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2009 Whatley Award

In memory of George Whatley, a founder and early president of the Popular Culture Association in the South, the editor and editorial board of *Studies in Popular Culture* annually recognize the article published in *SPC* that in their view best represents the scholarly values Professor Whatley sought for the organization and for the study of popular culture.

The 2009 Whatley Award winner is

Sexed Appeals: Network Marketing Advertising and Adult Home Novelty Parties

By

**Dawn Heinecken
University of Louisville**

Theory and Practice

Browne, Butler, Bakhtin; Campbell, Cawelti; Fiske and Hartley, Fiedler, Foucault. These are some of the lights of theory that have guided our work in popular culture. Their perspectives are various—from the broad sweep of archetypal content to the tight focus of a particular medium's techniques; from the single eye to the cultural panorama. When we write, we write with theory in our bones, whether or not we see the structure of our thought.

Studies in Popular Culture normally emphasizes specific cases of analysis—a discussion of *Fight Club*; an exploration of Elvis impersonators; R.E.M.'s collaboration with Howard Finster; the Klingon *Hamlet*; the *Left Behind* franchise; the vampires of Joss Whedon's *Angel* series. We take joy in such particular engagement with our popular culture, examining and sometimes embracing it. But on occasion, it is possible to get a better view by taking a step back.

In this issue we present a selection of articles which include not only some of our trademark close analyses, but also essays which must be described as more generally theoretical. Stephen Bates and Anthony J. Ferri give us "What's Entertainment? Notes Toward a Definition." Neither popular culture in general nor leisure *per se*, the term is loosely used—but, as Bates and Ferri assert, if we are to proceed as scholars, we should attempt a shared definition. They propose one with objective criteria, while acknowledging the difficult subjective questions. Among other things, their article provides an impressive review of literature on the subject. It also provokes response: Is passivity a necessary element of entertainment? As I read, I found myself recalling that transition I make when I move from watching a television show simply because I enjoy it, to watching a television show because I plan to write about it—the transition from entertainment to work (however pleasurable). Even when I watch purely for enjoyment, my mind is already actively leaping to note, for example, the closing image echoing the opening, or the writers' play with words, or the music's irony. As Bates and Ferri say, passivity is their most controversial criterion; it is one of the defining traits with which they, as they put it, attempt to launch a conversation.

Matthew Schneider-Mayerson focuses more narrowly, but still on a very large theoretical target: the study of popular fiction. As he notes, our academic productions, various as they are, tend to look at romances, or horror novels, or Westerns—not the category of popular fiction overall. Like Bates and Ferri, Schneider-Mayerson provides a useful overview of related scholarship. He argues that seeing the larger picture will bring "a fresh approach to genre criticism and the relevance of genre itself," while growing a group of scholars who specialize in pop fiction rather than, say, the detective novel in particular or popular culture in general.

Gulnara Karimova's "Interpretive Methodology from Literary Criticism" invites us to apply a grand unified field theory of Bakhtin's carnivalesque—not only to literature but also to popular culture such as *Jackass* and *South Park* (both in television and film incarnations) and to current culture in general. She too draws on the work of many scholars who have applied Bakhtin to popular culture. Her essay straddles general theory and specific discus-

sion (as many good *Studies in Popular Culture* articles do). Lynnette Porter asks us to ponder an event which became part of the popular culture—the 1950s theft of the “Stone of Destiny,” the coronation stone, from Scotland—and the struggles that filmmakers had in their attempt to translate it into popular film. National politics, the popular press, a Hollywood director, and the high culture of certain film festivals come together in a revealing illustration of the complexity of cinematic creation. Carlos Ramet and Bennett Kravitz contribute articles on two very popular novelists whose work might or might not fit under Schneider-Mayerson’s categorization. Ramet writes on Ken Follett’s transformation from newspaper writer to author of fiction, focusing on two of his earliest novels: *The Modigliani Scandal* and *Paper Money*, both from 1976. Bennett Kravitz discusses Michael Chabon’s *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union*, a novel of an alternative history for the Jews, who find themselves temporarily exiled to Alaska as the “Frozen Chosen.” Against widespread criticism in the popular press, Kravitz defends the complexity of the novel’s themes. Last, we include an article that fits into the classic definition of popular culture; but does it deal with entertainment, in Bates and Ferri’s definition? Carol-Ann Farkas carefully explores health magazines and the ways readers may make use of them. She sharpens her focus by giving detailed analyses of three: the women’s magazine *Self*; *Bicycling*; and *Men’s Health*. Using this selected group, she argues that the way we define “‘health’ and ‘wellness’ is as much negotiated as simply imposed.” And so we return to theory, and our own daily negotiations of terms and experiences.

As usual, we owe great thanks to those who are named in the opening pages and covers of this issue. Also, in addition to members of the editorial board, we thank many others who contributed their expertise as peer reviewers, including Pam Bedore, John Davis, Bryan Denham, Jill Hague, Dawn Heinecken, Sarah Henstra, Lorna Jowett, Lewis Moore, Eleanor Hersey Nickel, Roy Schwartzman, and Matthew Sutton. Without these readers, the journal would not be.

Rhonda V. Wilcox
Gordon College

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What's Entertainment? Notes Toward a Definition

Introduction

Entertainment has been a part of all cultures, from the Chauvet Cave paintings to the iPad. For Rothman, it is “the storehouse of national values” (xviii). Perhaps nowhere is that observation more apt than in the United States, a nation that Gabler terms a “republic of entertainment” (11). Many Americans seem to feel entitled to high-quality entertainment (Zillmann and Vorderer viii), and more and more entertainment jostles for their attention (Wolf 46). Zillmann goes so far as to predict that entertainment “will define, more than ever before, the civilizations to come” (“Coming of Media Entertainment” 18). The importance of entertainment can be gauged by a study conducted by Brock and Livingston (259). They asked 115 American undergraduates how much money they would require in order to give up television for the rest of their lives. More than half said they would demand over a million dollars, with several naming amounts exceeding a billion dollars.

Despite the centrality of entertainment to society, however, academia has treated the subject in a disjointed, scattershot, sometimes condescending fashion, for a variety of reasons. To start with, the earliest communication theorists chose to study the mass media in terms of persuasion rather than entertainment, and most subsequent scholarship has retained that em-

phasis (Katz and Foulkes 376; Singhal and Rogers 120). Furthermore, many scholars look on entertainment as too trivial for study (Shusterman 291). They believe that entertainment amounts principally “to taking up large amounts of the daily time of individuals, but not representing an important force for human behavior change” (Singhal and Rogers 120). In addition, different disciplines have asserted dominion over different aspects of the topic. Scholars of communications, film, literature, art, popular culture, leisure, history, psychology, sociology, economics, policy, law, neuroscience, and other disciplines all have claimed partial, often overlapping authority. But the importance of the whole has been neglected: no single discipline has undertaken to map the vast landscape of entertainment. Lieb observes that theorists have largely failed to explain “what entertainment is, what kind of functions it inherits, and how much further it may expand” (226). Vorderer deems the academic response to entertainment “astonishing, to the point of being incomprehensible” (“Entertainment Theory” 131).

To be sure, some entertainment scholars may see no need for any single, overarching definition. For them, a subjective approach (discussed below) suffices: entertainment is whatever individuals find entertaining. But we believe that development of a more objective definition can help unify and advance the field of entertainment studies. Terminological exactitude, after all, is a basic foundation of scholarship. We follow the example of Browne, who in 1972 published “Popular Culture: Notes Toward a Definition.” He wrote, “Despite the obvious difficulty of arriving at a hard and fast definition of popular culture, it will probably be to our advantage—and a comfort to many who need one—to arrive at some viable though tentative understanding of how popular culture can be defined” (10).

So, with due acknowledgment that some may see our undertaking as bootless, this article sketches different approaches to defining entertainment and then proposes a set of criteria. Our hope is to help launch a conversation, one that can fruitfully continue as diverse approaches to the study of entertainment arise and mature.

We begin with two observations that, though perhaps commonplace, ought to be kept in mind. First, entertainment often does more than entertain—or, put differently, entertainment functions are often intertwined with nonentertainment functions. According to Staiger, children and teens spent more time at movies during World War II in part because mothers were

working, so theaters became de facto day-care centers (22). Katz and Foulkes similarly observe that families may watch TV together in order to bond (382). Second, and regrettably, “There are few things less entertaining than trying to define mass entertainment” (Bosshart and Macconi 3).

Defining Related Fields

Popular and Elite Culture

Meyersohn treats *popular culture* and *entertainment* as synonyms (331). What, then, is popular culture? The term has been defined in capacious terms. Mukerji and Schudson write:

[P]opular culture refers to the beliefs and practices, and the objects through which they are organized, that are widely shared among a population. This includes folk beliefs, practices and objects rooted in local traditions, and mass beliefs, practices and objects generated in political and commercial centers. It includes elite cultural forms that have been popularized as well as popular forms that have been elevated to the museum tradition. (3-4)

Santino treats popular culture as “the expressive elements of daily life,” with *expressive* referring to the attachment of symbolic meaning and *daily life* referring to everything except elite art (Motz 10). Browne proposes an even broader definition: “Popular culture is the television we watch, the movies we see, the fast food, or slow food, we eat, the clothes we wear, the music we sing and hear, the things we spend our money for, our attitude toward life. It is the whole society we live in, that which may or may not be distributed by the mass media. It is virtually our whole world” (“Popular Culture Medicine” 260).

Elsewhere, Browne suggests that culture falls into four categories, defined by their modes of dissemination:

Those elements which are too sophisticated for the mass media are generally called Elite culture, those distributed through these media that are something less than “mass”—that is such things as the smaller magazines and newspapers, the less widely distributed books, museums and less sophisticated galleries, so-called clothes line art exhibits, and the like—are called in the narrow sense of the term “popular,” those elements that are distributed through the mass media are “mass” culture, and those

which are or were at one time disseminated by oral and non-oral methods—on levels “lower” than the mass media—are called “folk.” (“Popular Culture Notes” 6)

Popular culture in the broad sense, Browne maintains, includes mass culture, folk culture, and popular culture in its narrower sense—everything, that is, except elite culture.

What is elite culture? Under one approach, elite culture is whatever cultural critics give their seal of approval. Wollheim writes of the institutional theory of art; in his words, “Painters make paintings, but it takes a representative of the art-world to make a work of art” (14). Fiedler (23) and, to an extent, Gans (9-10) argue that class partly affects taste; the upper classes are more likely to embrace what is defined as elite culture than the working class. Another approach emphasizes self-improvement, even at the cost of pleasure. Edwin Lawrence Godkin, the founding editor of *The Nation*, defined culture—meaning high art—as a matter of labor for the audience: “[C]ulture ... is the result of a process of discipline, both mental and moral. It is not a thing that can be picked up, or that can be got by doing what one pleases.... In fact, it might not improperly be called the art of doing easily what you don’t like to do” (202).

In general, however, elite culture is an amorphous category (Mukerji and Schudson 35). After all, lowbrow entertainments can become highbrow. Elizabethan drama was considered popular entertainment during its time but has now become high art (Kammen 9; Levine 11-81; Shusterman 292). With auteur theory, similarly, film became of interest to elite viewers and critics even as it remained mass entertainment (Haberski 39-40).

Leisure

Leisure also overlaps with entertainment. Freysinger and Kelly discuss various approaches to defining leisure (17). It can be defined by a list of activities, they note, though perhaps only daydreaming always qualifies as leisure; all other forms can sometimes be work. Another approach is leisure as a state of mind: the feeling of having freely chosen to undertake a certain activity. A third is leisure as quality of action, which looks at whether the activity can be characterized as “playful.” A fourth approach is leisure as a social construction, which examines groups—by race, gender, class, and other variables—and the forms of leisure that dominate within them. A fifth approach considers leisure as political and examines relationships of power and privilege as they affect leisure activities. A final approach is

leisure as a dimension of life, which considers leisure in the context of the individual's other activities. The authors conclude that all of the approaches assume some levels of freedom and playfulness. Mobily and Shaw likewise report that studies generally find leisure to be characterized by freedom (14; 19-20). McLean, Hurd, and Rogers, however, note that leisure can include commitments and obligations, as in gardening or mastering a musical instrument (34).

Traditional Definitions of Entertainment

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *entertain* in its earliest usage meant “[t]o hold mutually; to hold intertwined.” The word comes from Latin, *inter*, meaning *among*, and *tenere*, meaning *hold*. One can construe *hold* as “focus attention” (Shusterman 292).

Adding *among* suggests two meanings: to focus on one of several objects competing for attention; or to be one of several people focusing on an object. The multiplicity, in other words, can refer to entertainments or to members of the audience. The latter suggests a communal nature to entertainment. Turner applies a slightly different term in writing that entertainment “literally means ‘holding between,’ that is ‘liminalizing’” (73). Turner’s approach suggests that entertainment functions as a sort of passage, perhaps (among other things) the audience’s passage through an entertainment work.

Governments also define entertainment. According to Tseng, the Bureau of Labor Statistics treats entertainment spending as comprising four categories: fees and admissions; televisions, radios, and sound equipment; pets, toys, and playground equipment; and other entertainment supplies, equipment, and services (73). As *The New York Times* points out (Kuehl), this approach encompasses pet food and veterinarian fees but not books. In Pennsylvania, the Township of Middletown defines entertainment for tax purposes to include “theatrical or operatic performances, concerts, vaudevilles, circus, carnival and side shows, . . . athletic contests, . . . exhibitions, contests, displays, and games” (qtd. in Martin, 799). Here again, books are excluded, as are films.

Scholars' Definitions of Entertainment

Objective Approaches

A few scholars have proposed objective definitions of entertainment. Zillmann and Bryant —"crudely," by their own admission—define entertainment as "any activity designed to delight and, to a smaller degree, enlighten through the exhibition of the fortunes or misfortunes of others, but also through the display of special skills by other and/or self," a definition that encompasses "any kind of game or play, athletic or not, competitive or not, whether witnessed only, taken part in, or performed alone," including "musical performances by self for self or others, of others for self, or with others" (438). For Barnouw and Kirkland, entertainment is a commodity that requires profitability: it is an "experience that can be sold to and enjoyed by large and heterogeneous groups of people" (50) and "a particular category of marketed product" (51). Mendelsohn and Spetnagel emphasize time and place rather than money: "Entertainments ... occur in designated places and on schedules that are originated by the entertainers and not by audiences" (20).

Subjective Approaches

What entertains a given individual is inescapably subjective, a matter of taste (Lieb 230; Vorderer, Steen, and Chan 4). One might paraphrase Berelson: some kinds of communication, under some kinds of conditions, will entertain some kinds of people (184). Some scholars contend that empathy can signal the presence of entertainment. Bosshart and Macconi suggest that entertainment requires one "to identify himself or herself with fictional persons and actions" (5). Similarly, Oliver explores tragedy and other somber forms of entertainment, and concludes that enjoyment of them correlates with what she terms "tender affective states," which are "associated with feelings of sympathy, warmth, kindness, and understanding" (55). Zillmann proposes an Affective Disposition Theory, in which audience members morally assess a character's behavior and either approve or disapprove it ("Theory of Affective Dynamics"). To Vorderer, Affective Disposition Theory constitutes "the strongest theory on entertainment available" ("It's All Entertainment" 252).

More elaborately, Vorderer, Klimmt, and Ritterfeld develop an empathetic model that includes physiological, affective, and cognitive di-

mensions (389). They begin with antecedent conditions, including the person's willingness and ability to suspend his or her disbelief. The suspension of disbelief is characterized by the willingness to let oneself go into some other world, whether a movie, a game, or any other form of entertainment. For these scholars, five emotions potentially lie at the core of entertainment: exhilaration; fear and relief; sadness or melancholy; sensory delight; and achievement, as in winning a video game (393). The authors give an example of how the theory works. A woman reads the latest book by John Grisham in order to seek distraction. "She is ready to suspend disbelief about how unlikely somebody like the hero of her book might be in the social world." She feels the fear of the villains who threaten her hero and feels "as if she is 'there' at the time and where and when the action takes place" (404). There are phases of suspense and relief; it is like being on a cognitive roller coaster.

Many other definitions are functional in nature. Entertainment can provide diversion and rejuvenation, according to Shusterman:

To sustain, refresh, and even deepen concentration, one also needs to distract it; otherwise concentration fatigues itself and gets dulled through monotony. These lessons, one might say, are inscribed in our anatomy of vision: we succeed in securing our physical sustenance and refreshment by looking outward and inward. (293)

Katz posits "mild arousal" as an element of entertainment, and argues that people seek "a balance of excitement and security" through entertainment (72-73). Similarly, Zillmann and Bryant cite studies showing that people tend to seek particular types of entertainment depending on their moods, as a sort of regulator (457). Research suggests that over-excited people tend to choose calming entertainment, for example, and people suffering from depression choose comedy. People thus select entertainment as part of "seeking mood changes for the better (i.e., in terminating bad moods, in switching over into good moods, or in facilitating and extending good moods)" (Zillmann and Bryant 443). Much entertainment consumption "is adaptive, recreational, restorative, and in this sense, therapeutic" (Zillmann and Bryant 457-458).

Meyersohn (336-337) and McLean, Hurd, and Rogers (31) apply the concept of "flow experiences" pioneered by Csikszentmihalyi. A flow experience, Csikszentmihalyi writes, entails the "complete involvement of the

actor with his activity” (36), “the merging of action and awareness” (38) with “a centering of attention on a limited stimulus field” (40). Flow can occur with play, creativity (including scientific creativity), and religious experiences.

Wurst also considers the user: “[W]hen we look at what entertainment means for those who use the media and expect to be entertained by their content, it is enjoyment that we most often find” (389). Mendelsohn similarly defines mass entertainment as “the experiencing of pleasure from the mass media of communication” (15). Vorderer defines entertainment as play, “a form of coping with reality” (“It’s All Entertainment” 256). Like children’s games, he argues, media use is “motivated more by internal than external causes”; it brings about “changes in perceived reality”; it is characterized by repetition, as “media users develop entertainment preferences and return to them in a more or less regular way”; it can lead to disappointment; and it tends to operate on the audience member’s part at a “low intellectual level” (254-255). Klimmt and Vorderer observe that entertainment can inform as well as amuse (349).

In a classic work, Stephenson stresses the element of play. As the key to the study of entertainment, he proposes looking for “conditions under which people can have communication-pleasure” (205). He distinguishes play—“disinterested, self-sufficient, an interlude . . . that brings no material gain”—from work—“not disinterested, . . . not an interlude in the day . . . and produces goods, services, or ideas, etc.” (192-193). Stephenson goes on to distinguish “communication-pain” from “communication-pleasure,” in keeping with Mendelsohn’s and Wurst’s emphasis on enjoyment as an element of entertainment:

Communication-pain is a command for work and action, for effort and production; education, the development of skills, and so on all may entail hard work and are subject to communication-pain. . . . Communication-pleasure is enjoyment, contentment, serenity, delight, such as is characteristic of entertainment, art, drama. . . .
(Stephenson 194)

Stephenson’s dichotomy between work and play contrasts with Csikszentmihalyi’s notion of flow, which can arise during work of a creative sort (36).

The fulcrum of entertainment is the human brain itself. Increasingly, subjective states of mind can be measured objectively. Sacks explores the

power of music in his book about “musicophilia” (literally, the love of music). He notes that music activates, and thus occupies, more areas of our brain than language does, making humans a musical species. Through magnetic imaging, further, empirical evidence demonstrates a functional segregation of brain structures underlying physiologic and verbal ratings along emotional dimensions of valence and arousal (Anders, Lotze, Erb, Grodd, and Birbaumer 200). In one study, musicians and non-musicians did not significantly differ concerning the responses to pure tones and piano tones, indicating that musicians do not differ in use-dependent reorganization in the brain (Lutkenho, Seither-Preisler, and Seither 935). To a greater and greater extent, according to advocates, researchers will be able to map enjoyment or pleasurable experiences in the brain.

Some authors, however, raise cautionary notes. Shermer remarks on the limits of brain imaging (67). More broadly, Lehrer claims that if neuroscientists want to understand the mystery of consciousness, they will need new methods. In his view, modern neuroscience represents the triumph of reductionism, in which “[t]he mind ... is just a particular trick of matter, reducible to the callous laws of physics.” He further observes that if a Beethoven symphony is reduced to wavelengths of vibrating air, we understand “less about music. The tangible beauty, the visceral emotion, the entire reason we listen in the first place—all is lost when the sound is reduced into its most elemental details. In other words, reductionism can leave out a lot of reality” (M8).

Antonyms

Like work and play, some terms are perhaps best defined by their antonyms. Leisure or play is the opposite of work (e.g., McLean, Hurd, and Rogers 37). Popular culture is the opposite of elite culture (e.g., Gans 7). What, then, is the opposite of entertainment? In keeping with Csikszentmihalyi’s flow concept, boredom is a strong contender (Bosshart and Macconi 4). Healy writes, “To feel bored is to suffer, in however slight a degree and for however short a duration. That is to say, it is a state of being from which one would like to be set free....” (42). Mikulas and Vodanovich define boredom as combining discontent and low arousal (1). O’Hanlon adds the concept of monotony to the blend (54).

If boredom is the disease, we suggest that entertainment is one—not the only—possible cure. But we should reiterate that we believe entertain-

ment must be defined objectively, not subjectively. Entertainment, whatever form it may take, will bore some members of the audience. It will fail to entertain them, but so long as it entertains some (and meets other criteria), it remains entertainment. We will say more about this below.

Cultural Context

Most definitions talk of entertainment principally from the perspective of one being entertained. Taking *culture* in the sociological sense, we can consider entertainment in its broader context, too. Parr and Lashua describe the approach with regard to leisure studies; it is equally applicable to entertainment:

[L]eisure is a phenomenon that is continually negotiated by people within constraints imposed by historical forces (e.g., capitalism), cultural ideology, and politics, and is embedded in social contexts (e.g., race, class, age, gender, ability/disability). Negotiation of roles and “appropriate” choices may occur within social structures and status hierarchies from both the “top-down” (hegemony) and “bottom up” (resistance)... Leisure becomes an aspect of life through which people may be repressed or liberated, controlled or empowered. (3)

Motz elaborates on the point, observing that some scholars view popular culture as a set of “texts or artifacts” (e.g., Hebdige 12), whereas others view it as “a series of processes, practices, or performances”; the latter scholars see popular culture “in terms of communication among individuals or groups” (Motz 9). In the process-oriented approach, according to Motz, “texts are always evolving rather than static, and the audience as well as the creator of the text is involved in the creation of the meaning of the text” (6). In terms of entertainment, we might, for example, consider *Avatar* as a text whose meaning depends on, among other things, the audience’s attitudes toward and experiences with warfare, native peoples, and the environment, attitudes and experiences that will vary by time and place. From another angle, one can see cultural power differentials lying behind the high culture/low culture distinction, with access to higher forms of art “limited by the high cost of participation, the necessity of higher education in order to appreciate the forms, the enforcement of certain types of audience behavior, and the exclusion of those outside the dominant class from policy-making positions in cultural institutions” (Motz 7).

Entertainment producers, distributors, and consumers operate in a web of relationships with government and other cultural institutions, too. The Production Code, for example, ensured that cinematic criminals came to bad ends from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s. Government propaganda offices during the World Wars worked with producers to ensure that film and other entertainment media stayed on message. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Supreme Court relaxed obscenity law, which changed the nature and availability of erotica. Some (e.g. Putnam) have suggested that contemporary entertainment forms encourage Americans to remain at home and thereby erode public discourse. In such fashions, society and entertainment constantly influence each other.

Possible Elements of a Definition

We propose the following as elements of a definition of entertainment:

Objective. As noted above, we reject the notion that entertainment must be gauged subjectively. Even though what entertains an individual is subjective, we believe that entertainment must generally be defined in objective terms if the definition is to prove useful to the majority of scholars. We say “generally” because, as discussed below, Stephenson’s subjective notion of communication-pleasure is an element of our definition, but with a focus on a segment of the audience and not on a particular individual.

Communication. We suggest that entertainment involves some sort of communication between an audience (including an audience of one) and a text, defined broadly. The requirement of communication helps avoid the sort of boundless definition that Browne gives for popular culture—“the whole society we live in” (“Popular Culture Medicine” 260). If nearly everything is entertainment, then the field of entertainment studies becomes all but meaningless. The communication requirement excludes massages and eating, again by contrast to Browne’s definition of popular culture (“Popular Culture Medicine” 260).

Note that we do not limit the *content* of that communication in any respect. The content of entertainment is limitless. It can be gazing at dead bodies, or “actual human specimens” (*Bodies*), which can be likened to viewing statuary. Fiction masquerading as fact can constitute entertainment: consider Benjamin Day’s Moon Hoax in the *New York Sun* in 1835

(Bjork 128), or Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* hoax of 1938 (Barnouw 87). Watching and listening to religious rituals qualifies, too, as Stephenson notes (195). Similarly, we believe that the highbrow/lowbrow distinction, perhaps meaningless in general today, is inapplicable here. Elite forms of art qualify as entertainment in that they provide communication-pleasure to some members of the audience. Contrary to Wollheim's institutional theory of art, in addition, entertainment requires no imprimatur (358). No high priests need to approve a particular film, for example, before it can qualify as entertainment. We likewise reject the distinction between entertainment and education. A Chautauqua lecture can be entertaining for some, as can textual analysis of a novel, consistent with Kimmt and Vorderer (349). But contrary to Vorderer, entertainment need not operate on a low intellectual level ("It's All Entertainment" 255). In addition, entertainment is not necessarily narrative—music, among other forms, also qualifies—so it does not require an empathetic or other response to characters, contrary to Bosshart and Macconi (6) as well as Zillmann ("Theory of Affective Dynamics").

We reject institutional approaches to defining entertainment, too. Contrary to Mendelsohn and Spetnagel, we do not believe that entertainment necessarily "occur[s] in designated places and on schedules that are originated by the entertainers and not by audiences" (20); reading or listening to music on one's own schedule qualifies. We also find unhelpful Barnouw and Kirkland's insistence on profitability as an element of entertainment (51), which would exclude nonprofit museums and theater companies as well as PBS, NPR, and the BBC. Entertainment may, in cultural terms, often reflect aspects of the capitalist system, but the pursuit of profit is not an essential element.

External stimulus. Consistent with our focus on communication, we believe that entertainment requires some sort of external stimulus. One cannot, by our definition, entertain oneself. This criterion excludes day-dreaming, which Freysinger and Kelly cite as the only activity that always qualifies as leisure (18), as well as singing, contrary to Zillman and Bryant's approach to entertainment (438). One can, however, be entertained in solitude, via a book, DVD, or some other text. The stimulus must be communicative, further, but it need not operate as mass media, contrary to Mendelsohn (15). Viewing a museum exhibition qualifies as entertainment.

Pleasure. A principal goal of entertainment is to provide pleasure. This criterion is in keeping with Stephenson (45) as well as Mendelsohn (15) and Wurst (389). Boredom is not entertainment. Neither is unpleasant effort. If, as Godkin maintains, cultural immersion (elite culture, in his case) does not bring pleasure, it falls outside our definition of entertainment (202).

Admittedly, the inclusion of pleasure does introduce an element of subjectivity into our generally objective definition. Our focus, however, is not on the response of a given individual, but rather on any subset of the audience as a whole. Of course, not every member of the audience will necessarily take pleasure from a particular entertainment, or from a given portion of an entertainment. The test is not unanimous approbation, but entertainment does require some level of appeal (Hinds 43). Nevertheless, we believe that one of Vorderer's criteria, that entertainment can lead to disappointment ("It's All Entertainment" 251), is unhelpful; what cannot lead to disappointment? Further, the pleasure given by entertainment need not, in our view, reach the level of "flow experience." That raises the bar too high; the rarefied experience of flow, with its total loss of self-consciousness, may result from entertainment, but entertainment does not require flow. In addition, unlike Zillmann and Bryant (441) as well as Katz (72-73), we do not address the motivation of the audience member. We need not posit that people consciously or unconsciously seek therapeutic or mood-regulating entertainment, beyond Stephenson's communication-pleasure.

Audience. As the foregoing suggests, we believe that entertainment must have an audience. Entertainment is at some level a public institution. This is not to rule out entertainment in solitude, as noted; a TV program does not lose its status as entertainment when the second person leaves the room. But entertainment must reach beyond its creator. On this point, Tolstoy writes of "the infectiousness of art." In his words, "If a man . . . experiences a mental condition which unites him with [the creator of a work] and with other people who also partake of that work of art, then the object evoking that condition is a work of art" (139). Entertainment is likewise communal, between creator and audience member as well as, at least potentially, among different audience members.

Passive audience. Passivity is a commonly understood, if often unspoken, element of the process of mass communication, which traditionally

“describes the media user as a witness to depicted events; an onlooker, listener, and, in general, an observer of what is presented on a screen, a page, or by a speaker” (Vorderer “Interactive Entertainment” 23). When Brock and Livingston asked students to define entertainment, more than two-thirds defined it in passive terms, such as “a show being put on for you: watching TV, listening to music, going to the movies” (268). The authors conclude that students define entertainment in terms of “being entertained relatively passively, by some exogenous performance or spectacle” (270). But others disagree. Zillmann and Bryant, for example, consider the display of one’s own skills to be a form of entertainment (438).

A passivity criterion for entertainment excludes forms of active recreation, many of which are also excluded by our first criterion, communication: playing sports (though watching sports would qualify), playing an instrument (versus listening to a musician), dancing (versus watching dancers), gardening, gambling, riding a Ferris wheel, and, perhaps ironically, “entertaining” neighbors with a backyard barbecue. These excluded activities, we believe, qualify as leisure but not as entertainment. The experiences are too *sui generis* and idiosyncratic. Concededly, different individuals, and even the same individuals on different days, will perceive a given entertainment in different fashions. But the variations in the experiences provided by recreational activities go further. The experiences of any two spectators at a baseball game differ, for example, but not nearly as much as do the experiences of any two players in the game.

Like Tolstoy, we believe that people being entertained ought to share a common experience, not completely but to some significant degree. So we propose passivity as a criterion. Entertainment (unlike leisure or play) is, we suggest, an experience of spectatorship more than participation. This passivity, of course, does not exclude emotional involvement, as in the case of a spectator at a baseball game. Elements of a spectator’s more active behavior, such as standing and cheering, fall outside our definition of entertainment, but so do other aspects of attending a ballgame, such as eating a hot dog or wearing a team cap. As noted above, entertainment is often interwoven with nonentertainment.

Concededly, passivity is the most problematic of our criteria, and perhaps the most likely to become outdated. With electronic games, Second Life, and other forms of virtual reality, some of which involve all five senses

and movement of the whole body, the line between spectator and participant grows blurry. It is likely that interactive technologies will move viewers increasingly into doers. As Vorderer observes, the development of interactive media “has completely questioned our theorizing about entertainment” (“Entertainment Theory” 143).

But it is difficult to encompass these interactive media in our definition without also including many activities that we do not consider entertainment. If a conversation in the public forum of Second Life is entertainment, as would be the case with an active-audience approach, then why not a conversation in the public forum of a city park? Why include online or videogame versions of chess or Scrabble but not the original board-game versions—and then if chess, why not charades; and if charades, why not dancing? If an Internet flight simulator qualifies, why not flying an authentic plane? How can videogames be distinguished from slot machines; and, once that line is crossed, how can video poker be distinguished from real poker? Positing an active audience leads to overinclusiveness that appears to be greater than the underinclusiveness resulting from the criterion of a passive audience. With misgivings, thus, we propose a passive audience as an element of entertainment.

In sum, we believe that entertainment must be defined largely in objective terms. Entertainment, in our view, involves communication featuring external stimuli; it provides pleasure to some people, though not of course to everyone; and it reaches a generally passive audience.

Conclusion

We have proposed criteria with which to identify entertainment and distinguish it from leisure, popular culture, and other categories. The challenge is considerable. “Entertainment is difficult to define *because* everyone knows what it is, because it is a common-sense idea,” writes Dyer (1). We suggest that entertainment, defined in largely objective terms, entails communication via external stimuli, which reaches a generally passive audience and gives some portion of that audience pleasure. Our criteria are perhaps obvious and very much tentative; we have noted some of their weaknesses. We offer them in hopes of launching a conversation that will

advance the field of entertainment studies—a first word rather than a last word.

Mukerji and Schudson observe that in a generation's time, popular culture studies went “from an academic backwater to a swift intellectual river where expansive currents from different disciplines meet” (1). Within a generation, perhaps the same will be true of the infant field of entertainment studies. The foundational task of discussing potential boundaries of entertainment can only help.

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Popular Fiction Studies: The Advantages of a New Field

Stephen Knight's *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, published in 1980, begins with the claim that "not very much has been written about crime fiction" (Knight 1). This was true in relative terms: although a great deal had, in fact, been written about crime fiction, the most celebrated and conventionally literary of popular genres, it was only a stream compared to the flood of work that emerged in the 1980s. "Crime fiction" and other established genres of popular novels—such as romance, thriller, science fiction, horror novel and Western—have each drawn extensive attention from a variety of disciplinary and methodological perspectives, but they have more often than not been considered and analyzed as disparate categories. "Popular fiction" as a general object of study has rarely been explored, in part because it is often subsumed under the umbrella of popular culture. This is a mistake: just as film and television have developed their own approaches that reflect the unique social, cultural, political, and industrial dimensions of each medium, so popular fiction should occupy its own critical space. In this article I explore the most significant debates about popular fiction within the United States, such as the significance of genre and the role of reception studies, and suggest that to fully recognize the possibilities of studying popular fiction, scholars should begin to treat it as a unique medium that deserves its own field.

"Popular fiction" has been defined in a number of ways (in Western, English-language criticism) over the last half-century. Although the specific terminology has often reflected the author's approach to the topic,

the subject's actual domain is rarely questioned. Popular fiction is defined by what it is not: "literature." Most critics openly or implicitly adhere to the following claims: Whereas "literature" is indifferent to (if not contemptuous of) the marketplace, original, and complex, popular fiction is simple, sensuous, exaggerated, exciting, and formulaic (for example, Gelder; Radway; Makinen; Warpole). "Real" writers spend decades agonizing over each sentence, while genre hacks produce a new paperback each year, to be "consumed" in airports and quickly discarded (Gelder 12-15). A persistent thorn in definitions of "popular culture" is the ambiguity of the word "popular": If a "literary" novel—by Philip Roth, for example—sells more copies than Nora Roberts' latest romance, which is "popular"? Can both be? Is the definition qualitative or quantitative? The significance of this distinction was highlighted by the controversy surrounding Jonathan Franzen's rejection of Oprah Winfrey's official endorsement of his novel *The Corrections*. When Franzen said in 2001, "I see this as my book, my creation, and I didn't want that logo of corporate ownership on it" (*Fresh Air*), he publicly alluded the wall between "real" literature and popular fiction, a distinction which would exist no matter how many copies *The Corrections* might sell. The contrast between "popular fiction" and "literature" occurs against the backdrop of continuing debates about the categories "low" and "high" culture by authors such as Lawrence Levine (1988) and Andreas Huyssen (2002) (among many others), but the study of popular fiction requires its own attention. Although many of the aforementioned terms used to stereotype popular fiction have been questioned by scholars, most would agree on a basic distinction: a novel is "popular fiction" if its success is measured (by the public and its publisher) as much by its sales and the devotion of fans (by its author) as opposed to timeless literary quality.

A Brief History of Popular Fiction Criticism

In the 1960s, American scholars showed little interest in popular fiction, and when they did mention the subject (primarily in English departments), it was, as sociologist Tony Bennett put it, primarily to present popular fiction as evidence of "both symptom and cause of a generalized social problem" of cultural degeneracy (Bennett xi). Early works viewed genres ahistorically and merely applied traditional methodologies of literary criti-

cism to more widely read fiction. Two representative examples are Bruce Merry's 1977 *Anatomy of a Spy Thriller* and Jerry Palmer's 1979 *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre*. Both are highly indebted to Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, focus entirely on the written texts themselves (as opposed to, for example, their political economy or reception), and assume a simple relationship of direct influence between readers and the novels. Although both studies yield insights into the thriller—Merry sees it in the context of the Cold War, while Palmer focuses on competitive (masculine) individualism and conspiratorial fears in the United States—their assertions about what the genre “means” (*to whom* is rarely discussed) are based almost entirely on their presumed status as literary ‘experts.’

A surprising amount of criticism still follows this model. One oft-cited example is Walter Nash's *Language in Popular Fiction*, published in 1990. Nash, originally a medievalist, has written on subjects ranging from humor to rhetoric but is perhaps best known for *Language in Popular Fiction*. *Language* reflects the lasting popularity of New Criticism: concerned primarily with women's magazines and action novels, Nash ignores new developments in literary criticism, such as the relevance of ideology, structuralism and historicism. Instead, he provides a close reading of the language of a variety of novels, from which he draws conclusions about their genres. Given the immense amount of popular fiction published in each genre every year, his selection is not nearly large enough to support his confident generalizations. More importantly, although Nash's focus on style certainly contributes to the study of popular fiction, his lack of attention to social and political context, readership, and political economy limits the potential of his work.¹

New Perspectives in the 1980s

The profusion of book-length studies of popular culture published in the 1980s was the result of the influence of feminism, the New Left, and, within the academy, cultural studies, but it should also be recognized as a reaction to the myopia of New Criticism. One of the first cracks in the dam was the 1978 English translation of Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production*, which applied an Althusserian “symptomatic” reading to

literary texts, specifically the works of Jules Verne. Macherey's work, heavily reliant on psychoanalytic criticism, broke new ground in its attempt to see popular fiction as reflective of sociopolitical currents, whereas previous critics merely considered social context as background or focused on an author's biography. In addition, Macherey fundamentally challenged previous criticism by exposing and denouncing the "interpretive fallacy" of many critics—that their role was to discover and explain the singular meaning contained in a given text. This simple acknowledgement delegitimized 'expert readings' and opened the door to intensive studies of reader reception.

Macherey's work, along with a general blurring of the lines between high and low culture that we now associate with postmodernism, were powerful influences on Janice Radway's groundbreaking study of romance readers, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (published in 1984). In a 1987 re-introduction to the work, often considered the best study of popular fiction to date, Radway traced its intellectual origins to a debate within American Studies, which at that point (she writes) still tended to assume that the history and "character" of the United States could be inferred from its classic literature. She not only focused on *popular* literature but asserted that "if literature is to be treated as a document in the study of culture, it is first necessary to know something about who reads, why they do so, and how they go about it" (ix). Radway's study was a fascinating amalgamation of approaches: a loose ethnography of viewers that represented an unprecedented attention to reception of literature and a thorough history of the political economy of publishing, with feminist psychoanalysis at its interpretive center.

Each of these strains was reflected in later criticism. Radway's broadest contribution was her attention to social context, which was influenced by the turn towards social history within history departments. Although Radway was unaware of the developments occurring in the field that has come to be known as cultural studies, particularly at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, they paralleled major aspects of her approach and were similarly influential. Following the model of E.P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart, Althusser and above all Antonio Gramsci, authors such as Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige and John Storey credited popular culture with political as well as aesthetic significance. Although their research interests varied widely, their unifying question was

the political role that popular culture served in establishing hegemony in the contemporary (Western) world. The first fruits of this line of thought in the study of popular fiction were two studies published by Michael Denning in 1987, *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* and *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America*. *Mechanic Accents* in particular was a masterful combination of literary study, archival research, and social history that has much in common with *Reading the Romance*: a focus on the political economy of literary production that frames a detailed examination of readers; a special awareness of the role of one category of identity, gender in Radway's case and class in Denning's; and a subtle appreciation of the way that popular books constitute a "contested terrain, a field of cultural conflict where signs with wide appeal and resonance take on contradictory disguises and are spoken in contrary actions" (3). If previous critics of popular fiction might be seen as endorsing the "culture industry" perspective put forth by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1944, Radway and Denning (the first implicitly, the second quite consciously) replace top-down meaning-making with a hegemonic field where reception is as important as production.

Attention to reception in one form or another became the norm for studies of popular fiction in the 1980s. This reflected a turn towards reception of media audiences in general, in part as a result of David Morley's *The 'Nationwide' Audience*, which pioneered a critical approach in which watching television was considered a complex cultural practice. The general influence of similar ethnographic and social turns in other disciplines, such as literary studies, communication, and history, was equally noteworthy (see Ang's 1991 work). Although the pendulum of emphasis and methodology has not swung all the way towards readers (as opposed to publishers or authors), there has been a distinct turn towards reception as a potentially transgressive act since the 1980s, especially among feminist critics. If there has been one dominant influence on the study and writing of popular novels over the last twenty-five years, it has been the activist intellectual work of feminism.

The Feminist Influence

Especially in the 1980s, many feminist scholars were drawn to popular fiction via the popularity of romance novels. Feminism, an activist movement whose academic representatives often maintain a strong connection to the “real” world, has led to methodologies and epistemologies that favor the study of popular over elite texts. (Merja Makinen’s recent overview, *Feminist Popular Fiction*—one of the few works to recognize popular fiction as a distinct field—expertly details the history of feminist criticism of popular novels.) The first notable publication was Germaine Greer’s 1970 polemic *The Female Eunuch*, which argued that romance novels pacified, deceived, and manipulated their female readers and should be shunned by women. Radway’s study was motivated in part by this knee-jerk reaction to romance novels, as was Tania Modleski’s similarly sophisticated and even-handed *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*. Representative of general feminist interest in the romance was the collection *The Progress of the Romance: The Politics of Popular Romance*, published in 1986, which generally supported the work of Radway and Modleski, rejecting the assumption that readers were passive imbibers of patriarchal indoctrination. This work, often termed “appropriation” because of its deliberate attempt to reclaim popular fiction from those who see only control by both traditional (androcentric) literary critics and the “culture industry,” was at first rarely applied to other genres of popular fiction. Early efforts (in the late 1970s) were modest in ambition: feminists searched for strong female characters, veiled critique of hierarchy, or a validation of difference and community in crime novels (Makinen 92-128). In the last two decades, feminist scholars such as Priscilla L. Walton, Manina Jones, and Merja Makinen have begun to reinterpret other genres, especially crime and detective novels, while feminist *authors* write explicitly feminist popular fiction of all stripes. In addition to questioning the formation of patriarchal canons and more readily acknowledging and studying emerging genres, many feminist critics have followed Radway’s model of moving critical interpretation towards reader reception.

The Existence and Significance of Genre

Perhaps the primary debate surrounding popular fiction is the significance and meaning of genre. Literary generic categories, as we understand them in the United States, have existed since the 1930s (Denning 76), although dedicated scholarly attention began only in the 1970s. Frederic Jameson's 1975 article "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre" argued that "genres are essentially contracts between a writer and his readers; or rather ... they are literary institutions ... like other agreements or contacts" (135). This assertion of the nature (and, indirectly, usefulness) of literary genre was an addition to an extensive theoretical debate that dates back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. In recent decades the finer points of genre and generic distinctions have become an increasingly weighty issue in some academic fields, engaged by writers as diverse as Northrop Frye, Frederic Jameson, Tzvetan Todorov, Jacques Derrida, and Carolyn Miller. The use of genre as a method of social analysis has broadened to include the field of communications, for example, and is now applied in the form of "speech action" to subjects such as Presidential addresses—in this view, almost every act of communication (or action) belongs to a certain genre. These theoretical debates could be easily applied to the study of popular fiction, but are often entirely ignored or not explicitly referenced.

Jameson's insight into the close connection between readers and authors (we might add publishers) predated Radway's ethnographic work, but its ripples took almost a decade to hit the shore. (For example, Ken Warpole's *Reading By Numbers: Contemporary Publishing and Popular Fiction*, published in 1984, claimed that genres are simply "convention-bound and formulaic" (1)). Often citing Jameson, critics since the late 1980s have understood genres as "relational and historical" categories that change over time in response to political and social conditions, such as technological developments, corporate ownership, publishing, and the unpredictable tastes of readers themselves (McCracken 12). Some have questioned how genres have been formed and represented by the canonization of specific works, an argument which mirrored the canon-making debates ("history wars") in schools and universities in the United States in the 1990s. Writers such as Kathleen Gregory Klein have claimed that since canonical

authors are generally male, conservative critics have misunderstood entire genres through their biased choices of representative texts.

In response to these challenges to the critical application of the concept of genre, many scholars have reasserted its significance. Their claims are worth noting. First, readers often reinforce generic walls by devoting themselves to one genre to the exclusion of all others. Second, genres, especially established categories such as crime fiction, are often self-referential: texts refer and respond to the genre's traditions, a game within a game that fans expect and enjoy (Gelder 7). Third, the existence of generic partitions is reified by material factors: for example, the blurbs on the back of novels (almost always provided by authors from the same genre), the genre's name printed on each book, and the classification of popular fiction in the physical organization of most bookstores.

The Direction of the Generic Approach

Putting aside, for the moment, the question of the value of a genre-based approach to popular fiction studies, the literary genres that most critics identify—the thriller, Western, romance, fantasy, etc.—were categorized and calcified over five decades ago and should be altered wholesale. Genres *do* remain important to readers, but as Derek Longhurst notes, they constantly evolve in reaction and relation to the world. Although minority authors such as Walter Mosely have begun to “appropriate” major genres along the feminist model, minority characters should not have to appear in traditional genres to merit scholarly attention, as they often have. Specifically African-American genres, for example, have existed for at least four decades but have been almost entirely ignored by academics. “Gangsta” fiction of the 1970s, with its focus on pimps and street revolutionaries, has had a major following and political influence. In addition to the popular Iceberg Slim, Donald Goines has sold more books than any other African-American author in history (Goode). Today’s “street fiction,” written and devoured by black middle-aged women, among others, offers sensational tales of tough love by prolific authors such as Zane and Noire and is sold in droves on the Internet and on street corners in major cities (Ditkoff). Both genres are almost entirely ignored by scholars.

A number of minor genres, not as popular as thrillers and romances but nonetheless possessing formulas and “contracts” with devoted readers, are similarly beneath the critical radar. For example, the collection *Political Mythology and Popular Fiction*, written entirely by political scientists, identifies “middle-class fiction,” the historical novel, the small-town American novel, the sports novel, and America-at-war fiction. In my own work, I have noticed the burgeoning genres of alternate history novels (by authors such as Harry Turtledove) as well as disaster fiction. Although thrillers continue to be of great significance, especially given their success in sales, scholars might look to identify smaller, newer, and previously ignored genres.

Such a shift would require an even greater awareness of readers, but the study of reception has undergone a great deal of recent criticism. First, critics say, reception often reduces a complex interrelated network of cultural practices and relationships to interpretations that rely on one or two determining factors (such as race or gender). Second, in adopting a definitive stance on the question of hegemony and resistance, scholars tend to romanticize readers’ responses as evidence of independent creativity or resistance. Third, audience research makes falsely authoritative claims and is too often treated as a scientific ‘slice of reality.’ Because researchers (like all scholars) inevitably bring biases to their work, attempts to uncover readers’ understandings and conceptions of individual texts amount to second-order interpretation (Ang 187; Radway “What’s”).

These arguments are compelling, but they should be regarded as cautionary reminders. One might call forth once again the words of Stephen Knight, who admitted that although his *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* would be more persuasive with more attention to readership, “it has seemed better to make a beginning, to offer analysis, than to remain silent about audiences as most literary criticism does” (4). Although a methodological overemphasis on reception can be misleading, studies such as *Reading the Romance* show that attention to reception—even if it is technically impossible to arrive at an unbiased representation, and even if it must be tempered by an acknowledgement of the limits of the chosen methodology—is necessary in a field that is so obviously dependent on its readers for its shape and direction. An instructive example is the field of American history, where the rise of social and cultural history in the 1970s has challenged the value of the “objectivity question.” If “objectivity” is agreed to

be an impossible goal, critics should adjust their expectations and allow mixed, interdisciplinary methodologies to answer a new series of questions.

“Popular Fiction” as a Field

The future of the study of popular fiction is difficult to predict. We have seen the two dominant modes. The first is the traditional, text-oriented, formulaic approach that views popular fiction as a meretricious cousin of real literature. The second is the feminist-cultural studies approach, which sees in readers the ability and tendency to reinterpret texts that are seemingly conservative and patriarchal in a resistant, transgressive, unpredictable and/or socially and politically informed manner. However, a number of recent developments suggest that new and often more complicated approaches are on the horizon, often occasioned by critiques of the apparent rigid binary of these two modes. (The term “popular fiction”—as compared to “literature”—itself manifests the distinction between these two approaches, along with the distinction between authors such as Nora Roberts and Franzen. In this way, renaming the field “popular literature” might signal a third way to these critical extremes.)

The issue of genre itself remains at the heart of almost every general study of “popular fiction.” Apart from three exceptions, notably Jerry Palmer’s *Potboilers: Methods, Concepts and Case Studies in Popular Fiction*, McCracken’s *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction* (1998), and Gelder’s *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field*, all primarily concerned with British literature, there has been little attempt to unify the field of popular fiction despite the obvious continuities between different genres. (The recent *Encyclopedia of American Popular Fiction*, which makes nuanced connections within its short biographies of major authors, is a noteworthy step.) Critics, publishers, and readers are all invested in the continued existence of generic boundaries for very different reasons, but there are a number of persuasive arguments to move beyond genre in future scholarship. First, as noted above, the existence of generic categories tends to lead scholars toward one-dimensional conceptualizations. For romance readers, it is their status as women; for Denning’s dime novels readers, their position as the working-class. However, as the intersection

of a variety of factors, such as race, class, ethnicity, gender, politics, and religion is acknowledged as a more accurate description of the formation of identity and community, genre-based criticism can prevent this development from influencing the study of popular fiction.

Finally, the existence of “bestsellers” seems to challenge the importance of genre. Bestsellers tend to cross generic boundaries, either occupying two (or more) genres or mixing the formulas of both. In her 2001 *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction* (2001), Joyce J. Jaricks attempts to assist librarians dumbfounded by reader requests by creating a list of “sure bets” that almost all readers will enjoy. What do bestsellers and “sure bets” tell us about the relevance of the concept of genre and existing genres? What do they reveal about genre readers? The conventional imagination of genre readers, created by ethnographies such as *Reading the Romance*, depicts fans of popular fiction as individuals (or groups) devoted to their literary niche, often devouring page-turners at an impressive clip. But if the ‘average’ reader is in fact a traveler picking up a novel with an eye-catching cover at an airport, should genres remain the central axis of analysis? This is a question that Jameson phrased nearly two decades ago. In a 1984 article, “Towards a New Awareness of Genre,” he argues that instead of placing a novel in a genre as if we were dropping it into a bucket, we might triangulate works *among* different genres. If a book was simultaneously a Western and street fiction, how does this alter the neat formulas of literary critics? Perhaps most importantly, how might this new perspective reflect the social, cultural, and political context in which it was published and consumed?

This would be one of the primary concerns of the field of “popular fiction studies”: a fresh approach to genre criticism and the relevance of genre itself. Within the study of popular culture, popular fiction is the underdeveloped brother of film and television studies. One advantage of considering popular fiction as a separate field would be to isolate its particular political economy and cultural position. More attention must be paid to the specific factors of consumption. For example, publishers and booksellers can attest that book covers and a novel’s placement in a bookstore—both factors that are directly tied into the political economy of publishing—may be as significant as content in determining sales. While some works, such as the collection *Consuming Books: The Marketing and Consumption of Literature*, have addressed this subject, most authors have ignored these

nuts and bolts issues. Greater attention to them would be a fruitful step toward understanding consumer choices and the relationship between political and industrial factors (such as shifts in corporate ownership) and the success of individual books.

Indeed, one further advantage of considering a subject as a “field” is to create scholars who specialize in it. Currently, the majority of authors who approach the genre of popular fiction, and many of the most insightful, do so as an isolated project, an outlier in an academic career dedicated to other pursuits. One might predict that scholars working in an acknowledged (sub)field might be more free and intellectually interested in pursuing in greater depth the approaches outlined here. The study of popular fiction remains in its infancy, subject to ‘expert’ interpretations and conjectures by academics who may be quite out of touch with the “average” reader. As other subjects are mined for new perspectives and further complications of dominant narratives in an increasingly crowded academe, the formation of the field of popular fiction presents a fertile opportunity to develop a greater understanding of American popular culture.

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Note

¹One of the few counterexamples was John Cawelti’s 1976 *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories of Art and Popular Fiction*. Developed from his 1970 article “The Concept of Formula in Popular Literature,” Cawelti’s book connected genres and formulaic plots to historical context via literary archetypes, psychological interests, and societal needs, and thereby identified the complicated but central relationship between reader, writer, and social context.

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Book Reviews

An invitation to reviewers

In forthcoming issues, *Studies in Popular Culture* will continue to include reviews of books in the field. Any scholar who wishes to review a book should contact the Book Review Editor, David Janssen, at djanssen@gdn.edu. Those whose work is unfamiliar to the editor may wish to send a CV.

Reviewers may suggest a book to be reviewed or request to be assigned one from among those sent to the editor. Reviews should be approximately 500-1,000 words long and should (like article submissions) be emailed as an attachment of a Microsoft Word document with the contributor's surname in the file name. Queries are welcome.

Interpretive Methodology from Literary Criticism: Carnavalesque Analysis of Popular Culture: *Jackass*, *South Park*, and ‘Everyday’ Culture

Various textual practices have been interpreted within the Bakhtinian framework of carnival, including popular cultural texts such as *The Big Lebowski* (Martin & Renegar, 2007), *Terminator*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and *12 Monkeys* (Dimitrakaki & Tsiantis, 2002); the animated series *The Simpsons* (Gray, 2006); the news and entertainment journal *The Onion* (Achter, 2008); horror fiction *The Shining* (Holland-Toll, 1999) and Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (Holquist, 1994), the television series *Jackass* (Brayton, 2007); and even the political campaign of Jesse Ventura (Janack, 2006). In these academic works, popular culture has been theorized in many different ways: as escapist, as resistant to the ideology of capitalism, or as containing “visions of utopia, collectivity or even emancipation” (Dimitrakaki & Tsiantis, 2002, p. 209). However, the carnivalesque is not restrained to popular culture texts, but transcends to ‘everyday’ life encompassing the lives of creators, those of audiences, and the directors of television programs and shows. Contemporary carnival is ‘everyday’ life itself. The social environment contains the ambiguous traces of carnival: it resists the ideology of capitalism and, at the same time, reproduces the capitalist social order. Thus, a carnivalesque analysis provides additional information not only to various phenomena of

popular culture, but to the social and political environment of ‘everyday’ life.

The article opens with a discussion of the Bakhtinian notion of carnival then continues with an analysis of various popular culture texts, such as *South Park* and *Jackass*. Further, the study reveals how carnivalesque futures penetrate not only popular culture texts but also the contemporary social environment and thus, these organize one inseparable system. Finally, the conclusion discusses the findings of the analysis.

The Bakhtinian Perception of Carnival

Many authors have devoted their works to interpreting carnival in different ways and have constructed particular discourses of carnival. Various events that have taken place at different times (Castle, 1986; Kolyazin, 2002) and in different countries (Mitchell, 1995; Lewis and Pile, 1996; Lindahl, 1996; Nurse, 1999; Tokofsky, 1999) have been described as being a ‘carnival.’ The matrix of ideas introduced by these different authors organizes the discourse of carnival.

This study however, focuses on Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1895 - 1975) concept of carnival and its influence on modern popular-cultural texts and ‘everyday’ life. For Bakhtin, carnival is a world of ambivalent festive laughter, which brings together oppositions, sublimates death and dispels the fear of death by bringing birth and death together (Bakhtin 1984, p. 51). Laughter for the sake of laughter; mocking the present official political system, religious dogmas and authoritative figures; grotesque realism; billingsgate language; degradation of high images; celebration of the lower bodily stratum; crowning and decrowning of the king (Bakhtin 1984); and masquerade are some distinguishing characteristics of the discourse of carnival constructed by Bakhtin. Bakhtinian carnival implies the ambiguity of life and a blurred borderline between actors and spectators which could have interesting consequences for the study of popular culture, because all these carnivalesque forms can be found in popular-cultural texts.

According to Bakhtin (1984), carnival is a utopian world of renewal, festivity and laughter (p. 9). For Bakhtin, everyone participates and lives in a second life that is beyond hierarchy, religious dogmas, official norms, and prohibitions. Yet this study will show that these traces are ap-

parent not only in what Bakhtin (1984) calls, “a second life” (p. 8), but also in ‘everyday’ life of people.

As described above, the Bakhtinian concept of carnival has already been applied to various phenomena of popular culture. Yet some important aspects of carnivalesque analysis seem to be overlooked by previous research. Carnavalesque analysis sets forth an alternative interpretation of some phenomena of popular culture by revealing its carnivalesque features. Although some features of the carnivalesque genre transmute with time, other elements are preserved. The transition of these elements from carnival cultural praxis to popular culture text represents, in the words of Lachmann (1988-1989), “creative memory.” The following examples demonstrate how “creative memory” is enacted in popular-cultural texts and how they present “the unconscious turn to the past” (Holquist 1994, p. 129). Moreover, this study will show how “creative memory” is also enacted in the contemporary social environment.

Carnavalesque Analysis of the Television Show and Film *Jackass*

Billingsgate language, which can be characterized as a familiar speech of the marketplace (a local trade affair), “abusive language, insulting words or expressions, some of them quite lengthy and complex” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 16), is one of the features of carnival. The billingsgate language of the body is manifested in the series and movies titled *Jackass*. The program’s name is partially constructed of the word “ass,” which can either mean a donkey or can be used to describe the lower part of the human body. In true carnivalesque fashion, the nature of this program is mostly concerned with the lower bodily stratum and grotesque realism. The characters in the program inflict pain on themselves or each other for no specific purpose but for their own amusement and that of the audience. The pointless suffering endured by the characters creates audience laughter, but for Bakhtin (1984), the essence of carnivalesque laughter is in its liberating and regenerating power (p. 51). The laughter in *Jackass* liberates the viewer from certain social norms and hierarchies by celebrating the lower bodily stratum, and by inversion and exaggeration. But, at the same time, these carnivalesque features can be used to reproduce the hierarchal order. Brayton (2007) draws readers’ attention to the fact that the film has earned \$79,493,831, which

acknowledges that “the cast is financially fused with the very bourgeois culture which it allegedly rejects” (p. 70). The film *Jackass* brings together such contradictory phenomena as heteronormative masculinity, homoeroticism, and aggressive and receptive identities (Brayton, 2007, p. 57). A vivid example of this fusion of contradictions takes place in the opening scene of the film (*Jackass*, Part II). One of the film’s main characters, Johnny Knoxville, enters a demolition derby, but not in any stereotypically straight-forward manner. In the film,

The working-class white masculinity of the redneck derby is spectacularized and curiously juxtaposed with Knoxville’s crash helmet, which bears the ‘rainbow flag’ insignia of gay/lesbian solidarity. The ‘double voicing’ of heteronormative and homoerotic sensibilities ‘refuses resolution into either pole; the doubleness is held in tension always’ (Hutcheon, 1991, p. 12, cited in Brayton 2007, p. 69).

This combination of multiple contradictions is congruent with the principles of Bakhtinian carnival. The laughter in *Jackass* is itself ambiguous: it liberates viewers from hierarchal structures and at the same time reproduces them; it frees viewers from social norms and at the same time sustains them.

In another replication of Bakhtinian carnival, there are numerous reversals of front and back and top and bottom within the context of the program. In the film *Jackass* (Part II), there are many scenes focusing on pain inflicted on each character’s genitalia. In testament to Bakhtinian carnivalesque reversal and focus on the lower body, in one scene, one of the film’s characters cauterizes the backside of another character with a chiseling iron in the shape of a phallus. This pain evokes laughter among the participants of the show. This laughter has a universal spirit as even those who are injured share in it. For Bakhtin, the lower bodily part has regenerative, reproductive and renewing power. Thus, the laughter evoked by *Jackass* characters has a regenerative power, as the organs which are hurt symbolize fertility. Such are some of the characteristics of carnivalesque festive laughter.

Another interesting carnivalesque feature regarding *Jackass* is that there are costumes, masks, and make-up involved in the production of the movie, giving it a carnivalesque flair. The characters often dress in costume to resemble the devil, a baby, an Arab terrorist, an old man, etc., which are

all illustrations of becoming the 'other' as it is in carnival. The members of the cast are all male and so often engage in cross-dressing. In one scene, a young man is turned into an old woman, and, by accident, her dress is torn off her, causing the spectators to laugh.

Another property of carnival is the mocking of social values. Laughing at cosmic fears in medieval times was an essential part of carnival. Bakhtin (1984) asserts, "In the sphere of imagery cosmic fear (as any other fear) is defeated by laughter" (p. 336). Mockery plays a great role in *Jackass*: God is mocked by the depiction of a red devil; the official fear of global terrorism (Bauman, 2004, p. 10) is mocked by the image of an Arab terrorist, and a mother is mocked by her son. Through their painful and playful antics, the characters are constantly challenging death and laughing at it. In one of the episodes, a raging bull is unleashed into a field where four of the characters are sitting on children's see-saws. The danger of death and of being ravaged by the bull's horns is apparent, but the participants laugh and mock it. The characters are put in situations of which they should be fearful for their lives, but this fear is downgraded.

Further, mocking death is symbolically expressed in the show's logo. The *Jackass* logo is depicted by the skull and two crossed walking crutches under it, instead of the more typical image of crossed bones. This represents death as handicapped. The symbol of death is depicted in a way that provokes laughter, thus, fear of death is dispelled by laughter. This laughter gives a sense of freedom, freedom from official and cosmic fears. The billingsgate language of the body adds a sense of happiness and joy by undermining hierarchal establishments. This is, according to Bakhtin (1984), "the gay, liberating and regenerating element of laughter" (p. 51) which exists in carnival.

Carnavalesque Analysis of the Animated Television Series and Film *South Park*

South Park can be considered the epitome of carnival culture because it exhibits many carnivalesque features such as festive laughter, grotesque realism, images in tremendously exaggerated forms, abusive language, and celebration of the lower bodily stratum. As noted, billingsgate

language, which can be characterized as a familiar speech of the marketplace, “abusive . . . , insulting . . . expressions, some of them quite . . . complex” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 16), is one of the features of carnival and is apparent in *South Park* as well as *Jackass*. Like the language of the marketplace, the abusive language of *South Park* refers to the lower bodily stratum; it has a liberating power and an ambiguous hue. (Editor’s note: See Janssen, *Studies in Popular Culture* Oct. 2003, on *South Park* as Juvenalian satire.) Gardiner (2005) explains that the language used by the *South Park* characters is

premised on anti-authoritarian laughter against the adult order. Polymorphously perverse, it confounds boundaries between oral, anal, and genital drives; the human and the animal; the ideal and the debased; masculine and feminine; an older and younger generations and the order of kinship. (p. 59)

The abusive language used by the *South Park* characters is directed towards the adults’ authority and destroys the borderline between adults and children. In the animated film *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut*, one of the leading characters is a child by the name of Eric. His assaults directed at Saddam Hussein, “shitty boner bitch, muff, pussy, butthole, Barbara Streisand,” refer mainly to the zone of genital organs and therefore have not only destructive and degrading powers, but also regenerative and reconstructing ones. This abusive language liberates the speaker from social orders and conventional rules through expressions which are broken in syntax, illogical and, by many accounts, senseless.

Billingsgate language also manifests itself through bodily forms. In *South Park*, bodily principles are shown through the images of characters that eat, drink, fart, vomit and have sexual intercourse. In the show, Stanley vomits any time the girl he loves talks to him; Mr. Garrison has sexual intercourse with various men; Stan’s dad produces ‘the biggest crap’; Terrance and Phillip’s jokes are based on bodily functions, etc. These acts create the billingsgate body language which is part of the Bakhtinian concept of carnival.

In carnival everything is “inside out, vice versa,” and “upside down” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 370):

All . . . thrust down, turn over, push head first, transfer top to bottom, and bottom to top, both in the literal sense of space, and in the metaphorical meaning of the image.

In the episode *How to Eat with Your Butt*, one of the *South Park* children, Kenny, makes a joke by posing for a school picture by flashing his buttocks to the camera instead of his face. In *South Park* the top and bottom exchange places in a literal sense. Another such reversal can be detected in the representation of the *South Park* children as more reasonable than their parents as they are able to draw more logical conclusions from the various situations they find themselves in.

The theme of death recurs in each episode with the death of one of the children, Kenny McCormick. For Bakhtin (1984), “gay death” is one of the attributes of grotesque imagery (p. 51). In each episode, Kenny dies in an unexpected and terrifying way, but at the same time, generates laughter. In one of the episodes, *Scott Tenorman Must Die*, Kenny actually dies from laughter. According to Bakhtin (1984), death from laughter is one of the forms of gay death (p. 408), and an ambivalent image of carnival. Randall Auxier (2007) undertakes an attempt to explain the reasons for Kenny’s death in almost every episode. For this purpose he addresses the theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung (1875-1961) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). According to Freud’s schema “Cartman is the Id, Kyle is the Superego, and Stan is the Ego” (Auxier, 2007, p. 231). In this case, Kenny represents the Death Impulse (p. 232). In order to explain his role, Auxier (2007) refers to Jung’s theory. Kenny fulfils the “transcendental function” which “arises from the union of conscious and unconscious contents” (Jung 1976, cited in Auxier, 2007, p. 233). Kenny is thus necessary to unite the boys and the entire cast of *South Park*. Yet it is still not clear why Kenny should be killed in each episode. The understanding of this act can be provided by Heidegger’s concepts of “ontic” and “ontological” levels of experience. To explain these terms, Auxier gives an example of a person who is standing at the top of a cliff and experiences fear (“ontic”) and, at the same moment, anxiety (“Angst”).

Fear is “ontic,” which is to say that fear is associated with your everyday self and its bundle of survival instincts and social skills . . . , but Angst is “ontological.” Angst brings you into an awareness of your total-self, your self-as-a-whole, by bringing into your vague awareness the limits of it (2007, p. 236).

One can enjoy standing at the top of a cliff because it gives a feeling of total-self. One can jump but does not do it; “your death is a possibility, but not an actuality” (Auxier, 2007, p. 238). People can understand their own

deaths by watching other people die. By his death Kenny enables viewers to experience themselves-as-a-whole and reminds them of the value of life (p. 240). The death of Kenny contains procreative and regenerative forces; his death gives birth to the viewers' self-as-a-whole. This carnivalesque image helps us to defeat the cosmic fear of death. It also helps us to defeat or cope with the absurdity of life. Karen Fry (2007) compares Kenny's destiny to die in almost every episode with Sisyphus's destiny to roll a heavy rock up and down a hill. Albert Camus (1913-1960) thinks that acknowledging the absurdity of life and yet accepting the continual struggle is "enough to fill a man's heart" (Camus, 1955, p. 123, cited in Fry, 2007, p. 86). With his death, Kenny generates laughter, which helps to overcome the fear of death, mortality and absurdity of life.

The fear of death has been closely interrelated with the notion of hell. In medieval carnival, hell was illustrated in ridiculous forms: such as "a dragon, spitting fire, an elephant with men astride, a giant devouring a child, an old devil eating wicked wives" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 393), etc. All these images are ambivalent because they "include in one way or another symbols of fear defeated by laughter" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 394). In one of the episodes, "Death," the children meet Death, who laughs at the jokes on the *Terrance and Phillip* show that the children love watching. A laughing Death is the ambivalent symbol of birth and death, renewal and destruction.

Hell during the Renaissance "was pictured as more and more filled with kings, popes, clerical and political leaders, not only the dead, but also those still living" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 396). In the film *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut*, hell is the residence for politicians and celebrities. It has an ambiguous nature because this hell brings together people such as Adolf Hitler, Mahatma Gandhi, Michael Landon,¹ and Saddam Hussein.

Another ambivalent image related to hell and death is the figure of Satan, who is represented as a red sentimental giant with the body of a champion bodybuilder. In one episode, he lies in bed with Saddam Hussein and speaks affectionately in a deep voice. This creates a gay (joyful) laughter which demolishes the fear of death. The connection between the carnival of *South Park* and Bakhtinian carnival can be detected in the gay laughter that is embodied in the gay (homosexual) devil. The creators of *South Park* use the word *gay* (homosexual) for invoking the *gay* (cheerful) laughter described by Bakhtin. These ambiguous images disclose the ambiguity of

American popular culture of the 1990s. In her article *Why Saddam Is Gay: Masculinity Politics in South Park - Bigger, Longer and Uncut*, Judith Kegan Gardiner (2005) points out contradictions in American popular culture of the 1990s between “male dominance and gay liberation, extended childhood and the absence of innocence, free speech and media hegemony, and liberal humanism and U.S. imperialism” (p. 51) which are reflected in *South Park*. A gay Saddam Hussein becomes an embodiment of such contradictory strategies as “sexual liberation and free speech” and “masculinism and ethnocentrism” (Gardiner, 2005, p. 61). All these different aspects are captured within the figure of Saddam Hussein.

Defeating fears by laughter is one of the main aspects of Bakhtinian carnival. As people of the Middle Ages used carnival for defeating their fears by mocking them, the creators of *South Park* use the animated series for mocking the fears of society in the form of homophobia and terrorism. The fear of homosexuals is mocked through one of the characters: Mr. Garrison, who is gay (homosexual). In the episode “Mr. Garrison’s Fancy New Vagina,” Mr. Garrison decides to change his sexual orientation by having a sex change operation. After the operation, Mr. Garrison becomes a lesbian. There is an irony in Mr. Garrison’s transformation into a lesbian. The character of Mr. Garrison is illustrated as a woman with the face of a middle-aged bald man who is a lesbian. This depiction generates a festive laughter which liberates people from particular fears. In his “Flatulence or Philosophy: A Lot of Hot Air, or the Corruption of Youth?” William W. Young III (2007) writes that, “through its vulgarity, *South Park* verbalizes the drives and desires that we often repress; and it allows us to laugh so as to reveal these inhibitions” (p. 14). Carnavalesque laughter frees the viewer from the restrictions and regulations imposed by society.

‘Everyday’ Life as a Contemporary Carnival

South Park can be viewed as a representation of the contemporary social system. The fears and problems that fourth-grade children, the main characters of the animated series, encounter in each episode are familiar to the viewers of *South Park*. The characters face the fear of global terrorism, AIDS, homosexuality, drug addiction, corporate capitalism, sexual harassment, and molestation—fears which, towards the end of each epi-

sode, are downgraded through laughter. The act of crowning and decrowning, as well as other aforementioned carnivalesque features, creates a carnivalesque atmosphere. This atmosphere generates a new form of carnival which represents the contemporary carnival that is part of social life. For Bakhtin, carnival changes over time, and if Medieval carnival was a “second life” for people, the contemporary carnival is ‘everyday’ life. *South Park* reinforces and charges this atmosphere in different ways, such as the behavior and actions of the creators, and the production. These points will be analyzed further in more detail.

The show’s producers, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, usually appear in public together, and seem inseparable while giving interviews or walking the red carpet. Such fusion of two separate entities creates a grotesque carnivalesque image. Their appearance at the Oscar awards ceremony, in 2000, wearing Gwyneth Paltrow’s and Jennifer Lopez’s dresses can be interpreted as carnivalesque not only because of the involved cross-dressing but also because it mocks the society of the spectacle (Debord 1995), branded environment and celebrity culture. Yet, although they ridicule celebrities, they themselves have acquired celebrity status. This contradiction is itself carnivalesque in nature.

South Park criticizes existing norms, but, at the same time, it maintains social constructs. As Gournelos (2009) puts it,

South Park is obviously within the arena of dominant cultural production, but it also creates and maintains a critical perspective traditionally associated with alternative culture. (p. 162)

There are two opposite motifs that run through the production of the *South Park* episodes: the critique of capitalist ideology and millions of dollars generated by the animated series. In 2005,

according to TNS Media Intelligence, it generated \$34 million in advertising revenue. In 2004, Comedy Central sold the syndication rights in a deal said to be worth \$100 million. But “*South Park*’s” real value may lie in the future - particularly in new media, where the show performs spectacularly. It dominates the iTunes top 100 television show downloads list. Amp’d Mobile, a cell phone service provider, is in discussions to launch a 24/7 “*South Park*” channel for its customers. (Leonard, 2006)

Thus, *South Park* includes oppositional themes: resisting the dominant capitalist ideology and reproducing the capitalist order. This motif re-

flects the nature of ambivalent humour. Such co-existence of contradictory traits reveals the carnivalesque nature of the *South Park* series, as well as the carnivalesque nature of everyday life and socio-cultural system.

Another example of how carnivalesque features percolate into everyday life is the controversy deployed over the prophet Mohammed episode (season 14, episode 6), aired on April 14, in 2010. The episode was censored after the producers received a warning from a New York-based group of extremist Muslim converts that could be construed as a death threat. The group, through its website Revolutionmuslim.com, had reacted to last week's episode of *South Park* which first depicted Muhammad dressed as a bear by saying its originators, Matt Stone and Trey Parker, "will probably wind up like Theo van Gogh" (Baddie 2010).

In the episode, the prophet Muhammad is brought into the show by Tom Cruise and several other celebrities who have been ridiculed in previous *South Park* episodes. They believe that the prophet can make them immune to further ridicule. In the episode, Muhammad is dressed as a bear because he cannot be portrayed "as a cartoon in the wake of death threats made against Danish cartoonists by Islamist extremists, who see any depiction of Muhammad as a gross insult to their religion" (Baddie, 2010). *South Park's* laughter takes away fear, but by mocking fear it becomes the fear itself. This fear has evoked a warning and death threat from a New York-based group of extremist Muslims. By undermining fear, *South Park* creators become fear themselves. Such is the ambivalent image of the carnivalesque system that creates the link between birth and death, and between destruction and regeneration.

These are a few examples that demonstrate how popular culture texts reinforce and change the carnivalesque traits embedded in the contemporary social system.

Conclusion

This study has shown how carnival culture is at work in the text of modern popular culture such as the *Jackass* TV show and the *South Park* animated series as well as in the social structure of 'everyday' life. Many studies have displayed how some phenomena of popular culture are situ-

ated within the paradigm of carnival popular culture which can be characterized by grotesque realism, billingsgate language, celebration of the lower bodily stratum, masquerading, crowning and decrowning, festive ambivalent laughter, dispelling of cosmic fear, suspension of hierarchal structures, and bringing oppositions together. However, popular culture texts cannot be viewed in isolation from the social system. This study has demonstrated how both of these elements organize one inseparable system. The discourse of carnival offers the possibility to perceive popular culture texts as not only containing carnivalesque features but also as reinforcing modern society. The study has conceived of three ways in which such reinforcements take place, illustrated clearly in *South Park*. First, a reinforcement of the carnivalesque atmosphere of social life appears through the behavior of *South Park* originators. They create a grotesque carnivalesque image by incorporating such contradictory traits as mocking celebrities and, at the same time, attaining celebrity status. Second, the *South Park* series combines such conflicting motifs as critiquing capitalist ideology and simultaneously gaining large profits from the production. Third, *South Park* dispels the fears of social life by mocking them, but at the same time, the show becomes a fear for certain social groups. This combination of death (destruction of fears) and birth (generation of fears) is a part of carnivalesque imaginary.

The significance of the carnivalized text of popular culture is that it offers an alternative way of looking at the accepted order of life and establishes a dialogue between various, often contradictory, voices. Carnivalization is an “artistic form of visualization” (Bakhtin, 2003, p. 166) that helps to depict in life “unknown depth and possibilities” (Bakhtin, 2003, p. 174). Such readings allow us to view popular culture texts and the socio-cultural environment as organizing one indivisible carnivalesque system, permeated with contradictions and ambivalence.

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Notes

¹Michael Landon (October 31, 1936 – July 1, 1991) was an American actor, writer, director, and producer associated with the television series *Bonanza* (1959-73) and *Little House on the Prairie* (1974-82).

²Theo Van Gogh is a Dutch filmmaker killed in 2004 after he made a documentary about the abuse of women in Muslim countries.

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The Cinematic and Historic Weight of *Stone of Destiny*

Stone of Destiny undoubtedly has earned a place within Scottish film history as a controversial film, not only for its subject matter, but for its reception at home and abroad. Those non-Scots who see the film on DVD might question just why this seemingly innocent entertainment gained so much notoriety in 2008 for its politics and role as Scotland's cultural representative to the cinema-going world. Several sociocultural issues—from the Scottish political environment in 2008 to the director's and lead actors' nationalities to the needs of so many Scottish businesses, including the film industry as well as local companies—combined to create a perfect storm of controversy surrounding what, on the surface, seems to be a pleasant, good-but-not-great film.

At its official premiere at the Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF) in June 2008, *Stone of Destiny* was billed both as a nationalist film and “an uplifting account of the theft in the 1950s of the Scottish coronation stone from Westminster Abbey” (Cornwell, “Move Proves”). It is certainly a different kind of “political film” than many audiences are used to seeing and, indeed, Canadian writer/director Charles Martin Smith denied that the film's initial *raison d'être* was to become a political statement. *Stone of Destiny* thus bridges both popular film and politics, currently popular cinema and history. Throughout 2008, the film involved more Scots in their country's popular culture by making *Stone of Destiny* a hot topic in the

local media (as the actual Stone had been in the 1950s), but it also became a touchstone for international popular culture because of its (and often its actors' or writer/director's) presence at film festivals around the world.

In an interview before the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), where the film was selected for the prestigious closing night gala, Smith (also an actor in Hollywood films) emphasized that “[w]hat I didn’t realize when we first started this was the politics of it. I sort of thought of it as a movie about young people overcoming big obstacles, sticking together and pulling something off . . . Not only that, I always was making the film for an international audience” (Bradley). Timing is everything, however, and *Stone of Destiny* came on the scene at a time when Scottish nationalism was heating up again. Smith noted that “There was a lot of objection to the politics of the movie, which I’m sorry about. I didn’t intend it to be a political statement. But it is. . . There’s a lot about Scottish politics in it. A lot about Scottish culture that to them was overly obvious. I felt I had to do that for audiences that didn’t know Scotland” (Bradley).

To understand the significance of the film’s title, one must know at least a brief history of the Stone of Scone, also called the Stone of Destiny, and its sociopolitical significance to Scots. For a thousand years, the coronation of every Scottish, English, or British monarch took place on this Stone. Scottish ruler John Balliol’s coronation was the last (in 1292) before the Stone was taken in 1296 by Edward I. To help crush Scottish spirit and bring the northern nation under England’s dominion, Edward II took the Stone to London, where it long resided in Westminster Abbey. Most recently the Stone was integral to Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation.

In 1950, a group of university students “repatriated” (to Scots, or “stole,” according to the English) the Stone away to Scotland. Nevertheless, the recovered Stone once more was sent back to England. In 1996 it was returned to Edinburgh for the foreseeable future, although it is still the property of the British government. The Stone of Destiny remains a symbol of Scottish nationalism and to many Scots is the nation’s greatest cultural icon (“Stone of Destiny,” *Historic U.K.*).

At the time of the film’s release in 2008, the Scottish National Party (SNP) was experiencing a resurgence of popularity, and Scotland seemed to be gradually moving toward independence. Although the faltering global economy and the results of the 2010 U.K. general elections have helped diminish the most recent nationalist movement, in spring and summer 2008

Scotland's independence was perceived as a real possibility.

In 2007, the SNP doubled its number of local council seats and became the dominant party in local politics. In the 2007 Scottish national election, the SNP ended 50 years of Labour Party rule by winning 47 of 129 seats in the Scottish Parliament. The SNP, however, was unsuccessful in forming a coalition government, and the gains made in 2007 have since been superseded by the party's results in the U.K. general elections in 2010. Despite winning approximately 20 percent of the popular vote in 2010, the SNP gained only 10 percent of the number of Scottish seats within the British Parliament ("SNP Begin"). Although Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron's ancestry is Scottish, he was born a Londoner, and his politics are very different from the promoted aims of the SNP.

In 2008, the increased interest in Scottish nationalism split the *Stone of Destiny* audience into oppositional groups: Scots or non-Scots (whether English or a largely apolitical international audience) and SNP supporters or detractors. In addition, this high-profile Scottish film attracted the attention of multiple other groups, many who had a vested interest in the film's success: Scottish Screen, the film board partially funding the film; Scottish cast members trying to promote local talent; and the tourism industry and local businesses hoping both to attract more filmmakers to the region and to pique international travelers' interest in Scotland as a prime holiday spot. With so many varied interests monitoring the film's reception and box office, *Stone of Destiny* early on became weighed down by a plethora of expectations and different definitions of its success.

In contrast to the swirl of controversy surrounding the film, its premise is straightforward: University student Ian Hamilton, disgruntled by Scotland's continuing slide into British political obscurity, plans to drive to London, remove the Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey on Christmas Eve 1950, and repatriate the Stone to Scotland. In this endeavor he is aided by three equally fervent accomplices: Kay Matheson, Gavin Vernon, and Alan Stuart. Their daring, if inexpertly planned, deed gains national notoriety and helps unify Scots by revitalizing national pride. Although unwilling to participate in the event itself, Bill Craig assisted in the planning and, later, in moving the Stone where authorities could find it when the time was deemed right. The film shows the five "conspirators" being hauled away by police, although none was sentenced.

At a pivotal time when many Scots believed independence loomed nearer, the release of this film (October 10, 2008 in Scotland; December 12 in the rest of the U.K.; February 20, 2009 in Canada) increased public interest in the Stone's history. Scots once more began remembering not only what happened in 1950 but in 1999, with devolution and the Scottish parliament. In 2007, the rising power of the Scottish National Party (SNP) increased the urgency of its plan for an independence referendum. Ian Hamilton, the man behind the Stone's repatriation in 1950, believes he may yet see Scottish independence in his lifetime. In 2008, surrounding the film's highly publicized local and international festival premieres (and in 2009, around the DVD release and further reviews and commentary), Hamilton's memoir gained additional attention as the book on which the film was based.

Instead of being an incendiary or a revolutionary film about a symbol of independence and nationhood, *Stone of Destiny* is a gentle reminder of what can happen when people, particularly the young, decide to take a stand to protect their freedom. Nevertheless, the film gathered quite a bit of attention (especially before its EIFF reviews) about its potential use as a "nationalist" film. Advance publicity in the U.K. included articles claiming that

nationalists may try to hijack new film *Stone of Destiny* as a rallying cry for Scottish independence . . . but the producer claims it's bigger than that . . . Everybody will come out of this film very proud to be Scottish. But you don't have to be a Scottish nationalist to enjoy this movie. It's David v Goliath - the little guy overcoming the big guy. The movie doesn't knock England. It is completely feel-good. It'll make you laugh. It'll make you cry. (Fulton, "New Film")

Even in December 2008, when the film gained wider release throughout the U.K., the mixed reviews emphasized Scottish politics. The *Daily Record* listed this brief review within its holiday movie guide: "Given a festive release to take advantage of stirrings of patriotism common in many Scots around New Year—and the fact the plot is set around historical events which took place at Christmas—this is one of the best Scottish films to be made in recent years" ("At the Movies"). Predictably, concerning reviews for this film, other newspapers took a different approach, calling it "a rather cuddlier tale of disputed nationalism" and "a daredevil, real-life story of a dedicated band of nationalists who broke into Westminster Abbey in the early hours of Christmas morning and lugged out the all-important lump of

granite,” a tale unfortunately deemed “turgid” and “careless” in this retelling (Ide). Such seems the fate of *Stone of Destiny*, a film that cannot escape its nationalist origins, especially in the U.K.; every review, whether pro or con, made a comment about Scottish politics or nationalism.

Unlike truly political films made around the same time, such as the dramatic and highly politicized *The Kite Runner* (2007), a film about friendship that put the lives of its child actors at risk in Afghanistan; any Michael Moore film critical of the U.S. or Bush administration, including 2007’s *Sicko*; or Oliver Stone’s meant-to-be-heart-wrenching *World Trade Center* (2006) or clearly political *W* (2008), *Stone of Destiny* takes a different tack. Even the much earlier *Braveheart*, revealed during the week *Stone of Destiny* premiered at the EIFF to be Scots’ all-time favorite Scottish film (Smith), made a political statement about a series of historic events; its bloody battles and graphic martyrdom, however, place it in a very different entertainment context than the kinder, gentler *Stone of Destiny*.

In addition to the politically-themed film reviews, critics often attacked the film’s structure, including plot points, tone, and dialogue. One Edinburgh International Film Festival reviewer caustically summarized the critical reception:

American actor-turned-director Charles Martin Smith’s feeble caper about the Scottish nationalist students who stole the coronation stone back from Westminster Abbey was by far the worst film of the festival: a thoroughly embarrassing and badly out-of-date slice of tartan tweeness, which served only to demonstrate that the otherwise noble impulse to showcase national product shouldn’t come at the expense of all quality control. (Harkness)

Reviews like this contradicted the public’s perception of the film; *Stone of Destiny* received a “much preferred” rating by audiences polled after its two EIFF screenings. After the first 10 days of the festival and based on 18 of 21 films for which audiences could vote for their favorite, *Stone of Destiny* was ranked seventh (Pendreigh, “Audience on Edge of Hate”). After all votes had been tallied at the end of the festival, *Stone of Destiny* was ranked 8 out of 21 films, and 48 percent of the audience attending either screening awarded it 4 stars, or “unmissable” (McKinlay).

True to the producers’ description of a “feel-good film,” *Stone of Destiny* as an entertainment does not seem like the type of film to generate so much political commentary or potentially to be remembered as more

than a pleasant cinematic diversion. It has a relaxed pace and linear plot, which give it an old-fashioned feel appropriate for its 1950 setting. The director looks back nostalgically to a simpler era when Westminster Abbey was guarded by a single night watchman, when snogging in the front seat, even if only as a way to fool the police about the students' true actions at the cathedral, was a breach of conspirator Kay Matheson's moral code. Even the political act of taking and then returning the Stone to Scotland seems more of a uni prank during the Christmas holiday than the jumpstart of nationalist sentiment. Although the film automatically attracts political commentary, its aim is clearly to entertain, even if it also ends up making a statement.

As a film, *Stone of Destiny* struggled under the weight of so many divergent groups' expectations and, more than other recent Scottish films, carried the responsibility of illuminating the world about Scotland's history and future. Its varied reception, exemplified by premieres at the Edinburgh International Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival, raises several questions for those who study film: How effective is *Stone of Destiny* as a film—as entertainment—as well as an opportunity to make a political statement? Is Smith's approach as writer or director the correct one to make the story of the Stone understood and remembered not only in Scotland but internationally? How will it hold up in world cinema or when compared with other recent Scottish films? Does it matter if a film is not a blockbuster as long as it has political value? Ultimately, will *Stone of Destiny* be important not as a film but as yet another footnote to history that instigated greater events—or is it even fair to put so much weight on what, after all, is a “feel-good film”? Film critics and the audiences who viewed *Stone of Destiny* at EIFF or TIFF probably would disagree about answers to these questions.

Significance of the Director-Writer's Nationality

Writer/Director Charles Martin Smith is perhaps better known to audiences for his roles in such U.S. blockbusters as *American Graffiti* (1973) and *The Untouchables* (1987), although more recently he won acclaim for directing films as diverse as *Air Bud* (1997) and *The Snow Walker* (2003), which was nominated for direction and screenwriting at the 2004 Canadian

Leo and Genie Awards. Smith collaborated with producer Rob Merilees of Vancouver's Infinity Features on both *The Snow Walker* and *Stone of Destiny*.

For more than a quarter century, Smith has called Canada home, and he clearly was awarded native son status in reviews of *Stone of Destiny*. Although many critics considered Smith's writing and direction of this film as less than successful, film festival and general audiences seemed to enjoy Smith's work, and DVD buyers' reviews were most often positive. (By August 2010, for example, 9 Amazon.com reviewers gave the DVD 4 [3 reviewers] or 5 [6 reviewers] stars; 1 of 2 Amazon.ca reviewers gave it 5 stars [the other, 3 stars]; the majority of Amazon.co.uk reviewers [7 of 8] gave the DVD 4 or 5 stars [the other, 1 star].) No matter how much or little critics like *Stone of Destiny*, however, Smith's Canadian connection often comes up in the press, especially in professional reviews published in Scotland and Canada.

In Scotland, critics wondered why a Canadian (even one who brought plenty of funding with him) was the one to bring this story to the screen; in Canada, his interest in an international story was lauded. In either case, Smith's "non-Scottishness" led Scottish critics to fault him for playing up national stereotypes. Despite Smith's love of the story, his positive comments about Scottish crew, cast members, and the country in general, and his eagerness to make the film, he just could not compensate for the fact that he is a non-Scot. "You can tell he's a fan of Scotland, but no matter how much he loves our country or the story, the film still feels like a nostalgia trip from a tourist's perspective" came from the *Daily Record* shortly before the film gained wide release in Scotland. "Thanks to tartan, our accents, the scenery, and Mel Gibson, we Scots are susceptible to cliché Hollywood interpretation. . . . If I was to apply the same principle to American culture, I'd surely be right in thinking that everyone from the deep south plays the banjo, wears dungarees and calls their first-born son Elmer" ("*Stone of Destiny*," *Daily Record*). To U.S. citizens, this comment about the South might seem horribly out of touch, whether from a social or a cinematic perspective of what it means to be Southern. To Scots, the director's romantic depiction of rolling green hills (even in December), plenty of tartan, and 1950s' family life and morality is far removed from the modern urban reality of Glasgow or Edinburgh (although some Scottish critics and actors like the fact that this film presents Scotland as something more family friendly

than does *Trainspotting* [1996] or *Red Road* [2006]). The point remains that an “outsider” like a Canadian director may not be able to capture the nuances of Scottish culture, even in a film depicting events in 1950 that already will seem “ancient history” to many audiences.

Stereotypes aside, Smith clearly became enamored with the story and, during the course of researching and writing the screenplay, became “one of the world’s leading experts on the Stone.” During interviews, he easily explained the significance of the Stone of Scone and the many theories about its authenticity. He also cinematically told a story that, perhaps surprising to non-Scots, not everyone in Scotland knows. Smith explained that he “found that most Scottish people, virtually all the Scots [he] talked to over a certain age, know the story. With the younger generation, it can be a bit hit and miss” (“Movie Q&A”). Thus, as a scriptwriter, he needed to appeal both to those familiar with the basic plot and those, at home or internationally, who were new to the story. The undertaking, for many reasons, would become much more controversial than Smith ever could have anticipated, no matter how carefully he researched the subject.

Quibbles over Casting

As one critic succinctly noted, “*Stone of Destiny* is a feature film from Canada, the first country to address the subject of modern Scottish nationalism.” After admitting that “a few Scots loiter on the sidelines,” the inevitable question was raised: “But shouldn’t a film about Scottish nationalism star a Scotsman?” (Harrison). Of course, the critic later admitted, many films involving Scotland or Scotsmen (e.g., *Braveheart* [1995], *Rob Roy* [1995], *Highlander* [1986]) starred actors not from Scotland, but this question about casting plagued *Stone of Destiny* in the U.K. or Commonwealth press. Even a more recent review in the *New Zealand Herald* noted the film’s casting is “slightly ironic [in] that the two main roles in this feel-good celebration of Scottish nationalism are English and American” (Calder).

The U.K. critics’ comments centered on two aspects of casting: the actor’s nationality (and ability to pull off a Scottish accent) and age. Lead (English) actor Charlie Cox (Ian Hamilton) caught most of the flak for his “painfully bad Scottish accent,” but even Glaswegian Robert Carlyle was faulted for “inexplicably doing an accent that rivals Cox’s in the grating

stakes” (Gallagher). Although non-Scots might not notice the presence or lack of a specific regional Scottish accent, U.K. reviewers certainly did. American Kate Mara (Kay Matheson) largely escaped accent assessment but was frequently referred to by nationality, and, when evaluating her performance, critics questioned why an American actor was cast in a Scottish role. (This is not a fair criticism, although it is a common argument for casting “real” [insert nationality, race, or sexual orientation] in a particular role. Critics that week did not admonish Scottish James McAvoy for playing a Chicagoan in *Wanted*.) Nevertheless, because the film may come to represent Scottish history not only during the film’s theatrical release but in cinematic history, some critics and filmgoers questioned the long-term credibility of these casting choices.

Billy Boyd and Stephen McCole bore the brunt of another criticism—age. Although Boyd (Bill Craig) could not be faulted for his accent, he was deemed just this side of too old to play a university student, even one just finishing his second degree. The same problem was noted of casting McCole as student muscle man Gavin Vernon; the actor received the uncharitable comment that he had to “dye his hair from grey to ginger” (“Festival Cuts”) to play the role. Boyd handsomely fits author Hamilton’s description of his friend Bill Craig: “He had charm and ability . . . Indeed in the fun and frolic of a rectorial election he led me into much temptation . . . , and together we got into all sorts of trouble, which was not real trouble because he had the useful facility of knowing how not to be caught . . . [H]e was small in stature, but he had a commanding presence” (Hamilton, *Stone of Destiny* 14). Although the actors failed to look like students in their early 20s, their performances were nonetheless effective, and they fit Hamilton’s description of the real people behind the story.

Perhaps the best cast surprise was Ciaron Kelly as Alan Stuart. His age and longish hair make him look more typically like a student, but in one scene he easily surpasses any shy-guy stereotype. He convinces a hulking bulk of a drifter to give the students back the Stone they had thought well hidden in a field. Kelly’s easy grace not only in identifying with a man so physically his opposite but poetically explaining the Stone’s importance helps the audience understand just why the Stone—and its return to Scotland—is significant. Kelly well represents the next generation of Scottish actors but does not yet have global name recognition.

Whether an English, American, and Scottish cast guided by a Canadian/American director can adequately portray a now-romanticized event in a film suitable not only for local but international audiences, not only in 2008 but for all time, seemed a highly debatable point in most reviews. Even if Smith intended that his film primarily be an enjoyable caper, Scottish audiences' expectations for this film forced it to meet a higher standard than escapist entertainment.

Promotion of National Virtues

As noted by its selection for several international film festivals, *Stone of Destiny* represents some positive qualities associated with Scots. Although the film shows them as being subsumed under English culture as part of the U.K., they struggle but ultimately succeed in maintaining a distinctive national identity, which the 1950 event helped them achieve. Despite the comedic aspects of the "caper," the film also illustrates the students' commitment to a cause, inventiveness under duress, and solidarity with each other. These young people clearly love their country enough to do something for it, and their repatriation of the Stone is completed without bloodshed or violence. Their story, as told in this film, promotes the value that one individual, or a small group of individuals, can work together to overcome what others see as overwhelming obstacles and to stand up for their beliefs. Audiences outside Scotland may be more likely to see the "forest" of these virtues rather than the "trees" of casting issues or the director's nationality that some Scots feel detract from their national image.

In his blog published the week before the film debuted at the EIFF and his book was republished, Ian Hamilton summarized the positive nature of the characters portrayed in the film:

In this film there are no car chases, no explosions, no swear words, no sex, there are no special effects, no guns, no one even gets a sock on the jaw. It is about people being kind to one another in adversity and winning through for a high ideal. No wonder these hardened film moguls at Cannes stood and cheered and signed it up. They had seen the thing that the modern cinema has lost. They had seen the decency of young people trying to do something brave. I am terribly glad I was one of those

young people all those years ago. (Hamilton, “Stone of Destiny”)

Hamilton’s perception of the story equals that of the many audience members with whom I shared the Scottish and Canadian premieres (and who voted in the EIFF polls) and illustrates the division between the general audiences’ enjoyment of the film and its political or cinematic critiques.

The Film and Politics at Home

The Scottish National Party seemed to have no qualms about the critical reception, either before or after the film’s official premiere at EIFF. They homed in on the film’s topic: the theft or return (depending on one’s point of view) of the Scottish coronation stone. Taking this symbol of nationalism was a patriotic act for the four students in 1950. Taking the film as a political touchstone was the SNP’s act to encourage public sentiment for independence.

Culture Minister Linda Fabiani proposed—and led the discussion several times—to have *Stone of Destiny* shown in the Holyrood debating chamber. Scottish Parliament vetoed her petition because the film has “political overtones” and its message is considered as more than political history. *The Scotsman* quoted a confidential report to the bipartisan Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body summarizing the reasoning behind the veto: “Even though the film is being considered as a comedy, we are advised it will have political overtones which the agreed criteria for events exclude it from being screened in the debating chamber” (Swanson). The SNP’s next option was to screen the film at Holyrood during August’s Festival of Politics, but the screening would not be allowed to take place in an arena of formal political debate. During the festival, however, no notice of the film appeared in the schedule, and the SNP must have decided against this option for a screening.

Months later, in early October 2008, the press surrounding the Scottish general release of *Stone of Destiny* generated equally emotional commentary, much of it political. Cancer-stricken Sir Neil MacCormack, whose father John was one of the founders of the SNP (portrayed in the film by Robert Carlyle), watched the film in a private screening at home. He and his wife saw the film with the director and Ian Hamilton and his wife. In

anticipation of the event, MacCormack told *Scotland on Sunday* that he planned to watch the film “in context. I won’t be saying: ‘Oh, here’s a film about my dad and there’s the Stone in it as well.’ More the other way round – here’s the film of this remarkable event . . . I am interested in the whole story. I was quite tied up in it as a child at the time” (Pendreigh, “Premiere”). MacCormack’s childhood recollections of gathering around the radio to hear the news and the resultant cheering sound much like the director’s scenes of the aftermath, and such a poignant news article on the weekend of the film’s general release in Scotland was sure not only to generate interest in the film but remind readers of the SNP’s history.

Other articles promoting the film in Scotland described it as much more than a heist caper or comedy. A few days before the MacCormack story was published, another article described the film this way:

Frustrated by political apathy and Scotland’s diminishing sense of nationhood, Hamilton sought to reawaken Scottish national pride and spur his generation into action. For hundreds of years, the English had jealously guarded the Scottish coronation stone, the Stone of Destiny – an ancient block of sandstone symbolically used in coronation ceremonies which Edward I took from Perth in the 13th century. Hamilton led a group of university friends to London to make a dramatic gesture to reinstate Scotland’s place on the political map. (“Stone of Destiny Set to Cause a Stir”)

The film—and media coverage of it—prompted emotional responses in local newspapers shared online around the world. One Edinburgh resident protested the use of “thieves” to describe the students who took the Stone: “Bearing in mind the stone was taken by King Edward I in 1296 from Scone Abbey, maybe ‘reclaimed’ or ‘repatriated’ is a more appropriate description” (Orr). Editorials such as this one indicate that the film, and critics’ reviews, are being carefully read and considered, at least in Scotland. Future Movies’ website report from the EIFF noted that “It’s doubtful that the event had quite the national impact that this flag-waving (and at points unbearably cheesy) comedy drama portrays, but it still seems a story worthy of big screen treatment” (Gallagher). On the day after the film’s EIFF premiere, the *Sunday Post* headline (albeit on page 5) announced “Story of the Stone Destined to be a Big-Screen Blockbuster” and added that even rain “couldn’t dampen Scottish ardour at the world premiere of

the eagerly awaited film” (Bowron 5). Whatever the reviewer’s or filmgoer’s personal response to *Stone of Destiny*, it generated plenty of commentary.

Politics naturally came up when the actors were interviewed prior to the EIFF premiere in June, as well as the film’s opening across Scotland in October. Robert Carlyle (John MacCormick) wanted the audience to be as moved by the story as he was, but he stopped short of making a stand for or against independence. He, like fellow Glaswegian Billy Boyd, prefers to live and often work in Scotland, although his career takes him anywhere in the world, which may make him want to avoid making overt political statements (“This Slice of History”). (At the conclusion of the 2008 EIFF, Carlyle was recruited as a patron of the festival, thus becoming “a key factor in maintaining the event’s profile and network of contacts, drawing new films, stars, and film-makers to the city” [Cornwall, “From Sir Sean”].)

Boyd frequently talked with the press as part of the film’s publicity, but he, too, mostly kept safely away from expressing his own opinions for or against independence. Instead, he explained the students’ motivation for taking the Stone as a desperate act by people being ignored. He believes in the importance of telling local stories, not just making big Hollywood films, and the story of the Stone is indeed an important “local” story. When asked in general about his political ideals, however, he focused on global issues like climate change (Mottram 27). A few days before the film went into wide release in Scotland, Boyd elaborated that the story should fire up national pride but noted that Hamilton, who was on set every day, would think the Stone itself was not the issue. Rather, it “was doing something that mattered. He just wanted Scotland’s voice to be heard. He just felt he had to do something. At the time he felt taking the Stone was the biggest thing he could do” (Reid).

In one interview, however, Boyd opened up a bit more about his political ideas but still did not commit either for or against Scottish independence:

I love Scotland, and I choose to live in Glasgow. I want it to be the best city and country we can make it. If you are talking about independence to achieve that, I feel there are a lot more questions to be asked. Small countries running their own affairs is normally a good idea, especially if it’s joined by something bigger such as the European Union. But we really have to think why we want it and what we want to get from it. With budgets for The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and the Science

Centre being cut, what kind of country do we want? We want great music, great art but more importantly, we want great housing and health. (Fulton, "Exclusive")

Shortly before the film's October release in Scotland, Charlie Cox (Ian Hamilton) admitted that "he knew nothing of the story beforehand, [but] having learned it, . . . feels it contributed to the movement for Scottish independence. 'Although it didn't have a direct impact into the Scottish government, it was certainly a huge catalyst towards all of that.'" Like Smith, Cox did not think he was making a political film, adding that "'a lot of this is by chance; filming it now is interesting because the nationalist party are in power'" ("Stone of Destiny Set").

Promotion of *Stone of Destiny* gave the actors a chance to espouse their political concerns, whether narrowed to Scotland or broadened to the entire world, but they did not make a case for or against nationalism as the focus of their remarks. Instead, they pinned their hopes on *Stone of Destiny* attracting attention because of its history and the quality of the human story behind it, rather than the film gaining notoriety because of current political controversy.

In the 2008 reissue of Ian Hamilton's memoir about taking the Stone (now retitled *Stone of Destiny* to coincide with the film's title and, presumably, to attract the attention of a new generation of readers and filmgoers), he emphasizes that the event occurred long ago and seems to him to have taken place in another lifetime. Nearly 60 years after Hamilton's daring act, watching scenes being filmed in the Abbey is more memorable to him than the real event. The film's recent publicity and "glittering premiere" brought then-82-year-old Hamilton back into the public spotlight and made him something of a local hero in Argyllshire (Walker). The memory may fade, but the ramifications of that fateful night remain. During festival week in Edinburgh, Hamilton frequently found himself at the center of attention for being what he claims is a "footnote" in Scottish history, but he is still glad to be remembered for that daring act, even if he is happier to be better known for his long legal career.

Especially at home, *Stone of Destiny* never was judged only on the basis of its entertainment value. Simply the way the film was heralded by the government and given media attention before the EIFF marks *Stone of Destiny* as more than mere entertainment, no matter how well it ultimately succeeded or failed as such in the marketplace. In the press surrounding

the EIFF's red carpet premiere on June 21, the actors frequently expressed how proud they were of this film because of its story, and the director—at both screenings—prefaced the presentation by explaining how long it had taken to bring the story to screen and how pleased he was to debut the film in Edinburgh, where the Stone now resides. He expressed his gratitude to Ian Hamilton, who received applause as he stood before the audience and later shook hands with the actors; Hamilton, Smith praised, had become a friend as well as a collaborator on the film. Alan Stuart, another one of the four nationalists who appropriated the Stone, also received a warm welcome to the premiere.

Between June 21 and 23, when the film received a second screening, the government feted Hamilton, the cast, and director at a gala dinner, and Hamilton once again viewed the Stone, now “on loan” in Edinburgh Castle—an act he once vowed would not happen until Scotland received its independence. In the new edition of his book, which publisher Birlinn released during festival week, Hamilton explains that the nation is close enough now to independence that he felt all right about seeing the Stone again. It did not hurt that First Minister of Scotland Alex Salmond wrote an introduction to Hamilton's book or publicly commented in many articles about the Stone's questionable authenticity, further keeping the film in the public eye.

Commercial Benefits of a Successful Film: Tourism, Local Business, and Future Filmmaking

Although the film's possible political significance and use to incite independence were focal points in U.K. reviews, many businesspeople in Scotland also hoped that, politics aside, the film would generate more revenue for tourism, local business, and the film industry.

The curator of Arbroath Abbey, where pivotal scenes were filmed, hoped that audiences would want to visit such historic destinations, and a Glasgow film critic praised the film for making Glasgow look so lovely on film: “It has been a long time since the city looked this good on screen and Glasgow University and the surrounding areas are made to look truly stunning” (Greenwood). Such comments, plus old-fashioned images of Scotland's green hills (even shown during a driving sequence supposedly taking place in late December) and the credits overlaid with the unofficial national an-

them, “Flower of Scotland,” should attract filmgoers who like to travel. As well, the film industry hoped that such romantic depictions of the country would help attract other filmmakers.

Even local businesses benefitted from the film, not only during production but even a few years later. During late summer 2010, the Kirkcaldy’s classic vehicle show highly promoted two vintage cars that once belonged to English royalty (the Queen and Queen Mother). The vehicles also were touted as being featured in the “Hollywood film *Stone of Destiny*.” Local newspapers (which, of course, reach an international audience via the Internet) emphasized the film connection equally with the significance of the vehicles’ former owners (Shannon). In the two years since the film’s release, however, *Stone of Destiny* had become classified, by this newspaper at least, as a “Hollywood film,” not a Scottish one, perhaps more of a commentary on its high-profile media and film festival attention rather than its filming location. Corporate association with a Hollywood film, however, might be deliberate to indicate this company’s prestigious business of providing classic cars to future filmmakers as well as locals.

Part of the film’s funding came from public money through Scottish Screen, the film board deciding how many and which films would receive funding in 2008. In light of several films’, including *Stone of Destiny*’s, disappointing box office receipts, politicians criticized Scottish Screen’s funding decisions. This criticism of Scottish Screen continued even in 2010, when a new funding agency, Creative Scotland, took over. According to *The Scotsman*, “many in the film industry blame Scottish Screen for making bad funding decisions and repeatedly pouring public money into projects that have failed to materialise. Of £26.2 million handed out to local production companies since 2001 only £2.2m has been recouped from completed projects, such as *Stone of Destiny*” (“Art of the Matter”). Again, because of its high profile but less-than-stellar box office, the film remains a convenient target for critics of Scotland’s film industry, which had perhaps unreasonably high hopes for this film and others.

In April 2008, however, *Stone of Destiny* seemed a likely candidate to generate international interest and cash flow. The film quietly debuted at Cannes. Hoping to attract the interest of distributors, the producers showed the film on “Scotland day,” away from the main festival venue, and Rob Merilees from Infinity Films participated in a panel discussion about Scot-

tish films (“Scotland Day”). This gentle initial push into the international market nonetheless helped the film build momentum toward inclusion in several other international film festivals.

Several nations hoped to benefit from an international release. At Cannes, *Stone of Destiny* generated a fair amount of publicity and some good reviews, but Arclight Films, handling international sales, did not secure an international distributor. The film already had been scheduled for U.K.-Canadian release, as befitting the joint production efforts of Canadian Infinity Films and Scottish Screen. Canada’s Alliance Films handled distribution in Canada (Strauss). Scottish Screen found the film beneficial to showcase Scottish talent and locations, by which they hoped to attract more filmmakers to Scotland. Promotion of *Stone of Destiny* emphasized its entertaining story, but critics saved any political commentary until the film’s premiere in Edinburgh, most likely not wanting to scare off any distributors at Cannes who might want to invest in the production.

Success of Film Internationally

Stone of Destiny became a staple at international film festivals during the latter half of 2008. Around the world the film became better known as a “feel-good film,” more along the lines of Smith’s initial intentions. In addition to its brief exposure at the Cannes Film Festival and official debut at the EIFF, the film also appeared, in Canada alone, at the Toronto International Film Festival; Cinefest in Sudbury, ON; the Vancouver International Film Festival; and the Whistler, BC, Film Festival. In mid-October the film was shown during the Hamptons International Film Festival in New York, and before the end of the year, *Stone of Destiny* was shown at festivals as geographically distant from Scotland as Turkey, Argentina, and Dubai.

By late 2008, the film still had not secured distributorship outside the U.K. and Canada, although it had been released throughout the U.K. by the end of the year and was released in Canada in February 2009. Instead of a global theatrical distribution, the film went to DVD in the U.K. in March 2009, followed by release in formats suitable for North America. DVD reviews in Canada promoted the film as family entertainment, and sales were respectable but not exceptional.

Outside Canada and Scotland, *Stone of Destiny* became a true representative of Scotland and took its place to represent global cultural diversity; as such, it became more of a national product than a political statement or simple entertainment. The film was chosen to become part of Dubai's Cultural Bridge programming for its festival. In a press release highlighting the film festival, the programmer of the Cultural Bridge segment explained that "Our goal is to create a lasting impact, and to prove without doubt that one solitary person can move mountains. Seven of the films selected this year are based on true events, and the stories they tell will reach out to viewers by speaking of mutual humanity, compassion, and hope in the face of adversity" ("Everyday Heroes"). *Stone of Destiny's* theme of an individual, Hamilton, aided by his friends standing up to English authority in order to promote Scottish patriotism fit the bill; the film represented Scotland among a wide range of similarly categorized selections from Italy, South Africa, New Zealand, and Venezuela, among others.

In Argentina, at the San Luis Cine Film Festival early in November, *Stone of Destiny* competed against 17 films from Mexico, Japan, Spain, Argentina, Germany, Brazil, and Jordan for a \$50,000 prize to be divided between the winning film's director and producer. The international competition was steep, with the Jordanian film *Captain Abu Raed* already a winner of the Sundance Film Festival's World Cinema Audience Award (Newberry). The criterion for this festival was strictly the quality of the film, not its political or social commentary or even its ability to represent its culture.

In film festivals around the world, *Stone of Destiny* failed to win awards as an outstanding production, but it won the hearts of audiences for its uplifting "can-do" spirit. Without any political baggage, the film—judged only on its entertainment value—received average reviews from critics but above-average kudos from audiences.

Comparison with Other Scottish Films

In international release beyond film festivals, *Stone of Destiny* largely had to rely on the story, not actor name recognition or nationalism, to get audiences into the theatre or, later, to buy the DVD. As one young Canadian seated in front of me commented shortly before the TIFF screening,

Stone of Destiny does not have easily recognized actors, at least to North American audiences. Robert Carlyle, best known outside the U.K. for *The Full Monty* (1997) (prior to his more recent *Stargate Universe* television role), probably has the greatest name recognition, although U.S. audiences might remember Kate Mara's brief role in the controversial *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). Charlie Cox, Stephen McCole, and Ciaron Kelly are not household names (although Cox's roles in *Casanova* [2005] and *Stardust* [2007] gave him more international exposure). Scottish favorite (and tourism spokesman) Billy Boyd primarily is known for his role in *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003), but at the Edinburgh premiere, his fans kept him far busier than any of his co-stars signing autographs. A contingent of U.S. and Canadian fans also attended the TIFF gala simply because Boyd had a role in the film. Nevertheless, the fan base for any one actor was not enough to boost sales significantly across the U.K. or Canada.

Industry-staple *Variety* doubted that the film would have international appeal, claiming "this unabashedly sentimental and outright anti-English pic is stodgy as a cheap haggis with nationalistic sentimentality. That will endear it to auds north of Hadrian's Wall, but ravage the pic's theatrical prospects in England. Offshore, 'Stone' may stir the hearts of kilt-carrying expats and descendants in ancillary" (Felperin).

Of course, *Stone of Destiny* also immediately faced comparison with *Braveheart*, an Academy Award-winning movie starring and produced by Mel Gibson, a megawatt Hollywood star with a huge budget and easier access to international film distribution. *Braveheart* won the hearts of not only Scots but international filmgoers, because of, not in spite of, its political message. Although it was released back in 1995, its presence is still felt in the Edinburgh tourist districts. During festival week 2008, a blue-faced Gibson-as-William-Wallace impersonator entertained the crowd just outside the entrance to Edinburgh Castle, not far from a statue of the real Wallace. Tourists from around the world, as well as Scots, embrace Gibson's version of Wallace as a symbol of Scottish identity.

Stone of Destiny will never be in that league. It cannot truly be compared with *Braveheart* in more than an apples-and-oranges way because of its budget (\$13 million U.S.), name recognition of cast, and genre. It is more of a small independent feature than an epic studio production, and, as such, it faced different challenges in finding distributors, appealing to a wide audience, and becoming recognized in its own right as an important Scottish

film.

Instead of fitting more easily with the political epic *Braveheart*, *Stone of Destiny* followed in the cinematic footsteps of recent “feel-good” small films shedding light on smaller events or segments of Scottish culture. In fact, one review commented that “If you liked *The Flying Scotsman*, you’ll like this” (Edwards).

Many of these films include the familiar faces of Scottish actors who may be recognized around the world for roles in larger films. A glance at the cast lists of such EIFF entries from recent years as *The Flying Scotsman* (2006) or *On a Clear Day* (2005), as well as *Stone of Destiny*, reveals repeated names like Billy Boyd (*Lord of the Rings*, *Master and Commander* [2003]), Robert Carlyle (*Trainspotting*, *The Full Monty*), Brian Cox (*Troy* [2004], *The Bourne Supremacy* [2004], *The Water Horse* [2007]), and Peter Mullan (*Trainspotting*, *The Magdalene Sisters* [2002], *Young Adam* [2003]). Although these actors also play roles in non-U.K. films as well as more typical “dark” Scottish fare, they increasingly are called upon to lend their talents to this newer generation of “uplifting” films, most set in modern times. These lighter films also namedrop problems like job redundancy, depression, and a general Scottish sense of feeling left out or slighted, but the characters overcome these and other challenges to find success, as well as love and happiness, by the end of the film.

The move away from darker themes to promote Scotland as a happier place to live (or visit) is welcomed by many who work in the industry as well as see film as a main way for potential tourists to get their first impressions of the country. During my stay in Glasgow in June 2008, several people were curious about my reasons for studying Scottish film because so many offerings are downright depressing. Even films claiming to be lighter fare, such as Dungeons and Dragons-themed *Gamerz* (2005) or American goodfellas-getting-to-know-Scotland *American Cousins* (2003), include scenes of bullying, fighting, drug use, and gunplay. *Stone of Destiny*’s Stephen McCole succinctly summed up the need for less gritty depictions of Scotland on film: “[*Stone of Destiny* is] a really important film, and I hope people get behind it. We need another big film in Scotland that’s not about junkies” (English).

The move toward less gritty realism is not always embraced as a positive. One reviewer described *Stone of Destiny* as one of many “government-funded identikit features,” including *On a Clear Day* and *The*

Flying Scotsman. “Despite the success of full-blooded Hollywood visions of Scottish history in *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*, historical, political or socially relevant subjects have not been tackled” (Harrison). Whether Scottish stories should be feel-good entertainment or gritty glimpses of reality, or if both can help Scotland establish its cinematic identity, is only one part of the problem; funding is another. With such mixed consensus about *Stone of Destiny*’s success or failure, the film may become best known as a catalyst for influencing the way the government, filmmakers, and critics direct the Scottish film industry.

The Film’s Mark on Scottish (Film) History

Expecting *Stone of Destiny* to be a future “classic,” a political statement, *and* lighter entertainment may be too heavy a burden for this film—or any Scottish film—to carry. The film succeeds in showing how the past 50+ years’ gradual move toward independence began with an unexpected event that captured public imagination and made many Scots resolve to remain Scottish, not be subsumed as British. *Stone of Destiny* makes audiences long for simpler days when a landmark like Westminster Abbey was guarded by a person instead of electronics, when idealistic young men (and woman) united behind a cause and did not feel compelled to resort to violence, when such a notorious act ended without a lengthy media trial or perpetrators’ confessions on late-night talk shows.

Smith does offer a slightly revisionist history, but movie audiences may not immediately turn to Hamilton’s newly updated and reissued book to learn the real reasons why the Stone was not immediately returned or ransomed or how it ultimately was handed over to authorities. A film based on real people and events, especially such a bloodless coup long romanticized as the cornerstone of an independence movement, suffers because much of the (Scottish, at least) audience already knows at least something of the characters and plot. There are no surprises for them in this film, but it documents and keeps alive an important moment in history. That reason, more than the good but not great storytelling, makes *Stone of Destiny* a significant Scottish film. What would make it great international cinema

would be its ability to surpass history, a la *Braveheart*, in order to make the events portrayed in the film memorable and relevant to audiences around the world. Even with a much smaller budget and less epic subject, however, *Stone of Destiny* should continue to win fans internationally as an interesting film showcasing a little-known (at least outside of Scotland) event that could someday end up changing the course of nationalist history.

Stone of Destiny reminds instead of revolutionizes audiences. It lets them identify with lovable idealists rather than be troubled by incendiary martyrs. It also reminds audiences that one person—or four, or five—can often make a difference. *Stone of Destiny* gently, often humorously, makes that point in a way audiences of all ages can enjoy. As an EIFF- and TIFF-hyped film, it is adequate. As a Scottish film trying both to capture history while promoting nationalism and following the trend to lighten up, it struggles to do everything well but still ends up being a pleasant little film.

The problem with making a Scottish movie for the ages while still attracting large audiences is that it is in competition for attention with bigger, faster, visually cutting-edge films like *Wanted*, a movie that premiered during the week of the EIFF. In trying to position itself in such a global market while trying to be successful as so many different “types” of film, *Stone of Destiny*’s reach exceeded its grasp. Nevertheless, it is a useful transitional film that indicates where Scottish film would like to go, and it provides a measure of what is right about Scottish films as well as what needs to be improved if EIFF entries are truly going to make their financial and cinematic mark outside of Edinburgh.

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Call for Papers: *The Mid-Atlantic Almanack*

The Mid-Atlantic Almanack, the annual refereed journal of the Mid-Atlantic Popular / American Culture Association, issues an open call for submissions for its 2007 edition. The preferred method of delivery is to email materials as Microsoft Word attachments to rdonald@siue.edu. If you must, the snail mail address is Ralph Donald, Editor, *The Mid-Atlantic Almanack*, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Department of Mass Communications, Box 1775, Edwardsville, IL, 62026. Phone is (618) 650-2236. We suggest an initial query email. If you mail your submission, please enclose three double-spaced copies.

Please also include a short (one paragraph) "About the Author" biography and a manuscript abstract of the same length. Photos or illustrations are encouraged. Authors must obtain written reproduction permission from illustration copyright holders. Send pictures or artwork via email as separate files in one of these formats: .tiff, .jpeg or .eps. So that more articles can be published in each annual edition, try to hold your manuscript length to 20 pages, including notes and bibliography. Documentation may be in the form appropriate for the discipline of the writer. Otherwise, MLA or APA style is preferred. However, when using Microsoft Word, DO NOT EMBED NOTES in the copy. All notes and citations should be at the end.

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Ken Follett and the Scribbler's Trade: A Midnight Train to Somewhere

In his detailed, clever, and sometimes sardonic *Short History of British Journalism*, BBC political editor and commentator Andrew Marr observed that “there are two ways to be seriously posh in journalism: you can become the editor of a great newspaper or you can get out. Getting out often means becoming a novelist, which is today considered ‘nice’ or ‘proper’ for an ambitious person, rather as joining the colonial service or a ‘good’ merchant bank used to be” (42). Marr’s own career trajectory was characteristic of many who entered “the trade” in Britain in the last third of the twentieth century: as opposed to the practical journalists who had made their way up straight from school through an apprenticeship program, Andrew Marr, and others like him, were university graduates, often with degrees in English. Numerous trainee programs for university graduates existed at that time but were strictly governed by the National Council of Journalists, which insisted that trainee journalists work for at least three years on provincial papers before moving to the national papers then associated with Fleet Street. Marr duly entered a trainee program at the *Scotsman* in Edinburgh and learned shorthand, which he terms “invaluable to anyone in journalism” (xxi), before moving to London to cover Parliament three years later.

As he put it, inspired by the examples of star journalists working for *The Financial Times*, the *Observer*, and other major newspapers, “there was a press of ambitious young people determined to find a way straight to Fleet Street” (40).

Much of what Marr describes is applicable to Ken Follett, the author of such best-selling novels as *Eye of the Needle* (1978), *The Pillars of the Earth* (1989), and *World Without End* (2007), whose training and journalistic background led to his ultimately “getting out” by virtue of becoming a novelist. Follett, who was born in Cardiff, Wales, in 1949, attended the University of London and graduated with a degree in philosophy in 1970. Subsequently, he completed a three-month post-graduate course in journalism through Thompson Regional Newspapers and was placed as a trainee reporter in Cardiff on the Thompson-owned *South Wales Echo*. He returned to London three years later as a general-assignment reporter for the *Evening News*, which at the time was Britain’s leading evening tabloid. In some recent novels, Follett has depicted journalists—especially those in broadcast media—in highly unflattering terms. They are either unscrupulous and manipulative, such as the television reporter Carl Osborne in *Whiteout* (2004), or sanctimonious and fulminating, such as the radio talk show host John Truth in *Hammer of Eden* (1998). But such unrelentingly negative portrayals were not always the norm. An examination of two of Follett’s earliest novels, composed closest to his own experiences as a practicing reporter and written on the cusp of his breakthrough success into book publishing with *Eye of the Needle*, reveals a more subtle and complex presentation of the life of the journalist and “the trade.”

In addition, an examination of these works provides insight both into the newspaper craft of the time and Follett’s reasons for leaving journalism. Rather than being the dead end he describes for his characters, journalism would allow Follett to break into publishing fiction, first with a series of books published under a variety of masks, and then with a short story he was proud enough to publish under his own name.

Follett wrote both *The Modigliani Scandal* and *Paper Money* in 1976, a little more than a year after having left journalism for the publishing business. Both books were published under the same pseudonym, Zachary Stone, because the books were similar in structure: “They lack a central character,” Follett noted in the introduction to the second book, “but feature several groups of characters whose stories are linked and share a common climax” (*Paper Money* v). Both books also make considerable reference to the lives of reporters and editors, the frustration that comes from working on a daily newspaper, and the seamier side of investigative journalism.

In *The Modigliani Scandal*, Louis Broom is a young reporter who sits at his desk reflecting on his career. Although it had been “a short and spectacular one” which allowed him to move from Oxford to a small South London weekly to a news agency and now to a quality Sunday paper within five years, he realized there was “little substance beneath the glittering surface” (205). Follett’s career path may not have been as “short and spectacular” as Broom’s, but he shared with the fictional character a growing impatience. As with many other British college graduates from his generation, Follett had been politicized by the turbulence of the 1960s, especially *les événements*, the student protests in Paris in 1968 (qtd. in Jacques 51). He has said he was initially attracted to reporting because of his interest in politics and was inspired, as were many other would-be reporters, by the investigative reporting of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein into the Watergate scandal, which broke in 1972 (interview with Swaim).

However, Follett was also attracted to the opportunities for upward mobility represented by the journalism of the day: “I wanted to be rich, successful, make loads of money, sell millions of books,” he acknowledged years later in an interview with the hometown newspaper, the *South Wales Echo*, where his writing career had begun (Jones 1). British life in the post-war period has often been characterized as a cultural conflict between socialism and materialism, but Follett, in assessing these competing strains, has commented that he’s “never really had a problem” reconciling materialism with a social conscience, “though I know some journalists do” (Jones 6). In fact, Follett was part of that “press of ambitious young people” who wanted to move as directly as possible to Fleet Street. “All I’d ever really wanted to be was a hot-shot journalist,” Follett has noted, “but when I got to Fleet Street, I realized I didn’t have the patience to rise to the top in journalism. . .” (McDowell 96).

Louis Broom is equally frustrated because he knows he could do something better, given his education in literature and art, but that it will be “a very long queue for the art critic’s comfortable chair” (*Modigliani* 205). There is a clear parallel with Follett’s situation: he has stated that even as a reporter on the *South Wales Echo* he began to recognize that he wasn’t going to become a great investigative journalist in the mold of Woodward and Bernstein nor become the editor of a major national newspaper as soon as he wished (“The Art of Suspense”). Instead, he started to write fiction

in his spare time, penning short stories which were never published but believing that he might have “something more” in him, something which would make him popular with a large reading audience (qtd. in Jones 1). In *The Modigliani Scandal*, Follett’s fictional character Broom has grown cynical, knowing never to begin a project on the day it was assigned because the editor will surely change the assignment the next day. Broom’s skepticism extends to anonymous tipsters, whom he suspects of being cranks and frauds (206), and to his editor, who is portrayed as crude and dismissive (209, 210). *The Modigliani Scandal* depicts a time and place where the young are already world-weary cynics and reporters like Broom are not above bribing a reception clerk for information or threatening a bank manager with a negative story should he not cooperate (211). As one character puts it in *The Modigliani Scandal* when considering unattractive career options: “Be a journalist, and find that you have to say what the editor thinks, not what you think” (74).

Paper Money, Follett’s novel which followed on the heels of *The Modigliani Scandal*, provides even clearer parallels between a character’s deepening disillusionment with journalism and Follett’s own desire to leave “the trade.” *Paper Money*, to an even greater extent than *The Modigliani Scandal*, gives readers a feel for the workings of a daily London newspaper and for the milieu Follett inhabited in the 1970s. Not surprisingly, the book contains the period details and lost occupations from a generation ago—copy takers answering phones and pounding out dictated stories on clattering typewriters; noisy vending machines dispensing instant tea with milk and sugar; middle-aged messengers wearing cycle clips on their trouser cuffs, and wire stories rolling out from the teletype on uncut reams of paper. The newsroom is described as “scruffy—chairs were scattered randomly, newspapers and sheets of copy paper littered the desks, and redecoration had been postponed in last year’s economy drive” (28). A fellow reporter from that period, Mark Williams, has referred to Follett as “a well-remembered and respected colleague” on the *Evening News* (Williams, Afterword 32) while another writer from that same paper, who called it “the last of the great commonplace newspapers” (Thomas 12), confirms the atmosphere of the time: “It was smoky and littered; dusty papers and tea cups, china tea cups, piled together on wooden desks. There were still gas mantles grinning on the walls. It seems it had remained unchanged since Frank Harris had been editor in the nineteenth century” (10).

The action of Follett's novel *Paper Money* takes place during a single day in the life of a London evening paper, and he attempts to capture the rhythms of a newsroom from that era as well; the slow beginning to the day and the individual routine of employees as they arrive; the tense editors' conference and the frenzied activity as deadlines approach; the banter about sports and the writing of joke captions for spiked photos towards the end of the day. He also describes the process of writing a story, from tip to investigation to first draft to greatly edited published version. As noted in a recent profile, "like the early works of Frederick Forsyth, another journalist turned novelist, Follett's early thrillers devote much attention to *how* things are done" (SMSO). In *Paper Money*, the reader learns that a story might begin with an anonymous tip and that an investigative reporter is not above bribing someone or entering an apartment under false pretenses. It is a world imbued with the tricks of the trade as described by Marr: "We learned the soon-to-be-useless skill of removing the voicebox from a public telephone so that a rival couldn't phone his story back—this being several years before mobile phones arrived. We were told to bribe publicans to put 'out of order' signs on the bar phone and encouraged to call rivals with misleading train times—the field craft of a vanished era" (xxi). It is very much a pre-"Battle of Wapping" era. Follett recognized as much in the introduction to a reprint edition of *Paper Money*: ". . . I am not as sure as I was in 1976 of the links between crime, high finance, and journalism; but. . . it presents a detailed picture of the London that I knew in the seventies, with its policemen and crooks, bankers and call girls, reporters and politicians. . ." (vii).

By the 1980s, that newspaper world had largely disappeared. As a former writer from the *Evening News* put it, the paper "finally died of modernization in 1980" (Thomas 9). By late 1985, even more significant changes were underway. When Rupert Murdoch, who would change much of British journalism through the acquisition first of tabloids and later of the *Sunday Times*, clandestinely moved his print operations to the London district of Wapping, he provoked a year-long trade union strike. When the strike itself ultimately collapsed, the demise of Fleet Street and restrictive trade union practices began.

Follett's characters in *Paper Money* remain blithely unaware of the transformation yet to take place. One of the characters in the book from 1976 affirms the centrality of Fleet Street at that time; "provincial diehards"

had warned him about its corrupting influence (179). Another character observes that restrictive labor practices are damaging both to ambition and to productivity: “[The pre-1980s] system had a double impact: bright youngsters stayed at school instead of becoming [news] messengers; and those who did become messengers knew they had no prospects, so they did as little work as possible” (30).

If his characters in *Paper Money* remain unaware of the social and economic changes about to occur, they do come to terms with their own internal change resulting from a crisis in the newsroom. Arthur Cole, whose health has been ruined by twenty-five years in newspaper work, is the worn-out deputy news editor of the *Evening Post*. He’d begun his career as a “Lad,” or messenger, and received his National Union of Journalists card after the war. At the time, he reflects, “a smart Lad could become a reporter; nowadays, that road was closed” (30). His smart young reporter, Kevin Hart, is very much the post-1950s British journalist and the character who comes closest to Follett in age, appearance, and attitude. As such, he becomes a spokesman for the author’s views and provides the best glimpse of what Follett may have thought about journalism shortly before leaving it.

As with Ken Follett, Kevin Hart (who shares a similar name with the author) is university educated and the product of a trainee program at a provincial paper. He’d been eager to make the move to Fleet Street because he’d believed that “would mean doing the important stories on a national level.” As a trainee journalist, he had been content covering the routine stories about amateur theater, lost dogs, vandalism, and local politics. He had also written a few good stories on the plight of immigrants in a Midlands town, wasteful spending by the local government, and a hearing on the town planning process. But Hart “needed a way to shine” and was no longer content writing routine stories now that he was working for a London paper (*Paper Money* 180).

According to an article in the *South Wales Echo*, where Follett apprenticed from 1970 to 1973, he was “a mere cub reporter” at that time who did not want “the life of the newspaper equivalent of a firefighter or dog mess correspondent.” Instead, he was full of “self-esteem or shrewdness” and had “a fat ambition to be a great writer” (Jones 1). In *Paper Money*, Arthur Cole also considers the young Hart to have “rather too much self-confidence” (74). Kevin Hart is twenty-three years old, one

year younger than Follett was when he made the move to the *Evening News* in London, and dresses stylishly—a practice that Follett has long maintained.

By the end of the novel, Hart has moved from the self-confidence and cockiness about his prospects which Arthur Cole observed to a more candid assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of the newspaperman's life. He admits that he enjoys the physical sense of anticipation when he is investigating a story, yet worries that he might “not score” (132). He admits as well that he “had long known that the story which made his name would probably be a tragedy for someone else” (136). When his investigative piece is rewritten beyond recognition, he becomes angry because he “had not entered the business to become a mindless hack. Exaggeration was one thing—he was quite prepared to turn a drunken brawl into a gang war for the sake of a story on a slow day—but the suppression of important facts, especially concerning politicians, was not part of the game” (178).

Follett has recounted similar experiences on the London *Evening News*. If those experiences did not necessarily involve a heavily censored investigative piece, they did include exaggeration and the deliberate misleading of readers. As Follett recalled, “I worked for a London newspaper that didn't have a fine sense of responsibility.” When he wrote a story about a schoolyard disturbance where “white boys were fighting white boys” and “black boys were fighting black boys” it appeared under a page one headline proclaiming “Race Riot!” On another occasion, he was asked by the London *Evening News* to question six people on the street about whether or not they supported a particular judge who meted out severe sentences: three were in support, two were opposed, and one was undecided. Predictably, the headline read “Londoners Say Judge is Right” (Christy 39).

Hart offers additional reasons for questioning “whether he really wanted to be a journalist” (180). He recognizes that there is altogether too much waiting involved, with only “the occasional high when something went right” (178). He realizes as well that the serious stories on a national level that he aspires to write are “handled by specialists and for those jobs there is a long line of bright, talented people just like Kevin Hart” (180).

Above all, he believes that the realities of the newsroom are at odds with his principles. While he denies being a callow idealist who is unwilling to accept the “prurience and. . . sensationalism” that are part of the craft (179), he still believes that the suppression of details in his story was

an act of cowardice and that “newspapers should publish and be sued, or even arrested” (233). Although the novel does not end ambiguously for Arthur Cole, who has lost his job, it does end ambiguously for Kevin Hart. He has determined that “he did not care for his job as much as he had this morning” (179) and questions what else he can do in life, whether “advertising, or public relations, or retail management.” However, he wants “to leave newspapers as a success, not a failure” (181). Ironically, Cole encourages him to stay in the newspaper business, but as a manager rather than a reporter. While Hart remains unsure, he has concluded that his high-minded principles have been “easy for him to believe [in]. . . , for he was not an editor” (233).

While the future for Kevin Hart remains in suspense in *Paper Money*, we do know how Follett became “seriously posh in journalism” by moving out of it. A colleague on the *Evening News*, Patrick Long, had published the thriller *Heil Britannia* (1973), which encouraged Follett to try his own hand. Within weeks, he had finished his first novel, a thriller about drug dealers, which was published by Everest Books as *The Big Needle* in 1974 under the pen-name “Symon Myles.” “[It] wasn’t a big success, but I began to think that my future might be in books rather than in newspapers,” he reflected in recent public remarks (“The Art”). Two additional thrillers, also following the exploits of the series hero Apple Carstairs and published by Everest Books under the same pseudonym, came in quick succession (*The Big Black* [1974] and *The Big Hit* [1975]). By late 1974, Follett was able to leave newspaper work for good and begin working as a deputy assistant editor for his publisher, Everest Books, which he has described as a small company managed mostly by ex-newspapermen. “We were a young company and nobody knew anything about publishing because we were all straight out of journalism,” Follett has stated. “But we knew how to promote, we knew the media, and that saved us” (McDowell 96).

Although Follett left journalism early in his career, the nearly four years he spent working for newspapers did allow him to develop and hone certain writing skills, to learn the life on the street and develop an interest in human stories, and to publish his first efforts at fiction. At both the *South Wales Echo* and the *London Evening News*, he had to learn sheer newspaper fluency. “A reporter is on constant deadline,” he recalled in discussing the influence of journalism on his career. “There was no time for rewrites”

(Christy 39). He was helped in acquiring this fluency, and in being given interesting reporting assignments, because of his skill at shorthand—an ability which Marr has called essential for the journalist, even in today's mass communications and internet-dominated trade. This allowed Follett to cover court cases: "I was often sent to court," he reflected, "because my shorthand was so good. . . . Shorthand was necessary for court work because if you report something wrong in court you lose your immunity from prosecution" ("Salon Interview"). By the time Follett was writing and publishing his third international bestseller, *The Key to Rebecca*, in 1980, he observed that "fast" is his normal speed, a tempo he had mastered at a Fleet Street typewriter ("Niles" 87). However, he had recognized as well that in order to become a successful novelist, he had to "unlearn newspaper fluency, which would be too facile in a novel. Newspaper writing requires the bare facts stated concisely. In writing novels, I had to learn to linger at climactic scenes" (Christy 39).

Newspaper work also brought him into contact with a range of people, places, and situations. In addition to covering court cases and spending time at Scotland Yard, he wrote a regular column on the River Thames and on his very first newspaper job had a pop music column, which allowed him to interview luminaries such as Stevie Wonder and the members of Led Zeppelin ("Salon"). In discussing his very first published novel, *The Big Needle*, Follett noted that "in those early days, I didn't do much research. Instead, I used backgrounds that I knew. Apples lives in London and knows neighborhoods, like Wapping and Bethnal Green, that I'd been to as a reporter. He comes across the kinds of villains I had seen in courtrooms" ("on early"). Follett, who would later be known for historical novels or for those set in the then-recent past, was drawing on his more immediate experiences, as he would for his two books explicitly about journalism, *The Modigliani Scandal* and *Paper Money*.

Finally, Follett's considerable contacts in journalism allowed him to break into publishing fiction, not only with several category books written under a variety of pseudonyms, but with an original short story under his own name. As we have seen, Follett used the pseudonym "Symon Myles" to publish a series of hard-boiled mysteries written at the rate of one every four to five months in 1974-1975, but from 1975 to 1978 was also writing children's stories, science fiction books, and crime capers under three separate pen-names—"Martin Martinsen," "Bernard L. Ross," and "Zachary

Stone”—one for each of the genres. Follett has offered two principal reasons for his use of pen-names at that time: most publishers only want to issue one book per-author per-year, and he was writing several (personal interview); secondly, he was advised by his agent to save his real name for the better works which would surely come later (Hauptfuhrer 107). By 1975, Follett was apparently feeling confident enough in his craft to release his first works of fiction as his own and did so through his knowledge of the world of journalism, with the novel *The Shakeout* appearing under his own name that year and the short story “A Midnight Train to Nowhere” appearing with the byline “Ken Follett” in the London *Evening News* in August of that same year.

For almost a century, an original short story had appeared in the London *Evening News* as a regular feature. According to the editor of a collection of these stories, publication in the *Evening News* was often a breakthrough opportunity for aspiring writers, many of whom became famous in later years. H.E. Bates, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, Monica Dickens, and C.S. Forrester were among those who “cut their literary teeth in the *Evening News* short story pages.” The stories were generally short-shorts of about 1,500 words and became so popular as a feature that the newspaper moved from printing a story every other day to running a short story on a daily basis (Williams, Preface 6). As a former reporter for the *Evening News*, Follett would have been keenly aware of the feature and of the opportunity it represented to reach the wide audience he desired to reach.

Follett discussed his ambitions with Peter Haining, an acquaintance with whom he shared a regular London Underground commute and a love of crime fiction. At the time, Follett had already left the *Evening News* and was an editor at Everest Books, which had produced three of Haining’s books. “[Follett] told me he had already tried his hand at writing some fiction novels under the pen-name of Symon Myles,” Haining has written. “None had proved very successful, but he was nevertheless developing the storytelling skills which have since made him a worldwide success” (455).

Shortly thereafter, the *Evening News* published Follett’s short story, “A Midnight Train to Nowhere.” The tale, which Follett said was inspired by his own late-night journey on the Underground, cleverly appeals to the experiences and fears of his presumed readers (qtd. in Haining 455). In the tradition of the *Evening News* short story series, “The World’s Strangest

Stories”—“a series about hauntings, earthquakes, revolutions, murders, legends, and alleged miracles. . . . [about] anything difficult to believe [yet] riveting reading for the Londoner on the train” (Thomas 10), the story focuses on a central female character, Janet, who gradually realizes that she has inadvertently been let off the tube train at an abandoned station—one that won’t be reopened for a year. While the story seems indebted both to Edgar Allan Poe’s “buried alive” stories and to the “book of horror stories” Janet has fallen asleep over while reading on the train (“Midnight” 29), Follett creates mounting suspense with a sure-footedness that was missing in some of his earlier, more loosely constructed fiction. In contrast to the multiple plot strands and multiple points-of-view in the two flawed Apple Carstairs thrillers which preceded this tale (*The Big Black* [1974] and *The Big Hit* [1975]), in “A Midnight Train to Nowhere” Follett maintains an emphasis on unity and the “single effect” which Poe felt was essential to the short story. He does this in part by creating a dominant point of view.

As Poe noted in a famous review of Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales*, if the writer’s “very first sentence tend not to the outbrining of [an] effect, then in his very first step he has committed a blunder” (425). Follett seems aware of this dictum, because his story begins with the trainman and the guard both deep in daydreams, thereby establishing the precariousness of the night journey and the unreliability of the thought process late at night. This initial hovering point of view soon moves to a single narrative consciousness: it will be Janet’s thoughts, fears, and sensory awareness that will guide the reader through the tale, even if the reliability of her perceptions has been undercut by the late-night movement on a train and by the underground setting. “The station lights seemed very dim, and she had to peer into the distance to see the end of the platform,” the reader is told (29-30). When another train passes the station, images from inside the half-empty carriages flicker by like moving pictures on a screen: In one carriage, “a couple were necking; in another, a man had fallen asleep under an open newspaper. A third carriage was filled with a grey haze from an old gent contentedly puffing a pipe like a small furnace. . . . [until] the last carriage disappeared into the black throat of the tunnel and the noise died away” (30-31).

Other actions within the story also call into question the reliability of Janet’s—and the reader’s—perception. The structure of the story does

allow for the possible interpretation that Janet has remained asleep after reading the horror stories and therefore has only dreamt about leaving the train and being stranded on an empty platform. However, the reader is also told directly that Janet woke “with a start and, realizing she was well past Euston, jumped out just as the doors closed” (29). When she realizes, whether in a dream or in her waking reality, that there is no exit from the station, she becomes genuinely terrified and wonders if there was “such a thing as a ghost station, a place in the supernatural limbo where lost souls wandered for eternity, clutching their tube tickets in their hands, cursing the driver who had stopped by mistake and the guard who had opened the doors before realizing the error” (31).

The story further undercuts the reader’s certainty by offering a resolution to Janet’s conflict only through another dream. Screaming and exhausted, she slumps against a wall and shuts “her eyes tight, hoping she would wake up in bed” (31). Instead, “in a dream, she heard a West Indian voice” telling her that she’s not in hell, only in a station that won’t re-open for another year (32). But which part of this final dream—if any—reflects reality? If there is a West Indian custodian working late at night, then there is a way out from the station. If there is no West Indian custodian and only a blocked exit, then Janet will presumably die in this tomb-like place.

Follett’s skill in this masterful story comes partially from his ability to blend genres—the psychological horror tale, the ghost story, the buried alive tale, the moving vehicle story, and so forth—but also from his willingness to adopt a style which establishes his narrative as fiction rather than non-fiction. In his earliest novels written under pseudonyms, Follett was often reliant on the fast-paced, breezy newspaper style which he later said he had to “unlearn,” a reportorial style exemplified by the following section from *The Big Needle*: “Crown Terrace is an old street in the East End. Most of the property has been turned into small factories and beat-up offices or left empty to rot. Number 17 I had bought in a package, and I hadn’t been able to do anything with it” (107). Although the passage shifts from objective reporting to subjective storytelling through the use of an interpretive first-person point-of-view, it favors summary narration over description and relies on short sentences and the simple present tense—hallmarks of newspaper style.

By contrast, the very opening of “A Midnight Train to Nowhere” establishes the tale as fiction through the use of a more deliberate literary

style characterized by third-person point-of-view, imaginative detail, sensory appeal, and metaphor: “The driver was thinking about winning the pools, champagne, early retirement, a holiday in Jamaica, girls in bikinis. Through the mist of his daydreams he saw a station and touched a brake” (456). Equally descriptive passages from “A Midnight Train to Nowhere” have been cited earlier.

Follett’s experiences with the short story have been minimal, yet they have proved an important training ground. In addition to the short story “A Midnight Train to Nowhere,” he published two science fiction stories for children in 1977 and 1979 under the pseudonym Martin Martinsen (“Dead Alien” and “Mind Bend”)—and the case can be made that opening chapters from at least three of his novels (*Triple* [1979], *The Key to Rebecca* [1980], and *Lie Down with Lions* [1985] are crafted with the unity and compactness of the classic short story. (See Ch. 7, Ramet.) As Peter Haining noted in his introduction to Follett’s earliest published short story, “the memory of [our] journeys added a special sense of *déjà vu* when I read ‘A Midnight Train to Nowhere’. . . . Follett’s ability to generate thrills was already in evidence. . . . and it brings back a little chill of recognition whenever I find myself traveling on the line it features” (455-56).

Although Follett would return to non-fiction in 1983 with *On Wings of Eagles*, his account of a true-life rescue mission to Iran at the height of the 1979 revolution, his journey away from journalism was assured. He would become well-known for best-selling novels as different in setting as *A Dangerous Fortune* (1993), about a Victorian banking dynasty, and *Code to Zero* (2000), about the Cold War race to establish supremacy in space; as divergent in theme as *The Hammer of Eden* (1998), which examines the violent activities of a commune, and *Whiteout* (2004), which argues for the possibility of redemption through family. He would publish exclusively under his own name. For Follett, his after-hours apprenticeship as a fiction writer and his move away from journalism allowed him to catch a midnight train to somewhere.

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2009 Whatley Award

In memory of George Whatley, a founder and early president of the Popular Culture Association in the South, the editor and editorial board of *Studies in Popular Culture* annually recognize the article published in *SPC* that in their view best represents the scholarly values Professor Whatley sought for the organization and for the study of popular culture.

The 2009 Whatley Award winner is

Sexed Appeals: Network Marketing Advertising and Adult Home Novelty Parties

By

Dawn Heinecken
University of Louisville

The “Aquatic Zionist” in *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union*

The dark comedy that is at the heart of Michael Chabon’s highly amusing yet deeply disturbing novel *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union* projects the text’s and apparently the author’s ambivalence concerning all things Jewish and their intrinsic relationship with the concept of exile. In the *New York Times* book review appearing on Sunday April 29, 2007, Patricia Cohen notes that Michael Chabon uses the phrase the “Frozen Chosen” for the way that world Jewry describes those pioneers who made it to Alaska during World War II in Chabon’s fantasy of Jewish history. Chabon’s dystopia takes place in the real-life island of Sitka, Alaska, probably chosen because of its potentially Yiddish sounding name. There all similarity between the real Sitka and its dysfunctional imaginary counterpart comes to an end. The only other realistic aspect of the novel is that there was discussion in the US State Department of opening up Alaska in 1940 for European Jews who faced destruction at the hands of the Nazi regime. The Act was supported by then Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, but was defeated in Congress. An imaginary advantage of Chabon’s novel is that three million Jews who died in the Holocaust ended up in Alaska instead of meeting certain destruction. The bad news is that the so-called Republic of Israel only lasted a few months before being defeated by the Arab world. Many of the scattered took refuge in Alaska, yet as the novel opens the “Reversion” is about to take place, with the Jews once again being forced to abandon their homes and seek their fortunes elsewhere. The Jews were given sixty years to settle in Alaska, but their desire to achieve statehood or permanent resident status was never approved by the American government.

It seems that only the ultraorthodox community that rules the Island as a mafia gangland enterprise will have no trouble obtaining papers to move elsewhere. Sitka will be returned to the aboriginals and most of the Jews will be forced to leave. Their future is uncertain, as most residents have been unable to create a viable alternative to their lives in Alaska. Although much of the novel offers a comedic reading of life, it is ultimately a grim, frightening picture of what happens when Jews are both granted and not granted a state. There seems to be no solution for a people that has been unable to win its independence in the Middle East and has committed many errors of judgment, as it tries to manage its semi-autonomous state in Sitka.

The novel's general ambivalence towards Jews, Jewishness and a Jewish State has caused outrage among many of the critics, some of them extremely harsh with Chabon, if not decidedly irrational. Thus, for example, John Podhoretz claims that the author's ambivalence posits virulent anti-Zionism. In a bizarre interpretation, he manages to equate Chabon's so-called disdain for Israel with the novelist's "new-found passion for the half-Kenyan, half WASP Hawaiian-born Senator from Illinois... His [Chabon's] Obama is at least as much a fictional character as Kavalier or Clay." No less perturbed by the book is James Lewis in his review, "The Ultimate PC Novel":

There are no pleasant, constructive or even likeable human beings in this gigantic book, written by an American Leftwing atheistic Yiddishist, living, significantly, in Berkeley, California. There is no lively State of Israel in Chabon's imaginary world; there is no thriving American Jewry in the most prosperous and tolerant country on earth; the world of Christian Americans and other religions barely appears, and then only as cardboard cutouts... There is no love unspoiled by hate in this book.

Lewis indeed goes over the top when he notes that the book may be original, but that the same could be said of *Mein Kampf*. In a much more rational though extremely negative review, Ruth Wisse declares the novel's and author's ambivalence and perhaps contempt for the Jewish State. Writing in *Commentary*, Wisse discusses Chabon's "staged alienation" (John McWhorter's term) to turn a profit among the Jews: "Audiences pay good money to enjoy abuse at the hands of their own." As she views the novel,

which she claims perpetuates a poor excuse for proper Yiddish terms, it is a "deliberate and sustained act of provocation, tap[ping] deeply into Chabon's vein of irreverence by inventing...a Jewish territory and a half-borrowed, half made-up language to go with it" (5). But worse than that is the way Wisse views the novel's so-called message: "the intimacy he [Chabon] creates is, of course, the intimacy of exile, of powerlessness. Chabon's mock-Yiddish reinforces the sentimental stereotype of the Jew as a harmless refugee, one who does not threaten the peace of the world, or the peace of the Jews themselves, unless and until he fatally conspires to resettle the land of Israel...Messages – in this case, beware the Zionists bearing death – hardly come clearer than this" (4-6). I can only imagine that Chabon would be pleased to know that his novel inspires so much emotion, albeit negative.

I suspect that Chabon's ambivalence towards exile and a Jewish homeland is the root cause of the hostile reactions to his text. This feeling was crystallized when I read Shlomo Sand's *Invention of the Jewish People*, in which he argues that the exile of Jews from the holy land – as an entire group – may well be a creation myth to sustain the notion of a unified Jewish people throughout history. It is difficult for the invested to confront the mythological history of any nation; in that sense Sand and Chabon have something in common. Both in their own way force Jews to examine their feelings towards exile and the creation of the Jewish State.

Fascination with exile, as we all know, does not begin with Chabon or Sand. Arnold Eisen reminds us that in the beginning there was exile, as we can understand from a reading of Genesis (xi). Moreover, Eisen raises a question that is central to understanding Chabon's work: "What can it mean for Jews to come home, impelled by their tradition, if what they find and build there falls far short of the fulfillment stored up in every traditional promise of return? American Jews turn to the same sources for help in justifying and comprehending their own ambivalent relation to the center" (xii). Michael Chabon answers Eisen's question with a vengeance. What he finds lacking in the "promise of return" takes a central part in the plot he creates, both for the fictional Jewish settlement in Sitka and the "real" Republic of Israel, which is fictionally wiped off the map after a mere three months of existence. Nevertheless, this essay, while acknowledging that the authorial ambivalence towards Jewish exile and return is the prime mover

of *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, will also demonstrate that the novel – through its glorification of exile – is an affirmation of Jewish life and thought.

The novel sees the world through a glass darkly because of the inevitable failure of the Jews as an independent people. No less problematic is the idea that the settlement the novel creates, supposedly representative of “the Jewish People,” is hardly that. For some strange reason, half the Jewish population, that of Sephardic and Mizrachi (oriental) origins, is ignored, as if those Jews had never gone to Israel and didn't exist. What exactly became of them when Alaska became the home to millions of Jews? How is it that the new Jewish homeland uses Yiddish – or Chabon's watered-down version of it – as its national language, effectively denying those Jews who speak Arabic or Ladino?

In her review of the novel, Erica Lipper informs us that “More than just vocabulary, Yiddish is the linguistic trademark of a diaspora [sic] people ever teetering between joy and sorrow, living in the space between.” I would amend that argument to note that what is true of Yiddish is also true of Ladino, the infusion of Castilian Spanish with Hebrew, Arabic, Greek and French that Sephardic Jews have spoken ever since their expulsion from Spain in 1492. Yiddish only represents part of that Diaspora people, yet the novel and the review assume that the Diaspora relates to Yiddish speakers only.

In Abigail Nussbaum's review of the book, she notes that Jew is often substituted for person, but this is not negative but rather universal because it refers to everyone in that geographical space. She claims that “For the residents of Sitka... substituting ‘Jew’ for ‘person’ isn't an act of exclusion but in fact its opposite – an address which remarks not on a differentiating quality but on a universal one. Jews are the same as people because all people are Jews.” Yet the universality she observes is actually a double disenfranchisement. All people of Sitka are not Jews because the aboriginal Tlingit Indians are living there as well. Moreover, the Jews are not universal but exclusionary, since they only account for those of Eastern European descent. While the novel makes hysterical if not always appropriate use of the Yiddish language to invent many wonderful words or applications, every Jew not of Ashkenazi or Eastern European origins – along with the Tinglits – is effectively present only by her absence.

That the novel is a dystopia, or at least a saga of failure and ambivalence, is evident from the first page of the hardboiled, "Chandlerian," detective frame story. ¹ Meyer Landsman, the fallen detective, must solve the murder of Mendel Shpilman, Tsadik Hador (in Hebrew and Yiddish) which means, approximately, the righteous one of his generation, who had the miraculous powers of a potential Messiah. Unlike that other young Jewish rabbi who performed miracles in the holy land two thousand years ago, ours is more of a fallen Messiah, one who couldn't face the pressure of being the son of the Verbover Rabbi, a great rabbinical authority and head of a powerful criminal enterprise. The Tsadik Hador, Shpilman, decides to escape from his responsibilities because as a gay youth he can't imagine acquiescing to an arranged marriage with a female. An alternative explanation is that he is unwilling or unable to accept the weight of the Jewish people's salvation as his "cross" to bear. Perhaps it is a combination of these circumstances, though I suspect that Mendel Shilman is wise enough to understand that once the possibility of Messiah is close to fruition it reverts to an impossible dream. Messiah is only possible when it is impossible. He realizes that Jews, unlike Christians, can never look forward to the actual coming of the Messiah and, in that sense, must always live in exile. Overwhelmed by this knowledge and his personal circumstances, our unwilling Messiah unfortunately finds his solace as a junkie addicted to heroin and abandons his father's house to disappear in the underworld.

The author's apparent ambivalence toward the idea of a Jewish state, which is a focal point of this novel, is well presented from the first page, when we are introduced to our down-and-out detective in the Hotel Zamenhof, named after the father of Esperanto who fantasized about saving the world from the miscommunication derived from multiple languages. The results of that project are well documented. All of the hotel signs, put up fifty years earlier, are in Esperanto, perhaps signifying the futility of the Jewish project as a whole.

The novel opens with a dead "Yid," or Jew, signed in as the chess great Emmanuel Lasker; he has been discovered in the flophouse with a bullet in his brain. Emmanuel is a fitting pseudonym, meaning, in Hebrew, God is with us. Indeed, this is one of the ways that Jesus is referred to in the New Testament. But there will be no mission of redemption for our would-be Jewish Messiah. He has been unwilling to take the sins of the world

upon his slight shoulders. If the job of Messiah is turned down by many, or accepted only by the unworthy, our floundering detective seems to audition for the part, though on a much smaller scale. He would like to get to the bottom of this murder, even though he is about to be out of a job in six weeks, once the Alaskan Reversion takes effect. Perhaps he identifies with the victim, another son who has disappointed his father and will never meet his expectations. It seems that Meyer Landsman is outraged that the Jews were deprived of their Messiah just when they most needed one. Whatever the reason, Landsman is deeply motivated to get to the truth. Like an ancient Hebraic interpreter of signs, a Jewish Phillip Marlowe, Landsman approaches his task with unexpected gusto.² Perhaps it is the case that will allow him to regain his interpretive powers and refashion his life. Landsman is the typical down-on-his luck hardboiled detective with an interesting twist. That is, his work has become meaningless except for the meaning that he decides to assign it. No one cares if he solves the whodunit; and a lot of powerful people would prefer that he didn't unravel the case at all.

Like all Jewish residents of Sitka, Meyer Landsman's native tongue is Yiddish and the reader is treated to delectable inventions in the language to describe all kinds of people and artifacts. In fact, Landsman's last name means compatriot, family member, or member of the tribe in Yiddish, signifying his connection to the murder mystery he stumbles upon.³ The piece he carries is known as a "sholem," peace in Yiddish and similar to Shalom, peace in Hebrew, a kind of Jewish-cowboy peacemaker. His cell phone is known as a "shoyfar," which is a ram's horn, a communicative instrument that is part of the Yom Kippur ritual. A true "Sitkanik," Meyer is the most decorated "shames," or detective, in Sitka's history, but since he has decided to abort his and his wife's potentially genetically deficient fetus, Django, as he painfully refers to him, and has suffered the consequences of a guilt-ridden subsequent divorce, he has become a dysfunctional alcoholic.

Landsman is not only fascinated by the murder, but also by the chess problem left behind on a paper board in the victim's room. Landsman's father was a champion chess player, which is one of the reasons that our detective hates the game. Yet Landsman and his partner, Shemets, must solve not only a murder but also a chess conundrum—which are intimately connected.

The chess problem, as will later become apparent, is indicative of the impossibility of Messiah, the State of Israel, and perhaps the impossibility of the novel. The problem, as Landsman eventually discovers, creates the situation known as *Zugzwang* in chess. The latter is "a situation in which a player is limited to moves that cost pieces or have a damaging positional effect" (*Dictionary*). But the practical result of *Zugzwang* is much worse. Every move a player makes can only lead to defeat. The player is literally forced to move, albeit through his own volition, toward a position of checkmate. Thus, there is no correct move and a skilled chess player, once recognizing *Zugzwang*, will concede the game rather than drag out the inevitable defeat. This seems to serve as a metaphor for the authorial voice's view of a Jewish homeland. Exile and the resettlement of the land both lead to political *Zugzwang*. To establish a state had been impossible in the Holy Land and the efforts to transfer the state to Sitka are also about to end in failure. But the detective Chabon has created will not accept this position. He will do his utmost to arrive at some sort of satisfactory solution, despite the harsh reality he must face, whether it is with the chess board, the murder investigation, or the upcoming removal of the Jews from Alaska.

In his noble efforts to solve the case, Landsman encounters an old Jewish bum named Elijah, collecting coins for the reestablishment of the nation of Israel. During the traditional Passover gathering a glass of wine is poured at the table for the Prophet of Israel, Elijah, who is expected to return one day to announce the coming of the Messiah. Landsman's Elijah, a homeless man, may be collecting donations for the re-establishment of the State of Israel, but inspires little confidence in the viability of the project. As the narrator informs us,

The Holy Land has never seemed more remote or unattainable than it does to a Jew of Sitka. It is on the far side of the planet, a wretched place ruled by men united only in their resolve to keep out all but a worn fistful of small-change Jews. For half a century, Arab strongmen and Muslim partisans, Persians and Egyptians, socialists and nationalists and monarchists, pan-Arabists and pan-Islamists, traditionalists and the party of Ali, have all sunk their teeth into Eretz Yisroel (land of Israel) and worried it down to bone and gristle. Jerusalem is a city of blood and slogans

painted on the wall, severed heads on telephone poles. Observant Jews have not abandoned their hope to dwell one day in the land of Zion. But Jews have been tossed out of the joint three times now – in 586 BCE, in 70 CE, and with savage finality in 1948. It's hard even for the faithful not to feel a sense of discouragement about their chances of once again getting a foot in the door. (17)

While it is true that the narrative seems to disapprove of the project of statehood for the Jews, it is not with an unequivocal voice. In the above passage this “wretched” place is not merely suffering from the Jewish presence but also from a radical and nationalist Islam that has “sunk its teeth” into the land of Israel and “worried it down to bone and gristle.” The implication is that the holy land is overrun by extremists and that it is only the ultra-observant among Jews who would want to return. Perhaps the passage presents some kind of transference in the motivation to resettle the land. That is to say, it is psychologically easier to discuss the homeland desires of religious Jews than to acknowledge that the very same yearning for a state might apply to secular Jews as well. Perhaps it is embarrassing to want to have a state in a land that is in constant turmoil, a place where death seems to be worshiped no less, if not more, than life.

When Elijah tells him the Messiah is coming, thus implying that the historical state will be returned to the Jews, Detective Landsman hands him a twenty dollar bill, wishes him well, and: “‘that works out well,’ Landsman says jerking his thumb towards the hotel lobby. ‘As of tonight, we have a vacancy’” (18). Landsman has no patience for religion, especially not for his own. Indeed, the emptiness and hypocrisy of religious fervor also come under attack. Not only are the most religious Jews the crime bosses, but the barrenness of ritual is well portrayed in the way the junkie Messiah tied off his veins. He used the ritual phylacteries or tefillin, in Yiddish and Hebrew, to bring a vein to the surface of his pathetically skinny arms so that he can inject his heroin (23). Leather thongs that are used for daily prayer serve this junkie to get his fix, which is, to say the least, not an auspicious state of affairs for a would-be Messiah or his religion.

If there ever were a place for the Messiah to appear, Chabon's 21st-century Sitka seems to be ideal. Chaos and despair abound. The Jews have been defeated and are about to be removed from their temporary home-

land. In the fictional 1948, after the Republic of Israel collapses and is overrun by Arabs, Jews are slaughtered and driven into the sea. Sitka seems to be their last hope. Yet no “JewLaska, lawmakers promise,” but rather an interim period for Sitka as a federal district (29). It seems that no matter where Jews are given autonomy, trouble is unavoidable—seemingly in real life, but certainly in Chabon’s dystopia.

The upcoming Reversion is perhaps the darkest event of the novel. What greater nightmare could the author create than the dispersal of the Jews when no state is particularly willing to take them in? Indeed, the American officials responsible for carrying out the Reversion are known collectively as the “Burial Society” “to prepare the corpse for interment in the grave of history” (55).

Despite these grave events our detective is determined to see justice done. Landsman’s quest to discover the Messiah’s killer leads him to Verbover Island, a neighborhood completely dominated by the Verbover Rabbi and his mafia chieftains. Chabon seems to be criticizing the power of the religious orthodox Jews in Israel, which is not quite Mafioso-like, but certainly enjoys, because of the oddities of the parliamentary system, a disproportionate influence on Israeli politics and budgets. In Chabon’s imaginary world, the Verbovers not only serve as a religious sect, but also double as the most successful crime family in Alaska, if not in the world (103). When Landsman confronts a couple of body guards near the Rabbi’s house he realizes the futility of his mission:

Landsman pulls at his chin. Madness, he thinks. Chasing a theoretical lead in a non-existent case, you lose your temper for no reason. The next thing you know, you have caused an incident among a branch of black hats with clout, and a stockpile of Manchurian surplus and Russian firearms recently estimated by police intelligence, in a confidential report, to be adequate to the needs of a guerilla insurgency in a small Central American Republic. Madness, the reliable madness of Landsman. (103)

But we all desire closure, even if ironic, and Landsman is no exception. What better way to complete his career as a detective in a country soon to be lost than by solving a case that no one wants solved? What better tribute to the demise of his national existence than to get the job done just

because the opportunity presents itself? What better way to affirm Jewish life and thought than to act as if with power in a powerless situation? It is almost as if Landsman decided to play the role of secular Messiah, to do something uplifting in a time of need and despair.

The most nebulous of all Landsman's encounters in the novel – and perhaps the key to understanding it – is his meeting with Zimbalist, the so-called Boundary Maven, or he who understands boundaries and borders. The Boundary Maven specializes in setting up boundaries around the homes of people with rows of string so that they can carry out their illicit activities on the Sabbath, without, supposedly, breaking the mandate to rest on the Holy Day (110). Landsman is furious about this activity, blaming both man and God for what he views as a sham:

Landsman has put a lot of work into the avoidance of having to understand concepts like that of the eruv, but he knows that it's a typical Jewish ritual dodge, a scam run on God, that controlling motherfucker. It has something to do with pretending that telephone poles are doorposts, and that the wires are lintels. You can tie off an area using poles and strings and call it an eruv, then pretend on the Sabbath that this eruv you've drawn – in the case of Zimbalist and his crew, it's pretty much the whole District – is your house. That way you can get around the Sabbath ban on carrying in a public place, and walk to shul with a couple of Alka-Seltzers in your pocket, and it isn't a sin. Given enough string and poles, and with a little creative use of existing walls, fences, cliffs, and rivers, you could tie a circle around pretty much any place and call it an eruv. (110)

Understanding this passage is essential to understanding the novel's ambivalence towards Jews, Judaism, exile, Ashkenazi Jews and a Jewish State. Ultraorthodox religion has been reduced to a sham because of its apparent insistence on outsmarting God and avoiding his laws. It is yet another attempt to create a failed boundary between the believer and his or her home, state, or individual transgressions. It is also liminal, a boundary that sets off one world from another, though what the new world might be like is far from clear. Just as creating the boundaries of the real State of Israel has been unsuccessful so, too, is the attempt to rope in God, almost

literally, and have every manmade Sabbath activity declared “kosher.” If the Ashkenazi Jews are granted ethnic exclusivity in the novel, they also come under attack because they are the trickster lawmakers and dubious religious authority.

Though the Boundary Maven implies that Jews finally have boundaries, physical and mental, with which to function, just as the real-life current State of Israel is involved in its own volatile quest for recognized boundaries, still the omniscient narrator highlights the futility of such an endeavor. In the last analysis, the Boundary Maven and his followers are only fooling themselves into thinking they behave appropriately on the day of rest.

Questioned by Landsman, the Boundary Maven is able to recognize the photo of the deceased; it's Mendel Shpilman, authorially named so as to call attention to the so-called Jewish Messiah, Menachem Mendel Shneerson, the real-life (or after-life) Rabbi of Lubavitch (117). A replica of his house in Brooklyn has been exactly recreated on a plot of land near Ben-Gurion Airport, waiting for his return from the dead. Perhaps the proximity to the airport indicates that the Messiah will one day fly into the country. The Boundary Maven explains that as a child Shpilman showed signs of genius, with an IQ of 170, mastering numerous languages and displaying a chess prodigy's mastery of the game (117). The narrator notes that most miraculous of all, Mendel, even as a young child, understood the messiness of human life:

The older Mendel got – the more dazzling his feats of scholarship, the brighter his reputation for acumen beyond his years – the more painful this waste appeared. It was not just Mendel's memory, the agile reasoning, the grasp of precedent, history, law. No, even as a kid, Mendel Shpilman seemed to intuit the messy human flow that both powered the Law and required its elaborate system of drains and sluices. Fear, doubt, lust, dishonesty, broken vows, murder and love, uncertainty about the intentions of God and men, little Mendel saw all of that not only in the Aramaic abstract but when it appeared in his father's study, clothed in the dark serge and juicy mother tongue of everyday life. If conflicts ever arose in the boy's mind, doubts about the relevance of the Law that he was learning in the Verbover

court at the feet of a bunch of king-sized ganefes [thieves] and crooks, they never showed. Not when he was a kid who believed, and not when the day came that he turned his back on it all. He had the kind of mind that could hold and consider contradictory positions without losing its balance. (121)

Yet his ability to understand these “contradictory positions” did not enable him to accept the unacceptable: to play the part of the Jewish redeemer. Mendel as Messiah echoes and mirrors the positions of the real-life State of Israel, Chabon’s imaginary temporary Jewish homeland of Sitka Alaska, and the chess problem that is Mendel’s parting message to the world. Every move that one makes in all these settings forces one into a bad place. There seems to be no appropriate strategy for coming out ahead. So although the text is ambivalent about the idea of a state for Jews and Jewish exile, there is also more than a tinge of regret about such complex existential realities. In the real-life state, the latest manifestation of impossible existence is the war in Gaza. This novel was published before the war, but it expresses the frustration of the dynamic before its latest outburst. Although the reality on the ground is much more complex than I will present it, Israel, aside from its obvious excesses, felt required to make a choice about privileging human life: whose children are more important, yours or mine? In the land of Sitka the terms of existence are, by definition, impossible. How can a people thrive when they know that their existence as a nation is under severe time constraints, the nation’s demise scheduled in advance? How could they develop as an autonomous entity without impinging on the rights of the native Alaskans? And how can a Jewish Messiah accept his role, understanding full well that the moment he is declared Messiah he can no longer accept the burdens of the world on his shoulders? Finally, how can even a chess prodigy escape the constraints of *Zugzwang*, which demands that one move towards one’s own destruction?

The would-be Messiah, we are informed, was born on the 9th day of the Hebrew month Av, the anniversary of the destruction of the holy Temple (195). This suggests that he, too, was fated to fail, on the way to his own destruction from the day he was born: a life of *Zugzwang*, so to speak. He is unwilling to fulfill anyone’s expectations, especially those of his family, and not even his own. Thus, Mendel runs away from his wedding dis-

guised as a woman. His father sees him as a “freak, an aberration” and blames his wife for the results (219).

Exactly what tortures Mendel is probably a conglomerate of issues. It might be his gayness, having the world on his shoulders, the hypocrisy of his rabbi-gangster father, or the impossibility of being alive and a Messiah or all of the above. As the narrator explains it:

The Tzaddik Ha-Dor (the righteous one of a generation) was tendering his resignation. He could not be what the world and its Jews, in the rain with their heartaches and their umbrellas, wanted him to be, what his mother and father wanted him to be. He could not even be what he wanted himself to be. She (his mother) hoped – sitting there, she prayed – that one day, at least, he might find a way to be what he was. (226)

Suspended from duty and armed with only his pathetic union card, the Yiddish Policemen’s Union, Landsman doggedly pursues the investigation he has been ordered to shut down. All of the various and tangential aspects of the case, including his sister Naomi’s supposed accidental death after she flew the Messiah to a rehabilitation facility, are connected to the futility of the Zionist project:

It was from an early boyfriend that she had caught the itch to fly. Landsman never asked her what the attraction was, why she had worked so long and hard to get her commercial license and crash the homoidiotic world of male bush pilots. She was not one for pointless speculation, his dashing sister. But as Landsman understands it, the wings of an airplane are engaged in a constant battle with the air that envelops them, denting and baffling and warping it, bending and staving it off. Fighting it the way a salmon fights against the current of the river in which it’s going to die. Like a salmon, that aquatic Zionist, forever dreaming of its fatal home – Naomi used up her strength and energy in struggle. (238)

Naomi’s flying, Shpilman’s messianic tendencies, a search for a homeland, and Landsman’s desire to detect and live a meaningful life, all seem

reduced to the same impossibility that a salmon discovers while swimming upstream, attempting to fulfill the role of an “aquatic Zionist.” Indeed, according to the text, perhaps all Zionists are like salmon: they swim upstream, try to accomplish the impossible and are launched on a path to certain death. Yet the text informs these endeavors with nobility, which is in itself an affirmation of Jewish life and thought.

Despite all obstacles, in his own small world Landsman is able to create a coherent if not particularly satisfying chain of events. He stumbles upon the Beth Tikkun Retreat (the house of repair), which is either a rehab facility for junkies or a training station preparing for the Messiah and reconquest of Israel or both (249). Landsman seemingly accidentally discovers the shady plots of the Verbovers, guarding their genetically manipulated red heifer, which now has a white spot. That is how the red heifer must appear if it is to be appropriate for the sacrifice at the new Temple in Jerusalem, which the Verbovers believe they are destined to rebuild. They do have a slight problem to overcome, however, as they must blow up the mosque known as the Dome of the Rock, which supposedly sits on the temple site (276, 295). Unfortunately, towards the novel’s end fanatics do succeed in blowing up the mosque, suggesting that Jewish fanaticism is every bit as poisonous as its Muslim counterpart. And if Jews can be such fanatics, the novel seems to ask if they are worthy of statehood at all. It is ironic, however, that other peoples and nations are rarely required to answer that question.

Landsman also discovers that his sister was killed by the Americans to safeguard their plot to remove the Arab presence from Jerusalem, the idea having found particular favor with the “imaginary” American fundamentalist president at the time. This “make believe” administration is interested in returning the Jews to the Temple Mount so that the Messiah can come. Of course, they also believe that on the last day all the Jews will accept Christ as their savior. Their Jewish fanatical partners are willing participants in the plot, though their plans for the final day are very different.

In a tidy conclusion, Landsman and Berko (his Jewish-Indian cousin and partner) learn who killed the Messiah as well as the secret of Berko’s Indian mother’s death: “Berko calls his wife. He explains to her, not very coherently, that his father and a man named Alter Litvak were indirectly

responsible for his mother's death during the worst Indian-Jew violence in the sixty-year history of the District, and that his father had shot himself in the head (after he admitted shooting the would-be Messiah to put him out of his misery)" (320).

At the novel's end, Landsman notes that "every Jew has a personal Messiah who never comes," a declaration that well fits Chabon's authorial voice (331). Indeed, perhaps this best sums up the novel, though the fact that Jewish religious fanatics are responsible for the destruction of a holy shrine in Jerusalem doesn't make the Jews look very good. Or perhaps they are merely mirroring the role of Hamas, since the shoe is on the other foot, so to speak. Conqueror is conquered; winner is loser; and all oppressed people are capable of great cruelty and fanaticism. It seems that Chabon has created a *Great Gatsby* for the Jews. We recall the narrator of *Gatsby* imagining that green, virgin land that the Dutch sailors first saw on their voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. At that pristine moment, we are led to believe, everything was perfect and everything was possible in America. But there has never been true virgin land or perfect opportunity in America. The latter is true for the Jews of Sitka and of Israel; it is even so for the coming of the Messiah: indeed, as the text informs us, "A Messiah who actually arrives is no good to anybody. A hope fulfilled is already half a disappointment" (349). Put quite simply, "*Every Messiah fails...the moment he tries to redeem himself*" (335). Perhaps that is why Mendel Shpilman wanted to die, to avoid such a defeatist position, mirrored in the *Zugzwang* chess problem he left behind.

Once Landsman unravels the whodunit, he decides to make the most of the situation. Although as secular messiah he cannot redeem his people, he is able to protect his immediate family. Since he knows about the American plot to remove the Muslim presence from Jerusalem, he has the means to trade his silence to the American government for papers for his extended family. He secures documents for Berko, his wife and kids, and papers for his reconciled ex and himself (367). Justice, with a twist, is the best he can do. He opts for love with his wife Bina, the boundaries of his redemption reduced to the area of the wedding canopy. His salvation will not depend on the Messiah, nationhood or anything else (411). Apparently Landsman believes the borders of love, without a Boundary Maven, are more manageable and much more honest than the types of borders that burden the Jews,

existential, religious and secular. Optimistically, the novel ends with Landsman calling a long time acquaintance reporter, and letting him know: “Brennan...have I got a story for you” (411). Beyond the conundrum of statehood, telling good stories is the essence of being a Jew: for Landsman and perhaps for Michael Chabon as well.

What is most interesting about this story, however, is that it portrays such an ambivalent attitude towards the notion of a Jewish state and what it means to be Jewish. The alternative reality that Chabon creates is representative of failure on at least three levels: the so-called Republic of Israel is destroyed after a few months in 1948; the Reversion will remove the Jewish presence from Sitka; and the Non-Ashkenazi Jews, a majority in Israel of the 21st century, have disappeared. Nevertheless, I cannot help but acknowledge something optimistic about Chabon’s struggle with exile and ambivalence vis-à-vis the Jewish people.

Franz Rosenzweig has noted that exile is an integral part of Jewish existence. Writing in 1972, he declares that “The events which have dictated the terms of Jewish existence in our generation – Holocaust and Statehood – have had an especially profound effect upon recent Israeli reflection concerning the meaning of Jewish homelessness and homecoming” (*Star of Redemption* 117). In that respect, nothing much has changed over the past thirty-eight years, and what Rosenzweig says about Israelis is true about Jewish Americans as well. Jewish homelessness and homecoming, exile, statehood, and redemption are still critical issues that Jews must engage. I find no reason to fault Michael Chabon for creating such a wildly entertaining, engaging, and noble effort to do so.

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Notes

¹For a discussion of the “Chandlerian” prose, see Elizabeth McCracken’s review of the novel in the *Washington Post*, May 13, 2007. For the grim reality of the book, and its similarity in that respect to Philip Roth’s *The Plot Against America*, see “Raymond Chandler on Ice,” the *Guardian*, June 9 2007. Cal Godot describes the novel as “a sort of Saul Bellow meets Raymond Chandler.”

²Michiko Kakutani describes Landsman as “one of the most appealing detective heroes to come along since Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe.”

³The perfect hilarious exemplification of the term occurs in *Frisco Kid* (1979) when “Rabbi” Gene Wilder mistakenly assumes a group of Amish are indeed his Landsmen because of the way they dress.

⁴I take issue with Sam Anderson’s *New York Magazine* review of the novel; he argues that “Anyone looking for a precise political allegory hidden in this backwoods American Diaspora won’t have an easy time. Chabon seems more interested in his alternate world as a novelistic challenge – how to bring something so outlandish to life? – than some kind of subtly coded analysis of contemporary Middle Eastern politics.” Were fundamentalists on all sides to have their way, Middle Eastern politics might well be as explosive as they are portrayed in the novel.

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“Tons of Useful Stuff”: Defining Wellness in Popular Magazines

In our efforts to attain and preserve our health and wellness¹, we rely on our health care providers as sources of expert knowledge; but we also try to acquire as much expertise as we can on our own through the consumption of various media in the popular culture. In this study, I will focus on one such source, the health and wellness magazine. Although the internet is becoming increasingly central to our experience of culture, one reason why it has not yet supplanted the health and wellness magazines may be that the internet contains so much information that it is too much—vast and unstructured—whereas magazines still offer one of their original functions, as digests that organize and filter information for us. So far, they are more manageable both physically (we can read them on the train or the elliptical trainer) and cognitively. Examining a sample of such publications for male and female audiences—*Self*, *Bicycling*, and *Men's Health*—reveals a variety of expectations and desires at work in the production and consumption of these texts. These products of popular culture are sites where the experience of “health” and “wellness” is as much negotiated as simply imposed, complicating the range of available meanings for these terms in ways which are sometimes problematic, and sometimes actually beneficial.

The overt message in these wellness publications is that striving to be their best will free readers from anxiety, and will open the door to more power—agency, control, influence—in the relationship with self and community. However, scholarly critique is wary of this message, and has struggled to focus on the potential of wellness texts to be read positively, tending instead to emphasize the working of oppressive forces. Smith Ma-

quire finds that the discourse of health/wellness and self-improvement is part of a tension in society to promote, on the one hand, individual empowerment through greater “medical self-competence” and, on the other, “personal responsibility for risk reduction” wherein the individual acts unconsciously to do the state’s work for it. Responsibility becomes discipline and docility, and the institutional workings of power go unexamined (453). Dworkin and Messner similarly argue that health and wellness texts promote “a radical turning inward of agency toward the goal of transformation of one’s own body, in contrast to a turning outward to mobilize for collective action” (352). Critical observers agree that wellness magazines portray the body as a thing that can, and therefore must, be manipulated to appear and behave in certain ways which promote consumption—of products by readers, of women’s bodies by the male gaze. Bartky’s influential Foucauldian study describes the way in which society’s “disciplinary power,” though “dispersed and anonymous” operates to control its members, specifically women:

The disciplinary techniques through which the ‘docile bodies’ of women are constructed aim at a regulation that is perpetual and exhaustive—a regulation of the body’s size and contours, its appetite, posture, gestures and general comportment in space, and the appearance of each of its individual parts. (132-32)

Helstein argues that by taking on the authority to define what is “best” in terms of what is most healthy and well, the expert advice we consume acts to highlight what is currently *not* well in our lives, undermining our efforts towards greater freedom, so that “what you are right now becomes the abnormal...emancipation is not enabling or subversive in this instance, but rather limiting” (289-90). Thus, in such analyses, the seemingly benign goals of self-improvement espoused by wellness magazines take on profoundly sinister undertones.

But: I want to suggest that as much as wellness magazines, as part of a larger trend in the media generally, make health information more and more available, and more a subject of anxiety and concern, they can also work to shift our awareness in beneficial ways, to act as tools that we can actively use on our own behalf. As Hardin, Lynn, and Walsdorf remind us, “although texts may have a dominant...ideology, that ideology may not be entirely accepted by audiences...[T]o be popular, texts *must* be polysemic” (108). The publishers of wellness magazines have multiple motives, some conscious, some not, in producing these texts, which are in

turn open to multiple readings and uses by consumers; readers are in some ways constructed by texts, but they can also have a productive, negotiatory relationship with texts to construct new and useful meanings. Thus, though our vigilant pursuit of health information may fuel an obsessive-compulsive mix of hypochondria and consumerism, it may also result in our acquiring a great deal of expertise ourselves; sooner or later we will learn something, and acquire power from that knowledge.

Moreover, previous critiques have carefully explored how wellness magazines, especially for women, provoke self-absorbed, distracting anxiety by conflating goals of bodily self-improvement and self-discipline with questions of aesthetics, sexuality, and consumerism. I want now to suggest that in addition to fraught concern and obsession with how the female body looks and functions, readers of both sexes are also led to consider how wellness of the body is related to identity, one's relationship to self and others, in *positive* ways. Though there certainly are problems with how our physical and social wellness is constructed in these publications, we should not underestimate these texts' polysemic potential to allow readers to glean helpful and productive knowledge from their pages.

Out of the many wellness-themed magazines available, I have chosen to focus here on three of the best-selling publications, each of which claims to offer essential guidance for living a healthy life, including information on training, nutrition and weight loss/management, and emotional, social, and sexual fulfillment: *Self* (for women), *Bicycling* (for both sexes, though the audience is mostly male), and *Men's Health* (for men, although enough women read it to have prompted the creation, Adam's rib-like, of *Women's Health*). These three magazines tend to be more substantial than others in their market, in terms of the ratio of editorial content to advertising; I also confess to a personal bias as I have been reading them—and following some of their advice—for many years. In fact, it is my own fascination with these magazines, and the vision of wellness they promote, that has led me to ask the key questions of this study: how do these publications construct themselves and their audiences? What definitions of health and wellness are they operating with? How do these publications fuel—and satisfy—our anxiety about the wellness of our bodies as physical and social entities?

According to the media kits found on the websites of their respective publishers, the target audiences for *Self* (Condé Nast), *Bicycling*, and *Men's*

Health (Rodale), share one common characteristic, which is the socio-economic status to allow them to invest time and—crucially—money in their health and wellness. As *Bicycling*'s publishers put it in their mission statement, these magazines “connect...with millions of active, affluent professionals” (“Media Kit—*Bicycling*”) whose target age ranges from the mid 20s to late 30s/mid 40s, and whose median household income is in the mid 80s (*Self*: \$85,671; *Bicycling*: \$81, 352; *Men's Health*: \$80, 941). These magazines have the potential to influence the thoughts and behaviors of very large numbers of readers; for example, *Men's Health* claims to be the “largest men's lifestyle magazine in the world with a global reach of 22 million in 42 editions serving 44 countries” and nearly 12 million readers in the US market alone (“Media Kit – *Men's Health*”). The other publications vary in the size of their readerships—*Self* claims 6.1 million readers, and *Bicycling*, with its more specific interests, reports a readership of only 1.6 million issues (“Media Kit—*Self, Bicycling*”). All of these magazines have a reach beyond their sales, as the publications tend to circulate amongst additional readers through shared use in book stores, libraries, gyms, or doctors' offices.

In describing the missions of the respective magazines, their publishers place an overt emphasis on the shared values of magazine and readers, and on the magazine's utility in helping readers clarify and reach their full potential. *Self* identifies itself as “a resource for the woman who wants to stay informed, get inspired, grow, and achieve her personal goals” (“Media Kit—*Self*”); *Men's Health* is “for men who want greater control over the physical, mental, and emotional lives. We give men the tools they need to make their lives better” (“Media Kit – *Men's Health*”); *Bicycling*'s mission is to provide a “unique combination of travel, gear, fitness, style and award-winning stories...[which] brings the sport to life for passionate readers who take us along for every ride” (“Media Kit—*Bicycling*”). Inside the magazines, the information we need in order to achieve this vision of wellness is plentiful, and bolstered by research and extensive use of sources: a mix of academic researchers, nutritionists, personal trainers, or life coaches—often ones who have services, books, or products for sale. No matter the topics covered or the sources consulted, for every bit of advice we also receive information about the apparatus to make it happen. In all of these magazines, and the many others like them, there is a huge focus on “cutting-edge gear” (“Media Kit – *Men's Health*”): makeup, clothes, fitness apps for the

smart phone, diet foods; special bicycle clothes, different kinds of bikes, pedals, shoes, tools, parts; barbecues, stereo equipment, baseball bats. If we were to look at more “alternative” publications like *Natural Health* or *Yoga Journal*, we would find their pages full of articles and ads promoting vitamins, naturopathic remedies, eco-friendly clothes, yoga props, and décor items. Even the least commercial-seeming publications cannot escape the fact that they are vehicles for selling commodities; for readers, the message implicitly is that wellness is a condition that encompasses what *Bicycling* calls an “experiential lifestyle” involving many dimensions: doing good for one’s self; perhaps doing good for one’s community; and, undeniably, doing good for the economy by shopping.

From a distance, whether the publication is about fashion or fitness, the covers of most lifestyle magazines look very similar, reflecting a well-tested strategy of appealing to readers with attractive role-models whom we aspire to emulate, and exuberant, multi-colored text: how to achieve this, avoid that; how to gain or lose; revelations of fixes, secrets, and all that is new, fast, and easy. Within this proven template, each publication works to appeal to its particular readership. *Self*’s cover defines wellness as an involved process of modifying all aspects of one’s physical and social life: its motto is “You at your best.” The January 2010 cover exhorts readers to “make [this] your ‘I did it!’ year.” They can learn how to “be a casual beauty” with “5-minute fixes” for dull, spotty skin; readers will learn “16 ways to sleep great!” and how to “spark up your sex life”—not in any particular order. Most importantly, the magazine will reveal “31 tiny tricks that peel off major pounds...sexy-stomach short-cuts...[and] the simple no-gym plan designed just for you.”

The cover of *Bicycling*—the “World’s Leading Bike Magazine”—clearly establishes that the magazine aims to supply an expert and highly-specific focus on the training and equipment for cycling. The January 2010 issue proclaims that we will “get a fast bike for less,” and “save [our] ride in 8 easy fixes”; we will learn about “smart (& fun!) indoor training,” and “the best ride in America.” *Bicycling* magazine is well-designed to appeal to readers who are, or, importantly, *envision* themselves as, serious athletes for whom health and wellness are understood as synonymous with *training*: wellness, in this context, is not simply a general condition, but also includes an identity with a certain sub-culture whose members share interests, values, and definitions of status. Finally, *Men’s Health* offers all manner of advice

for achieving wellness in the form of “tons of useful stuff.” This is a genial, general assertion which might appeal to a man who imagines himself as a “guy,” for whom it would be unseemly to pursue wellness with any overt display of seriousness, but who is nevertheless very concerned about having an array of useful tools—skills, gear, attributes—ready to hand. In the case of the January 2010 issue, readers will “discover how strong [they] can be” in the new year, which involves lessons on “the new American diet,” “Smart Choices—how to spot ‘em, how to make ‘em” and the “anatomy of a booty call (this is her brain on sex).”

From cover to contents, we can see that these different publications represent complicated, sometimes competing motives for pursuing health and wellness. For both readers and editors, wellness is not just this diet or that workout; rather, looking and being well depends on a combination of consumption and active practice, encompassing good nutrition, regular exercise or training, and a good relationship with oneself and others. It is in this combination of self- and other-focused interests that we can find both the harmful and beneficial functions of the wellness magazines: readers may, in part, be driven by insecurity and anxiety, but they also find inspiration and uplift from making real improvements in their own health, and in feeling that they are part of a larger movement for health in their society.

As we have seen, many commentators have focused on the negative, rather than the positive, reading of wellness magazines. For example, what has always attracted critique of wellness magazines, especially for women, is the equation they make, not very subtly, between health, slenderness, and beauty; in order to achieve health and wellness as defined by the magazines—and exemplified by their models’ lean and toned physiques—readers must follow exacting regimes that are primarily designed to achieve weight loss, or at least prevent weight gain. Thus, in some women’s wellness magazines—*Shape*, *Fitness*—eating and working out are rarely done simply for fun, for aesthetic, social, or physical gratification: the goal is to get prettier, which usually means getting *smaller*. The typical prescription, as exemplified in the January 2010 issue of *Fitness*, calls for a diet of 1500-1800 calories per day, and light, brief (30-45 minutes) workouts several days per week, combining aerobic activity and weight training. However, since the diet will leave most adult women ravenously hungry even at rest, the workouts cannot be very strenuous, which is actually preferable because readers fear “bulking up.” Consequently, both diet and exercise recommen-

dations fall short of current U.S. Health and Human Services and Centers for Disease Control guidelines for good health, which call for diets of at least 2000 calories per day, and 30-90 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week (“Dietary”; “Physical Activity and”; “Physical Activity: Key”). Women cannot make significant gains in strength using the lighter recommended weights (Heaner E8), and—most importantly—while the regimen will result in weight loss in the short term, it is a recipe for the kind of hunger and feelings of deprivation that undermine healthy habits for the long term.

That women continue to seek out such regimens, and that many (though not all) wellness magazines continue to offer them, has been taken as evidence that the publications are primarily instruments of oppression.² But as much as scholars (including this one) have delineated these negative aspects of wellness magazines, readers keep reading them. Rather than seeing all wellness magazines’ recommendations as a capitulation to, or even sinister reinforcement of, oppressive social forces, perhaps the diet and exercise advice—in at least some publications—has some positive value for readers in supporting their efforts to improve their overall wellness, while also recognizing and accommodating the demands of their lives.

Self, for example, has in recent years tried to move away from the stringent caloric restriction endorsed by many other publications. The January 2010 “Food Lover’s Diet” is not the typical set of calorie-controlled menus, but is instead a set of recommendations for eating less while eating better: “eat more, shed pounds, and love the results...no deprivation or strict calorie-counting required!” (91). Readers are encouraged to monitor portion sizes and choose 150-calorie snacks of whole-grain pita and hummus rather than chocolate bars (99). They are also encouraged to eat for nourishment and pleasure—but not distraction or self-medication. Readers are advised to “avoid eating in front of the TV,” to “seek out a nonfood reward that inspires you,” and to practice slower, mindful eating and self-reflection (99). That some foods are just too lovely to forego is accepted: “no food is off-limits; just think of your daily intake as a level scale—if you put something in, take something else out...Normal and overweight women who ate their most desired food daily were less inclined to devour it after two weeks” (92-102). Wellness almost always involves appearance and size in this genre of magazine; many readers do, indeed, want to get smaller. Consequently, *Self*’s diet advice is certainly meant not only to im-

prove one's overall nutrition, but to result in "drop[ping] a size this month!" (91). Nevertheless, the advice here is also meant to "make eating right a lifelong habit" (104), and is part of the magazine's stated goal of helping readers to "achieve total well-being" ("Media Kit—*Self*").

Self's fitness advice is similarly meant to be one manageable component of an overall healthy—and complicated—lifestyle. *Self's* fitness prescriptions tend not to depart too much from those of competing publications: the featured workouts are meant to tone and burn calories, not provide training in any particular set of skills. But while we can hope that readers will set more ambitious fitness goals for themselves, we must also note how the magazine's prescriptions are adapted to the constraints of readers' lives. *Self's* advice focuses on the workout as a commitment to be regularly scheduled—necessary for readers whose lives are already over-scheduled with work and family obligations. The workouts are designed to be done anywhere, perhaps at the gym or the park, but also likely in the reader's home, and are meant to be done quickly and alone. Research in exercise motivation shows that people are less likely to stick with activities done for "extrinsic motives" such as appearance, and are more likely to stick with an activity if it is performed for "intrinsic motives" which combine a desire for health with a desire for challenge, competition, and social interaction (Kilpatrick et al., 87). Such activities—rock climbing, bicycling, soccer, ballet—also tend to take more than 30 minutes at a time, when the average amount of leisure time available for American adults is only 24 minutes per day, and women have less leisure time than men ("Measuring Leisure," 28-31). Moreover, even though exercising only for extrinsic motives such as weight loss or appearance "might be detrimental to exercise participation and mental health," women find it "challenging . . . to prioritize their own health and self-care needs" (Segar et al, 184). Many readers of *Self* would prefer to have more time to train, or even to play—but they may only have time to exercise, and the magazine's workout prescriptions are thus, if somewhat limited, do-able for anyone regardless of ability or schedule.

And *Self*, like the other magazines, also recognizes that readers have—and need—a mix of those extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for working out as part of their broader investment in wellness. Outside of the feature articles on the latest work-out regimen, readers are encouraged throughout the magazine to try new things, overcome psychological roadblocks to achieving their goals, and build connections with others: one

former contestant on television's *The Biggest Loser* credits trainer Jillian Michaels with teaching her that "the one thing I ended up needing the most [was] a support system" ("Let Me Train You" 107). The magazine portrays itself as part of that support system, offering guidance in its pages, and the opportunity to participate in mutually-encouraging discussion groups on the "Community" page of the magazine's website. And readers become involved with activities in the real community as well as the virtual: they are regularly told about "How *Self* readers give back to their community" (December 2009), through simple efforts such as setting up a skills-swap with friends, to volunteering, to starting their own non-profit organizations (with information provided for readers who wish to contribute themselves). Readers of *Self* can read the magazine just for the diet, just for the workout, but they do not. As the magazine's construction implies, readers have multiple reasons for changing their diet, activity, and overall lifestyle, and dropping a dress size out of an internalized sense of societally-determined bodily discipline is only one of them.

The attitude towards wellness taken by *Bicycling* is similarly complex: being on the bike requires a certain commitment, but also becomes a literal and figurative focal point for a healthy lifestyle. As with the other magazines, readers of *Bicycling* care about their weight: each issue of the magazine certainly contains earnest items on optimal nutrition for training, taking for granted that readers will want both natural foods and the most scientifically cutting edge—artificially-engineered—forms of supplements, bars, gels, and drinks. The January 2010 issue advises readers on the difference between "active" and "lazy" calories (32), and profiles Scott Cutshall, who lost over 300 pounds through diet and—of course—bike rides of steadily increasing distance and intensity (46-53).

But the magazine's view of diet and nutrition is more accommodating than we see elsewhere in many wellness publications: the assumption is that readers like to play hard, that they can and ought to exercise clinical exactitude in their approach to "performance nutrition"—and for this effort, they are allowed to eat well, and occasionally plentifully. Until recently, *Bicycling* ran a regular item called "Because You Ride"; if one has worked hard, one has then earned a truly impressive quantity of treats. For example, to "replenish the 3360 calories [burned] riding for five hours at 14 mph" one could eat the equivalent of "seven Dunkin Donuts egg and cheese croissant sandwiches" (August 2007, 46). Not that one would follow through on this

information—but the data contribute to the magazine’s overall celebratory attitude towards the role of bicycling as part of a healthy and fulfilling lifestyle. In a similar vein, each issue features a profile of a particular riding experience, which includes recommendations for a route, the important sights worth stopping for, and, crucially, the best places to go for food and drink. For example, in January’s article on cycling Santa Barbara, we learn where to get our flats fixed, and where we can get anything from natural food, to coffee and pastry, to beer (24). The magazine also regularly profiles chefs who discuss their combined love for cycling and cuisine; here Denver chef Jennifer Jasinski talks about mountain biking in Moab, and shares a recipe for cauliflower fuji apple soup (30) which calls for a stick of butter and four cups of milk—acceptable to readers, “because they ride.” Instead of portraying treats as an indulgence for which one must do penance, as we often expect to see in fitness magazines, in *Bicycling* the relationship with food seems completely the opposite. Eating is less fraught with potential danger and can instead be, at the least, fuel, and even, simply, fun.

This approach to eating is inextricable from fitness, and obviously, in *Bicycling*, there is only one physical activity of interest: much of the magazine’s content is concerned with how to ride better, and as much as possible, or—more realistically—as much as one can in the time available. In the January issue alone, Chris Carmichael (Lance Armstrong’s trainer) considers indoor cycling classes as an alternative to riding outdoors (28); “FitChick” Selene Yeager offers “seven off-season tricks to give you an edge come spring” (26); we learn how to “ride all winter long by overcoming . . . common cold-weather obstacles” (43); and six pro cyclists offer their advice for staying “cycling-fit without pedaling a bike” over the winter (45). During the regular training season, a typical regimen for serious competitors will involve several workouts per week, involving 30-180 minutes of intervals, climbs, and “time-trial” rides of 20-40 kilometers (“Train for the Tour,” August 2007). For many readers (who have the time), riding is not just exercise, not just a way to “torch calories,” but is instead inseparable from challenge: riding to complete exhaustion, testing one’s strength and fortitude, maybe getting quite dirty, doing hard work. For others, riding some, whatever little bit, is better than not riding at all.

But the magazine demonstrates that bicycling fulfills many other needs in readers’ lives as well, as a means to commute, vacation, and build social ties and communities. In recent years, the magazine’s “BikeTown”

feature has focused on the use of bikes in African communities; where the government is unable to provide infrastructure and basic services, grassroots organizations can use bicycles to disseminate everything from health care to education. In so doing, the celebration of the bike as civic tool also involves analysis and criticism of the failure of government in these areas. More simply, the magazine regularly features articles about how cycling has changed people's relationships with friends and family—riding was a key factor in blogger Elden Nelson's weight loss, and in coping with his wife's illness and death from cancer as he became involved with, and supported by, charity rides to raise funds for cancer research (Donahue 17). Joe Kurmaskie, his wife, and his three sons, age nine, seven, and one, learned many lessons on togetherness in the course of a family ride across Canada (including the discovery that a cyclist "hauling 15 feet of bike train, three children, and hundreds of pounds of gear" has an appetite that "knows no mortal bounds") (91). Basically, the magazine is for people who want to be on their bikes all the time (or who want to someday be the sort of people who are able to do so) but for whom riding is partly, but never wholly, about fitness. Though it is possible to be very serious about cycling, it is very much a functional, fun, activity that promotes individual and social health.

Men's Health has perhaps the most consciously-formulated attitude towards wellness. On the one hand, the magazine does the expected, endorsing an exercise regimen and diet which promote muscle-building and weight loss; the magazine's formula for super foods, summed up in the acronym "ABSDIETPOWER," emphasizes the consumption of calorie-controlled nutrients and protein, balanced by suggestions on ways to temper inevitable splurges. Our friendly magazine has a stern undertone—apparently, "guys" appreciate straight-talk, welcoming warnings in the January 2010 issue that if one commits the "crime" of eating 1540 calories in a TGIF Cheesy Bacon Cheeseburger, he must be prepared for the "punishment" of shoveling snow for 3 hours (36). Readers are similarly given no-nonsense orders to "*drink this* [the 190-calorie grande caramel macchiato], *not that* [the 400-calorie grande white chocolate mocha]" at Starbucks (62). *Men's Health's* "Eat This, Not That" feature, with editor David Zinczenko as spokesperson, has, in fact, turned into something of a social cause for the magazine and its readers, resulting not only in a diet book about making sensible meal choices, but a program for improving food and exercise programs in public schools. The magazine also regularly features articles on the American food

industry, with frankly-proselytizing articles urging men to spurn processed food, factory-farmed meat and fish, and “Americanized” ethnic cuisines, to re-discover the pleasures of cooking authentic, simple food from scratch, and to take a stand against practices which negatively affect the health not only of the individual reader, but of community and planet as well. Nutrition, in what is becoming a quasi-ideology for the magazine, may be partly about shaping up for “booty calls”; surprisingly, good nutrition also involves being discriminating, responsibly civic-minded, and appreciative of healthful food.

Along with this nutritional idealism, *Men’s Health* very explicitly makes fitness a central part of its ideology of manliness. That this ideology tends to reinforce modern gender roles is certainly not without its problems; nevertheless, my focus here is on how the magazine makes connections between fitness, sociability, self-respect, and respect for community which may provide a beneficial corrective for readers who are otherwise caught up in the less healthy aspects of North American commercial culture. The magazine poses a challenge to readers to prioritize their health and wellness, in particular to demonstrate to others masculine skill, and to achieve a particular appearance—one that will be sexually appealing to women. Whenever possible, working out is also meant to be sport-specific: as with *Bicycling*, in *Men’s Health* the worth of physical activity is portrayed as inseparable from challenge, competition, and, importantly, enjoyment and social interaction. But, as with *Self*, the workout prescriptions are also designed to reflect the realities of readers’ lives: many training regimes are centered on the gym, and designed to be done alone. Readers may pursue, or at least contemplate, an ideal; but the practical reality is that most readers must balance competing obligations to employers and family, and struggle to avoid the temptations of the couch/media/food combination. With little time left over for themselves, these readers must be time-efficient and pragmatic with their workouts.

But as we have seen, efficient weight-loss is only one of many important motives for readers’ pursuit of fitness as part of the larger goal of wellness. Reader before-and-after profiles (the “Belly-Off Club”) demonstrate the hazards of modern life where individuals become so focused on jobs and possessions that they lose sight of their health—their “wake-up call” is typically a sudden realization that their wellness is tied to that of others in their lives. As a typical example, in the January 2010 issue, reader Rich

Vittoria recounts how his weight was endangering his health, causing high blood pressure and sleep apnea—and his wearing a positive airway pressure device frightened his three-year old. By following *Men's Health's* advice about diet and exercise, Vittoria has lost the excess weight, regained his health, and become a crusader for healthful food in schools: “now I’m a role model for my sons and students” (62). In December 2009, author Jonathan Lesser recounts his realization that “a man *has* to be able to fix things”: “I want to take care of this place the way a man should want to take care of his body...[The house is] a 1700 square foot extension of me. It’s a living thing, and I can’t call someone every time it hiccups” (111). Studying *Men's Health* is not something that readers are motivated to do only as a result of anxiety about appearance and sex-appeal; achieving wellness requires readers to actively acquire the skills, the competence, to build and maintain all aspects of their environment.

Certainly, these magazines present problems: we know that the advertising and the editorial content is designed to play on our loftiest aspirations—and our deepest anxieties—about what we think we should have in terms of knowledge, behavior, and appearance. In *Bicycling*, the anxiety is perhaps the mildest as readers are led to worry about cycling status—about whether they are doing it right, with the right gear, and that they look right doing it. In *Men's Health*, despite the cultivation of the casual tone, all “guys” and “stuff,” the concern is more serious: the reader here is anxious not just about his appearance, but his appearance of competence as a man in contemporary culture: he needs to be man enough to know how to do the right thing, all the time, in bed, in a meeting, in the kitchen, on the playing field. For the women readers of *Self*, they worry about not being woman enough, where “enough” means being small and restrained in one’s appetites for things like food and strength, which might threaten their appearance of feminine, heterosexual, attractiveness. Readers of both sexes can easily become caught up in consumption of advice and products, becoming obsessed with monitoring and controlling their bodies rather than challenging power relationships in our culture.

However, these publications can be, and are, created and read for what they claim to be, a source for helpful information, “useful stuff” to help us be healthier. We do not live in a healthy world—from the condition of the oceans to the condition of our arteries, we have not been very good at looking after ourselves. North Americans eat too much, and over half of

us are overweight to obese; despite the proven benefits of physical activity, more than 50% of U.S. adults do not get enough physical activity to provide health benefits; 24% are not active at all in their leisure time (“Physical Activity and Good Nutrition”). Modern life, including the modern system of health care, makes it difficult to be healthy, not to mention potentially very expensive. How many basic health care plans offer unlimited coverage for nutritionists, counselors, personal training, and gym fees? How many jobs would allow us the time to use the full range of such services? To practice preventative healthcare, not to mention the larger goal of wellness, we are largely on our own, on our own time.

Thus, while wellness magazines do not solve all problems, for the reader who wants to take some action, make some positive change, these publications can be a legitimate starting point. Diet and exercise regimes that are very stringent, such as those in *Men’s Health* or *Bicycling*, set goals to aspire to; regimes that are more basic, such as those in *Self*, provide a non-intimidating entry point. For those who are just starting the work of getting fit, exercise prescriptions that are too difficult would be counterproductive; many readers might be self-conscious about not being as fit as the magazines (and all of our culture’s other, omnipresent media) portray as the ideal and so might rather work out alone in the privacy of their homes rather than face the exposure of the gym, or unforgiving cycling clothing. And even when changes in diet and nutrition do not result in a beach-ready body, they can still have very beneficial effects on health and wellness, such as lowering the risk of disease and debility, and improving, if not perfecting, body image through improving self-efficacy (Anderson et al. 510).

Wellness, when used as a code word for self-discipline and docility, is not something that should be coerced; but wellness when used to describe a desirable state of body and mind is not something that can be bestowed either. If individuals want to be healthy and well, they must actively construct that condition for themselves, as well as they can; they need information to do it, and publications such as the ones examined here can supply it. These publications do send conflicting messages to readers—increased anxiety could be one of them; but we must be careful not to assume that readers are only ever passive, acted upon by these publications, victimized; nor to assume that a concern with health must always be prompted by an unhealthy concern with appearance. Readers must be given credit for being able to actively use these publications in different ways, to achieve a variety of

valid individual wellness goals.

Moreover, though it seems a somewhat paradoxical claim, the anxiety which might drive readers to be vigilant about their individual health and wellness has the potential to pull readers out of solipsism into more collective critique and social engagement. The magazines examined here, as representative of their genre, do, at first glance seem to focus only on the health—or lack of it—of individual bodies; however, a closer look reveals that all regard health and wellness within a larger social framework. The precarious state of the environment has been receiving growing attention, and the health and wellness magazines now regularly feature advice on how to make eco-friendly changes to one's lifestyle; if one is going to consume, one can at least now buy products that are less, rather than more, likely to harm the environment. The magazines all, to varying degrees, make connections between the reader's individual interests and social concerns which may affect them: changes to legislation which protect the environment by promoting cycling; problems within the health care system which result in sub-standard care; the relationship between industry and government which promotes cheap, but poor-quality food which harms animals, the environment, and consumers.

Throughout the year, these publications go beyond the individual's choice of sandwich or figure-flattering jeans to take on the larger issue of the physical and ethical health of groups: athletes, children, expectant mothers, cultures, nations. And to examine the various hazards which threaten the members of these groups means to question the social institutions which actively create or passively perpetuate those threats. All of these magazines set high standards of ethical conduct and are willing to critique and challenge failed institutions which threaten the physical or social health of their constituencies. While these feature articles undoubtedly arise from, and exacerbate, readers' anxieties, they also offer advice about the action that readers can take, ranging from taking individual measures to becoming involved with organized reform efforts.

The very nature of the self-help magazine ensures a focus on the self over the group: one's problems are one's own, and often brought out by one's own deficiency; the only solution is to recognize—constantly, every month—one's flaws, confess them, and perform elaborate rites of penance through vigilantly dieting, exercising, and shopping. And yet: there is potential here for us to construct the meaning of health and wellness in

additional ways. The knowledge to promote and maintain the health of the body is not esoteric lore, possessed by a few; rather, there is “tons of useful stuff” that we can all draw upon to promote individual and group power instead of powerlessness, greater liberation instead of continued docility and obedience to hegemonic authority. With the proliferation of health information in these wellness magazines, and other forms of media in popular culture, our ability to educate ourselves might actually result not in increased hypochondriacal neurosis, but in increased expertise that will allow us to critically assess our institutions of power to see how deeply flawed they are, how poorly qualified they are to be dictating the terms of our wellness, and how necessary and possible it is for us to become involved with efforts for change. Reading our health magazines, raising our individual level of awareness, knowledge, and expertise, may take us from advocating the wellness of our own bodies to working together to improve the wellness of the body politic.

Carol-Ann Farkas

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Notes

¹ “Health” is “the condition of being sound in body, mind, or spirit; especially: freedom from physical disease or pain” (“Health”). The term “wellness” describes, in general, “a level of health that minimizes the chances of becoming ill,” and, specifically, an embodied experience “of emotional, environmental, mental, physical, social, and spiritual health” (“Wellness”).

² See also: Duncan, “The Politics of Women’s Body Images and Practices: Foucault, the Panopticon, and Shape Magazine”; Dworkin, “‘Holding Back’: Negotiating A Glass Ceiling On Women’s Muscular Strength”; Marcula, “Beyond The Perfect Body: Women’s Body Image Distortion in Fitness Magazine Discourse”; and Spitzak, *Confessing Excess*.

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Book Reviews

Lukas, Scott A. *Theme Park*. London: Reaktion Books, 2008. 272 pages; bibliography, index.

Socio-architecture has been a concept far longer than its formal definition first coined by Humphry Osmond (psychologist) and Kyo Izumi (architect) in 1951. Earlier, it was attributed to Sir Winston Churchill that we shape our buildings and thereafter they shape us. Scott Lukas in *Theme Park* continues this interest in the social and cultural meanings of architectural space with a brilliant description and analysis of recreational space and its evolution from a place of amusement and entertainment to an environment of altered reality.

The practitioners of architecture and planning have frequently differed as to the primacy of the artistic and aesthetic over the functional and behavioral. Though the importance of the social realities of architectural design has been recognized since Ebenezer Howard's pioneer efforts in the development of the garden cities of Letchford and Welwyn in the early part of the 20th century, Lukas starts in the middle of the previous century at the social significance of the development of parks and planned recreational space as the early stages in a continuous process of the evolution and development of the theme park.

In six chapters, through a combination of anthropological, sociological and psychological perspectives, the theme park is viewed as Oasis, Land, Machine, Show, Brand and Text. Through description, numerous photographs, illustrations, drawings, and sophisticated analysis blending numerous social scientific theories and concepts, Lukas takes us through the early planned gardens, expositions and amusement parks, like Coney Island, to major theme parks like Disney World and finally to themed communities like Las Vegas.

In "Theme Park as Oasis," pleasure parks, such as Vauxhall in England, are noted as places of natural beauty that were supplemented with the availability of some forms of entertainment and refreshment. These alternate environments contrasted with the growing dehumanization and impersonality of the industrial urban environments of the times.

Similarly, the chapter "Theme Park as Land" focuses on the emerging role of recreational space as an educational vehicle for sharing the geo-

graphical and cultural diversity of a world beyond the reach of a local population. Though often portrayed in stereotypes, these parks provided voyeuristic opportunities to go where one could not.

In “Theme Park as Machine,” the role of the amusement ride, be it a roller coaster, carousel or another application of technology, is viewed as a vehicle of social interaction and common experience to be shared by all groups and classes of people. The democratization of fright, fear or awe plays an important role in the theme park experience.

This opportunity of experience is also addressed in “Theme Park as Show.” Immersion in an increasingly total experience marked the transition from amusement to a true theme park experience. Theme parks were emerging, with the advent of Disneyland and a number of similar venues, as total experiences and not just a collection of amusements. A central theme permeated the park experience not only in terms of amusement experiences but also of all of the actions, activities and events that took place both within and between the amusements. In the dramaturgical perspective of Goffman, Lukas takes us through the planned presentations that link together the total park experience. Interestingly, having worked as a park trainer at AstroWorld, Lukas is able to introduce numerous ethnomethodological explanations and insights into the theme park experience.

From an economic perspective, the fifth chapter focuses on the marketing potential of “Theme Park as Brand.” The Disney influence has shaped the modern theme park as not only a coherent marketing strategy, but also a social and cultural experience that promotes the theme as a valued identity as well as a product opportunity. The goal of the modern theme park is to socialize the participants into cast members while they are in the park as well as when they return to their homes and the outside world. The opportunity to socially condition individuals to become both advocate for and a consumer of experience was not lost on either Orwell or Disney.

In the final chapter, “Theme Park as Text,” Lukas explains how the concept of theme parks is extending beyond the concrete and physical and becoming conceptual and cultural. Moving from socio-architecture to environmental psychology, Lukas focuses on how the concept of the theme park is being extended to communities and commercial venues ranging from resort towns, planned neighborhoods and retail megaplexes.

The sociological perspectives of Berger and Luckman, who focused on the social construction of reality, have been adapted by Lukas in his examination of the theme park as the social construction of a faux reality. According to Lukas, the faux reality of the theme park is being enhanced by new technologies and psychological conditioning principles as the theme experience morphs to become, in fact, a new reality. This was stated best by Walt Disney, who believed that the reality of the park was real and that it was the outside world that was false.

This book is both a sophisticated social scientific review of the history, development and transformation of theme parks and an entertaining and extremely well-written journey through the world's vacation venues. With the advantage of having been a participant in the world of the theme park and a scholar of socio-architecture and cultural anthropology, Lukas provides a variety of perspectives and insights into this interesting aspect of an alternative social experience. He takes us on an informed journey from recreation to "re-creation." Like the best of theme parks, this book is both fun and informative and helps us understand an important element of popular culture as both a participant and as an observer. It is a memorable ride.

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Tucker, Linda G., *Lockstep and Dance: Images of Black Men in Popular Culture*. Jackson: The UP of Mississippi, 2007. 191 pages; bibliography, index.

At a basic level, popular, unlike high, culture, seeks to investigate various topics including art, film music, sports, that generate from the perspective of every day individuals and institutions. In that vein comes the book *Lockstep and Dance: Images of Black Men in Popular Culture* by Linda G. Tucker who seeks to examine African American males within the, larger context of popular culture. The theme that runs through this text is that contemporary representations of black men as criminals generate support for violent methods of "controlling, containing, and annihilating black men" (6). Furthermore, this support reinforces the structure of the prison writ large. The term *lockstep* suggests inflexible, strict obedience, while *dance* denotes a flexible freedom of movement. Thus, the title does indeed fit the general focus of this book: two ways of viewing Black men in America: heroes and victims.

In Chapter One, “Writing Home,” Tucker details “how white America sees black men” in that its behavior, policies, and practices seem both moral and just (3). The term *prison writ* appears quite often at this stage of the book. Specifically, the prison writ is due to the perception that “black men are a race of criminals [that] yield a racialized system of containment” (5). Furthermore, representation practices in popular culture perpetuate the image of black men as a group predisposed to criminal behavior. Here the author sets her ideas in the context of John Wideman’s book, *Brothers and Keepers*. It is here that the construct of representation becomes a central theme in the book. Tucker elaborates on the lives of two African American men, John Wideman and his brother Robby, showing how they hope to resist white oppression. Robby’s unsuccessful attempt to “plac[e] himself beyond the reach of the criminal justice system” is compared to John Wideman’s escape attempt “from Pittsburg, from poverty, from blackness” (31). These men did not succeed in liberating themselves in ways they had hoped. Used in the sense of how people, behavior, and events are portrayed, Tucker notes that there are two competing dimensions of representation. One is the way in which black men are seen by whites and the other way is how whites are seen by blacks. Tucker argues that representations of the former function “as resources that are used in the United States to define real black men’s relationship to whites and to enable the latter to maintain social, political, economic, and institutional control” (23).

In “The Legacy of Type,” Tucker expounds on the topics of minstrelsy, lynching and what she describes as a “white lore cycle” (50). Blackface minstrelsy, lynching, and advertisements all capture the relational nature of white identity (50). According to the author, “minstrel performance allowed white men to appropriate – or at least try on for size – what they perceive as a competing masculine identity” (51). Tucker’s depiction of lynching emphasizes the spectacle of an event to be witnessed, primarily by white males. The smell, the sight of lynched black males, the ads, and the pictures of deformed bodies sent to friends and to opponents of lynching are strong features of this chapter.

In “Court Gestures,” Tucker focuses on the ambiguous court performances of black basketball players who have been able to play the game for the benefit of both themselves and their audiences. The focus is on black males performing in positive and in negative ways. This chapter con-

tinues the theme of the previous chapter: black men are portrayed as criminals and as brutes. Much of the discussion is centered on Latrell Sprewell and Dennis Rodman, former basketball players. These players, according to the author, find ways to resist the system. In Sprewell's case, he is known for assaulting his coach. In Rodman's case, he challenges and breaks the rules of conduct expected by athletes in that high-profile position. The light is shone more on Rodman than on Sprewell, primarily through his impulse to break rules, to not show for practice, his flamboyant attire, and multiple tattoos. Moreover, the image of these basketball players is juxtaposed against that of Michael Jordan, whose image conforms to the larger society's expectation of how black men, especially black athletes, should conduct themselves.

“The Last Black Face” examines films that are favorably received by mainstream audiences [which] tend to entertain white audiences while reassuring them that the threat of blackness, which is embossed in the white imagination as the image of a black male, has been contained. More often than not, the perceived threat is contained by a comedic frame and/or narrative in which criminality is severed from structural and systemic inequities and violence. (101)

This chapter is centered on the meaning of two movies, *Bamboozled* and *Barbershop*. In *Bamboozled*, Tucker notes that Spike Lee is caught in the lockstep of his own dance because every black male character in the film is complicit in a slippage of representation that ultimately results in their extermination as black entertainers (114). In *Barbershop*, Tucker sees this physical space as one for social bonding, for entrepreneurship, and for a definition of character among black men. It is not just a place for cutting hair. Rather, it is a place where black men have “resisted such images [of criminality] in ways that have little to do with white ways of looking” (121).

In “Holler If Ya Hear Me: Black Men, (Bad) Rap(s), and the Return of the Black Brute,” Tucker reiterates the image of black men as portrayed in the media through rap and rappers, focusing specifically on Tupac Shakur, whose “thug-like tattoos also suggest that his work is informed by an African American messianic tradition” (157). Rap artists use their craft to point out images and instances of social injustice. At the same time, rappers are caught between political expression to uplift their community and their behaviors that appear in conflict with that philosophy of uplift. Tucker finds

that “when black men speak beyond the parameters of acceptability delineated by white America, their voices are demonized” (131).

On the whole *Lockstep and Dance* seeks to bring together elements of popular culture into a work that focuses on the lives of black men. Although there are elements of repetition, Tucker, who at the end of the work admits that she is a white Canadian woman, does bring a measure of objectivity to the study. Since the cultural concept of representation is a salient feature of this work, I would have liked to see more analysis from the perspective of how meaning is obtained from these events in the lives of black men. On the whole, readers should be able to read *Lockstep and Dance* objectively and to place it within the larger body of scholarship on popular culture.

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Villez, Barbara, *Television and the Legal System*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010. 141 pages; bibliography, index.

We now have Barbara Villez’s valuable *Television and the Legal System* in English. First published in French as *Séries télé: visions de la justice* in the middle of the decade by the Presses Universitaires de France, it has now been republished by Routledge in its “Law, Society and Popular Culture” series, translated by the author, a native New Yorker now teaching at University of Paris 8. Reading it again now, after struggling through the French version, I must admit to only grasping a fraction of its subtlety and breadth.

It is certainly no surprise, coming as it does from one of the seminal European figures in the development of the study of comparative media and law, that this monograph offers an important guide, proposing new ways to think about how the import/export of television legal drama inexorably influences legal culture in a nation like France. “American citizens know their rights and how their judicial system works,” Villez writes in an important passage,

although there has never been an obligatory program on the subject included in school curricula, contrary to France. It is likely that a vast majority of the population in the United States has acquired this information simply from watching courtroom dramas, perhaps religiously and for some, from a very young

age. If the French television channels buy American law series and French viewers watch, when programming is reasonable, then it should be no surprise that people in France have acquired criteria on the American legal system rather than on their own. Watching the American law series produced since the 1990s, which provide a complex image of law and justice, the French have become aware of questions which are not foreign to their own society, one that has become just as judicialized and complex. Thus, it is perhaps not only the quality of these programs which lure the French viewer, but also the questions dealt with and which echo those of all modern societies.

Villez also suggests discerning ways to think about each of the major players in such dramas, from judges to juries, and contemplates lawyers as both mythic figures and models.

Television and the Legal System is, however, also a first-rate book about television. So much writing about television these days—the Open Court series (*The Sopranos and Philosophy*, *Seinfeld and Philosophy*), the BFI TV Classics, for example—often have little or nothing to say about television itself. Villez offers not only important insights concerning the particularities of television narrative but a rich survey of seminal American legal dramas as well. Whether writing about *Perry Mason*, *Ally McBeal*, *Picket Fences*, or *The Practice*, she demonstrates an indigenous knowledge of the genre. Comparing developments across decades or laying out a valuable typology of the genre, Villez’s writing is consistently clear and judicious. She even examines the industry question of whether to “purchase or produce” and ponders the implication of the increasing international circulation of television, especially American television, for understanding legal systems.

Television and the Legal System is not merely a translation. Villez has updated, in an afterword, developments since the book was published in France and given us a thorough and useful filmography as well. May I add as well, as an admirer of the form, that the book’s epigraphs are a thing of beauty?

I count myself lucky to have heard Barbara Villez speak on more than one occasion. The same combination of engaging modesty and critical acumen she radiates in person shines through these pages as well.

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Rickels, Laurence A. *I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 2010. 440 pages; index, bibliography.

I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick marks the latest offering from Rickels in a complex body of work in both German and English that includes *The Case of California* (1999), *The Vampire Lectures* (1999), and *Nazi Psychoanalysis* (2002). The title itself speaks of the breadth of play involved in this undertaking. Is it actually *I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick*? Or perhaps the title is as it is on the cover with its abutment of self and Other: *I Think I am* [with black type] *Philip K. Dick* [with white type]. What is additionally striking as one reads the book is the missing “therefore” of Enlightenment thought. Given Dick’s fractured and sometimes psychotic perspective, the title is not, appropriately, *I Think; Therefore, I Am: Philip K. Dick*.

The alternate realities of Rickels’s title echo the indeterminacy of important existential questions in Dick’s oeuvre, such as “What is reality” and “What does it mean to be human?” Rather than argue for an answer to these questions, Rickels presents a correlation of ideas, an interdisciplinary “relay of texts” (19) offering connections between the deep subjectivity of schizophrenic case studies, Walter Benjamin’s Frankfurt School-inspired insights, and, of course, the work of Philip K. Dick. In a wide-ranging reading early in the book that includes Goethe, Byron, and Tolkien (especially his translation of *Pearl*), Rickels notes that “My one and only practical critique over the years has been to inquire of every system of thought and belief what it does with and for the dead” (7). Rickels’s analysis, therefore, begins with Dick’s work of unmourning for his dead twin sister Jane: “The embedded moment is the blind spot along for fantasy’s drive for super-vision—so super as to be dead, or rather dead-dead, eternally alive” (74). Dick, of course, like us, wondered often where the dead go, and Rickels’s psychoanalytical mapping attempts to retrace the author’s own research into schizophrenia. This blurring of the boundary between sane and insane then develops into a deeper interrogation within the demilitarized zone of Dick’s work, a place where neither readers nor characters can be sure about the distinction between reality/simulation, spirit/material, alive/dead, and past/future.

Dick’s work cannot be merely read, flung out as it often was at warp speed from within the event horizon of extreme postmodern angst. The

literature of psychosis itself, in fact, appears to have been the final frontier for Dick, the last place left to colonize, and sometimes, as in *Lies, Inc.*, it becomes Whale's Mouth, the undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveler returns. Rickels also notes that later works such as *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* and *Ubik* "refine and reflect the combination first tried out in *Martian Time-Slip*" (120) of unstable temporal realities. This theme of scrambled ontology, first noted in Rickels's title by the absence of the causal "therefore," later develops "though the archetypes of the collective unconscious [that] recur in a variety of altered states" (153). What begins as a quest to create meaning in *Galactic Pot-Healer*, for example, becomes dangerously pathological in *Dr. Bloodmoney*, where "Dick projects mass death resulting from convergence between psychosis and modern physics via the figure of Dr. Bluthgeld" (153). Psychosis and technology work together in a secularization of Christian teleology: no one can return in part because reality has an annoying habit of always changing. The ontological scramble becomes an epistemological one: if reality is always shifting, how can we know what is real?

The last part of the book explores Dick's other big question: what does it mean to be human? Here empathy is defining, and this quality, like the impossibility of fantasy and psychotic vision, is disembodied like Dick's tragically deceased twin Jane. Just as the "digitally enhanced" (an ironically tactile phrase) final cut of *Blade Runner* blurs the distinction between audience and fiction, "Dick's alternate reality of mourning or unmourning as half-life [,] views the deceased and the survivor as always having in common that they both lost each other. Therefore it proves possible to travel through a time in which one cannot decide who died on whom" (417). Similarly, the difference between human and non-human, human and replicant, dead and undead, past and future, real and unreal, collapses since each is a projection of the Other.

I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick is a complex work well worth the effort of exploration. Importantly, the book has application beyond the study of Dick and other writers and film-makers he influenced. Rickels does not merely invite readers to see Dick's work the way he does; instead, the theoretical framework invites a broader vision that includes and projects outward from science fiction and fantasy.

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Book Reviews

An invitation to reviewers

In forthcoming issues, *Studies in Popular Culture* will continue to include reviews of books in the field. Any scholar who wishes to review a book should contact the Book Review Editor, David Janssen, at djanssen@gdn.edu. Those whose work is unfamiliar to the editor may wish to send a CV.

Reviewers may suggest a book to be reviewed or request to be assigned one from among those sent to the editor. Reviews should be approximately 500-1,000 words long and should (like article submissions) be emailed as an attachment of a Microsoft Word document with the contributor's surname in the file name. Queries are welcome.

Contributors

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Carol-Ann Farkas is an associate professor of English and the Director of Writing Programs at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences in Boston. She teaches first-year expository writing, as well as elective courses in 19th century British fiction and Literature and Medicine. Her research focuses on representations of women and wellness in popular culture; her next published article will be appearing in *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* in early 2011, entitled “Fictional Medical Women and Moral Therapy in the Late-Nineteenth Century: Daughters of Aesculapius, Mothers to All.”

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Dr. Lynnette Porter teaches humanities and communication courses at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida. She has written sev-

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Carlos Ramet earned a B.A. in film production and English literature from the University of Southern California, holds a Master's degree from San Francisco State University, and completed his Ph.D. in English at the University of Illinois-Chicago. He currently serves as Executive Assistant to the President/Executive Director of Public Affairs at Saginaw Valley State University in Michigan. He has published fourteen short stories and more than twenty-three journal articles, book reviews, or encyclopedia articles. His book *Ken Follett: The Transformation of a Writer* (The Popular Press, Bowling Green, Ohio, 1999) was the first full-length critical analysis of Follett published by a major university press.

Matthew Schneider-Mayerson is a graduate student in the Department of American Studies at the University of Minnesota, and completed his B.A. at Yale University. His research interests are in post-war American popular culture; he has published and forthcoming articles on the connection between 9/11 and *The Da Vinci Code*, the libertarian politics of alternate history novels, and the racial formation of the National Basketball Association in the 1970s and 1980s. His dissertation explores the "peak oil" movement—its culture and politics, its relation to American exceptionalism, and the effect of the Internet on twenty-first century social movements.