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## “Rhizome National Identity: ‘Scatlin’s Psychic Defense’ in *Trainspotting*”

Jennifer M. Jeffers

. . . and so I was forced to account for the hiatus in Scott’s endowment by considering the environment in which he lived, by invoking the fact—if the reader will agree it is one—that he spent most of his days in a hiatus, in a country, that is to say, which was neither a nation nor a province, and had, instead of a centre, a blank, an Edinburgh, in the middle of it.

Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland*

Irvine Welsh’s debut novel *Trainspotting* (1993) became famous and fashionable with the Miramax Films release in 1996. However, John Hodge’s screenplay of *Trainspotting* is only minimally based on Welsh’s novel; the film *Trainspotting* narrowly presents one strand of events to the exclusion of several others found in the novel. The overwhelming popularity of the film’s discourse is analogous to Foucault’s idea of the discourse of the author in which a false or misleading “mystique” of the author overshadows subsequent interpretations: “It points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of the discourse within a society and culture” (Foucault 123). The film *Trainspotting* “defin(es)” the “form” and “characteriz(es)” the “mode of existence” that the discourse on the novel is likely to take (Foucault 123). According to Andrew Macdonald, the film is a “buddy movie” which indicates the narrow focus on the exploits of

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Mark Renton and his small group of friends.<sup>1</sup> With substantial help from the film soundtrack the film's focus on a group of young men from Edinburgh's youth subculture makes the mystery occupation of "trainspotting" common place (Primal Scream's "Trainspotting"), and heroin use seem hip and attractive even though it can be argued that the film does not promote drug use (the film opens with Iggy Pop's infectious "Lust for Life," and continues buoyed by songs like New Order's 1982 dance hit, "Temptation"). Welsh's title is only mentioned once in the text in "Trainspotting at Leith Central Station." With the hobby of trainspotting identifying as many different trains as possible is the primary "goal," and, in this way, the "hobby" lacks a specific teleology: trainspotting is open-ended and may be likened to heroin use (or life, itself).

Despite the pop culture image, it is my contention that the novel *Trainspotting* enters into a discourse with the Scottish literary tradition, and through its use of a non-linear, non-stable narrative rhizome structure severely critiques Scottish life and culture. Taking a very harsh view of the Scottish past and present, the novel effectively demonstrates the lack of connection between individuals, the lack of a genuine cultural or literary past, a self-loathing, and a hopelessness by *enacting* the rhizome structurally. While representation in the text almost always presents these characteristics—from baby Dawn's death from neglect to Tommy's succumbing to heroin and eventually testing HIV positive to Dodi's racially motivated beating—the rhizome further heightens the effect of despair and tragedy through "a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing . . . a process that is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again" (*Thousand* 20) without heed to purpose or end. Welsh amplifies the despair and hopelessness of his out-of-work Scottish characters in the 1980s by presenting their narratives rhizomatically; one might even question categorizing the text as a novel, rather than simply a collection of sketches about a group of people more-or-less from the same economically depressed working class Edinburgh suburb. Appropriate, then, for the concept of the rhizome we take the title from a relatively minor character, Tommy, whose section is titled, "Scotland Takes Drugs in Psychic Defense" which is taken, again fittingly from an Iggy Pop song, "America Takes Drugs in Psychic Defense." Drunk and on speed at an 1980s Iggy Pop concert, Tommy has an epiphany when he hears Pop sub-

stitute “Scatlin” for America: “Iggy Pop looks right at me as he sings the line: ‘America takes drugs in psychic defence’; only he changes ‘America’ for ‘Scatlin’, and defines us mair accurately in a single sentence than all the others have ever done.”<sup>2</sup> The reason that “Scatlin” takes drugs (including alcohol, of course) for defense of its soul and mind relates directly to its colonial past and post-industrial present. With no past or future of its own making, the rhizome structure of the novel presents as a mirror image the rhizome-like cultural, linguistic and national identity of Scotland.

As the epigram indicates, Edwin Muir’s seminal 1936 assessment of Scottish literature connects spatially and thematically to *Trainspotting*; similar to Walter Scott, we can say that Welsh is writing “in a hiatus, in a country, that is to say, which was neither a nation nor a province, and had, instead of a centre, a blank, an Edinburgh, in the middle of it” (Muir 11–12). Muir posits that Scotland lacks a genuine literary heritage because there are only a few individual writers (Walter Scott; Hugh MacDairmid), and no sustained national literary tradition. Written in English, *Trainspotting* can be read as a response to a colonized culture, society, economy, education system, and literary tradition that is conducted in English, rather than Gaelic or Scots; in terms of a Scots or Gaelic heritage it is a vacant past, and what is there has been falsely “imagined” for economic reasons (by non-Scots). As Hugh Trevor-Roper argues in “The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland,” the Highlands, for example, were dependent upon culturally, and, until the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, ruled by the Irish. Trevor-Roper maintains that the Highland “hereditary bards, physicians, harpers (for their musical instrument was the harp, not the pipes) came from Ireland,” and “even under the oppressive rule of England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Celtic Ireland remained, culturally, an historic nation while Celtic Scotland was, at best, its poor sister. It had—could have—no independent tradition” (Trevor-Roper 16). The only Scottish literary production to emerge is the “Kailyard” tradition which ironically indicates the very lack of an original, vibrant Scottish tradition. Cairns Craig defines “Kailyard literature” as a substandard tradition of “inherent sentimentality” with “its flight from the realities of industrial Scotland, becomes both the symptom of the state of the national imagination—a national imagination without a state—and the sickness to which Scottish writers will continue to fall victim whenever they try to engage with the nature of modern Scotland” (Craig 14). “A national imagination

without a state” is compounded by the loss of a national language with which to express the national imagination. While Walter Scott wrote in English, Hugh MacDairmid attempts to reinvigorate Scottish poetry by using Scots, but acknowledges the duplicity of his identity, “Curse on my dooble life and dooble tongue, /—Guid Scots wi’ English a hamstrung.”<sup>3</sup> While Welsh certainly rejects a sentimental view of Scotland and a supposed “Scots” culture, an awareness of duplicity, a “dooble life and dooble tongue” are presented in the text. The primary narrative voice, Mark Renton, has an interior monologue in which he does not “blame” the English for colonizing Scotland and creating centuries of “doobleness,” he blames the Scots for being colonized by the English:

Ah hate cunts like that. Cunts like Begbie. Cunts that are intae baseball-bating every fucker that’s different; pakis, poofs, n what huv ye. Fuckin failures in a country ay failures. It’s nae good blamin it oan the English fir colonising us. Ah don’t hate the English. They’re just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We can’t even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by. No. We’re ruled by effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation. Ah don’t hate the English. They jist git oan wi the shite thuv goat. Ah hate the Scots. (78)

This passage is often referred to (and even makes it into the film in a different context) because of the recognition that the English conquered and colonized Scotland in the past, and thus, a postcolonial interpretation reads the English-are-wankers as the most important feature of the passage. The subtext of the passage is that the Scots have a national crisis of identity. The by-product of the crisis produces individuals such as Begbie who in their inferiority are defensive, racist and fearful of difference; the cruel behavior that accompanies this kind of individual eventually drives certain characters to despair and accounts for some characters’ solution to hopelessness: heroin use and alcoholism.

In fact, the dominant strands of narrative are those that present fear of or hate for Others; when we focus on these discourses we then read be-

yond the fashionable, hyped and now clichéd club culture popularized by the film version. From the above passage Renton tells the reader that challenges come from foreigners whose skin color makes obvious their difference (“pakis”), HIV positive people probably infected by contaminated needles, but ultimately the contamination blamed on male homosexuals (“poofs”), and more generally non-Presbyterian Scots, tourists, women, and anyone generally perceived as different by virtue of class, education, or life outlook (“what huv ye”). As a novel which is culturally and linguistically aware of its place in what it describes as culture of “wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash,” multiple strands of narrative emerge to amplify the rhizomatic connections; narratives continuously repeat and reconnect with discourses involving self-loathing and hate which are often directed toward those who are or are perceived to be different.

Leith, once a separate town, lies north of Edinburgh (incorporated into the city in 1920), and historically was a vital port. Scotland’s traditional industries include shipbuilding, mining, and other “heavy industries.” After the Second World War these industries went into decline, and by the 1970s and 1980s Leith was a severely economically depressed area. John W. Books theorizes that a “dependency” view of Scotland’s economic down turn “would concentrate on how the actions of the British Government in first creating heavy industries like shipbuilding and then closing them (and mines and other heavy industries) kept Scottish development dependent on the centre (London) working through the centre of the periphery (Edinburgh)” (219). In the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the new dependency is on the Multi-National Corporation that comes into Scotland, builds a plant (electronics, computers) and employs hundreds of Scots, but the MNC profits and products go elsewhere. However, the 1980s *Trainspotting* precedes the Multi-National Corporation phenomenon which was brought about by the policies of the Thatcher administration, 1979–1990. Thatcher broke the trade unions and ushered in an era of “free trade” and economic reform. The working classes saw Thatcherism as initiating an era of economic down turn as she worked to eliminate their jobs, introduced a Poll Tax, engineered the Falklands War, and welcomed yuppie values. The reader can easily ascertain the novel’s political position when Renton thinks of Margaret Thatcher to ward off premature ejaculation in “The First Shag in Ages.” Alan Freeman frames Thatcherism in *Trainspotting* in terms of late capitalism’s commodity culture:

The trainspotters exemplify Late Capitalism's replacement of work with leisure, of action with consumption, of meaning with system, of life with lifestyle. Commodity culture is inscribed with values of corporate capital, the kitsch, the ersatz, with passivity and expendability. 'No future' was the battle-less cry of the Sex Pistols and the punk generation with which Renton identifies, both symptom and diagnosis of commodity culture. Unable to act in history, Welsh's characters correspondingly suffer the segmentation of their experience. (256–57)

Although Freeman does not distinguish those narratives which differentiate their commodified views (Renton's views are markedly different from Sick Boy's, for example), Freeman does sum up the economic and cultural paralysis which affects all the narratives in the novel. However, Freeman fails to distinguish Edinburgh's unique position relative, to say, Leeds or Manchester; having been colonized and brought into a union with England in 1707 *does* distinguish Edinburgh—Leith—as more vulnerable, apparently more expendable, to London's economic policies. The one answer to economic and culture stagnation is Scotland's, and more precisely Edinburgh's, tourist industry which does not touch the community of Leith (no tourist would want to visit Leith in the mid-1980s), and which is dependent upon the commercially viable kilts-and-bagpipes image of the happy Scotsman that Renton, in particular, rails against throughout the novel. According to Freeman, the characters' failure to act in history is reflected in the "segmentation of their experience" that is, I would argue, the narrative structure of the novel because, precisely, segmentation *is* their post-colonial identity.

Admittedly, *Trainspotting's* language is defiant—certainly to anyone who holds a "high art" concept of the literary novel—and so, predictably, several critics have argued that language in *Trainspotting* works to undermine the authority of the traditional English novel. In "Contemporary Scottish Novelists and the Stepmother Tongue" John Skinner posits that Welsh's use of language is not strictly "Scots"; his manipulation of various dialects and individual idiomatic verbal characteristics gives Welsh's novel a power and a range lacking in "Scots." Skinner illustrates his point by comparing *Trainspotting* to James Kelman's Booker Prize winning

novel, *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994) that Kelman wrote in “Scots”: “Rather than abandoning Standard English, like Kelman’s *How Late It Was, How Late*, *Trainspotting* merely overturns conventional linguistic hierarchies by marginalizing the language. Welsh’s metropolitan Scots is actually far more impressive in range and variety than the more homogenous Glaswegian demotic forged by Kelman” (218). While there is a certain thumbing one’s nose at London by Kelman (who gave his Booker Prize acceptance speech in Scots), Welsh’s practice of moving in and out of Leith-speak, utilizing various voices but primarily Renton’s, then into cockney in the London bar and Standard English (Renton), proves that the “original” (proper English) can be copied, however poorly, so that the original ceases to have the authority of originality. According to Andrew O’Hagan, Welsh “has accused James Kelman, for example, of sanitising the way people talk—airbrushing out their racism, their sexism, their self-defeating naffness about people. It’s true to say that the characters in the fiction of Kelman and Gray and Janice Galloway speak as people do in the West Coast of Scotland—but they don’t say the things that people *say* there” (8), which may be, it could be argued, a way to “airbrush” their literary productions for an English reading public; if it is the case that a Scottish novel must be written with London in mind (it is true, generally speaking, of contemporary Irish novelists), then this is another instance of Scotland’s dependency—economic, cultural, and linguistic—on the (former) colonial “centre.”

In *Devolving English Literature* (1992) Robert Crawford argues that Deleuze and Guattari’s *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* “contains material likely to be stimulating for anyone interested in questions of how an un-English identity may be preserved or developed within ‘English Literature’” (6). Yet, Welsh’s presentation of difference does not promote an idea of “un-English identity” or a pro-Scottish identity, rather the text repeatedly emphasizes the inferiority of the Scots and their inability to identify themselves without reference to the English, and without use of the English language. When Renton discusses Kierkegaard or his own attempts to read books or discuss psychiatric theories, he uses standard English. Muir believes that the Scottish mind is “doobled” because it thinks, reasons, and critiques in English, but feels in Scots: “For, reduced to its simplest terms, this linguistic division means that Scotsmen feel in one language and think in another; that their emotions turn to the Scottish



tongue, with all its associations of local sentiment, and their minds to a standard English which for them is almost bare of associations other than those of the classroom” (Muir 21). Welsh, of course, rejects Scots, and one who glances at the novel for the first time would hazard that he has primarily rejected English, too. Yet, Welsh has not rejected the English language because the characters in the book *must* speak English because their schooling, television, music, and other forms in the symbolic are in English; what Welsh forces upon the reader in terms of language is “understanding” a Leith-speak vernacular which is phonically accurate and consistent.

Welsh’s interaction with the *lack* of an indigenous literary tradition is to further its lack of coherence and presence. The novel accomplishes this through its rhizome non-hierarchical, narrative structure: narratives begin, splinter, connect to a new narrative, the first narrative re-attaching perhaps later in the narrative, perhaps not, all seemingly random and non-hierarchical. The narrative structure helps to produce the effect of randomness, chaos, and pointlessness which unexplored and unanalyzed is in fact the sum of the novel. The theorist Gilles Deleuze can help us to frame Welsh’s discourse of randomness and (in)difference. Deleuze’s concept of the rhizome promotes a philosophy of difference because it is non-representational and operates on the “plane of consistency” which resists any kind of universalization. The first characteristic of the rhizome is that it makes random connections, in opposition to an organizational plane that plots, orders and produces hierarchies. Secondly, the rhizome is heterogeneous in formation and stratification. Connected to its heterogeneity is the rhizome’s multiple alliances which do not seek unity on a plane of organization. *Trainspotting* does not try to unite the multiple discourses and narratives; we can make the connections, but the connection is in the interpretation rather than in any kind of *a priori* intentionality. Fourth, the rhizome is an asignifying rupture—it never ends—it keeps attaching, and reattaching. An exception to the novel’s randomness—maybe its greatest flaw—is that one may argue the novel’s ending is too neat and tidy because it provides too much closure. Or, one may argue that the novel in fact never ends—Renton departs for Amsterdam and the narrative could continue *ad infinitum*, especially if one interprets Renton as the main character. A fifth characteristic is that the rhizome maps a new cartography; one could argue that Welsh’s novel is indeed “path breaking,” especially in

terms of the use of language. Sixth, the rhizome rejects “decalcomania,” or the transference of one thing on to another; the decal simply transfers the image already mapped or drawn. Yet, the novel is a copy, supposedly, of a certain group or class of people in Leith, Scotland whose vernacular, in particular, is both a copy and a seeming “original” in literature. The novel’s imbrication of the rhizome—a systemless system that keeps renewing itself heedless of a linear or horizontal configuration—is a paradigm but a not a stable one which Welsh uses to mirror his interpretation of the fragmented, unoriginal, and often violent Scottish identity.

Because of limited space, I would like to focus on three groups of discourses which effectively show that the rhizome structure spins them out so that they lack traditional narrative connection, but that each discourse reconnects—and breaks off again—with the principal idea of self-loathing and racial hatred as a national discourse. The discourses loosely involve “pakis” or perceived foreigners, the “invented” or “imagined” bond with Northern Ireland, and the familial with the text’s vile “hard man,” Begbie, as progenitor. Each of these discourses show that despite the myth of progression, the Scots who were conquered by the English in turn attempt to conquer those they believe are beneath them, or as Foucault aptly states: “Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination” (151).

Among the several derogatory references to people of color, there are those that target women of color. Early in the text Johnny Swan shares his fantasy of going to Thailand to have sex with women and notes that it is a place “whair ye could live like a king if ye had a white skin n a few crisp tenners in yir poakit” (12). Also early in the text, Sick Boy’s interior narrative in the section, “In Overdrive,” relays his thoughts while cruising the festival scene for women. Sick Boy, Simon, who carries on a conversation in his head with Sean Connery, steps into help with “Good old-fashioned Scoattish hoshpitality” “two oriental types” who appear lost looking at a map:

—Can I help you? Where are you headed? ah ask. *Good old-fashioned Scoattish hoshpitality, aye, ye cannae beat it,*

*shays the young Sean Connery , the new Bond, caus girls,  
this is the new bondage . . .*

—We're looking for the Royal Mile, a posh, English-colonial voice answers back in ma face. What a fucking wee pump-up-the-knickers n aw. *Simple Simon sais, put your hands on your feet . . .* (29)

This passage presents a colonial triangle: the “Scoat,” the English colonial (voice), and the “oriental.” Simon feels racially superior to the “oriental” until he hears her “posh” English voice which symbolically castrates him (in a colonial power dyad). Emasculated and perhaps imagining an era when as soldier for the crown these women would have feared and revered him, Simon cannot compete with the “posh” postmodern, “English colonial voice,” and so, immediately fantasizes that the “oriental” women subservient—bending over so that he can have sex with them. This short strand of narrative features the intersection of sex, power, postcolonial (oriental) wealth, and images of past colonial military campaigns. Indexing the fact that Scots supplied the colonial military armies for centuries is a discourse that has multiple tentacles that connect throughout the text. As we will see, Renton muses later in the text, “Anybody will tell you: the Scots make good soldiers” (190).

Perhaps the most disturbing racist and sexist episode in the novel occurs in Stevie’s narration of “Victory On New Year’s Day” which takes place during the Scottish celebration of Hogmanay. As his sole narrative, Stevie’s discursive strand is seemingly randomly placed and his voice speaks from both within and without the Leith group of friends. Stevie, who now lives in London, has returned for the holidays, and is reluctantly dragged from one New Year’s party celebration to another. Stevie is in love with Stella, who is not with him in Leith, and who he must meet at the train station after the Hibernians and Hearts match. Renton, Stevie and the other “lads” are all Hibs supporters and this is ongoing topic in the text.<sup>4</sup> Stevie, wearing a Hibs scarf, is caught up in a crowd of Hearts fans who taunt him with “‘Hibby bastard’ and ‘fenian cunt’” (49) then punch him in the mouth and kick him. Rather than finish Stevie off, as Begbie might, the Hearts fans find victims whose otherness is much more apparent and threatening:

He thought they were going to come back for him, but they turned their attention to abusing an Asian woman and her two small children.

—Fuckin Paki slag!

—Fuck off back tae yir ain country.

They made a chorus of ape noises and gestures as they left the station.

—What charming, sensitive young men, Stevie said to the woman, who looked at him like a rabbit looks at a weasel. She saw another white youth with slurred speech, bleeding and smelling of alcohol. Above all, she saw another football scarf, like the one worn by the youths who abused her. There was no colour difference as far as she was concerned, and she was right, Stevie realised with a grim sadness. It was probably just as likely to be guys in green who hassled her. Every support had its arseholes. (49–50)

Stevie's attitude toward the Asian woman is surprisingly sensitive and his limited ability to think only through football team "support" makes his observation more poignant. More poignant because the reader recognizes Stevie's ability to be different is a great achievement given the fact that he has no reason, outside of human kindness, to be different than either the brutal Hibs or cruel Hearts supporters. For Stevie to momentarily feel what the woman feels, "There was no colour difference," is true insight on part of this character who just left the side of Begbie at the football match. The hearts fans make a "chorus of ape noises and gestures" which indicates that it was a group of Scots, not an isolated individual; indeed, Stevie sarcastically refers to them as "sensitive young men" which indicates their plurality as well as their gender. This passage also tells us that "Paki" is a derogative term that stands in for any person of racial Asian origin. The Hearts fans are not interested in a "Paki's" country of origin—Indian, Pakistani, Chinese or Korean—they are all "Paki slags" and everyone of them should "Fuck off back tae yir ain country." In *The New Scots: The Story of Asians in Scotland* Bashir Maan states that "By 1980, the Asian community in Scotland stood at about 32,000. This carefully estimated figure includes Pakistanis, Indians, Chinese, Bangladeshis and Vietnamese" (174). The overall population statistics for Scotland have been

just over 5 million for the last several decades. Therefore, it is odd that such a small minority, granted that the minority population is most concentrated in the cities, has an effect on the imagination—the fantasies, both sexual and cruel—of the white males in the novel.

Another narrative strand going out in a rhizome seemingly without pattern is an assemblage of discourses presenting Scotland's relationship to Ireland, Northern Ireland, in particular. While Spud (Danny Murphy) is of Irish lineage, Renton's identity is hybrid: Renton's mother is Catholic ("ayesur papish bastards oan ma Ma's side" 218), and his father is Protestant, a "Weedjie," and Orange Order supporter ("soapdodging orange cunts oan ma faither's" 218). Midway through the novel Renton remembers a time in London when he was offended by someone who called the "the Scots" "'porridge wogs'" (190), but in the following passage he considers in retrospect that the slur "porridge wogs" is offensive because it is a profound insult to blacks to be associated with the Scots:

A place ay dispossessed white trash in a trash country fill ay dispossessed white trash. Some say that the Irish are the trash ay Europe. That's shite. It's the Scots. The Irish hud the bottle tae win thir country back, or at least maist ay it. Ah remember gettin wound up when Nicksy's brar, down in London, described the Scots as 'porridge wogs'. Now ah realise that the only thing offensive about that statement was its racism against black people. Otherwise it's spot-on. Anybody will tell you: the Scots make good soldiers. Like ma brar, Billy. (190)

The sentence "The Irish hud the bottle tae win thir country back, or at least maist ay it" refers, of course, to the partition in Ireland between what is now the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland that is still part of the United Kingdom because of the Scottish Presbyterian interest and influence. This rather simplistic sentence carries with it the "nightmare of history" in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Northern Ireland which personally impinges upon Renton's family.

Renton despises his father's Glasgow relatives and only refers to them in derogatory terms such as "Weedjie Orange bigot" (212) and "Weedjie white trash" (216) which connects them to conservative Ulster Scots val-

ues and policies. In the section titled, “Bang to Rites,” Renton narrates through his brother’s funeral ceremony, the post-funeral gathering, and his subsequent seduction of Billy’s pregnant girlfriend, Sharon. Billy, whom we have encountered through other stands of narrative, was fifteen months older than Mark, bullied him as a child, and turned out to be the thick-headed brother lured into “Her Majesty’s Service” because of the high rate of unemployment in Leith and a misguided sense of duty. Renton makes clear that Billy’s death is not entirely the fault of the Provos who killed Billy while patrolling with his squad “at Crossmaglen in Ireland. . . . They had left their vehicle to examine this road block, when POW! ZAP! BANG! ZOWIE!, and they were no more” (210), rather the death is to be blamed on his father’s family and others who participate in the Orange parades in Scotland:

His death wis conceived by these orange cunts, comin through every July wi thir sashes and flutes, fillin Billy’s stupid heid wi nonsense about crown and country n aw that shite. They’ll go hame chuffed fae the day. They can tell aw thir mates about how one ay the family died, murdered by the IRA, while defending Ulster. It’ll fuel thir pointless anger, git thum bought drinks in pubs, and establish thir doss-bastard credibility wi other sectarian arseholes. (221)

Renton’s interpretation of Billy’s heroism and the attendant Scottish pride is that only the “Orange cunts” have profited by one of their “oan” getting killed by the IRA because it fuels their hatred (keeping it alive), and pathetically, his Glasgow relatives will be bought drinks in the pub for sacrificing “one ay the family.” Despite his clear understanding of Billy’s beguiling, Renton feels nothing for his brother because he was a mean and selfish person. In fact, Renton nearly begins to giggle during the service as he remembers the 70s pop tune, “Billy Don’t Be a Hero,” which he feels in this context is ironic. Still, Renton is careful to separate the politics of Billy’s death from the bathetic fact that Billy was simply “scoobied”: clueless, too dumb to know better.

Another reason that Renton feels nothing for his brother Billy has to do with their mentally and physically handicapped brother Davy. Davy, the youngest, has died before the text’s narrative begins. In “Search for the

Inner Man” Renton presents in dialogue format a typical discussion with his psychiatrist, Dr. Forbes, who attempts to get Renton to talk about Davy. The discussion begins with Forbes questioning Renton about Davy; Renton, however, refuses to talk about him and begins to tell Forbes about his university experience in Aberdeen. When Forbes points out that Renton began using heroin “heavily around the time of your brother’s death,” Renton simply states “A loat happened aroond that time. Ah’m no really sure how relevant it is tae isolve ma brar’s death” (182). Eventually, Forbes leads Renton back to Davy:

Me: Ah suppose ah resented um whin ah wis younger. Ah mean, ma Ma would just take um oot in this pram. This big, outsized thing in a fuckin pram, likes. It made me n ma big brar, Billy, the laughin stock wi other kids. Wid git ‘Your brother’s a spastic’ or ‘Your brother’s a zombie’ and aw that sortay shite. Jist bairns, ah ken, but it doesnae seem like that at the time. Because ah wis tall n awkward as a wee laddie, ah started tae believe thit thir wis something wrong wi me n aw, that ah wis somehow like Davie . . . (long pause) (183–84)

Although we know kids of any racial or cultural background can seem cruel, and Renton recognizes the fact that they were just kids, “Jist bairns,” he nevertheless was deeply hurt by their cruelty. As an adult, however, his guilt about being ashamed of Davy is intermixed with the knowledge of his own lack of feeling for Davy. Renton states that “he wis like an object, rather than a person” perhaps partly out of self-defense, but also partly out of despair and sorrow for Davy’s condition. As an adult, Renton knows that to be cruel to someone for something that they cannot help is wrong, and it was through these experiences with Davy that he became different than his other brother Billy, and his group of Leith friends. In fact, it is implied that it was “friends” like Begbie and Sick Boy, whom Renton has known his whole life, who would have been the very “bairns” teasing Renton and Billy about Davy.

Another telling feature of the above excerpt is that when Renton quotes the local kids’ taunts he uses proper English instead of vernacular, for ex-

ample: “Your brother’s a spastic” instead of “Ye brar’s a spa.” Scottish working-class kids growing up in Leith would not, especially away from teachers and parents, speak standard English. By presenting the taunt in this manner it seems that Renton is still distancing himself from the full impact of the slur. In fact, he has translated it in his head from: “Ye brar’s a spa” to something that was *not* said “Your brother’s a spastic.” This translation acts to distance Renton from the full memory and from experiencing the full pain of the situation. This verbal slip indicates that Dr. Forbes is correct, perhaps too correct, in assessing that Renton “started using heroin heavily around the time of your brother’s death” (182). The presentation of language also records the “dooble” Scottish identity at work: English distances the event. If Renton allows himself to remember the said, “Ye brar’s a spa,” then he allows himself to *feel* “in his own language.” Standard English and eventually skag keep the vernacular away.

The guilt and pain of Davy’s death and unprocessed or *reprocessed* memories of others’ mean taunts in regard to Davy’s difference form a rhizomatic link to Renton’s lack of feeling for his brother Billy. Although Renton apparently never stands up to Billy in regard to their brother Davy, he is smoldering with hate for Billy for being a coward. Standing by Billy’s grave side during the service in “Bang to Rites” Renton remembers again the children taunting, “Your brother’s a spastic,” to Billy:

Billy being tormented by the Sutherland Brothers and entourage, who certainly made him quiver ha fuckin ha as they danced around him singing: YOUR BROTHER’S A SPASTIC, one of the great Leith street hits of the seventies, generally performed when the legs got too tired to sustain the twenty-two-a-side game ay fitba. Were they talking about Davie, or perhaps even me? Didnae matter. They didne see me looking doon fae the bridge. Billy, your head stayed bowed. Impotence. How does it feel Billy Boy? Not good. I know because (211)

The paragraph breaks off without finishing the sentence and without punctuation. From this passage it is evident that Renton, too, knows he is a coward. The difference between Billy and Renton is that Renton never tried to “fit in” with the lads, and felt true, though unarticulated, sympathy



for Davy. Renton hates Billy for his “hard man” attitude; indeed, because Billy is the “hard man” brother who might have stood up for Davy, but did not, this may be one of the most important reasons that Renton despises Billy. From Renton’s point of view, Billy was too “scoobied” to know who to “stand up” for and who to fight for, and his death at the hands of the Irish Provisional Army is justice. Renton’s hate is inwardly directed and his heroin use an attempt to flee the pain and sorrow of Davy’s situation. In the same section Renton admits that a drug counselor, Tom Curzon, pushed him the furthest in terms of understanding his heroin problem: “Ah despised masel and the world because ah failed tae face up tae ma ain, and life’s, limitations” (185). Renton was not strong enough to love and protect Davy, nor is he strong enough to accept life as an open ended and uncertain process. Life is trainspotting.

The various segments of the racist rhizome discourse connect in multiple places in a section titled, “Na Na and Other Nazis.” In this section, Spud narrates the events of a hot July day in Leith. Although Spud is not intellectual, like Renton, he is more sensitive and gentle than Renton. “Na Na and Other Nazis” is one of the most complex strands of narrative in the text, not for the way Spud narrates, but for the discursive nuances he is able to produce through his Spud-like gentleness and simplicity. Having been off heroin for over a month, he is bored and after chance encounters with Begbie, who playing the big man gives him two ten pound notes, and Ricky Monaghan, who talks football, Spud decides to get out of the uncharacteristically hot weather and see his maternal grandmother, “Na Na.” Spud’s maternal grandfather was from County Wexford, and apparently “Murphy” is also Spud’s surname. Spud’s grandmother had eight children by five men. The last child, Dode, was born in her forties and is the offspring of “a West Indian sailor”; he is, as Spud innocently and without malice says, “half-caste”: “Dode’s auld boy pulled intae Leith long enough tae git Na Na up the kite. Then it was back to the seven seas” (124–25). Because of Spud’s naive outlook on life his narrative produces an ironic effect. He is unable to mask the prejudicial words and phrases that are common—he uses them—but they do not have the same intentional malevolence that others in the text might have uttering the same words. For example, “half-caste” quoted above would not be “politically correct” if spoken by others, nor would parts of the following passage in

which Spud attempts to explain what it was like growing up around his uncle Dode who is not much older than Spud:

When ah wis a sprog Dode eywis seemed a real spooky dude. You'd go up tae Na Na's oan a Setirday, likesay, fir yir tea, and there would be this nasty young black cat, starin at everybody, before creepin oaf, likesay round the skirtin boards. They aw said Dode hud this chip oan his shoodir, n a thought so n aw, until ah began tae suss the kinday abuse the gadge wis takin, at school n in the streets n aw that. It wis naebody's business, ah kin ye man. Ah sortay jist laugh whin some cats say that racism's an English thing and we're aw Jock Tamson's bairns up here . . . it's likesay pure shite man, gades talkin through their erses. (126)

Because of Spud's lack of artifice in his narrative and his way of thinking about the world, this passage immediately establishes racism as a real phenomenon in Scotland crossing geographical and class borders. Spud effortlessly shifts the source of Dode's "chip oan his shoodir" from Dode to the society who hates him for his difference, and the real or supposed threat he creates. The phrase "we're aw Jock Tamson's bairns up here" might be "translated" as "we are all the same up here" meaning "we treat everyone the same up here" in Scotland versus how the English treat people. The mythical image of the Scots as generous in hospitality and egalitarian in the treatment of others is repeatedly referred to as "pure shite man, gades talkin through their erses."

In only a few pages of text, Spud is able to fully capture the racism against Dode when they go out for pint at the local pub, "the Percy's a quiet family type pub," through the encounter with the Orange Order marchers out for the parade season and the local skin heads. Spud's narration presents several strands of thought and the admixture of political and racial identities is very telling in relation to the idea that "we're aw Jock Tamson's bairns up here": Spud is a white Scots with an Irish Catholic background; Dode is a black Scots; the Orange marchers, who include Renton's father and brother, Billy, are white Protestant Scots; the skin heads who approve of the Orange marchers are white, of course, and we

assume are Protestant Scots; lastly, and surprisingly, Na Na, who Spud blames for the violence against Dode, is Scots with a questionable background in terms of religious affiliation.

The section “Na Na and Other Nazis” rhizomatically attaches to several other narratives involving racism and politics in the novel. The situation in Northern Ireland in the 1980s was tense and support for Nationalist paramilitaries was renewed after the deaths of H-Block hunger strikers led by Bobby Sands in the spring of 1984. Chronologically, we also know from Spud and Ricky’s conversation about football that this chapter takes place after the controversial “Anglo-Irish Agreement” signed by Prime Minister Thatcher and Irish Prime Minister Garret Fitzgerald on November 15, 1985. Spud, who has not kept up with football, attempts to make conversation with Ricky (Monny) by asking if “Durie still in the team? Monny jist looks at us and kinday shakes his heid. —Naw, Durie wis transferred ages ago, Spud. Eighty-six. Went tae Chelsea” (122). Since “ages ago” is open-ended, and the chronology of the text ranges roughly from 1982–1988, we can assume that the “Anglo-Irish Agreement” would still be fresh in the minds of those involved in Northern Ireland politics. The agreement protected the Protestant majority: “The agreement was clearly aimed at the rise in the Republication support. It provided in Article 1 that there could be no change in the status of the North without the consent of the majority” (Coogan 216). However, Unionists were so unhappy with the Anglo-Irish Agreement that there was a huge protest outside Belfast City Hall and fifteen Unionist MPs resigned as a result of the passage of the agreement. The Unionists did not like the new role of the Irish government detailed in Articles 5 to 7. According to these articles, the Republic would be involved with the terms of the proposals for the minority population in the North, including having a say in police authority and security forces. The fact that Thatcher, an ultra-conservative, and Tom King, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, signed this document confounded the Unionists. As historian Tim Pat Coogan puts it: “Who now could Unionists trust in England?” (217).

Jingoistic rhetoric caused by political tension, therefore, was still at an apex evidenced in the song “aboot Bobby Sands, slaggin him off, likesay,” the skin head table begins to sing. Spud comments on Sands, “I dunno much aboot politics, but Sands tae me, seemed a brave dude, like whae never killed anybody. Likesay, it must take courage tae die like that, ken?”

(127). For the Loyalist/Orange parade marchers Sands is simply the enemy and the more detested, despite “whae never killed anybody,” because he whipped up support for a fresh generation of IRA and Sein Fein supporters. Willing to die of starvation for a cause impresses Spud even though he is not too sure of the political circumstances; he is sure enough to know that Sands was a “Fenyin bastard” (128) to the Loyalist/Orange parade group. Concerning the parades Spud is characteristically turned off because all he can see is the enduring hate and the divisions caused by the marching season: “These cats, it has tae be said, have never really bothered us, but ah cannae take tae them. It’s aw hate, likesay, ken? Celebratin auld battles seems, likesay, well, pretty doss. Ken?” (127). The July parades celebrate the William of Orange Protestant victory over the Catholics at the Battle of Boyne in 1690. Spud knows from experience that celebrating old battles is not what the marches are about; rather, they celebrate and keep alive the hate and fear between Loyalists and Nationalists.

The rhizome narrative of “Na Na and the Nazis” is tentacle-like as it extends to include Renton’s father, brother and other family members. They are not just “there,” they are participants in the Orange Order activities and Spud reports that Renton’s father’s brothers and nephews are all there. Oddly, Spud states “Rent’s auld boy’s a soapdodger and a Paris Bun, but he’s no really intae this sortay gig any mair” (127); this is an odd statement because Renton’s father is in fact there with Billy and the rest of his Glasgow family, so how could he not be “really intae this sortay gig any mair”? Although Spud is embarrassed to see Renton’s father and brother Billy among the group, they do acknowledge Spud and Dode though Billy is characteristically cool, “He gies us a nod fae the bar, but ah don’t think the cat really digs us” (127). It is here that Spud presents very lucidly the political division inside of the Renton family: “Rents doesnae hit it oaf wi these cats; really sortay hates them, likesay. Doesnae like talkin aboot them. Different story wi Billy though. He’s intae aw this Orange stuff, this sortay Jambo/Hun gig” (127). These family relations spiral out connect, break off, and reconnect for both Renton and Spud which shows that events and attitudes are not isolated. After Dode is beaten up, Spud and Dode escape and before Dode is taken to the emergency room, Na Na “cradlin his heid” says “Thir still buckin daein it tae ye son . . . when will they leave ye alain, ma laddie . . . since he wis it school . . .” (129). Despite the obvious distress shown for her son, Spud does not empathize

with his grandmother's concern for Dode, rather he *blames* Na Na for Dode's situation:

Ah'm dead fuckin angry man, but at Na Na, ken? Wi a bairn likes ay Dode, ye'd think thit Na Na wid ken how anybody thit's different, thit sortay stands oot, likesay, feels, ken? Likesay the woman wi the wine stain n that . . . but it's aw hate, hate, hate wi some punters, and whair does it git us likesay, man? Whair the fuck does it git us? (129)

The woman with the wine stain is the daughter of a man who Na Na is trying to "cruise" in the common room of her apartment building: "Na Na reduces the daughter tae tears by making snide remarks about the bad birth-mark oan her face" (123). From Spud's perspective, Na Na is not any better at respecting someone who is different or someone who stands out any more than those responsible for beating up Dode. Perhaps she does not use violence, but her hate, according to Spud, is the same. In this way, hate repeatedly used against difference or those who are different is a "repetition of the Same"; with repetition of the Same, hate insures that difference is never left "alain." Moreover, there is also a recognition that Na Na is to blame for not preventing Dode's conception. Spud is making a judgment on his grandmother's promiscuity, the idea that a Scottish woman in the 1950s should not have "befriended" a man of color, and by extension he is also making a judgment on Dode's unknown father for leaving offspring in such an inhospitable society.

With my final example, the family is again a source of complexity and underscores the idea that the characters are not, indeed, all Jock Tamson's bairns. Throughout the novel *Begbie* (Francis Begbie) spews his hate for those outside his circle, for those *inside* his circle for disagreeing with him, and for anyone seemingly different. Renton illustrates Begbie's character early in the novel in "The Glass" section in which it is made clear that Begbie's "mates" fear him rather than revere him. Begbie's "hard man" profile is misleading, as Renton tells us, because he would not be a "square-go, withoot his assortment ay stanley knives, basebaw bats, knuckledusters, beer glesses, sharpened knitting needles, etc. Masel n maist cunts are too shite-scared tae test" [his hard man profile], "but the impression remains" (82). In fact, Renton finds the courage to steal the

drug deal money from his “mates” at the end of the novel out of his disgust and need to distance himself from Begbie: “it was Begbie who was the key. Ripping off your mates was the highest offence in his book, and he would demand the severest penalty. Renton had used Begbie, used him to burn his boats completely and utterly. It was Begbie who ensured he could never return” (344). Further, Begbie is cruel to June the woman who is pregnant with his son; the son in turn is despised by Begbie. We see Begbie’s characteristic treatment of June the section, “Inter Shitty.” June is pregnant in this section and Begbie, who is hung over, refers to June as “it”: “Ah punches it in the fuckin mooth, n boots it in the fuckin fanny, n the cunt faws tae the flair, moanin away” (110). When June screams at him to stop for the sake of the bairn, he tells her to shut up about the bairn, and adds: “It’s probably no even ma fuckin bairn anyway. Besides, ah’ve hud bairns before, wi other lassies. Ah ken whit it’s aw about. . . . Ah kin tell ye aw about fuckin bairns. Pain in the fuckin erse” (110).

The father-son issue, which attaches to the narratives of Renton and his father, as well as Billy and his father, even Dode and his absent father, culminates with Begbie in “Trainspotting at Leith Central Station” near the end of the text. Renton, who is returning to Leith from London at the holidays, narrates this section. Running into Begbie, he decides to join him drinking; they stop to urinate at the old Leith Central train station, “now a barren, desolate hangar, which is soon tae be demolished and replaced by a supermarket and swimming centre” (308) when an old man approaches them:

An auld drunkard, whom Begbie had been looking at, lurched up tae us, wine boatil in his hand. Loads ay them used this place tae bevvv and crash in.

—What yis up tae lads? Trainspottin, eh? He sais, laughing uncontrollably at his ain fuckin wit.

—Aye. That’s right, Begbie sais. Then under his breath:—Fuckin auld cunt.

—Ah well, ah’ll leave yis tae it. Keep up the trainspottin mind! He staggered oaf, his rasping, drunkard’s cackles filling the desolate barn. Ah noticed that Begbie seemed strangely subdued and uncomfortable. He wis turned away fae us.

It was only then ah realised thit the auld wino wis  
Begbie's faither. (309)

Walking silent until they come upon a lone man, Begbie hits him in the face and boots him a couple of times. The anger, the hate, and the self-loathing that Begbie embodies always translates into violence upon the other. "Trainspotting at Leith Central Station" pulls together and makes lucid the various strands of discourse that focus on hate, especially self-hate, and fear of anything different—people, places, ideas, even football clubs. I do not wish to suggest that novel has closure, but "Trainspotting at Leith Central Station" pulls together the title of the text with a multiplicity of discourses, including Leith's economic depression and cultural stagnation which breeds individuals like Begbie. Renton stealing the drug money from his mates in London and the novel ending with "contemplat[ing] life in Amsterdam" ends the story of Renton and his friends once and for all. Renton states that he could never go back to Leith or Scotland if he takes the money. Therefore, we might have a second novel that concerns Renton in his new life, but we will not have this group of "mates" again. Moreover, we will not have the mates' story with Renton taking place in Leith or in Scotland because that is the one place that Renton can never visit again. What "Trainspotting at Leith Central Station" illustrates is that Begbie is destined to be like his father, the "auld wino," and if real changes do not occur in this culture and society that Begbie's son with June will be a repetition of the Same of his father, and his father's father: Begbie as model Scottish progenitor.

The theme of trainspotting, Scotland's past, and the economically depressed area of Leith are central to the attitude and behavior of each character we have considered. The complex, overlapping, and often disconnected strands of *Trainspotting* produce a discourse preoccupied with debunking mythic Scotland by presenting how specific social, cultural, and economic situations foster and promote racism and fear of difference and change. The rhizomatic or non-hierarchical structure of the narrative mirrors the effect of randomness, chaos, and gratuity of the inner life of many of the characters, their interactions with others and their fragmented postcolonial identity. The novel's rhizome produces a Scotland that "instead of a centre" has, as Muir states, "a blank" because the rhizome builds-up, breaks-down, attaches, and reattaches continuously never al-

lowing a meaningful “centre” to form and stabilize the text. *Trainspotting* enacts the rhizome to depict or even to cope—“Scatlin’s psychic defense”—with the situation for those economically stymied by Thatcherite era policies and opportunities, and culturally adrift with a borrowed language and an invented heritage.

## Notes

1. Andrew Macdonald quoted by Xan Brooks in *Choose Life: Ewan McGregor and the British Film Revival* (Cameleon, 1998), p. 87.
2. See Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting*, (W. W. Norton and Co., 1993), p. 75. Subsequent references cited in the text.
3. From MacDiarmid’s *Cencrastus*, quoted in *Dooble Tongue: Scots, Burns, Contradiction* by Jeffrey Skoblow (U of Delaware Press, 2001), p. 72.
4. The Hiberian football club is located in the northern part of Edinburgh, while the Hearts is in west Edinburgh.

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