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Heroin / Heroine: Addiction as Narrative and Transgression in *Junky* and *Trainspotting*

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí bakalářské práce (supervisor):

Mgr. Miroslava Horová, Ph.D.

Zpracovala (author):

Helena Roušová

Studijní obor (subject):

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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heroin, addiction, identity, transgression, solitude, homosexuality, politics

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Abstract

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to conduct a comparative analysis of two novels representing transgressive fiction and literature of addiction. These two novels, *Junky* (1977) (first published as *Junkie* in 1953) by William Burroughs and *Trainspotting* (1993) by Irvine Welsh, deal with drug addicts and their transgressive behaviour. They describe the choices the main characters make when they try to break free from the confines of society and their search for identity. The protagonists of both texts try to escape from the rules and expectations society imposes on them, they cross the boundaries of law, morals, and ethics; they transgress.

The origins of the term "transgressive fiction" are explained and transgressive techniques and transgressive features in both texts are analysed. The transgressive potential of the subtitle of the first edition of *Junkie* is explained and moments of undermining middle-class identity and mocking American lifestyle are discussed. In *Trainspotting*, the transgressive elements involve, among others, the psychological effect of humour in grave and/or graphic transgressive situations and the manipulation of others using intellectual superiority. In both texts, channelling of transgression through violence plays an important part. Violence is seen as the only avenue for emotional response.

The different narrative styles of the texts are compared - Burroughs' flat and emotionless narration is in contrast with Welsh's multiple narrators who deliver a fuller picture of society and offer a wider range to play with different narrative tones and styles. The use of sensual descriptions is debated. The main sensual organ in *Junky* is eyes, Burroughs' descriptions follow the trajectory of eyes as if it were a camera lens. Welsh's descriptions are not only visual, but also tangible, aural as well as olfactory.

One chapter is dedicated to the search for identity. The historical background of the attitude of The United States towards homosexuality and the implications of McCarthyism,

particularly the so-called Lavender Scare, are explained as they play an important part in Lee's search for identity. In *Trainspotting*, the search for identity of the protagonists is influenced by consumer capitalism and competitive individualism brought about by Margaret Thatcher. Welsh connects these political measures with transgressive elements in the text.

A crucial transgressive feature is the use of language. Both texts use drug jargon which serves as a means of identification with a certain social group. *Trainspotting* is written mostly in Scots dialect. Language in *Trainspotting* serves as a means of shifting power and as a means of distinguishing various narrators. Welsh's gift for voices and dialogue makes the text very readable and authentic.

The last part of the thesis deals with the role of women in the texts. It elaborates on the fact that female figures are almost absent in *Junky*. Burroughs' deliberate exclusion of his marital life in *Junky* is discussed. Welsh's *Trainspotting* is also focused mainly on men and their damaged masculinity but women are present, too. In general, women in *Trainspotting* are stronger than men, they are liberated and confident, which is perhaps surprising in the traditionally male-dominated world of the working class.

The transgressive elements pervade the texts on all levels. The narrative techniques of the texts reflect the transgressive acts, the main protagonists are trying to escape and break free from the limitations imposed on them by society. The authors open taboo topics and portray uncomfortable situations. By creating an acute sense of discomfort for the readers they make them ask questions and raise awareness about unpopular or openly vilified topics.

Abstrakt práce

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat a porovnat dvě knihy, které reprezentují transgresivní fikci a závislostní literaturu. Tyto dvě knihy, *Feták* (1977) od Williama Burroughse (poprvé publikováno v roce 1953) a *Trainspotting* (1993) od Irvina Welshe, se zabývají drogově závislými a jejich transgresivním chováním. Popisují, jaké volby činí hlavní postavy, když se snaží vyprostit z omezení daných společností a při hledání své identity. Hlavní postavy obou textů se snaží uniknout před pravidly a očekáváními, jež na ně vyvíjí společnost, překračují hranice zákona, morálky, etiky, chovají se transgresivně.

V této práci je vysvětlen původ výrazu "transgresivní fikce" a jsou analyzovány transgresivní techniky a transgresivní prvky obou textů. Práce popisuje transgresivní potenciál podtitulu první edice knihy *Feták* a rozebírá části, které podřívají identitu střední třídy a vysmívají se americkému životnímu stylu. V knize *Trainspotting* se transgresivní prvky zabývají, mimo jiné, psychologickým efektem humoru ve vážných a/nebo graficky transgresivních situacích a využíváním intelektuální převahy k manipulaci ostatních lidí. V obou textech hraje důležitou roli násilí jako nástroj transgrese. Násilí je jediný způsob, který dokáže vyvolat u hlavních protagonistů citovou odezvu.

V této práci se porovnávají rozdílné narativní styly obou textů - jednotvárný styl Burroughse, který úmyslně eliminuje veškeré emoce, je v kontrastu s mnohačetnými vypravěči Welshe. Větším počtem vypravěčů dociluje Welsh ucelenějšího vykreslení společnosti a nabízí širší škálu charakteru a stylu vyprávění. V práci se rozvádí, s jakými způsoby smyslového vnímání pracují autoři při popisu věcí a událostí. Hlavním smyslovým orgánem v knize *Junky* jsou oči, Burroughs popisuje věci, jako by jeho oči sledovaly trajektorii objektivu kamery. Welshův způsob popisu není jen vizuální, ale i haptický, zvukový a čichový.

Jedna kapitola je se věnuje hledání identity. Předkládá historické pozadí toho, jak se Spojené státy stavěly k homosexualitě, hovoří o implikaci mccarthismu, zejména o události známé pod jménem "Lavender Scare", protože tyto události hrály klíčovou roli v Leeově hledání identity. Hlavní protagonisté v knize *Trainspotting* jsou při svém hledání identity ovlivněni hlavně tržním kapitalismem a konkurenčním individualismem, který zavedla Margaret Thatcherová. Welsh spojuje tato politická opatření s transgresivními prvky v textu.

Zásadním transgresivním prvkem je jazyk. Oba texty používají drogový žargon, jenž slouží jako nástroj k sounáležitosti s určitou společenskou skupinou. Převážná část knihy *Trainspotting* je napsána ve skotském dialektu. Jazyk zde vystupuje jako nástroj, který umožňuje přesouvat moc a slouží jako rozlišovací prvek každého vypravěče. Welshův vrozený dar pro dialog a jednotlivé hlasy činí text velmi čitelný a autentický.

Poslední část této bakalářské práce se zabývá rolí žen v analyzovaných textech. Práce akcentuje skutečnost, že ženské postavy se v knize *Feták* téměř nevyskytují, a rozvádí fakt, že Burroughs záměrně z knihy *Feták* vynechal svůj manželský život. Welshova kniha *Trainspotting* je také zaměřena převážně na muže a na jejich narušenou maskulinitu, v této knize se však vyskytují i ženy. Ženy v knize *Trainspotting* jsou obecně silnější než muži, jsou emancipované a sebevědomé, což je ve světě dělnické třídy, kde tradičně dominují muži, překvapivé.

Transgresivní prvky prostupují textem na všech úrovních. Narativní techniky obou textů zrcadlí transgresivní jednání, hlavní protagonisté se snaží uniknout a osvobodit od omezení, která na ně společnost uvaluje. Autoři otevírají tabuizovaná témata a vytváří nepříjemné situace. Tím, že čtenáře vystaví naléhavému nepříjemnému pocitu, u nich vyvolají řadu otázek a také povědomí o nepopulárních či otevřeně očerňovaných tématech.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	11
2. CHAPTER I: TRANSGRESSION AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES.....	14
2.1. Transgression in <i>Junky</i>	16
2.2. Transgression in <i>Trainspotting</i>	19
2.3. Narrative Style of <i>Junky</i>	22
2.4. Narrative Style of <i>Trainspotting</i>	25
2.5. Comparison of the Narrative Styles.....	26
3. CHAPTER II: THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY.....	29
3.1. Homosexual Identity in Cold War America.....	30
3.2. Working-class Identity in Thatcherite Scotland.....	33
3.3. Homosexuality and Gender Stereotypes.....	36
3.4. Language and Identity in <i>Junky</i>	41
3.5. Language and Identity in <i>Trainspotting</i>	43
4. CHAPTER III. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE TEXTS.....	48
4.1. Women in <i>Junky</i>	48
4.2. Women in <i>Trainspotting</i>	49
5. CONCLUSION.....	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	56

1. Introduction

The main objective of this thesis is to analyse and compare two classic novels that represent transgressive fiction and literature of addiction, *Junky* by William Burroughs (1977) (first published as *Junkie* in 1953) and *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh (1993). Both texts describe the life of drug addicts, the life on the fringe of society and relations between drug addicts and the outer world. Both authors deal with transgression and with the search for identity. Each of them germinated from a very different background (socially as well as geopolitically), and each of them points at different problems in their novels, pushing the limits of the genre in transgressive ways – these transgressive techniques are formal, discursive, as well as ethical and political. The aim of this thesis is to identify the transgressive features in both texts regarding the choices the characters make and the topics the authors address. This thesis will also attempt to explain the role of heroin in the search for identity, or, concurrently, at the time of the loss of identity, describe the narrative techniques, and elaborate on the issue of gender roles and treatment of women in both texts.

It is crucial to mention which edition of *Junky* was used in this study, the reason being that the first edition (published by Ace Books in 1953 under the title *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict*) and the second edition (by Penguin Books in 1977 under the title *Junky: The Definitive Text of Junk*) evince significant differences, far greater than just a different spelling of the title. A partial list of changes is included in the 1977 edition, however the full list of changes has never been catalogued. The first edition of *Junkie* was not even printed as a separate volume, it was bound back-to-back with *Narcotic Agent* (a reprint of Maurice Helbrant's memoir)¹, which was not an entirely bad move, as together they sold over

¹ *Narcotic Agent* was first published in 1941. It is a memoir of an employee for Federal Bureau of Narcotics and describes a drug trade in the period from the 1920s through the 1940s.

100,000 copies. Allen Ginsberg used a fitting expression for this first edition; he said *Junkie* was "69'd".²

The choice of primary literature was based not only on the subject matter - heroin, addiction, search for identity, transgression, but also on the fact that both of these novels are debut novels of the authors, and both of them had problematic reception due to their frankness and naturalistic, graphic depiction of the drug underworld. *Junky* was not the book that brought about Burroughs' fame; it was *Naked Lunch*, a brutal and grotesque satire which presents "images of cannibalism in order to illustrate the bloodthirsty nature of the capital approach to 'justice'".³ *Naked Lunch* was hard to digest for many - it was even banned in Boston and Los Angeles and underwent an obscenity trial. In 1966 *Naked Lunch* was defended successfully, which promoted the book immensely as well as making a name for its author. *Naked Lunch* is also seen as a transition text between Burroughs' more conventional works and his cut-ups (like the *Nova* trilogy). It is fair to say that there are two camps when it comes to perceiving Burroughs' work. As Oliver Harris (an expert on William Burroughs) says, Burroughs "acted as a godfather for literary countercultures from the Beats to the Cyberpunks and [...] those he does not repel, Burroughs fascinates."⁴ Towards the end of his career, Burroughs returned to more conventional style (*Cities of the Red Light*, 1980) which marked his commercial comeback.

The reception of *Trainspotting* was not as cold as the reception of *Junky* at the time of its release. *Junky* was also breaking the taboo topic of drugs, a topic that was very acute at the time of its release. The novel has many defects when it comes to narrative cohesiveness – this

² Allen Ginsberg, "Junkie: An Appreciation" (1977), in William Burroughs, *Junky* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008) 157 [15X-166].

³ Edward S. Robinson, "The Rise and Fall and Rise of William S. Burroughs", *Working With English: Medieval and Modern Language, Literature and Drama* (2006) 73. Accessed 25-05-2019 at <<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/documents/working-with-english/volume-2-1/robinson-the-rise-and-fall-and-rise-of-william-s.-burroughs.pdf>>

⁴ Oliver Harris, "Can You See a Virus? The Queer Cold War of William Burroughs", *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 33 No. 2 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 243. Accessed 15-05-2019 at <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27556645>>

will be analysed later in this thesis. The importance of *Junky* as an account of an era was not apparent at the time of its release. Due to its flaws and the anti-drug attitude of society, there was no indication of *Junky* making it into the ranks of classic literature. The negative criticism of *Junky* was therefore not surprising, even though it was promoted and supported by Allen Ginsberg and other members of Beat Generation who were already famous and their critical reviews carried significant weight. *Junky* was given second chance owing to *Naked Lunch* and to the loosening of attitude towards drugs in the 1960s. *Trainspotting* addresses the same taboo topic as *Junky* but is set and was received in an utterly different milieu. Welsh's advantage is the significant forty-year time span between the publication of *Trainspotting* and *Junky*. Since the 1960s, the public attitude towards drugs has been much more benevolent and experimental, and society had been presented with more books on a similar topic since the publication of *Junky*. Therefore, although shocking and uncomfortable, *Trainspotting* was criticised at a time when frankness about drugs was no longer as shocking and scandalous as in the 1950s and was received with less furore than *Junky*. Nonetheless, the early criticism of *Trainspotting* also displayed only lukewarm attitude. As the success of *Naked Lunch* accelerated the fame of all Burroughs' books (including *Junky*), there was also a point of acceleration in the positive reception of *Trainspotting*, especially following Danny Boyle's eponymous and vastly popular 1996 film adaptation.

Both books, *Junky* as well as *Trainspotting*, made a huge impact socio-culturally as well as aesthetically and are well known in the literary circles. Their contribution to world literature is apparent; they raise questions rarely asked and point at the impact of certain political measures. In *Junky* it is specifically The Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914 which put a significant number of American citizens outside of the law due to the fact that doctors could not legally prescribe opiates to their patients anymore. Addiction was not seen as a disease and those patients that were already addicted had to procure their drugs illegally. This led to a

wave of violence and crime. *Junky* touches upon this law only marginally at the beginning of the novel. Other political measures *Junky* addresses in greater detail are connected to the person of Joseph McCarthy, especially his heavy sanctions imposed on homosexuals. *Trainspotting* assails the political measures of Margaret Thatcher, her rejecting of state ownership of business and the socio-cultural repercussions that inevitably followed. She pressed individuals to go ruthlessly after their economic goals and to take responsibility for their life regardless of a wider or closer community. Those who were not lucky with their choices received no help from the state. It was the time of deep individualism and disintegration of community cooperation, and Welsh's novel reflects these issues on all its levels.

The principal focus of this thesis is transgression. The title of this thesis mentions heroine, but neither *Junky* nor *Trainspotting* have significant women characters, or heroines, at their disposal. Nevertheless, the treatment of women is an important issue that is dealt with in the last chapter of this thesis, but the heroine as a strong woman character of extraordinary qualities remains unoccupied in both novels. The titular heroine therefore serves as a discursive tool for word-play but is not further employed as an analytical device. The heroine connotes an important counterpart of a character's life, such as a partner or a role model. All the main characters struggle to form and sustain relationships, be it a partnership or a friendship. It requires certain social and personal skills, effort and tolerance, which none of the protagonists possess. All these traditional relationships are supplanted by heroin. In this manner, heroin occupies the position of the heroine in both the chosen texts.

2. Chapter I: Transgression and Narrative Techniques

Transgressive fiction is a genre exploring the notion that knowledge is gained at the edge of the experience. The term was coined by the American literary critic Michael Silverblatt in an

article "SHOCK APPEAL / Who Are These Writers and Why Do They Want to Hurt Us? The New Fiction of Transgression". This article was published in *Los Angeles Times* 1 August 1993. Silverblatt describes transgressive features mainly of two books that created a lot of discomfort: Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* and Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*. Silverblatt states that "the transgressive writer is more honest, knowing that all desire is unsafe, that all fantasy is trumped up style, that all transgression is a mixture of violation of style and personal risk".⁵ Transgressive fiction focuses on characters bound by the norms and expectations of society who try to break free from its confines, often in a way that is beyond the law, strictly prohibited or morally condemned. In simple words, they rebel. Often it is because they deal with pressing personal issues society either sweeps under the carpet or does not want to openly talk about (these issues can range from involvement with pornography, drug use, homosexual identity, violence, the trauma of death, or radical politics, just to list a few). As transgressive fiction makes either the reader or society feel uncomfortable or exposed, it was often banned in the past for being too obscene or vulgar. The protagonists of transgressive literature are often isolated, antisocial, mentally ill or otherwise unacceptable for society. The key themes of transgressive fiction are often isolation, amorality, deviancy, escape, or search for freedom. Both novels analysed in this thesis contain characters that demonstrate exactly these attributes. In *Junky* this character is William Lee (AKA Bill), a bored educated loner from a functional middle-class family whose performance at school, sports, friendships or jobs is mediocre. In *Trainspotting* the multiple protagonists/narrators come from dysfunctional and largely uneducated working-class families. The protagonists in both books struggle with identity, they feel hard-pressed, they try to break free from the confines of society by transgressive behaviour and harmful choices. They choose to use drugs; Lee because he wants to feel something, the protagonists in *Trainspotting* because they

⁵ Michael Silverblatt, "SHOCK APPEAL / Who are These Writers, and Why Do They Want to Hurt Us?: The New Fiction of Transgression", *Los Angeles Times*, (1 August 1993) Accessed 06-08-2019 at <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-08-01-bk-21466-story.html>>

do not want to feel anything. The protagonists in both books choose to act against the law, they act violently - Lee's sexual orientation is outlawed, Renton's sexual intercourse with a minor is illegal. They lie and scheme in order to achieve their temporary goals, be it drugs or evading incarceration. Both books reflect the transgressive acts of the main protagonists in the novels' narrative techniques. Welsh employs fragmentation, black humour and graphic bombast, Burroughs uses oppressive monotony and hum-drum tempering of interest.

2.1. Transgression in Junky

If the oeuvre of William Burroughs goes through the transgressive prism of Silverblatt's genre-defining theory, what comes out as an absolute winner is Burroughs' novel *Naked Lunch*. It is often this book that *Junky* is placed in context with and analysed. "[...] *Junky*'s transgressive value has been implicitly judged as something 'less' than *Naked Lunch*."⁶ A more accessible text (with regard to a linear narrative line, absence of flashbacks and flashforwards, the story being placed in a more realistic world where realistic rules apply) from Burroughs' first creative period, the novel *Junky*, was chosen for this analysis. Even though according to Edward S. Robinson "Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) displays a structural similarity to *Naked Lunch*",⁷ *Junky* serves the purpose of this analysis better, as both *Junky* and *Trainspotting* are the first novels of these writers. Debut novels are in general often limited in literary complexity because the authors are still searching for their distinctive writing style. In terms of literary competition both novels start from the same starting line. Both authors were unknown and inexperienced, and in this sense, they had the same starting conditions. William Burroughs' style changed dramatically throughout his writing career. As Oliver Harris says, "Burroughs' first novel is both absolutely distinct from everything he

⁶ V. S. Grivina, "Transgression in W. S. Burroughs's *Junky*", *Scientific Notes of HNPY in the Name of G. S. Skovorodi*, Issue 2 (2015) 90. Accessed 05-05-2019 at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.32949>>

⁷ Edward S. Robinson, 72.

would write after it, and yet impossible to read without encountering at every turn phantom traces of the writing to follow."⁸ Irvine Welsh, on the contrary, elaborated on the same style he used in *Trainspotting* in many novels that followed (e.g. the loose sequel *Porno* or the more experimental *Filth*).

The transgressive features in *Junky* surface on many levels. Apart from the topic - the most obvious transgressive element - one can find a transgressive tone in the subtitle of the first edition: *Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict*. The subtitle was added after Burroughs was pressed by Ace Publishers to add the word *Confessions* in order to attract larger audience. "At this intersection the first signs of Burroughs's transgressive aesthetics came out to the surface. A forced subtitle that begins with a word 'confessions' ends up mocking its own status: 'Confessions of and Unredeemed Drug Addict'."⁹ An unknown author is always an economic risk for a publisher. To increase the market value the publisher wants to approximate the unknown to the known. By adding the subtitle starting "*Confessions of [...]*" the potential reader / buyer might think of classic works of 19th-century transgressive literature dealing with violence and drug use, e.g. Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821) or James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Burroughs pays tribute to these in his subtitle *Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict*. After years of heavy heroin abuse and multiple withdrawal therapies, Burroughs proclaimed: "I have never regretted my experience with drugs. I think I am in better health now as a result of using junk."¹⁰ The most important words in this statement are the words "I think".¹¹ The statement is transgressive, and it is not supported by any facts or medical research. The words "I think" take us to the subjective, authentic world

⁸ Oliver Harris, Introduction to *Junky*, in William Burroughs, *Junky*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008) (1st published 1953) xi.

⁹ V. S. Grivina, 91.

¹⁰ William Burroughs, *Junky*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008) xl. (1st published 1953 as *Junkie*) All future page references to this edition (2008) will be included in parentheses in the text in the following format: (Burroughs, respective page).

¹¹ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

where Burroughs' rules apply. In *Junky*, Burroughs arrives at his own conclusions regarding drug use. Many of the references are of descriptive nature of a state or personal experience, some of them have a tinge of charlatanism, like the theory of orgones that Burroughs adopted from Wilhelm Reich. Burroughs mentions orgones only several times in *Junky*. The original chapter twenty-eight where he elaborated in detail about orgones was removed by the editors of Ace Publishers. It is added as Appendix 1 in the 1977 edition. In this chapter Burroughs writes that "Reich describes orgones as life energy of bluish colour that can change organic material. He created an orgone box that served for treating cancer. This inspired Burroughs to create his own orgone box to treat his withdrawal symptoms."¹²

Another moment of transgression is undermining the concept of middle-class identity. Burroughs does so, for example, by pointing out that the doctors' ability of decision making is based on ridiculous rules (such as knowing who the current president of the United States is) and that their cultural awareness is very limited (being unaware of the existence of Vincent Van Gogh). Lee tells a story of how he cut part of his finger off to impress somebody. He sees a parallel with Van Gogh's amputated ear and refers to his own act as a "Van Gogh kick" (Burroughs, xxxix). Lee had to explain his behaviour to a doctor in a lunatic asylum and describes the situation as follows: "The nut-house doctors had never heard of Van Gogh. They put me down for schizophrenia, adding paranoid type to explain the upsetting fact that I knew where I was and who was President of the U.S." (Burroughs, xxxix). Burroughs is ridiculing the system of questions that identify one as mentally inept. Knowing who the President of the U.S. was used to serve as a sign of sanity. And not knowing who Van Gogh was played no importance in the world of the "sane ones".¹³ Showing the absurdity of what is relevant and what is not in terms of identifying one as mentally disturbed and undermining the constrictive

¹² Burroughs, 134-135 (loosely recounted by the author of this thesis).

¹³ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

rules of middle-class identity scorns the society at large - it is uncomfortable, abnormal, and therefore transgressive.

Making fun of American lifestyle is another transgressive mode Burroughs delivers. The American lifestyle is based on the Puritan ideal of achieving a "good life"¹⁴ through persistent "hard work".¹⁵ Hard work implies the stereotype of a person that works every day, pays taxes, and places his work above everything else in life. In *Junky* Burroughs uses this label when describing a thief. "Norton was a hard-working thief and he did not feel right unless he stole something every day[...]" (Burroughs, 1). On a similar note, Burroughs describes the job of a drug peddler in terms of a social worker: "The job of peddler was a sort of public service that rotated from one member of the group to the other, the average term of office being about three months" (Burroughs, 25). Describing the illegal jobs in terms of ordinary jobs of hard-working people is yet again showing the transgressive mode of his text. The subversive effect of these transgressive elements leads to mocking the very ethos of America as a land of hard-working people building a Capitalist paradise.

2.2. Transgression in Trainspotting

All the literary, cinematic and theatrical work of Irvine Welsh focuses on taboo subject matter, therefore his work belongs to the transgressive genre. Irvine Welsh's work includes for example *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1995), *Filth* (1998), *Glue* (2001), *Porno* (2002) - a sequel to *Trainspotting*, *Skagboys* (2012) - a prequel to *Trainspotting*, and many more. *Trainspotting* in particular deals with drugs, violence (it also includes violence connected with football), gender issues, and dysfunctional communities. There is also a hint of pornography, but it is not the main issue in *Trainspotting*. Pornography is dealt with in greater detail in the sequel to *Trainspotting* called *Porno* (2002). The characters of *Trainspotting* are trying to

¹⁴ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

¹⁵ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

break free from the norms and expectations of society. Renton's famous monologue states that very blatantly: "Society invents a spurious convoluted logic to absorb and change people whose behaviour is outside its mainstream. [...] They won't let ye dae it [use smack], because it's seen as a sign of their ain failure."¹⁶ There is a similarity with Burroughs' *Junky* in pointing out that the government (and society) does not want to take responsibility connected with drug addiction and refuses to see and acknowledge why somebody might choose to take drugs instead of not taking drugs. Renton continues:

Choose us. Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting on a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit crushing game shows, stuffing fucking junk food into yer mooth. Choose rotting away, pissing and shiteying yersel in a home, a total fucking embarrassment to the selfish, fucked-up brats ye've produced. Choose life (Welsh, 187).

Renton despises society, its values, its limited choices. He listed what he considered the middle-class choice for a mediocre life, the life his parents want him to lead, society wants him to choose, but that he abhors. "Renton's resistance [...] works in response to what he sees as oppressive and futile societal norms."¹⁷ Renton wants to transgress, to break free. "Well, ah choose no to choose life. If the cunts cannae handle that, it's their fuckin problem" (Welsh, 188). Renton chose to step out of consumer society, or more accurately, not to enter it in the first place. Robert Morace sees Renton's choice of being a heroin user as "a potent floating signifier of social pathology, political dependence, and consumer capitalism."¹⁸ Renton's transgressive behaviour points at systematic deficiencies in a dysfunctional society focused on individualism, lacking social feeling and sense of community.

¹⁶ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (London: Vintage, 2001) 187. (1st published 1993). All future page references to this edition (2001) will be included in parentheses in the text in a format: (Welsh, respective page).

¹⁷ Christine L. Harold, "The Rhetorical Function of the Abject Body: Transgressive Corporeality in "Trainspotting", *JAC*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Fall 2000) 880. Accessed 13-05-2019 at <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20866369>>

¹⁸ Robert Morace, *Irvine Welsh*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) 46.

The act of transgressing is possible only when there are limitations. When there is no line one can step over, transgression is impossible. Michel Foucault describes the correlation between limit and transgression in these words:

Limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows.¹⁹

Many of the boundaries are not firmly fixed, they can move, change, disappear, appear anew. Therefore, transgression is a constant involvement with limits and boundaries. Crossing the boundaries can also be seen in injecting heroin into the body: "[...] the act of injecting heroin breaks the blood-air barrier, the borderline of skin between the inside and the outside of the body."²⁰ The hypodermic serves as a symbol of somatic transgression.

It is the taboo topics that Welsh openly talks about in *Trainspotting* that are the most conspicuous form of transgression. In the chapter titled "It Goes Without Saying" Welsh describes the cot death of baby Dawn. This chapter takes place in a drug den, not an ideal environment for a baby. Within thirty minutes from the discovery of the baby's death, all people present are under the influence of heroin to drown the bitter taste of the event. Welsh's use of names is significant. The baby's name was Dawn, it could symbolize a new beginning, a given chance. With Dawn being dead, the given chance is gone, there is only darkness left. Death of Dawn brought the dusk. Another very transgressive moment is in chapter "Bang to Rites" where Renton has sexual intercourse with his dead brother's pregnant wife. This part is probably hard to accept for most readers. Renton's attitude, his crude and emotionless depiction of sex on the bathroom floor, is appalling, yet, at the same time, Welsh managed to lighten the situation with black humour. "Ah think about how close she is tae poppin and how

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practise: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) 34.

²⁰ Neil Livingstone McMillan, "Tracing Masculinities in Twentieth-Century Scottish Men's Fiction", Ph.D Thesis submitted to the Department of Scottish Literature (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2000) 175. Accessed 23-06-2019 at <<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5190/1/2000McMillanPhD.pdf>>

far up ah am, an ah can see masel stickin it in the foetus's mooth. Some concept, a shag and a blow-job simultaneously" (Welsh, 219). The black humour in transgressive situations became Welsh's trademark. Without the black humour, the book would be very difficult to process. The psychological effect of humour in transgressive moments lightens the graphic scene, while retaining the transgressive potential, even highlighting it. By this method Welsh brings the reader into the liminal zone between pleasure and pain. Another transgressive element in this very passage is the fact that Renton takes what is not his. He penetrates his dead brother's pregnant wife. Renton takes advantage of alcohol, sorrow and his intellectual superiority to achieve his goal. This is an act of sexual and psychological violence, a denial of equality between the women and men. It is a quintessentially transgressive act, breaching the boundaries of accepted morality and the ways in which we perceive the ethos of the novel as a genre.

2.3. Narrative Style of Junky

Junky is a semi-autobiographical work. In order to classify a work as autobiography, it "usually involves the author and the narrator/protagonist sharing the same proper name."²¹ *Junky* was published under the pseudonym William Lee, the narrator's name is the same, using Burroughs' mother's maiden name. To make his point clear, Burroughs himself acknowledges in the preface to the novel that the text is autobiographical. The subtitle of the first print included *Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict*, which adds the confessional discourse, placing the novel in the long tradition of similar transgressive texts, implying a religious or moral resolution to the amoral content. In this literary genre "the reader, in a position of authority, responds to the writer in a variety of preordained ways, ranging from

²¹ Alex Wermer-Colan, "Implicating the Confessor: The Autobiographical Ploy in William S. Burroughs's Early Work", *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Winter 2010) 496. Accessed 07-05-2019 at <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41413713>>

congratulation to condemnation."²² Both of these attitudes are at play when reading *Junky*. It is very much dependent on the cultural background, set of moral codes, and openness of the reader. Condemnation usually comes when the story takes up cyclic tendencies and the same situation of forming the habit again and again repeats. It comes even more strongly into the reading experience when violent episodes are related, e.g. when Lee confesses about hitting his wife or mutilating a cat. "When my wife saw I was getting the habit again, she did something she had never done before. [...] My wife grabbed the spoon and threw the junk on the floor. I slapped her twice across the face..." (Burroughs, 97). Lee's wife's words where she pleads with Lee: "Don't you want to do anything at all? [...] It's like all the lights went out." (Burroughs, 7) were not taken on board by Lee. Lee's wife has no significance for Lee, she does not even have a name in the novel. Her abrupt appearances in *Junky* create a lot of questions on the part of the reader. These questions remain unanswered. The novel, in its matter-of-fact wry style of writing, lacks emotions. Therefore even this passage describing domestic violence which, under normal circumstances, calls for emotions, is written without sentiment. The passage describing a fight with a cat is a significant one; it is one of the very few moments when Lee expresses emotions:

I brought my face down to touch the cat's nose with mine, and the cat scratched at my face. [...] I held the cat out at arm's length, slapping it back and forth, across the face with my free hand. The cat screamed and clawed me, then started spraying piss all over my pants. I went on hitting the cat, my hands bloody from scratches. The animal twisted loose and ran into the closet. [...] "Now, I'll finish the bastard off," [...] Sweat was running down my face. I was trembling with excitement (Burroughs, 103).

This passage stands out in the otherwise flat and emotionless text. The impact of the expressed emotions is perceived negatively by the reader because the emotions are caused by violence. Violence is the only avenue for emotions left in the character's responses. Moments where Burroughs describes emotions are very scarce in *Junky*. Without emotions the text feels flat, monotonous, at times even soporific. The lift from the reader's stupor is delivered by the

²² Alex Wermer-Colan, 497-498.

specific vocabulary of the junky argot. The openness and honesty of the narrator balance the dry laconic tone of the text. The openness and honesty, which are certainly a benefit to the text, are only selective, however. As will be mentioned later in the text, Burroughs wanted to leave his marital life out of the book. He created an iconic identity as a drug user; he generated a paradigm for his future writing style. Other narrative techniques are at play in his work, though, and as critics have observed, "addiction is an important matrix, but that still does not make it Burroughs' ground any more than it makes *Junky* a blueprint for all of Burroughs' work."²³

V. S. Grivina came up with an observation about narration in *Junky*. She observes: "Because the narration in *Junky* comes from Lee "post-addiction", the reader never gets the chance to meet Lee "before addiction". Thus we are presented with the transformation of a character whom we never get to know in the first place."²⁴ Looking at the narration and narrator from this point of view does not really make much sense. Grivina does not mention Lee "during addiction", which is also a very important part of Lee, maybe even the most important. There is no clear indication that all the text came into existence in the "post-addiction" time. If Grivina meant that the character was not described before he started experimenting with narcotics, that has to be disregarded as the Prologue to *Junky* offers description of Lee "before addiction" and the first pages of the novel present Lee "before addiction" too. The subject matter of *Junky* is heroin and addiction, not the comparison of Lee before, during and after addiction. The narrator's choice of when and how to present certain facts and particular details can emphasize the gravity of the situation or, on the contrary, lighten its impact. The narrator has no obligation to include the whole time frame and every single fact. The form of presentation of some facts in *Junky* is debatable - the problem is not the absence of Lee before addiction as Grivina states, but the abrupt appearances of Lee's wife

²³ Oliver Harris, "Can You See a Virus?", 246.

²⁴ V. S. Grivina, 93.

(discussed in the thesis chapter "Women in *Junky*) and chapters with discordant writing style (discussed in the thesis chapter "Homosexuality and Gender Stereotypes").

2.4. Narrative Style of *Trainspotting*

The narrative technique of *Trainspotting* cannot be described in simple terms as there are nine different narrators. This fragmentary nature was hard to digest for some critics; Mark Brockington says that it was "hard to call it a novel, more a ragged accretion of short stories,"²⁵ and Sarah Hemming sees it as "a series of unrelated episodes".²⁶ The narrators appear without being introduced, therefore it is difficult for the reader to identify who is speaking. Both above-mentioned critiques are understandable; the fragmentary chaotic style gives the impression of unrelated short stories. Nevertheless, very soon, the reader discovers that the stories are interlinked, that the narrative is very complex, and the plot, although seemingly chaotic, is linear. Parts of the narrative are peppered with stream-of-consciousness style. The different narrators offer their distinct points of view, the world is seen through their eyes and judged through their respective knowledge and experience. Eight of the narrators relate the story in the first-person, and sometimes their flow of words is interrupted by a third-person omniscient narrator that talks from the position of authority over the text. This omniscient narrator is also projected as a voice talking from the position of "the other / not one of us / the opponent".²⁷ The reader tends to pay more attention to this voice in order to reveal a potential trick or deception directed from above. The narrators take irregular turns, and each has a specific pattern of speech, which is their sign of identification. The story revolves around four main male characters, Mark "Rent Boy" Renton, Daniel "Spud" Murphy, Francis "Franco" Begbie and Simon "Sick Boy" Williams. The majority of the story is told by

²⁵ Michael Brockington, "Poisoned Haggis" *Vancouver Review* (Fall/Winter 1995) Accessed 01-07-2019 at <<http://www.minusblue.ca/writing/phaggis.html>>

²⁶ Sarah Hemming, "Grim Wit in a Drug Wasteland", *Financial Times*, (21 December 1995) 11.

²⁷ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

the pivotal character, Mark Renton. The system of various narrators offers a richer picture of the community the characters represent. When criticism comes from multiple narrators, it has a much bigger impact on the reader. The heterogeneity of the novel is achieved through the fact that each narrator uses a different way of speaking. This topic will be described in detail in the thesis chapter "Language and Identity in *Junky / Trainspotting*".

2.5. Comparison of the Narrative Styles

The writing styles of both novels are very different due to the nature of the literary style. *Junky* is semi-autobiography and *Trainspotting* is fiction. Both novels have a very catchy and appropriate first sentence. The opening line of the novel has a difficult role to fulfil. It should pull readers in, and it doesn't matter whether it is done through the content of the sentence or through its form. Both novels, *Junky* as well as *Trainspotting*, revolve around the narcotic culture and this is clearly stated from the first sentence. The first sentence of *Junky* is: "My first experience with junk was during the War, about 1944 or 1945" (Burroughs, 1). *Trainspotting* follows a similar line: "The sweat was lashing oafay Sick Boy; he wis trembling" (Welsh, 3). Very early on, both novels start to develop in a different way. *Junky* is written very much as non-fiction. Burroughs uses short sentences, short paragraphs, he states facts, the development of the plot is limited and the narrative lacks emotions. Burroughs adds his own speculations and conclusions which are not scientifically backed, therefore *Junky* is not non-fiction, it only bears a resemblance of such in its narrative form. Harris remarks that

Burroughs' speculations about addiction have turned out to be extraordinarily prescient, literally prophetic, but others show him up as an amateur on his soapbox, a crackpot eccentric; talking about "orgones," Burroughs admits here that he might be taken 'for lunatic'.²⁸

Burroughs' narrative style places *Junky* on the borderline between genres. It is a very intricately poised semi-autobiography; it is not non-fiction or a memoir, as the author would

²⁸ Oliver Harris, Introduction to *Junky*, xxxi.

often claim, but it is not pure fiction, either. Burroughs' later writing style can be categorised as a cut-up technique, but this does not apply to *Junky*. What can be said about *Junky* with certainty is that it is a prime example of a transgressive novel, also subverting the docu-fiction line of the American 1950s (remember Burroughs' scathing review of Capote's *In Cold Blood*). The genre categorization of *Trainspotting* is much easier, it is fiction. In fiction, the author and the narrator are not interchangeable. Even though all the clues lead to the assumption that the character of Mark Renton is the closest to the mindset of Irvine Welsh, it is only the reader's assumption. In *Junky*, on the contrary, Lee equals Burroughs, as far as the narrative concept is concerned.

Another similar narrative feature of the two novels is the wry, laconic style of writing, but the effect of this style is different in each book. *Junky* comes across as dull and monotonous with the occasional joke alleviating the atmosphere, whereas *Trainspotting*, although also wry and at times seemingly emotionless, offers a scathing dynamic narrative full of black humour. Welsh experiments with language on many levels, he uses puns and orthographic modification of words, especially in the chapter "House Arrest". When Renton goes through heavy withdrawal symptoms, the words are capitalised and scattered on the page chaotically as thoughts that go through Renton's mind. The quick passing of time is expressed by words that are not separated: "Yefuckinkilledme litmefuckindie junkedupootyirfuckinheids watchinthefuckinwaws [...]" (Welsh, 196). The emphasis of the word is expressed by repetition of letters: "Is this sllllleeeeeeeeepppppppp" (Welsh, 196). Welsh experimented with visual modification in his novel *Filth*, where one narrative voice is a tapeworm and its speech is delivered in an elongated shape resembling its body which covers the original text more and more as the tape worm grows. Welsh also offers the reader a bespoke acoustic experience due to his phonetic transcription of the words in Scots dialect. Non-Scottish readers sometimes have to voice the words in order to be able to deduce their meaning. The narrative style of the

two texts also differs in how the main characters describe the world around them and how much of their inner thinking they reveal to the reader. Lee in *Junky* hardly ever expresses his feelings and his course of thought. When he describes things around him, his main sense of perception are his eyes. His feelings are restricted to a description of pain in the onset of withdrawal effects. The narration in *Trainspotting*, on the other hand, often takes the form of a monologue, it is sometimes delivered in the stream of consciousness mode, hence the reader is invited into the narrator's train of thought. Albeit a great part of the text is very matter-of-fact, the facts are often ambiguous and offer a sarcastic take on the given subject matter which keeps the reader alert. Welsh's detailed description engages more senses. His description of feelings is not limited to the description of pain and suffering, he also describes joy and exaltation. "Take yir best orgasm, multiply the feeling by twenty, and you're still fuckin miles off the pace. My dry, cracking bones are soothed and liquefied by ma beautiful heroine's caresses" (Welsh, 11). In this sentence Welsh places the drug in the position of the heroine. They are interconnected. This sentence is the original inspiration for the title of this thesis. He describes smells too "[...] pungent shower of skittery shite" (Welsh, 94), "foostie-minged fucker" (Welsh, 159), "[...] powerful ivy smell" (Welsh, 219). There are references to music, which adds to the acoustic experience of the reader. Iggy Pop, The Smiths, The Clash, help the reader to picture the ambient culture of the 1980s and they immediately transport the reader and help him cross the boundaries and drop their guard, they help the reader transgress together with the main protagonists, in a multi-sensory capacity. *Junky's* narrator often uses repetitive ways of describing things. *Trainspotting*, with its variety of different speakers, offers diversity in the language as well as the narrative style.

At the beginning of each novel, there is a moment that frames the whole plot. It is a presentiment of where the book is headed. In *Junky*, such a moment is described in the prologue. "I recall hearing a maid talk about opium and how smoking opium brings sweet

dreams, and I said: 'I will smoke opium when I grow up'" (Burroughs, xxxvii). And he did what he adumbrated. Lee ended up as an opiate addict, the unredeemed one, who is incessantly in search of the next hit. In *Trainspotting* Welsh also used a sentence at the beginning of the story that frames the plotline of the entire book. The drug dealer Mother Superior says: "Nae friends in this game. Jist associates" (Welsh, 6). Even though the novel talks about the adventures of Leith friends, they all prove to be ruthless individuals. Renton's final betrayal when he steals money from his friends confirms that the "naw friends in this game" comment / dictum is true. Both novels manifest transgressive elements by framing the plotline in the ways described above. *Junky's* "I will smoke opium when I grow up" (Burroughs, xxxvii) didn't end up a mere child's whim. Lee kept his word and by becoming an addict he entered the criminal world. *Trainspotting's* "Nae friends in this game. Jist associates" (Welsh, 6) outlined the world without trust. Renton became a thief and a traitor. Both, Lee as well as Renton, wanted to break free from the confines of society and its expectations and made transgressive choices.

3. Chapter II: The Search for Identity

The search for identity is a lengthy inward process and often it does not provide a clear and simple answer of who we are, but it can define the seeker negatively, specifying who he/she is not. The pursuit of the meaning of life is an omnipresent urge of mankind, a subject matter studied by philosophers since the ancient times with never ceasing fervour. The answer is not to be learned from a single entry in a book; it has to be lived, experienced, and even that is sometimes not enough. During the journey, one experiences moments of hope, success, but also despondency, misery and loss. The search for identity is also connected very closely with the need to belong, need to be part of something one resonates with and not part of something that one disagrees with or even abhors. Both novels that are analysed in this thesis show the

struggle of the main characters during their search for identity. The characters manifest transgressive behaviour as means of identification or a way of belonging. The world of drugs, violence, use of rude language, their sexual orientation, their sexual fiascos, these all play role in the characters' search for identity.

3.1. Homosexual Identity in Cold War America

For Burroughs, the search for identity was delineated by the fact that he belonged to two social groups that were despised and persecuted the most, leaving aside ethnic and racial, as well as political persecution, of course. He was a narcotics addict and a homosexual. The period starting shortly after the WWII, the so-called Cold War America, was strictly against homosexuals. Burroughs, even though he had a wife and a child, came out in the 1950s. He didn't feel safe, because, as Corber writes, "[...] they aim to incarcerate all undesirables, that is anyone who does not function as an interchangeable part in their antihuman Social Economic set-up."²⁹ Homosexuals in America in the 1950s, the era of McCarthyism, were systematically fired from state employment. Joseph McCarthy (an American Senator between 1947 and 1957) wanted to disseminate a federal-wide moral panic. Most famous for its persecution of communists or purported communist agents, a systematic purge with a strong sense of ethnic and racial discrimination, the wider area of McCarthyistic persecution included homosexuality and other forms of non-heteronormative sexual identity. He labelled homosexuals a "security risk".³⁰ This anti-homosexual campaign is referred to as the "Lavender Scare"³¹ and led to numerous suicides amongst gays and lesbians. Such was the ambient political atmosphere for Burroughs' coming out. It is important to stress the sequence

²⁹ Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in the Cold War: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 104.

³⁰ David K. Johnson, "The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Oct., 2004) 529. Accessed 02-07-2019 at <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3704539>>

³¹ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

of Burroughs's addiction and homosexuality. He was first homosexual and later became a narcotics addict, not vice versa. Heroin, the drug of Burroughs' choice, lessens sexual appetite, eliminates desire and it is technically impossible for a male heroin user to perform intercourse. In this light, using heroin could be seen as running away from problems arising from being an active homosexual in an era less than congenial. "Junk short-circuits sex. The drive to non-sexual sociability comes from the same place sex comes from, so when I have an H or M shooting habit I am non-sociable" (Burroughs, 104). Homosexuality and related problems are mentioned in the book but are marginal. The primary focus is addiction and crime connected with it. Society is not prepared to see drug addicts as victims, and this applies not only to the society of the 1950s (the time of the first publication) or the 1970s (which was a lot more open-minded society towards drugs) but also for the society of 2019 (society with plethora of scientific information and a much more informed and to some degree liberalised sense of drug use). Burroughs took on himself a very difficult task, he wanted to "place some of the responsibility for the problems that are associated with drug use on the United States government."³² By revealing the truth about drugs in 1953, Burroughs performed a brave and revolutionary act. By publishing *Junky* he helped society to better understand the reality of addiction and to discover how complex the problem really was – apart from its documentary or clinical value, the novel lays bare the transgressive potential of the evolving genre as it tackles the structural and ethical limitations of tradition to reach out to the manifold issues arising from 20th-century lifestyle overhaul and wider socio-cultural evolution.

It would be simplistic to conclude that Burroughs started using heroin because of the politics of the United States in the 1950s. Such conclusion would be neither fair nor correct. Why did Burroughs build his identity as a drug icon? Why did he choose this path? William

³² Kurt Hemmer, ed. Kurt Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, (New York: Facts On File, 2007) 163.

Burroughs was a loner suffering from nightmares and anxiety, a well-educated boy from a comfortable middle-class family, with a trust of 150\$ a month (a substantial sum in the 1930s), who feels uninspired, bored, empty and tends to "drift into solo adventures" (Burroughs, xxxviii) such as "breaking into houses, shooting chickens, or reckless driving" (Burroughs, xxxviii). In *Junky* Burroughs explains that this form of transgressive behaviour arising from long-lasting ennui gave him at least some emotional high in his otherwise boring life. Ennui, often a result of lack of occupation, interest or enthusiasm, and, crucially, an impending sign of Western modernity, disappeared when Lee descended into the world of drugs and addiction. He changed one form of transgressive behaviour for another. In the Prologue to *Junky* he writes:

I was greatly impressed by an autobiography of a burglar, called *You Can't Win*. The author claimed to have spent a good part of his life in jail. It sounded good to me compared with the dullness of a Midwest suburb where all contact with life was shut out (Burroughs, xxxviii).

So far, Burroughs (AKA Lee) comes across as a slightly spoiled adolescent without a clear direction in life. There is no "must" or "have to"³³ in his life. Therefore, when asked why he started to use narcotics his answer is not at all surprising: "You become a narcotics addict because you do not have strong motivations in any other direction. Junk wins by default. I tried it as a matter of curiosity. I drifted along taking shots when I could score. I ended up hooked" (Burroughs, xl). This quotation sums up the answer. The fact that Burroughs was a drug addict and a homosexual gave a clear indication of his identity to the American authorities. During the Cold War, the drug addict, as well as sexual deviant (meaning the official status of homosexuality at the time), fell under a "new category for human identity, the psychopath."³⁴ This shift from a condition to an identity meant that those people were "constitutively different from ordinary people"³⁵ and fell under heavy scrutiny. Burroughs,

³³ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

³⁴ Alex Wermer-Colan, 503.

³⁵ Alex Wermer-Colan, 503.

finally having a direction in life, found his identity. In the last paragraph of the prologue to *Junky* (which is also a very brief summary of the following text) he writes: "I have learned the junk equation. Junk is not, like alcohol or weed, a means to increase enjoyment of life. Junk is not a kick. It is a way of life" (Burroughs, xli). Finding a way of life, finding a place of belonging is a process of searching for identity. Lee built his identity around heroin, his acts of transgression woke feelings in him which were otherwise dulled by society and its expectations. The overall transgressive potential of his novel remains part of the reading experience – and its overarching ethos is ultimately up to the individual reader.

3.2. Working-class Identity in Thatcherite Scotland

The 1980s in Great Britain are indivisibly connected with the political figure of Margaret Thatcher. She was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom between 1979 and 1990, exactly in the period *Trainspotting* is set in. The historical context in which both novels were written is of supreme importance. *Junky* was written as a reaction to McCarthyism in the United States, and *Trainspotting* was in turn a reaction to certain political steps brought about by Margaret Thatcher. Her political measures were focused on boosting the economy at all cost and discrediting the notion of the social safety net. Her advocating of consumer capitalism and competitive individualism encouraged people to selfishly fulfil their economic aims at the cost of breaking the sense of community and social belonging. She liberalised the free market, privatised public services and her steps led to the demise of heavy industry and manufacturing. Heavy industry was a source of income for many in northern England and Scotland.

Trainspotting is set in Leith, a very poor area of Edinburgh where the working class lived, in the 1980s. With traditional working-class jobs disappearing, the level of unemployment being astronomical, majority of the families were dysfunctional, and the

traditional role models of strong family ties and the man being the bread winner did not apply for the youth of the 1980s. "In such socio-economic scenario, the Scottish working-class youth became a vulnerable, marginalised subgroup, forced to deprivation and unemployment."³⁶ The loss of traditional values left a hollow space of emptiness that was filled with selfishness and individualism. The mirror image of ruthless individualism and selfishness promoted by Thatcher can be traced through the whole novel, but the most evident moment of individualism is revealed at the end of the book. The novel ends with Renton stealing money obtained from selling heroin, money that belonged to all four main protagonists, thus committing a colossal betrayal. He fled to Amsterdam and cut off all his ties to the Leith community, friends and family. This presents a rather a pessimistic ending of the book, but it is also very open-ended. Looking at the ending through the Thatcherite prism, Renton is the winner in the capitalist game of the survival of the fittest. "He had done what he wanted to do. He could never go back to Leith, to Edinburgh, even to Scotland, ever again. There, he could not be anything other than he was. Now, free from them all, for good, he could be what he wanted to be. He'd stand or fall alone" (Welsh, 344). The grim reality of the situation in Scotland made Renton act, he used the opportunity to become economically independent, he acted in accordance with the Thatcherite notion of economic efficiency, he triumphed in terms of consumer capitalism. If one uses Welsh's rhetoric, Margaret Thatcher could also be labelled the heroin of conservative liberalism. Welsh didn't hesitate to turn this into a joke when he made Renton apply her economical views on drugs: "On the issue of drugs, we wir classical liberals, vehemently opposed tae state intervention in any form" (Welsh, 53).

The above-mentioned situations point at the unpopular moves Thatcher implemented and show their impact on society. Welsh didn't stay at implicit hints, he went further and

³⁶ Ángela Rivera Izquierdo, "Befriending the Other: Community and Male Camaraderie in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*", *ES Review, Spanish Journal of English Studies* 38 (February 2017) 90. Accessed 10-06-2019 at <<https://doi.org/10.24197/ersjes.38.2017.89-112>>

described the notion of hatred towards the Iron Lady explicitly. When a frail woman approaches Johnny, a junkie who passes himself off as Falkland Veteran and begs in order to obtain money for drugs, she spills her sorrow about the death of her son at him. "Ma Brian was a Royal Scot, Brian Laidlaw. [...] Brian nivir came back. [...] Twinty-one he wis. [...] Ye know son, ah'll hate that Thatcher till ma dyin day. Thir isnae a day goes by whin ah dinnae curse her" (Welsh, 320). This situation describes the intervention in Northern Ireland, where many soldiers lost their lives. There is an unwritten ethos dictating moral response that some situations deserve to be venerated. The death of a son is one of them. Welsh transgresses this law ruthlessly and denigrates the army and ensuing benefaction by making Johnny list all the drugs he was going to purchase with the twenty-pound note he was given by the woman and say: "God bless ye, [...] Yes, god bless the Royal Jocks, and god bless NHS" (Welsh, 321). NHS stands for the National Health Service. Johnny is going to steal cyclozine from his friend Albi, medicaments Albi uses for cancer. Therefore the NHS provides Johnny with a ticket to better times. Johnny's unethical actions incite anger on the reader's part, as basic morals are disregarded, hence the reader is appalled - yet, Johnny's transgressive behaviour is in accordance with Thatcher's political agenda. Episodes like this show the world reduced to dog-eat-dog amorality dictated by the disenchantment arising from the ramifications of the adverse political climate of the 1980s.

Welsh's disdain of the British intervention in Northern Ireland was voiced multiple times in *Trainspotting*. The situation described above is a variation of a moment that happened a hundred pages earlier. Renton's brother Bill died on Her Majesty's Service on patrol near Crossmaglen, Northern Ireland. When Bill's death was glorified by a Minister, he promised that "his [Bill's] killers will be ruthlessly hunted down" (Welsh, 211). Renton's reaction is: "So they fuckin should. All the wey tae the fuckin Houses ay Parliament" (Welsh, 211). The politicians around Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s were a bone of contention for

Irvine Welsh. He sees the futile search of identity of the working-class youth in the 1980s as a result of Margaret Thatcher's political measures. His critique of the situation is often delivered through the character of Renton, at other times by the omniscient third-person narrator that keeps appearing in the novel. Sometimes the omniscient narrator talks about Renton as in the following example. Renton is in the middle of sexual intercourse with Dianne and he is afraid of coming too early. "Renton stopped feeling her and tried to imagine that he was shagging Margaret Thatcher, Paul Daniels, Wallace Mercer, Jimmy Savile and other turn-offs, in order to bring himself off the boil" (Welsh, 141). The omniscient narrator's standard English is the voice of power, the voice of Westminster politicians. The description of Renton's sexual episode in this tone raises his act on par with a political act. The two registers, standard English and the Scots dialect, are strictly separated. Standard English orders, castigates, prohibits and judges – it is normative. The Scots dialect defends and resists, subverting any and all authority. The criticism of political situation is delivered not only in a straightforward form of a wry comment – Welsh's choice of characters and description of their attitudes and choices they make in turn points at the trap they were led into, performing political critique. The political insinuations are many - *Trainspotting* is very critical towards the Thatcherite era and its ramifications in terms of sociological fallout. Welsh pictures Thatcher and her ruthless political measures as transgressive towards the sense of community and especially towards the working class.

3.3. Homosexuality and Gender Stereotypes

While the novel *Junky* is primarily focused on the search for identity through drugs, its sequel *Queer* deals with homosexuality and is more openly critical towards politics. Burroughs started writing *Queer* even before *Junky* was published and parts of the text originally intended as part of *Queer* were inserted into *Junky*, the reason being that Burroughs' publisher

Ace Books wanted the text to be longer. Oliver Harris says: "The large middle portion, [...] can now be identified as a light reworking of material taken from the first half of *Queer*."³⁷ This was not the only intrusion into the texts. Parts of the original text of *Junky* were deleted, parts were lost, the manuscript was pieced together by Allen Ginsberg who advocated its publishing with unrelenting fervour. Allen Ginsberg wrote in his Appreciation of *Junkie* in 1952: "It remains to be said that the publisher presents this book to the public for its originality of style and content in dealing with a highly controversial subject. [...] It is an important document; an archive of the underground; a true history of the true horror of a vice..."³⁸ It is comical that writing about the originality of style is coming from Ginsberg's pen, as it was him who was trying to put the pages of the manuscript together. The major part of the individual sheets was sent to him by Burroughs in a form of letters over a period of time. These letters were sporadic and there was no time linearity. The final stages of piecing *Junky* together was done by Burroughs. He "literally cut up carbon copies and pasted the fragile pieces together."³⁹ Stitching the novel together did not end up producing a text without visible seams. The disparateness occurs on two levels - one of them is the piecing together chapters from different books, the other is factual gaps in the plotline. The most flagrant evidence of not matching chapters is on page 87. This chapter is a transition between the story taking place in the USA and later in Mexico. The Mexican part starts on page 92, but the linking chapter already shows a different writing style. Every page until this time has some relation to narcotics, withdrawal effect or description of people connected with narcotics, this chapter suddenly starts talking about citrus and cotton farming. It is also hard to believe that a man who is running away from the law, always short of money, suddenly got "into a partnership with a friend named Evans to buy machinery, hire a farmer and raise a cotton

³⁷ Oliver Harris, Introduction to *Junky*, xxvii.

³⁸ Allen Ginsberg, "Junkie: An Appreciation" (1952), in William Burroughs, *Junky*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008) 149.

³⁹ Oliver Harris, Introduction to *Junky*, xxvii.

crop" (Burroughs, 91). From page 92 the story takes place in Mexico. Suddenly there are mentions about Lee's homosexual advances, those were not mentioned in the previous part set in the USA. Sentences of utterly different content appear, such as: "His lips are thin and purple-blue like the lips of a penis. The skin is tight and smooth over his face. He is basically obscene beyond any possible vile act or practise" (Burroughs, 93). Or "The boy dropped his hand onto my leg under the table. I felt my stomach knot with excitement" (Burroughs, 94), or even "Angelo's face was Oriental, Japanese-looking, except for his copper skin. He was not queer, and I gave him money; always the same amount, twenty pesos. Sometimes I didn't have that much and he would say: *No importa*" (Burroughs, 95). These homoerotic passages display a greater deal of emotions, the wry laconic style of describing the drug world is not present. Being clear about his sexual orientation was paramount for Burroughs in his search for identity, and the way it was presented in *Junky* is discordant with the flow of the text. It disrupts the thematic focus of the book. The fact that remarks about homosexual tendencies appear only in one section of the book and that they overshadow the topic of drugs indicate that they were written for different purposes and their fusion into one text gives the impression of being forced together unnaturally. Ginsberg's editorship was hindered by the length requirement of the publisher. He also felt pressed for time. In June 1952 Burroughs wrote to Ginsberg in one of his letters:

Is he or is he not going to publish JUNK? Two books already out on the subject - DOWN ALL YOUR STREETS and H IS FOR HEROIN. I think this beginning of deluge. NOW is time to publish or we bring up rear and lose advantage of timeliness... Subject is hot now but it won't be hot long.⁴⁰

Both Burroughs as well as Ginsberg wanted to see *Junky* published as soon as possible. The result of the first edition is not only two volumes in one book (*Junkie* and *Narcotic Agent*), but also two texts of William Burroughs in one novel, *Junkie*.

⁴⁰ Letter to Ginsberg, June 15, 1952 (Ginsberg Collection, Columbia University), cited in the Introduction to *Junky*, in William Burroughs, *Junky* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008) xix.

Trainspotting also contains remarks connected with homosexuality. The homosexuality in *Trainspotting* is put into contrast with the stereotype of the "hard-man" icon. The prototypical attributes of a working-class hard man are physical strength, appetite for violence and alcohol, all pointing towards a hegemonic masculinity. The hard men present themselves as strictly heterosexual and condemn otherness. The prime example of a hard man is the character of Begbie. The violent, narrow-minded wife-beater and bully is seen as a shining example of a Scottish hard man by Renton's mother. "Begbie, total fuckin crazy psycho Beggars, is held up as an archetypal model of manhood Ecosse. Yes, there may be poor bastards picking bits ay beer glass oot ay thir faces when Franco goes oan the rampage, but the laddie works hard and plays hard etcetera, etcetera." (Welsh, p.198) To put Begbie into perspective, Renton functions as Begbie's antithesis. He is surprisingly quite open-minded about his sexuality. When Renton is approached by a gay man in a cinema who places his hand on Renton's thigh, Renton's first reaction is quite harsh and stereotypical. "Git tae fuck. You wantin yir heid n hands tae play wi, ya cunt" (Welsh, 233)? He then rethinks the situation and explains: "Ah'm no a buftie pal, ah tell um. [...] No homosexual, ah point at masel, feeling vaguely ridiculous. What a fuckin daft thing tae say" (Welsh, 233). Renton's train of thought goes on: "How the fuck dae ah ken ah'm no a homosexual if ah've nivir been wi another guy? [...] Ah've always hud a notion tae go aw the wey wi another guy, taw see what it wis like. Ah mean, yuv goat tae try everything once" (Welsh, 233). In the same paragraph, he relates how he was given a good blow job by a "gorgeous young queen"⁴¹ (homosexual). References to homosexuality are only marginal in *Trainspotting*. The protagonists in *Trainspotting* identify themselves with heterosexuality. Renton's attitude of relative sexual openness is isolated in *Trainspotting*. And even his relative openness can be read as just a by-product on the way of search for identity. Renton, when on holiday in

⁴¹ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

London, describes his episode with an Italian gay immigrant Giovanni. His attitude is such, that he cannot imagine being penetrated by another man, but he can imagine he would "huvtae be in the drivin seat" (Welsh, 233). For Renton, the door of homosexual experience is not closed but he does not perform any act to open it. "Anywey, ah widnae mind gaun aw the wey wi a gadge, if it felt right. Jist for the experience. Problem is, ah only really fancy birds" (Welsh, 234). This, in the end, is quite a conservative outcome. Christopher Whyte puts Renton's conclusion into perspective with the "intersection of national, gender and sexual identity."⁴²

Flirtations with homosexuality serve to reaffirm Renton's 'normality'. [...] What happens on holiday is under a special dispensation and, in this case, 'holiday' can be glossed as 'outside Scotland'. Homosexuality is carefully situated beyond the boundaries of Renton (and Welsh's) nationality [...] An ethnically pure Scottish male, one should conclude, could never be in any real sense homosexual.⁴³

Whyte's interpretation excludes the situations when Welsh describes homosexual tendencies that occur within the territory of Scotland, therefore it is not entirely conclusive. The image of Scottish national identity as straight working-class men was valid in the middle of the twentieth century, but in the light of LGBT that came into existence in the mid-to-late 1980s, sexual diversity and gender identity changed the general perception of the "straight"⁴⁴ stereotype. The heterosexual stereotype is attacked not only through the character of Renton; Kelly, Renton's ex-girlfriend, spends some time with a pair of lesbian backpackers from New Zealand and her reaction is very positive. "Ah've never felt so close tae other women before, and I really did wish I was gay" (Welsh, 276). It seems as if the words of Kelly and Renton were the harbingers of change in the perception of homosexuality in the years that followed.

⁴² Christopher Whyte, "Imagining the City: The Glasgow novel", *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century*, (Frankfurt: Lang, 1990), cited in Neil Livingstone McMillan, "Tracing Masculinities in Twentieth-Century Scottish Men's Fiction", Ph.D Thesis at Department of Scottish Literature, (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2000) 190. Accessed 05-07-2019 at <<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5190/1/2000McMillanPhD.pdf>>

⁴³ Christopher Whyte, "Imagining the City: The Glasgow novel", *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century*, (Frankfurt: Lang, 1990) 281.

⁴⁴ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

Homosexuality is only a marginal issue in *Trainspotting*. The central theme is the manifestation of the crisis of masculinity. Most of the male characters are afraid to form intimate relationships and to conduct a normal conversation with the opposite sex. The emotional restraint on the part of the males stems from dysfunctional families where the manliness was destroyed by unemployment and led to a "lack of tolerance for emotional issues and homophobia."⁴⁵ Manliness used to be reaffirmed with heavy work and manual labour. As the men became unemployed, they became "dysfunctional urban men who are [...] victims of injustice and discrimination on a class basis."⁴⁶ The fathers passed on to the young generation described in *Trainspotting* the feeling of being victims and losers, in the sense of manhood in crisis. Using heroin makes the user antisocial, therefore it is hard for him/her to form new relationships, as well as sexually inactive as heroin users have no libido. Using heroin therefore only deepens the crisis of masculinity. Masculinity in crisis can be seen as a parallel to Scottish nationhood in crisis as a result of political steps implemented by Thatcher.

3.4. Language and Identity in Junky

Search for identity and belonging to a specific group is often connected with specific language. What adds credibility to the book is the jargon Burroughs used in *Junky*. "The junky culture is fascinating because of its language, and the language is its culture."⁴⁷ The junky jargon is listed at the end of the novel. It is also mentioned that this jargon is subject to rapid changes. Rapid meaning that a word that is in one year may not be used the following year at all or may shift its meaning. Some word-meanings also vary locally. A list of expressions is offered below for a linguistic overview (taken from the glossary at the end of *Junky*:

⁴⁵ Ángela Rivera Izquierdo, 94.

⁴⁶ Ángela Rivera Izquierdo, 95.

⁴⁷ Kurt Hemmer, 164.

- C, Coke, Charge, Charlie** - Cocaine
- Chucks** - Excessive hunger, often for sweets. This comes on an addict when he has kicked his habit far enough so that he starts to eat. When an addict is cut off the junk, he can't eat for several days. I have seen addicts who did not eat for a month. Then he gets the "chucks" and eats everything in sight.
- Croaker** - A doctor
- H, Horse, Henry** - Heroin
- The People** - Narcotic Agents (A New Orleans expression)
- Pigeon, Fink, Rat** - Informer
- Poke** - Wallet
- Pusher, Peddler, The Man** - Junk seller. "The Man" is another New Orleans expression, and can also refer to a Narcotics Agent.
- Yen Pox** - Ash of opium after the opium has been smoked. Yen Pox contains about the same morphine content as opium before smoking. It can be eaten with hot coffee or dissolved in water and injected intravenously.
- Sawski** - is a slang of slang Sawbuck which means 10\$

The inclusion of the glossary at the end of the novel fulfils several functions. Firstly, pragmatically, it is useful for those who are not familiar with the junky jargon. Secondly, because this type of jargon is very volatile and changes with time, this glossary serves as a historiographic recording of junky jargon. Thirdly, the glossary shows how complex the drug subculture is. One has to make an effort to be able to navigate through the drug-world. By pointing out the complexity of this subculture, and by listing the glossary, Burroughs places his world out of the ordinary world. He disassociates himself from standard, normative society; he breaks free, he transgresses. Burroughs' use of the junky jargon is important for

the authenticity of his work. Had he used standard American English, a lot of what he narrates would not have such authentic strength and overall persuasiveness.

3.5. Language and Identity in Trainspotting

Trainspotting is heavily accented, largely written in the Edinburgh dialect (a variant of vernacular Scots). Welsh uses the phonetic spelling of the words as well as slang vocabulary. The third-person omniscient narration is delivered in standard English as well as the direct or indirect speech of characters somehow excluded from Scottish working-class society. These include politicians, tourists, and, surprisingly, Renton's cousin Nina's narration is delivered in standard English, and Renton morphs into standard English when it is expedient for him. Scots dialect serves as a common denominator of the oppressed, yet, at the same time, it gives the oppressed group the advantage. The Scots understand standard English, whereas outsiders often struggle to understand their Scots dialect. Language plays a crucial role in *Trainspotting*. It is a form of identity - Scottish identity as well as Scottish working-class identity. Unlike in *Junky*, where Burroughs' jargon focuses on the drug community alone, the language in *Trainspotting* has a wider scope, it is the embodiment of national identity, national meaning Scottish, not British. Language not only distinguishes the different narrators, but it is also a ticket to "success"⁴⁸ for those that can use it correctly. What is meant by the correct use is the ability to switch codes, to be able to speak both in dialect as well as in Standard English, and to be able to distinguish between formal and informal register. This ability is often a sign of education and intelligence. Renton, the main protagonist, has the capacity to switch codes and use language to his benefit. It was this ability that helped him in the jobcentre not to get the job, he also managed to convince the judge to suspend his sentence when he tried to justify his stealing a volume of Kierkegaard from Waterstones in

⁴⁸ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

order to read it. In this moment, the calculated code-switching is apparent. "- Mr Renton, you did not intend to sell the books? - **Naw. Eh, no**⁴⁹, your honour. They were for reading" (Welsh, 165). Renton "the chameleon"⁵⁰ takes on the disguise of an educated young man and swiftly changes "naw" for "no".⁵¹ His inner thoughts are different. "- So you read Kierkegaard. Tell us about him, Mr Renton, the **patronising cunt** sais"⁵² (Welsh, 165). Renton, the liar extraordinaire, charms the judge (whom he sees as a patronising cunt) by his coherent and reasonable speech:

I'm interested in his concepts of subjectivity and truth, and particularly his ideas concerning choice; the notion that genuine choice is made out of doubt and uncertainty, and without recourse to the experience or advice of others. It could be argued, with some justification, that it's primarily a bourgeois, existential philosophy [...] (Welsh, 165).

Renton sounds eloquent, and at the same time, he addresses the problematic class distinction. By talking about genuine choice he alludes to his genuine choice to exclude himself from standard society and its expectations. Renton's choices are of transgressive nature, and he finds his actions supported by Kierkegaard's philosophy. Spud, on the other hand, completely lacks the ability to adjust. He cannot switch codes, all he manages to utter when asked whether he wanted to sell the books to finance his heroin habit is: "That's spot on man ... eh ... ye goat it, likesay [...]" (Welsh, 165). Language is shown as the key that opens door to wherever one needs to get, but one needs to be able to read the situation correctly and apply logic and intelligence. Not many from the circle around Renton can do it. If the text is to be read as the image of society, then the generalization that working class is unintelligent, aggressive, hard to shape, proves incorrect. There is always one "Renton" that does not fit this formula. It is short-sighted to generalize. Seeing people in one social group as the same mass of people is depriving them of their individuality. Renton's ability to adjust makes him a

⁴⁹ Bold inserted by the author of this thesis.

⁵⁰ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

⁵¹ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

⁵² Bold inserted by the author of this thesis.

very ambivalent character. He is full of contradictions, he represents many of the opposing poles. It seems as if he was taking up different identities and with each one, his beliefs take new forms. He is from a working-class family, but he went to university (which he found easy but hated it with all his heart so he quit after the first term). He is Scottish, but unpatriotic, which is very unusual amongst his social class and his friends. His unpatriotic way of thinking is scathing:

Ah hate cunts like that. [Begbie] [...] Fuckin failures in a county ay failures. It's nae good blamin in oan the English fir colonising us. Ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers. We are colonized by wankers. We can't even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonized by. No. We are ruled effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fucking low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation. Ah don't hate the English. They just git oan wi the shite thuv goat. Ah hate the Scots (Welsh, 78).

And on a similar note, Renton describes London: "Ye can be freer here, no because it's London, but because it isnae Leith" (Welsh, 228). He can denigrate both, not feeling an attachment to neither place. To add more diversities to the figure of Renton, his father was a Protestant from Glasgow, his mother a Catholic from Edinburgh, he was a vegetarian but he did not show any affection or love for animals. The episodes of firing an air rifle at dogs and cats, throwing stones at a squirrel, or setting pigeons on fire portray Renton as a cold-blooded creature. Violence is one of the major topics, and techniques, in transgressive fiction. It seems that Renton channels transgression through violence, yet, he is the one that scorns the overtly violent behaviour of Begbie. It is difficult to analyse Renton and place him in one box. He performs the transgressive steps of deep moral and ethical gravity (theft, betrayal, lying, violence), yet he is able to introspect. His intelligence helps him to scheme, calculate and manipulate, yet it is his intelligence that also helps him to see things clearly and to anticipate situations. Welsh uses Renton as a sympathetic link to the reader. The readers can relate to Renton more than any of the other characters.

Welsh is capable of combining the repulsive and the funny. He is able to describe a truly transgressive moment in such a dry ironical way that he turns a great part of the novel into black comedy, as can be seen from the following example. Renton, in his early withdrawal state of severe diarrhoea, sits on the toilet. "As ah shit, flies batter oaf ma face, sending shivers through ma body. Ah grab at one, and tae ma surprise and elation, feel it buzzing in ma hand. Ah squeeze tightly enough tae immobilise it. Ah open ma mitt tae see a huge, filthy bluebottle, a big furry currant of a bastard" (Welsh, 25). This so far is not such an alien concept, most of us have felt a buzzing creature in our hand at some point in our lives. Welsh takes the episode further. "Ah smear it against the wall opposite; tracing out an 'H' then an 'I' then a 'B' wi ma index finger, using its guts, tissue and blood as ink" (Welsh, 25). At the beginning of the sentence, the tracing out of the 'H' looked like Renton was going to write 'HEROIN', but the word soon took a different shape. Welsh continues: "Ah start on the 'S' but ma supply grows thin. Nae problem. Ah borrow from the 'H', which has a thick surplus, and complete the 'S'" (Welsh, 25). This moment can be read as Renton glorifying the effects of heroin, it has a lot to offer, it has a surplus. The glorification is reduced to zero when one reads the word written on the wall - HIBS - Edinburgh football team. Renton's philosophical elaboration is gone, his mind is occupied by base things. The story continues: "Ah sit as far back as ah can, withoot sliding intae the shit-pit below ays, and admire ma handiwork. The vile bluebottle, which caused me a great deal of distress, has been transformed intae a work of art which gives me much pleasure tae look at" (Welsh, 25). It gives Renton pleasure to look at the sign HIBS created by bluebottle guts and blood. By this, Welsh makes fun of the importance of football, it is, in his rendition, just a sign created by the fly's intestines. He mocks what most Scottish, not only working-class, people identify with. And it is again the ambivalent character of Renton who creates this situation that allows seeing it in an

unpatriotic way. Renton is an example of hybridization. He sees himself as a "hypocrite".⁵³ This passage uses the disgusting, the somatic as well as the graphic as a transgressive technique that affects the reader's senses and sensibility. The reader is in a permanent state of tension evoked by transgressive techniques like the above mentioned.

In *Trainspotting*, language serves as a keystone to identity. The identity of those that are the victims of political measures imposed by the colonizers (British). The word colonizers is used figuratively (even though Welsh uses this term frequently throughout the book) because in political terms Scotland has never been a colony. The two separate states were united in 1707 by the Act of Union. Stacey Mankoff remarks that "*Trainspotting* is a postcolonial nature of the work."⁵⁴ The bitter aftertaste of oppression is given a transgressive outlet in *Trainspotting*. The oppressed have the advantage of Scots dialect which balances at least a little the power the standard English symbolises and represents. The ratio is such that a significant majority of the text is written in dialect and only fractions are written in Standard English. That shifts the power over to the colonized nation. "The abrogation or denial of the privilege of 'English' involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication."⁵⁵ Standard English is also connected with politicians, therefore by using the vernacular, Renton and his friends distance themselves from Thatcher and other political leaders from Westminster. It is impossible to list all the expressions that define the Leith clan, as it would turn this thesis into a dictionary. Here is only a very limited personal choice of words:

Bog - toilet

Bevvy - alcoholic drink

⁵³ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

⁵⁴ Stacey Mankoff, "Wankers, Burds, and Skag: Heteroglossia in *Trainspotting*", *Empty Mirror*, (January 2013) accessed 05-07-2019 at: <<https://www.emptymirrorbooks.com/literature/wankers-burds-and-skag-heteroglossia-in-trainspotting>>

⁵⁵ B. Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practise in Post-colonial Literature*, (London: Routledge, 1989) 38.

Bombed oot	-	high on drugs
Choc-box	-	anus
Dosh	-	money
Fitba	-	football
Gadge	-	mad, crazy idiot, fool (Begbie's favourite word)
Labdick	-	police officer
Likesay	-	like / likes of (a filler word favoured by Spud)
Skag	-	heroin

4. Chapter III: The Role of Women in the Texts

4.1. *Women in Junky*

In *Junky* the presence of female figures is crucially neglected. One of the very few female figures that are mentioned in the text is Lee's own wife, and her appearances are very abrupt. She appears out of nowhere and disappears almost as quickly as she appeared. No description of her of any sort is given. She is first mentioned on page 23 only very marginally when Lee was arrested in New York: "At twelve that night, my old lady bailed me out and met me at the door with some goof balls. Goof balls help a little" (Burroughs, 23). The first mention of Lee's wife is therefore done in words "my old lady,"⁵⁶ a very hazy term as "old lady" can mean 1. a wife, 2. a mother, 3. a girlfriend. The context suggests that the mother can be ruled out, but the proof that "old lady" is a lawful wedded wife comes when she is mentioned for the second time. The second mention of the wife and first (and only) mention of Lee's children are as late as page 70 (more than halfway through the book). The police officer says: "If we find anything, your wife will be put in jail, too. I don't know what will happen to your children. They'll have to go to some home" (Burroughs, 70). It is very clear that Burroughs' married life

⁵⁶ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

is intentionally left out. One can only ask why; especially when *Junky* is classified as an autobiography or sometimes semi-autobiography. Personal facts about Lee's wife that keep appearing in the text are "outside of a planned paradigm of junk".⁵⁷ Lee was unable to keep strictly to the description of narcotics, "the partial personal facts that resurface from the discourse of junk become discursive excess".⁵⁸ These appearances are disruptive in an undesirable way. The reader keeps asking: "How did she [Lee's wife] appear here? Did I miss anything? Why is she even here? Why did she disappear?"⁵⁹ Answers to these questions cannot be found in the text, there is no explanation about the circumstances of the marriage and there is no follow-up on anything regarding this part of Lee's life. Women remain a taboo subject matter in *Junky*. Gender politics is very one sided here. Lee's approach to women is not antagonistic, it is virtually non-existent. By excluding women from the novel, he also makes a statement. A statement of disinterest. Women have no place in Lee's world. The fact that Lee's wife is mentioned in the text but is not considered a substantial character and is not given any narrative interest is in itself transgressive, disrupting and subverting the traditional expectations of a 'memoir' or novel.

4.2. Women in Trainspotting

As far as mentioning women in the text, *Trainspotting* differs from *Junky* immensely. There are many women figures in *Trainspotting* - none of them is the main figure, though. The portrayal of women in *Trainspotting* is nonetheless quite complex. Often they are downgraded as mere sexual objects whose only purpose in life is to offer pleasure to the male populace of the world. The depiction of sexual intercourse is often delivered in a wry tone devoid of emotions, detailed descriptions reveal everything shamelessly:

⁵⁷ V. S. Grivina, 94.

⁵⁸ V. S. Grivina, 94.

⁵⁹ Quotation inserted by the author of this thesis.

She has a powerful ivy smell. Then again, ma cock also smells pretty foul and flecks of knob cheese are visible oan the helmet. Ah've never really been too much intae personal hygiene; [...] Ah concur wi Sharon's wishes n fuck her in the fanny. It's a wee bit like throwin the proverbial sausage up a close [...] (Welsh, 219).

Most of the time, the attitude of male characters towards the women arise from their damaged sense of manhood and inability to form relationships as was mentioned in the chapter about gender. This chapter will deal solely with women. It is easy to get misled into thinking that women are treated as inferior to men, thanks to the derogative language directed at them, and the misogynist behaviour of some characters. The truth is that the women characters that do have at least some narrative focus in the novel are presented as empowered, intelligent and strong beings with a clear direction in life. One such example is Dianne, a minor that orchestrates her sexual experience with Renton in the house of her parents. Through her actions, she puts Renton in a position of subordination, he is made to accept her conditions. She executes power not only over Renton but also over her parents. Her highly developed way of thinking and her combinatory techniques help her to become a lawyer. Another woman of significance, Renton's ex-girlfriend Kelly, delivers a talk which has a similar outcome as the misogynist male talks. "We slagged off men, agreeing that they are stupid, inadequate and inferior creatures. [...] I think that all men are good for is the odd shag" (Welsh, 276). As Welsh likes to put things into perspective, the girls do not strike the reader as egotistic and self-centred, they are capable of self-reflection and can see their flaws too. Kelly: "Our problem is, we don't think about it that often and jist accept the bullshit these pricks dish oot tae us" (Welsh, 276). Kelly is addressing the issue of conventions, the hard man attitude and the submissive tone of women that let the hard men proceed with their stereotypical patterns of behaviour. With her use of "we,"⁶⁰ she means the whole female population, including herself. She is not trying to prove that she is different. She sees the problem as a collective issue and she sees herself as part of it. Her way of thinking is socially

⁶⁰ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

directed and inclusive. The numerous comments of guys about the appearance of women (describing their bosom and backside) are balanced with a comical observation from women. In Kelly's words, men are "freaky looking things that cairry their reproductive organs on the outside ay their bodies" (Welsh, 277). An unforgettable mixture of empowered behaviour on the side of Kelly, as well as transgressive behaviour and black humour, happens in the chapter "Eating Out". Kelly, even though she stated previously that they [women] "jist accept the bullshit these pricks dish oot tae us" (Welsh, 276), does not just accept the bullshit. Four upper-middle-class English customers lead sexist talk in a bar where she works.

One sais: - What do you call a good-looking girl in Scotland?

Another snaps: - A tourist! They speak very loudly. Cheeky Cunts.

One then sais, gesturing in ma direction: - I don't know though. I wouldn't kick that out of bed (Welsh, 303).

Kelly, degraded as a sexual object, humiliated by a pronoun "that" instead of "her"⁶¹ decided to pay back.

Ah'm smack-bang in the middle ay a heavy period. [...] Ah go tae the toilet and change tampons, wrapping the used one, which is saturated wi discharge, intae some toilet paper. A couple of these rich, imperialist bastards have ordered soup; our trendy tomato and orange. As Graham's busy preparing the main courses, ah take the bloodied tampon and lower it, like a tea-bag, intae the first bowl of soup. Ah then squeeze its manky contents oot wi a fork. A couple ay strands ay black, uteral lining float in the soup, before being dissolved wi a healthy stir (Welsh, 303-304).

This chapter is closed with contemplation about morality. According to Kelly, morality is relative. There are also moments when Kelly's attitude of a fighter does not help. One day, Sick Boy and Renton made a joke, Sick Boy went to a phone box and called to the pub wanting to speak with MARK HUNT. Kelly shouted across the whole bar: "ANYBODY SEEN MARK HUNT" (Welsh, 278)? The customers started laughing uncontrollably. Kelly felt humiliated because "the joke is on the woman, again" (Welsh, 279). As many times before, it is again Renton who does not feel comfortable with this situation and realizes that this stereotypical behaviour of humiliating women does not suit him.

⁶¹ Quotation marks inserted by the author of this thesis.

Renton looks at her and sees her pain and anger. It cuts him up. It confuses him. Kelly has a great sense of humour. What's wrong with her? [...] He looks about and picks up the intonations of the laughter around the bar. It's not a funny laughter. This is lynch mob laughter (Welsh, 279).

Renton realizes that it is not all right to denigrate women. Women in *Trainspotting* are for the most part seen as stronger than men, able to act, they are not shy and can be very funny. Their strength makes them divorce or separate from those, who are incapable of looking after the family or behave in an unacceptable way. They are not presented as impassive and withdrawn, they are liberated and confident, contrarily to the majority of men portrayed in *Trainspotting*. Women in *Trainspotting* swapped the gender roles with the males.

5. Conclusion

Junky displays transgressive discourse, the text is not an unconditional confessional novel because it is selective. Burroughs was not able to keep the straight narrative line connected only to narcotics, the excess of his personal marital life and his homosexual experiences are not worked well into the text. They stand out, are disruptive, have no follow-up and break the flow of the text. One might consider this a deliberate intention in order to achieve an alienating effect, when the reader is forced to ask questions and demand explanations which are invariably not granted. This technique could prompt the reader to question the norms and attitudes of society. In the light of the facts connected with the novel's publishing history, the speedy editing of the novel, the publisher's demand for a longer text and Burroughs' own critique of *Junky* in later years, the deliberate workings towards the alienating technique can be disregarded. The tone of *Junky* is monotonous and emotionless which makes it rather tedious to read at times. There is almost no plot, the body of the text consists of a description of moments of high and moments of low, how to procure the next dose of narcotics and how to survive the withdrawal symptoms. Yet, taken into consideration the era when the book was written, it has a very important value. The value of *Junky* is not literary, it is far from being a

literary gem. The immense significance of the novel is its recording of the underground and its anthropological survey of the drug underworld. Burroughs himself honestly acknowledges that *Junky* is not his masterpiece. "I don't feel the results were at all spectacular. *Junky* is not much of a book, actually. I knew very little about writing at that time."⁶² In spite of its many literary shortcomings, *Junky* is a canonical literary piece. It is, therefore, not only literary mastery that makes a novel canonical, it is also its cultural and historical value and not least how renowned the author is. It is questionable whether *Junky* would become a canonical work had it not been for the fame and reception of *Naked Lunch*.

Novels of transgressive nature will always provoke more debate as they open up taboo topics. *Junky* as well as *Trainspotting* attack the conventional concepts of the moral and the immoral, setting an interrogation further towards the amoral. They juxtapose the individual versus society, lower class versus middle class and individual choice versus the given order. Protagonists in both books use heroin as an escape from the constraints of society. Lee identified himself with the icon of a junky, and even though the book ends with Lee being clean, he is still in pursuit of his final fix.

Kick is seeing things from a special angle. Kick is momentary freedom from the claims of the aging, cautious, nagging, frightened flesh. Maybe I will find in yage what I was looking for in junk and weed and coke. Yage may be the final fix (Burroughs, 128).

Trainspotting, on the other hand, explores the lack of options, feeling of inferiority and the attitude of distance from everything that creates pressure. The protagonists in *Trainspotting* were taking drugs because there was nothing better on offer, but they didn't identify with them for life, as Lee did. Drugs served as a temporary crutch on the way from adolescence into adulthood. Drugs changed Renton's life dramatically, but in a different way than they changed Lee's life. It was the money obtained from selling heroin that helped

⁶² Sam Jordison, "Junky and William Burroughs' oblique moral vision", *Guardian*, (11 February 2014) Accessed 05-07-2019 at <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/feb/11/junky-william-burroughs-heroin-moral-reading-group>>

Renton break free and start a new life. Renton's ruthless transgressive behaviour made him succeed economically, he followed the rules imposed by Thatcher and applied them in transgressive anti-social ways, revealing the anti-social core of official political doctrine. In *Trainspotting*, transgression is linked with economic success, which ridicules and hence subverts the political measures of Thatcherite era. According to Mendelsohn, the most important question of the book is "Whether [Renton] will have the strength to move on and become his own person."⁶³ As everything about Renton is ambiguous, so is the answer to this question. He created a possibility by stealing a huge amount of money, he left his junky friends behind to escape the temptation of drugs and left for Amsterdam, the hub of European drug culture. It is therefore quite possible to see the ending as a happy one. Renton created an ambiguity at the very end of the novel.

The transgressive elements of both texts work on many levels. The most obvious transgressive element is the choice of the subject matter, in this case heroin, addiction, and drug-related crime. The transgression is seen in the choices the main characters in both texts make in order to break free from the confines of society and its normative expectations. The language both texts use is also transgressive as well as the frank, graphic description of uncomfortable situations. The protagonists are not seeking sympathy, neither do they regret their deeds. Both texts are a form of testimony of those who decide to take a path that is not prescribed. Both texts are deeply critical of the political situation of the time, McCarthyism and Thatcherism. Linking theft with economic success is linking transgression with politics and socio-economics. In both texts, the transgressive behaviour of the protagonists is caused by political decision, and vice versa, the implications of political decisions are transgressive towards the protagonists. *Junky* as well as *Trainspotting*, two canonical transgressive novels, will either make the reader accept the transgression and enjoy the text, or reject it altogether.

⁶³ Jane Mendelsohn, "Trainspotting": Review of *Trainspotting*", *New Republic* 2, (October 1996) 33.

The nature of transgressive fiction is such that it forces the reader to question the morality of given boundaries as well as the morality of crossing these boundaries. It encourages the reader to cross the boundaries together with the protagonist, to become the transgressor in a literary sense.

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