reject a binary model of diaspora and even erects a postcolonial identity that depends on the center of a sacred homeland. Thus, Clare Savage becomes the vehicle through which Cliff critiques not only imperialism but also diaspora by showing us how place and identity are of the same body, the latter needing the former to exist.

II. Diaspora as Dystopia

Cliff dramatizes this critique of diaspora as a kind of dystopian experience through Clare's family's displacement from Jamaica to the United States. Clare's father, Boy Savage, frames diaspora as dystopia in the text, for his plan of finding a better life in the U.S. ultimately becomes a process of erasing his family's identity. Rather than encountering economic and social liberation in 1960s America, Boy is reintroduced to the politics of racist categorization upon the Savages' arrival in the American South. When the Savages first arrive in America, at the Red Clay motel in Georgia, Boy confronts a racist hotel owner who questions Boy's claim to whiteness. As Boy attempts to defend his Jamaican background to the hotel owner, he is plunged into the problem of cultural identity: "Am I remembering it right? he asked himself. These Aristotelian categories taught by a Jesuit determined they should know *where* they were—and fortunate at that. In the Spanish colonies there were 128 categories to be memorized" (56; italics mine). Boy's encounter with the hotel owner evokes a childhood memory about the colonizer's

placing of his identity. Despite his awareness of this return to the logic of racist categorization, Boy suppresses this realization and by doing so begins the process of identity erasure. By choosing to pass as "white," Boy fails to create a new identity and buys into racist logic: "He was streamlining himself for America. A new man" (57). The migration to America, then, produces an erosion of Boy's—and the family's—sense of place. Boy forces his family to embrace the "sanitary" life of the American city, failing to realize that the whiteness with which he identifies is really nothing more than a reinscription into a cultural absence or nothingness. "Fictions" (62) are the basis of his new self, and while these lies may move Boy up the social ladder Cliff makes it clear that his "streamlining" has the wider effect of stripping away all the cultural signifiers that hold his family together.

Cliff presents the effects of this erosion of cultural identity most poignantly in the character of Clare's mother, Kitty. Kitty's struggle with Boy more largely symbolizes the novel's initial portrayal of diasporic theories of identity as dystopian loss of self and home. Kitty's homesickness for Jamaica and her family signals this critique through her reaction to the family's migration: "All became excitement, adventure for Boy— encountering but trying to evade the quiet apathy of Kitty, who didn't hold to metamorphosis and felt but homeless, breaking silence to tell her husband that he sounded like a character in a boy's annual" (54). Through Kitty, we begin to understand that "home" cannot be reestablished through the diasporic movement because the markers of the individual's identity derive from the palpable place of the homeland. Even when the family starts to acquire furniture, mattresses, and other domestic objects for their apartment in New York City, Kitty's actions, decisions, and selections all arise

from her knowledge of home: "A used bed might have experienced the death of someone—of cancer, or TB, two of the scourges of Jamaica. Her point of reference—the place which explained the world to her—would always be her island" (66). In contrast to Boy's program of passing and erasure, we have Kitty stressing the importance of home and how it shapes identity. The location of place becomes the generator and conveyor of a particularized knowledge for the self, a knowledge that more or less bears the stamp of a specific cultural identity. Through Kitty, then, Cliff seems to show us that the place of origin is immutable and immovable (in short, a monolithic site), and Kitty herself becomes a signifier for this inextricable link of place and identity.

Kitty's reliance on home and her failures to rebuild it in New York City directs our attention to a larger critical issue in the arena of postcolonial migration. The Savages' migration to the United States touches upon one of the most intensely debated topics of postcolonialism, namely globalization. The scattering and relocation of different cultures across the globe raises questions about the construction of cultural heritage and identity and, as we have seen, Cliff's novel focuses acutely on this problem. Cultural theorist John Tomlinson argues that one of the effects of globalization is the possibility of "deterritorialization."[303] Tomlinson loosely defines deterritorialization as "'the loss of the "natural" relation of culture to geographical and social territories,'"[304] borrowing the phrasing of critic Nestor Garcia Canclini. He states further, "globalization fundamentally transforms the relationship between the places we inhabit and our cultural

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[303] John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 106.

[304] Tomlinson 107.

180

practices, experiences and identities."[305] Using Tomlinson's terms, we can think of the

Savage family's migration as an incidence of this cultural break, where the relationship

between selfhood and place in one's natural (i.e., native) environment is severed by the

journey to foreign territories. It is precisely this disconnection between place and cultural

experience and identity that Cliff dramatizes through Kitty's struggles in the American

metropolis.

While in New York City, Kitty tries to combat Boy's racial passing and cultural

streamlining by making several attempts to reclaim the cultural space of home that she

lost in the migration to the metropolis. Tomlinson describes this kind of response to

deterritorialization as "reterritorialization": "The drive towards reterritorialization can

thus be seen in various attempts to re-establish a cultural 'home'. Amongst these there

will be examples of very direct collective cultural-imaginative projects—for instance the

creation by cultural diasporas of 'invented homelands' such as the Sikh diaspora's claims

to 'Khalistan.'"[306] Kitty's Jamaican cousins in the city, Winston and Grace, provide the

Savages with a potential outlet to establish such an "invented homeland" and connect

with their culture. However, when Grace calls the Savages to inquire about the family's

settlement and to suggest a visit, she meets resistance from Boy: "She [Grace] said she

would make it another time but never called again, and the Savages were not asked back

to Queens for evenings of rice and peas and curry chicken and fast games of dominoes

and playing mento on electric guitars and marimbas and congas and claves. Children

dancing and then dozing among unfamiliar clothing" (62). Winston and Grace's

apartment is a potential utopic site where the place of homeland exists in diasporic

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[305] Tomlinson 106.

[306] Tomlinson 148.

181

displacement, but, as evinced from this passage, Boy's efforts to pass as white and fit in to mainstream society thwart this possibility of maintaining or even creating the identity of a Jamaican home within the family's diasporic movement.

Kitty attempts to find a second utopic space within the U.S., however. "One connection [being] broken" (62), she turns to the neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, "where in between the high-priced ghetto-specific chain stores she discovered shops from *home*, as if they had been airlifted intact…" (64-65; italics original). This neighborhood, with its cultural shops and markets, more concretely reterritorializes Jamaica for Kitty: "In these shops she broke her silence, here she felt most the loss of home, of voice, even as she brushed the loose dirt off the yam-skin, imagining its origin in the bush, stroked the rough green lips where the cho-cho split, stuck her finger in the sap where the mango had been joined to the tree, remembering how it could burn and raise a sore" (65). The shops literally recreate a tactile sense of Kitty's homeland, triggering her memories of how she experienced identity in Jamaica. The visits to the Jamaican shops ease the angst she experiences as a result of her cultural dislocation. This attempt to establish an invented homeland in the diasporic space of the city fails again, though, with Boy's interference. Boy repeatedly warns Kitty about the dangers of traveling to Bed-Stuy (75, 81), which are really thinly veiled threats that limit Kitty's freedom and ultimately collapse her efforts to retain or create her culture, her home, and her self. Therefore, it is difficult to accept Wendy Walters's contention that Kitty successfully remaps home imaginatively in the diasporic space of Bed-Stuy: "For Kitty Savage in Bedford-Stuyvesant, the sensuous encounter with a Jamaican mango releases her past to her

consciousness and imagination."[307] Kitty may briefly discover a reterritorialized, invented homeland in her diasporic location and creatively reform her cultural identity momentarily, but Boy's angry insistence that she stop her visits forever exiles Kitty from this invented homeland and cultural identity.

Perhaps it is significant, then, that Kitty's only moments of solace come when she visits the grave of an eighteenth-century Jamaican servant, Marcus. Kitty "pass[es] her fingers over the letters cut into the slate: FAITHFUL SERVANT" and fears that "she would join him" (63). While Kitty's communion with Marcus's grave literally represents the racist servitude she is experiencing in the city at her job at the symbolically named White's Sanitary Laundry (as well as the restraint Boy places on her personal freedom), it also figuratively signals the burial of her hopes to create and possess her identity in relation to her home and to rebuild the structures that would support herself. In short, it is a strong critique of the utopic theories of diaspora presented by Hall, Premnath, and Appadurai. By leaving behind the place of home, Cliff suggests that the postcolonial subject's efforts at identity formulation are repeatedly frustrated. As a result, Kitty rejects the diaspora and leaves the U.S. with Clare's younger sister, Jennie, for Jamaica.

Moreover, Cliff shows that the invented homeland of Bed-Stuy fails as a site for diasporic identity even without Boy's intervention in Kitty's life. When Jennie rejoins the family in America after Kitty's death, she eventually frequents the shops of Bed-Stuy regularly:

> She [Clare] left Jennie to her wanderings in the city…The woman [Boy's new wife] tried to be kind to Jennie, silently wondering when she would lose her tan, bringing her vials of sample scents, tubes of sample lipsticks, discouraging the girl when she returned from suspicious places with

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[307] Walters 223.

> strange victuals. It upset her father too much, the woman told her, to
> smell curried goat after all this time. (106)

While Jennie's wanderings in this diasporic homeland do not place her into disfavor with her father, they do inevitably force her to encounter a more deadly foe: drug addiction. As Clare recounts, "Her sister was a junkie in Bed-Stuy…Slipping in and out of an American high school, she slid into the street" (89-90). Despite the recreation of a Jamaican culture in Bed-Stuy, Cliff's characterization of Jennie reveals further that the diasporic space of Bed-Stuy is not a place where hybrid, heterogeneous identities, as Hall would argue, are constantly being produced. Jennie is not able to recreate a cultural identity in her diasporic conditions; rather, the only markers of identity she gains in this diasporic space are the heroin scars of "punctured arms" (168). As a drug addict, Jennie is transformed into a shadow of a human being and forgotten in the narrative. In Jennie's succumbing to drugs, Cliff not only comments on how racism, poverty, and possibly gentrification isolate and destroy immigrant communities in the West, but also suggests that the diasporic sites in the U.S. are places where the postcolonial subject loses her agency.

III. The Non-place as Dystopic Diaspora

The significance of my discussion of Clare's parents' negotiation of the diaspora in the U.S. rests on the impact it has on Clare. The tension of Cliff's critique of diaspora—of the inevitable loss of home and identity and the subsequent loss of self in the politics of racial passing—is distilled in Clare's character and haunts her for the rest of the novel. Clare's fragmented identity becomes the novel's key focus once Kitty abandons Boy and returns to Jamaica. Without her mother, Clare falls under the spell of

Boy's philosophy of racial invisibility—an influence that intensifies the erasure[308] of her Jamaican identity. Boy "counsels his daughter on invisibility and secrets. Self-effacement. Blending in. The uses of camouflage" (100), which is advice that ironically does not help Clare pass for white. Her interview for high school entrance with the school's administrator reveals that Boy's counsel of self-effacement rewards her with the classification of a nonbeing: " 'I do not want to be cruel, Mr. Savage, but we have no room for lies in our system. No place for in-betweens'" (99). By forcing Clare into the racist logic of passing, Boy has only triumphed in making his daughter a veritable figure of ambiguity with no place of home to offer or support a sense of identity.

The diaspora in the U.S. for Clare, then, can best be described as a liminal existence. New York City is the place where she begins to realize that she feels neither Jamaican nor American. In other words, Clare's experience of diaspora is what French anthropologist Marc Augé calls a "non-place": "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place."[309] For Augé, the non-place is a locale of modernity divested of particular cultural or anthropological meaning or signifiers; it is a hotel chain, a holiday club, an airport or railway station[310]—places that

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[308] I use the term "erasure" to capture more forcefully the effect that Boy's politics of passing has on Clare. Clare's identity is being erased through Boy's insistence that she pass as white. This erasure occurs as Clare is forced to forget one past and replace it with another. In "Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character," Cliff describes this process of erasure in the Western environment as "bleaching": "A knowledge of history, the past, has been bleached from her skin" (265). See Michelle Cliff, "Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character," *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe (Wellesley, MA: Calaloux Publications, 1990) 263-268.

[309] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 1995) 77-78.

[310] Augé discusses railway and airport stations, holiday clubs, hotel chains, and supermarkets as examples of non-places. See Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso, 1995) 78-79.

are more or less stripped of the historical or cultural markers of place that help to characterize or contribute to the identity of the individual. In contrast to the non-place, we have John Tomlinson's reading of Augé's definition of "anthropological place" as a place "that provides cultural identity and memory, binding its inhabitants to the history of the locale through the daily repetitions of 'organic' social interaction."[311] Clare's experience of the U.S. disconnects her from cultural identity and complicates her cultural memory;[312] being forbidden by Boy to leave the house after her mother's departure (93), she stays "in, keeping house and watching television, moving within the space of her loss" (93). Clare's place in America is a non-place, for there is nothing for her to inhabit but emptiness.

Cliff amplifies her critique of Clare's diasporic displacement to New York City by focusing on the tiny box that occupies Clare's attention in the house: the television. Critic Sven Birkerts cites the television as "*the* galvanizing force" (italics original)[313] of the postmodern condition that corrupts the individual. For Birkerts, the television is the ultimate collapser of critical distance, the ultimate conflater of the real and the copy. The effects of these results are familiar to most critics and students of postmodernism: the loss of distance with the fast acceleration of media images increases the ambiguity of signification and the inability of the human subject to form an emotional response to the

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[311] Tomlinson 109.

[312] Regarding Clare's memory in the liminal space of America, Cliff juxtaposes Kitty's experience of hearing the dogs howl in Jamaica, which signifies her mother's death (66-69), with Clare's reception of the news that Kitty has died, to illustrate how diaspora has stripped Clare of her cultural memory: "This death [Kitty's] came without warning. No dogs howled. Had they done so, the daughter would not have sensed the significance of their noise" (104). The symbolic function of the dogs' howls no longer serves as a cultural signifier for Clare. The politics of "passing" in America have bleached such memories from her mind.

[313] Sven Birkerts, "Postmodernism: Bumper-Sticker Culture," *American Energies: Essays on Fiction* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992) 22 (italics original).

image or sign. The resulting death of affect is only exacerbated by the erosion and replacement of the real with the copy, a process that leads us into the problems of what Jean Baudrillard has famously termed "simulation."[314] Birkerts ultimately suggests that such a media blitz possibly prescripts identity and agency: "Who can guess what cumulative effects this sort of exposure has on the psyche? What habits are eroded, what other implanted?"[315]

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff takes up this seemingly postmodern issue and rewrites the television as a galvanizing force of the *postcolonial* condition. The television becomes a disruptive force of postcolonialism by transmitting images created by the colonizer into the place of the colonized, creating a psychological form of subjugation and control. Cliff analyzes this form of postcolonial control by comparing the Savages' TV to the films transported to Jamaica: "…all man-made images were channeled into the cinemas, whose programs changed once a week, and over these selections there was no control. The island took what it was sent, not so different from the little black box catching waves in the Brooklyn apartment" (93). The physical presence of the colonizer may be gone, but cinematic images, bearing the influence of the West, are basically forced upon the Jamaican (and American) consumers. The result of the impact of these images on the postcolonial subject is a colonization of the imagination: "In the streets and in the yards, Brer Anansi, about whom their grandparents taught them, Rhyging, about whom their mothers warned them, Sasabonsam, whose familiar image terrorized them, mixed in their games with Wyatt Earp, Legs Diamond,

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[314] See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra & Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

[315] Birkerts 23.

Tarzan the Apeman, and King Kong" (93). Western media images invade consciousness and compete with signifiers of the homeland that make up the identity of the postcolonial subject. Cliff's description suggests that such media colonization by the "infernal television" (80) and film industry is a harbinger of the corruption of cultural identity.[316]

The television exerts these colonizing effects on Clare in America, as she attempts to make sense of her mother's desertion: "The absence of the two other people was noted differently by each. Clare tried to wipe them from her mind, yet caught herself, even while watching the *mind-wiping* moving pictures on the television, passing her eyes and hands across still pictures of the family unit which she held in her lap" (96; italics mine). The television acts as a Boy-esque streamlining influence on Clare, numbing and hollowing out her inner self. It deterritorializes Clare's psyche; the collage of images of Western society contributes to the erasure of her memory of family and home, and hampers her ability to establish an emotional connection to her mother. In essence, Clare internalizes the liminal qualities of the "non-place," as described by Tomlinson: "Non-places are, as we can see, bleak locales of contemporary modernity: places of solitude (even in the presence of others), silence, anonymity, alienation and impermanence."[317] These characteristics aptly capture Clare's struggle in America: her diasporic experience

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[316] This fusion of Western media images with place-specific cultural signifiers *can* be seen as a different kind of cultural identity formulation for the postcolonial subject in diaspora. Especially given Arjun Appadurai's theoretical models of the ethnoscape, mediascape, and technoscape (Appadurai 328-330), such a hybrid cultural identity would make for a productive discussion of how postcolonial subjects negotiate ever-changing, multiple (both actual and imaginary) landscapes in diaspora. However, Cliff's negative characterization of the TV and film industry in the text clearly shows that this formulation of identity is *not* a viable alternative for Clare. For a discussion of these models, see Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 324-339.

[317] Tomlinson 110.

confers her with the status of a nonbeing that is struggling to find cultural signs of identification in a culturally vacuous non-place.[318]

Cliff widens her investigation of the diaspora in the novel when Clare begins to search actively for signs of cultural identification. Clare ultimately locates these signs in the letters that her mother sends her from Jamaica. When pondering Kitty's death, Clare recalls her mother's advice from one of her letters: "A reminder, daughter—never forget who your people are. Your responsibilities lie beyond me, beyond yourself. There is a space between who you are and who you will become. Fill it" (103). In the space of Clare's loss, the letter serves as an artifact of the homeland—it is the beginning of an awakening for Clare about the importance of identity and its connection to the cultural place of home. These words also awaken Clare to an awareness of her liminal existence in America—that she must fill the cultural absence she has experienced in the diasporic space of the American metropolis.

Because of this realization, Clare attempts her own diasporic journey to London in search of identity and belonging. While her movement is physically away from the homeland, she metaphorically moves closer to Jamaica by retracing and rewriting the steps of the Middle Passage. This new diasporic experience functions, then, as a plan to recover some concept of a "sacred homeland"[319] from the ruins of colonial rule and postcolonial oppression. Jamaica arose from British rule, and Clare travels to this "mother-country" as a way to unravel the psychological mechanisms of the colonizer that

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[318] Cliff seems to render her displeasure with the space of the modern city and the domination of electronic media like the TV through Clare's somnambulist-like existence in the NYC apartment. Thus, Cliff's depiction of the "non-place" differs markedly from other contemporary and postmodernist novels that tend to show characters reveling in or comically struggling with such bleak, concrete-filled, TV-saturated environments (e.g., J. G. Ballard's *Crash*, Martin Amis's *Dead Babies* and *Money: A Suicide Note*, and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*).

[319] Hall 119.

formed the spiritual inner core of her psyche: "This was the mother-country. The country by whose grace her people existed in the first place. Her place could be here. America behind her, way-station" (109). Now freed from the liminal "way-station" of America, Clare begins a program of revisionist excavation to redefine her identity. She undertakes this project through her graduate studies in art history, in London, where she "sees the dour Roundhead questioning the blue-suited Cavalier child in a painting she once scanned in a seminar on the reconstruction of the past in art" (92). This passage is telling, for it perhaps serves as a symbol of her experiences in the United States with her father. Much like the Cavalier child being ruled by the new cultural authority figure of the Puritan, Clare has been the young woman instructed by the "streamlining new man" of her father to forget her past culture and allegiances and to adopt instead a new set of principles, a new identity. Her identification with the painting, then, awakens Clare to the imaginative and creative process of reevaluating her own past. But this act of creation appears to be wholly dependent upon locating identity in the physical place of the homeland, not in the spatial territories of diaspora.

This dependency becomes clear in perhaps one of the seminal passages in the novel, where Cliff describes the new knowledge Clare gains from her studies: "She was praised for the way she analyzed Aristotle's definition of *place* in the *Physics*. Each thing exists in place. Each thing is described by place" (117; italics original). Clare's intellectual achievements here literally articulate Cliff's theory of place in the novel. This passage argues for a conception of a specifically *cultural* identity, for the territory of place provides the raw material for existence to be possible and fashions the place-specific markers of identity for the product of place. The effect of this realization on

190

Clare provides her with new direction: her analysis of place instigates her movement

back to the homeland to find identity and agency in Jamaica.

IV. Rediscovering Identity in the Homeland

Clare returns to Jamaica just after this realization of the importance of place and

identity. She befriends Harry/Harriet, one of the key figures who politicizes Clare's

thoughts on place. During their evening out at the nightclub Pegasus, Harry/Harriet

satirizes the postcolonial racism underneath the tourist trappings of the club and

comments on how such tourism has fictionalized the nation's identity: " 'Our homeland

is turned to stage set too much'" (121). Clare's response signals an awakening of

consciousness: "The word *homeland* startled Clare. Still, that is what it was" (121; italics

original). Clare is moving closer to understanding her relationship to the homeland, but it

is Harry/Harriet who actualizes the importance for her. S/he helps frame Clare's

perspective on diaspora; that is, Harry/Harriet's deconstruction of Jamaica's cultural

identity crisis enables Clare to make the connection between the significance of place and

the establishment of cultural identity. Harry/Harriet explains,

> "But we *are* of the past here. So much of the past that we punish
> people by flogging them with cat-o'-nine-tails. We expect people to live
> on cornmeal and dried fish, which was the diet of the slaves. We name
> hotels Plantation Inn and Sans Souci…A peculiar past. For we have taken
> the master's past as our own. That is the danger."
> Clare nodded, not ready to take on all he had said. (127; italics
> original)

Harry/Harriet's insight into the plight of Jamaica is more than an apt characterization of

this postcolonial condition; it reveals to Clare that migrations outside of Jamaica will not

mend the "fragments" of which she is composed (87). This description of Jamaica erects

191

the island as a site of postcolonial archaeology, where a creative "re-telling"[320] of

Jamaican cultural identity must be rooted, not in diasporic space, but in the place of the

homeland. Harry/Harriet's call to action informs Clare that for a new past, a new identity

to be born, she must choose to return. In this context, Clare's diaspora functions as a

process of wandering and partial discoveries that do not, on their own, lead to the

achievement of a cultural identity and a political commitment. As Harry/Harriet tells

Clare bluntly, " 'I mean the time will come for both of us to choose. For we will have to

make a choice. Cast our lot. Cyaan live split. Not in this world'" (131). Through

Harry/Harriet (who ultimately chooses to identify as feminine), we learn that hybridity is

not an option in Cliff's formulation of diasporic thought.

The world that Clare inhabits at the moment, where she is "neither one thing nor

the other" (131), is the space of diaspora. Clare's inner confusion and indecisiveness

derives from her inability to connect to her environment. Her diaspora thus takes on the

dimensions of the liminal qualities that she encountered in the United States, for her

global wanderings prevent her from resolving the existential malaise that consumes her—

a malaise that intensifies the longer she delays her return to the homeland. The structure

of Clare's movements expresses Cliff's rejection of diaspora as a space for the creative

retelling of cultural identity. Cliff renders this rejection clearly and *physically* by creating

a parallel between Clare's last diasporic adventure with the Vietnam veteran, Bobby, and

her homecoming in Jamaica. On a symbolic level, the doomed relationship with Bobby

represents another failed moment in Clare's efforts to forge personal connections that

may ease the psychic displacement from which she suffers. Cliff illustrates this idea by

emphasizing the sexual union of Bobby and Clare during their roamings in Spain:

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[320] Hall 111.

> They reached the sea, slipped from their clothes, and let the waters cover them.
>   He entered her, coming into her along with the salt sea. Her own liquid rushed out, and they stood, bodies wrapped, one with the water. (155)

Remembering that the sea holds special symbolic value in Cliff's novel—that it signifies the psychic space of the homeland where the hidden history of Jamaica rests[321]—Clare's sexual experience in the sea can be seen as a failure to recreate a sense of home or connection outside of the homeland. Her location in the exiled waters of Europe does not offer her identification or personal connection; rather, it empties Clare of her own procreative powers. Upon arriving in Jamaica for her final stay, Clare learns of her condition resulting from this union with Bobby in the sea: "A raging infection in her womb, the doctor finally told her. She had carried it for some time—several weeks at least, he said. Are you promiscuous, my girl? You are probably sterile, he continued, not waiting a response. We can't say absolutely. But that is the usual result" (169).

Cliff structures this water symbolism as a challenge to the theories of diaspora once Clare recovers and begins to explore her grandmother's land on the island. In a poignant moment in the novel, Clare immerses herself in the river water of the homeland and heals her psychological fragmentation:

> Clare found her way to the river, and they cut through. Through the deep green informed with red and yellow and purple, some growth she did not recognize. The strip of water moving over rocks and gathering into pools—narrower, shallower than she remembered. Rocks still white from washerwomen, skirt hems tucked into underpants' legs, squatting, slapping, feet propped against rock as water cascaded across their brownness.
>   The importance of this water came back to her. Sweet on an island surrounded by salt. She shut her eyes and let the cool of it wash over her naked body, reaching up into her as she opened her legs. Rebaptism. (172)

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[321] When Cliff writes of the environment in Jamaica in Chapter 2, she describes this symbolic nature of the sea: "The sea water which hid their history was not at fault" (17).

Clare's occupation of the place of home is finally what enables her to mend her "fragments" and restore a sense of cultural identity to herself. The physicality of place here seemingly overturns the effects of Clare's diasporic journeys. The sexual description of her communion with place in this passage signifies a new fertility for her. Despite her physical sterility, the Jamaican waters impregnate her with its hidden past and hidden voices. Her cultural identity is finally reborn imaginatively, but such an identity is only possible once the postcolonial subject inhabits the sacred ground of homeland. Cliff's construction of this parallel, which clearly emphasizes Clare's resurrection at home, argues against Wendy Walters's claim that the "narrative function of *No Telephone to Heaven* is to destabilize and undercut the endless desire for home and to allow for a postmodern subjectivity that problematizes a modernist binary of home and not-home."[322] Walters attempts to deconstruct the modernist conception of a fixed homeland in Clare's diasporic movements: "Jamaica can no longer function for Clare as womb space, secure home, or nurturing mother. She sees that the histories of slavery and colonialism and the present realities of imperialist industrial capitalism are all connected and that they disrupt the narrative of Jamaica as idyllic Eden."[323] While Clare is aware of the postcolonial slavery represented by the Dungle and the neocolonizing forces of the Western cinema and media, her rebaptism in the river at her grandmother's home unmistakably suggests that this *part* of Jamaica is a secure, idyllic site.[324] The binary

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[322] Walters 230.

[323] Walters 230.

[324] Cliff's characterization of Jamaica as home here also problematizes Gautam Premnath's theory of diaspora and resistance. In "Remembering Fanon, Decolonizing Diaspora," Premnath takes up Fanon's famous assertion, delivered at the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in 1956, that colonialism breaks all connection and points of reference to precolonial community and argues that within diasporic

194

model of "home and not-home" is thus left intact, for the transformative effect this scene has on Clare creates a clear distinction between Clare's experiences in Jamaica (home) and in diaspora (America, England, Europe = not-home). More importantly, the magical powers of the river mark the territory of the homeland as sacred indeed.

This sacred presence provides Clare with a keener insight into the generations of Jamaican women who came before her as well as reestablishes an imaginative bond with her mother: "I was blessed to have her here. Her passion of place. Her sense of the people. *Here is her*; leave it at that" (174; italics mine). Now intimate with the land and its hidden histories, Clare gains a spiritual clarity of place: "Once she put the ruinate of her grandmother's place behind her, the road lay before Clare as a relief map, each feature—house, gully, ancient orange tree—familiar" (183). In essence, Clare's reborn identity and capacity to retell history are products of an archaeological immersion in place. Even Clare's newfound cultural identity hardly appears to be a "production"[325] with the play of historical transformation; rather, it seems to be a resuscitation of an identity hidden deep within her that is imaginatively recreated. Earlier in the novel, Cliff describes how Clare's "longing for tribe surfaces—unmistakable. To create if not to find…She remembers the jungle. The contours of wildness. The skills are deep within her. Buried so long, she fears they may have atrophied" (91). In short, not only does it

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conditions there can be "no recovery of the precolonial past except in pulverized, fragmentary forms" (Premnath 69). Premnath sees such traditions of community as retrievable only in remembrance—as a form of intellectual and political resistance that informs the consciousness of the postcolonial national community. However, Cliff clearly uses the physical place of Jamaica and its sea waters as an entrance into a kind of precolonial past. Even though Jamaica's very history is dominated by colonial foundation and rule, Clare's immersion in the native waters of her homeland gives her access to the lives and ways of her mother and grandmother and to the culture they knew. This immersion in place becomes, then, Clare's recovery of a way of life untouched by colonial oppression and intrusion. It is this possession of place and home that enables her finally to develop a sense of political agency at the end of the novel.

[325] Hall 111.

seem that place harbors the cultural artifacts of identity, but Cliff's description also reveals a kind of essentialization of Clare's cultural identity. While Clare reflects the qualities of a diasporic identity that is "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew"[326] on the surface, this achievement relies on the essentializing "unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning"[327] that she uncovers in both the place of the homeland and herself. The heart of the matter, then, is that Cliff's novel refutes the formulation of cultural identity in diaspora—a diaspora that has functioned more like a dystopia that she escapes. The diaspora is simply a struggle to get to where cultural identity can be *found* and thus refashioned: at home.

V. Simulation and the Compromise of Agency

Ultimately, the conclusion of the novel with the film noir chapter complicates Cliff's valorization of place and its connection to cultural identity. The attempt to storm the film set by the band of revolutionary guerrillas that Clare has joined obviously represents a struggle against the neocolonial forces of the Western media. The guerrillas target the film crew not only because they wield economic control of Jamaica and its resources, but also because of the film crew's manipulation of the *representation* of Jamaica. In the postmodern age where image, media, and advertisements have become the means of controlling and producing knowledge, the film crew's production of a "historical" film on the island constitutes an obliteration of Jamaican reality. Again, Cliff exposes the postcolonial dimensions of typically postmodernist forces: the film setting is not just a zone where the real and the imaginary are conflated; it is now a site where

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[326] Hall 120.

[327] Hall 111.

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cultural identity is scripted by the neocolonizers from the stereotypes of Hollywood. The result is a postcolonial simulacrum, because Jamaican "reality" becomes a product of Western cinematic copies and forgeries of lived experience and not Jamaican experience itself. In other words, Hollywood images come to represent the island, its people, its heritage, and its identity.

The problematic nature of the final chapter rests with this tension between the simulacrum of Jamaica and the real Jamaica that Clare and her friends are struggling to restore. The presence of this neocolonizing simulacrum undermines the formation of cultural identity and place that Cliff has presented throughout the novel through Clare's return. In short, the final chapter converts the place of the homeland into a simulacrum that Clare and her friends are unable to destroy. The generation of this simulacrum is apparent when the American and British filmmakers discuss the conditions of filming in "third-world" regions:

> "You think this place is bad…Jesus! Have I seen places…the Congo—"
> "We're not going to hear about the African bloody Queen again."
> "Sorry." The American pronounced the word with British intonation.
> "And all the bloody dysentery and the bloody bugs and running out of bloody gin—or was that the film?" (201)

These Westerners characterize foreign landscapes as nothing more than film locations and even confuse the reality of place with its cinematic representations. Both their conversation and their treatment of the land signifies the presence of what Jean Baudrillard labels a fourth-order simulacrum, where the image "has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum."[328] One of the men goes on to remark, "We have an island. Landscape. Extras up the ass. Weather. And a fucking army complete with helicopters—" (203), revealing how critical facets of the island signify

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[328] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra & Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 6.

nothing more than stage props—the products of the simulacrum. As Baudrillard notes, "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal."[329] The place of Jamaica is transformed, then, into a hyperreal at the novel's closing. The film crew's appropriation of everything around them—a move itself that is based on the stereotyped tropes of Hollywood—becomes a process of fashioning a model on a copy that does not have an origin or a reality. Jamaica is seemingly reconfigured from previous Hollywood reconfigurations.

Clare's struggle against the film production crew signifies an attempt at political resistance against Western neocolonialist imperialism and the simulacrum itself. Clare and the guerrillas are trying to reestablish the authenticity of place and cultural identity against this postcolonial simulacrum. The suggestion of this authenticity comes with Clare's death, when the novel closes with the language of place filling both Clare's and the reader's ears (208). The natural sounds of the jungle seem to signal a political achievement for Clare, for the cultural identity she has gained from the place of the homeland now enables the homeland to speak to us literally, shattering the effects of the simulacrum. Cliff endorses such a reading of political agency achieved:

> Many readers of this novel think this an unhappy ending; they do not want
> the character to die. Though essentially tragic, for her life has been so, I
> see it, and envisioned it, as an ending that completes the circle, or rather
> triangle, of the character's life. In her death she has complete
> identification with her homeland; soon enough she will be
> indistinguishable from the ground. Her bones will turn to potash, as did
> her ancestors' bones.[330]

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[329] Baudrillard 1.

[330] Michelle Cliff, "Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character," *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe (Wellesley, MA: Calaloux Publications, 1990) 265.

Aside from stating that Clare rejoins her ancestors, Cliff argues, "At the end of *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare Savage is burned into the landscape of Jamaica, by gunfire, but she is also enveloped in the deep green of the hills and the delicate intricacy of birdsong."[331] Cliff here clearly equates Clare's achievement of identity and agency to a communion with the physical space of the homeland—a space that is marked as sacred and primal. What Cliff does not acknowledge is that the ground into which Clare is "burned" remains as part of the film crew's stage set, thus raising the problem of the homeland being trapped within a neocolonial cinematic simulacrum. Clare and her comrades no longer inhabit the place of home, a territory, or an actual substance. Their dead bodies lie in the vacuum of the simulacrum: "The valley was lit by a harsh, *unnatural* light, sending deep shadows into the hollows of landscape, creating *false* contrasts" (206; italics mine). In essence, the final, hidden image of text is that of Clare and her friends lying lifeless on a film set, becoming props in a lost battle, actors in a failed drama.

In the end, Cliff portrays the diaspora as a dystopian process, not a liberating zone for identity production. The novel reveals a critique of theories of diaspora and cultural identity while subtly illustrating the difficulty of uniting identity with place in the midst of postmodernist influences in postcolonial culture. The diaspora in the novel bestows Clare with the markers of a hybrid, multiethnic identity, but such an identity proves useless to her throughout much of the narrative. It is only with the repossession of the place of home that Clare is able to heal the fragments of herself and choose to be one with her Jamaican past *in* Jamaica. This healing is powered by fixed cultural signifiers buried in both the land and in her psychic "longing for tribe" (91), which represents her

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[331] Cliff in Cudjoe 266.

connection to a sacred, precolonial family culture in Jamaica. The political agency of Cliff's postcolonial subject derives from this equation of place and cultural identity, for it is Clare's spiritual and physical union with the land that finally enables her to fight for herself and her people. But the presence of the postmodernist-postcolonial forces of media problematizes this construction of agency. Clare's political action at the novel's close not only fails to challenge the neocolonial presence of the Western media, but it also becomes imprisoned within the frame of the film crew's set that manipulates the land. Trapped in the simulacrum and disconnected from the reality of place, Clare and her rebel comrades' efforts to rid Jamaica of the postmodern neocolonizers of Britain and America are drained of their power.

Cliff ultimately rejects diasporic sites as untenable for the production of cultural identity for the postcolonial subject, but she does offer some hope for postcolonial subjects to recover their pasts and discover a sense of political agency—a model considered impossible by the likes of Stuart Hall, Arjun Appadurai, and Gautum Premnath, but still a viable one. However, Cliff seems to underestimate the dystopian influence of simulation in the form of Western media and how it plagues attempts at establishing identity and history outside of the colonizer's influence.

Epilogue: Notes Towards a Dystopian Manifesto

> Well you know from our viewpoint, America in the '60s, before the assassinations, was kind of a time of idealism and people—what's the JFK line? "Ask not what your country can do for you but ask what you can do for your country." And he doesn't mean the government, he means what you can do for your country…your community and fellow citizens. After the JFK assassination, Robert Kennedy, MLK, America became self-centered and more cynical and still hasn't recovered that innocent idealism that had existed. So the name also signifies the loss of that idealism and our lyrics and music suggesting that maybe it's time to bring those back.
> - East Bay Ray, guitarist, Dead Kennedys[332]

> It's about a society falling…On the way down it keeps telling itself: "So far so good…so far so good…so far so good." How you fall doesn't matter. It's how you land.

> If everyone runs away from arguments, we'll be in a fine mess.
> - Mathieu Kassovitz, *La Heine*[333]

I. History Repeats

As I have researched, thought about, written, and even taught texts from this dissertation over the past couple of years, I have been continually struck by the eeriness and irony of the focus of my study. The 1970s and 1980s in both Britain and America

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[332] East Bay Ray, "History," Dead Kennedys Official Website, Web, 12 June 2005.

[333] Mathieu Kassovitz, *La Heine* (1995; United States: Criterion, 2007).

represent a bizarre mix of hyper-consumerism and pop cultural obsession and severe economic recession and racial tension. On the one hand, pop culture came of age in full force and broke many age-old barriers of high and low culture, perhaps most poignantly epitomized by the success of pornographic films, beginning with *Deep Throat* in 1972, and videos and the pop-culture machine itself, MTV, which saturated the West in 1981 with its rapidly flickering version of reality driven by music marketing. On the other hand, these decades witnessed the growth of paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland and England, leftist violence in Europe (the rampage of the Baader-Meinhof Gang culminating in the "German Autumn" of 1977), race rioting throughout Britain, the return of high-powered conservatism in both the U.S. and Britain, and an economic meltdown that skyrocketed unemployment, raised oil and gas prices, and crashed the housing markets in Britain and the U.S.

When I flash-forward to the present, history has repeated itself—something that I have loved to share with my students between 2003 and the present as I taught dystopian fictions of the present. The first decade of the twenty-first century has read more and more like a recycled nightmare of the 1970s and 1980s than a fresh start to a new era. Housing markets have collapsed again; the global economy suffered its worst collapse since the Depression of the 1930s and the recession of the 1970s; Cold War fears of nuclear conflict, thought to have been put to bed during the 1990s, have reappeared under the face of international terrorism and North Korea's and Iran's push for nuclear power; the racism that so openly plagued both Britain and the U.S. from the 1960s throughout the 1980s has returned most noticeably in the form of Arizona Governor Jan Brewer's controversial immigration legislation requiring not only all immigrants (or those "looking

like" immigrants) to carry identity papers but also banning the teaching of ethnic studies in public schools and eliminating all teachers who have an accent (indeed, the situation in Arizona at times disturbingly resembles Enoch Powell's xenophobic rhetoric and attempts to ban and patrol immigrants in Britain); and, not to be forgotten, pornography has one-upped itself and, arguably, single-handedly driven much of the innovations of the Internet, just as it did with film and video cassettes decades earlier. In short, 2000-2010 has almost mimicked with flawless accuracy some of the most troubling moments of the Seventies and Eighties.

Guardian journalist William Skidelsky has recently discussed this trend in his essay, "Why Novelists Love the 1970s," noting the current abundance of "State-of-the-Nation" novels appearing in Britain. Skidelsky suggests that one possible reason for this trend is that Britain stands at the end of a political epoch, with a sense of national crisis in the air. He cites a recent essay[334] by novelist Philip Hensher who claims that current British history mirrors the recent past perfectly. Skidelsky writes,

> Many of these new novels deal with the violence, radical political protest, economic malaise and sense of societal breakdown that defined large chunks of the 1970s and 1980s—trends which, Hensher suggests, are resurfacing in our own time. "The sense of historical pressure in 2008 has led many English novelists to return to pressures of a similar nature, 30 years ago....For Callaghan read Gordon Brown; for the Red Brigades and the Rote Armee Fraktion read al-Qaida; for the violence acted out in punk read the audacious violence acted out in dancehall and hip hop."[335]

Skidelsky's alternative suggestion for the popularity of Seventies and Eighties obsessions in recent British fiction is nostalgia, the charge often thrown at those who engage in postmodern past manufacturing. He asks,

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[334] Philip Hensher, "Writing the Nation," 27 April 2008, *Prospect*, Web, 12 March 2010.

[335] William Skidelsky, "Why Novelists Love the 1970s," 2 April 2008, *The Guardian*, Web, 12 March 2010.

> Works of cultural nostalgia, after all, are immensely popular at present. The baby boomer generation is one that likes to be constantly reminded of its childhood, whether in the form of remakes of 1970s Hollywood movies, pastiche TV shows such as Life on Mars, or memoirs about growing up in the 1970s and 1980s. In deciding to write state-of-the-nation novels, are novelists simply cashing in on the fashion for nostalgia?

While marketing impulses can certainly not be ignored, Skidelsky's preferred suggestion here seems all too simple and dismissal. Sure, writers could be cashing in on a "fad," but it is more plausible that those of us who grew up during the turbulence of the Seventies and Eighties are now of an age and cultural maturity to notice the creepy historical repetitions at work and thus to want to take stock of how the recent past has informed our present.

The only major missing piece of this historical repetition and its renewed interest in fiction has been public protest. Although various papers from *The Huffington Post*, to the *LA Times*, to the *San Francisco Sentinel* reported that about 100,000 protested Arizona's new immigration policies in the streets of Los Angeles, for example, significant, disruptive activism has vanished. Meanwhile, protest appears all but dead in Texas, where the Educational Board has made changes to public school curricula that will, as the BBC notes, teach "that the UN could be a threat to American freedom, and that the Founding Fathers may not have intended a complete separation of church and state."[336] Not only is history being distorted, but peoples' intellectual liberty is also being perverted before our very eyes. And while rallies and marches may register a certain level of opposition, such "polite protests" will do nothing to actually *stop* a powerful minority from making their corruptions law. At times like these, I wonder where are the Herbert Marcuses of today? Marcuse discusses this exact state of affairs—i.e., how

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[336] "Texas schools to get controversial syllabus," 22 May 2010, BBC News, Web, 22 May 2010.

ruling majorities use power to eliminate minorities from social, political, and economic participation—in his essay, "Repressive Tolerance" (1967), and argues that oppressed groups have the right to protest violently, if necessary, in order to break the established chain of power that keeps them oppressed in democratic societies. Are Marcuse's ideas too dangerous or too much of a relic of a different time, or have we become all too complacent and afraid of fighting for human rights and responsible intellectualism?

When I speak with members of my parents' generation about protest, some of them recall the vibrant student protests of the late 1960s: protests that brought social and racial issues to the forefront, that closed colleges and businesses. In France, May 1968 saw the student movement and thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault combine with striking workers—an event that almost caused a second civil war. Over the years, I have asked members of this generation what happened—that is, what moment did they think ended the protests and paved the way for, paraphrasing Robert Lowell from "Memories of West Street and Lepke," the "tranquillized present"? One of the most poignant answers I received came from one of my doctors during a routine checkup. After inquiring about my dissertation and getting probably more than enough information on my topic, I asked him this question—what happened? His generation was part of the last major push for widespread social change we have seen in years. He sighed, paused a bit, and said, "It was Kent State. After that, the student movement literally died overnight. At least it did where I went to school, in New York." It was the most convincing answer I have heard to this question in the past ten years of asking it, and one that bore the most historical truth: polite protests are fine, as we continue to witness to this day, but real protests—protests that test authority—are suppressed by the state, with

violence if necessary. As I left his office, he added, "You know, I would have thought that if any time would have caused people to protest loudly again, it would been during the past eight years [the W. Bush era]."

II. Is Art Dead?

In November 2005, I found myself teaching a group of high school juniors in Georgia. Across the Atlantic, in France, in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois, mass rioting was breaking out over the deaths of two teens, Bouna Traore and Zyed Benna, that had been pursued by the police and died accidentally by electrocution while hiding from the police.[337] The incident served as the flash point between what immigrants and youths in the impoverished Arab and African communities in France saw as racist police harassment and French government neglect, and what the French government saw, in the words of Nicolas Sarkozy, as the "racaille" (rabble) of youth vandals. For three weeks, rioting and violence spread throughout many cities and towns around Paris, and more than 10,000 cars and 300 buildings were firebombed.[338] Ironically, the response of the French government to the rioting a year later was to suggest tougher laws on crime.[339] Nowhere was there an acknowledgment of the problem of racism or police brutality.

At the time, I was teaching a unit on the British Romantics. I broke off from my lessons immediately. Instead, I held a "media day" where we discussed what was going on in France. I told my students about the tensions of unemployment and racism in la banlieue in and around the urban centers of France, and directed their attention to

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[337] "French Violence Hits Fresh Peak," 7 November 2005, BBC News, Web, 2 May 2010.

[338] "Riots Haunt Parisians a Year On," 27 October 2006, BBC News, Web, 2 May 2010.

[339] "Riots Haunt," BBC News.

Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Heine* (*Hate*; 1995), a film that predicted the race rioting and anti-police anger with near perfect accuracy a decade earlier. Here, I thought, was a perfect opportunity to discuss the importance of realist dystopian works and the very real connection they have to present events. In conjunction with our school's Parisian French teacher, I scheduled an after-school screening of *Hate*. While a handful of students attended, none stayed afterwards to discuss the film more thoroughly—and even a few students peeked out of the screening off and on to take cell phone calls.

What happened? I thought. Or, to borrow their texting parlance, I thought, WTF!? But the cynical answer seemed obvious: no one cared, and I was the fool thinking I could make a difference.

While being a perfect film about very real, dystopian problems, *Hate* was also an incredible failure. Not only did my students not care about its subject matter or about kids their age in Europe, but France's government soon went conservative with Sarkozy's election to president. If dystopian art this good and this accurate had failed to achieve any kind of significant social debate or change, then was the political effectiveness of dystopian art indeed dying? I recall here the interview I quote in my introduction between Tony Wilson and The Smiths's Morrissey:

> Wilson: "What right does the fact that you are a popular and successful pop star give you to comment on political and local events?"
>
> Morrissey: "Well, I feel that if popular singers don't say these things, who does? We can't have any faith in playwrights anymore; we can't have any faith in film stars. Young people don't care about those things—they're dying arts. And if you say, 'What right do you have?', the implication there to me is that popular music is quite a low art, it should be hidden, it can be there, but let's not say anything terribly important. Let's just, you know, make disco records or whatever. So, I really feel that we do have

an obligation, and I know that people respect it, and they want it, and it's working to great effect."[340]

Perhaps Morrissey is right—all the more right in 2010 than 1985. Perhaps not only youth but also adults do not care about traditional arts; perhaps Adorno and Horkheimer's Culture Industry has completely banished the idea of art and fully converted it into mind-numbing entertainment that reinforces the values of those in power. Or, as the Dead Kennedys sing in "When Ya Get Drafted," "Forget big demonstrations, kids today sit on their ass/Just a six-pack and you're happy."[341] Consumerism has conquered political consciousness.

In the midst of these pessimistic musings, I am reminded of Fredric Jameson's call for utopian thinking. In *Marxism and Form*, Jameson acknowledges the problem of Adorno's Culture Industry and its consequences for art, but he suggests that utopian thought is the method that we must embrace to combat the troubling aspects of our world. Jameson states, "The Utopian idea, on the contrary, keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is."[342] Jameson believes that utopian writing can establish visions or frameworks that deny the constructs of our current reality. This stance implies the failure of dystopian thought and art by suggesting that its commitment to portraying a recognizable reality compromises its ability to critique that reality. But American writer Kathy Acker reminds us that utopianism can also serve as unproductive escapism: "I learned that it is impossible to have, to live in a hypothetical, not utopian but perhaps freer, society if one

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[340] "The Smiths," Granada Reports, 1985. YouTube. Web. 12 May 2008.

[341] Dead Kennedys, "When Ya Get Drafted," *Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables* (San Francisco: Alternative Tentacles Records, 1980).

[342] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) 111.

does not actually inhabit such a world. One must be where one is. *The body does not lie*. Language, if it is not propaganda or media blab, is the body; with such language lies are not possible."[343]

It is in the spirit of Acker's observation that dystopian art still has hope. By mining our reality, our histories, our bodies, more direct and understandable critiques and commentaries can be written or performed for audiences. And by communicating such pain or political injustices, dystopian art can actually create greater possibilities for utopian change than airy utopian theoretical musings or fantastical utopian tales. In Mike Newell's film, *Amazing Grace and Chuck* (1987), such a dystopian-turned-utopian tale is told. The film dramatizes a young primary schoolboy's growing unease with the prospect of nuclear war. After visiting a missile silo on a school field trip, Chuck, the town's star little league pitcher, decides to give up baseball as a way to protest our current reality's death drive. When the local media picks up the story and syndicates it, Boston Celtic's star Amazing Grace is moved by Chuck's gesture and subsequently leaves the NBA to join Chuck in protest. Eventually, several notable athletes from the NFL, NHL, MLB all gradually join the ranks of Chuck and Amazing Grace, despite the ire it has generated in fan and business circles in the U.S. and worldwide. The U.S. President eventually intervenes and tries to talk Chuck out of his protest, in order to restore social order. He invites Chuck to the White House and tells him, "Now Chuck, I can't deny you the right to protest, that's in the first amendment and God forbid that should change. But there's

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[343] Kathy Acker, "A Few Notes on Two of My Books," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 9:3 (1989): 35.

an old saying: 'You can't run into a crowded theater and yell fire!' Chuck nervously

collects himself, and soon responds, "But, sir, what if there is a fire?"[344]

Newell's film concludes with Chuck's protest successfully bringing the U.S. and

Soviet governments together to ban all nuclear weapons. While such an ending perhaps

smacks of corny American happy-endings, it rightly demonstrates how art can portray a

dystopian reality through simple dramatic realism and shows how protest can be

imagined and ultimately produces (utopian) social and political change. Dystopian art

and thought are really perhaps the only tools we have to make the wider public recognize

that there is indeed "a fire." What we need now more than ever is an art and a critical

practice that make more of an effort to eschew the academy and the marketplace and

communicate directly with the greater public.

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[344] Mike Newell, *Amazing Grace and Chuck* (1987; United States: Warner Home Video, August 1990).

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