CHOOSE SILENCE:
HOW THATCHERISM DROVE SCOTLAND’S UNDERCLASS UNDER-THE-INFLUENCE

by

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Abstract

The drug addicted characters in Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* novels and Danny Boyle’s film adaptations desperately seek to escape their Edinburgh environment through their use of heroin. Some may view their drug-taking as a display of inherent deviance or an attempt at self-destruction; instead, I view their consumption of opioids as a method for self-preservation in response to their societal alienation. In my thesis, I argue that this alienation stems from the predicaments plaguing Scotland’s population during the premiership of Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher’s administration prioritized the material desires of neoliberalism over the frequently suppressed principles of the welfare state. In this way, Thatcherism further oppressed *Trainspotting*’s underclass by pushing policies that often inspired adverse emotions in those who could not adapt, which I propose encouraged subsequent substance abuse as a method of self-preservation. Specifically, these policies contributed to deindustrialization, mass unemployment, uninhabitable housing conditions and an overall sense of deprivation and disenfranchisement among the Trainspotters. Largely devoid of the immediate option to improve their circumstances due to a lack of economic means and limitations related to their social statuses, the Trainspotters instead search for a superficial way out of these constricting circumstances.

Already alienated from society, the characters in Welsh’s novels and Boyle’s films see in heroin an opportunity to reinforce their withdrawal as they live like ghosts in a state of ‘junkie limbo,’ a space that exists between full participation in Thatcherite society and total disengagement via death. Initially meant as a temporary anesthetic, opioids become a lifelong companion of the Trainspotters due to the painful nature of physical withdrawal and poor drug policies. Methadone, for instance, sustains the Trainspotters’ drug dependency while increasing the prevalence of an overdose, and continues to claim the lives of Scottish addicts left over from the ‘Trainspotting Generation.’ Utilizing the complete *Trainspotting* series as a key case study,
with an added focus on the most recent text, *Dead Men’s Trousers*, and film, *T2 Trainspotting*, my thesis will contribute to the prior research done on the ‘*Trainspotting Generation*.’
Lay Summary

Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* novels, supplemented by Danny Boyle's film adaptations, depict a troubled cast of underclass heroin addicts in Edinburgh, Scotland. Too often their troubles are represented as the result of individual moral failings, but what I am calling the *Trainspotting* series suggests that blame needs to be placed on broader political forces and practices. In order to better understand the influence of these forces and practices on Scotland's drug-dependent citizens, I assess the role of the government of Margaret Thatcher in driving the underclass under-the-influence. I argue that the problematic Thatcherite policies and intolerant ideologies of the 1980s doubly disenfranchised the vulnerable Trainspotters by further alienating them. Some of the initial issues in *Trainspotting* persist as problems in Welsh's latest text, *Dead Men's Trousers*, and therefore demand additional attention.
Preface

This thesis is original and independent work by the author, Alexis Elizabeth Danner.
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For those who “chose not to choose life”
Introduction

Sometimes ah think that people become junkies just because they subconsciously crave a wee bit ay silence

(Trainspotting 7)

Danny Boyle’s first film adaptation (1996) of Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993) opens with the well-worn sneakers of protagonist Mark Renton pounding the pavement as he flees from the police. The gritty city scene passes by as objects stolen during his most recent criminal escapade fall from him until his body, already harrowed by heroin, is aggressively halted by a car. Similarly, Boyle’s sequel, *T2 Trainspotting* (2017), picks up with an older Renton once more mid-stride, this time clad in proper running attire deliberately doing cardio. Again, a graphic crash ensues as Renton’s now-buff body is violently thrown from the treadmill and the thumping soundtrack is punctuated by silence. Although an obvious transformation exists between these two almost unrecognizable Rentons, his running in both scenes suggests an ongoing attempt to escape and the subsequent crashes communicate the futility of his effort to simply run away from his problems. Nonetheless, Renton does, in fact, exit the last *Trainspotting* novel, *Dead Men’s Trousers* (2018), and final film, *T2*, in a positive position with heroin behind him. However, his situation is unique in the context of *Trainspotting*’s underclass cast as numerous other characters, such as Daniel “Spud” Murphy, often perish prematurely or exit the series worse off than they were initially. Their downward trajectories are inextricably linked to Scotland’s own degeneration in the 1980s amidst an opioid crisis that was largely inflamed by a surplus of “cheap Pakistani heroin” that flooded the streets of *Trainspotting*’s primary setting, Edinburgh (Ratnam). However, increased availability alone cannot provide an explanation for the spike in heroin consumption: it is pertinent to also consider the historical and social context for this crisis rather than adopting Margaret Thatcher’s stance that this drug addiction was a “moral, not a social, issue” (Evans 76). When these greater contexts are considered, it becomes clear that the
immense economic and social changes brought about by Thatcherism were a seminal factor in the escalation of Edinburgh’s substance use.

Unfortunately for *Trainspotting’s* “drug-addled underclass,” those comprising the lowest social stratum in Scotland, these changes served as catalysts in creating a massive societal schism, relegating Renton and his mates to the murky margins of mainstream society (*Skagboys* 346). Literally and figuratively located on the fringe, these drug-taking members of the underclass are often neglected and their ill-fated experiences are ignored. Welsh, supplemented by Boyle, offers a polyvocal illustration of Edinburgh’s chemical counterculture and provides a possible explanation for their desperate drug-fueled escapism. Beginning with Thatcher’s first term and continuing into a post-Thatcherite context, Welsh and Boyle produce intelligent and serious cultural commentary addressing the previously silenced voices of *Trainspotting*’s addicts as they illuminate in new and compelling ways the predicaments plaguing Scotland’s population. Although Margaret Thatcher did not take prospective addicts by the arm and taint their veins herself, Thatcherite ideologies and policies targeted at the welfare state contributed to an overwhelming environment that further oppressed *Trainspotting*’s underclass. Pushing conformity and consumerism, neoliberal policies often alienated those who could not adapt to or adopt them, which I will argue encouraged subsequent substance abuse among the characters as a method of self-preservation.

While the cinematic adaptations of Welsh’s work avoid blatantly attacking Thatcher, Boyle acknowledged that the books “blame Thatcher’s policies for handing Scotland a staggering unemployment rate and a corresponding increase in drug use in the mid-eighties” (Burns 36). Even in *Dead Men’s Trousers*, the most recent *Trainspotting* novel set in 2015, Thatcher still exists in the minds of the characters as a harrowing figure. Indeed, perhaps the most important
condemnation of Thatcherism in Welsh’s work can be found in *Skagboys* (2012), where the narrative chapters are punctuated by small sections titled “Notes on an Epidemic…” that comment on the heroin and HIV crises that began to ravage Edinburgh in the 1980s. One of the most telling of these is “Notes on an Epidemic 1” which details the key events of 1979: the Scottish Devolution Referendum and the election of Prime Minister Thatcher. By situating Thatcher’s election within the context of an epidemic, the text openly compares the rise of Thatcher with a spreading disease. Subsequent “Notes” sections in the novel also imply an indictment of Thatcher as they tackle the upsurge of additional societal issues at the hands of the government during and after her administration.

Consequently, my first section, “Notes on an Epidemic,” aims to explore the escalation of societal unrest following the Scottish Devolution Referendum and the election of Prime Minister Thatcher in order to establish that the later spike in heroin consumption was far from spontaneous. Paying careful attention to Thatcher’s biography and how her experiences starkly contrasted those of the characters in the *Trainspotting* series, I will subsequently demonstrate that her ideologies and policies willfully neglected the needs of Scotland’s underclass. *Trainspotting’s* continued portrayal of how these measures increase misery is key to understanding why heroin initially enticed certain vulnerable members of Scottish society who were already dealing with difficult and deep-rooted circumstances. Ignoring the needs of the underclass and suppressing the principles of the welfare state, Thatcherism then prioritized the desires aligned with her neoliberal mantra of meritocracy, which assisted in further dividing an already disenfranchised Scotland that had, in the words of Renton in *Trainspotting*, long been “colonised by wankers... [and] ruled by effete arseholes” (77). This divide then allowed for the strategic alienation of the underclass as unemployment and the reorientation of social housing, both driven by the new
economic and social policies of Thatcherism, forced the *Trainspotting* faction to inhabit the fringes. While *Trainspotting* depicts life on the impoverished outskirts of Edinburgh, the upper echelon, “at the heart of Thatcher’s support” (Evans 62), occupied elite spaces of “Thatcherite opportunity” in which conformity and consumerism were continually prioritized, further alienating the underclass (Duff 72). Consequently, such a confining and economically exclusionary environment yielded a multitude of adverse emotions, which I will argue renders some vulnerable characters in the *Trainspotting* series additionally susceptible to increased opioid consumption. The *Trainspotting* novels and films explore the sentiments and experiences of its underclass characters as they age in a consumer-centric society that continually seeks to alienate them.

My second section, “Withdrawal,” then examines the final phase of opioid progression, resignation from this conventional life through drug consumption, which affords the addict the opportunity to reinforce their own alienation. Tracing the core addicts across the *Trainspotting* series, “Withdrawal” will analyze the ultimate response of the underclass to the aforementioned alienation and “social malaise” that surrounds them (Robertson and Richardson 491). *Dead Men’s Trousers*, supplemented by Boyle’s film *T2*, is crucial to this part of the analysis since Welsh offers a conclusion that supports my argument that the effects of inequalities observed in the UK since 1979 are long-lasting and enduring. In this regard, Welsh’s portrayal of physical withdrawal is also crucial since it reflects the equally painful nature of society and the lasting impact of Thatcher’s policies on Scotland’s addicts. As observed in Boyle’s *Trainspotting*, drug policy often promotes prosecution or medication-assisted recovery that sustains desperation, which perhaps explains why heroin prevails in *T2* as a ‘friend that never leaves.’ The prescribing of maintenance drugs that prevent sobriety while increasing the prevalence of an overdose proves
especially problematic as evidenced by the fact that half of Scotland’s “opioid-related deaths” in 2018 involved the maintenance drug Methadone (MacNicol). Consequently, I conclude my essay by looking at how these recovery strategies fall short for the addicts that comprise the *Trainspotting* series.

Although Welsh and Boyle occasionally differ in their depictions, together they offer a similar conclusion to the multimedia *Trainspotting* franchise, which includes leaving Renton in an arguably improved position with heroin behind him. Unfortunately, Scotland’s actual situation is far more ambiguous, and the addiction crisis continues unresolved. For many of Scotland’s “aging, long-term users,” or “the so-called ‘Trainspotting Generation,’” their stories often conclude with premature obituaries (Brooks). As of July 2019, Scotland sadly dominated the contest for the title of the “world’s drug-overdose capital” due to these deaths, again, many of which include Methadone (“Scotland Overtakes America as the World’s Drug-Overdose Capital”). These recent dire developments suggest the need for a fresh perspective on the prior research done on Scotland’s ‘*Trainspotting Generation.*’ Presenting *Trainspotting* as a key case study, my small-scale research here offers an instance where intolerant state ideologies and policies played a paramount role in driving vulnerable factions under-the-influence through alienation and marginalization. Consequently, addressing this relationship between the state and the individual is key to understanding why the ‘Trainspotting Generation,’ in the novels and films as well as in actual Scottish society, initially chose opioid-induced silence over the noise of Thatcherite society.
“Notes on an Epidemic”

Ah’l'll hate that Thatcher till ma dyin day. Thir isnae a day goes by whin ah dinnae curse her

(Trainspotting 320)

Just as Renton experiences a massive transformation throughout the Trainspotting texts and films, the societal setting that surrounds him also undergoes a significant shift. Regardless of one’s opinion of Prime Minister Thatcher, the fact that her terms were characterized by colossal change is incontestable. Unfortunately, these changes were not all the result of positive political triumphs, nor were they unintentionally unfair. In Thatcher and Thatcherism, Evans claims that “by design, Britain became a more unequal society under Thatcher… [and] those at the bottom of society […] failed to benefit” (139). Capturing the most severe consequences of this inequality, Trainspotting presents the “true legacy of the Thatcher years... better than any political critique ever could” by giving a voice to those located on the very bottom rung of Thatcher’s social ladder (Ross 196). Welsh’s and Boyle’s depictions of Scotland’s “lowest of the low” provide ample evidence that the changes and related conflicts associated with Thatcherism increased misery among Trainspotting’s underclass characters and contributed to their desperate escapism, which I contend encouraged societal withdrawal through the consumption of hard drugs (Trainspotting 78).

However, before the actual act of withdrawing can undergo proper analysis, some of the factors that drove the Trainspotters to drugs in the first place must first come under inspection. Skagboys, the prequel to Trainspotting, is particularly revealing in this context, as it addresses the early stages of the characters’ addictions, which the other texts and films in the series then expand upon. Specifically, as mentioned previously, the “Notes on Epidemic...” sections in
Skagboys insinuate that the 1979 Devolution Referendum and election of Thatcher cultivated an environment ripe for a narcotic crisis in Scotland. Consequently, it seems worthwhile to afford these events additional attention beyond Welsh’s brief mentions in the text itself.

Admittedly, Britain was already in the midst of economic and social difficulties prior to Thatcher’s rise to power, and experienced an array of problems which peaked during the 1978-79 “Winter of Discontent” (Aitken 5). Ultimately aiding in anti-union Thatcher’s ascension to power, this bleak time was characterized by the grim consequences of mass striking and foreshadowed the harsh conditions in Scotland that would follow. March 1, 1979, proved especially decisive in Scotland’s social and economic degradation as it marked a pivotal and problematic political event: the Devolution Referendum. This vote to establish a Scottish Assembly could have awarded the nation a greater degree of ‘Home Rule’ autonomy, yet due to an insidious stipulation concerning the electoral roll, the referendum instead served as a “brilliant act of anti-democratic political manipulation” (Pittock 123). Despite a slim majority actually voting ‘Yes,’ the referendum ultimately failed, a fact which Pittock maintains resulted in mass confusion as many Scots were left unsure of what Scotland had actually voted for or even wanted (123). The vote was also followed by mass misreporting of the facts by newspapers and textbooks alike, which resulted in additional confusion and negatively affected Scotland’s political self-perception – though one notion that most could agree upon at least was the shared understanding that Scotland had, in fact, “been cheated” by the devolution ordeal (Pattie et al. 25). Capturing the emotional tenor of this time, an embittered Neal Ascherson wrote in the Scotsman, “while Scotland waits for the next chance we can agitate, drink, or grow up” (Pittock 141). Trainspotting corroborates Ascherson’s first two suggestions as agitated anti-Scotland
sentiments and substance use dominate both the text and films set in the midst of these troubling times.

Unfortunately, the troubling times were just beginning for the Trainspotters coming of age early in Thatcher’s premiership. Aaron Kelly partly attributes this trouble to the newly elected Conservative government’s fundamental rupturing of previously implemented social improvements (6). Evans shares this stance but adds that this social fracture was particularly severe in Scotland where the marginalization was based on the fact that the Scots were “not prone to voting Conservative” (59). With fewer votes at risk, Thatcher viewed the Scots as a population that she could safely experiment on without major consequences. As a result, Scotland witnessed a steady Conservative decline throughout the Thatcher and Major governments from 1979 to 1997 (Denver et al. 29). This decline suggests an overall Scottish disenchantment with those in power, a fact that both Welsh and Boyle reinforce with Renton’s perturbed tirades such as his ‘Colonised by Wankers’ rant, included in both Trainspotting and the film adaptation (77). Renton’s rage and the upset of the underclass become readily explainable by outlining the dramatic differences that divide Thatcher and the Trainspotting characters. Calling attention to this divide reveals that Thatcher and the Trainspotting cast encounter diametrically opposed opportunities and obstacles, and this contrast likely fueled her disdain of any demographic that differed from her own. This disdain then resulted in neglect as the policies implemented and ideologies espoused during the Thatcher era further oppressed the already struggling Trainspotters for generations to come.

Many of the ideological principles that divided Thatcher from the kinds of characters depicted in the Trainspotting series were rooted in her upbringing. Her early autobiography, The Path to Power (1995), makes it abundantly clear that the “upright” Methodist values that
characterized her childhood would later inspire her “refusal to alter [her] convictions” (7). This rigorous religious implementation dominated the life of the Roberts family and prevented young Margaret from mingling with those outside her church. She would then carry this behaviour with her to the Kesteven and Grantham Girls' School where she refused to mix with her economically diverse classmates and allegedly earned the nickname “Snobby Roberts” (Aitken 31). Strained and self-serving socialization would define the remainder of her education and is especially visible in her years at Oxford during which she pursued a degree in Chemistry. The lonely lab work associated with her academic specialization prevented her from engaging with outside ideas and she was also “free to read only what she was likely to agree with” (Campbell 60). Even outside of the lab, Thatcher preferred her “own company and thoughts,” according to Aitken (42), though Thatcher insists she did interact with the “like-minded friends” that she found in Oxford’s Conservative and Methodist groups (The Path to Power 61). As a result, her own ideas and beliefs were continually reinforced without objection from diverse viewpoints which would prove significant in the development of the kind of closed-minded policies that targeted Trainspotting’s underclass. Consequently, some biographers, such as John Campbell, cast her Oxford education in a negative light since it appears that she failed to form “lasting friendships” and “underwent no intellectual awakening” (45). Interestingly, Thatcher was either oblivious to this consensus or was consciously mythologizing her university years, since she insists in The Path to Power, “I gained a great deal from the fact that Oxford at the end of the war was a place of such mixed views and experiences” (37). Yet, Thatcher’s documented socialization, reading, and participation in extracurricular groups makes it abundantly clear that she had no interest in engaging with mixed company or opposing views, an approach to an idea of society that would ultimately prove significantly harmful to the Trainspotters.
This lack of engagement with outside perspectives would perhaps play a primary role in Thatcher’s later tendency to be “unpleasant towards those whose views or misfortunes lay outside her field of empathy,” such as those who comprised the diverse Trainspotters (Aitken 2). Governing strictly by ideology, and acerbic towards those who differed from her, Thatcher failed to consider that her own ascension to success was not universally achievable. For instance, compared to Thatcher’s schooling, Trainspotting’s diverse members encounter entirely different educational experiences. These characters’ educations are troubled by their complicated existences, and their inevitable academic failings generally yield additional problems and complications instead of awarding them the societal advancement that Thatcher herself achieved. As supported by the story of Alison, a recurring character that appears in each Trainspotting novel, extenuating circumstances beyond one’s control can serve as a major catalyst in derailing one’s chance for conventional success. When Ali does encounter those who are conventionally successful, she “contemplate[s] what they had that she didn’t” (Skagboys 97). In actuality, it is not a personal shortcoming that hinders Ali’s progress but rather the unavoidable obstacle of her mother’s lengthy battle with cancer. Specifically, Ali reveals that she once received impressive grades but her exam scores suffered when the testing took place during her mother’s initial diagnosis. After that, Ali struggled to stay on track academically throughout her “Mother’s long illness” and instead began filling her life with dangerous “distractions” as a coping mechanism (Skagboys 86). Ali is faced with losing not only her mother, but her father as well, as he “visibly dwindl[es] in solidarity with his wife” (Skagboys 86). Simultaneously confronted by the loss of both parents, Ali becomes understandably overwhelmed and soon starts to spend her nights doing drugs in search of a brief escape. Eventually, Ali’s drug use escalates, and she starts “cookin” up heroin in the title Trainspotting text and in Boyle’s adaptation (7). Once a smart
student with a bright future, like Thatcher, the only light in Ali’s life now emanates from the lighter she holds under a skag-filled spoon.

Similarly, Renton’s bright future is also threatened by fated familial circumstances. Originally a devoted undergraduate at Aberdeen University, young Renton abandons his studies prematurely after he acquires a heroin habit. This increase in substance abuse appears to have coincided with the death of his brother, Wee Davie, who was severely handicapped with a rare and debilitating combination of chronic cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, and extreme autism. In Dead Men’s Trousers, Renton admits that Davie served as a source of great stress and “social embarrassment” prior to his passing, yet his death brings about additional adverse emotions as indicated by the lingering nature of this trauma (417). Likewise, the entire Renton family is understandably ravaged by Davie’s life and death as well, which gives insight to the issue with Thatcher’s lack of empathy. Specifically, Davie’s existence was sustained entirely by the National Health Service, a social service that Thatcher entertained the idea of dismantling despite her initial assurance that the “NHS is safe with us” (Evans 66). Although Thatcher’s unfulfilled proposal for “compulsory private health insurance” did not impact Wee Davie, the apathetic nature of her assertion that such measures “would, of course, mean the end of the National Health Service” nevertheless demonstrates that Thatcherite policies often contributed to, or at the minimum disregarded, the misfortunes present in the population she was governing (Travis). In many cases, these problematic policies, which were driven by preexisting ideological beliefs rather than informed insight, significantly contributed to the sense of misery pervading Scotland’s already-unfortunate Trainspotting underclass.
The Renton family, in particular, certainly undergoes no shortage of misfortunes. Already devastated by the death of Davie, tragedy strikes again when Renton’s other brother, Billy, later perishes as well while serving as a soldier in Northern Ireland. Renton summarizes it thus: “[Billy] died a spare prick in a uniform… He died an ignorant victim ay imperialism, understanding fuck all about the myriad circumstances which led tae his death” (Trainspotting 210). Trainspotting occasionally laments the loss of Billy, but more often these instances only add to Renton’s upset state as he feels immediate regret upon revealing his feelings, which introduces implicit commentary on the harshness apparent in Thatcherite and post-Thatcherite society. Specifically, Renton guiltily labels his depressing disclosure about the deaths of his brothers as “socially inappropriate” (Dead Men’s Trousers 333). In Dead Men’s Trousers, decades after Billy’s passing, Renton finally begins “mourning Billy now, after all these fucking years” indicative of the lasting effect of trauma (Dead Men’s Trousers 341). In fact, even the title Dead Men’s Trousers references the loss of Billy, since the trousers mentioned belonged to Billy but were stolen off a laundry line by Spud, which simultaneously communicates the horrible conditions present during Thatcher’s terms that drove Spud to steal a pair of pants (344).

The degree to which these deaths weigh heavily on Renton, regardless if he admits it or not, calls attention to the insensitivity apparent in Thatcher’s ideologies. A proponent of a meritocratic society, Thatcher’s stance on success fails to consider that unavoidable adversities exist, as evidenced by the traumas that derail Alison and Renton. Comparatively, Thatcher did not encounter adverse experiences such as the prolonged illness of a family member or the loss of a sibling during her formative years. Although Aitken, among others, questions the authenticity of her “sanitised” autobiography over which she had total control, the facts surrounding her life-narrative suggest that Thatcher was fortunate enough to avoid most
obstacles (Aitken 24). For instance, regarding family deaths in The Path to Power, Thatcher only mentions being sent away for the duration of her Grandmother’s funeral and claims a quick emotional recovery upon her return (16). Amazingly, Thatcher also escaped World War II relatively unscathed despite the fact that Grantham was a target bombing site and other families experienced great loss. Additionally, the Roberts avoided economic suffering as well, partly due to the frugal family’s presumably easy transition to wartime rationing but also because their income came from the grocery business. In Thatcher’s own words in The Path to Power: “people always have to eat” (23). Thatcher, then, not only narrowly avoided a myriad of obstacles but she also often had access to opportunities that many did not, thus creating the perfect conditions for her privileged path to power, which in turn led her to believe that success was dependent on hard work and discipline alone. In reality, Thatcher’s hard work was significantly assisted by the opportunities allocated to her, such as Oxford’s “University Appointment Board” which set Thatcher up with job interviews and placements despite her poor performance as a career chemist (Campbell 66). Additionally, it should be noted that Thatcher’s upward life trajectory and career path certainly did not suffer from “marrying a millionaire businessman” (Evans 50). Although Thatcher’s ascension to success does not reflect a universal course for those outside the underclass and there are many people who grow up privileged who do not share her ideologies, her exposure to “every opportunity” does offer a reminder of how far removed she was from the experiences encountered by the marginalized characters in Trainspotting (The Path to Power 119).

Whereas Thatcher enjoyed a surplus of opportunities accompanied by relatively few obstacles, Trainspotting’s Spud encounters just the opposite and faces sustained discrimination due to his substandard education and societal position. At the start of Skagboys, Spud is an
average working-class educated and employed member of society and has a steady job delivering furniture (Skagboys 46). Although mass unemployment is starting to ravage the community around him, and his coworkers are beginning to lose their jobs as well, Spud believes he is secure. He relates that “he’s been there since he left school: [and is] a good, reliable worker. Surely he’s safe” (Skagboys 47). Ultimately, he is not, as he is fired soon after. Largely deprived of alternative opportunities, Spud is inevitably arrested alongside Renton for the petty crime of stealing books. However, Renton’s education, use of proper English while offering Kierkegaard’s philosophy as a defense, and ability to mimic an alternative class allows him to impress the judge into replacing his jail time with rehabilitation. Whereas the judge presumes Renton stole the books to read them, the far-less eloquent Spud is incapable of such mimicry. Defending himself in his signature difficult-to-decipher Scottish slang, he ultimately receives a custodial sentence. Therefore, the judgement characterizes Spud as an underclass ‘lost-cause’ criminal who is undeserving of an opportunity for rehabilitation but is instead deserving of punishment. Since Renton is not punished in an identical manner for committing the same crime, Spud’s sentencing suggests that his punishment directly correlates with his position in the underclass hierarchy. At one point, Spud does lie to elevate his education in a job interview, ‘to get his foot in the door,’ which fails but demonstrates that Spud is aware of how his social position limits his opportunities (Trainspotting 66). By the end of Boyle’s first Trainspotting film adaptation, Spud is no longer a functioning member of society and is shown incoherently slurring on the sidewalk before receiving the funds Renton left for him. Yet, money alone cannot save Spud’s sordid state and Dead Men’s Trousers includes Spud illegally serving as a ‘black market’ kidney courier for the prospect of earning a few pounds (70). As a member of the underclass, and an especially low counterculture within the underclass at that, Spud lacks the
privileged contacts and conveniences that Thatcher possessed. So while Thatcher may claim to have grown up without a “sense of division between classes,” the aforementioned examples of opportunities made available to these classes communicate that Spud and his fellow Trainspotters do not share such a luxury. Instead, the only chances these characters are offered often come in the form of a drug deal. As expressed in *Dead Men’s Trousers*, “the skag deal wis an opportunity” (236). This juxtaposition effectively presents that Thatcher could not assume that the favourable opportunities made available to her were readily accessible for all British citizens.

Yet, as evidenced in Thatcher’s neoliberal beliefs, such as those espoused in her 1979 comment “pennies don’t fall from heaven, they have to be earned here on earth,” she had no interest in providing public support for those suffering (“Speech at Lord Mayor’s Banquet”). Unfortunately, this ideology ignores the fact that she was governing and disregarding a severely troubled population facing death, disease, deprivation, and even the lingering distress over the devolution decision. Promoting intense individualism and a “self-help philosophy,” “she had little empathy or sympathy for those members of society who were too different or too disadvantaged” and subsequently blamed individual failings for one’s lack of success (Aitken 6). As a result, Thatcher exhibited great “intolerance and incomprehension of the efforts and needs of those whom life has treated less kindly” such as the beaten-down bunch that comprise the *Trainspotting* cast (Evans 51). This incomprehension of needs appeared long before she became Prime Minister, as indicated by her cuts on milk for school children when she was Education Secretary under Edward Heath, which branded her “Milk Snatcher Thatcher,” but would prove especially problematic once she arrived on Downing Street (Aitken 19). As suggested by Thatcher’s surplus of opportunities and lack of obstacles, the Prime Minister’s misunderstanding
of the underclass experience would directly impact those in *Trainspotting* already struggling with extenuating circumstances. The additional adversities brought about by Thatcherism rendered many underclass members doubly disenfranchised while members of the United Kingdom’s upper-class often profited from Thatcherite policies. Significantly contributing to a deprived and divided society, Thatcherism cultivated a shared sentiment of adversity among the underclass as “many held that their world was deteriorating” (Black 104). For the *Trainspotting* faction, heroin would offer a way out of that world.

With Thatcher’s ideologies established, the injurious impact of her influence on the Trainspotters becomes recognizable. Welsh and Boyle offer up valuable representations of this impact as they reflect how unemployment, housing, conformity, and consumerism significantly assisted in the alienation of *Trainspotting*’s underclass. Thus, readers and viewers may arrive at the understanding that the characters were already socially marginalized before they chose to finalize their disengagement through the use of heroin. Beginning with unemployment, Welsh utilizes “Notes on an Epidemic 2” to call attention to the massive decline of labour in the 1980s. As Welsh writes in this *Skagboys* section, “following the election of Margaret Thatcher, in the spring of 1979, unemployment levels tripled” (135). Partly due to the push for anti-union and deindustrialization-based legislation, this labour breakdown wrecked the once-vibrant working class and their communities. In a 2007 interview with Ian Peddie, Welsh reinforced the damage of this breakdown with his insistence that “being working-class in post-Thatcherite Britain is to be disenfranchised” which he makes visible in his use of Edinburgh’s Leith as a primary setting in *Trainspotting* (133). This significant setting is inextricably linked to the identities of the Trainspotters, as evidenced by Sick Boy’s comment in *Porno* (2002): “I come from Leith, how can I be a snob?” (442) As a result, the Trainspotters and their environment share a simultaneous
decline. *Skagboys* demonstrates the early stages of this phenomenon as deindustrialisation destroys the port of Leith and the surrounding area disintegrates into a crime-ridden “ghost town” marked by “defunct docks” utilized for the heroin trade as depicted in the famed skag deal that concludes Boyle’s first *Trainspotting* film (284).

The attack on labour industries and the correlating unemployment crisis not only changed the setting of Leith but also significantly altered how its inhabitants, the Trainspotters, would relate to labour. Interestingly, *Trainspotting*’s working-class is, in fact, not working for a substantial portion of the novels and films. As Linda McDowell has insisted, waged labour is a “key to identity” which helps to illuminate the immense fragmentation that was inspired in the Trainspotters as a result of the decrease in employment opportunities (343). Welsh’s “Notes on an Epidemic 2” in *Skagboys* points to the fact that as many as thirty-five people were after a singular employment vacancy (135) with unemployment falling disproportionately on younger workers (Convery 179). This accusation of ageism could aid in understanding Spud’s previously recounted progression from furniture deliverer in *Skagboys* to drug-addicted destitute in Boyle’s *Trainspotting*, yet Spud’s story earns an even better explanation from his son’s critical ability to analyze his father’s downfall at Spud’s funeral in *Dead Men’s Trousers*. In a robust monologue, significantly abbreviated here, Andrew Murphy offers an objective take on his father’s demise:

> My dad worked in furniture removals. He liked that manual labour, loved the optimism people felt when they were moving into a new home. As a young man, he was made redundant. A whole generation were, when they shed all the manual jobs… My dad wanted to work. But he had no skills or qualifications… My father’s life was wasted, and yes, a lot of it was his own fault. Still more of it was the fault of the system we’ve created. (348)
Shifting some of the blame for his father’s passing onto a larger societal system, Andrew provides an important service by reminding readers that his father’s heroin habit transcended an individual moral failing. Boyle’s second film concludes with Spud alive and therefore lacks this specific scene, yet still communicates the sense that Spud might have significantly benefited from additional support from the system that assisted in the decline of his own optimism.

Unfortunately, there is no support in sight for Spud due to the Thatcherite attack on public expenditure and the resulting dismantling of the welfare state. Such an effort appears incredibly insensitive considering that like Spud, a minimum of 3.6 million people were unemployed in 1982 (Skagboys 135). Of course, Thatcherism did not invent poverty and unemployment; however, prior to Thatcher, other administrations had at least attempted to reduce deprivation (Walker and Walker 5). Instead, Thatcher’s government (and Major’s following government, for that matter) were more interested in reducing the financial cost of poverty to the taxpayer rather than reducing poverty itself and therefore went after public spending (Black 147). Due to Thatcher’s insistence on her image and her commitment to replacing a culture of apparent ‘dependency,’ statistics were manipulated, qualifications were severely tightened, and the stipulations were modified a whopping thirty times throughout the Conservative administrations in order to have as few people qualify for benefit allocation as possible, Spud included (Evans 30). An especially concerning stipulation, as told by Welsh in Skagboys, was the fact that then only those who were actively receiving benefits, instead of claimants, were counted as legitimately unemployed (135). The true total of those unemployed was severely misreported as hundreds of thousands of recipients were removed from receiving benefits. T2 exposes this phenomenon as demonstrated by Spud’s loss of his assistance after missing a series of appointments by one hour due to the ‘Daylight saving’ time change. Spud laments the loss of his
benefits during a Narcotics Anonymous meeting and attributes his relapse with heroin to the culmination of consequences from his marginally missed commitments. With this, Welsh and Boyle inform their audiences of a tradition of penny-pinching public expenditure and then subsequently demonstrate the consequences of this strict benefit allocation.

Unemployed and often denied support, “hundreds of thousands of young, working-class people in the UK had a lot less money in their pockets and a lot more time on their hands” according to Welsh in “Notes on an Epidemic 2” (135). Coupled with deteriorating social conditions, this unemployment leads most Trainspotting characters to commit crimes, predominantly theft-based according to Spud in T2, in order to fund their lifestyles. Despite substantial evidence that urban deprivation and decay were to blame for the huge increase in crimes committed during Thatcher’s terms, the Prime Minister still insisted that crime was not a social problem but instead was a moral issue (Evans 76). By framing the increase in crime as an issue of morality, this stance further aids in the alienation of the thieving Trainspotters by directing disdain their way. This disdain increases the social stigmatization of the Trainspotters, which Prime Minister Major would then sustain with his “condemn more and understand less” stance on crime (Lowe 213). Positions such as these aid in turning most of mainstream society against the transgressing Trainspotters, as evidenced by the abundance of negative remarks, such as “killing themselves. Serves the cunts right” aimed at Renton, Spud, and Tommy in Trainspotting by Billy’s mainstream mate Lenny (101). Early on in Skagboys, prior to his own breakdown, Renton reflects Thatcherite rhetoric when he encounters a change-scrounging addict:

This cunt disgusts me; he’s nae pride, nae politics… He’s been beaten tae a pulp by the system, and aw the parasite can dae is try tae scrounge offay people whae’ve goat the bottle tae fight back. ‘Wanker,’ ah hear masel snap. ‘Dinnae be
It appears that Renton does not wish to know the addict’s story likely because he already thinks he understands the situation due to the assumptions made about addicts by society. His characterization of this addict as a poor scrounging parasite also allows Renton to place himself in a higher position above the addict in the social hierarchy. Unfortunately, this response, addressing deprivation with antagonism, results in a push for more police and more punishments while minimizing compassion (Newburn 63). As proven by Spud’s custodial sentence, even brief incarceration can confirm one’s status as a criminal and renders Spud an ongoing offender.

Burgling houses in Skagboys, attempting insurance fraud in Porno, taking part in the ‘black market’ in Dead Men’s Trousers, Spud continually commits crimes and even ends T2 with an act of forgery. Sick Boy also admits in Porno, “I’ve stolen, robbed, choried everything that isn’t tied down, and so have most of my mates here and in London,” confirming the presence of a criminal culture and implicitly suggesting it may be the response of a generation to their deprivation (138). Again, in Dead Men’s Trousers, it is revealed that Spud stole Billy’s jeans while desperate for clothing (344). Consequently, it is possible to arrive at the conclusion that these theft-based instances are not the result of isolated and spontaneous moral failings but are instead a response to economic distress caused by mass unemployment and close-fisted welfare allocation. This additional distress indicates that Thatcher’s terms contributed to disenfranchising Trainspotting’s underclass characters which assisted in driving their desperate transgressing and escapism.

Already alienated socially due to their economic and underclass status, Trainspotting’s cast would also be strategically excluded spatially. Thatcherite housing policies, in particular, assisted in maintaining the Trainspotters’ distance from mainstream society. Geographically
pushed to the periphery of Edinburgh, these characters exist in communities, or ‘schemes,’ such as the infamous Muirhouse where Welsh once resided. Initially, as described by Welsh, these “drab housing schemes” possessed the potential for people to have a “bit of work and there’d be a chance of moving into something different” (Kelly 1). Yet, with the rise in unemployment and the consequences of Thatcher’s 1980 Housing Act, which intended to create a “property owning democracy” with the hope that “such a society would be naturally Conservative,” the schemes severely suffered (Black 21). Of course, Welsh’s Trainspotters are located outside of this desirable demographic, which Renton insists impacts the sordid state of the schemes: “the Government made them sell off all the good hooses … There’s nae votes for the Government doon here, so why bother daein anything fir people whae urnae gaunnae support ye? Morally, it’s another thing. What’s morality goat tae dae wi politics, but? It’s aw aboot poppy” (Trainspotting 315). Largely lacking this ‘poppy,’ the social housing schemes and their subjects are forgotten and fall further into states of decay due to Thatcher’s refusal to fund public building projects, and ultimately solidify the social inferiority of Renton’s Muirhouse mates. With property ownership, a central principle of Thatcherism, now crucial to social mobility, Trainspotting’s underclass characters become almost completely cut off from society and grow increasingly miserable as their existences in these housing schemes are neglected.

As time progresses, the conditions of these estates continually deteriorate until they are eventually described as “hell on earth” (Duff 61). This sense of decay also reflects the state of those trapped inside them, such as Spud who becomes a “rancid shell of a human being, propelled by drugs from one scabby flat or grotty pub to a subsequent similar den of corruption in search of his next toxic ingestion” (Porno 81). In another toxic instance, Tommy dies from Toxoplasmosis which Welsh foreshadows with “Tommy will not survive winter in West
Granton,” which shifts attention to the involvement of the location in his death (Trainspotting 317). Made visually apparent in Boyle’s adaptations, these scabby spaces inhabited by the skag using Trainspotters reflect the severity of the misery characterizing their grim realities and serve as a “spatial representation of the troubled past of welfare” (Duff 59). In Boyle’s first Trainspotting picture, Johnny ‘Mother Superior’ Swan’s troubled drug den is depicted as nearly devoid of furniture, with missing walls, collapsing ceilings, and an overall sense that this sorry excuse for shelter is moments away from completely crumbling. Perhaps this crumbling, visually presented in the “varicose-vein” cracks in the walls, foreshadows the demolition of many schemes under John Major (Trainspotting 315). Done in an attempt to also demolish the drug use that occurred in these estates, this strategy appears ill-considered in T2 since heroin is still consumed in close proximity to a demolished council estate represented in a pile of rubble. At one point, Renton approaches an upright tower block which contains garbage, a broken lift, and Spud shooting up after writing his suicide note. Socially trapped in this setting, Spud feels out of options and is headed for a final collapse much like his tower block, which communicates that the outside pressures have not ceased, and the internal cracking continues in these estates.

Shockingly, Spud’s dilapidated flat is actually an improvement, since the “prevailing mood of [Trainspotting] is one of homelessness,” which also characterized Thatcher’s terms (Horton 224). Spud’s frequent occupation of the sidewalk, depicted from Boyle’s first film to Welsh’s final text, and the lack of furnishings in the aforementioned flats also reiterate a severe schism apparent in British society. While Spud, Tommy, and the others are either devoid of a home or the possessions that make a space a home, the opposite end of the societal spectrum was enjoying economic prosperity and fervently embracing Thatcherite consumerism. Meanwhile,
the Trainspotters, experiencing abject alienation, are completely excluded from the consumer equation and the “I spend therefore I am” mantra that accompanied Thatcher’s terms (Black 11). Whereas the Trainspotters struggle with their survival in the sparse and sordid spaces of Edinburgh's decaying urban setting, those able to participate in consumer culture are preoccupied with purchases that Welsh acknowledges in *Trainspotting* as “society’s materialism and commodity fetishism” (343). Renton offers the following commentary in response to this rampant consumerism: “basically, we live a short, disappointing life; and then we die. We fill up oor lives wi shite... tae delude oorsels that it isnae aw totally pointless” (*Trainspotting* 90). Beyond utilizing materialism as a distraction, the upper class also appears to use their purchasing power to push the less-affluent members out of the city centre, as “society invents a spurious convoluted logic tae absorb and change people whae’s behavior is outside its mainstream” (*Trainspotting* 187). Duff submits that Thatcherite rhetoric specifically linked “material prosperity” with “active citizenship” insinuating that the alternative is subsequently passive and dependent, therefore weakening their society (63). Even Spud, who is continually depicted as simple-minded, recognizes this calculated class-based alienation. In *Porno*, he complains “they only want cats wi cash in toon, ah mean...they want us aw oot in schemes oan the edge ay toon” (261). Since practices such as these exile those who cannot afford to adopt or adapt to this consumer culture, the end result is an impending extinction of “gadges” like Spud in “ten years’ time” (*Porno* 229). Forced out of the city centre socially and financially trapped in nearly uninhabitable schemes, this strategic alienation serves as a direct attack on *Trainspotting*’s underclass and threatens their very survival, which appears to be the intent behind the aforementioned measures increasing misery. Evans argues that this society “by the late 1980s had become a more grasping, greedy, mendacious and mean society and so it has remained”
Welsh reinforces this premise, insisting that “in Thatcher’s Britain ‘Scots were losers, young people were losers, and the unemployed were losers’,” thus confirming that the survival and well-being of the Trainspotters was not an interest of the public (Ross 196).

Their elimination is entirely conditional on conformity, as the Trainspotters are told: “you’re going to have big fucking problems in your life if you don’t grow up and join the rest of the human race” (Porno 14). The Trainspotters do occasionally attempt to conform, especially Renton who previously directed Thatcherite rhetoric at an addict and insists upon a “veneer of normalcy” (Trainspotting 76). For instance, Boyle’s first Trainspotting includes a park scene with an exaggerated punk character whose stand-out style of dress starkly contrasts Renton’s casual appearance, suggesting that Renton’s aim is not to completely digress from societal norms even though his drug use is exceptionally deviant and situates him within a subculture. The film also depicts Renton adhering to the dominant notions of society when he nearly quotes Thatcher verbatim with his “there was no such thing as society” remark when he relocates to London. However, Renton’s rendition of this Thatcherite rhetoric concludes with “and even if there was, I most certainly had nothing to do with it.” So, while Renton may espouse such a stance, he is ironically forbidden from readily adhering to it due to the limitations placed on him by the very society he is minimizing. Although Thatcher’s meritocratic position attempts to blame the sorry state and estrangement of the Trainspotters on their deviance and lack of discipline, their inability to assimilate extends beyond their personal shortcomings. Instead, the larger problems preventing their success exist outside of them, in Welsh’s words: “it’s skag plus the culture of poverty and the total lack of experience, or expectation, of anything else” (Porno 261). As a result, Welsh’s characters cannot simply choose to conform. Hence, Trainspotting’s inclusion of Renton’s iconic “choose life” tirades that appear in both of Boyle’s films.
In the first *Trainspotting* film, Renton rants: “choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fuckin junk food intae yir mooth. Choose rotting away…” (87). Similarly, *T2* provides an updated:

Choose… designer lingerie in the vain hope of kicking some life back into a dead relationship. Choose handbags. Choose high-heeled shoes. Cashmere and silk to make yourself feel what passes for happy. Choose an iPhone made in China by a woman who jumped out of a window, and stick it in the pocket of your jacket fresh from a South Asian firetrap...choose disappointment. (84)

Severely shortened here, both tirades include lengthier listings in their original contexts and almost overwhelm the audience with all of the consumer-centric demands accompanied by upsetting comments which link materialism to misery. Renton reveals in *T2* that these monologues on materialism are the ironic appropriation of a “1980s anti-drugs campaign,” however they might also be understood “as a parody of Margaret Thatcher’s assertion that ‘people must be free to choose what they consume in goods and services’” (Horton 226). Within Thatcher’s presumption exists the ultimate limitation estranging the Trainspotters: they do not have total freedom over their choices.

As continually demonstrated throughout the novels and films, for *Trainspotting*’s characters “real choices are proscribed” (*Dead Men’s Trousers* 54). Coming of age in a fragmented and agitated country following the 1979 Devolution Referendum and election of Thatcher, the Trainspotters’ access to opportunities become increasingly limited. Alternatively, Thatcher’s exposure to a myriad of opportunities with fewer obstacles, accompanied by her refusal to socialize with those who differed from her, resulted in an “excess of hubris and want of
listening” that would fail to consider the needs of *Trainspotting*’s underclass individuals facing hardships (Aitken 7). Characters such as Alison and Renton encounter difficult familial hardships that trouble their ability to adhere to the traditional path toward socially accepted success. Even for those without preexisting personal or familial struggles, such as Spud, meeting Thatcher’s meritocratic standards proves impossible due to his underclass status significantly worsened by the plethora of problems that characterized her terms and the years following. Mass deindustrialization ravaged working-class communities and the subsequent unemployment was met with shady stipulations and the suspect handling of statistics in order to decrease public expenditure. Close-fisted benefit allocation coupled with a social housing crisis resulted in extreme economic misfortune and the strategic exiling of *Trainspotting*’s cast to the periphery of Edinburgh. While severe social malaise and degeneration in these Scottish schemes drive the inhabitants to decay and transgression, those profiting from Thatcherite policies continued to celebrate consumerism and push for conformity. The continuous calls for conformity in *Trainspotting*, “choose us,” significantly contribute to the alienation of the underclass and lead to a series of negative emotions in this overwhelming and exclusionary environment (187). Cut off from the traditional experience of employment, housing, and social support, this new generation experiences deep class division and is coincidentally excluded from the freedom to choose a better future. *Dead Men’s Trousers* appears to accept this effect of Thatcherite neoliberalism, which Sick Boy expresses with “so for now we simply go with neoliberalism as an economic and social system, and pursue [our] addictions relentlessly. We have no choice in the matter” (54). However, for Renton and his fellow Muirhouse mates in *Trainspotting*, one choice still remains which appears in his chilling comment, “well, I choose no tae choose life” (187).
Withdrawal

Thir’s nivir any real dilemmas wi junk. They only come when ye run oot

(Trainspotting 223)

Differing from Welsh’s text, Renton’s “choose life” rant in Boyle’s Trainspotting is accompanied by an additional remark. Offering an explanatory monologue while Iggy Pop’s ‘Lust for Life’ ironically plays in the background, Renton announces his choice to embrace opioids instead of Thatcher’s consumer culture. Specifically, Renton, voiced by Ewen McGregor, states: “I chose not to choose life. I chose something else. And the reasons? There are no reasons. Who needs reasons when you've got heroin?” Already removed from mainstream society through the aforementioned measures outlined in my previous section, Renton announces his official withdrawal from Thatcher’s world through drug consumption, which appears to afford the addict the opportunity to reinforce their own alienation. Therefore, in order to fully understand the Trainspotters’ drug use, I now want to turn my attention to how heroin assists in finalizing their disengagement. Beginning with a brief consideration of the pharmacology of opioids, I will then move on to examine how heroin specifically aids the underclass as depicted in Trainspotting. Characterized by a dramatic duality, as a “life-giving and life-taking elixir,” the drug offers benefits and extreme detriments, including the miserable issue of physical withdrawal (Trainspotting 10). Trainspotting’s brutal portrayal of opioid withdrawal proves crucial since it reiterates the severity of the overwhelming societal pressure and also suggests how the Trainspotters transitioned from initial escapists to lifelong users who live in a ghost-like limbo. In this regard, a discussion of 1980s drug policy in Britain, as reflected in Trainspotting, appears relevant since the response to heroin often prioritized prosecution or medication-assisted recovery that sustains desperation, which perhaps explains why heroin prevails in the later T2.
Consequently, I will also examine how these recovery strategies fall short for the addicts that comprise *Trainspotting* often rendering their societal withdrawal final and fatal.

While *Trainspotting* is essentially synonymous with heroin addiction, a myriad of alternative drugs, including everything from Ambien to MDMA, decorate the texts and two films. Full of fixes, the *Trainspotting* franchise is saturated with substance use that offers commentary on the distressed consciousness of Scottish society throughout the troubling times depicted in the series. Therefore, considering the progression of *Trainspotting*’s underclass under-the-influence, it seems pertinent to differentiate among the various influences that appear throughout the works since not all substances are treated the same within Welsh’s world. Communicating the pervasive nature of intoxicants in Welsh’s drug-filled domain, the titles of the novels often appear to correlate with a dependence, and even the third text, *Porno*, suggests the addictive potential of sex. Welsh’s latest work, *Dead Men’s Trousers*, carries the initials DMT and references the narcotic N, N-Dimethyltryptamine which makes several intriguing appearances in the novel as an “education[al] drug” (265). Other intoxicants, such as marijuana and alcohol, occupy comparatively boring roles within the context of *Trainspotting*. Alcohol, for instance, is commonplace and almost goes unnoticed amidst the other chaotic habits. In Boyle’s *Trainspotting*, for example, Begbie’s psychotic tossing of his drink onto an unsuspecting victim beneath him in a pub deprioritizes the alcohol inside the glass and instead focuses on the addiction to “violence n peeve” that sustains him, which he later admits to in *Dead Men’s Trousers* (7). Begbie’s unyielding anger coupled with his alcoholism brings to mind the aforementioned quote from Neal Ascherson amidst the Devolution Referendum: “while Scotland waits for the next chance we can agitate, drink, or grow up” (Pittock 141). Utilized as an aid during this emotional epoch, alcohol also occupies the role of a “principal social lubricant” and
makes an appearance at most gatherings, including the whiskey-fueled funeral for Nina’s Uncle Andy in the title text (*Trainspotting 36*).

Similarly, some of the Trainspotters use stimulants, such as cocaine and amphetamines, which Boyle includes in *T2* in a particularly high-strung scene presenting the drug in a manner that both over-excites and overwhelms the viewer. These uppers are also employed for socialization and performance purposes, as depicted in Boyle’s *Trainspotting* scene where amphetamines are consumed prior to a job interview, insisting that “a little dab of speed is just the ticket.” In *Porno*, Sick Boy’s Thatcheresque entrepreneurial spirit and intense individualism are also driven by a copious amount of cocaine, a practice which continues into *Dead Men’s Trousers*. *Porno* and *Dead Men’s Trousers* both align his cocaine use with business ventures and the pursuit of class mobility. This suggested connection between effort and cocaine depicts it as a hyperactive and productive drug which brings to mind Duff’s previously discussed argument regarding Thatcherite rhetoric and the insistence on “active citizenship” (63). Duff’s point on societal participation may explain why cocaine is not associated with the Trainspotters, despite Renton’s claim in Boyle’s *Trainspotting* that they embrace a lengthy list of drugs:

We took morphine, diamorphine, cyclozine, codeine, temazepam, nitrezeepam, phenobarbitone, sodium amytal dextropropoxyphene, methadone, nalbuphine, pethidine, pentazocine, buprenorphine, dextromoramide, chlormethiazole. The streets are awash with drugs that you can have for unhappiness and pain, and we took them all.

Primarily uninterested in active participation, most of the Trainspotters do not seek out cocaine which indicates the presence of a drug hierarchy among the underclass. For instance, cocaine's participation factor earns it the label as the ‘drug of millennium’ in Welsh's *Porno* and appears
more socially accepted (270). Alternatively, since heroin is diametrically opposed to cocaine, it is treated far more harshly.

Boyle’s first film illustrates this hypocrisy with the montage of “various disapprovers” that chastise Renton for his heroin use (Lowe 210). As film critic Andrew Lowe recounts in his summary of the scene, “Begbie, smoking and drinking, assures us that ‘No way would I poison my body with that shite’” followed by Tommy, also smoking and drinking, scolding Renton for his substance use as well (210). These chastising characters voice the mainstream stance of society since heroin is viewed as “crossing a line” and attracts vitriol throughout the series (Skagboys 54). Such an acerbic response may be due to Thatcher’s attacks on idleness, passivity, and dependency, all of which are hallmarks of a heroin high. As depicted in the highs that comprise the Trainspotting films, shooting up is almost immediately followed by laying down. Following the iconic “choose life” monologue in the first Trainspotting, Renton actually goes from standing to completely horizontal on the floor of Mother Superior’s sordid skag den. T2 sustains this imagery when Spud completes his suicidal shoot-up on his back.

In these collapses exist the preliminary service that heroin provides: an intense and immediate escape. Welsh describes this phenomenon using the term “anesthetic,” which appears on several occasions throughout the novels, including when the Trainspotters themselves try to theorize “how heroin made [them] feel and the term ‘anesthetic’ comes up” (Skagboys 437). Wildly different from the aforementioned substances, such as amphetamines and cocaine, heroin essentially offers a chemically induced coma over which the injector has a tenuous degree of control, which results in the Trainspotters’ temporary loss of their senses and awareness. One of Welsh’s characters responds to this loss by asking, “if heroin is an anesthetic, what are we anesthetizing ourselves from?” (Skagboys 437) Hopefully, I have offered a series of possible
motivations for this anesthetization in my “Notes on an Epidemic,” but, in short, the Trainspotters seem to utilize heroin in order to induce a quick exit from their environment which is exceptionally overwhelming and therefore encourages an escape. Largely devoid of the immediate option to improve their circumstances due to a lack of economic means and limitations related to their social statuses, the Trainspotters instead search for a superficial way out of these constricting circumstances, which Renton likens to “quicksand” in Dead Men’s Trousers (6). Throughout the series, the Trainspotters desperately try a myriad of methods to distract themselves from the personal and societal problems plaguing their existences, yet no other option comes close to heroin’s ability to fully withdraw them from that world. For instance, escapism is everywhere in the texts and films as Sick Boy preoccupies himself with predatory pursuits, Tommy leans on his lust for Lizzy, and Begbie focuses on fighting just about everyone he encounters. Renton, too, tries an array of escapist options in an attempt to run away, literally through exercise and figuratively through his use of the ‘geographic cure’ or physical relocation. Yet, heroin still appears to be the most effective option utilized in the series. As demonstrated in the Trainspotting scene that comes after Renton’s lengthy “choose life” passage, the skag-users are scattered throughout Mother Superior’s place and lie motionless on the floor completely uninvolved with each other and their surroundings, suggesting the severity of their disengagement. Although Boyle’s portrayal of this phenomenon is accompanied by Iggy Pop’s highly ironic “Lust for Life,” in reality such a scene would be almost entirely devoid of noise, thus indicating that the Trainspotters have swapped society for silence, as their unconscious condition reflects a complete severance with their environment and all the adverse emotions that accompany it.
Peele and Brodsky put forth that “if an intoxicant stands for escape and oblivion then it will be widely misused” (40). However, the *Trainspotting* Generation’s embrace of heroin seems to stand for more than just an emotionless escape or a “good kick” (*Trainspotting* 90). Beyond simply ‘dropping out’ of their current circumstances, this escape generates a sense of satisfaction for the Trainspotters which is something they rarely encounter while sober in society. It is important to note that the subjected Trainspotters approaching opioids have not been content for quite some time; otherwise, they would not be searching for an anesthetic. Yet, opioids miraculously, albeit temporarily, resolve this. As explained by William Burroughs in *Junky*, arguably one of the most insightful novels on opioid addiction, “when you take a shot of junk you are satisfied, just like you ate a big meal” (22). Renton makes a similar remark in *Trainspotting* regarding satisfaction, stating “junk fills the void” (186). The bliss that results from this satisfaction is magnified when juxtaposed against the dissatisfaction generally experienced by the Trainspotters dealing with death, deprivation, and the demolition of their communities. Therefore, shooting up results in immediate fulfillment. Boyle represents this “concentrated physical pleasure” in his sexualized styling of the injection scene near the beginning of the first *Trainspotting* in which the “fully orgasmic release of the heroin rush” is depicted (Ross 205). Renton reminds onlookers of the “pleasure” while Sick Boy and Alison visually experience pure ecstasy. Challenging the audience to “take the best orgasm you've ever had, multiply it by a thousand, and you're still nowhere near it,” Renton effectively adds sensation to his seemingly unfeeling and unaware escape.

Some readers and audiences of the novels and films have argued that Welsh and Boyle romanticize the pharmacology of heroin with their depictions of this intense gratification; however, an alternative argument can be made. Specifically, it appears that this chemically
induced contentment is less about heroin’s innate ability to offer comfort and is instead a
reflection of the intense discomfort present in Welsh’s post-Thatcher dystopia. As posed by
Burroughs in *Junky*, “perhaps all pleasure is relief” (6). While *Trainspotting* depicts the pleasure
present in a singular hit of heroin, the real service of the substance appears in the relief from
societal pressure that results from a “true and sincere junk habit,” as related by Renton in the first
film. Specifically, what heroin seems to provide for the Trainspotters is an accommodation.
Discussing his “alienation from society,” Renton asserts his “view that society cannae be
changed tae make it significantly better, or that ah cannae change tae accommodate it”
(*Trainspotting* 186). Although the Trainspotters may not be able to change their society or
radically modify themselves to fit Thatcher’s neoliberal mold, heroin does afford the user an
opportunity to reorient how they interact with the society that alienates them. Essentially, a ‘true
and sincere’ heroin habit creates an instance of ‘tunnel-vision’ in which the addict’s societal
experience significantly changes. Boyle’s cinematography reinforces this ‘tunnel-vision’ view as
evidenced by the final scene in *T2* in which Renton is filmed from behind in his childhood room.
As the camera zooms out and flies backward, the frame takes on the shape of a tunnel and
mimics the sensation of being on a train. Dancing to the classic “Lust for Life” track
synonymous with the original *Trainspotting*, this *T2* Renton is briefly replaced by a flashback to
the scene where he falls backward after having just injected heroin. As a result, this somewhat
disorienting shot offers a narrow view of Renton’s space and serves as a reminder of his equally
narrow experience throughout *Trainspotting*.

As previously discussed, the Thatcherite push for conformity threatened the very
existence of the Trainspotters by exiling those who could not adapt, meaning the impending
extinction of “gadges” like Spud in “ten years’ time” (*Porno* 229). Aware of their upcoming
extinction, those in *Trainspotting’s* underclass may have felt the need to self-destruct. Yet, although Mark and the others continually flirt with death, suicide is rarely considered. Renton even explicitly labels himself as a “coffin dodger” (*Trainspotting* 14). Therefore, I view their use of heroin not purely as a method for destruction but instead one of self-preservation within their narrow worlds. Welsh maintains that his characters possess a “real will to survive” and it appears that heroin’s ‘tunnel-vision’ effect is simply a tactic to help them endure their sordid situation with the hope that something better will eventually appear on the horizon (Morace 51).

Stripping away the overwhelming aspects of society that seek to oppress them, heroin effectively reduces the realities of the Trainspotters to the bare minimum required to live. This notion is continually presented throughout the *Trainspotting* novels and films as Renton often expresses how heroin has reoriented his desires. Narrowing his priorities, heroin requires an exorbitant amount of attention, leading Renton to remark, “ah love nothing (except junk), ah hate nothing (except forces that prevent me getting any) and ah fear nothing (except not scoring)” (*Trainspotting* 21). Similarly, he offers the following in *Trainspotting*:

> Whin yir oan junk, aw ye worry aboot is scorin. Oaf the gear, ye worry aboot loads ay things. Nae money, cannae git pished. Goat money, drinkin too much. Cannae git a burd, nae chance ay a ride. Git a burd, too much hassle, cannae breathe withoot her gittin oan yir case. Either that, or ye blow it, and feel aw guilty. Ye worry aboot bills, food, bailiffs, these Jambo Nazi scum beatin us, aw the things that ye couldnae gie a fuck aboot whin yuv goat a real junk habit. Yuv just goat one thing tae worry aboot. The simplicity ay it aw. (133)

Heroin hijacks the user’s hierarchy of needs, centering it around one incredibly demanding concern while reducing and reorienting the requirements of their existence. Interestingly, this
phenomenon proves to be a useful tool for surviving the miserable consequences of Thatcherite ideologies and policies, such as unemployment, demanding consumerism, uninhabitable housing, and social alienation.

First and foremost, Peele and Brodsky submit that the “purposefulness” of one’s life directly correlates with one’s becoming an addict (58). Likewise, Thatcher’s Methodist upbringing raised her to believe that idleness was a top transgression. Ironically, despite her unyielding denunciation of passivity, her dismantling of organized labour and role in unemployment effectively left the *Trainspotters* devoid of occupation. Heroin effectively rectifies this and although the heroin high itself is incredibly passive and comatose, maintaining a heroin habit requires an exorbitant amount of work. In Boyle’s *Trainspotting*, Renton even explicitly refers to his habit as “work,” saying, “after all, I had work to do” before heading out to score opium suppositories. Michael Gardiner shares this understanding of heroin as labour intensive in *From Trocchi to Trainspotting* and illustrates skag as an “anti-work form of action” meaning the unemployment of the Trainspotters is not synonymous with leisure since the characters constantly search for new and creative ways to obtain their fix (90). Tommy reinforces this in Boyle’s first film by remarking during Renton’s period of sobriety that Renton is one of the “junkies who don’t know what to do with themselves since they stopped doing smack,” which suggests that while on smack he never had to concern himself with staying occupied even while unemployed. Describing his skag schedule in the film, Renton relates the acts that kept him so busy: “we stole drugs, we stole prescriptions, or bought them, sold them, swapped them, forged them, photocopied them or traded them with cancer victims, alcoholics, old age pensioners, AIDS patients, epileptics, and bored housewives.” Even in *Dead Men’s*
*Trousers*, with Renton off of heroin and serving as the manager for a series of drug-dependent DJs, he still works tirelessly to acquire narcotics for his clients (73). Thus, Welsh once again reiterates the labour-intensive nature of drug dependency and by aligning scoring with Renton’s legitimate employment likens this behaviour to work.

While the Trainspotters’ constant scheming, scamming, and stealing allows them to maintain their involvement in drug capitalism, these activities do not award them enough capital to participate in Thatcherite consumerism. However, this participation proves unnecessary since a drug devotion appears to define consumption in a radically different way, allowing Welsh’s addicts to ignore the material examples listed in Renton’s lengthy “choose…” rants. The most interesting avoidance is perhaps Renton’s mention of stuffing “food intae yir mooth” in the first tirade. This rejection of food consumption is not Renton’s first time taking on the subject, as food is often missing from *Trainspotting* and Renton voices aggressive disdain for bodily fat. Addressed in every novel and film, these frequent food-centric inclusions would appear to be intentional. Perhaps, Renton’s aim is to once again communicate the perils of excess consumption within neoliberalism’s economic system. Of course, Renton cannot entirely forego food and does intermittently eat throughout the film, including unhealthy options, but only when he is not actively on heroin. In fact, his only shopping trip coincides with his initial attempt to quit heroin in *Trainspotting* during which he stocks his residence with “ten tins ay Heinz tomato soup, eight tins ay mushroom soup (all to be consumed cold), one large tub ay vanilla ice-cream” (*Trainspotting* 15). Since Renton only appears to require nourishment when coming off of heroin, this food haul suggests that he was previously almost entirely removed from consumer culture. This indicates how heroin has reoriented his needs and desires, therefore making it
somewhat easier to live a deprived existence with an almost non-existent income and little help from the dole.

Another physiological need, shelter, is also greatly impacted by heroin in *Trainspotting*. Welsh and Boyle continually communicate the horrible state of housing and also depict the housing divide that separates addicts and non-addicts, which reiterates that heroin deprioritizes participation in Thatcherite consumerism. ‘Commodity fetishism’ increasingly defined certain forms of British identity under Thatcher and manifests itself in the mass amount of material objects that decorate the Trainspotters’ living quarters. As we see when we are shown Tommy’s first flat in Boyle’s *Trainspotting*, he owns an array of furniture, wall decor, and a massive collection of memorable VHS tapes from which Renton steals Tommy’s sex tape with Lizzy. Fast forward in the film, and viewers will be shocked to discover heroin-addicted and AIDS inflicted Tommy now residing in a vastly different setting. Dying in a dilapidated West Granton scheme, Tommy’s “previously well-furnished flat is ‘gutted’” and the ‘Iggy and the Stooges’ poster that once hung in his old place intact is now torn to shreds, indicative of a troubling transformation in between (Lowe 211). His furniture is shockingly sparse and incomplete as shown by his mattress laid directly on the floor, which is littered with garbage and unprotected vinyl records, yet no record player is shown in the scenes. Additionally, Tommy’s old flat had coats and other consumer objects, but he now has an empty coat rack and a series of shelves that remain bare. These changes indicate that Tommy exists outside consumerism as his heroin habit itself refutes materialist ideals and the fact that he is dying further inflames the matter.

*T2* continues this anti-materialism message as evidenced in Spud’s predominately empty flat. His possessions are so sparse, in fact, that he is forced to write his suicide note on the backside of a past-due bill. Conversely, when Begbie and his son, Frank Jr., burgle a wealthier
estate, Boyle’s audience is awarded an opportunity to view how the upper echelon lives in a post-Thatcherite context. This juxtaposition, much like the one between Tommy’s two spaces, not only demonstrates the erasure of consumer identity for the Trainspotters but also how a basic physiological need, shelter, is also greatly assisted by heroin. Described as “hell on earth” the Scottish schemes that exist in Trainspotting offer grim conditions that would prove unsatisfactory for most (Duff 61). While some may argue that the Trainspotters are wholly responsible for their grotesque living quarters, such as Tommy’s trashing of his flat, the responsibility for the crumbling exteriors of these council estates fell on the government. The Thatcherite sale of social housing in order to construct a property-owning society and the refusal to fund the construction of both new and existing council blocks resulted in rendering these schemes unlivable. Yet, due to the insular nature of heroin, the Trainspotters are able to transcend these terrible spaces and ignore the limitations associated with their living arrangements (Morace 61). Their survival suggests that skag effectively makes the seemingly uninhabitable somewhat habitable, which may as well be heroin’s motto throughout Thatcher’s premiership.

The inward-looking feature of heroin that allows the Trainspotters to ignore all that exists outside them also allows them to share these sordid spaces with a multitude of people, as evidenced by the array of bodies that decorate the floor of Mother Superior’s drug den. Also referred to as “shooting galleries,” spaces such as this reflect an additional self-preserving service provided by heroin: its ability to reorient how the Trainspotters interact with the society that alienates them (Kelly 37). Greatly inflamed by Thatcher’s neoliberal notions about privatisation and rugged individualism, the breakdown of working-class communities predisposed the
‘Trainspotting Generation’ to societal disengagement. Then, the antagonism directed at the deviance apparent in this underclass further reinforced their estrangement. Frequently reiterated throughout Welsh’s works and Boyle’s films, the ‘junkie’ is an especially despised figure in Edinburgh. Even in the “loosely-knit communities” of “Muirhouse, Wester Hailes, Pilton, [and] Leith… in which poverty and deprivation are widespread,” the junkie receives additional unwanted attention as made apparent in the “AIDS JUNKY SCUM” vandalism that decorates the stairwell of Tommy’s council housing (Horton 222). The antagonism present outside his flat consequently creates a juxtaposition which depicts the inside of these drug dens as safe spaces. While Mother Superior’s domain often houses a multitude of drug users, Tommy’s solitude reflects that heroin can dismantle one’s need for human interaction; hence, why Tommy’s coat rack remains empty since he has no need to go outside and partake in society. Almost mirroring Thatcher’s anti-social politics, heroin inspires an intense degree of self-interest. Visible in a variety of circumstances throughout the novels and films, heroin’s reduction of life to the simple equation, which Ross refers to as the “crystal clear relationship of need and gratification,” supersedes other relationships (206). Welsh calls additional attention to this by illustrating the asexual nature of opioids as well. Whereas a more sexual Renton appears in Dead Men’s Trousers, his youthful libido was previously compromised by chronic heroin addiction in the earlier novels and film. Hence, his infamous interaction with underage Dianne is aptly titled in Trainspotting “The First Shag in Ages” in which he conquers his prior chemical impotence (129). Since heroin “acts as a substitute for intimacy and human connection,” the drug proves to be a useful tool for surviving the miserable consequences of Thatcherism since it silences the pressure associated with social alienation (Senekal 30).
So while the users may not require interaction, an ironic connection does, in fact, form from this drug-assisted disconnect. As suggested by Horton in “Trainspotting: A Topography of the Masculine Abject,” heroin can also offer “a way out of alienation and allows characters to locate themselves within a meaningful community” (224). Although Boyle’s depiction of Mother Superior’s den shows the Trainspotters prioritizing silence-inducing injection over human interaction, their sharing of the space suggests subtle solidarity. Under one nearly crumbling roof, a chemical camaraderie appears to exist as the characters share a space of subjection, both physically and figuratively, in underclass schemes at the bottom of the social ladder. While critics such as Morace insist “there is no sense of community in the novel” beyond the debased, this society of skag users does appear to yield some value as indicated by Renton’s lamentation regarding his loss of it. Specifically, his attempts to kick heroin sever his ties with this unique form of interaction, leading him to relate during a period of sobriety, “at present I crave it more than ever; the whole social thing; copping, cooking, banging up and hanging out with other fucked-up ghosts” (Skagboys 437). ‘Banging up,’ or the act of injecting, proves to have an especially profound effect on linking Welsh’s tenuously connected users. The significance attached to shooting up by the Trainspotters was largely due to the lack of syringes made available to them for most of Thatcher’s premiership. As Welsh communicates in Skagboys’ “Notes on an Epidemic 4,” the shutdown of a Needle Exchange in Tollcross, Edinburgh in the early 1980s by the police “meant that members of Edinburgh’s growing intravenous drug-using community no longer had easy recourse to clean injecting equipment” (226). Now forced to share syringes, each injection essentially serves as a blood-oath between users as they bond over their drug-dependency and shared subcultural status. In Trainspotting, when Renton refuses to share a needle he is told “now that’s no very social,” which suggests that a significance has been
attached to this exchange of injection paraphernalia (9). Evidently, this exchange also has lasting implications, as expressed by Sick Boy in T2, “and we shared a needle… Your blood runs in my veins, Mark.”

Although this blood-bond somewhat salvages the connection between Sick Boy and Renton, direct blood-to-blood contact from intravenous heroin use was also responsible for deadly spread of HIV among Scotland’s ‘Chemical Generation.’ As documented by Welsh, Edinburgh was hit especially hard, to the extent that “some sections of the media were describing Edinburgh as ‘the AIDS capital of Europe’” (Skagboys 226). Trainspotting documents this fatal consequence, as evidenced by the chapter “Bad Blood” in the title text and an array of other AIDS appearances throughout the novels and films. Tommy’s HIV-related Toxoplasmosis death provides an especially heart-wrenching representation of this phenomenon, partly due to the background and brevity of his heroin habit, and the antagonism directed at his disease. Yet, perhaps the most important issue delineated by Tommy’s death is simply how pain prevails within a “true and sincere junk habit.”

Specifically, Welsh’s Trainspotting describes heroin as a simultaneous “life-giving and life-taking elixir,” which demonstrates the dramatic duality of the drug (10). In the following passage from Trainspotting, Renton perfectly posits this dichotomy, using the imagery of a wave to relate the ebbs and flows of a heroin high:

This internal sea. The problem is that this beautiful ocean carries with it loads ay poisonous flotsam and jetsam…that poison is diluted by the sea, but once the ocean rolls out, it leaves the shite behind, inside ma body. It takes as well as gives, it washes away ma endorphins, ma pain resistance centres; they take a long time tae come back… ...It’s all okay, it’s all
beautiful; but ah fear that this internal sea is gaunnae subside soon, leaving
this poisonous shite washed up, stranded up in ma body. (14)

Calling attention to the psychological anesthetic that heroin provides, this abbreviated excerpt
also addresses the physical pain that results from sustained drug dependence. The subsiding of
the sea specifically refers to the phenomenon of drug withdrawal, which is infamously
synonymous with opioid addiction. Whereas Welsh claims to understand the sensations
associated with being actively addicted to opioids, Renton is initially unable to fully comprehend
the suffering present in a junk habit. At the beginning of *Skagboys*, Renton aggressively responds
to an addict desperate for assistance with antagonism (6). Conversely, when Renton encounters a
similar situation in *Dead Men’s Trousers*, he offers compassion instead: “a shivering junky asks
ays for cash, and I slip him a two-euro coin. He tears off without recognition, sick wi need. I
dinnae take offence, I’ve been there, his condition compels him tae act, he’ll be glad ay it” (149).

This acknowledgement of the sick necessity characterizing the junkie’s ‘condition’ starkly
contrasts Renton’s prior “nae pride, nae politics” Thatcheresque morality-based rhetoric
espoused at addicts (*Skagboys* 6). Just as Renton’s understanding of addiction undergoes a
transformation across Welsh’s texts, the reader’s own preconceptions might change as well. For
this reason, *Trainspotting*’s portrayal of withdrawal proves significant in the effort to challenge
the aforementioned Thatcherite conceptions of the Trainspotters as ‘losers’ and instead present
them as stuck in a sick “condition” (*Dead Men’s Trousers* 149).

Discussed extensively throughout Welsh’s novels and depicted by Boyle in the films,
withdrawal often revolves around physical pain, which points to the misery apparent in this
process of ‘kicking’ or attempting to get off of heroin. In fact, the first line in the title
Trainspotting text begins with the documentation of painful physical withdrawal, “the sweat wis lashing oafay Sick Boy; he wis trembling,” suggesting that Welsh wishes to call significant attention to this aspect of addiction (3). Hodge’s screenplay recycles this line in Boyle’s T2 when Spud compiles the tales of the Trainspotters. Much like Welsh’s work, Spud’s starts “the sweat was lashing off Sick Boy,” which reiterates that the symptoms of withdrawal are necessary to address when recounting the miserable experiences of Trainspotting’s underclass. The explanations of these symptoms grow more grim as Trainspotting progresses; Renton relinquishes heroin several times, and on each occasion reiterates the grotesque details of withdrawal that he and his mates experience. Whereas Renton describes the pleasure of heroin in Trainspotting with “take yir best orgasm, multiply the feeling by twenty, and you’re still fuckin miles off the pace,” the inverse, junk sickness, might be better described as ‘take your worst flu, multiply the feeling by twenty…” (11). Already harrowed by heroin, Renton’s physical state is further ravaged by his attempts to get clean, as evidenced in Boyle’s Trainspotting by the fact that he must gather three buckets to collect his bodily fluids throughout the process. The need for such extreme preparation should inspire a recognition that one has reached ‘rock bottom,’ yet Renton’s nonchalance regarding the matter suggests this is merely a fact of his addicted existence. Whereas the turmoil present in Thatcherite society initially drove the Trainspotters to take heroin, this withdrawal sequence suggests that the threat of physical anguish has become a secondary drive sustaining their dependence.

However, despite heroin’s initial use as an anesthetic, psychological pain can also result, as indicated by Renton’s disclosure in Trainspotting that “the psychological dependency is stronger than ever” (450). Yet, whereas the aforementioned instances of physical discomfort come from the user’s rejection of heroin, psychological pain appears to result from the embrace
of reality. Often unintentional, this return to reality means re-entering the sordid situation that initially influenced the Trainspotters to take drugs. Now devoid of their chemical crutch, the addicts must once more encounter the troubles of Thatcherite society, which are presumably heightened following the sense of relief provided by heroin. Therefore, it appears that fears of physical withdrawal and societal reengagement work together to keep the Trainspotters under the-influence. While descriptions of withdrawal are many and varied across Welsh’s novels, those brought to life in Boyle’s adaptations are perhaps the most memorable. Two of the most stand-out instances, in this regard, are Renton’s infamous experience in “Scotland’s Worst Toilet” and his post-overdose withdrawal sequence.

“Scotland’s Worst Toilet” refers to the sickening scene in which Renton, ravaged by the early stages of withdrawal, is forced to relieve himself in a revolting public washroom. Welsh’s textual version of this occurrence is shocking enough, yet Boyle takes it a step further when Renton goes for a surreal swim in the toilet to retrieve the opium suppositories he has lost that were intended to ease his withdrawal transition. Whereas the murky washroom is depicted as beyond repulsive, this swim offers an entirely different sensation, as Renton is engulfed by brilliant blue water accompanied by a tranquil, almost therapeutic, soundtrack. The juxtaposition created between the scenes is two-fold and effectively illuminates the dichotomous experience of the Trainspotters under-the-influence. In the commentary provided on the 1996 Trainspotting DVD, Boyle himself explains the scene: “it fulfills two elements of [the character’s] life, one of which is the degradation that they’re prepared to go through. It also allows you to see some of the beauty that they find eventually in their search.” However, additional degradation exists in the sequence. Not only is Renton degraded by the debased behaviours he is willing to commit to ease his junk sickness, which underscores the severity of physical withdrawal, but the setting he
exists in is also degraded. Throughout *Trainspotting*, Welsh continually challenges the romanticized tourism-motivated depiction of Edinburgh as a European place of perfection and the inclusion of this toilet scene is no exception. Boyle’s *T2* continues this notion as well, with the appearance of yet another low-down, squalid washroom, emblematic of a broader public space. The fact that the initial toilet sequence unravels in public calls attention to the horrid conditions that exist in the ‘real Leith’ and the real world. As a result, this suggests the sordid experience of societal reengagement is what drives Renton back to a deep-blue opioid-induced bliss where he is able to ignore the issues that surround him.

Following this withdrawal sequence and sobriety attempt, Renton eventually relapses, overdoses while also being administered Methadone, and is returned to the care of his parents when he emerges from the hospital. In his childhood bedroom, his detox is induced while he is essentially under house arrest, which removes any autonomy Renton once possessed. Literally locked in his room, the imagery of the bolted door reminds both Renton and the audience of his sensation of feeling trapped or “fucking stuck” in society (*Dead Men’s Trousers* 20). As the heroin begins to leave his body, the scene takes a bizarre turn. Renton encounters a series of haunting hallucinations, including: “baby Dawn crawling across his ceiling; Spud [sitting], his ankles in chains, above the bedroom door; and his parent participating on a very bright, over the top, game show on his television set” (Littley 449). The scene is disorienting, yet “there is a strong element of reality in these hallucinations, unlike anything he has dealt with whilst in his heroin-induced state of euphoria” (Littley 459). The dizzying train wallpaper and loud music reflect the return of Renton’s overwhelming reality, while the hallucinations present issues that he largely ignored while under-the-influence of heroin. Whereas Spud’s criminal position and Baby Dawn’s death drive home the troubles present among underclass drug addicts, the
participation of Renton’s parents in a flashy game show suggests their position under-the-influence of societal conformity and consumerism, thus linking the return of reality with the sensation of being overwhelmed.

In both “Scotland’s Worst Toilet” and Renton’s post-overdose withdrawal sequence, Welsh and Boyle construct an interesting spectrum where withdrawal exists between heroin’s relief and reality’s misery. Renton employs the phrase “junky’s limbo” to describe the state where he is “too sick tae sleep, too tired tae stay awake”; however, it also seems useful to delineate his addiction as a state of limbo as well. Specifically, it appears that heroin allows the Trainspotters to enter a space that exists between full participation in Thatcherite society and total disengagement via death. As discussed, death is an exceptionally easy and accessible option for the Trainspotters, as made clear with Renton’s near overdose, yet Welsh’s cast rarely reaches for that possibility, again reiterating that these characters possess a “real will to survive,” which demonstrates their use of the ‘limbo’ as a self-preservation purgatory between life and death (Morace 51). Horton also views the Trainspotters as existing in an “invisible world that mirrors and co-exists alongside our own” (219). In particular, Horton reads the imagery of the skull on Trainspotting’s cover, much like the skeletons on Skagboys’, as the representation of an x-ray, thus suggesting the presence of an “alternative reality” in which the Trainspotters exist (219). While I agree with the idea of an alternative reality, I prefer to view the Trainspotters as ghosts instead of skeletons as a way to explore their limbo, or self-preservation purgatory. It is precisely this ghostly state that I believe affords the addict a chance at surviving their sordid surroundings.

While the figure of the ghost is only implicit in Boyle’s films, Welsh’s texts explicitly mention ghosts a multitude of times. Appearing in every novel, ‘ghost’ or ‘ghosting’ are frequently employed to describe both the Trainspotters themselves and how they move. Once
functioning-members of society at the beginning of *Skagboys*, by the end of the novel Welsh has started to report Renton and the others as “ghostly reflection[s]” (283) calling attention to their “ghostly remnants” (185). Labeling the Trainspotters as “fucked up ghosts” in *Skagboys*, Welsh continues this characterization in the other texts, making remarks such as “others cruise along silently, like ghosts” (*Trainspotting* 262) and “they just file out into the night like the ghosts” (*Porno* 122). Linking their ‘ghostly state’ with silence and movement reveals how the heroin addicted characters in Welsh’s cast relate to their environment. Removed from reality, Spud reiterates the severity of this societal severance in Boyle’s *T2* when he expresses his unfamiliarity with ‘Daylight saving time,’ or “British Summer time,” at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting: “how was I supposed to know? I've been on skag for 15 years. You know how it is… daylight is not exactly high on your agenda when you got a habit.” Cruising along silently in an opioid-induced anesthetic state, the ghost-like Trainspotters seem almost immune to the conditions that surround them, at least while they are under-the-influence.

Off of heroin, as Renton claims in Boyle’s *Trainspotting*, “you have to worry about bills, about food, about some football team that never fucking wins, about human relationships and all the things that really don't matter when you've got a sincere and truthful junk habit.” Hence, most of his robust profanity-filled rants occur during his periods of sobriety. His iconic ‘Scots are the scum of the earth’ tirade in the first film takes place while he is clean, and immediately after this display of emotion, Renton declares “at or around this time, we made a healthy, informed, democratic decision to get back on drugs as soon as possible.” With heroin momentarily relinquished from their systems, Renton and his mates are painfully reminded of their miserable realities under Thatcher’s domain. Specifically, Welsh writes that the Trainspotters in this state
are “like ghosts; hurting inside, yet fearful of the imminence of even greater pain and discomfort,” which communicates the misery apparent in facing society while sober (*Trainspotting* 242). In the aforementioned “Scots are the scum…” scene, recalling that they are the “lowest of the low” within a society plagued by deprivation proves painful and the realization quickly sends them running off in search of heroin once more. Once the Trainspotters return from their ghostly state, the adverse and overwhelming emotions that characterized their prejunk days return as well. As a result, this return reiterates the service that heroin offers, as Welsh suggests in *Trainspotting* that heroin provides a defence against the ills and pressures of society: “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” (75). Situating drugs as a defence, Renton effectively indicates that heroin is employed as a method for self-preservation meant to help the addict, not harm them.

Unfortunately, since many of the effects of inequalities observed in the UK since 1979 remain, the need for a psychological anesthetic accordingly persists in *Dead Men’s Trousers* and *T2*, the most recent novel and film in the series. Calling attention to the ongoing issues originally apparent during Thatcher’s decade, Welsh effectively adds an additional ghostly element to his novel. The Trainspotters not only lived as ghosts during Thatcher’s years in power but now continue to be haunted in the years following. In particular, Welsh presents the remaining council housing estates in *Dead Men’s Trousers* as “ghost buildings” (343), with heroin addiction continuing to be a serious issue among this section of the Scots population. This fact, coupled with the physical dependence factor of opioids and the painful withdrawal that accompanies them, largely explains why heroin persists in *T2* as a ‘friend that never leaves.’
Recovery

THROWIN AWAY YIR LIFE DOESNAE NEED TAE BE AN AUTOMATIC DEATH SENTENCE DESTROY REHABILITATE
(Trainspotting 195)

As I have previously suggested, the sordid societal conditions in Scotland and the physical dependence feature of opioids have a major effect on sustaining the Trainspotters’ addiction. A third factor is the adverse impact that Thatcherism had on drug policy in Britain in the midst of Scotland’s 1980s opioid crisis. The fact that present-day Scotland is still ravaged by opioids also indicates the lasting impact of Thatcher’s policies on Scotland’s addicts. Consequently, I conclude my thesis by looking at how these recovery strategies fall short for the addicts that comprise Trainspotting, since these strategies extend beyond Welsh’s and Boyle’s fictional works to affect the real ‘Trainspotting Generation’ currently dying after their lengthy stays in junkie limbo. Thatcher’s policies not only assisted in driving Scotland’s underclass under-the-influence but kept them under-the-influence long after she left Downing Street.

Committed as she was to cuts in public expenditure and their effects on the underclass, it should come as no surprise that Thatcher’s drug policy was neither generous nor compassionate. Heroin addiction was largely “exacerbated by the Thatcherite NHS’s withdrawal of the most effective treatment measures in favor of low success measures” (Ross 196). Although criminologists insisted that deviance and drug-taking behavior apparent among youth was the “inevitable logical conclusion of her long assault on the welfare state,” the Prime Minister continued to insist that drug use was a moral rather than a socioeconomic issue (Ross 199). Evans also argues that under Thatcher, Britain became “less tolerant” and “far less humane,” a fact certainly reflected in her administration’s handling of addiction (13). Ultimately, this intolerant, uncaring response yields a counterproductive result. Despite the fact that Thatcher
fervently fought against a culture of dependency, her problematic policies would significantly sustain just such a culture.

Visible in the courtroom scenes included both in Welsh’s *Trainspotting* and Boyle’s film adaptation, the two preferred responses for heroin addiction are prosecution and medication assisted recovery. Interestingly, while both Spud and Renton are heroin addicts and commit the same crime, they receive different treatments and subsequently end *Dead Men’s Trousers* with vastly different conclusions. With this, Welsh and Boyle provide possible, albeit fictionalized, outcomes for real-life policies that highlight the flaws present in these approaches to addiction. Due to Spud’s especially low position among the underclass and his prior convictions, the judge views him as devoid of potential and as just another debased criminal. Rendering him useless in Thatcher’s meritocracy, this judgment results in Spud receiving a custodial sentence post prosecution. As I have noted, even brief incarceration can confirm one’s status as a criminal and in this case renders Spud an ongoing offender. Renton recognizes the problems apparent in this response to addiction and compares jail recidivism to a heroin relapse in *Trainspotting*:

> Kicking and using again is like gaun tae prison. Everytime ye go to jail, the probability ay ye ever becoming free fae that kind ay life decreases. It’s the same every time ye go back tae smack. Ye decrease yir chances ay ever bein able tae dae withoot it. (317)

In the film, the judge anticipates that Spud will continue to transgress: “in sentencing you to six months' imprisonment my only worry is that it will not be long before we meet again.” Although this comment is likely intended as an attack on Spud’s status as a habitual thief, it also provides a veiled critique of the prosecution policies imposed by the state. Of course, the judge is ultimately correct in his prediction and Spud resumes his criminal wrongdoings upon release. Although
Spud, arguably already the most kind-hearted among the Trainspotters, occasionally tries to improve himself and his situation by quitting heroin, he is never able to fully distance himself from his skag-fueled criminal lifestyle. Spud’s long struggle with heroin is summarized thus: “he’s never stopped. Paused, sometimes, I'll give him that. But never… stopped” (T2). As a result, Spud’s antics grow increasingly concerning until he arrives in Dead Men’s Trousers trafficking stolen kidneys with a bag of skag stitched inside his own body. Spud’s participation in such plans eventually prove fatal in Welsh’s text; however, Boyle’s T2 provides Spud with a second chance at recovery. Showing Spud speaking at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting, T2 demonstrates an alternative addiction strategy that diametrically opposes what prison offered Spud. Specifically, incarceration sustained Spud’s societal disengagement by pushing him further into the fringes of the underclass and silenced him among a community of other criminals. On the other hand, Spud appears as a participatory member within a positive and supportive community in the Narcotics Anonymous meeting, and his speaking suggests he has been momentarily removed from his silent ghost-like state. Beyond this, again as shown in T2, being occupied with work by renovating Sick Boy’s brothel also aids Spud with his recovery. In this way, Boyle offers an alternative approach that subtly critiques the additional alienation of addicts imposed by prosecution-centric drug policy.

As for Renton, although the judge perceives him as having more potential for recovery than Spud, his treatment still fails to halt his heroin habit. In particular, the judge orders Renton to continue “undergoing maintenance therapy having been prescribed Methadone and Temazepam” (Trainspotting 167). A long term and long-acting opioid, Methadone seduced the Conservative government as a harm reduction strategy due to the fact it can be consumed orally.
This method of consumption does not require risky needle sharing and therefore made it a desirable option to ‘treat’ the Trainspotters since Scotland was simultaneously facing heroin and HIV crises. Unfortunately, Methadone is accompanied by a multitude of issues that significantly hinder real recovery, since one opioid is merely being replaced by another. When taken at the correct dosage, Methadone does not deliver a high comparable to heroin and therefore leaves the addict looking for more and counting down the minutes until they can access their next dose. As related by Renton:

It’s still fourteen hours n fifteen minutes until ah kin git ma new fix. The state sponsored addiction: substitute Methadone for smack, the sickly jellies, three a day, for the hit. Ah’ve no known many junkies oan that programme whae didnae take aw three jellies at once and go oot scorin. (*Trainspotting* 177)

Renton’s mother reinforces this problem as well, insisting “nae Methadone. That made ye worse, son, ye said so yirs. Ye lied tae us, son. Tae yir ain mother n faither! Ye took that Methadone n still went oot scorin” (*Trainspotting* 190). The addition of heroin proves dangerous, since mixing the two opioids together often yields fatal results, as evidenced by the fact that nearly half of Scotland’s fatal heroin overdoses in 2018 involved Methadone (“Drug-Related Deaths in Scotland in 2018”).

Still under-the-influence, the Trainspotters fail to leave their opioid fugue and the ‘tunnel vision’ sensation that accompanies addiction. Consequently, they remain in their ghost-like states, estranged from reality. This suggests that Methadone alters very little, in terms of addiction, for the Trainspotters and instead brings about an additional overdose risk. Interestingly, Renton’s only heroin overdose in Boyle’s first film occurs in the scene following his musings on his Methadone treatment and therefore suggests the shortcomings associated with
medication-assisted recovery. Again, much as with Spud, brief suggestions of alternative treatment options are provided that appear more effective. Also like Spud, Renton seems to benefit from Narcotics Anonymous meetings which he claims he attends “occasionally… as a lifebelt” in the epilogue of *Dead Men’s Trousers* which reiterates the significance of societal engagement and the subsequent access to a supportive community (419). Beyond Narcotics Anonymous, Renton also appears to make a marginal amount of recovery progress with the help of Tom Curzon’s “Rogerian client-centred counseling” in *Trainspotting* (185). Curzon specifically calls attention to the influence of “life’s limitations” in Thatcherite society and leads Renton “to admit that Tom seemed tae get us closer tae what ah believe the truth might be” (*Trainspotting* 185). Through Curzon’s counseling, Renton even arrives at the conclusion in *Trainspotting* that his heroin habit goes back tae [his] alienation from society” and says, “so basically ah agree wi Tom here” (186). Reaching this understanding appears crucial in the context of recovery, since it effectively challenges the Thatcherite belief that drug addiction is merely an issue of morality and not a side effect of social malaise.

Methadone is often prescribed as a long-term solution, which proves problematic considering that 76% of Scottish addicts would prefer to be drug-free, according to the 2011 “Drug Outcome Research in Scotland study” analyzed by Kathy Gyngell for the Centre for Policy Studies (4). Ironically, the Centre for Policy Studies, a Conservative pressure group, was co-founded by Thatcher in 1974, which suggests that even among those tenuously linked to the Prime Minister there is a belief that the Thatcherite move to Methadone was a poor one. Miraculously, Renton avoids a life-sentence of remaining in junkie limbo; however, his behavior in *Dead Men's Trousers* suggests that he has yet to fully leave a state of ghost-like limbo. In the final novel, “most ay [his] life is spent in hotels, airports and on phones and email,” which
indicates that Renton continues to exist in an unixed position, much like a ghost (24). Although Renton certainly exits *Dead Men’s Trousers* with an improved mindset -- his initial “well, I choose no tae choose life” becomes “life isnae so bad” -- it is clear that he has not fully escaped the initial sentiments that drove his drug use and has merely found an alternative fix (418).

Continually haunted by the deaths of his brothers and friends, as well as the enduring socioeconomic issues from Thatcher’s terms, Renton still attempts to outrun his problems and the adverse emotions that stem from his alienation. In *T2*, Renton even explicitly admits his strategy to “be addicted to something else” and says his solution was “getting away,” which indicates his desperate escapism has not subsided. He also advises Spud to “be addicted” to something such as running or boxing. While this is undoubtedly a healthier suggestion than heroin, it does not address the internal sensations that motivate one to seek out an escape or an anesthetic, much like the prescribing of Methadone. This may explain why the middle-aged long-term addicts that comprise the real-life ‘*Trainspotting Generation*’ are currently dying in unprecedented numbers after decades of opioid use. With Scotland now labeled as the world’s drug-overdose capital, it appears more important than ever to address these underlying motivations by giving a voice to the previously voiceless ghosts disenfranchised under Thatcher. Hopefully, I have demonstrated what drove the Trainspotters to choose opioid-induced silence over the noise of Thatcherite society and with this information offered some insight into which societal ills must be acknowledged in order to ensure that more underclass members ‘choose life.’ Unfortunately, as illustrated by the current deprivation map of Edinburgh, the fringe schemes of Granton, Leith, and Muirhouse still witness the worst degree of low income, employment, education, housing, and geographic access, among other factors crucial to creating a habitable existence (“SIMD Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation”). Furthermore, as Welsh and Boyle have shown, the
underclass members exposed to these factors often have additional co-occurring issues which suggests these factions are still quite far from Renton’s later “life isnae so bad” remark (*Dead Men’s Trousers* 418). Consequently, until these enduring and overwhelming elements from Thatcher’s terms are addressed, it appears the underclass will continue to choose silence, in the form of heroin, over the noise of society.
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