WRITING THE LIMITS OF THE MARKET:

TRANSNATIONAL NOVELS WITHIN NEOLIBERALISM

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite the global spread of the latest form of capitalism called neoliberalism, literary scholars widely privilege American and British texts when studying this economic ideology. This project, however, takes a transnational approach to a literary understanding of neoliberalism by turning primarily to the work of contemporary non-Western novelists to complicate certain assumptions about neoliberalism. Chief among those assumptions is the recent argument by political and literary theorists that neoliberalism forms a global economic totality that is impervious critique, but the novelists considered in this project explore and demonstrate precisely how that work of critique is possible. These novelists write stories that narrate the limits of the totalizing vision of neoliberal ideology and examine how its contradictions play out in different geographic and cultural locations. Different aspects of artistic work form the basis for these critiques—production, performance, and reception. Novelists considered here interrogate how literary production itself is a space to critique the violent of work of capitalism even as the artistic labor that goes into writing a novel is simultaneously supported by capitalist market economies. Other writers examine how neoliberal values produce unique performative pressures that affect the articulation and display of narrative arts. Finally, some authors focus on the moment of a narrative's reception to consider what it means to receive and interpret neoliberalism itself, which these authors consider to be an act of writing in its own right. Taken together, these novelists envision what it means to tell stories and produce effective critiques that neoliberal ideology cannot fully subsume, all while acknowledging the immense challenge such work faces.

DEDICATION

To Sally and Isla

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This project began in response to a perplexing tendency within literary studies. Research on the latest intensification of capitalism, called neoliberalism, continues to widely privilege American and British texts, even as scholars simultaneously acknowledge that neoliberalism has a global reach. This continued Eurocentric method of critical inquiry is curious, especially when transnational theoretical approaches to literature are increasingly becoming standard practice. The following chapters grew out of a fairly straightforward initial question: What does a transnational literary approach to neoliberalism tell us about global capitalism's continued effect on literature and vice versa? Implicit within that question is the expectation that transnational literatures make significant contributions to our understanding of how neoliberalism operates across the globe. Further, since cynical and even fatalistic arguments within Western literature and academic scholarship about the supposed indomitability of neoliberalism are easy to come by, I wanted to see whether a similar hopelessness appears throughout non-Western literatures or if a slightly different narrative thread is discernible.

Any answer to these questions first requires a preliminary definition. Neoliberalism is a hegemonic ideology that situates the capitalist construction of a naturally self-correcting "free" market as the organizing principle of political, social, and cultural life. Neoliberal ideology was first formulated in the 1930s, refined as a theory in the midcentury, and more forcefully put into practice in the US and abroad in the 1970s and 80s. Its global rise has continued in the last three decades and generated steep

economic inequalities due to such practices as granting unethical loans to developing countries, financial deregulation, increased privatization, and massive tax cuts for those with the most wealth. Because of the global spread of neoliberalism, I approach it in this study primarily as a transnational economic ideology. While neoliberalism has different effects and outcomes depending on the local and/or national contextual sampling under consideration, the extent to which neoliberal policies have privileged private corporations adds a transnational dimension to its global work. While it is true that most transnational corporations remain linked to a specific national location (Keohane and Nye xv-xvi), the resource extraction and environmental degradation they initiate scatters and displaces indigenous communities, a key hallmark of the creation of transnational cultures (Vertovec 3). Further, the transnational movement of capital is "at once subnational and supranational," a both/and construction that is visible in the uneven development of any "uniform proletariat" across the globe (Lowe and Lloyd 2). To understand neoliberalism as operating in a transnational manner would be to approach it as "theories and practices that cross national boundaries that need not be mediated by the state, the form in which the West is instantiated" (Lowe and Lloyd 6).

Some standard neoliberal practices are greater privatization; a significant emphasis on individual responsibility, to the extent that individual freedom means the self-determination to participate in the market and increase one's wealth; the protection of the market from state interference by deregulating financial systems; and the rapid accumulation of capital through risky investment in and trade of financialized instruments, such as derivatives and securities. As may be evident, neoliberalism has much in common with classical liberalism due to its emphasis on individual freedoms,

self-determination, a free market, and a general distrust of state interventions into economic affairs. But the two economic ideologies are also distinct in key ways, to the point that many critics refer to neoliberalism as liberalism in overdrive, so much so that it becomes a form of "market fundamentalism" (Prechel and Harms 4). Within liberal thinking, markets were constructed and viewed as "efficient means for producing and distributing goods"; however, neoliberal theories tout markets as "morally good in themselves, and thus should be applied to all aspects of life" (Prechel and Harms 4). This application results in two key shifts, one political and the other social or cultural. The political shift is visible within the tendency today to regard individuals primarily as economic subjects, and the socio-cultural shift is marked by the neoliberal drive to economize nearly all aspects of life by commodifying them for the purpose of extracting greater amounts of capital.

First, the most notable political shift is that economic concerns take precedence over political matters in neoliberal societies, or, to put a finer point on it, the political becomes understood through the economic. Wendy Brown contends that this shift is what chiefly distinguishes neoliberalism from liberalism. The former is marked by the "neoliberal triumph of *homo oeconomicus*"—that is, the economic subject—"as the exhaustive figure of the human" which replaces the liberal subject that "governs itself through moral autonomy and governs others through popular sovereignty"; Brown terms this liberal subject *homo politicus* (79). Both conceptualizations of the individual have existed side by side for much of modernity, and it has long been the case that a subject's economic participation never "extinguish[ed] his *political* features" (Brown 94, emphasis in original). For instance, in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth

centuries, “quests for political emancipation, enfranchisement, equality, and … substantive popular sovereignty … are not formulated in economic language” (Brown 94). Within political thought, the individual subject was not regarded first and foremost as economic; rather, from Adam Smith and John Locke to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill, the individual is a free sovereign dependent on others in a web of social and democratic relations with others (Brown 95). However, the shift to regarding the individual as an instantiation of capital occurs when the liberal model of the “political economy” was replaced by simply “the economy,” a change that emphasized the necessity of “macroeconomic growth” above the collective interests of the public good that former Keynesian models held as most important (Brown 82-83).

This shift is further explained in Michel Foucault’s lectures on the biopolitical aspects of neoliberalism. He notes that from neoliberalism’s inception, political and economic strategists have faced down the key question of how to make sure that governmental practices are fully modeled on the work of the economy (131). The liberal goal of growing and protecting market spheres of exchange gave way to an emphasis on facilitating market competition, and this shift is visible in how people are encouraged to think of themselves. *Homo oeconomicus* is no longer the “partner of exchange” conceptualized in liberalism; now, this subject is an “entrepreneur of himself” (Foucault 226), for labor is no longer regarded or treated as something abstract (or abstracted) from a worker. Instead, the worker “comprises a capital” with his/her specific set of skills and abilities and *becomes* capital, possessing “capital-ability” (Foucault 224, 225). Foucault contends that when neoliberal economists make this new analytical distinction, they are also opening up “economic analyses to completely new fields and domains” (227), for if

individuals are encapsulations of potential capital, any area of life can be experimented with to maximize profitability. This telos of neoliberal capitalism is perhaps most recognizable within the near-constant move to subject anything and everything to an economic rationale. This impulse is evident in (to name only a few social and cultural examples) the turn to sports analytics, the popular *Freakonomics* books, and the heavy emphasis placed in school on standardized testing. All of these are driven or explained by an economic rationale that assesses something's value and necessity. Many scholars and critics note how this recourse to economic rationalization has over time enabled neoliberalism to take on the semblance of a social and cultural common sense, whose application to any quotidian matter is deemed an appropriate course of action. One outcome of this privileging of economic rationalization, is that there is little within neoliberal societies that cannot be understood as either a commodity or commodifiable, including the arts.

Second, cultural and social forms frequently become economized because of neoliberalism's hegemonic structure and global spread that places a premium on considerations of value, worth, exchangeability, and profitability. Accordingly, this study specifically considers how this latest iteration of capitalism affects literature: Is literature just another commodity? Are readers nothing more than consumers whose books merely possess exchange value? Do the hegemonic aspects of neoliberalism create social performative pressures that are impossible for the arts and individuals to reject, or is there space for resistance and critique, new modes of being and belonging? What formalist changes has neoliberalism generated within literature, if any? What limitations does literature run into when attempting to narrate or represent neoliberal ideology? Is

literature able to carve out a social or critical space that is not immediately subsumed by the work of neoliberalism? To the attuned reader, these questions may bring to mind echoes of Theodor Adorno's mid-twentieth-century concerns about capitalism's affect on aesthetics, and while I am indebted to the groundwork his arguments lay, this project seeks to expand on his theories by moving specifically into the terrain of literary accounts of neoliberalism. And not only that, but I also, as noted earlier, consider how the broader transnational network of novelists help us to more compellingly and richly answer the above questions.

Therefore, I start in chapter two by establishing a theoretical understanding of what it means to approach neoliberalism from a transnational perspective. A key part of that discourse is the thorny issue of how precisely to categorize and conceptualize neoliberalism—namely, is it national, international, transnational, some combination of those, or something else entirely? And how does the way we answer that question affect our study of literature? I address these issues by tracing the contours of neoliberalism's growth across the twentieth century through an examination of the differences between colonial capitalism and neoliberal globalization. Relying on the work of theorists from Rosa Luxemborg, Vladimir Lenin, and Frantz Fanon to Foucault, David Harvey, and Quinn Slobodian, I argue that neoliberalism is a global ideology with imperialist means and ends, the likes of which significantly alter prior understandings of labor, value, and production. I then locate these ideas in a specific literary example by turning to Hergé's graphic series *The Adventures of Tintin*. I look specifically at one of the series' earlier stories from the 1930s, *The Broken Ear*, because it questions what the value of art is within the specific period the aforementioned theorists describe. Hergé considers what

the cultural and economic value of different forms of art are in the midst of the twilight of colonialism, rise of mechanical reproduction, and tendency to produce one's art with the market in mind.

Hergé's question leads us to more pointedly consider literary modes of production, and chapter three covers how neoliberal values influence literary labor. Adorno's arguments on the commodification of art within late capitalism are well known, but I return to a recent debate by Stewart Martin and Nicholas Brown about the contemporary significance of Adorno's theories. They question whether art and literature can ever be anything but commodities or if their capacity for critique is neutralized by their commodified status. I locate answers to this debate within Ruth L. Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* and Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Both novelists use their work to explore what it means to produce literary work within an age of neoliberalism, playing with the extent to which their (and any) novels can produce substantive political effects in the world around them. Both novelists acknowledge how their work is complicit in the very economic systems it seeks to critique, but they also envision how an artwork's call for political resistance cannot be fully subsumed and neutralized by a market economy, either. Ozeki specifically uses her novel to show how art can spotlight neoliberalism's contradictions in ways that create meaningful change in people's lives. While she suggests that large-scale, macroeconomic concerns like corporate abuses and the violence of the industrialized food industry remain intact, she does note that significant reparations and social progress can occur through communal efforts of care and selflessness that are rooted in artistic work. Hamid writes his novel in the style of a self-help book to comment on how neoliberal values have saturated literary

forms and can turn the act of writing into simply another capitalist enterprise. Yet, at the same time, he also shows how the interaction between reader and writer is itself a significant communal effort of artistic production, where new forms of meaning and knowledge can be generated in ways that directly challenge neoliberal ideology.

Since most areas of life are now subjected to economic rationalizations, chapter four examines how neoliberal values produce unique performative pressures that affect the articulation and display of narrative arts. I approach this issue in light of the growing tendency within economic theory over the past two decades to conceptualize the work of the economy as performative in the linguistic sense most often attached to J. L. Austin—that is, that the act of naming something creates that which is being named. I trace these ideas from Austin to the present and connect them with Michel Callon's theories of performative economics before considering how these ideas play out (and are complicated) within Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The former contains literal performances—Amy Dunne's staged murder—and performative utterances—the fake diary she constructs to frame her husband, Nick, for her murder. Flynn shows, though, that the performative pressures motivating Amy's actions cannot be understood outside of the conflicts created by the 2008 financial collapse; further, Amy's ability to effectively execute her different narrative modes of performativity crucially depend on her utilization of different privatized structures of capital accumulation that are transnational and/or international in scope—plasmapheresis, derivatives trading, and mortgage-backed securities. Roy, on the other hand, explores how narrative art itself becomes a performance in deference to Western capital invested in the rapidly modernizing landscape of postcolonial India. Using

Kathakali dancers' ancient practice of retelling Hindu history as a framing device, Roy shows how the influx of Western investment through entities such as the World Bank both alters and limits the performative possibilities of narrative modes. Storytelling in *The God of Small Things* becomes a practice tainted and appropriated by the hegemonic influence of Western neoliberal practices, so much so that indigenous cultural forms become nothing more than avenues for the continual selling-off of resources in a former colony such as India.

But whether produced or performed, narrative arts require an audience, and chapter five focuses on the moment of reception, when a text is consumed or read, to consider how the interpretive work of reception does or does not afford agency to individuals. Moving beyond merely considering how the act of reading and literature itself constitute forms of cultural capital, I turn to two recent Latin American novels that question what it means to receive and interpret neoliberalism itself, as if the latest form of capitalism is a text to demystify. I first look at theories of reception from Wolfgang Iser, Roland Barthes, and Stanley Fish to understand historically what options are available to readers as they interact with texts before turning to Alejandro Zambra's *Multiple Choice* and Samanta Schweblin's *Fever Dream*, both of which target this issue through experimenting with the novel form. Zambra writes his novel as if it is a standardized test, and in doing so he comments on the neoliberalization of education in Chile; Schweblin plays with the conventions of the horror genre to cast neoliberalism as a system that generates environments of terror and violence. By altering generic conventions, both writers call attention to the contingency of meaning inherent within the novel form, subverting what we as readers expect a novel to be and do. Through their

narratives, Zambra and Schweblin each show how the work of reception is inherently collaborative and that interpretive communities responding to neoliberalism can succeed in creating alternative forms of knowledge and meaning. In this way, Zambra and Schweblin's novels connect to accepted theories of reception while also charting an agential space within the work of interpretation and locating it as an opportunity to produce a discourse that confronts the work of neoliberalism.

Lastly, in the conclusion I consider some of the current and future challenges writers encounter when representing the often invisible work of neoliberal capitalism. Literature faces the tall task of essentially translating neoliberalism and its effects into legible terms via narrative form. Three novels in particular address this struggle. I first return to Hergé's final and unfinished story *Tintin and Alph-Art* from the 1970s, where he revisits some of the concerns in *The Broken Ear*, only this time he queries what the lasting value and worth of *Tintin* is when private investment from the world of global corporate finance often supports the arts. Hergé's conclusions act as a more cynical corrective to some of Benjamin's optimism in the 1930s. Two more recent novels, *Ghachar Ghochar* by Vivek Shanbhag and *The Emissary* by Yoko Tawada, complement Hergé by considering how language itself is challenged by the rapid changes initiated by the global spread of neoliberal capitalism. Shanbhag notes how language must perpetually try to catch up to the present, an impossible task that can only come close to being accomplished through creative neologisms and the construction of alternative lexicons; Tawada, however, suggests that, even through the limits of language, the imaginative work of literature is still capable of helping us as readers come to terms with what otherwise seems improbable.

Finally, two comments on selection methods. First, this study covers only novels, not because other genres are incapable of speaking to the theoretical and practical issues surrounding literature and neoliberalism, but because the novel is uniquely positioned to engage with issues of economy, commodification, and interests. Novels continue to "uncover and historicize the economic paradigms of the present" through their formal and thematic changes that "speak to the epistemic changes" generated by neoliberal capitalism (Johansen and Karl 204). Indeed, the novel has always performed this kind of critical work by cataloguing "the history of the relation between subject and world" (Nilges 371). But we can also understand the novel as having always been the most capitalist of literary genres, either because it is the most profitable and bankable genre for authors that regularly dominates fiction bestseller lists or because of its political history, where the rise of the novel mirrors the ascendance of liberal thought and its values. In other words, the novel—whether a novelist wants this to be the case or not—is complicit in and reinforcing of many of the same market structures that the writers I study here are critical of. To paraphrase what Roy says in a recent work of nonfiction, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, everyone—novelists included—has blood on their hands. The writers covered in the ensuing chapters all use their novels to express their discomfort over the reality that the production, exchange, and dissemination of literature is caught within some of the more unsavory aspects of capitalism, yet they also consider how the political function of producing literature remains effective in its execution and necessary to undertake.

Second, this study privileges global Anglophone texts, whether originally written in English or translated into English. English continues to be the most profitable

language to write in, as the global literary marketplace still chiefly runs through London and New York City. However, the towering number of books published every year in English should not only be viewed as a sign of literary market hegemony within the English-speaking world. We can also understand some global texts written in English as a contemporary mode of "talking back," a tradition with its roots in the mid-twentieth century as former colonies lambasted their oppressors by cataloguing their abuses in the language of the colonizer. On into today, I understand it as highly intentional for Roy to write in English and not Malayalam, for Hamid to choose English over Urdu, and for Schweblin to have Megan McDowell translate her novel from Spanish to English. Though we could understand these decisions as ones of personal interest—certainly few would object to the potential of having their book sales increase—we should also grasp the political imperative behind these choices. These writers produce novels that introduce alternative ways of viewing, thinking, and reading neoliberalism. This is perhaps less an example of the empire writing back, and more a case of a market irruption, a desire to narrate the contradictions, violence, and limitations of neoliberalism and interrupt the complacent acquiescence to neoliberalism that so forcibly bolsters its hegemonic status.

CHAPTER II

TRANSNATIONAL NEOLIBERALISM AND LITERARY VALUE IN HERGÉ'S *THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN*

To begin, two separate points in the history of capitalism. First, in his 1955 reflections on the racial and economic violence of colonialism, Martinician poet and co-founder of the Négritude movement Aimé Césaire contends that, no matter a Western power's methods of conquest, the colonial project has always been devoid of "human contact" because it turns "the indigenous man into an instrument of production" (42). The result of this inhumane contact, Césaire argues, can be summed up by the following equation: "colonization = 'thingification'" (42). Césaire positions the impetus to accumulate capital, capitalism's *raison d'être*, as not only the engine driving colonization but one that ends up reshaping the pre-capitalist, indigenous world. As a result, "natural *economies* … have been disrupted" and "agricultural development [has been] oriented solely toward the benefit of the metropolitan countries" through "the looting of raw materials" (43, emphasis in original). Put simply, colonialism commodifies. Second, many scholars today describe neoliberalism, the latest iteration of capitalism, in terms that align with David Harvey's—that it constitutes a "new imperialism" (106) precisely because the execution of neoliberal policies around the globe gives rise to a method of "accumulation by dispossession" that is "fragmented and particular" and, therefore, difficult to organize against (178).[1] These two moments in

[1] Harvey appears to glean the term "new imperialism" from James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer's assessment of the neoliberalization of Argentina's economy and political system, where they argue that the "pillage of the economy, growth of vast inequalities, [and] economic stagnation followed by profound and

capitalism's history are, to be sure, markedly different from each other: Colonization was driven by decidedly more nationalist and territorialist modes of expansion, while the scope of neoliberalism is more international and transnational as its ends are achieved through privatization, deregulation, and imperialist interventions to protect Western democratic visions of "freedom." For all their differences, though, we can also understand these shifts in capitalist method as unified by the continued dedication to expanding geographically, nurturing hegemony, and increasing commodification.

First, both Césaire and Harvey stress that the accumulation of capital necessarily catalyzes geographic expansion. This, however, is rarely the story told about neoliberalism within literary studies. All too often, literary monographs that study the rise, spread, and effects of neoliberal ideology privilege American and British literature, despite their simultaneous acknowledgement of the global reach of neoliberalism.[2] To an extent, this Eurocentric focus makes sense. As Frederic Jameson notes in his study of late capitalism's effects on cultural forms, "this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world" (*Postmodernism* 5). Therefore,

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enduring depression and massive impoverishment of the population [were] a consequence of the greatest concentration of wealth in Argentine history" (86).

[2] See Jasper Bernes, *The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization*; Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy*; Mitchum Huehls, *After Critique: Twenty-First-Century Fiction in a Neoliberal Age*; Caren Irr, *Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U.S. Fiction in the Twenty-First Century*; Leigh Claire La Berge, *Scandals and Abstraction: Financial Fiction of the Long 1980s*; Annie McClanahan, *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First-Century Culture*; and Rachel Greenwald Smith, *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism*.

Some scholars, however, are beginning to shift their attention to a more global literary understanding of neoliberalism: see both Michael K. Walonen's *Contemporary World Narrative Fiction and the Spaces of Neoliberalism* and *Imagining Neoliberal Globalization in Contemporary World Fiction*; Alison Shonkwiler, *The Financial Imaginary Economic Mystification and the Limits of Realism* (Chapter 5); and *Literature and the Global Contemporary*, edited by Sarah Brouillette, Mathias Nilges, and Emilio Sauri.

it is rather difficult to talk about economic trajectories without returning in some way to the US. But we would be wise to try, for Brett Levinson warns that any failure to substantively critique neoliberalism may stem from a similar limitation that deconstructionist thought encountered—namely, “the conflicts that ensued, at least within intellectual circles, did not take place between dominant and marginal voices, central and peripheral perspectives, canonical and noncanonical analyses, Same and Other” (*Market* 12). Simply put, when it comes to cultural understandings of neoliberalism and its effects, there are plenty of literary voices to bring to the table that are currently absent.

Second, Césaire and Harvey underscore different modes of capitalism’s hegemonic power. I use the word *hegemony* in the sense theorized by Antonio Gramsci—that a dominant group’s power wielded over another group is not merely effected through a force of will; rather, the installment and preservation of the dominant group’s power also requires a measure of consent from a portion of the oppressed group (12). Césaire notes that colonial powers enact “the hasty manufacture of a few thousand subordinate functionaries, ‘boys,’ artisans, office clerks, and interpreters necessary for the smooth operation of business” (42). These are colonized locals helping to carry out the West’s administration of their own territory and community. Similarly, Harvey notes that consent to the notion that neoliberal ideology is tantamount to “common sense” formulates its hegemonic hold (39). By ostensibly standing for the protection and assurance of freedoms and universal rights, neoliberal nations are able to invade other countries on the suspicion that rights are being infringed upon or denied, even though these invasions typically violate the hallowed neoliberal ideal of the “right to self-

determination" (Harvey 180).[3] Which is to say that living within a neoliberal framework "is to accept that we have no alternative except to live under a regime of endless capital accumulation and economic growth no matter what the social, ecological, or political consequences" (Harvey 181). That necessarily includes the aforementioned geographic expansion of capitalism by violence.

Third, Césaire and Harvey's arguments, when paired, point to evolving trends of commodification. Not that the commodification of nature Césaire describes has stopped; indeed, the gutting of the world's natural resources has only worsened as developing nations continue to modernize with the all-too-eager investment backing of the major Western capitalist powers. However, in addition to depleting natural resources, neoliberal ideology now establishes new methods of capital extraction by proposing and encouraging the application of economic analyses and rationalizations to formerly non-economic spheres of everyday life. This stems from the neoliberal presumption that "markets and market signals can best determine all allocative decisions" (Harvey 165). Little exists today that cannot be filtered through assessments that measure the profit/loss margin, value, worth, or earning potential of an object, an event, an action, a partnership, etc. The commodification of "sexuality, culture, history, heritage … nature as spectacle or as rest cure … originality, authenticity, and uniqueness (of works or art,

[3] This has certainly been the case in Iraq the last 15 years. Brown points to the effect the Bremer Orders had on Iraqi agriculture in 2003 as a recent example of neoliberalism's "instrumental rationality," where market efficiency, rather than value, is all that is taken into account as the means to an end (119). The US met Iraq's political crisis (social instability after years of war that led to the collapse of the wheat industry) with an economic solution (selling wheat seeds cheaply to farmers via agribusiness giants, such as Monsanto). Bremer Order 81, however, does not allow the "re-use of crop seeds of protected varities" (qtd. in Brown 143), which means that Iraqi farmers are dependent on continuing to buy seeds from Monsanto, and since the wheat provided is not part of the typical Iraqi diet, most of it is bought back by the US. Many Iraqi farmers are now "monocrop participants," growing wheat to send to the US while importing "staples formerly grown on its own soil" (146). Iraq's former "ecologically sustainable" wheat industry is now gone, their economy is dependent on the US, and the US gains a new cheap import (145).

for example)—these all amount to putting a price on things that were never actually produced as commodities" to begin with (Harvey 166).

This study, in turn, attends to just one aspect of culture commodified by a hegemonic neoliberal ideology: novels of various types—literary, popular, graphic. I do so by maintaining a globalized understanding of neoliberalism and turning my attention to transnational novelists. In the upcoming chapters, some Western writers unavoidably still appear, for as Jameson notes, it is difficult to talk about the effect of the economy on culture without somehow returning to the US or Europe. But I also consider novelists from nations that have their own complicated history with the imperialist spread of neoliberalism—Pakistan, India, Chile, Argentina, Japan—to understand how the current dominant capitalist ideology affects literary production, performance, and reception at different sites of contact. There is a troubling tendency within recent scholarship to speak of neoliberalism as an indomitable monolith, in that any critique of neoliberalism can be understood as simultaneously denouncing and supporting its values.[4] However, literary representations and critiques of neoliberalism helpfully complicate that picture. Instead, it makes sense to speak of a "family of neoliberalisms" due to the "plurality of views" that make up conceptualizations of neoliberal theory (Plehwe et al. 2), and indeed, as I will discuss later, neoliberal theories contain key differences from Germany, Austria, and on to the US.

[4] See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, Smith, and Huehls. Harvey also notes that this is one complication that neoliberal ideology presents to those who would try to critique or resist its influence. For instance, the language of human rights directly plays into "the neoliberal insistence upon the individual as the foundational element in political-economic life" (176). When groups opposed to neoliberalism focus on those rights instead of "the creation or re-creation of substantive and open democratic governance structures, the opposition cultivates methods that cannot escape the neoliberal frame" (176). To a different extent, the US has made appeals to human rights to "justify imperialist interventions" and "military humanism" in the late-twentieth century and early-twenty-first century (178, 179).

By joining Césaire and Harvey's arguments and identifying a common thread, my point is not to suggest there is a coherent narrative of capitalism covering the last 60 years. Such an account neither exists nor would it tell an accurate story. What I do intend to stress, though, is how certain economic and political changes of the last 60 years help to explain the heightened commodification of the artistic process. Capitalism has certainly not gone away after decolonizing efforts in the mid-twentieth century; therefore, neither has the commodified world. Indeed, if colonization sent capitalism abroad and "thingified" formerly non-commodified realms of everyday life, we see a similar, if also distinct, impetus within methods of neoliberal capitalism to thingify areas or resources formerly regarded as non-economic. In order to understand these developments, I argue we must grasp how capitalism has also changed. We cannot understand shifts like these without attending to the transition from colonial capitalism to neoliberalism. In order to do that, I turn to theorists from the past century—Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin, and Frantz Fanon—to understand how some of the key aspects of neoliberal ideology already existed within colonial capitalism. By placing these theorists in conversation with more recent scholars—Michel Foucault, Quinn Slobodian, and Harvey—we gain a clearer understanding of how neoliberalism becomes the next development in Western imperialism and that such a conceptualization has important ramifications for how we approach contemporary transnational literary accounts of neoliberalism at work. From there, I turn to Hergé's *The Adventures of Tintin*, an earlier literary example that narrativizes the concerns surrounding the commodification of art and how the market has come to influence artistic production.

Colonial Capitalism: From Territory to Finance

Determining when exactly neoliberalism "begins" continues to be open to debate. Harvey and many others privilege the 1970s with the coup in Chile and global oil crisis as key points in neoliberalism's growth. However, Foucault looks to the formulation of ordoliberalism by the Freiburg School in 1930s Germany as the genesis for what we think of today as neoliberalism. Further, according to Giovanni Arrighi, many of the cycles of high financialization we tend to associate with neoliberalism form a fairly consistent pattern over the last 500 years, where an economic hegemon initially pursues commodity trade and territorial acquisition only to shift to more immaterial forms of capital accumulation via international investment of their accumulated surplus. Regardless of the disagreements over periodization, all of these scholars agree that contemporary forms of capitalism are imperialist or hegemonic, but even that claim necessitates clarification and historical context.

For instance, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri differentiate between the terms *colonialism* and *Empire*, where colonialism is best understood as a militaristic, physical occupation of another territory, while Empire (or imperialism) is the continued dominance over, disenfranchisement of, and oppression of another territory via chiefly financial efforts (xii-xiv). Though Hardt and Negri's claims are instructive, they are also overstated. Their conviction that the rise of financialized imperialism signals something completely new and alternative to what colonial powers have practiced throughout history does not stand up well to the burden of proof. Colonial hegemony, as Césaire notes, was always primarily driven by the global expansion of capitalism and the

Western desire for economic prowess.[5] The same is true of neoliberal imperialism throughout the twentieth century and today. What *has* changed, however, in the shift from colonialism to neoliberalism are the means to the end of building economic prowess. Imperialism via a long-term physical, militant occupation of a colony and claiming it for the mother country is an approach now expanded and supplemented by economic modes of oppression.

Today and in the last 70 years, imperialism spreads and is facilitated through international loans given to developing nations, many of whom default and lose a substantial portion of their political sovereignty to their lending nation.[6] This pattern of financial imperialism, however, is not entirely new. Both Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin identify how late colonial powers increasingly relied on economic methods to achieve their political ends, methods that Frantz Fanon would later expand on to understand how the violent inequality between the post-colony and its former colonizer was facilitated through financial means. These critics and theorists, among others, all made these claims across the first half of the twentieth century. What is compelling, however, is how all of these writers presciently or diagnostically identify the shift toward a form of imperialism that was chiefly driven and supported by financialization in an increasingly globalized world.

[5] Jason W. Moore has more recently argued that this is not necessarily unique to colonialism, either; rather, it has been the *modus operandi* of capitalism since the fifteenth century. Its industrial expansion has long been predicated on free work and an attendant Human/Nature split that excludes some populations from the category of Human and assigns them to Nature instead, which means they could be exploited in the race to accumulate more capital (79).
[6] This is a process Harvey describes as the "neoliberal state in practice" that has been seen in nations from South Korea and Mexico to numerous South American countries (70-81).

For her part, Luxemburg identifies over-accumulation as "*the* problem," the "characteristic phenomenon" of capitalism that creates financial crises and intensifies global economic inequality (190, emphasis in original). The core of this problem is the surplus value that capitalist production generates to proportions so large that the capitalist class can neither consume it nor funnel it back into the market without triggering a price collapse. At first, the capitalist class will hang on to its surplus value, "not for the purpose of hoarding," but so that it can be put to work for greater capitalization. That, however, will require finding "the material prerequisites for its activity forthcoming" (Luxemburg 84), and within the confines of one nation, capitalists will at some point run out of "any buyers whatever for the commodities in which the accumulated part of the surplus value is embodied," and that leaves only one option: "foreign trade" (Luxemburg 108). But this will not solve the problem of excess capital, for "the difficulties implicit in the analysis are simply shifted—quite unresolved—from one country to another" (Luxemburg 108). But capitalists have to locate "the economic demand for the surplus product" (Luxemburg 128).

That necessary demand can be generated within societies that are not yet capitalist (Luxemburg 332). This is initiated by the "incessant transition from non-capitalist to capitalist conditions of labour power that is cast off by pre-capitalist, not capitalist, modes of production in their progressive breakdown and disintegration" (Luxemburg 342). To do this, advanced capitalist nations have pursued the natural resources and non-white labor power of non-capitalist regions. Though the modes of production in these regions are at first non-capitalist, invading Western nations will quickly transform these zones into capitalist ones to increase accumulation beyond its

own borders (Luxemburg 345-46); however, if profitable accumulation is to continue apace, Western nations cannot wait for pre-capitalist territories to become capitalist organically. Therefore, it is imperative that social structures and "primitive associations" in colonized communities be destroyed, since they stand as the strongest impediment to capitalism's development; indeed, "[f]orce is the only solution open to capital," and military occupation quickly follows (Luxemburg 350-51).[7] Once a territory's independence has been removed, a commodity economy will be introduced as soon as possible to replace the natural economy, and this usually begins with large-scale endeavors to build modern transport that facilitates the colonizer's powers of extortion and their pirating of resources.[8] The goal is to force the peasant economy to buy the colonizer's commodities instead of its own, and this is quickly achieved by secluding peasants to one economic sphere: agriculture. Over time, though, even that sphere will be subjected to a commodified transition.[9]

The irony is that capitalism cannot grow beyond its national borders without the initial assistance of pre-capitalist institutions, yet it also cannot go on afterward if these same territories do *not* become capitalist themselves. The accumulation of capital is only possible if it simultaneously obliterates pre-capitalist stanchions. Alluding to Marx, Luxemburg notes that theoretically there should be a point when the accumulation of capital must cease, but that is why imperialism is the historical imperative for

[7] British involvement in India and French policies in Algeria are cases in point. See Chapter 27, "The Struggle against Natural Economy", in *The Accumulation of Capital*.
[8] England's Opium Wars in China are an example. See Chapter 28, "The Introduction of Commodity Economy", in *The Accumulation of Capital*.
[9] This occurred with agriculture in the post-bellum US. See Chapter 29, "The Struggle against Peasant Economy", in *The Accumulation of Capital*.

capitalism's continuance (397-98).[10] When there seems to be no available use-form anymore for a nation's over-accumulated capital, the nation can funnel it via international loans to developing nations to successfully broaden the possibilities for future accumulation.[11] The lending Western country is happy to provide funds and materials to jumpstart production in the borrowing nation, since that accumulated capital sat in its coffers unused. Thus, "there has come about, voluntarily or by force, a new demand of the non-capitalist strata" (Luxemburg 407). The developing nation continually borrows to finance projects that would modernize its infrastructure, a plan that seems "to reach the height of madness," but the lending colonizer is happy to watch its current or former colony fall into perpetual debt (Luxemburg 415). When the borrowing colony is unable to pay its crippling interest, the Western lender can commission regulations for the colony's finances, thereby wielding enormous power over its political process. This ensures that oversight with militaristic occupation and force will follow, what Luxemburg labels "the executor of the accumulation of capital" that is "lurking behind international loans, railroad building, irrigation systems, and similar works of civilisation" (419).

The main shift today within neoliberalism from what Luxemburg describes is the way that these lending and collection services are now facilitated by international lending groups established by (and after) the Bretton Woods Agreement—the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO). But

[10] Luxemburg is also confident in capitalism's future collapse because of its predilection for over-accumulation. Even though, more than a hundred years later, capitalist systems seem stronger than ever, Luxemburg's arguments remain crucial today due to the careful manner in which she provides a historical account of how and why capitalism operates in an imperialist mode.
[11] Luxemburg identifies a future problem here, though: Lending runs the risk of "creating new competition for the investing countries" (401).

Luxemburg helps to remind us that the kind of loan-based imperialism we associate with neoliberalism today has a much longer history, one rooted in nineteenth-century colonial capitalist expansion. The industrialization of a colony's natural resources, establishment of ports from which to export those resources, and the construction of modern industrial forms of travel, such as railroads, are all signs of a successful capitalist takeover of pre-capitalist territory. Yet, at the same time, all of these would have been built on the financial backing of Western loans that rapidly place a colony in irrevocable debt to its colonizer. The seeds of today's neoliberal methods of economic expansion are evident within the colonial work of industrial capitalism.

For Vladimir Lenin, this capitalist invasion via developmental loans is what defines "modern capitalism" and its imperialist drive (62). Surplus capital ultimately has to be invested abroad wherever "capital is scarce, the price of land is relatively low, wages are low, [and] raw materials are cheap" (Lenin 63). Governments in developing nations are glad to undertake industrial projects like railways at the behest of Western capitalist powers because they bring an influx of capital. Lenin notes that none of these developing nations would refuse these loans, lest the lending Western nation move on to one of the developing nation's rivals with its investment. But this export of capital through developmental loans also has a generative effect by turning the borrowing nation into a potential political pawn.

Lenin claims that this turn toward finance capital requires us to redefine imperialism because of the "historical place of this stage of capitalism" (90). He does not label this shift as something never seen before, though. Instead, he adds this qualifier: "Needless to say, all boundaries in nature and in society are conditional and changeable,

and, consequently, it would be absurd to discuss the exact year or the decade in which imperialism 'definitely' became established" (90). Lenin's arguments are instructive here because they provide a much earlier caution to the aforementioned work of Hardt and Negri, who argue that we are seeing something wholly new within imperialist modes of finance capital. But Lenin argues otherwise.[12] What he is willing to characterize as "new" within late capitalism are the "obvious features of something transitory," where "free competition and monopoly" are combined (40). This vaguely defined "transitory" feature leads Lenin to ask what this form of capitalism will lead to, and by "transitory" he means banking is now its own industry, a sector of the business world where labor is largely immaterial (40). But manual labor is certainly still required, and material commodities are still at play. Luxemburg notes that, try as capitalist nations might, the social element of material labor cannot be eliminated from economic processes when we consider that there is no part of a commodity's value that does not somehow involve human labor that both "creates value" and also leads to "value-in-use" (37-38).[13] Lenin's reference to immateriality, however, appears to refer to the Western side of the capitalist equation and how the economic work of the West in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century becomes increasingly ghostlike, predicated on the movement of money

[12] Though Lenin, writing in the early 1900s, marvels at how the work of finance capital has surpassed commodity trading, Arrighi has also persuasively shown how this, too, is nothing new. The shift from a commodity-driven economy to one of finance capital and lending has been the pattern that the past four economic hegemons of the last 500 years have followed, the four being the Genoese, Dutch, English, and American financial empires; see *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times*.

[13] Lenin's arguments anticipate the twentieth-century Italian Marxists, or Autonomists, who argue that labor is largely immaterial now. This is a rather narrow view of capitalism, one that considers only the financialized metropole and not the developing world where much of the material labor that necessarily underpins modern luxury and convenience has been outsourced. For arguments against contemporary theorizations of labor's immateriality, see Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy* (Chapter 2) and Annie McClanahan, "Investing in the Future: Late Capitalism's End of History."

via investments, credit, and interest. Some of the privileges Western lenders acquire via developmental loans beyond their centers of finance are certainly intangible—commercial and political interest, future contracts—but others are also specifically material, too—natural resources, territory for industrial expansion (Lenin 65).

Lenin's arguments anticipate Frantz Fanon's study of the political and economic situation in the post-colony. Writing with France's occupation of Algeria in mind, Fanon takes specific interest in the ways the Western colonizer continues to dominate the former colony from afar after it ostensibly gains independence. Of key importance is the involvement of the comprador class, or "nationalist bourgeoisie" (Fanon, *Wretched* 62), which is devoted to compromising with the former colonizer because it does not want to lose any financial benefits derived from an economy built on exports. The comprador class has had a taste of modern living and would prefer to hold onto it, so they separate themselves from peasant rebels. The former colonizer keeps peaceable ties open with the comprador class because it still needs the cheap labor and natural resources the former colony offers to buoy its economic interests. Therefore, a colony could gain independence without the economic relationship changing at all (Fanon, *Wretched* 65-67).[14]

As imperial countries continue to build their wealth by exploiting colonies, that economic disparity remains a stranglehold. Western nations will not invest if they see there is political instability, but newly-independent colonies need money, so an economic pact will be struck that allows the Western nation to continue to have political

[14] Lenin foresaw much of the same, arguing that imperialism "creates the economic possibility of corrupting the upper strata of the proletariat, and thereby fosters … opportunism" (104). It has "the tendency to create privileged sections even among the workers, and to detach them from the main proletarian masses" (106).

input in the former colony (Fanon, *Wretched* 101-4). Lenin argues, via economist Rudolf Hilferding, that this kind of political arrangement will only result in greater political unrest. Hilferding notes that capitalist occupation and oppression cannot occur *ad infinitum* without colonized people eventually being awoken to "national consciousness." Over time, the colonized will pursue the same goal European powers had in the past: "the creation of a united national state as a means to economic and cultural freedom." The only way for European nations to avoid this scenario is "by continually increasing [their] means of exerting violence" (qtd. in Lenin 121).

Fanon, however, observes that former colonizers also have help from the comprador class within the developing nation, since independence becomes an attempted money grab on their part. For example, industries are not revamped or set up to benefit the former colony; instead, they continue to export to the former colonizer, who gladly participates in this continued profitable degradation of its former colony (Fanon, *Wretched* 150-54). This neocolonial form of control inevitably and ultimately takes a neoliberal turn when, through economic incentivizing and unequal distribution of wealth, the former colonizer continues to control the now "independent" nation with help from the comprador class. The newly-independent government exploits its own people and their resources for the sake of funds from the former (and still-present) colonizer (Fanon, *Wretched* 166-67). Little, then, has changed since independence, except that the methods of economic and political exploitation have changed. While developmental loans have aided the brutal work of Western colonialism since the nineteenth century, they also facilitate a specific shift from militant colonialism to neoliberal imperialism. By the time Fanon is writing, military occupation of territories is

becoming less and less necessary when entities like the World Bank and IMF allow for political takeover in a specifically financial manner. If a nation is unable to pay the interest on their loans, structural readjustments or economic reform is forced upon the borrowing nation at the behest of the nations who hold the largest voting share in the World Bank and IMF. Not coincidentally, those nations are the Western capitalist powers that formerly colonized the most territory in the past few centuries.[15]

Neoliberal Capitalism: From Finance to the Economization of the Everyday

It is more than a little ironic, then, that initial theorizations of neoliberalism were attempts to address issues of excessive state power that had ballooned into unchecked empires. But as is evident from reviewing early neoliberal theory and considering contemporary manifestations of neoliberal ideology, the narrative surrounding capitalism's latest form is a conflicted one. That is because, depending on the theorist one is reading, neoliberalism can appear to be either a failed project or a resounding success in achieving its preliminary objectives. What is less confusing about neoliberalism is ascertaining what it has become: a capitalist ideology predicated on

[15] For this and other information on voting percentages within the different organizations of the World Bank, see the "Voting Powers" page on the World Bank's website:

Organization	US	UK	Germany	France
Intl Bank for Reconstruction and Development (189 voting countries)	16.28%	3.85%	4.11%	3.85%
Intl Finance Corporation (184 voting countries)	20.99%	4.48%	4.77%	4.48%
Intl Development Association (173 voting countries)	10.21%	6.23%	5.46%	3.81%
Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (181 voting countries)	15.02%	4.03%	4.20%	4.03%

The voting percentages for the IMF are ("IMF Members' Quotas"):

Organization	US	UK	Germany	France
Board of Governors (189 voting countries)	16.52%	4.03%	5.32%	4.03%

transnational forms of imperialist expansion that limit political and economic liberties even as it promises to expand individual freedoms.

The earliest theorizations of neoliberalism were decidedly opposed to the construction of yet another hegemonic political force. Indeed, the limitation of state-based imperialism was at the heart of the work of the Freiburg School, an influential collective of early neoliberal thought whose theory of ordoliberalism was named after the journal *Ordo* that economist Walter Eucken created in 1936.[16] The Freiburg school aimed to create or describe an economic rationality that would rectify the social irrationality of capitalism (Foucault 106). This resulted in a lengthy examination of how Nazism grew, and one of the key realizations for the ordoliberals was that, though Nazi Germany could seem socialist due to its massive state power, its political might was merely an intensification of capitalism. So while the objective of liberalism since the eighteenth century was to limit imperial impulses and state power for the sake of economic limits, the state apparatus actually grew and did the very thing liberals such as Adam Smith set out to avoid. The ordoliberals' solution to overturn what had led to the growth of Nazism was a rather simple one: invert the political theory that stated a large market economy would be destructive and that such power should be given to the state (Foucault 116). Instead, the reverse would be true: the market would now supervise the state. This is what distinguishes neoliberalism from being merely a resurgence of liberal ideas, since it flips the emphasis from the state to the market, from the political to the

[16] Disagreement exists over whether or not ordoliberalism aligns with our contemporary understanding of neoliberalism. See Taylor C. Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse, "Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan." Foucault observes that US neoliberalism does differ slightly from ordoliberalism in that, from the beginning, neoliberalism helped to build up the state apparatus in the US rather than rein it in, as the goal was in Germany (217).

economic. As a result, exchange is no longer the most important aspect of the market; instead, it is competition (Foucault 119).

Foucault identifies three aspects that comprise a neoliberal form of governmental style: monopolies, conformable economic action, and social policy. First, neoliberal economists are intent on showing that monopolies are not an offshoot of capitalist logic, contrary to what Lenin argues. The ordoliberals genuinely believed that the market would correct and balance itself, so the only thing governments needed to do is prevent "external processes" from intervening in the market and trying to create monopolies (Foucault 137). Here we can detect an early formulation of the neoliberal distaste for governmental regulations that interfere with economic processes.[17] Second, the ordoliberals' goal was not to try and find an economic paradigm that would fit preexisting enterprises, such as agriculture; instead, the focus became a new "set of technical, scientific, legal, geographic … social factors" that governments could conform in service to the economy (Foucault 141). This constitutes a chiefly neoliberal form of biopolitical control, wherein adjustments are made to society for the benefit of facilitating market activity. Third, the ordoliberals' social policy held that everyone should have equal access to goods. Since regulatory redistribution of wealth would be considered state intervention in the market, the very thing that was now to be avoided, privatization became the answer. As a way to ensure access to consumer goods, instead of redistributing capital, the state would use private property as its key instrument,

[17] However, as Lenin notes, capitalist economies do not require external processes that build monopolies, for it is capitalism's logical endpoint. He is skeptical about any supposedly natural law that economics follow, pointing instead to the role that free trade and concentrated production play in promising the rise of monopolies (20). The same monopolizing impulse was visible within the banking industry at the start of the twentieth century, where larger, centralized banks would absorb smaller ones in the act of "affiliation," joining them together and, thus, increasing their holdings and lending power (Lenin 32).

making the only social policy one of "economic growth" (Foucault 144). The emphasis on privatization now left it up to individuals to protect themselves from economic risks.

The ordoliberals concluded that society could be regulated, but the market should not, and that this arrangement would compensate for any destructive aspects of the market. It is here that we begin to see the first signs of arguments later made popular by economists such as Milton Friedman in their defense of neoliberalism—that the market follows certain natural laws, as if by an organic process, and it is one that works best when left alone.[18] For reasons already made clear by Luxemburg, this theoretical approach to a politics of the market as a way to limit the destructive expansion of political and economic power could never work. Indeed, privileging the economic over the political and placing emphasis on competition instead of exchange would only further encourage, if not intensify, the sort of capitalist and territorialist expansion that marked the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Foucault similarly acknowledges that at some point the market will have nowhere to expand but beyond its own borders (54-

[18] For instance, Friedman argues that the Federal Reserve System did nothing to preserve economic stability; if anything, it had the reverse effect, and banks failed after the Great Depression. Instead, Friedman proposes monetary laws in place instead of a centralized body, something akin to a Bill of Rights for economic matters. Rather than a price level rule, he suggests a legislated rule that would specify a rate of growth for the nation's stock of money (44-55). Friedman also calls for international trade free of interference, criticizing the price control of commodities. He proposes different ways to create an equal standing amongst foreign entities when it comes to currencies and commodities, the end goal being "a system of freely floating exchange rates determined in the market by private transactions without governmental intervention" (67). Prices could fluctuate, but in a minimal way, since the participating countries would have stable systems.

Karl Polanyi, however, takes issue with the view that the market is naturally self-correcting in words that prophetically anticipate much of the political and economic conditions around the globe today:

> To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society. … Robbed of the protective covering of cultural institutions, human beings would perish from the effects of social exposure; they would die as victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime, and starvation. Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighborhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed. (73)

55). The imperialist impulse of capitalism, whether in liberal or neoliberal societies, cannot be abated as long as competition, ever-enlarging reproduction, and the increase of surplus value are its chief ends. The ordoliberals' goal of limiting state power may have been well intentioned, but privileging and protecting the market as the means to avoiding imperial overreach seems, in retrospect, like attempting to put out a fire by pouring gasoline on it.

More recently, however, Quinn Slobodian has argued that the reining in of political power was never the intention of any conceptualization of neoliberalism; rather, early neoliberal theorists understood that, if such an economic system were to thrive, it would have to be global in scope and one that was successfully inured to democratic attempts to challenge it. The focus of early German ordoliberals and Austrian economists was not specifically the economy or the market but, rather, "institutions creating a space for the economy"; furthermore, the diminishment or dissolution of the state in favor of the market was not their chief aim; instead, economists sought to understand how the market was just one institution embedded within many other social institutions (Slobodian 7). Slobodian especially privileges the often-overlooked Austrian economists in the Geneva School in his study, for they were concerned with "less a discipline of economics than a discipline of statecraft and law" (11). They were not interested in "making markets"; rather, their focus was the creation of "market enforcers," and this is significantly different than the ordoliberals, who advocated for an "'economic constitution' at the level of the nation," while the Geneva School set about crafting "an economic constitution for the world" (11). Slobodian calls this a "rethinking of ordoliberalism at the scale of the world," labeling it "ordoglobalism" to more

accurately capture its intent (12). There is, then, for ordoliberals, ordoglobalists, and neoliberals a significant conflict between national and global forms of market-oriented policies. The nation-state form helpfully provides “services of stabilization” for the market, but neoliberals were concerned about that influence “tipping into excess” (Slobodian 15). Thus, they promoted a concept of “militant globalism” comprised of “a set of institutional safeguards and legal constraints to prevent nation-states from transgressing their commitments to the world economic order” (Slobodian 15). A neoliberal world, then, is not a “borderless market without states”; rather, it is predicated on a number of institutions that help to “encase the global market from interference by national governments” (Slobodian 16, 20). In other words, neoliberalism was long designed to become a “project of law, state and organizations at the global level” (Slobodian 87).

This globalist understanding of neoliberal ideology helpfully contributes to whether we should approach neoliberalism as a national, international, or transnational phenomenon, and it is clear that how one answers that question necessarily depends on context. Plehwe et al. argue that there are “neoliberal hegemonic constellations” that can be identified and understood at “national, transnational, world-regional, and global levels” (3).[19] So while neoliberal capitalism is dependent on national actors, Fanon, for instance, has noted the limits of a national consciousness in the post-colony. The world of empires was broken down into nation-states in the twentieth century, but the

[19] Likewise, Roy et al. note that there are many “market-oriented systems” that can fall under the umbrella of neoliberalism, and that the way they are introduced into new markets will vary from nation to nation, meaning there are many “neoliberalisms” to speak of (5). That said, such economic experiments in different geographical and cultural contexts remain driven by a “common set of ideas”—what Slobodian describes as a global economic constitution—that can be categorized as a “neoliberal shared mental model” (Roy et al. 7).

continued flow of resources and commodities from the post-colony to the metropole points to a continued international imbalance of power and capital, not an entirely successful resurgence of national sovereignty that would somehow be capable of eschewing participation in a global economy.[20] Indeed, according to Laura Doyle, this type of political arrangement is precisely what defines the transnational, where nations exist primarily as "transnations or internations" because their relation to other countries is "dialectical and dyadic yet also multiple and circumferential or horizonal. Nations are invested in each other, in every sense of the word, and they are invested in and attuned to each other's investments" (11). It is worth remembering that the limitations to national sovereignty Fanon describes were what the Geneva School understood as necessary for the legitimation of a world economic order, which would require national entities "appealing above their own nations, or to world law within their nations"; however, this course of action today has been "taken largely by corporations" (Slobodian 280).

Whether different architects of neoliberalism intended for it to limit state power, expand the market, or encourage states to submit to a global economic order, it is clear from the last 40 years that private corporations have been able to seize a considerable amount of political and economic influence on a transnational scale. Globalization has been markedly different from its earlier stages during Western colonialism and the industrial revolution, for "nearly every corner of the world is rapidly becoming an integral part of a global economic system that is increasingly dominated by large

[20] Ankie Hoogvelt does a thorough study of the ways that the global economic crisis of the 1970s transformed the structure of the world economy as well as its modes of production and distribution throughout the postcolonial world. The growth of global economic inequality is what she terms the "postcolonial condition" driven by the combination of "external pressures" such as globalization and "locally and historically specific characteristics and struggles arising out of the (neo)colonial relation" (xv).

transnational corporations" (Harris and Seid 5). These corporations are bolstered and sheltered by the IMF, World Bank, and WTO, where "the governments of the major capitalist countries … are the main actors" (Harris and Seid 6). What makes this development specifically neoliberal is the extent to which powerful capitalist countries and corporations "have promoted major structural changes … in the economies of most developing countries in order to facilitate the increased integration of these countries into the global capitalist economy" (Harris and Seid 11), a pattern Luxemburg would say is taken directly from colonialism's playbook.

Harvey also observes that the "neoliberal state" commonly institutes policies that protect corporations from collectivist action (77). In return, private corporations in the US have been able to make unlimited financial contributions to political parties since 1976 as a form of protected free speech (Harvey 49), and the political involvement of US corporations has significant transnational implications. This has been most clearly seen within business schools, such as Stanford, Harvard, and the University of Chicago that promote neoliberal ideology and receive substantial corporate donations; the latter especially became a hub for international graduates to take methods of neoliberal economic reform back to their home countries or into political institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and UN (Harvey 54). Besides helping spread neoliberal reform globally, corporations also receive numerous benefits at home, such as adjustments to US tax code and lucrative subsidies that further increase their revenue. As heavy tax cuts are passed through policy measures, much public money formerly sent towards social welfare programs is now redirected to corporations, which are then able to expand operations abroad (Harvey 164-65). Within these changes, where a world economic

order must be protected and private corporations become just as (if not more) powerful than some small countries, profit is paramount. This shift fundamentally changes how we view labor, land, and money across the globe, things that historically have not been thought of as commodities but now have "coherent markets" created for them (Harvey 166). To further facilitate the extraction of capital from these now-commodified resources, neoliberal reforms play a key role by limiting or eliminating labor unions, and workers in a variety of markets become disposable as corporations hunt for the lowest production costs (Harvey 168-69).

The drive to extract capital from any and all sectors of life encourages the commonplace practice of placing any number of adjectives in front of the word *capital*—social capital, human capital, cultural capital (Harvey 167). Which is to say, we can also turn to these capitalized realms to garner additional narratives of capitalism and its work. Indeed, neoliberalism, theoretical and ideological though it is, possesses a "materiality of ideas" that we must attend to, and we can best understand that materiality by focusing on its "social aspects" (Plehwe et al. 5). The extensive commodification of the everyday certainly does not bypass culture, not that economic concerns and cultural production, such as the arts, have ever been separate. Historically, artists have long been dependent on the wealth of others, relationships of patronage that have placed artists and their work in close proximity to political and religious power. But the commodification of art is noteworthy, and, specifically with literature in mind, it is still a fairly new development when compared against the long view of art history. Culture, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno famously observed, is now its own industry geared toward profit, a fact that has crucial implications for the political significance, cultural

meaning, and social value of art when capitalist methods of "standardization and mass production" are introduced (95). These methods can create a "sameness" of culture, a homogenization that allows for "the general [to] replace the particular and vice versa" (94, 102).

There is, today, no shortage of narratives that can speak to those processes of standardization and mass production, especially as neoliberal reforms have helped send those processes even farther out into the world than when Horkheimer and Adorno were writing. The commodifying impulse of capitalism has been global in scope for centuries, but contemporary modes of capitalism have sent commodification into overdrive and exported it to formerly untapped sectors of everyday life and experience. By attending to literary renderings of these effects from a variety of national and cultural spaces, we can garner a more nuanced—and, therefore, less totalizing—understanding of not only neoliberalism's effects, but also its limits. True, literature (and especially the novel) constitutes its own capitalized form of culture today, one that can be commodified to an extent that many writers grapple with in their work. It is through that very intellectual and artistic angst that writers use their novels to engage both the material and immaterial fallout of this capitalizing force. They narrativize its violence while also acknowledging with unease the various ways their own artistic production is caught within the same disruptive economic work it would seek to critique.

Reproduction and Commodification in *The Adventures of Tintin*

The aforementioned theorists chart the slow changeover from more industrial forms of capitalism in the colonial period to the rise of the financialized and hyper-commodified

form of neoliberalism. What Luxemburg describes as the colonial method of forcing natural economies to become commodity-driven and capitalist initiates a concomitant change in the world of art by altering a pre-capitalist culture's understanding of what constitutes art's value, meaning, and significance. As a way to ground a literary understanding of this shift, I turn to a graphic novel that appears far earlier than the other texts I consider in this study, but I do so in order to emphasize how writers and artists have been engaging with the steady march toward neoliberalism for quite some time. That text is Hergé's series *The Adventures of Tintin*, where the shift to a market-driven commodification of art appears as a frequent concern in multiple stories.[21] I turn here to Hergé's life work because, in addition to its attention to commodification, we can read the rising popularity of *Tintin*, written from the late 1920s to the early 1970s, alongside the development of neoliberalism. Within that shared timeline, Hergé frequently queries what the commodifying work of capitalism means for art in general and *Tintin* specifically. In one of the earlier stories from 1935, *The Broken Ear*, Hergé questions how capitalist reproduction affects the value and meaning of art in an increasingly postcolonial world. He does this by placing both ritualistic art and reproducible art in his narrative and examines what the meaning and value of both are, the two examples being a "rare fetish" made by the fictional Arumbaya people and *Tintin* itself (Hergé, *Broken* 1). The story begins with the theft of the fetish from a museum, and Tintin becomes

[21] I view the entire *Tintin* corpus as a cohesive graphic novel, even though it is often labeled as a comics strip and not a coherent series due to its initial serial publication (Peeters 147). However, all 24 stories can be read as a lengthy graphic novel, since myriad peripheral characters return at various junctures and later *Tintin* stories assume the reader is familiar with events in earlier texts. It is a sustained narrative across time and space, novelistic in form.

interested in locating the sculpture, only to escape an attempt on his life by two other men, Alonso and Ramón, who are also looking for it.

The Broken Ear acts as a sort of reset for *Tintin*. By this point in the series, Hergé had already started moving away from stories with explicit colonial storylines and references.[22] Instead, in this story, the hunt for the fetish leads Tintin, Alonso, and Ramón to the fictional South American nation of San Theodoros, where they are caught up in the country's revolution. General Alcazar overthrows General Tapioca, and through a series of events Tintin becomes Alcazar's aide-de-camp. In the midst of the country's fragile state, the General American Oil Company encourages Alcazar to invade the neighboring nation, Nuevo Rico, and seize control of the oil-rich Gran Chapo region that both countries share. This American corporation seeks to devolve the political stability of the region for profit and pays a European arms dealer to supply both the San Theodoran and Nuevo Rican militaries with advanced weapons.[23] Tintin tries to dissuade Alcazar from taking the American offer and is quickly regarded as a traitor. He flees San Theodoros and hides deep in the jungle with the Arumbaya people. There, he learns the reason Alonso and Ramón are intent on finding the original fetish: It houses a

[22] From 1929 to 1935, Hergé consistently worked from a colonial mindset with stories that sent Tintin to the Belgian Congo, Native American reservations, Egypt, and China during the Japanese invasion. These stories are rather notorious for their instances of racist and stereotyped depictions of non-White people. Then, from 1938 to 1946, Hergé set some *Tintin* stories in fictional nations amid plots that emphasized national sovereignty as a comment on Belgium's conflict with Germany during World War II. After WWII, Hergé's attention turned to political tensions stemming from the boom in the oil trade and opening of new foreign markets as the US rose to prominence as the new global superpower.

[23] Hergé wrote *The Broken Ear* with "the war of Gran Chaco" in mind, "which pitted Bolivia and Paraguay against each other from 1932 to 1935. This bloody conflict had been stirred up by two oil companies, and as in the book, the expected oil deposits had finally proven unusable. Hergé also took on one of the most notorious and respected arms dealers of the time, Sir Bazil Zaharoff. The arms company Vickers was rechristened the 'Vicking Arms Company, Ltd.' in the original version and later 'Korrupt Arms.' Zaharoff was renamed Bazarov, but his features and manner of dressing so closely resembled the real person that his true identity was unmistakable" (Peeters 90).

large diamond. Meanwhile, San Theodoros and Nuevo Rico continue to escalate toward war, until it is discovered there is not a trace of oil in the Gran Chapo region. A cease-fire is agreed to, and Tintin returns home, dumbfounded as to where the original fetish is. Upon finding a store with dozens of replicas of the fetish, he learns that the sculptor's brother, an art collector, had the original. Only days prior, though, it had been sold to a wealthy American, Mr. Goldbarr, who that morning sails back to the US. Tintin catches the ship, but so do Alonso and Ramón. In the scuffle that follows, the fetish is dropped, cracks open, and the diamond rolls overboard with all three men after it. Tintin is pulled to safety while the others drown, and the fetish, in pieces, is returned to the museum and patched back together.

The Broken Ear is one of Hergé's more complex stories, and against the backdrop of political and economic conflict on a global scale, the story is primarily concerned with the value of art in the modern, increasingly postcolonial world. The setting of the museum that begins the story is key, for it recalls Benedict Anderson's observation that the museum is a site where nationalist pride can be strengthened, for it serves as storehouse where a Western nation's prowess over numerous colonies is on display (181-84). But at a time when Western nations were becoming increasingly anxious about the stability of their territorial prowess, what is the value of something like the Arumbaya fetish? The artifact possesses no "intrinsic value" (Hergé, *Broken* 2), as is made clear multiple times throughout the story by characters unaware of the diamond housed inside it. One radio broadcast describes the fetish as a "sacred tribal object" (Hergé, *Broken* 1), which places it within a religious, ritualistic context. Here we can begin to understand why, perhaps, the Arumbaya fetish carries no intrinsic value.

Indigenous religious rituals and their related objects are likely meaningless for any Belgian museum patrons. All that is left, then, is the sculpture's aesthetic quality, yet the fetish is fairly simple, plain, and altogether unimpressive.

While it is unlikely Hergé read Walter Benjamin (Peeters 83), it is noteworthy that he raises concerns in *The Broken Ear* that are notably similar to Benjamin's arguments on the aestheticization of politics. Additionally, both Hergé and Benjamin examine changes to art that follow Luxemburg's description of the imperial process that forcibly changes natural economies into commodity economies that eventually become capitalist sectors. Within those same three stages, Benjamin is interested in what happens to the cultural, social, or political significance of art, and he describes three changes that are also central to the conflicts in *The Broken Ear*. First, in natural or pre-capitalist economies, art could possess an aura whose significance is attached to communal and/or religious ritual. In such pre-colonial communities, an artwork's "existence," not its "being on view," is all that matters; if anything, an artwork's "cult value" may very well demand that it stay hidden instead of being put on display (Benjamin 225). Second, in commodified or capitalist economies, the rise of Renaissance and Enlightenment ideals of art for art's sake ("*l'art pour l'art*") points to the moment when Eurocentric universalizations about form and aesthetics were being established (Benjamin 224). These standards and norms would form the "secular cult of beauty" against which indigenous works of art would be judged and deemed inferior and thus confirm Western assumptions about a culture's backwardness or lack of culture

altogether (Benjamin 224).[24] These ritualistic forms of art carry deep political significance for the West because their acquisition and display in museums play a key role in strengthening the colonizing nation's identity. So while a small sculpture, such as the Arumbaya fetish in *The Broken Ear*, may not meet a European standard of beauty or pure art, the desecularizing display of what would be formerly hidden in an indigenous culture helps Europe to establish not only its military might, but also its cultural dominance.[25] Thus, art for art's sake is not necessarily about the eschewal of ritual as much as it is an establishment of a new global ritual, that of deference to the power of the West.

But even that political ritual comes to be replaced by industrialized capitalism's machinery that facilitates reproducible commodities, and this is the third key part of Benjamin's arguments: He shifts his attention away from art for art's sake to consider how the dominance of the market necessitates artists' foremost consideration of their consumer base (231). The market—not religion, not the state—becomes the driving force behind artistic production.[26] This shift further chips away at any notion of art for art's sake because of the political and economic interests surrounding art's production;

[24] Edward Said writes extensively about a colonialist history of aesthetics, most notably in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*.

[25] Therefore, we can complicate Benjamin's claim that art was based on politics once it could be reproduced. If the Western acquisition and display of indigenous art was not just about beauty, but also about establishing one's own standard of beauty as superior to that of ostensibly unenlightened cultures on other continents, then we can and should regard the systemization of European aesthetic standards as an inherently political project.

[26] I want to underscore here that Benjamin is too easily read as presenting an optimistic vision of the democratic potential within the capitalist reproduction of art. Indeed, John Berger's expansion on Benjamin's ideas in *Ways of Seeing* influences much of how we read Benjamin today, for Berger more explicitly articulates how the reproducibility of art challenges or even dissolves certain social hierarchies that the world of high art maintained for so many centuries. While Benjamin certainly does gesture toward the democratic possibilities of art, his consideration of how artists must now be deferential to the market complicates how readily we can identify socially progressive opportunities for art within industrial capitalism.

instead, art for the market's sake takes precedence if reproducibility with one's base of consumers is foremost in the artist's mind. What happens as a result is that any "unique aura" the artist might possess also disappears, and it is replaced by the "phony spell of a commodity" (Benjamin 231).[27] Benjamin understands that within colonialism's twilight, the market is now one of the strongest driving forces behind artistic production, a catalyst that replaces ritualistic symbolism and the imperialist establishment of aesthetic standards as the new creative and generative factors undergirding artworks. Which brings us back to Hergé and the implicit question running throughout *The Broken Ear*: If the aura of the Arumbaya fetish has disappeared long ago and the sculpture itself isn't much to look at, what replaces its value?

As a partial answer, the syntactical double entendre of "fetish" is telling here.[28] On the one hand, the fetish could represent attempts to uphold artifacts of the past to say something about the present. For example, there is clearly a political imperative behind privileging such an artifact in that it speaks to a nation's colonial legacy. Paul Gilroy notes that this continues today—the perpetual re-referencing of different symbolic forms of national accomplishments from the past in an effort to regenerate patriotic pride for Western nations (88-89). But, on the other hand, Hergé actually undercuts such a reading, since the fetish itself is a (literal) hollow signifier. The fetish, which I also read to stand in for art in general, is simply a hollowed-out vessel for something of economic

[27] Benjamin specifically refers here to the work of a movie star and how the financing of an entire film industry helps to build an actor's persona, but the implications of his argument are still applicable, if not anticipatory, of a time under neoliberalism when the artist—and any individual for that matter—should primarily think of themselves as potential capital.
[28] There is certainly a sexual double meaning we can read into Hergé's decision to refer to the sculpture as a fetish, and the sexualized aspects of colonialism have been convincingly explored by Robert J. C. Young in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* and Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*.

value—in this case, the diamond inside it. It only holds interest and value for those in pursuit of it because of the diamond; after all, Alonso and Ramón were going to break the sculpture open anyway to extract it. It is stated repeatedly that the fetish holds no cultural value for the West and, thus, is not a signifier of cultural or national pride. Overall, it is meaningless. What is more, the Arumbaya fetish as a text is misread in many ways, and, indeed, the act of misreading is one of the key frameworks in *The Broken Ear*. Instances occur repeatedly where nothing is what it seems, and initial expectations or assumptions are quickly subverted.[29] The most consequential misreading is that the Gran Chapo region actually is not saturated with oil. Hergé suggests here that misreadings have significant geopolitical consequences. Both San Theodoros and Nuevo Rico are prepared to engage in armed conflict with each other to lay claim to the latent wealth promised by the ostensible oil beneath their soldiers' feet. Those political and economic tensions also extend beyond South America. The General American Oil Company wants Alcazar to invade the Gran Chapo region so it can succeed in "beat[ing] British South-American Petrol," taking over its interests, and crowding it out of the oil drilling futures in the region (Hergé, *Broken* 42). Here, as he did in his second story *Tintin in the Congo*, where the US is intent on entering the global diamond trade, Hergé depicts the US as the fledgling global economic hegemon, a nation blooming with

[29] When Alonso and Ramón attempt to run over Tintin with their car, he jots down their license plate only to find the wrong car later. Upon dropping his notebook on the ground upside-down, "169 MW" becomes "MW 691," and he realizes they have simply flipped their plates (Hergé, *Broken* 10-11). Later, when being pursued by Alonso and Ramón aboard a steamship, Tintin hides by disguising himself with blackface and a waiter's jacket. Further, Tintin finds what should be the original fetish, but it is merely a fake. Likewise, he has his suitcase stolen in San Theodoros and switched with a lookalike containing bombs, an attempt to land him in jail as a terrorist.

surplus capital to utilize beyond its borders. If military conflicts should break out because of its bidding wars, so be it.

The Broken Ear, then, spans from ritualistic art to conflict over natural resources funded by corporate investment. Lest the political chaos of *The Broken Ear* take precedence, it is important to remember that all of this begins with a pre-capitalist culture's artwork that houses a diamond. It is telling that Hergé decides to use a ritualistic artifact as the piece that begins the domino effect of the plot, an artwork that, as is stressed multiple times throughout the story, has no significant monetary value. In doing so, he traces a consistent thread from precolonial to commodified artwork. Gone is the fetish's aura and symbolic significance, and near the close of militant colonialism, the fetish provides little more than wistful nostalgia in terms of its value, alluding as it does to a time of former territorial expansion. Instead, the fetish traces a direct line to the commodification of art in *The Broken Ear*. While Hergé does not reveal the fetish contains a diamond until near the end of the story, it is upon that revelation that the earlier instances of misreadings take on a greater significance. They have been preparing the reader for the moment when Tintin stumbles upon a sculptor's workshop where replica after replica of the original Arumbaya fetish is being produced (see Figure 1). If everyday life in Belgium and the chaos of potentially seismic political conflicts in San Theodoros are marked by repeated misinterpretations, Hergé shows here that the contemporary art world is even more difficult to make sense of. By the end of *The Broken Ear*, Tintin encounters the machine of reproducibility when he enters the workshop to see numerous copies of the original fetish, an image of the twentieth century's pursuit of reproduction, the "sameness" that Horkheimer and Adorno lament.

If the original artifact has hardly any monetary value to begin with, what is it worth now when placed alongside countless perfect replicas?

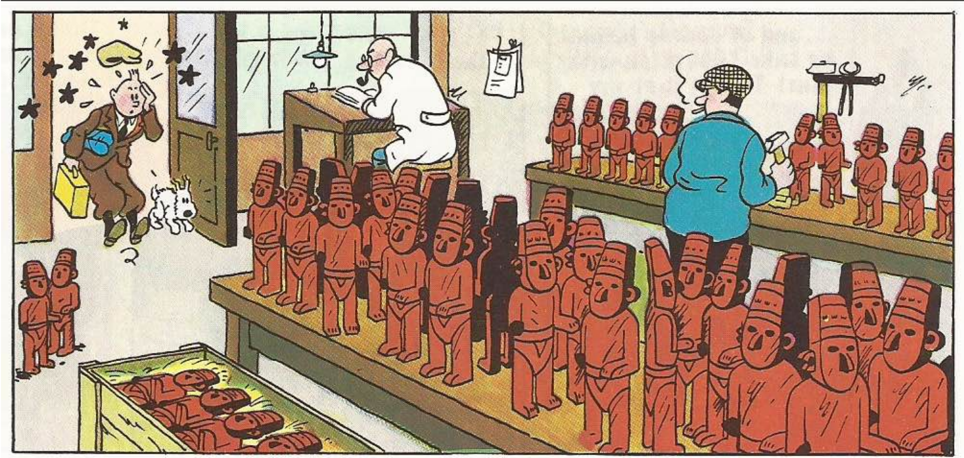

Fig. 1. Tintin finds a sculptor's workshop, the source of the copies of the original Arumbabya fetish. Reprinted from Hergé, *The Broken Ear*, Little, Brown, 1978, p. 57.

By placing questions of value around the Arumbaya fetish within his own artwork, Hergé self-reflexively considers what the worth and value of *Tintin* is in an increasingly capitalist postcolonial world. The fetish and *Tintin* occupy vastly different historical moments. The fetish is a ritualistic sculpture, one of a kind, and not originally intended for reproduction. *Tintin*, however, has only ever existed in a time of reproducibility. Hergé never had to rely on a sense of ritual for *Tintin*'s derivative cultural meaning, and, due to that lack of dependence on ritual, *Tintin* is enmeshed in the changes to the very purpose and function of art within an age of reproduction, a global one at that, where the series' readership would quickly begin to span countries and continents. The global dissemination of *Tintin* also raises the issue of its status as a

translated work. As Benjamin notes, "the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility" (224), but Rebecca L. Walkowitz argues we could just as easily change that to mean art is produced for translation's sake. Indeed, many novels today "start as world literature" and are written with translation in mind, what Walkowitz refers to as a text "born translated" (2, 3). The paradox translation presents is that "it is contemporary, above all, because it is historical," for born-translated works "highlight the effects of circulation on production" since they are "engaged in thinking about that process" (Walkowitz 6). Similarly, *The Broken Ear* traces how the Arumbaya fetish becomes a translated work, taken from its original context and made into either a political player facilitating the movement of diamonds or as a hollow economic signifier, made to facilitate methods of exchange as a reproducible commodity. Likewise, *Tintin* is a born-translated work that frequently grapples with "the effects of circulation on production" that Walkowitz describes. This is evident in different stories throughout the series as Hergé became more keenly aware that *Tintin*'s growing popularity, sales, and international readership placed it in a mode of reproduction that constantly redefined its artistic value and cultural significance. Not that Hergé was against this; rather, by the late 1930s, he already had plans for expanding *Tintin* to new markets in Switzerland, Canada, and England, and he began to imagine what merchandising might look like by moving *Tintin* into new formats such as "puzzles, calendars, and coloring books" (Peeters 95-96). Hergé also began to envision a *Tintin* store, whose shelves would carry "children's clothing, decorated mugs, and phonograph records … tablecloths, dolls, paper dolls, and other toys" along with the books (Peeters 96).

Most telling, though, is how market expansion also affected the actual content of *Tintin*, for Hergé seized opportunities to undertake large-scale rewrites of previously published stories. For example, Hergé made the decision to produce colorized books for the first time because, though expensive, he felt that "the benefits that would result from [it] are nothing to be dismissed lightly" (qtd. in Peeters 136). But that move to colorize also gave him a chance to revisit the first eight *Tintin* stories, many of which had been criticized for their racist content.[30] Hergé's biographer Benoît Peeters notes that in some cases complete rewrites of those stories were inevitable, since "the lettering, the layout of images, [and] the rhythm of the plot" for the books was completely different from the black-and-white weekly *Tintin* initially appeared in (138). Even so, the content changes Hergé elected to make are noteworthy, for they were an opportunity for him to rework *Tintin*'s image, what Peeters calls the series' "first stylistic self-realization" where content could be "carefully reviewed and rationalized" (140).[31] Similarly, Hergé changed the content of *Tintin* during his time writing for *Le Soir*, a German-run weekly printed out of occupied Belgium during WWII. The series greatly benefited from its run in the weekly, reaching new thresholds of exposure and profit.[32] But since *Le Soir* was

[30] The prototypical Western gaze in early *Tintin* stories is easy to identify, and it has been the subject of much critical work. See Philip Dine, "The French Colonial Empire in Juvenile Fiction: From Jules Verne to Tintin"; Hugo Frey, "Contagious Colonial Diseases in Hergé's *The Adventures of Tintin*"; and Philippe Met, "Of Men and Animal: Hergé's *Tintin au Congo*, a Study in Primitivism." It is important to note that *Congo* was not deemed controversial when it was first published (Assouline 28). Even 70 years later, Congolese perspectives on the book vary (see Norimitsu Onishi, "Kinshasa Journal; Tintin at 70: Colonialism's Comic-Book Puppet?").

[31] In some ways, Peeters' assessments are a bit overstated. Though some of the more overtly ethnocentric content is either toned down or removed, stories such as *Tintin in the Congo* and *Tintin in America* still contain brazenly racist depictions of the Congolese and Native Americans, respectively. While Hergé certainly made substantial changes to his earlier work, the stories did not exactly undergo a wholesale rewrite, either.

[32] By late 1940, *Le Soir* had a run of more than three million copies, and its promotional abilities helped generate larger readerships for Hergé's work (Peeters 121, 126). Profits from *Tintin* book sales also surged at this time and likely would have gone even higher had there not been a paper shortage during the war

supportive of the German war effort and published overtly anti-Semitic content, Hergé also had to cover himself and did so by writing stories whose content centered on the more classic adventure tropes of sunken pirate ships and buried treasure, which altogether avoided commenting on the politics of the moment in Europe. Indeed, most of the *Tintin* stories in *Le Soir* are decidedly neutral in terms of their political content, and this shift reflects Hergé's response to the political and economic pressures that surrounded him, a certain mode of economic survival and deference to the shifting concerns of lucrative markets in order to keep *Tintin* afloat.[33]

Hergé's deference to the market is also visible in *Tintin*'s expansion beyond the European continent. For instance, the convenient appearance of the USS *Los Angeles* coming in to save the day at the end of *The Red Sea Sharks*, which was serialized from 1956 to 1958, is a decidedly more heroic and flattering portrayal of Americans than in 1932's *Tintin in America*, "a change of direction not unconnected to the fact that negotiations were [currently] underway with the Golden Press for Tintin books to go on sale in the USA for the first time" (Thompson 226).[34] *The Red Sea Sharks* is also interesting as a case in point because *Tintin*'s growing international readership led to a

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that limited publishers' outputs (Peeters 126, 141-42). Further, by 1942, many of Hergé's ideas for merchandising had come to fruition, and it is clear that without *Le Soir*, Hergé would likely have had to shutter *Tintin*.

[33] For many, Hergé's decision to work with *Le Soir* is the moral failing that continues to sully his legacy, perhaps even more so because *Tintin*'s profits increased dramatically during the years at *Le Soir*. Without defending Hergé, Peeters notes that, short of quitting *Tintin* altogether, there was no potential of writing anything subversive at the weekly. A court file from a post-war Belgian military hearing on the activities of *Le Soir* notes that a journalist "could write whatever he wanted as long as it conformed to German wishes" and could "write nothing that was in opposition to the ideas patronized by the Germans" (qtd. in Peeters 117). Thus, earlier *Tintin* stories about nationalistic sovereignty, such as *King Ottokar's Sceptre*, would certainly not have passed muster at *Le Soir*, hardly veiled as that story is in its critique of Germany's invasion and occupation of other European powers.

[34] For an fascinating account of these negotiations with the Golden Press, see Chris Owens, "Tintin Crosses the Atlantic: The Golden Press Affair."

greater criticism of Hergé's representations of non-Western characters and cultures. This criticism led Hergé yet again to make frequent and significant revisions to already published *Tintin* stories.[35] As Walkowitz notes, the prospect of addressing multiple audiences changes how and what authors write (21), and this is clearly evident in the *Tintin* revisions. These different examples of Hergé's artistic deference to the market illustrate *Tintin*'s status as a born-translated work that was always already produced with reproduction in mind. But that also makes it exceedingly difficult to know how to interpret *The Broken Ear*, since it reveals a rather pessimistic vision of artistic reproduction.

At this early juncture in his life's work, Hergé begins to explore, seemingly with unease, the notion that art may be merely a vessel that facilitates larger economic interests. It is not accidental in *The Broken Ear* that the Arumbaya fetish and the chaos surrounding it are entangled in global conflicts ostensibly over oil and the international trade of weapons. Just as these political and economic negotiations, the fetish is also a vehicle of exchange, a potential conduit for money changing hands. The concern is that, over time, *Tintin* may become nothing more than a commodity, a receptacle for

[35] A scathing critique of *The Red Sea Sharks* and the *Tintin* series as a whole appeared in *Jeune Afrique* in 1962, concluding with an observation that characters portrayed in a racist manner often come from countries where *Tintin* had yet to be translated into their own language: "Tintin does not seem very concerned with himself and his exploits being read on a greater stage. And he has reason; this eternal conqueror risks this being his first defeat" (Rolin 25, my translation). Likewise, a piece in *Le Canard enchaîné* also cautioned parents about "this 'hero' for whom Whites are all white and Blacks all black. If your children must be as wise as images, do not let these images be the cartoonist Hergé's" (qtd. in Peeters 307). Reviews like these bothered Casterman, Hergé's publisher, since sales and the reputation of the series could suffer. With the market and *Tintin*'s growing collective of global readers in mind, Hergé was also sensitive to this kind of criticism and rewrote parts of stories at Casterman's request. Editors suggested Hergé lighten the complexion of some of the Africans and alter the way they speak in *The Red Sea Sharks* (Assouline 204). By 1967, Hergé had completed changes and removed the pidgin language of the Africans, replacing it with "conversant French, [that conveys] some phonetic flavour through the suppression of the occasional letter" (Lofficier and Lofficier 118).

exchange, which raises the question: Do Hergé's stories in and of themselves contain intrinsic value? Benjamin suggests that if there is value within an artwork, it comes from its ability to contribute politically and/or economically. If *Tintin* occupies a similar place as the Arumbaya fetish due to the ease of its reproducibility as a text, the implication is that the production of *Tintin* cannot possibly escape larger economic concerns that politicize its writing and dissemination.

However, given the aforementioned longer history of *Tintin*'s production, Hergé's concerns in *The Broken Ear* are also rather disingenuous, for over time he did not shy away from producing art that could capitalize on new markets. The repeated reshapings of *Tintin* in response to different political, economic, and cultural upheavals were chiefly done with the intent of helping *Tintin* enter new countries, increase its profits, and grow its merchandising arm. In light of this, a phrase from Foucault aptly applies to Hergé's work: *Tintin* becomes art that can "make the market possible" (146). Indeed, *Tintin* lives on today and, as of 2007, had sold more than 200 million book copies in some 70 languages (Farr, *Creator of Tintin* 4). After Hergé's death, no new *Tintin* books were produced, and all work was instead channeled into licensing to create more merchandise "that catered to nostalgic tastes of adults more than just being for children" (Peeters 338). *Tintin* quickly became and continues to be a commodified empire. While the books continue to sell well, they are not an end in themselves now but, rather, a launching pad into a world of an assortment of collectible figurines, television series, and clothing.

The Work of Art and Culture in the Economy

Hergé would grapple with the commodification of art throughout the rest of the *Tintin* corpus, most pointedly in the final incomplete story that was published posthumously, *Tintin and Alph-Art*. I will return to that story in the conclusion because it provides an interesting coda to *The Broken Ear* that shows how, in the 40 years between the two stories, Hergé had become more keenly aware of the art world's entanglement in the global political interests of transnational finance and competing private corporations. Hergé became concerned with what that meant for the more intangible forms of value—cultural, social, personal—that art can possess. Similar concerns have become a central component of much contemporary literature, especially as neoliberal hegemony has only grown in its influence since the time of Hergé's work. Hergé only lived to see the beginnings of neoliberalism's effect on artistic production, and he was not encouraged by what he saw. Today, culture, the arts, and literature have become highly profitable enterprises, which simultaneously means they are of significant political importance as well. The chapters that follow consider novels that engage with the economic, political, and cultural shifts of the last few decades and query what it means to produce, perform, and receive the literary arts in an age where neoliberal ideals constitute a form of common sense and culture is highly profitable.

Before turning to these novelists, it is worth noting how exactly culture and the arts are put to work toward achieving economic and political ends. Arlene Dávila notes how culture and creative projects are utilized "as anchors of urban development, tourism, or other creative economies that sustain neoliberal reforms" across the Americas (2). This means we are currently witnessing "culture's instrumentalization" in

different global contexts that benefit the growth of the “political economy” (Dávila 2). Indeed, because of the different social, racial, and ethnic hierarchies and “imperial legacies” connected to cultural forms that are or aren’t considered mainstream, “the process of commercialization and commodification of culture into creative products and industries has never been free of contestation” (Dávila 3). In many instances, “the upscaling of culture” traffics in and encourages “salient racial hierarchies and social disparities” (Dávila 8). George Yúdice points out that the limiting of state social services within neoliberal policies has created an “expanded role for culture,” whereby the arts and other programs are understood to be capable of mitigating social ills (11). This, for Yúdice, is an example of the recent rise in the “expediency of culture,” where it is “increasingly wielded as a resource for both sociopolitical and economic amelioration” (10). While the intersection of culture with politics and economics is not new, we are seeing a significant turn where culture’s “legitimation [is] based on utility”—specifically, the extent to which it is profitable for the state in “spurring capital accumulation” (Yúdice 11, 26). Referencing literature specifically, Sarah Brouillette contends that these different social, political, and economic forces put writers in complicated positions. For instance, some writers critique the excesses and problems of neoliberalism in their work, but then they become marketable precisely by making such a critique; other writers are expected to play to their minority status for market success and are accused of selling out if they do or accused of inauthenticity if they don’t (Brouillette, *Literature* 9-10). Due to this impossible situation, some writers have shifted not only to “position themselves as critics but to use their work to explore the barriers to

effective critique—not least, the incorporation of critique into neoliberal capitalization" (Brouillette, *Literature* 17).

Given these scholars' arguments, we can begin to understand other critics' tendency to render neoliberalism in more monolithic and indomitable hues. Contemporary capitalism's influence is felt seemingly everywhere—from art, entertainment, and sports to parenting, education, and grocery shopping. But the capacity for critique remains a more complicated issue than simply saying neoliberalism nullifies any potential of that happening. Though Brouillette cautions that the very interiority of the language arts lends to the kind of hyperindividualized ethos the creative economy privileges, writers often do present representations of the self that problematize the neoliberal vision of the ideal self as merely another creative outlet for the state to mobilize (*Literature* 13-14). Further, Dávila reminds us that the move to regard culture as its own industry is merely a "reductive treatment" that does not successfully account for "the variety of living and politicized manifestations and treatments of culture" that directly confront "its reduction on the basis of simple economic imperatives" (9). Similarly, Plehwe et al. call for a "comparative perspective" that approaches how neoliberalism functions in different cultural contexts in order to determine "commonalities and differences across space and time" (3). This is precisely the intent of the following chapters.

Before moving on to specific literary examples, some of Friedrich A. Hayek's arguments are worth revisiting as a way to complicate some of the supposed indomitability of neoliberalism. Granted, turning to Hayek may seem an odd choice, given that he founded the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947, a hub of neoliberal economists

and thinkers who were instrumental in conceptualizing and promoting neoliberal ideology that would challenge Keynesian policies. Though Hayek was against state interventionism in market affairs and advocated for individualism over collectivism, it would also be inaccurate to suggest his work articulates a totalizing vision of neoliberalism. Indeed, to hear skepticism about certain longheld truths about neoliberalism from one of its key founders should lead us to reconsider just how impervious its theories, values, and practices are to critique and resistance. For example, Hayek notes:

> The assumption of a perfect market, then, means nothing less than that all the members of the community, even if they are not supposed to be strictly omniscient, are at least supposed to know automatically all that is relevant for their decisions. It seems that that skeleton in our cupboard, the "economic man," whom we have exorcised with prayer and fasting, has returned through the back door in the form of a quasi-omniscient individual. (*Individualism* 45-46)

Hayek here rejects the rationalized view of the individual subject that has come to typify *homo oeconomicus*. This is an important distinction to make when other neoliberal theorists, perhaps most notably Gary Becker, reduce the individual by referring to him/her as a "consumer unit" whose eminently rational conduct can support entire systematic assessments of how to map and influence behavior (134). Foucault argues that views of the individual like Becker's assume behavior is always predictable to the point that "someone who accepts reality" eventually "appears precisely as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications

artificially introduced into the environment" (269, 270). But this is surely a non-sequitur, for human behavior is hardly so dependably rational. Hayek argues much the same, finding it baffling that John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith were being credited with defining the individual by "strictly rational behavior" when they never described any such thing (*Individualism* 11).

Instead, Hayek understands human behavior and our formulation of knowledge and reason as largely predicated on mimetic "observance": "Man acted before he thought and did not understand before he acted. What we call understanding is in the last resort simply his capacity to respond to his environment with a pattern of actions that helps him to persist" (*Law* 18). On the contrary, Hayek came to envision the individual and his/her behavior as located within market systems that were best understood through the metaphor of a web or network. This was because "comprehensive knowledge" would always be outside of the economist's grasp due to its "necessary dispersal among all members of society" (Slobodian 58). The "spontaneous order of the market" meant that a full knowledge of its inner-workings eluded any one individual, economist or otherwise; instead, "[k]nowledge that is used in it is that of all its members" (Hayek, "Competition" 308). Short of suggesting that Hayek is sympathetic here to collectivism, Slobodian does note that Hayek's perceived stringent individualism is likely overstated and worth qualifying, especially when Hayek believed the "world economy was basically unknowable" in its complexity (Slobodian 18). How rational and predictable, then, can *homo oeconomicus*—or neoliberalism for that matter—be?

There is no shortage of contradictions within neoliberal ideology. Greater democratic freedoms are promised, but then collectivist resistance is eliminated in often

violent methods. The “utopian rhetoric” of benefits for all surrounding neoliberalism has been followed mostly by financial benefits for the global elite (Harvey 203). On the whole, the promise of socially just “market-oriented reforms” have generally failed because equitable treatment is not regarded as an “a-priori condition for efficient economic growth” (Auerbach 29-30). But perhaps the most curious contradiction currently circulating around neoliberal ideology is the argument that it has become impervious to critique precisely because any criticisms of neoliberalism can be re-fashioned to look like arguments in its favor. Rarely, though, is anything so simple. This fatalistic stance makes sense on the one hand, for little has changed since Harvey wrote in 2007 that neoliberalism’s failures create the basis for “a resurgence of mass movements voicing egalitarian political demands and seeking economic justice, fair trade, and greater economic security” (203-04). On the other hand, perhaps the contradictions are not recognizable enough. But if the materiality and tangible reality of neoliberal ideology and its consequences are best understood by attending to its “social aspects” (Plehwe et al. 5), literature is a good place to start in pursuit of that understanding. Neoliberalism is not a totalizing narrative any more than one novel is; hence, the necessity of attending to multiple accounts. As Judith Butler puts it, the “production of texts can be one way of reconfiguring what will count as the world,” but since no one text reflects the world in its entirety, it will produce “partial provocations,” the likes of which ignite a “set of appropriations and criticism that call into question [the] fundamental premises” of what came before it (19). Let us move, then, to the production of texts.

CHAPTER III

NEOLIBERAL ARTISTIC PRODUCTION IN RUTH L. OZEKI'S *MY YEAR OF MEATS* AND MOHSIN HAMID'S *HOW TO GET FILTHY RICH IN RISING ASIA*[*]

When the values and practices of neoliberalism constitute a socially hegemonic authority, the economization of nearly everything in culture unavoidably affects artistic production. Just to what extent that occurs has been asked more broadly about industrial and late capitalism by Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, which has generated an extensive conversation that has recently turned to include neoliberalism.[1] This chapter considers the novel genre in connection with that discussion, and today, contemporary transnational novels are written in a way that reflects the dominance of neoliberal practices, either by telling stories about neoliberal conflict or even co-opting and mimicking the language and structures generated by neoliberal values. Within such novels, writers also interrogate the difficulty they face in finding ways to substantively critique the very capitalist system that also undergirds the production, exchange, and reception of their texts. Two cases in point are *My Year of Meats* by Ruth L. Ozeki and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* by Mohsin Hamid. Each explores how neoliberalism operates on a transnational level that has unique effects on art and literature's production and circulation as a commodity. These novelists also examine how their own work is constituted and facilitated by a global marketplace predicated on

[*] A portion of this chapter appears in slightly different form in *ariel* Volume 50, Issue 1, January, 2019, pages 141-70 (copyright © 2019 Johns Hopkins University Press and the University of Calgary). It is reprinted with the permission of the publishers.
[1] I am thinking chiefly here of Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*.

commodified exchange.[2] Since the 1930s, literary and Marxist theorists have argued that art cannot exist outside the influence of a capitalist system that commodifies objects in order to usher them into a competitive market economy built on a system of value exchange.[3] What is less clear, though, is how the neoliberal turn further affects artistic production as texts are drawn into and moved about by transnational financial flows. Whether the adjective used to describe late capitalism is "neoliberal," "multinational," "postindustrial," "deindustrial," or "post-Fordist," the point remains that the production of art is currently caught within the globe-spanning financial work of neoliberalism.

This chapter turns to the subject of literary production within neoliberal capitalism, and it is worth noting how Ozeki and Hamid structure their critique of neoliberalism by considering how their own novels are shaped by other forms of media. *My Year of Meats* specifically explores how the documentary form of filmmaking both challenges and contributes to the growth of neoliberal values. Ozeki considers at length how documentary film, a form generally regarded as factual and nonfictional in structure, is also carefully constructed through editing to elicit certain reactions from viewers. More pointedly, *My Year of Meats* follows the progress of a documentary that is critical of the neoliberal corporate state, and Ozeki positions the documentary as largely ineffective in its political critique, so much so that its message is reappropriated

[2] Both novels, focused as they are on artistic production, are self-reflexively taken up with their own creation. This is, of course, not a new literary approach. Artworks have long been self-reflexive about their own production before the late-twentieth century—*The Faerie Queen* and *Tristam Shandy*, for example—but Ozeki and Hamid undertake the kind of work Frederic Jameson describes in *Postmodernism*, where self-reflexivity is understood as influenced and driven by contemporary, globe-spanning developments within late capitalist modes.

[3] Beyond Benjamin and Adorno, some key texts in this debate have been Terry Eagleton's *Marxism and Literary Criticism* and *Criticism and Ideology*, Raymond Williams' *Marxism and Literature*, Jameson's *Marxism and Form*, Herbert Marcuse's *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Jacques Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*, and, though written before his turn to Marxism/Leninism, Georg Lukács' *The Theory of the Novel* helpfully contributes to this discourse.

by a neoliberal discourse of freedom. Simultaneously, Ozeki queries how successful the novel's constructed attempts at political and social critique can be when neoliberalism so often commodifies new realms by replacing a thing's use value with exchange value. One way *My Year of Meats* answers this question is by exploring how people and the art they create provide space for agency even as they are simultaneously subsumed by the transnational flows of neoliberal capitalism. There is both freedom and coercion, room for both the creativity to critique oppressive economic conditions as well as the impossibility of ever having one's art fully liberated from becoming a marketized unit of exchange. By tracing these complicated positionalities, Ozeki imagines not only how to navigate them, but also how to successfully challenge a neoliberal ethic driven by private corporations, challenges that are directly facilitated through artistic production and a renewed dedication to fostering diverse communities that rejects the hyper-individualized ethos of neoliberalism.

Hamid chiefly considers how other forms such as the self-help book shape the novel genre. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* self-referentially queries what the novel can or should look like in a world dominated by neoliberal finance. Written as a parodic self-help book in the second person, which turns the "you" of the reader into the novel's main character, *Filthy Rich* questions not only the contemporary purpose of literature, but also envisions how its processes of production continue beyond the page. Hamid situates books—and especially novels—as active and agential subjects in their own right, or, at the very least, he suggests they hold such potential. *Filthy Rich* considers not only how narratives have substantive political potential, but also how that potential can be ignored and cast aside. At the crux of this issue is the neoliberal value of

individual freedom, for Hamid questions whether literature is produced with a larger social responsibility in mind or if novels simply serve an economic function. Hamid suggests that both are true, meaning that neoliberalism's influence has not fully foreclosed literature's political potential, yet at the same time the commodification of literature can certainly limit its socially progressive effects.

The Work of Art in the Age of Neoliberalism

Both Ozeki and Hamid use their novels to examine how their writing and other art forms are both vehicles of critique and commodities that circulate in a world market dominated by the transnational work of private corporations. In this way, their novels interrogate a more contemporary dimension of the interactions between art and capitalism by considering how the higher emphases today on individual freedom, entrepreneurship, self-investment, and self-determination affect not only the production of art but also the ways that individuals interact with different art forms. These texts, then, contribute to a longer history of critique that questions whether art's often-romanticized socially progressive potential is nullified by the ubiquity of a global capitalist system. This has long been a subject of study due largely to the belief, as Nicholas Brown suggests, that art occupies a unique social and cultural space because it does not possess only use-value (3). In other words, art is not merely an object, since it has the ability to levy a critique in ways that other commodities cannot. Therefore, even though a painting or a book is a commodity in the sense that it can be transferred from one buyer to another via monetary exchange, it cannot be reduced solely to its material exchangeability. For instance, a novel differs from a potato, since, though both are material objects, the novel

cannot be reduced solely to its material existence of paper, ink, glue, and binding. Its pages, when read, have the potential to "speak up" or "talk back" in ways that a potato cannot—so the argument goes. Yet despite this supposed critical space that art occupies, there is increasing uncertainty over its ability to preserve at least some space of critical autonomy that remains unsullied by capitalism.

Specifically, Adorno questions whether there comes a point when art is so thoroughly commodified that it can no longer successfully and substantively critique the very market system that commodifies it. Adorno's arguments came at a key juncture in the 1960s shortly before neoliberal policies began to be implemented in experimental ways in the US and abroad.[4] At the same time, though, his arguments precede the full-fledged economization of everyday life that has more recently been visible in different neoliberal practices and attitudes. Adorno's view of the changing nature of the capitalist market economy and its effect on artistic production is also decidedly less optimistic than Benjamin's and does not suggest that capitalist reproduction and accumulation can lead to politically and socially progressive outcomes. That is not to say he advocates for art's distancing from capitalism. If an artist were to do this, the result would be the production of art that fails to launch any form of critique. For Adorno, this kind of resistance to capitalism via withdrawal is not only inadvisable, it is impossible. If art is going to have any substantive political effect, it cannot simply ignore the growth of

[4] As Harvey notes, the 1970s were marked by global crises of capital accumulation, unemployment, and inflation precipitated by such events as the 1973 OPEC oil embargo. In addition to economic uncertainty, the rise of Communist and socialist parties in capitalist and developing nations signaled a political threat for moneyed elites. Some of the solutions to these problems were "forced privatization" via the US-supported coup in Chile and military overthrow in Argentina (12-16). Harvey suggests that such imperialist action was undertaken to "prise open new investment opportunities" abroad and, thus, mitigate "depressed economic conditions" in the US (27).

commodification; it would do so “only at the price of its own powerlessness” (Adorno 21). Only by acknowledging the excessive commodification of everyday life—by “immersing its autonomy” in that reality—can art become “eloquent” (Adorno 21). Ultimately, then, art’s place within capitalism is an issue of representation, because art that will successfully achieve modern political relevance must do so “through mimesis of the hardened and alienated” aspects of capitalism’s dominance (Adorno 21).

The risk, however, is that this mimetic process risks presenting art as a fetishized commodity, an object whose social and material conditions of its production are obscured. Art, then, occupies a slippery terrain in a system of commodity exchange: Art that tries to claim it is “absolute” and free from the influence of the “free” market would be “worthless from the start” because of the absurdity of that claim; yet at the same time “the survival of art becomes precarious” when it “insists obstinately” on its own fetishization to a world where labor is largely made invisible (Adorno 228). In other words, art should not overlook the existence of capitalism’s violent effects, but neither can artists pretend as if their creative production is not somehow also connected to, influenced, or supported by the commodifying work of capitalist economies. Adorno claims that this problematic dialectic “forces art into an aporia” (228), where it cannot free itself from commodification nor fully represent it either. This impediment to faithful, realistic representation stems from audiences who have no interest in encountering art that displays how labor undergirds myriad forms of production. If we are to see through to the methods of production, Adorno argues that the ways we consume art—viewing it, listening to it, reading it—also have to change. To focus primarily on “reception” when interpreting art no longer makes sense, since art is first

and foremost "social in that it is the product of the division of labor"; indeed, "production" is the social connection to art that is "anterior to reception" (Adorno 228). To chiefly consider how audiences receive a work of art misses the point about its social significance, for the initial moment of contact between society and the artwork happened when social forms of labor produced it. Or to put it in more traditional Marxist terms, reception is merely a superstructure of the much larger base of social labor. Adorno contends that if we are to truly understand a work of art, we have to look to the social conditions of its production first. Why was the artwork produced? How was it produced? From there, we begin to derive a sense of its political significance. This does not mean reception is unimportant, for an audience's interaction with a work of art certainly carries crucial political and social implications, too. But Adorno asserts that to pretend the "social effect" of reception is *all* that matters in relation to an artwork never "comes close to understanding what is social in art" (228).

However, the thorny issue of art's "aporia" still remains, but it can be resolved through Adorno's underdeveloped pronouncement "The absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity" (21). Adorno does not fully suggest how art can remain absolute—that is, still maintain some level of autonomy—from commodification even as it is commodified, but Stewart Martin points out that Adorno's claims are best understood if we avoid yielding to the typically binary structure that this discussion has taken over several decades (i.e., art is either a commodity or it is not). Instead, we should approach autonomous art as a paradox that commodification does not eliminate but, rather, generates as its "contradictory product," which is to say that an autonomous artwork is "both produced by *and* destroyed by capitalist culture" and becomes "both its

ideology *and* its critique" (Martin 17, emphasis in original). It is precisely through that simultaneous activation and destruction that "culture can be resisted and criticized" through art (Martin 17). What this would look like is an "immanent critique: the generation of art's autonomy from *out of* commodification," which an artist could achieve via "the refusal of commodification by a subversive mimesis of it" (18, emphasis in original).[5]

To call for mimesis can paint a misleading picture, though. The point here is not that artists should attempt to merely duplicate or imitate capitalism's effects through their art. The risk there would be the creation of an absolute artwork that is nothing more than another fetishized commodity that "conceals the extent to which it is actually the product of social labour" (Martin 18). What Martin means here is that the concept of an artwork absolutely free from the influence of the market is a fiction, which is to say that the belief in any such idea simultaneously opens a space for critique. Similarly, there is no such thing as an absolute commodity, for exchange-value can never be fully free of use-value, "since it is use that is ultimately exchanged" (Martin 19). If a commodity no longer has a use, the necessity of its exchange also disappears, and this reveals the

[5] What Martin describes here as "subversive mimesis" is similar to Jameson's theories on the production of art in postmodern society. Jameson suggests that commodification's effect on art is not something to be concerned by. Instead, commodification offers both a "cultural and experiential break" (*Postmodernism* xiii) because postmodernism asks us to take up "new forms of practice and social and mental habits … with the new forms of economic production and organization thrown up by the modification of capitalism" (*Postmodernism* xiv). This means that artistic production has moved away from modernism in the sense that "aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally" (*Postmodernism* 4). However, like Adorno, Jameson does concede that making an effective critique through one's art is certainly challenging. Making any "moralizing judgments" as an artist is difficult since nearly everyone—artists, critics, and audiences alike—is "so deeply immersed in [the] postmodernist space" of late capitalism that "the luxury of the old-fashioned ideological critique, the indignant moral denunciation of the other, becomes unavailable" (*Postmodernism* 46). The reason that critique has become so problematic is because that long-honored value of "critical distance" has become compromised (*Postmodernism* 48). This is postmodernism's "moment of truth"—that late capitalism's effects are ubiquitous to the point that they unavoidably affect the production of art (*Postmodernism* 49).

impossibility of capital's "self-valorization"; this very impossibility creates a space of critique for art because "an artwork's affinity to a commodity does not prevent it from contradicting capital, but rather enables it" (Martin 19). Martin's point here helpfully clarifies Adorno's claim that the "absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity." Whether Adorno's verb should be translated as "converge," "meet," or "merge," the point remains that when artistic and commodity production collide, the dissolution of the artwork into the commodity form can only be partial, not total.[6] In other words, both absolutes are fictions. A commodity is not absolute (i.e., divorced) from the different social and material conditions of its production anymore than an artwork is. At the same time, an artwork is not absolutely free from the commodifying reach of capitalism. To pretend otherwise would be to fetishize art.

Though both the "absolute" qualities of an artwork and a commodity are mistruths, Martin understands Adorno's verb choice to mean that it is the effect of the absolute commodity fiction that activates and enables the semblance of an artwork's supposed autonomy, or, its ability to feign autonomy. This effect of the commodity form cannot foreclose art's ability to make a dialogic critique; instead, the force of commodification creates and provides a solution: "the distancing of the artwork from a commodified world through the abstraction of the commodity form itself" (Martin 20). Martin uses *abstraction* in the dual sense: that art in its critical capacities seeks to separate or distance itself from the commodity form yet *simultaneously* draws something

[6] There is disagreement over how to most accurately translate that verb from Adorno's German into English. Martin prefers "meets," the Hullot-Kentor translation referenced in this chapter uses "converges," and the 1984 Lenhardt translation for Routledge chooses "merges." Martin explains that he wanted to preserve Adorno's implication that there is "an affinity [between the artwork and commodity] that is otherwise counter-intuitive", which signifies a "contradictory relation of recognition at stake" (24-25n18).

from the commodity form and its abstracted (i.e., fetishized) processes. That is to say, art can playfully imitate capital's "internalization of abstract labour" and pretend that it is somehow independent of the social labor that created it (Martin 20). This places art in critical opposition against the impossible self-valorization of capitalism, even as it draws from the realm of fetishized commodities for its subject matter. The "objectivity of the autonomous artwork"—its labor, its creation—"takes on a subject-like character" (Martin 23), which has become a recognizable focal point in postmodern literature where the creative process of artistic production itself is narrativized. This kind of artistic subjectivity stands as a "singular subject contra the universal subject of capital," and through this contradiction it identifies "a link to an alternative collective subjectivity" (Martin 23). In this way, the force and work of capital does not fully absorb and neutralize an artwork's critique even as it determines some of its parodic and/or process-driven content.

Others are not so optimistic. Brown contends that the processes of artistic production today are wholly subsumed under capitalism because the shift from a commodity exchange to a monetary one means an object's use-value is no longer central to its existence (6). So while Martin argues that a commodity's use-value never fully goes away, Brown suggests that whether it does or not is beside the point. This is because what determines not only the production but also the value of a commodity changes when an object's *raison d'être* is no longer informed by the personal intentions of the producer, but by what people are willing to pay for.[7] This change affects art

[7] The difference here being the production of something for oneself versus producing it for others; in the latter case, all that matters while producing the object is whether or not it will be exchangeable.

because the work of interpretation undergoes a subsequent alteration as well, for if art is reduced to a commodity, "the form the object takes is determined elsewhere than where it is made, namely on the market," and it then makes more sense to study "the desires represented by the market" (Brown 7). When the goal becomes making one's art appeal to a certain audience, "the appropriation of commodities" has come to influence artistic decisions (Brown 8).[8] Like Jameson, Brown suggests that artworks lack critical distance and are, therefore, incapable of being anything other than commodities. Perhaps most interesting, though, is his suggestion that the subsumption of art under capital only leaves the decidedly neoliberal option for an artist to conduct herself as an entrepreneur of her self who has to turn to a "great gallery of dead forms" to appeal "theatrically to consumer desires" (14).[9]

I argue, however, that Martin and Brown have more in common than initially meets the eye. Martin notes that art must display an understanding of its production's entanglement in the commodifying process, lest it become irrelevant, while Brown

[8] Martha Woodmansee charts how the commercialization of literature and existence of a literary market that makes it possible for writers to carve out a sustainable living from their work goes back at least as far as the eighteenth-century rise of the middle class and increased literacy rates. See *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics*.

[9] Brown's treatment of art as wholly subsumed by a market economy is understandable in light of recent studies of neoliberalism's effect on literature. Jasper Bernes tracks how artistic work in the 1960s and 1970s specifically "helped to *articulate* … new qualitative complaints and demands" in response to the dissatisfaction with the increasingly mechanized and routinized forms of blue-collar and white-collar work (8, emphasis in original). However, that "aesthetic critique has been neutralized and naturalized" with "the recuperation of that critique via the refashioning of labor in aesthetic terms," and the clock will likely never turn back on that shift (Bernes 181). For other arguments that correspond with Bernes', see Mark Banks, "Autonomy Guaranteed? Cultural Work and the 'Art-Commerce Relation'"; Peter Fleming, *Authenticity and the Cultural Politics of Work: New Forms of Informal Control*; and Bill Ryan, *Making Capital from Culture: The Corporate Form of Capitalist Cultural Production*.

The shift to rebrand work and labor as creative endeavors is discussed (and encouraged) at length in Richard Florida's well-known *The Rise of the Creative Class*, a text that Imre Szeman argues acts as a "lobbyist on behalf of creativity to government, business, and the general public" and tries "to help encourage and harness creativity" in order to improve how different work systems operate (24-25). Further, Sarah Brouillette demonstrates how New Labour in the UK has "trumpeted the use of culture, including literature, in nation-branding strategies that would encourage investment in the UK and sell British foreign policy decisions" (*Literature* 4).

suggests that self-referentiality via the recycling of old forms is the only option in an artistic world overrun by commodification. Accordingly, both Martin and Brown suggest that, aside from artistic playfulness, most content is predetermined, though there are countless options available within the realms of parody and pastiche. But what Martin sees as still offering grounds for critique, Brown does not, and Brown's decision to specifically identify neoliberalism as playing a significant role in these changes, while Martin does not, should give us pause. Brown essentially regards art as fully objectified within neoliberalism, a text reduced to its exchange-value by the commodifying forces of late capitalism; Martin, however, theorizes that art still retains some measure of subjective force, even if that autonomy is paradoxically activated by the façade of absolute commodification. Art, then, for Martin, possesses a subjective strength even as—or precisely *because*—it is objectified through commodification.

Taken together, Martin and Brown's arguments point to a complication that Mitchum Huehls examines at length—namely, the immense difficulty in critiquing neoliberal ideology without one's arguments sounding as if they are making a case for it. Huehls argues that writers consistently encounter this frustration when neoliberal ideology so successfully co-opts critique. Just as Martin and Brown disagree over art's subjective or objectified potential within late capitalism, Huehls identifies this subject/object conflict as one of neoliberalism's central contradictions that shapes society and culture. For example, neoliberal theorists draw up the individual as either a free entrepreneurial agent or an objectified unit of data in service to the market, one that can be managed and learn to manage itself. But Huehls notes that neoliberal theorists rarely describe individuals as simultaneously subjects and objects, and this movement

back and forth between subjective and objective conceptualizations "defines neoliberal discourse" (Huehls 9). Though both of these representations seem contradictory, both play into the values system of neoliberalism and support its laissez-faire stance.[10] The critical impasse within neoliberalism comes from trying to challenge one paradigm of the world with its opposite, to continue to think of subjects and objects as purified distinctions from each other (Huehls 14-15). Similarly, Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea note how most of us occupy multiple roles at once—"citizens, taxpayers and workers"—meaning that "discourses which try to win us over must privilege one way of positioning ourselves over others" (11).

A key problem within these contradictions is the tendency to treat neoliberalism as normative, but Huehls recommends viewing neoliberalism as post-normative—that is, still powerful but not an ideology that primarily constructs subjects by creating norms for society. Instead, neoliberalism is more hands-off and influences people by shaping environments.[11] But if that is the case, that matters for issues of representation and, therefore, the representational arts. Normative culture establishes its specific modes and preferences representationally and, thus, invites a representational critique, but if neoliberalism is post-normative and only indirectly influences our actions or beliefs, then it would be "producing its value and influence non-representationally," which would require treating it as an ontological force (Huehls 3-4). Normative neoliberalism

[10] For example, you could advocate for the communal good in an attempt to counter the exploitation of individuals-as-objects, but that same language of social justice nicely advocates for the freedom of individuals' self-determination, a social stance that neoliberal ethics quickly adopts as the necessity of protecting an individual's ability to move through society as a budding entrepreneur. To speak of rights and justice, then, may help to strengthen the same structures of injustice one hopes to confront.
[11] Huehls' understanding of neoliberalism and its post-normative structure is informed by Michel Foucault's conceptualization of neoliberalism in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, where neoliberalism primarily influences individuals by shaping environments via experiments with the market economy.

invites critique, but post-normative neoliberalism would not respond to it. A responsive politics, then, would require intervening in an ontological manner by highlighting neoliberalism's contradictions.

This form of ontological critique is precisely what the novel can undertake, though the genre is not often regarded in such a manner. Anna Kornbluh criticizes how the social import of the novel has been turned into little more than a vehicle for increasing readers' affective maturity or a diagnostic mirror to remind us of society's ills. Instead, she contends that novels have always been more than this because of their "speculative, generative utopianism" that imagines forms of existence and belonging alternative to the violence of "capitalist contradiction" (398). In this way, the novel not only occupies "both the negative and affirmative poles of critique"; rather, critique is its "robust ontology" (398, 399). To say the novel does not produce critique but, rather, *is* critique is a key semantic distinction to make. It positions the novel as a "mode of knowing" in its own right instead of an "ideology" or "object of knowledge" to be utilized in service to some greater arena of discourse (Kornbluh 399). Indeed, the novel is "more than evidence, more than information, [and] more than data" that can be rallied in the support of various social and political causes (Kornbluh 400). To move on from this currently en vogue critical approach and return to the novel's immanent critical capacities requires an attendance to its "otherworldliness, its making of something new" (400). To regard the novel as ontologically critical corresponds with Huehls' call for critique that inhabits the "doubled subject-object ontology" neoliberalism produces but refuses to represent in its simultaneity (20). While this seems to be a slight embrace of

neoliberalism, Huehls suggests instead that artists would be embracing what neoliberalism refuses to represent—ontological complexity.

Engaging neoliberalism with a critique on the plane of normative culture may do little good, for it runs the risk of merely targeting its symptoms, not its underlying causes. Kornbluh argues that this is precisely how the novel has been put to work within social and political discourse, and such an approach fails to search for a novel's "formal actuation" of how it "work[s] out problems" (405). To be clear, a novel that possesses "immanent critique" (Kornbluh 406) is quite different than engaging in normative critique. While neoliberalism certainly generates norms, to engage neoliberal ideas through a normative critique of epistemology or ideology would fail to address the ontological impact of neoliberal values on individuals and cultural forms. Huehls observes that an ontological approach to critique places a premium on the significance of words and language, for if they "neither reduce to nor stand apart from the world," then the word/world are simultaneous occurrences just as a subject/object existence is; therefore, we would have to reconsider the poststructuralist assumption that language, via representation, "points to the world without joining it" (Huehls 25). Fiction has an ability to intervene in a neoliberal world by attending to the "representational impasses that both neoliberalism and critique have produced," and that would productively complicate "the purified divide between subject and object, word and world" (Huehls 29). Huehls' description of this both/and approach mirrors Martin's conviction that art's ability to maintain some level of autonomy in its ability to critique is activated by commodification, not in spite of it. Literature's efforts to critique neoliberalism should

not be deemed capitulation, for as Adorno reminds us, to produce art that tries to avoid the subject of capitalism's dominance would be to create something "innocuous."

While Marxist and neo-Marxist anxieties about the commodification of art are primarily taken up with Western culture, we must also consider how these are simultaneously global concerns if we are to disrupt what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the "first in Europe, then elsewhere" critical perspective that often surrounds such debates (7). To consider how global capitalism affects artistic production beyond Eurocentric contexts is not done for the sake of preserving outdated center/periphery models. True, capitalist modernity initiated a cultural transition of the developing world, which has been a "process of translating diverse forms, practices, and understandings of life into universalist political-theoretical categories of deeply European origin" (Chakrabarty 17). But we are also at a point when "non-European capitalist societies make their own claims on the history of capitalism," and this "economic fragmentation" leads to "cultural fragmentation" or "multiculturalism" (Dirlik 71). Ozeki and Hamid's novels do precisely this by moving beyond an early-twentieth-century period of capitalist modernity and formulating a re-translation that narrativizes how the global influence of neoliberal ideology affects the way artistic productions circulate in different national and transnational contexts.

Such literary terrain is not without its pitfalls. For instance, Graham Huggan notes how postcolonial literatures quickly became a "cultural commodity" because of the "complicity between local oppositional discourses and the global late-capitalist system in which these discourses circulate and are contained" (vii). As postcolonial literature became both a profitable sector for the literary publishing world and a legitimized

intellectual field, it "capitalized on its perceived marginality" (Huggan viii). With the largest publishing centers firmly established in major metropolitan areas of the West, there continues to be the sense that any non-Western literature must cater to its buying audience. As a result, postcolonial literature and its "rhetoric of resistance have themselves become consumer products" (Huggan 6). This has most successfully happened within exoticized representations of non-Western people and their cultures, a practice that "manufactures otherness" for Western readers (Huggan 13). These exoticized renderings mirror Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, for exoticization also veils processes of production by covering up the politics that makes non-Western cultures legible and saleable to Western readers (Huggan 18).

Such consumerist pressures certainly affect non-Western writers. Their attendant "anxiety about commercialization" reveals the compromises they might have to make if they are going to gain a foothold in the "global market for English-language literary texts" (Brouillette, *Postcolonial* 3).[12] While it is tempting to want to believe that literature can resist being relegated merely to the status of a commodity, postcolonial literature especially disproves the possibility that "autonomy from the commercial sphere" can exist for a writer from a former colony, since postcolonial writers often feel pressure to perform to certain expectations of Western publishers and readers (Brouillette, *Postcolonial* 3-4). It often becomes a no-win situation. A self-conscious and self-critical writing style can help to anticipate certain criticism of "selling out" to Anglo-American audiences; however, at the same time, such a postmodernist narrative

[12] In turn, this creates a form of hegemonic cultural capital. For how these ideas play out specifically in the realm of literary prizes, see James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (chapters ten and eleven).

style can be "highly saleable" (Brouillette, *Postcolonial* 5). But, as Vivek Chibber argues, any accusation of selling out in a postcolonial or transnational artistic context is not entirely fair, either. Because of the universalizing force of capitalism's modern growth in post-colonies, there is little of culture—whether economic, political, or artistic—that has not somehow been constituted by colonial and intra-national efforts to convert to a capitalist economy. If we view artists as agents who can choose to ruminate on or eschew parts of their culture, they can also make artistic choices with their "material interests" in mind (Chibber 196). The latter is not automatically tantamount to maximizing "economic interests" or being "relentlessly self-oriented" (Chibber 198). To write and sell stories can also be a choice made out of well-being, the desire to provide for oneself. The individual and communal decisions to protect well-being and freedom of choice are not somehow uniquely Western motivations, yet the narrative has existed since the Enlightenment that those are the West's chief exports—freedom, responsibility, rationality, choice, self-determination (Chibber 204-06). This is, of course, an extensively reductive understanding of world history, but these grander, Western-driven narratives have had a phenomenal shelf life. So, for a postcolonial writer to use the Western genre of the novel, court a literary agent in New York City or London, and land a publishing deal with, say, Penguin Random House does not mean that writer is condoning the near-global ubiquity of capitalism. Such accusations run the risk of further nurturing the myth of the West's primacy and immanence in all things economic, political, cultural, and social.

Yet it is also undeniable that the circulation of non-Western literature in advanced capitalist nations can entangle it with other, less-savory financial interests, a

possibility that both Ozeki and Hamid explore in their novels in relation to the documentary form and the financial endgame of self-help books.[13] Further, many scholars express unease over the significant formalist changes in literature that the rise of a global capitalist system has precipitated. The shorthand labels "world literature" or "global literature" are frequently used to describe literature that is delocalized, written for ease of translation, and easily disseminated across the globe to increase sales. Pascale Casanova describes the new world literature as promising readers "denationalized content [that] can be absorbed without any risk of misunderstanding," which turns today's books into "products based on tested aesthetic formulas [that are] designed to appeal to the widest possible readership" in a publishing industry that has become an "international business" (171-72).[14] Casanova, similar to Brown, holds the concern that artistic considerations like form, content, or style are only important insofar as they are attractive to as many consumers as possible. Within this development, Emily Apter identifies the tendency for world literature to embrace a "reflexive endorsement of cultural equivalence and substitutability" as well as the "entrepreneurial, bulimic drive to anthologize and curricularize the world's cultural resources" (2-3). Here, Apter alludes

[13] Arundhati Roy also identifies how several private corporations in India have various partnerships that influence the arts, like Reliance Industries Limited, which owns "mines, gas fields, steel plants, telephone, and cable TV and broadband networks" in addition to "a publishing company" (*Capitalism* 9). Mining corporations like Vedanta, the Jindal Group, Essar, Tata Steel, and Rio Tinto have begun to sponsor literary festivals, publish art magazines, commission individual artists, and defend free speech at the same time that they mine illegally, denude forests, and relocate impoverished communities (*Capitalism* 18-19). An unavoidable impasse remains for an artist as politically outspoken as Roy, and she asks, "But which of us sinners was going to cast the first stone? Not me, who lives off royalties from corporate publishing houses" (*Capitalism* 20). Roy is well aware that she is fully enmeshed personally and professionally in a world where nearly everything she touches and uses can be traced back to the high-volume production of massive corporations. Her fiction and political writing are no different.

[14] It is perhaps not surprising, then, how an algorithm was recently fed 20,000 bestselling novels and can now predict with 80% accuracy whether or not a new book will land on the *New York Times* bestseller list. See Jodie Archer and Matthew L. Jockers, *The Bestseller Code: Anatomy of the Blockbuster Novel*.

to the criticisms surrounding multiculturalism and how its ostensible celebration of cultural difference actually dissolves it. Similarly, Arlene Dávila notes how the logic of neoliberalism "demand[s] the transformation and proper repackaging of culture for public consumption" (4). As a result, entire social and economic classes, as well as histories, are reduced and altered for mainstream consumption. Culture, then, is infrequently "an antidote to economic imperatives"; instead, it is more often a "central component" of neoliberalism's continued growth (5). This, as Walter Benn Michaels argues, is a hallmark of neoliberal practice: culture and cultural difference is celebrated while the economic inequality neoliberalism generates continues to be ignored ("Neoliberal" 75). These concerns diagnose a certain blind spot that some "world" or "global" texts can possess, where writers produce texts that are driven by capitalism and not self-conscious about it. When the pursuit of greater readership becomes tantamount, the opportunity for critique is passed over during a text's production. Gone from the text is the self-referential awareness that Martin and others call for as a way to preserve literature's critique of its own commodification.

Accordingly, the editors of *n+1* note in their controversial 2013 piece "World Lite" that many works of world literature are "only vestigially social and geographical." This elision of specific senses of place and culture enable books to become more accessible and, thereby, saleable. The *n+1* editors worry that literature of this kind surrenders its ability to launch any effective political critique. Adam Kirsch, however, posits that these arguments also expose "a form of nostalgia for the union of modernist aesthetics and radical politics" from the 1930s and 1940s (16). Nostalgic though it may be, the point made by Cassanova, Apter, and others is hard to ignore: Just as capitalism's

spread to and takeover of formerly non-capitalist spheres has rendered many non-Western cultures "legible"—i.e., more capitalist—the same homogenizing force of its industrial means of (re)production makes non-Western literatures increasingly readable.

An interesting example is Heinemann's African Writers Series (AWS) that began in the 1960s.[15] On the one hand, the series helped create the category of literature we think of today as African Literature, and it also launched the careers and/or legacies of many acclaimed writers, from Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o to Bessie Head and Wole Soyinka. The series also initiated necessary conversations about canonicity and rightfully challenged certain secure assumptions, such as the inclusion of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* within the British canon (Stec 142). On the other hand, the series is also a case in point for continued Western dominance of certain sectors of life in former colonies—financial and educational especially. For instance, Phaswane Mpe notes how "the development of African literature is inextricably bound with both the dynamics of publishing and politics of book promotion" in the West (106-07). Similarly, Loretta Stec argues the AWS was created "because the editors saw both an opportunity to bring new writers into print and a potential for making profits" in new sectors (141). We specifically tend to regard Achebe, Ngugi, and Soyinka as the greats of African literature "because these were the writers chosen to be published and reviewed and acclaimed by companies with the capital and the prestige to do so" (Stec 142). While these arguments do not intend to diminish the political or artistic significance of these writers' works, they do remind us how literature that we associate with decolonial

[15] For historical accounts of the development and growth of the African Writers Series, see James Currey, "Africa Writes Back: Heinemann African Writers Series – A Publisher's Memoir" and Adewale Maja-Pearce, "Publishing African Literature: In Pursuit of Excellent: Thirty Years of Heinemann African Writers' Series."

movements is still largely driven and supported by the influence of Western capital.[16] Granted, this is also simply the structure of the business. To quote a British publishing executive, "There are those who think because they are publishing books with artistic worth they don't have to worry about balance sheets … but publishing is a business. You have to sell to survive" (qtd. in Stec 140).[17]

Concerns over artistic production are made more complex by the sheer global scale of capitalism's political and cultural effect. While none of the aforementioned scholars calls for or even believes it is possible to arrive at satisfactory answers to the question of critique, they do continue to suggest that it can be addressed in helpful ways, especially by the novel genre. By turning to *My Year of Meats* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, I consider how two writers compellingly explore the complexity of what it means to produce art in contexts driven by a neoliberal logic of economization. Ozeki explores the numerous ways that art and the genre of the novel are entangled in the privatized and transnational work of industrial corporations. She shows how there is no space of critique where art is not somehow supported—and therefore affected or even altered—by the interests of investors, shareholders, and consumers as national economies compete for dominance over one another. In this sense, the art in *My Year of Meats*—the television documentary—is certainly a commodity. Yet at the same time, Ozeki envisions how art and literature, commodified though they are, have the ability to

[16] In her article "In Pursuit of Publishing: Heinemann's African Writers Series," Gail Low charts some of the paternalistic aspects of Heinemann's efforts behind the development of the series; however, Olabode Ibironke has recently argued in *Remapping African Literature* that writers like Achebe, Soyinka, and Ngugi retained a considerable measure of agency in their work and publication with Heinemann.
[17] The dominating force of the English language can certainly be over- and under-stated in these debates. See Simon Gikandi, "Provincializing English" for considerations and evidences of English's hegemonic power as well as the ways it has been reworked and reappropriated in non-Western contexts.

activate subjective forms of resistance to a neoliberal ethic, such that new forms of social belonging are encouraged within tight-knit communities.

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia, meanwhile, questions what literature's social and economic role is within neoliberal contexts by considering what value literature presents to enterprising individuals and to the communities around would-be entrepreneurs. A key tension in Hamid's novel is the role of the self and how the neoliberal tendency to view the individual as chiefly an economic agent complicates and frustrates our understanding of what it means to be human. If economics and the movement of commodities can be measured in terms of a zero-sum game, Hamid suggests conflict will arise when an attempt is made to transfer those same theories onto literature, its production, and the individuals who interact with literature. Though *Filthy Rich* never suggests that the ubiquity and force of neoliberal capitalism can be fully rejected, Hamid does envision how the production and dissemination of literature-as-commodity spotlights myriad limits to the values and ideologies of neoliberalism, limits that *Filthy Rich* suggests literature can uniquely expose.

Neoliberal Limitation and Artistic Potential in *My Year of Meats*

My Year of Meats ends in a confounding manner. Japanese housewife Akiko Ueno achieves the "happy life" she desires by immigrating to the United States with help from Asian-American filmmaker Jane Takagi-Little (214). Akiko escapes her abusive husband, John, who rapes her earlier in the story, and, after learning she is pregnant from the assault, she flees to the US to start what she believes can now be that happy life. It is a happy ending in that Akiko asserts her own will to freedom, but this also makes the

novel seem like yet another immigrant story that problematically supports an American self-told tale of exceptionalism and freedom.[18] This complicated resolution owes to the way Akiko forms her expectations of the US—from watching a television documentary filmed by Jane that showcases American families. The show is financed by BEEF-EX, a fictional US "national lobby organization" for the American meat industry (Ozeki 9). Jane tries to use the show to broadcast a more diverse vision of what it means to be an American, but that nuanced image of the US is different than what Akiko sees. She assumes the US is simply a place where happy lives are lived. Jane's documentary, then, both succeeds and fails in its aims. On the one hand, it is the catalyst that helps Akiko escape a life-threatening situation; on the other hand, it only confirms certain exceptionalist assumptions about the US. Jane's artwork, then, is politically resistant and subsumed, dynamic and neutralized.

My examination of *My Year of Meats* is two-fold. First, I look at Jane's documentary *My American Wife!* It is essentially a commercial for BEEF-EX with the lofty goal of securing Japanese importation of American beef in an effort to counter Japan's burgeoning financial prowess over the US in the 1990s. Jane's art is never outside of the influence of the meat industry that finances her work, yet at the same time she finds ways to resist those artistic confines to significant effect. Her art is simultaneously constituted by neoliberal capital *and* able to subvert it. Second, I

[18] My conceptualization of US exceptionalism is informed by Ali Behdad and Donald E. Pease's arguments, where the US is exceptional precisely because its global acts of violence are presented as the exception to the socially-produced norm of America's ostensible promise of freedom and liberty for all. To combine some of these terms, Ong has also pointed out how neoliberalism often functions in an exceptional manner. Though we tend to think of the political notion of exception from Carl Schmitt as "mark[ing] out excludable subjects who are denied protections," Ong notes that "the exception can also be a positive decision to include selected populations and spaces as targets … associated with neoliberal reform" (*Neoliberalism* 5).

consider Akiko and what happens to her as an example of the myriad subject and object positions involved in global interactions initiated by neoliberal capitalism, and how those dual positions cannot be separated from one another. Moments of individual agency and instances of the individual being acted upon occur simultaneously in *My Year of Meats* to the point they cannot be distinguished. Ozeki's novel embodies the approach to art that Adorno calls for because of its back-and-forth narration of Jane and Akiko's experiences, but it does so in a specifically transnational and neoliberal way because of the influence of BEEF-EX's transpacific reach. The production of Jane's documentary and her first-person running commentary on its creation enable us to look at the social and material conditions of the production of art to understand its political significance within the setting of *My Year of Meats*. Adorno's second aspect of understanding the production of art within capitalism—audience reception—also comprises a significant portion of the text through Akiko's connection to *My American Wife!* In other words, to only analyze how *My American Wife!* is produced and not how it affects Akiko would fail render a full picture of what Ozeki understands as the significance of art's production and its sociopolitical meaning within neoliberal capitalism. Akiko's reception of the television documentary completes Ozeki's vision of the work of art in an age of neoliberalism, for Jane's documentary is the catalyst for progressive, healthy change in Akiko's life. Though *My American Wife!* is subsumed by neoliberal capital, Ozeki suggests that it can still have substantive effect beyond itself that is liberating for Akiko. In this way, *My Year of Meats* contributes to our understanding of the complicated positionalities within political theories of neoliberalism as well as theories of art's autonomy (or lack thereof). Ozeki's novel

spotlights how opportunities for agency or autonomy are simultaneously possible and impossible because of how neoliberalism activates Jane's artistic production while also unable to fully contain what she creates.

Jane's work on *My American Wife!* is easily co-opted by the ever-present US self-narrative of exceptionalism, despite her careful attempts to complicate that national narrative. At first, each episode showcases an "ideal" US housewife—white, attractive, heterosexual—who makes a beef recipe for her family. Akiko's husband, John, produces the show, and as Jane becomes acquainted with the unethical practices of the US beef industry, she sabotages his homogenous vision of the US by filming a more diverse set of Americans instead—Mexican immigrants, parents of a disabled daughter, a biracial vegetarian lesbian couple. Completing a viewer survey, Akiko gives Jane's episodes higher marks for authenticity than John's presentations of "typical" American housewives. Akiko is also intrigued by Jane's ability to thwart John and contacts her. Jane eventually facilitates Akiko's escape to the US, and Akiko travels around to meet some of the families featured on the show, cementing her feeling of belonging in her new country.[19] But *My American Wife!* is also an artistic production that is fully entangled by the interests of US capital, since its purpose is to aid the US meat industry's entrance into the Japanese market. Thus, Jane's more socially progressive aims seem immediately compromised. This is important to consider, especially in light

[19] Some scholars have suggested that Jane and Akiko, as a sort of feminist pairing, are successful in liberating themselves from patriarchal paradigms. For readings in this vein, see Jennifer K. Ladino's *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature* (specifically chapter six) and Shameem Black's "Fertile Cosmofeminism: Ruth L. Ozeki and Transnational Reproduction." For scholars who disagree with such a reading, see Palumbo-Liu's "Rational and Irrational Choices: Form, Affect, and Ethics" and Monica Chiu's "Postnational Globalization and (En)Gendered Meat Production in Ruth L. Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*."

of recent suggestions that the most efficient means for resistance against neoliberal capitalism are already housed within its very structures.[20] Ozeki posits just the opposite—that any critique of or resistance against the neoliberal state that privileges privatized corporate interests, no matter how seemingly effective that critique may be, can easily be used to the state's advantage. This ends up being mostly true with Jane's documentary. As Huehls identifies, this co-optation is one of the hallmarks of neoliberal thought that produces and preserves a rhetoric of common sense around itself that makes it seemingly impervious to transformative criticism. But despite these multiple limitations surrounding her artistic work, Jane still finds a way to exact a political resistance that is effective because it produces an alternative vision of American ways of being and belonging.

Ozeki portrays this both/and aspect of Jane's artistic work—how it is constituted by the work of neoliberalism yet also resistant to it—by first foregrounding how *My American Wife!* is caught in the economic conflict between the US and Japan in the late 1980s/early 1990s. *My Year of Meats*, published in 1998 and set during the Gulf War, places the production of the show a year after "the New Beef Agreement was signed with Japan" in 1990, which "relax[ed] import quotas and increas[ed] the American share of Japan's red-meat market" (Ozeki 127). The show's broader, privatized goal is to "inveigle a nice woman with her civic duty to promote American meat abroad and thereby help rectify the trade imbalance with Japan" (Ozeki 35). Each episode becomes a polemic, as Jane and her film crew are to quiz subject families at the end with a

[20] See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, Michael Feher's "Self-Appreciation: or, The Aspirations of Human Capital," and James Ferguson's *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution*.

segment called "The Survey," and one of the questions is "Do you think Japan is an economic threat to America?" (Ozeki 23). Four commercial spots for BEEF-EX also accompany every episode with the idea that the "commercials were to bleed into the documentaries, and documentaries were to function as commercials" (Ozeki 41). In this way, the documentary facilitates what Brown describes as the late capitalist prioritization of exchange-value. If the show does have use-value, it is geared toward increasing the exchange of imports/exports. *My American Wife!* is intended to fill the American economic need to regain financial prowess when Japan was becoming the latest global center of capital. As Giovanni Arrighi has carefully shown, capital typically has moved from declining centers to rising centers over the past five centuries, where the latter expands capitalist power to a greater extent than its hegemonic predecessor could (15). But this ultimately did not happen between Japan and the US. Japan eventually found it difficult to redistribute assets from the US to its own economy because "the world's richest and most developed continental power proved to be not as devoid of control over foreign business" as Japan soon found out (Arrighi 18). *My American Wife!* exists as one such effort to continue to control foreign markets via the interests of private US corporations.

Initially, Jane resists the idea that her artistic work is compromised by BEEF-EX and any American efforts to reestablish financial dominance over Japan. She claims that John's "wanton capitalist mandate had nothing to do with [her] vocation" (167), but this is ultimately incorrect, for it is the very reason her job exists. But that does not stop Jane from first approaching her work on *My American Wife!* as if it contains a way to subvert the privatized, corporate, and transnational interests driving the creation of the

documentary. She has recuperative intentions with the show, “to use this window into mainstream network television to *educate*. Perhaps it was naïve, but I believed, honestly, that I could use wives to sell meat in the service of a Larger Truth” (27, emphasis in original). Jane displays an intriguing peace here with the entanglement of art and business at the beginning of her work on the program. She realizes the contradictions yet still believes she can navigate them ethically or, at the very least, work around them to arrive at a locus of artistic autonomy similar to what Martin describes.

But Jane’s belief in any kind of autonomy is quickly challenged. When she is aghast that John will not film an African-American family in Mississippi, he replies, “It’s not about me. It’s a question of meats” (118), and when she does find a way to film a family with a physically disabled daughter while John is indisposed, he becomes enraged. As John puts it in his broken English, such content is “not good for program sponsor of BEEF-EX” and “TV program depend on sponsor. It is business” (164). Jane’s producer in New York, Kenji, delivers a similar message: “BEEF-EX is paying your rent. … And mine too. So don’t get all *auteur* on me” (165). Eventually, Jane comes to accept that *My American Wife!* is not some kind of altruistic, idealistic mission. She reiterates verbatim her earlier conviction “that you could use wives to sell meat in the service of a greater Truth,” but includes an addendum: “I was broke after my divorce and desperate for a job” (176). Ozeki suggests here that the use-value and exchange-value of *My American Wife!* dissolve into each other in complicated ways. The documentary certainly has an individual, utilitarian value for Jane in that it keeps her employed; however, the show’s exchange-value must be delicately preserved so that it directly corresponds to the use-value the show holds for Jane. In other words, *My*

American Wife! needs to do well enough to keep her employed, but John's metric for the success of each episode is whether or not its content corresponds to the values of a lobby organization that represents the US beef industry. Use-value, exchange-value, and ethics cannot all be satisfied for Jane because the show needs to be worthy of dissemination—or exchange—in the eyes of John, Kenji, BEEF-EX, and Japanese trade partners. Jane, then, comes to a conclusion similar to Brown's—that artistic production is eventually so saturated by the interests of capital that it becomes little more than a conduit of exchange. Indeed, Jane tells her boyfriend later, "You see my quandary? I peddle the stuff" (223).

Any critique of the US meat industry Jane would try to slip into the show's episodes would lack a higher moral or ethical ground. For that matter, any critique would likely be unsuccessful, for, as I will discuss later with Akiko's reception of Jane's episodes, audience reception can easily nullify any substantive critique of capital that the artist might try to effect. So what Jane eventually decides to do to subvert John's reductive vision of American families is create art that conveys the kind of "doubled subject-object ontology" Huehls describes, where people whose quotidian experience is driven by neoliberal capital (20). By filming more diverse families than John would prefer, Jane is not merely producing a representational critique, for as Michaels reminds us, neoliberalism's penchant for a rhetoric of diversity would co-opt such talking points. Instead, Jane's episodes make sure to spotlight the family's simultaneous subject and object positions. Each family is objectified in the sense that they are never outside the influence of the meat industry. After all, every family of the week on *My American Wife!* is showcased making a meat recipe, the hope being that Japanese housewives will be

persuaded to make the same meals, thus driving up sales of US meat across the Pacific Ocean. (In fact, one episode's family even runs a cattle operation on a massive, industrial scale.) But the families Jane films also always retain their subjecthood. At no point does Jane reduce them to a certain categorization of American life like John aims for. They are always more than stereotypes, each of them embodying, in subtle or obvious ways, alternative ways of being and belonging.

Jane's subversive episodes are not representational critiques, for she does not pretend they achieve verisimilitude, even if she formerly held the conviction that she can make a better show than John with her "residual loyalty to an ideal" of authenticity (28). By authenticity, Jane means she hopes viewers would "learn something real about America," and the problem with John's creative direction is that it produces "documentaries about an exotic and vanishing America for consumption" (15). The US he would have her portray is vanishing because it displays a whitewashed, heterosexual, homogenized America of some amorphous yesteryear that never fully existed anyway, and it is exotic because John's episodes fetishize this very construction.[21] But Jane's episodes still register as constructions by the time they are broadcast in Japan. She admits as much about the episode featuring Lara and Dyann, a lesbian couple who also happen to be vegetarians. While filming them, she sees the episode's affective potential unfolding into "another heart-wrenching documentary moment" (175). While there was a time when Jane believed in a "singular, empirical, absolute" truth, as she worked more with "editing and camera angles and the effect that music can have on meaning," she

[21] John's episodes are fetishizations in both the Freudian and Marxist senses of the word. His vision is a reductive portrayal of US culture made to look enticing or desiring, but his episodes also obscure more negative truths about forms of racial, social, gendered, and economic violence in the US.

came to realize how truth was measured in "ever-diminishing approximations" (176). Indeed, some of the complexities of American lived experience are altogether absent from Lara and Dyann's episode that Akiko eventually views. This is not to say the episode is meaningless, but its meaning has been carefully manufactured, and the elisions are significant. While the crew sets up the cameras to film Lara and Dyann, Jane notices how "the backs of [the couple's] hands brushed and their fingers entwined for a brief squeeze before releasing, quickly, well-trained in circumspection" (173). This circumspection, though, never appears in the final cut of their episode, but it is a nuance that could begin to show that not everything about Lara and Dyann's life in the US is happy. With that omission, any viewer is denied the knowledge of social hardships Lara and Dyann have experienced, since the necessity for circumspection does not appear as part of their "official" story. Their lives become exceptional because of the exceptions Jane makes with her editing. All the viewer will see is a couple living a happy life.

This is not to discount the emotional power of Lara and Dyann's story in the episode. The footage is moving for Jane, too. But as she edits, she realizes she never actually told the two vegetarians that BEEF-EX sponsors the show. And then Jane herself admits she has to "strive for the truth and believe in it wholeheartedly" while filming, even as she knows she is manipulating it (177). So everyone involved has blinders on—some self-imposed, others imposed for them—yet, from this same episode, Akiko acquires what she believes is an authentic understanding of the US. Jane identifies the simultaneity of truth and construction in the final cut of the episode, describing it as "a good one, really solid, moving, the best I'd made," but then continues to fine-tune the footage anyway in order to keep crafting "a seamless flow in a reality that was no longer

[Lara and Dyann's] and not quite so real anymore" (179). That which is "really solid" and deeply "moving" isn't actually real at all. But this still amounts to effective artistic resistance to the kind of reductive political and cultural work represented by John and BEEF-EX. As a way to give hope to the efficacy of art in a neoliberal world, Jane expresses a certain detached acceptance of the dual position she occupies as an artist with subjective power who is also an objectified pawn for BEEF-EX. She labels this contradiction "[h]alf documentarian, half fabulist" (360), or, to put it another way, she is partially hampered by the status quo of the neoliberal interests that support her own work and she is partially liberated by the politically resistant work that the artistic imagination can produce. Jane concludes, "Maybe sometimes you have to make things up, to tell truths that alter outcomes" (360). To "make things up" becomes tantamount to "tell[ing] truths," a way to navigate the limitations presented to the work of art in an age of neoliberalism. Therefore, Jane is not hamstrung creatively or politically in the sense that her culpability by working on *My American Wife!* keeps her from seeing the forest for the trees. She has not completely sold out in an ethical sense. But the frustrating duality of Jane's artistic work still remains, which she acknowledges by observing, "Maybe this exempts me as an individual, but it sure makes me entirely culpable as a global media maker" (335). Ozeki positions Jane as aware of both her own needs and different matrices of social responsibility that come with being an artist working within a global capitalist system. As Martin notes, that both limits and activates certain potentialities for the shape her art can take.

Just as Jane repeatedly tries to assert some kind of autonomy or agency within her commodified artistic work, Akiko is herself simultaneously in subjective and

objectified positions. When she comes to the US, she enters a complex power dynamic as an immigrant on the path to cultural citizenship.[22] Different political theorists have observed how there is no historically consistent American stance toward immigrants.[23] Bonnie Honig claims this ambivalence stems from positive and negative views of what immigrants bring to the US. On the one hand, their arrival implies the US is "choiceworthy," but, on the other hand, immigrants never cease to pose a threat to the US because of the "undecidability of foreignness" (75, 97). While both sides of the American political aisle admire the industrious immigrant, ambivalence never fully goes away because the US can never truly know if it is only witnessing "immigrant practicality," where a newcomer does and says the right things out of the will to survive (Honig 53). Honig suggests that at the core of these concerns is the question of which side has the greatest impact—the immigrant on the nation or the nation on the immigrant? This question ultimately poses whether an immigrant retains subjecthood or becomes an object acted upon by the state. Thus, the figure of the immigrant embodies the same contradictions that neoliberalism grapples with, that "hybrid ontology that

[22] Aihwa Ong defines cultural citizenship as a set of "cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory." Being a cultural citizen means becoming enmeshed in "a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society" ("Cultural" 738), and this simultaneity of "self-making"/"being-made" is precisely Akiko's positionality in *My Year of Meats*. Renato Rosaldo has been credited with coining the term "cultural citizenship," defining it as the minority's "right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense" (402). His theorization, though, does not sufficiently account for the overwhelming influence of the nation-state on a foreigner or immigrant like Ong's does. More recently, Nick Stevenson has further problematized the idea that "cultural citizenship" is as closely tied to the nation-state as Ong argues. He conceptualizes a more cosmopolitan understanding of the outsider's level of agency as he or she works to connect the "self and society" (43).

[23] Ali Behdad argues that, on the whole, the US has a "national consciousness" marked by "ambivalence" when it comes to immigration because there is an "irreconcilable difference between competing perceptions of national identity" (17). Will Kymlicka understands this ambivalence as stemming from what American citizens are and are not willing to admit—that the US is certainly "polyethnic," but there is an internal hesitation to view the US as "multinational," since the latter might require granting certain rights to minority groups (22).

neoliberalism has produced for us" (Huehls 20), which Akiko represents.[24] Ozeki narrates how powerful the allure of US exceptionalism and freedom are for Akiko, while also suggesting that she and Jane do find small ways to productively resist forms of oppression. Akiko is both subsumed by a narrative of US exceptionalism while also an agential subject within it. Before ever thinking of moving to the US, Akiko receives an image of a welcoming nation via *My American Wife!*, building an expectation of what it would be like to live in the US and start a new life. But even though Jane's episodes contain a more nuanced vision of American life, they actually succeed in inculcating Akiko with a romanticized view of the US. In one sense, Jane's episodes fail in their aims, but in another sense, they also succeed because they encourage and activate Akiko's determined agency.

Akiko's connection to *My American Wife!* marks the beginning of her growing cultural citizenship, the dynamic of "self-making"/"being-made" Ong identifies

[24] Ozeki is doing something quite compelling here in that her novel carefully subverts our literary and political understanding of simultaneity. Benedict Anderson famously postulated that the novel form creates a nationally unifying sense of "meanwhile" as it encourages readers to imagine themselves connected to fellow citizens across time and space (24-25). While Anderson's "meanwhile" is a unifying metric, one that grows national identities, Ozeki shows that literary simultaneity should be understood as a point of divergence, not convergence. The community of fellow-citizens may continue to be imagined, but what is imagined is not as unified as Anderson would lead us to believe. Instead, Akiko and Jane's different readings of *My American Wife!* and of the US reveal that any imagined community is diverse and varied in its interpretive framework. Or, to put it as Jenny Sampirisi does, narrative exists "as a series of events that happen and fail to happen simultaneously within the uncertain structure of language" (71). The act of writing itself enters "an all-at-onceness" that we should not regard as a moment of either/or or even both/and, but as "n/either" (73).

What Sampirisi describes here recalls Henri Bergson's concept of duration, that the ceaseless flow of past into present as a way to mark the passage of time amounts to a fluidity of experience where the "present [is] ceaselessly reborn" (44). Bergson would likely disagree with Anderson, claiming that imagining a "link among all individual consciousnesses" is *not* a unifying moment but, rather, the instance when our consciousness should actually grasp "multiple events lying at different points in space." That is to say, "simultaneity would be precisely the possibility of two or more events entering within a single, instantaneous perception" (45). The kind of nationalistically homogenizing and unifying imaginative moment within Anderson's "meanwhile" is, for Bergson, instead an opportunity to grasp the relativity of meaning within simultaneous events. Or, to return to Huehls, simultaneity is a space to productively explore the "hybrid ontology" of an individual's movement in today's age.

("Cultural" 738). The most compelling episode for Akiko is the one that features Lara and Dyann. While watching, she begins to cry "tears of admiration for the strong women" who found ways to have a family on their own terms (181). Their story moves her to write a letter to Jane, saying the episode has changed her life and motivated her to leave John. She closes the letter by asking Jane where she can go to "live my happy life like" the one Lara and Dyann have (214). The connection Akiko makes between the US and a "happy life" is complicated because, as Emily Cheng argues, it "posit[s] the United States as an unquestioned space of freedom" (203). But more than that, Akiko compares herself and her own unhappiness to a construction. What she perceives to be a better situation or outlet for relief in the real world is a carefully edited composition, pieced together to trigger the viewer's emotions, as noted earlier with Jane's comments on the post-production doctoring of the footage. The constructed nature of a television program is not the problem here, since those are simply aspects of the medium. The complication comes when, after watching the episode, Akiko believes what she has just seen confirms that the US is where her "happy life" can occur. What Jane labels an "ever-diminishing approximation" of the US, Akiko accepts as truth, which primes her for her move to America. In light of Adorno's arguments, if one were only to read Akiko's reception of *My American Wife!* to understand the documentary, it would be a reductive approach. By only seeing the finished, edited product, Akiko is shut out from the conditions in which Jane made each episode. She receives the documentary as if it were an absolute commodity.

Akiko's determination that the US is a space of freedom is solidified before she leaves Japan. Once she is pregnant after being raped by John, she thinks about her baby

growing inside her and "didn't turn on the television, not even once" (317). This is a significant moment. Akiko has sat dutifully in front of the television for most of the novel, rating the authenticity of the US and its citizens from what she sees on *My American Wife!* Her decision to leave the television off at first appears to imply that she is now avoiding constructions of "reality," which would suggest a growing autonomy as she gets ready to escape to the US. But simply avoiding a mediating force like television does not change the fact that Akiko has already taken in the mediated message of *My American Wife!* Rather than do an about-face from the simplistic vision of the US she has adopted, Akiko's decision to turn off the television is more of a declaration that she has seen enough and determinedly made up her mind about what she thinks the US is like. This is further evidenced by her comment to a friend that she is convinced her baby is a girl and hopes she "can grow up to become an American Wife" (318), a strong woman like Lara or Dyann. The US, captured as it is through Lara and Dyann's manufactured and carefully packaged story, is the ideal to strive for.

Yet even for all the ways this moment seems like a surrender of agency on Akiko's part, Ozeki still positions Akiko as asserting her agency by deciding to leave John and Japan. While it would be easy to view the agency of her decision as undercut by her pre-packaged, romanticized view of the US, Akiko still decides what to do with her life. Nobody forces her hand. *My American Wife!* influences her decision, but there is nothing about Lara and Dyann's episode that somehow announces it is imperative for her to move to the US and only the US. This is the compelling complication that *My Year of Meats* presents before Akiko leaves Japan: She is simultaneously agential and acted upon. *My American Wife!* clearly has an effect on her. The documentary's

carefully calibrated affective properties touch her deeply. In that sense, Akiko functions in an objectified manner as a faceless consumer, a mere number within a larger mass of coveted viewer ratings. But what she does with that experience as a viewer is up to her and is the moment when she becomes an agent, producing something of value for herself. This is not to say that there is a transitional moment where Akiko moves from being objectified one moment to an acting subject the next. She is both simultaneously, for it is clear that the affective propulsion of *My American Wife!* stays with her once she arrives in the US.[25]

Indeed, affect is a key part of Akiko's devotion to her idealized view of the US. As noted earlier, individual agency, industriousness, and economic power are key concerns of immigration, but as Honig reminds us, the ambivalence over the subject and object positions of the immigrant stems largely from something more affective in its constitution—namely, will the immigrant be devoted to the new nation? It is through the level of devotion to the immigrant's new country that the dyad within cultural

[25] Another way to state this is to say that Akiko occupies both a challenged and advantageous position as an Asian immigrant, a situatedness that both theories of immigration and neoliberalism help us to understand. Specifically, the stereotyping that Asian immigrants experience in the US as the "model minority" can work both in and against Akiko's favor when economic buying power carries more and more influence in an increasingly neoliberal, corporatized nation-state. The racialized stereotype of Asians as family oriented, hard workers, and financially successful is problematic because these perceived signs that Asians know how to "make it" in America testifies to the ability of the US to take in outsiders and assimilate them into its socio-economic apparatuses (Lee 7). The economic trends that buoy these stereotypes have continued into the present. The Census Bureau reports that as of 2017 the median household income for Asian Americans was $81,331 compared to $68,145 for White Americans (Semega et al.). One way to understand this aspect of stereotyping is through Honig's arguments, mentioned earlier, that economically savvy immigrants are viewed as less of a threat in the US. Though the model minority trope contains racialized assumptions, it is a form of stereotyping that regards the Asian immigrant as a safe newcomer. For more on how the "model minority" stereotype is an acculturating tool, see Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* and Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*. Others, however, have more recently argued that Asian immigrants are productively resisting and complicating this stereotype: See Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* and Walter Benn Michaels, "Model Minorities and the Minority Model – the Neoliberal Novel." For a comprehensive rendering of this debate, see Madeline Y. Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority*.

citizenship of "self-making"/"being-made" is further clarified. By the end of *My Year of Meats*, it is clear that Akiko's agential decisions are still simultaneously driven by the national narrative of the US she gleaned from *My American Wife!* Akiko's expression of patriotism plays a crucial role in this further development. Once she arrives in the US, her attachment to a romantic view of the nation quickly blossoms into full-fledged dedication, though it is briefly challenged while she rides a train in the Deep South. From the train, Akiko sees people living in poverty, and the sight hits her "with a shock." In her mind, Americans are not poor. "Maybe in the past" they were, "or in the movies, but not now. Not these days. Not in real life" (336). Ozeki presents Akiko's thoughts in a complicated way. For Akiko, poverty is either a historical moment or a cinematic one. If she believes that poverty is a thing of the past, then her image of the US is unrealistically optimistic in an economic sense. It is an exceptionalist view in that it takes poverty to be the exception to the norm of American life. But attaching American poverty to movies creates a difficult contradiction in her thinking. By saying that poverty is in the past, she claims it no longer exists. The "or" in Akiko's thoughts separates "the past" and "the movies," meaning that one way for poverty not to exist is for it to be featured in movies. In other words, movies are not real or, rather, they show things that are not real any*more*.

Given how devoted she has been to accepting *My American Wife!* as reality, this is an important admission in Akiko's inner dialogue. She knows what she sees in movies is fake, but this concession is immediately followed by her conviction that poverty is not around "these days. Not in real life." So despite seeing tangible poverty, Akiko brushes it aside as an aberration that cannot possibly constitute "real life." This means that

poverty does not fit *her* conceptualization of "real life," which is tantamount to Akiko confessing that her notion of "real life" is also an empty construction, devoid of actuality. She is not completely unaware of American history, since she considers that there was a time—"maybe in the past"—when Americans were poor. But even when she sees poverty from the train, she chooses to disavow the possibility that people could still be poor "these days." In many ways, Akiko is still watching television, only this time she is seated on a train, and the window by her seat frames the picture she views. What is real is fake, and what is constructed is real. This moment on the train has potential to be a breakthrough in the narrative, the point at which Akiko realizes she is pursuing a mere idea of the US. If Akiko would readily admit that movies are not "real life," then neither is television, and that means the representation of America and its housewives in *My American Wife!* are also not "real life." Therefore, her romanticized view of the US gleaned from television is not a dependable basis upon which to pin her hopes for the future. But she continues to do this anyway, reflecting back on another family from *My American Wife!* with whom she recently spent the Thanksgiving holiday. She thinks about how they were "authentic, exactly what she had seen on TV" (336). Movies and "real life" may not be the same for Akiko, but television and authenticity are.[26]

Akiko's train ride continues, and her cultural subsumption deepens as she accepts a romanticized form of the US as authentic. The majority of her fellow passengers are African American, and the train attendant, Maurice, informs her that she is riding the

[26] Akiko's ready acceptance of an exceptional America is also facilitated by the genre of Jane's storytelling. That Jane's work is done as a documentary—and not, say, a sitcom—demands a certain sort of faith from a viewer. The documentary ostensibly presents that which is real, authentic, or unscripted. It is understandable why Akiko would more readily accept what she sees on her television as fact if it is in documentary form. But Jane's documentary is, of course, no less of a construction than any other narrativized medium.

Chicken Bone Special, the name deriving from its passengers often being too poor to buy the lounge car's meals. Maurice notes how "these poor colored folk, they gotta make do with lugging along some home-cooked fried chicken instead" (338). The passengers around Akiko share their fried chicken and potato salad with her while Maurice starts clapping and leading the passengers in a chant of "chicken bone" over and over (339). Akiko "shiver[s] with excitement" over the communal camaraderie. As a result, she feels

> as if somehow she'd been absorbed into a massive body that had taken over the functions of her own, and now it was infusing her small heart with the superabundance of its feeling, teaching her taut belly to swell, stretching her rib cage, and pumping spurts of happy life into her fetus. *This is America!* she thought. She clapped her hands then hugged herself with delight. (339)

These sentences are complicated because they situate Akiko as being the agent in her search for the "true" America. Her pronouncement "*This is America!*" acts as a kind of confirmation of success. Yet she is also very much not the acting subject here. Ozeki's use of the passive voice—"somehow she'd been absorbed"—makes it clear that something other than Akiko's own willed optimism infuses her with patriotic euphoria. A romanticized view of the US is swallowing her up. By being "absorbed into a massive body," the US claims Akiko and challenges her autonomy, since it "take[s] over the functions of her own" body. After this physiological commandeering, an affective invasion follows, "infusing her small heart with the superabundance of its feeling" that

also spreads to her baby. Both mother and child have been filled with a patriotic happiness and awe.

Akiko believes that what she is witnessing on the train constitutes American reality and that it is something to be giddy over. Rather than consider why her fellow passengers are unable to afford food on the train, which might reveal some negative socio-economic and racial truth about the US, Akiko sees the situation around her as a joyous moment. Monica Chiu notes that Akiko's reaction here "soften[s] America's harsher realities" through a "normalizing of difference" (109), and Michaels argues that this effacement of difference via normalization is precisely the work of neoliberalism where issues of race and identity are over-privileged and the celebration of cultural difference overshadows the urgency of "minimizing economic difference" ("Model" 1023-24). Akiko commits this oversight earlier when first boarding the train. She notices that most of the people on the train are black and assumes they are also "taking the train to find their happy life" like her (336). Akiko does not consider that there could be social or economic reasons for taking a train instead of, say, a car or a plane, assuming instead that everyone in America is destined for a happy life. What Ozeki envisions here confirms Michaels' position that a carefree attitude toward difference or inequality in this scene hides other dire political truths. Accordingly, the joyous sing-a-long moment on the Chicken Bone Special does nothing to counter Akiko's assumptions.[27]

[27] The setting of this scene is telling, for the train car is frequently a site where claims to citizenship and belonging have been challenged or negated. Daylanne K. English notes how train car vignettes are familiar stock scenes throughout African American literature where the law would seek to "reinforce the noncitizenship status of African Americans" by moving black passengers to the back of the train to make room for white travelers (53). The train car, then, is where the juridical and cultural objectification of people groups has overruled their agency and autonomy as subjects. Further, the symbolism of Akiko's geographical movement suggests that she may not be as free (or her ending as happy) as she thinks it is. It

The absolute nature of Akiko's patriotism productively supports the nation in different ways, and though these train scenes could appear to problematically metonymize the Deep South with fried-chicken-loving African Americans, the stereotypically racist constructions serve a purpose here. Akiko is surrounded by a bunch of happy-go-lucky African Americans, an allusion to the long history of docile Uncle-Tom-type characters that have populated American fiction. Such stock characters have helped to place a shroud over black outrage at centuries of oppression. Akiko's fellow passengers, then, are American exceptionalism personified. They are nostalgic stereotypes that gloss over slavery, racism, and economic inequality as aberrations within an otherwise consistent national narrative of freedom and opportunity. It is no wonder that the black passengers' cheer, congeniality, and chant (as if a religious mantra) all help to accelerate the inculcation of patriotic fervor within Akiko, the likes of which encourage the formation of her cultural citizenship. Oblivious to the racialized history of the poverty she views from the train, she is able to maintain her idyllic view of the US, supported as it is by this stereotypical block of fellow passengers.[28] Paradoxically, this scene simultaneously does and does not mirror Jane's work on the television documentary. What Akiko witnesses is similar to the images of the US in

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is more than a little ironic that Akiko is on a train in the Deep South traveling north to New York, mimicking a journey purportedly to freedom.

[28] One counter reading to entertain is that the almost hallucinogenic effect of this train ride is actually a sign of Akiko's agential ability to represent. The reader learns earlier in the novel that Akiko was a manga artist before her marriage to John and would also write poetry for fun. One could read the descriptions of Akiko's time in the US as a kind of ode to the hyperreality of the manga form, a way of seeing the world, which would imply Akiko is more in control of her contact with US exceptionalism than is initially apparent. These arguments largely amount to conjecture, though, since Akiko's portions of the novel are in third-person, unlike the first-person narration of Jane's sections. We are never really privy to Akiko's thought process in the same way we are with Jane. However, we do know that Akiko pictures herself as the woman in the song "Polk Salad Annie," which plays at the end of one of the episodes of *My American Wife!* In that song, a woman leaves her man without even saying goodbye, an assertion of will that Akiko finds inspiring.

Jane's episodes where the US is diverse in a myriad of ways—racial, ethnic, economic, gendered, and sexual. Yet, at the same time, Akiko does not grasp the reality that is directly in front of her, just as she does not grasp the vision of the US that Jane would have viewers of *My American Wife!* understand.

Ironically, Akiko's thought "*This is America!*" can be read as her first moment of true clarity about the US in the novel.[29] This *is* America, the nation that takes immigrants and attempts to acculturate them to its larger narrative by convincing them to believe that other forms of social and cultural violence or inequality are merely exceptions to the norm. Michaels reminds us that neoliberal values encourage this type of cultural narrative, the glossing over of economic inequalities to the benefit of the multicultural project ("Neoliberal" 74). American multiculturalism often takes a "new cultural politics of difference" and uses it to display "its power of absorption," which turns into "a linear narrative that begins with difference but ends in sameness" (Behdad 12-13), the sameness being that everyone—citizens and immigrants—agrees to America's self-told tale of exceptionalism. Akiko may have seized her own agency by deciding to leave Japan and move to the US, but that does not remove the continued effects of the state on newcomers. While Akiko's absorption into the US—her objectification, the "being-made" aspect of cultural citizenship—does not negate her autonomous efforts of "self-making," it does suggest that attempts to extricate oneself from oppressive environments can only ever be partial. The friction of subjecthood and objectification seem destined to

[29] Akiko's exclamation here is quite similar to the main refrain "Ain't that America!" in John Mellencamp's "Pink Houses," a song that both sides of the US political establishment have used as a patriotic aesthetic at campaign rallies. Similar to Akiko's dismissal of the poverty around her, the first verse of "Pink Houses" describes a vision of American black poverty, only to move on to the chorus and exclaim that America is "something to see" and the "home of the free."

continue in their simultaneity, regardless of one's efforts to land fully on the side of freedom.

Though Akiko never leaves the path to patriotic cultural citizenship, she does not fully yield her agency, either. Akiko asserts her agency by making a decision to change the trajectory of her life.[30] The life Akiko embraces by moving to the US is certainly an improvement on her situation in Japan. Her decision to leave is an assertion of her self-worth and a resolution to survive, personally and for her progeny. The problematics of American exceptionalism aside, Ozeki portrays Akiko's options as better in the US than in Japan, and it is easy to forget that there is not always something implicitly ethnocentric in the possibility that one place is preferable to another. After all, Ozeki is writing about one character. Akiko is not a stand-in for Japan anymore than Jane is for the US. Then again, as noted earlier, Ozeki does also place these characters within the larger economic conflicts taking place between the US and Japan in the 1990s. While Akiko is not representative of all of Japan, Ozeki still places her East-to-West movement at the beginning of the 1990s when transfers of capital between Japan and the US were further showing signs of American imperialist dominance. While Ozeki writes just one story, its trajectory mirrors the neoliberal conflict between Japan and the US at that time. Though Akiko's situation in the novel improves dramatically, we must also consider what Ozeki shows to have declined, almost all of which is Japanese: The novel ends with John abandoned, his television program destroyed, and parts of the US beef industry shut down in a way that will certainly not please Japanese investors. These plot

[30] It is important to note that this choice does not fall into the realm of what Jane Elliott terms "suffering agency," a key feature of recent neoliberal novels where characters have the freedom to choose, but only between deplorable options. Instead, Ozeki shows something more complex than just a buffet of bad alternatives with Akiko's movement to the US.

points form a denouement where Japan, more or less, ends up losing and the US remains fairly unscathed. If the reader doubts for a moment that the US is unaffected, Ozeki leaves Akiko's subsumption into patriotic fervor as one of the novel's final images.

It is not uncommon to find within public discourse the description of Ozeki's novels as didactic, or what Shameem Black has labeled "entertainment-education fiction" (*Fiction* 14). *My Year of Meats* does contain some soapbox moments where readers are essentially told how they should feel and think about the US meat industry, and Ozeki's reliance on different genres (faxes, news articles, etc.) to quickly disseminate information about questionable practices within food and drug corporations can feel like gimmicky efforts to break from the rigors of narrative. But this didacticism is a surface ploy that functions as an expertly crafted framing device. Ozeki positions a didactic text (*My American Wife!*) within a larger, seemingly didactic frame (*My Year of Meats*). If *My American Wife!* falls short of Jane's intended political effect given how Akiko does not grasp the nuanced vision of the US that Jane hopes to give the show's viewers. However, we should view this as a self-referential exchange where Ozeki questions how successful *My Year of Meats* is in the neoliberal moment. In other words, does this novel do anything? Should readers expect that art and entertainment do something? Ozeki's answer, via the character of Akiko, seems to be yes to both questions, albeit not without the qualification that artistically-generated social change may only happen in small ways. For example, *My American Wife!* for all its problems, constructed presentations of reality, and connections to neoliberal corporate America, is transformative for Akiko in positive ways. The documentary does nothing to holistically change more macro-level political concerns, but it is a vehicle through which Akiko's

life is changed for the better. *My Year of Meats* seems to suggest that that's probably enough.

Ozeki has made vague comments on how to approach the happy, irresolute ending of her novel. She says that she gave the story a happy ending because she believes it is important to imagine how to "change the future" for the better; however, she admits being "suspicious of the efficacy" of writing happy endings, even if she hopes they would encourage readers to contemplate the issues long after they have put the book down ("Conversation" 13). She mentions that she has Jane "discuss the shortcomings of happy endings" in *My Year of Meats* to nudge the reader toward "a more complex relationship with that ending" ("Conversation" 13). Here, Ozeki shares a conviction more recently expressed by Jessica Berman, that fiction can encourage "ethical and imaginative freedom and, by virtue of its social situatedness, can also anticipate or rework relationships in the world" (22). These moments are a "redescription," where an alternative narrative of our environment potentially "resists or revises social reality" (25). Ozeki acknowledges that she is "point[ing] an authorial finger at the very thing [she] is writing" in order to "poke a hole in the seamlessness of the happy ending by making it self-referential and reflexive"; even so, she wants to emphasize "the power of the imagination" and holds firm to the stance that we "cannot make a better world unless [we] imagine it to be so" ("Conversation" 13). Similar to Kornbluh, Ozeki cautiously regards the novel as is immanently and ontologically a form of critique.

By the novel's conclusion, nothing has successfully challenged Akiko's romanticized view of the US. It is telling that she is subsumed by the nation on her train

ride as she delightedly accepts an idealized conceptualization of the US. As she sits on the train, moving from the Deep South to the North in a reiteration of a historical and mythic journey out of bondage to freedom, she enters a scripted future. In other words, it seems that Akiko's story has been absorbed into the American myth of immigrant freedom. Certainly, stories can be co-opted and probably always will be to some extent. But what Ozeki presents in *My Year of Meats* is a smaller vision of possible hope within larger political concerns: two women pushing against a violently masculine, imperialist, and neoliberal world by taking the reins of representation and, in the end, using art to forge a small community of femininity that tries to protect and provide for future generations. Ozeki's novel, then, suggests something rather hopeful, if also cynically realistic, about the hard but worthwhile undertaking of producing artistic critique. All things are not rectified by the end of *My Year of Meats*, but small, restorative victories can still be had.

Collaborative Literary Production in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*

Ozeki's novel addresses how to navigate the complications of producing politically efficacious art amid the violence of neoliberal capitalism by using the fictional story of a television documentary to comment tangentially on the status of literature. Mohsin Hamid, however, makes literary production within neoliberalism the key concern in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Though the novel is a rags-to-riches and slums-to-the-suburbs tale on the surface, Hamid's story is eminently about literature and, more specifically, novels. On the one hand, *Filthy Rich* initially appears to be concerned with the way books can serve a reader's desire to increase the size of their portfolio and net

worth by entering the market; on the other hand, Hamid uses that plot as a backdrop to explore questions about literary production itself: Why is literature sold? Why is it read? What is the status of a literary work's production when it is being received? All of these questions are posed within the novel's neoliberal setting, a world animated by an ethics of individualism that lauds and idealizes the self-made entrepreneur. In this sense, *Filthy Rich* suggests we could regard literature as one of many tools that exist to support the economic advancement of the individual. Indeed, Hamid considers different ways that literature and the novel appear to be just that—functional commodities. However, *Filthy Rich* also challenges the notion that literature can be reduced to the status of a commodity. While Hamid understands the ubiquity of neoliberalism as activating literary texts in certain profitable and utilitarian ways, the kind that do cause it to function as a commodity, *Filthy Rich* also envisions how, even within the forceful subsumption of literature, neoliberal capitalism cannot wholly objectify literature. Or, to put it another way, Hamid explores how neoliberalism cannot account for or control all of the processes of production surrounding literature.

The events of *Filthy Rich* occur squarely within the transnational scope of neoliberal capitalism. The narrative voice addresses a "you"—possibly the reader, possibly someone else—who is intent on becoming a rich man within an unnamed South Asian nation rapidly modernizing itself to become more capitalist.[31] It is a setting where the rural and pre-capitalist sectors steadily give way to the industrial: farmers sell their "communal land to a refrigerator assembly plant looking to expand" (82); the sky is

[31] For a closer examination of Hamid's use of second-person voice, see Jarmila Mildorf, "Pragmatic Implications of 'You'-Narration for Postcolonial Fiction: Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*" and "Reconsidering Second-Person Narration and Involvement."

perpetually clouded by construction dust, what was formerly "fertile soil [now] gouged by shovels, dried by the sun, and scattered by the wind" (113); and, as a result, the city You lives in receives a continual influx of migrants looking for work, their arrival swelling "the urban belly" of the city past new roads before their construction can even be completed (82). To move from the rural to the urban where privatized, corporatized, and industrial development happens nonstop is to "witness a passage of time that outstrips its chronological equivalent"; only "a few hours on a bus … appear to span millennia" (13). The city mirrors You's desires: to modernize, to gain wealth, to play the global corporate game and win it. Accordingly, *Filthy Rich* is written in the style of a self-help book, each chapter's title announcing a specific task that You needs to complete to achieve his goal of outrageous financial success, tasks like "Get an Education," "Work for Yourself," and "Be Prepared to Use Violence." That *Filthy Rich* is written as a parodic self-help book places it squarely within the ethos of neoliberalism that privileges individual freedom to self-invest and become a player in the market. To read a self-help book is to responsibly cater to one's self. Such a stylistic move on Hamid's part echoes Martin's concept of the autonomous artwork. To structure *Filthy Rich* as if it is a get-rich-quick text, Hamid acknowledges the ubiquity of the self-help form even as that very genre activates the grounds for the novel's critique. In this delicate balance, neither takes over the other and both remain in the foreground of the narrative in a sustained tension.

Each chapter's opening section helps build *Filthy Rich*'s surgical focus on the role and importance of literature within neoliberalism. Every chapter begins with a brief rumination from the narrator, this unnamed self-help guru who authors the text, who

pauses to reflect on the role of self-help books specifically and books in general in a world dominated by neoliberal finance and commerce. These reflections ask what or where the "self" is within the self-help genre and, more broadly, what purpose or function books serve in the heavily financialized present.[32] The narrator vacillates between two options: The self and books certainly appear to be swallowed up by You's—or anyone else's—determination to become filthy rich; however, the narrator also identifies different ways the self and books are not limited by the common-sense rationale to reduce everything to a bottom line or profit/loss margin.

To be sure, the narrator does not diminish the forcefulness of neoliberal values. The narrator acknowledges how the cultural pressure to modernize and financialize oneself within the spread of global capitalism turns books into little more than commodities. They become objectified tools for personal advancement and economic betterment of the self. The narrator, however, does not only consider self-help books as fulfilling this function for the reader; rather, he immediately includes novels in this genre.[33] First, there is the literary masterpiece, "that much-praised, breathtakingly boring foreign novel" that is full of "tar-slow prose and blush-inducing formal conceit" (19). Someone like You reads this novel "out of an impulse to understand distant lands that because of globalization are increasingly affecting life in your own," and the narrator

[32] Just as the self is difficult to locate in *Filthy Rich*, the "You" in the novel is both fixed and multiple. The narrator is clearly referring to a singular, specific individual throughout the story; however, at the same time, the narrator's level of direct address never enters into a reciprocating dialogue with that singular You, so much so that the narrator's observations and comments are understood to target any individual reader, whomever that might be.

[33] Though it is never stated, we should read the anonymous narrator of *Filthy Rich* as male. This is because throughout the novel it is made clear that the drive to become filthy rich is a game at which a man can more easily succeed. While "the pretty girl" in the novel also embarks on her own journey to become filthy rich, her attainment and preservation of wealth is far more precarious than You's. Indeed, in order to stay afloat, she has to change careers three times, while You does not. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the narrator never gives any indirect advice about how the pretty girl should attain her filthy-rich goals.

rhetorically questions how we could possibly understand such an impulse as anything but motivated by a desire to help the self (19). The narrator here clearly refers to Western literary novels, the kind written by the canonized "greats," what has become ostensibly required reading for any aspiring middle class (or higher) individual. Indeed, the connection between reading high-brow literature and economic standing is an idea that goes back at least as far as the eighteenth century, the notion being that middle-class readers should not bother themselves with lower forms of literature—i.e., "lite" reading versus the classics (Woodmansee 4-5). But Hamid adds another layer, one more transnational, to this old idea: to read the Western novel—in this case, reading in the direction from East to West, from Global South to the North—buoys one's effort to rise through the ranks of global finance. In other words, it is not enough to maintain a diversified portfolio; You must know his Charles Dickens, too.[34]

Hamid adds another twist to the old idea that reading more "serious" literature helps one enter the wealthier classes, which is that genre fiction works just as well, too. Or, at the very least, novels "you actually enjoy and read with delighted hunger" also fulfill a self-help function because they "help you pass the time, and time is the stuff of which a self is made" (19). But this turn to genre fiction also falls under the guise of reading-as-self-improvement within a globalized framework. If the literary novel helps You better understand the faraway West that "increasingly affect[s]" his life, so would a book full of "frequent gratuitous and graphic sex," for it would provide both a cultural

[34] To be sure, the marketability of globalized reading practices goes both ways. Within Western institutions of higher learning, for example, the goal of helping students become "global citizens" is an oft-heard term in the university system's neoliberal parlance. As others have noted, this move to create global citizens has significant political and Western imperial implications: see April Biccum, "Marketing Development: Live 8 and the Production of the Global Citizen" and Debra D. Chapman, et al., "Global Citizenship as Neoliberal Propaganda: A Political-Economic and Postcolonial Critique."

and economic education (e.g., what is permissible, what sells in the West, what is marketable, what the consumer wants, etc.) (19). The narrator suggests, then, that no matter the genre of text being produced and read, it can be "offered to the reader as a form of self-help" (20). The narrator's claim here echoes Nicholas Brown's argument that the way books are received makes "desires legible in the market" (14). Books certainly can and do exist for personal enjoyment, but the implication here in *Filthy Rich* is that the self-focused desire for economic advancement is equally at play. The narrator asserts that books, no matter their genre, reveal a desire to try and enter into a realm of financial abundance. In this sense, like Brown, the narrator notes how a book's use-value is primarily linked to its ability to facilitate exchange, the thing that crucially drives its continued production. The book, similar to the documentary in *My Year of Meats*, has been subsumed into a commodity form, a commodity whose exchangeability goes both ways, since "more often than not, the self [these books] help is their writer's self, not yours" (Hamid 57). Thus, both the writer and the reader are convinced their contact with the book form can result in some kind of financial benefit for themselves.

Like the book, the notion of the self in *Filthy Rich* is also saturated by neoliberalism, which is specifically visible in the significant value placed on the individual—his freedom, his ability to choose, his responsibility. Because of the importance of these values, the narrator firmly states that the pursuit of wealth must take precedence over all other considerations, especially love. The selflessness that a healthy relationship would require could be detrimental to that "essential propulsion" necessary in the "journey to the heart of financial success," a journey that is "already fraught" because of how competitive it is (37). In order to stay competitive and ahead of one's

opponents, You must maintain the ability to "inspire, motivate, uplift, and kill" (37). The de-emphasis of the self that love would require, though, is never really a concern for You, for he eventually comes to understand love in commodified terms. Indeed, when trying to woo the pretty girl later in adult life, the narrator informs us that You knows very little about women but does "know a fair bit about sales" and assumes romantic interests are a situation where he should "let the customer seek [him] out, lest [he] devalue [his] product completely" (88-89). It is, perhaps, not surprising when You's later marriage—to a woman other than the pretty girl—is hopelessly empty and devoid of any intimacy. For You, the self is simply another commodity, a product that holds a negotiable and ever-fluctuating level of value. Therefore, the self has the potential to be made marketable to others to the extent that potential lovers are reduced to mere customers. This fairly dull prospect, however, is precisely what is necessary according to the narrator. Successful accumulation of capital becomes dependent on a kind of nihilism, not idealism, since ideals go beyond "humans [by] repositing meaning in vast abstract concepts instead, [which] are by their very nature anti-self" (57).

However, *Filthy Rich* also explores the limits of neoliberal ideas, values, and practices in relation to books and the self. The narrator's reflections additionally consider how global capitalism cannot fully subsume and commodify the self and literary production. This is not to say that both cannot be economized, for they certainly can be in the ways already discussed by Martin and Brown. To imply that our books and our concept of the individual are somehow immune to the pervasive effects of neoliberal values would be foolhardy at best. But *Filthy Rich* also envisions how their subsumption is not total in scope. Especially with literature, the narrator theorizes how literature's

very production and presentation as a useful commodity points us to ways that it resists such a classification. In this way, Hamid's novel echoes Martin's conviction that, while artwork is commodified, it can never be absolutely a commodity; if anything, its ability to critique the contradictions of contemporary capitalism is activated precisely by its commodification. Weihsin Gui similarly argues that Hamid "render[s] the expansive networks of neoliberal[ism] … as aesthetic objects rather than sovereign subjects and fetishized commodities" (175). It is somewhere in between, and the way the narrator speaks of the self and literature makes it difficult to separate the two. He shifts back and forth between them repeatedly to underscore how the existence, construction, and growth of the self is intimately connected to literary production because of how You (or any other reader) invests himself in the book he is reading. The self becomes the text and the text becomes the self in mutually reinforcing ways.

It is noteworthy that *Filthy Rich* immediately begins by admitting that the idea of the self is very difficult to locate, labeling it "a slippery one" (3). It is slippery because You's continued reliance on a self-help book directly highlights the limits of the self and individualism. By turning to a self-help book, You's actions proclaim how the—or his—self is insufficient, he needs help, and there is a certain communal requirement that must be met if he is to advance to a higher net worth. This insufficiency provides the nexus point for the narrator to explore how literary production can meet and expand these very communal possibilities that You requires. This is evident at the beginning of chapter five when there is a breakdown in the narrative voice. For the first time in the self-help novel, the use of the second-person voice disappears. The narrator begins to discuss what is necessary for "our collaboration to work," a line that instantly undercuts any

preconceived notions of the self-made man that *Filthy Rich* may have been pretending is even a possibility. Books, such as the narrator's, "are two-way streets, after all. Relationships" (77). In an ironic twist, relationships are suddenly not a sign of weakness or detriment to ambition. While the writer-reader interaction of the narrator and You carries no amorous possibilities, the issue of dependence is still here, which was the narrator's earlier concern in relation to love, since dependence on another person could hamper one's "ambition," that drive necessary for "achieving a massive bank balance" (37). But the implications for literature or a writer are just as significant as they are for You's self. If literary production is a relationship, a two-way street, then the notion of the auteur disappears, obliterating the "illusion of full agency on the writer's part" (Poon 144). The narrator argues that relationships are what help to make the "successful entrepreneur" (Hamid 78), and the notion here for literature, self-help or otherwise, is worth stressing—it is communal. Brown would argue this does nothing to thwart the commodifying force of the market. The connection between artist and audience is not relational; rather, the artist merely faces a formalist problem where "the reaction of the spectator, or customer, assumes importance in precise correlation" to the entanglement of art in the market (Brown 14). Hamid disagrees, though, making a point to describe the writer/reader connection as relational, not merely transactional. That is to say, literature is not autonomous not only because it is commodified, but also because it is inherently collaborative.

This is because, for Hamid, the processes of literary production do not stop with the writer, a case made by the narrator in one of the novel's most important passages at the start of chapter six:

> Like all books, this self-help book is a co-creative project. … [W]hen you read a book, what you see are black squiggles on pulped wood or, increasingly, dark pixels on a pale screen. To transform these icons into characters and events, you must imagine. And when you imagine, you create. It's in being read that a book becomes a book, and in each of a million different readings a book becomes one of a million different books… (97)

Shortly after this observation, the narrator tries to return to the idea of an independent, enterprising self, claiming, "Readers don't work for writers. They work for themselves," and that if You is going to continue to increase his wealth, he will eventually have to work for himself (98). In other words, You should take a cue from his reading experiences as inspiration for how he should conduct himself as a businessman—with a lone-wolf mentality. The problem, of course, is that just moments ago the narrator established there are limits to these individualistic efforts, and if You were to truly transfer his reading practices to his business dealings, he would have to surround himself with others in a collaborative, not competitive, way. He would need to regard becoming filthy rich as a "co-creative project." Angelia Poon agrees, noting that *Filthy Rich* shows how the self is "always already plugged into multiple communities," a point that constitutes You's "moral transformation" (140, 147). Indeed, the "relational ethic [is] *the* catalyst for flourishing" in this novel (Walker 193, emphasis in original).

So while Brown claims that the option for writers within late capitalism is to recycle and repurpose dead forms, Hamid suggests there is more that happens when the writer and reader interact. Instead of literature merely registering repeated

"manipulations of a formal problem" (Brown 19-20), Hamid asserts that something new is created, that the reader's imagination extends and fulfills part of the production process of literature.[35] Because of this, literature has the potential to be preserved from being confused as an absolute commodity, for if the reader is also actively part of the process of production, the possibility exists that he is privy to the means of production—the social and material context in which it is put together. This is where we can make sense of Hamid's claim that reading is another form or continuation of writing, of the production process. The reader very likely does *not* occupy the same social and material context as the writer, and this is especially true of You if he is keen on reading the Western "greats" like the narrator suggests he is. If You were to take, for instance, *Great Expectations* into his South Asian context, a new form of Dickens would be produced.[36] On the one hand, this further Westernizes You and places a premium on the already self-aggrandized importance of Western literature; on the other hand, Hamid suggests that a new copy of the text is produced, a new take on it. This, Poon argues, points to the "ethical role" the novel genre can play within global capitalism: its "narrative energies and temporal possibilities" can highlight the "historical contingenc[ies]" of capitalism's work (140). That is to say, books are active and agential things—as the narrator suggests they are at the start of *Filthy Rich*, when he notes the self-help book "has to find you" to

[35] Here, Hamid's view of literature aligns with Roland Barthes' in "The Death of the Author"—that to reduce a literary work to a concrete, ultimate meaning would further commodify it, make it more consumable, and thereby better package it for the market.

[36] This also recalls Jorge Luis Borges' short story "Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*," where Menard re-creates *Don Quixote* line for line, yet the narrator of Borges' story who is reviewing the work credits Menard with writing something that is new or, at the very least, a fresh take on a classic. On a further and related note, we can consider this ironic praise of *Filthy Rich* from Alan Cheuse's 2013 review for NPR (despite its baldly Eurocentric predilections): "[T]his tale of an unscrupulous striver may bring to mind a globalized version of *The Great Gatsby*." It is as if Hamid is merely re-presenting Western classics in a kind of Pakistani simulacrum.

fulfill its objective (4)—but so are readers, what with their participation in the production process.

It is worth nothing, though, that the narrator overstates the success or actuality of this collaborative production. For example, at no point does the specific character named You seize upon the communal and productive work that the narrator describes. The narrator's claims remain purely theoretical. That is not to say it is impossible; the opportunity is certainly there. But at least within the narrative context of *Filthy Rich*, it remains a missed opportunity. Hamid identifies at least two of the options literature offers: It encourages us to see beyond ourselves, understand our dependence on other people, and choose the socially progressive option of deferring individualistic gain and pursuing relational intimacy; or, we can just as likely pick up a book and read it with the intent of advancing our own betterment, whether that results in increasing our cultural capital or actual finances. What is more, since the narrator suggests the actual type of book is rather unimportant, any reader could approach and engage with a text with a selfless or selfish agenda, and the book would lend itself to either form of reading.

Thus, the selfless and selfish approaches to engaging with a book are not so distinct from each other. A certain level of social capital in the form of liberal self-righteousness quickly attends the first option when we consider how literacy has long been placed on a pedestal of respect within the history of liberalism. The point here is not that our interaction with books and the productive work it creates is somehow ever divorced from capitalist considerations; rather, Hamid shows how the collaborative production generated by books will offer readers an opportunity to see beyond themselves, should they choose to do so. No one, however, is forcing readers to do such

a thing, so a novel such as *Filthy Rich* strongly qualifies a claim like Kornbluh's, that novels are immanently a form of critique. While the novel may be critique or inherently possess critical capacity, our engagement with a text can continue and extend that text's production in such a way that critique is either entirely missed or altogether ignored. Hamid's novel makes for compelling reading precisely because it exists between the two options that Brown and Martin theorize. Brown's claim that we would be wiser to attend to audiences' desires and market preferences makes sense, for *Filthy Rich* is imminently taken up with the idea that books are written for readers with their consumerist desires in mind. After all, financial self-help books target their readers' intent to accumulate more capital. Yet, at the same time, Martin's contention that we need to study how artworks create a "subversive mimesis" of their own commodification still stands, and this remains true of *Filthy Rich*. Hamid's co-opting of the style and aesthetic of the self-help book is done as a mimetic critique that calls our attention to the commodification of literature and how that critique can fail if we are not reading carefully for it. Kornbluh argues the novel has always already been critique; *Filthy Rich* asserts that to assume it no longer is risks turning any text into a fetishized commodity.

The excerpt at the start of chapter six contains one such careful form of attendance to the language of a text so as not to fetishize and obscure its production. The narrator ruminates on literature's ability to represent reality and admits to the arbitrariness of language; what is on the page is, after all, merely "black squiggles." But that does not amount to meaninglessness. If anything, those squiggles and pixels provide an opportunity for the exercise of agency in the production process. Both writer and reader fashion meaning out of those symbols, adding further significance to them

because when "we imagine, we create" (97). This reference to arbitrary signifiers within neoliberal literary production recalls Brett Levinson's arguments on the intersection of representation, deconstruction, and neoliberalism. While Hamid envisions new forms of possibility and meaning, Levinson claims the market has become a way of "knowing the globe" such that it brings knowledge to an end (*Market* 1). Rather than it being the end of history, it would be "the culmination of history" precisely because neoliberalism has become so common sensical as to end thought (*Market* 2). Levinson argues that the rigorous linguistic criticism deconstructionism purports to achieve has neither happened to its fullest extent nor fully identified the arbitrariness and alternative truths within neoliberal discourse. Neoliberalism has, after all, expertly subsumed the word "freedom" for its various purposes. Levinson attempts to imagine a linguistic criticism that a neoliberal consensus cannot claim by speaking in a language it cannot replicate. He stresses the urgency of this by noting that

> if the completion of the market turns on a consensus that "goes without saying," then the amplification of the "saying," attention to the "fact that there is language," is fundamental to any disruption of that totality. Conversely, the "sweeping by" of the "saying," its avoidance, cannot but feed consensus and neoliberalism, the "it goes without saying" itself. (*Market* 8)

Levinson means that a greater attention to the constructed nature of language will provide a needed complication of neoliberalism's hegemonic strength. It is crucial, then, linguistically or otherwise, to narrate the limits of the market. While language-based critiques can and often will fail, they can still say something consequential even in their

failure, which is precisely what the authors considered in this chapter do. Hamid, however, does not envision the possibility that neoliberalism has fully subsumed language. If anything, it is the linguistically-based process of producing literature that promises opportunities for new, alternative meanings to arise from texts. To be clear, Hamid is not calling for a representation of neoliberalism's limits. Like Huehls, he regards the effectiveness of representation dubiously. For instance, the narrator mentions repeatedly throughout *Filthy Rich* that You's "image of [the pretty girl] is not entirely determined by her physical reality" (107). You goes years and even decades at a time without seeing the pretty girl, though he does occasionally catch glimpses of her on billboards or on television. Thus, in this frequently reiterated line, the narrator comments on the limits of reality but also of representation. The way You remembers the pretty girl is all that really matters, which is another way of saying that You's imagination and its ability to create and sustain illusions is what is most important, not any referent. You holds the reins of representation, both in terms of how he thinks of and remembers the pretty girl and also in regard to his ability to take a text—such as a self-help book—and transform it into something completely new.

Though literary representations can only signify actuality in the abstract form of squiggles and pixels, *Filthy Rich* still theorizes how this illusoriness can be overcome or, at the very least, seen through for what it truly is. For example, You's father is a kind of character that recalls Adorno's aforementioned ideal critic, the kind of person who can see past the world of commodities and production to the true political implications of the world around him. When You's father looks at the rural countryside, he does not see commodified potential—that is, an expanse of post-production delicacies, such as "an

effervescent salad" or "a heavenly balloon of stone-ground, stove-top-baked flatbread"; instead, he sees the years of "labor by which a farmer exchanges his allocation of time in this world for an allocation of time in this world. Here, in the heady bouquet of nature's pantry, [he] sniffs mortality" (7). If the narrator initially labels the self as "slippery" and difficult to place, this excerpt suggests that You's father locates some kind of unfiltered reality of the self in the place where labor works to initiate the production process of commodities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the chapter housing this excerpt is titled "Move to the City," a mandate that the narrator says is step one if You's financial situation is going to improve. The self-help book, then, is intent on ushering You away from a place where political and existential actuality is clearest, which is another way to say that the self-help book possesses the potential to only further occlude reality through its representations. This, according to Poon, is why the novel genre is so important: "it foregrounds a blind spot of the self-help book—that not everyone can possibly succeed in life and that many will be left behind" (143). Thus, You's dedication to self-help books may only further hide the kind of clarity that his father has when gazing at the field of crops: Everyone is just buying time.

Death, however, does not impede the narrator's arguments. In the tenth chapter, when "we are nearing our end, you and I, and this self-help book too," the narrator makes it clear that the book has the potential to persevere far longer than the life or memory of You will (177). The narrator notes how neither the book nor You can continue forever by asserting that "fate, or narrative trajectory," must eventually run its course (181). But since another reader can come along and continue the process of literary production, the book indeed will outlive You. By acknowledging that the

commodity will likely outlive the labor, the narrator further complicates what sort of status we should ascribe to literature. As we have already seen, literature exists in the economy, reading can be undertaken for economic reasons, and if the text far outlasts the reader (who has also helped further produce it), what is exactly the point of literature? The narrator posits that stories are told and written with the intent of escaping by belonging. To participate in the production of stories is to "be a refugee from the state of refugees," is to "seek a solution to the problem that time passes" (213). If the movement from rural to urban, from pre-capitalism to global capitalism is like jumping millennia; if labor is just an "allocation of time in this world for an allocation of time in this world"; if artists and audiences try to address the conflict presented by the passage of time—the narrator boils much of existence down to the effort to match the speed of modernity, an effort that only briefly distracts from mortality. In between birth and death, "we can create" (213). Those creations can, of course, become monetized, assigned a worth, distributed, sold, and bought. But if, as the narrator claims, artistic creativity is an effort to belong in a world that is largely inhospitable, how much of the world's unwelcoming aspects dictate the content of the art?

In other words, we can understand this passage about arts-as-belonging within the broader aforementioned conversation about global literature and the disdain some have for the delocalized texts that are being produced. *Filthy Rich* addresses this issue by showing how, if stories are a way to try to belong to the world, the changing world necessitates a shift in the way the stories are written. Here, then, we can understand global literature and its structure as an aspect of neoliberal capitalism's influence, as well as a writer's efforts to simply work with what he has in front of him. Global

literature may mean delocalized literature to some, and it is true that Hamid's novel is not the most specific kind of text; after all, we are never told what nation or city the events of *Filthy Rich* take place in. Some would argue, like Casanova and Apter do, that something is lost because of that, a lexical or cultural specificity that lends literature a certain richness. Gone, for example, is the meticulously laid-out depiction of Cairo that we find in Naguib Mahfouz's works. But even that loss of exactitude is essentially a story of what it would take to belong in a neoliberal world, to Westernize, to commodify, to become marketable. *Filthy Rich*, then, tells a story of the limitations that pursuing economic success allows You to belong in this world; therefore, stories would be the next option, and maybe that leaves a story that is less local, one that is more accessible to a global reading audience. Whether or not it is "good" literature is a fairly inconsequential debate, since only time, that thing the narrator says we keep trying to avoid, will tell what stands from the twenty-first century as the great works of literature. It very well may not be *Filthy Rich*. What we can at least identify for the moment is Hamid's exploration of the market's influence on literary production and vis-a-versa. As Ashcroft et al. famously postulated, there was a noticeable period of mid- and late-twentieth century postcolonial fiction where the empire wrote back in the English language of its oppressor, with Salman Rushdie being perhaps the writer par excellence with novels such as *Midnight's Children*. Today, we may be seeing an example of commodities writing back in the languages of the market—specifically, with Hamid, in the lingo of the self-help genre.

Hamid concludes his novel with an image of subsumption, but it is a markedly different picture than the one Brown theorizes. You eventually does find and settle down

with the pretty girl when they are both well into their eighties. Due to different circumstances, each of them has also lost most of their wealth they spent their lives accumulating. As You passes away, his story is not absorbed into capital; rather, the narrator observes, "[Y]ou contain her, and this book, and me writing it, and I too contain you, who may not yet even be born … and so may you, may I, may we, so may all of us confront the end" (222). The book that You—character and/or reader—hold(s) is certainly a commodity, but it is not only a commodity. Its language, for both the writer and reader, is malleable, an opportunity for meaning and belonging to be created, much like Akiko's reception of Jane's documentary. The language is certainly driven by neoliberal values and practices (this is, after all, still a book about getting filthy rich), but the possibilities of language are not fully foreclosed, either. Indeed, *Filthy Rich* ends by positing that the true subsumption, the one of lasting significance, is a relational one. Ozeki shares that same conviction at the end of *My Year of Meats*, where Akiko sits in the home of her new friends, Lara and Dyann, calmly awaiting the birth of her daughter. Sentimental though this ending of *Filthy Rich* is, it provides an alternative to an economic connectedness that leads to competition; this, instead, is connectedness that is equalizing (Poon 148).

To close, one thing that stands out from reading Ozeki and Hamid is their consideration of the different ways that language is productively co-opted by neoliberalism, what that means for artistic production, and how neoliberalism both activates and limits the work of art. Despite this simultaneously promising and dour outlook, both novelists also envision what a loss of language is like and how it has severe ontological implications. In *My Year of Meats*, Akiko seems to have thoughts and

comments that are not her own while on the train in the Deep South, as if the romanticized narrative of the US tells her what to think as it subsumes her. In *Filthy Rich* You is incapable of thinking of love in terms that are not provided by his understanding of commodities, sales, and profits, and this unavoidably affects how he lives. Neoliberal values seemingly take over his life. Such passages correspond with Huehls' conviction that we should view neoliberalism as post-normative and, therefore, something that registers on an ontological level. But, as the next chapter will consider, neoliberal ideology affects language, and language is still very much normative. Further, because of language's performative properties, it actively shapes and stabilizes social norms. If language is not outside neoliberalism's purview, as Ozeki and Hamid suggest it is not, then we should also question what the literary implications are for neoliberalism's socially normative effects on the words we speak and write.

CHAPTER IV

NEOLIBERAL PERFORMATIVITY IN GILLIAN FLYNN'S *GONE GIRL* AND ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

The economizing influence of neoliberal ideology affects language itself, as scholars across disciplines have noted.[1] Everyday examples of the neoliberalization of language are numerous: The individualistic emphasis on "self-care" has created its own lucrative industry, and it is commonplace to ask about an individual's unique "brand" or how people are "branding" themselves. Such developments and questions point to the commodification of identity and personhood across a variety of professional sectors.[2] The emphasis on branding is particularly interesting because it reveals how the act of naming has rapidly become its own marketization tactic—naming, that is, in the sense of saying or writing something into being or naming something with the intent of triggering a certain outcome. There are literal implications of these shifts, such as the way names can be tied to capital. For example, the developers of the job search engine Adzuna recently compiled data from more than a half million CVs to determine which names have the highest (and lowest) average salaries. Interested individuals can then search

[1] In "The Linguistic Imperialism of Neoliberal Empire," Robert Phillipson shows how the dissemination of an American model of neoliberalism across the globe has further facilitated the spread of the English language. Others contend that the central values of neoliberal ideology work their way into language and that such parlance changes how we refer to the world around us; see Marnie Holborow, "Language, Ideology and Neoliberalism" and Gerlinde Mautner, *Language and Market Society: Critical Reflections on Discourse and Dominance*.
[2] For arguments about how the logic of self-care constitutes a neoliberal withering of feminism, see Catherine Rottenberg, "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism." For a study of how personal "branding" in the professional world both limits and activates forms of agency, see Steven P. Vallas and Angèle Christin, "Work and Identity in an Era of Precarious Employment: How Workers Respond to 'Personal Branding' Discourse."

their name across that bank of résumés.[3] Furthermore, middle names carry their own importance. Simply the inclusion of a middle initial on application documents "increases positive evaluations of people's intellectual capacities and achievements" in a variety of professional situations (Van Tilburg and Igou 400).

The existence of specialized search engines such as Adzuna or the research on middle names is not surprising given the growing neoliberal tendency over the last 40 years to economize nearly everything in day-to-day life by establishing how it connects to or influences one's earning potential.[4] What is intriguing within these examples, however, is the effort put into determining how the act of naming can be tied to a future monetary outcome. These studies speak to an underlying anxiety or pressure to use language carefully, whether in service of naming or constituting a brand that can place an individual on the path to economic success. Here we get a glimpse into one of the ways neoliberal values can dictate or demand a certain standard for language in its performative function—that is, when language names things into being either through the literal act of naming or through the ways the words we speak and write can generate certain actions or processes. I emphasize the act of naming here because it is just one—if also the most dramatic—example of what J. L. Austin describes as the performative mode of language, and I turn to theories of language's performativity in this chapter because they make a necessary contribution to the study of neoliberalism in light of economists' recent move to describe economics as performative. I intentionally cover a

[3] The blunt rhetoric of Adzuna's site is worth noting. Typing in your own name will not just reveal what the average annual earnings are for people who share your name; you are specifically told, "People called [your name] are worth an average of [monetary amount]." The name, in other words, is not worth that amount; the persons themselves are.
[4] As just one case in point, there are studies that examine the "long-term consequences on *human capital*" that breastfeeding can have for a child's future (Victora, et al. 199, my emphasis).

swath of theory across disciplines in the humanities and economics in order to show how a conceptualization of economics as performative has significant social and cultural consequences, for the performativity of economics does not stay within the economy, especially when we consider the neoliberal stance that social and political spheres can and should be adjusted via the work of the market.[5] Theorists from Austin to Judith Butler help us understand what the cultural ramifications are of treating the economy as a performative entity that names and activates certain realities into existence.

In the time since Austin's arguments, scholars across disciplines have refined and expanded his ideas to critique the linguistically-driven normative power of social structures and further clarify what language "does" as it creates, reshapes, or activates specific realities. Additionally, since literature is narratively driven by linguistics, understanding what language "does" is equally important to any study of neoliberalism and literature. To do so, this chapter reads two very different novels, Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, to explore a uniquely neoliberal type of performativity. I argue that neoliberal performativity is defined by the social pressure to shape oneself as, first and foremost, an economic individual whose self-worth and sense of agency is either tied to or determined by their financial success. This pressure is performative not only in the sense that one must play their social role correctly, but it is also performative in the linguistic sense because Flynn and Roy show how embracing one's economic potential requires the spoken, written, and/or narrativized shaping (i.e., marketing) of the self in a way that corresponds to the

[5] Michel Foucault extensively covers in the tenth and eleventh lectures of *The Birth of Biopolitics* how social factors come to be understood through economic analyses and altered through the application of market rationales to formerly non-economic areas of life.

common-sensibility of neoliberal values and practices. Both of these novels emphasize how this performativity is inherently textual, narrativized, or artistic and how this also means the words we say, write, and embody provide opportunities to engage neoliberalism and its effects.

The performativity of language is a necessary follow-up consideration to the previous chapter on the production of literature within neoliberalism. If the arts or literature cannot be wholly reduced to a commodity form whose exchange value is all that matters, as Ruth L. Ozeki and Mohsin Hamid suggest it cannot be, what then of language? Neoliberal performative pressures do change or influence language and behavior, but whether or not language can produce a discourse that does not somehow copy or reinforce the common-sense rhetoric of neoliberalism is another issue. Both Flynn and Roy's novels underscore how the performative modes of language, writing, and narrative construction are driven by neoliberal ideology. It is a performativity influenced by the transnational breadth of neoliberalism in that these novels' characters become economic subjects who live in environments shaped by the globalized movement of finance and corporate capital. Flynn and Roy, however, provide two different visions of what performativity is capable of. *Gone Girl* situates performativity as an agential space, one that can subvert the confines of a neoliberal common sense, albeit with monstrous, terrifying results. Neoliberal performativity in Flynn's novel is driven by narrative and becomes a performative utterance that renames and restructures aspects of reality via the performer. But even though *Gone Girl* shows how neoliberal performativity can be navigated and wielded to buoy an individual's agency, the novel demonstrates how the performer will only become further entrenched in the influence of

neoliberal ideology. That is to say, an individual may be free to manipulate and navigate certain neoliberal structures to his/her advantage, but Flynn positions the individual as fully subsumed into neoliberal capital. To a very different extent, *The God of Small Things* explores how everyday life in developing India is made subject to "the economic imperatives of capitalism" (Lutz 58), and Roy suggests that development investment in India produces a performative pressure to continually defer to Western capital. It is a transactional relationship that continues to place developing countries in subservience to their former colonizer. She traces how this negatively affects indigenous forms of art and local economies, to the point that any sense of agency within or escape out of neoliberalism is rendered impossible.

These novels narrate how the use of language becomes a space of agency and subjugation within neoliberalism, and in doing so they add another dimension to earlier discussions of performativity. Austin's theories have generated varied responses over the last 50 years, but I add the often-overlooked semiotic work of American novelist Walker Percy to that conversation. Percy provides a necessary bridge between cultural theorists and economists who conceptualize the causes and effects of performativity because he situates how the common-sense rationales of performativity are driven by the effects of late capitalism. As I will discuss later, economists have begun to theorize over the past two decades how economics and the economy function in a performative manner because of how it creates and animates the economic individual, *homo oeconomicus*. Percy specifically clarifies how neoliberal performative pressures generate a culture of consent that defers to capitalism's reshaping of everyday life. It is through this cultural

consent that the often-accepted narrative of neoliberalism-as-common-sense grows, and for Percy this common sense is rooted in language.

Theories of performativity contain a range of perspectives on the social effects of performative pressures, and Flynn and Roy's novels specifically explore how language has become burdened with specifically neoliberal performative expectations.[6] Since the health, preservation, and growth of the "free" market is the driving force that creates governing rationalities in neoliberal societies, it is imperative to understand how neoliberalism affects language as well as how its effects are limited. That is to say, if neoliberal values circulate as common sense, neoliberalism already possesses a normative and punitive power that constructs societies in which the preservation of the market, as well as individuals' ability to enter it, is the primary concern. This market-driven ethics with its dominant status also unavoidably trickles down to affect something as foundational as language and individual subjectivities.

Neoliberal Performativity

When economist Michel Callon contended in 1998 that economics and the economy could be understood as performative in structure and execution, his arguments placed the work of the market alongside an already substantial body of critical work on performativity. Notably, the way Callon describes economics as performative mirrors

[6] Due to Butler's work in the 1990s, it is common to think of performativity in a gendered manner. This has enabled critics across academic disciplines to consider how language is subsumed and utilized in the construction of powerful social norms. Rather than cover the well-trod grounds of that debate again, I specifically consider the different ways economic imperatives drive a more neoliberal kind of performativity, though neoliberalism certainly also intersects with oppressive paradigms of gender normativity. For example, Siri Øyslebø Sørensen examines the role of "choice" within feminism through a performative lens, considering how choice "construes subject positions that structure social categories, such as gender and class" (298). For further arguments on the gendered aspects of neoliberalism, see Angela McRobbie, "Feminism, the Family and the New 'Mediated' Maternalism."

the way Austin explains how language functions in a performative mode—that is, they name an actuality into existence. Austin explains that when language functions in a performative manner, what is said or written cannot be labeled true or false, even though it may resemble a statement. Instead, the act of saying what one does is also to perform or fulfill its very action (Austin 235).[7] Austin qualifies how something is constituted as performative: The convention spoken of must actually exist, and the utterance has to fit the occasion (237). This means, then, there are any number of ways a performative utterance could go wrong, one being that you could say something "when you do not have the requisite thoughts or feelings or intentions," which amounts to "insincerity" (Austin 239). There is also the possibility that we can utter something performatively "under duress or in some other circumstances which make us not entirely responsible for doing what we are doing" (Austin 240). Austin also observes that what is considered socially acceptable in terms of performative pronouncements will change from culture to culture and as language evolves (245), meaning that performative utterances are significantly shaped by specific cultural practices.[8] Therefore, we cannot map—across time or space—a stable conceptualization of performativity.

[7] Austin's examples are wedding vows ("I do"), making amends ("I apologize"), and the christening of a ship ("I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*") (235).

[8] Austin's arguments carry two other key implications in addition to the cultural nuance of performative utterances. First, the performative function of language corresponds with postcolonial theories of mimicry. If the "insincerity" of an utterance is tantamount to "an abuse of the procedure," that abuse can go two ways. On the one hand, a nation's declaration of independence from its oppressor is a performative utterance; however, the efficacy of that declaration will certainly be undone by the insincerity of the speakers if, for example, they continue to funnel their nation's exports and surplus value back to their former oppressor. On the other hand, the insincerity of a performative utterance can also be a productive tool of resistance for the oppressed, a subversive form of mimicry (see Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*). Second, Austin suggests that linguistic performativity is not necessarily produced only internally but also externally. If a performative statement can be elicited from someone "under duress" to the point they would be "not entirely responsible" for their words and actions, then the performative mode of language is also an avenue for the punitive manipulation of individuals and groups. For example, a developing nation stating, "We agree to the terms of this

Understanding the manipulative potential within performative utterances has enabled broader theoretical work on performativity from literary theory, cultural studies, and on up to economics. Mary Louise Pratt includes literary texts within her understanding of the performative work of language, reminding us that, contrary to long-held opinions, literature is not "linguistically autonomous" from everyday speech utterances (xii). Instead, all literature is like linguistic utterances because of its reliance on everyday speech; hence, the difficulty in separating out constructed narratives from actuality as if they possess some kind of performative difference (Pratt 89-92). Therefore, if Austin claims performative utterances have significant cultural effects due to their actionable power—sincere or insincere—Pratt states that literature carries a comparable level of influence. Likewise, Barbara Johnson identifies significant performative power within fiction. She argues we should understand Austin as asking, "What kinds of things are we really *doing* when we speak?" (57, emphasis in original). This is a central question to pursue, since Johnson asserts that Austin mistakenly rules out "equivocation" as a part of performative utterances (59). But literature can be and surely is performative for the writer of the text and, thereby, effectual in its engagement with the world—but more than that: An utterance "automatically fictionalizes its utterer when it makes him the mouthpiece of a conventionalized authority" (Johnson 60).

This means that speaking on behalf of another may be a fictional move, but it does not make the act of speech false or ineffectual. Thus, Austin's qualifier of felicity still remains in place even upon shifting our attention to literature. This is because the

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developmental loan from the World Bank," is a performative utterance, but as shown by Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin in the pervious chapter, such financial lending is often coercive.

"nonseriousness of a performative utterance … results, then, not from [an actor's] fictional status but from his duality," and Johnson reminds us that "the question of seriousness attends the act of interpretation of *any* performative utterance" (60, emphasis in original). Shoshana Felman similarly emphasizes the dual nature of performative utterances, arguing against Austin's suggestion that the truth or falsity of linguistic acts is unimportant. Instead, she suggests that what matters is whether a performative utterance is "successful or unsuccessful, felicitous or infelicitous" (17). With that qualification in mind, there are very few utterances that cannot become implicitly performative.

The pervasiveness of performative language and its potential power within cultural practices are joined together in Butler's influential work on the social effects of performativity and how language generates social performative pressures. Butler calls the performative "a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (*Gender* 139), contingent because it relies on certain culturally-established truths, assumptions, or notions. Butler notes that a construction "regularly conceals its genesis," and to question it or refuse to participate in its performance can trigger punitive measures, so "the construction 'compels' our belief in its necessity and naturalness" (*Gender* 140). The repetition of socially-constructed norms is vital to their growth, since that repetitiveness constitutes the "ritualized form of their legitimation" (*Gender* 140). A construction, however, does not amount to "illusoriness or artificiality"; instead, "cultural configurations" can "take the place of 'the real' and consolidate and augment their hegemony through that felicitous self-naturalization" (*Gender* 32-33). This repeated performance "within a highly rigid regulatory frame" can, over time, "produce the

appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (*Gender* 33). Here we can begin to understand performativity's connections to cultural forms of common sense. If the frequent, lengthy repetition of certain norms, mores, or values helps to solidify social constructions to the extent they no longer seem constructed but, rather, natural, then those norms will become set in their ostensible actuality.

However, even the rigidity of linguistically-based norms can begin to show cracks that provide opportunities for resistance against oppressive social paradigms, resistance that Butler argues can be narratological in form. Butler, like Johnson, carefully considers the role of ambiguity within performance by noting how the stability of performative utterances is shown to be problematic when lived experience does not fit into "culturally established lines of coherence" (*Gender* 24). The "fictive production" of social norms can be exposed when "attributes … resist assimilation into the ready made framework of primary nouns and subordinate adjectives" (*Gender* 24). In other words, resistance can take a specifically linguistic form. Indeed, Butler further suggests that this exposure also reveals how "the ontology of substances" is "essentially superfluous" (*Gender* 24). Butler is not discounting the power of performance; it does, after all, have a "substantive effect" by "constituting the identity it is purported to be" (*Gender* 24, 25). But it does have its limits.[9] While "reiterative or ritual practice" helps to seemingly naturalize a social norm, this repetition can also be its undoing, for it unavoidably creates "gaps and fissures … as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions" make exceptions or limits to social norms visible (*Bodies* 10). This happens because the

[9] This is why something like drag, for Butler, is so productive in its signifying performance. It does not simply parody an original core; it parodies "the very notion of an original" by amounting to "a production which, in effect—that is, in its effect—postures as an imitation" (*Gender* 138). These forms of resistance overtly call attention to the constructedness of various social norms.

repetitive actions and utterances needed to create social norms requires a "constitutive outside," its Other, but the very presence of this Other simultaneously "secures and … fails to secure the very borders of materiality"; therefore, performative language's ability to establish seemingly naturalized norms "works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well" (*Bodies* 188). This means that the authoritative ability for performative language to name or solidify a norm always stands on an unstable foundation of cultural signification. That is because the performative utterances of discursive power are continuously haunted by what it labels as aberrant before bracketing it to the margins of society. Along the space of these "abject borders," Butler locates "the unlivable, the nonnarrativizable, the traumatic" (*Bodies* 188).

It is precisely the effort to narrate stories from these "abject borders" that can formulate powerful resistance. If narrated successfully, then "the very meaning of 'referentiality' is altered" in the normative, hegemonic space (*Bodies* 11). Since performative utterances are an essentializing force that aims "to preclude the possibility of a future for the signifier," the new goal should be to change "the signifier into a site for a set of rearticulations that cannot be predicted or controlled" (*Bodies* 219). There are, however, limits to this agential pursuit of rearticulation. Attempts to performatively redefine the political meaning of different signifiers can be extremely difficult, since that would require an engagement with a system of signification that always already constructs and activates different subjectivities. Therefore, any resistance to discursive oppression requires entering "a chain of prior usages, to be installed in the midst of significations that cannot be situated in terms of clear origins or ultimate goals" (*Bodies* 219). The individual or communal agency involved in this kind of political resistance

can never become "a controlling or original authorship over that signifying chain, and it cannot be power, once installed and constituted in and by that chain, to set a sure course for its future" (*Bodies* 219). Butler reminds us here that any central cultural or social signifier has such a long textual and enunciatory history, that any attempt to rewrite its meaning runs the risk of being quickly eliminated by either cultural common sense or by punitive social measures.

A key part of the conflict Butler describes is further clarified by Percy's semiotic arguments—namely, that many individuals are simply not interested in considering just how much of their day-to-day lives are predicated on social constructions. Percy's critical work provides an intervention in understanding how a uniquely neoliberal performativity is generated. This is because his assertions track how a common sense that preserves neoliberal values is created in a specifically language-driven manner and also supported by different capitalist apparatuses that regard and target the individual primarily as a consumer. This clarifies how neoliberalism—often equated to a form of natural common sense—attains its normative power.[10] To explain how a form of cultural common sense is created, Percy uses a sightseer's dissatisfied encounter with the Grand Canyon as a representative example. He argues that before the sightseer ever reaches the

[10] While "common sense" as a topic has been widely studied long before neoliberalism, contemporary theorists understand that neoliberalism's hegemonic hold is facilitated by the way many of its values and ethics have been elevated to a level of common sense. Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea argue that social and collective attachments to the welfare state have largely given way to a "more competitive, individualistic market-driven, entrepreneurial, profit-oriented outlook" (11). The "structural consequences" of this common sense are a heightened individualism, privatized responses to public problems, and the general lauding of competition (12). As noted earlier, Holborow examines ways that language itself is being neoliberalized. On the one hand, financial or economic metaphors are stretched to extents that do not entirely fit their situation, in which case neoliberalism's common-sensibility experiences a breakdown. On the other hand, she also considers how neoliberalism has successfully co-opted language (59-60). Jim McGuigan also identifies how neoliberal values enter everyday speech with "the language of branding, consumer sovereignty, market reasoning and management" becoming commonplace outside the workplace (233).

canyon, an expected set of outcomes has already been created for him that is textually driven—"by picture postcard, geography book, tourist folders, and the words *Grand Canyon*" (47, emphasis in original). These texts produce the cumulative work of the "symbolic complex" of "performulation" where "the sightseer measures his satisfaction *by the degree to which the canyon conforms to the performed complex*" (Percy 47, emphasis in original). This is the ostensible "highest point" of consumer satisfaction, replacing a sightseer's desire for "sovereign discovery" (Percy 47).[11] Percy's descriptive example alludes to postmodern theorists' conceptualizations of simulacra, how the repetitive copying of an original eventually comes to replace the original. It is, as Jean Baudrillard puts it, the "liquidation of all referentials" (4), and Frederic Jameson argues that the hyperreality of simulacra amounts to a "weakening of historicity" (*Postmodernism* 6), where any sort of actuality has been effaced. These simulacra are able to grow in a social space where exchange value has obliterated use value (*Postmodernism* 18); therefore, with Percy's example, no longer does one visit the Grand Canyon for reasons of usefulness—camping, discovering new geological sights, etc. Instead, one goes for the immaterial exchange of it, to simply be able to say in conversation, "I've been there, I've seen it." However, "it is more likely that what he has done is the one sure way not to see the canyon" (Percy 47). Simulacrum, then, only "reinforces and intensifies" the logic of late capitalism that would commodify all

[11] Percy also notes that the sightseer refuses to confront the Grand Canyon as something to be known by taking a photograph of it, further distancing himself from a true encounter with the thing. Here, Percy's disdain for this practice of increasing distance between oneself and the site, thing, or event stands in direct contrast to John Berger and Walter Benjamin's arguments about photography. Taking a photograph, in Percy's example, does not increase the agency of the photographer or produce increased access to the photographed subject—a painting, a natural landmark, etc.; rather, it increases the power of the symbolic complex over individuals by augmenting their separation from the subject at hand. See Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and the first chapter of Berger's *Ways of Seeing* for arguments on the positive political and economic effects of photography.

experience (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 46).[12] Individuals dissatisfied with this experiential prepackaging may try to find an “unspoiled” place in order to have a truly authentic experience (Percy 51). These efforts will ultimately fail, though, since all they will find is a “desperate impersonation” instead (Percy 52). The symbolic complex, saturated as it is in the commodifying work of capitalism, is ubiquitous to the point it is impossible to approach events and situations without a “standard of performance in mind” ahead of time (Percy 52). Though people desire authentic experiences, they willfully (albeit ignorantly) surrender their experiences to be “measured by a prototype” (Percy 53). Percy asserts that this loss of agency is when the individual ceases to be a “person” and becomes solely a “consumer” (54).

The specific moment a cultural common sense is created is when the “consumer is content to receive an experience just as it has been presented to him by theorists and planners” (Percy 54-55). If the experience does not conform to those expectations, he will be disappointed. But “the danger of theory and consumption is a seduction and deprivation of the consumer,” for the consumer is marked by a loss of curiosity as things and experiences are placed in a “symbolic package” (Percy 55, 57). Over time, the consumer will come to confuse the abstract for the concrete or natural, as Butler argues. Stephen J. Ball and Antonio Olmedo note that this “rationality of performativity” within neoliberal governmentalities—this socially-constructed conviction that certain experiences should meet certain standards—“is presented as the new common sense, as something logical and desirable” (89). While it may be viewed or encouraged as a form

[12] Jean-François Lyotard describes the problem as “capitalism inherently possesses[ing] the power to derealize familiar objects, social roles, and institutions to such a degree that the so-called realistic representations can no longer evoke reality except as nostalgia or mockery, as an occasion for suffering rather than for satisfaction” (74).

of common sense, Percy sees it as a debilitating loss of sovereignty within the individual, an argument not without its irony, given both liberalism's privileging of personal sovereignty and the fetishization of individual freedom within neoliberal ideology. Even so, Percy sees common sense within late capitalism as tantamount to a refusal to make any effort to see what sort of processes of production are lying beneath the surface, processes that tell people in advance how to view or experience something.[13] Indeed, the theories discussed in the previous chapter help illuminate Percy's concerns. What Percy is describing is a mid-twentieth-century malaise of passively accepting commodities as fetishized. That the social, political, and material production of things and experiences is obscured never registers for the person-as-consumer in Percy's examples. It is not that people are incapable of seeing through the smoke and mirrors; rather, they simply have no interest in doing so, which for Percy is the truly devastating aspect of what common sense has become. Under late capitalism, people consign themselves willingly to the role of the passive consumer. This turn of events is performative because it accepts at face value what the linguistic apparatuses of late capitalism advertise and name into existence; this lack of discourse falls into what Brett Levinson describes as the "goes without saying" aspect of a neoliberal common sense,

[13] Percy's work additionally complements the aforementioned theorists because he contributes to a more holistic picture of performativity. Because of her dependence on the work of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, Butler's approach to performativity is chiefly epistemological. Percy, however, because of his reliance on the philosophical traditions of existentialism and phenomenology, regards linguistic performance through an ontological lens. While Butler's arguments occasionally reference the ontological significance of performativity's hegemony, her comments on the nature of being are usually bracketed within the framework of understanding how performative pressures create social structures and norms—our ways of knowing. Percy, on the other hand, remains primarily focused on how performative pressures affect individual lives and how people think of and conduct themselves in regards to the performulated spaces in which they live and move about.

which amounts to a “reduction of Being” that makes the market “the destiny of man” (*Market* 2).

Percy provides myriad examples of ways the symbolic complex preserves fetishized commodities by placing greater distance between individuals and the thing they are trying to encounter, and his claim that the symbolic complex generates a performative impulse in the consumer is key to any understanding of how performativity carries economic significance today. Since 1998 and the publication of Callon’s arguments in *The Laws of the Market*, economic theorists have joined the academic conversation on performativity. Callon argues that we should stop thinking of economics-as-discipline and economy-as-practice as mutually exclusive entities and instead begin to understand that economics functions performatively because of its ability to actively name, shape, and remake reality via the work of the market. The debate over whether or not economics is performative has continued ever since and was cohesively revisited in *Do Economists Make Markets? On the Performativity of Economics*, in which Callon adds to his initial arguments.[14] Those reflections are decidedly more neoliberal and share similarities with Percy’s view of the market’s work on cultural practices and consumers.

[14] *Do Economists Make Markets?* contains many noteworthy pieces that expand upon and challenge Callon’s theses while also describing how the performative work of economics creates neoliberal subjects. See Francesco Guala, “How to Do Things with Experimental Economics”; Petter Holm, “Which Way Is Up on Callon?”; Donald MacKenzie, “Is Economics Performative? Option Theory and the Construction of Derivatives Markets”; Philip Mirowski and Edward Nik-Khah, “Markets Made Flesh: Performativity, and a Problem in Science Studies, Augmented with Consideration of the FCC Auctions”; and Fabian Muniesa and Michel Callon, “Economic Experiments and the Construction of Markets.” In the years since this edited collection, Ivan Boldyrev and Ekaterina Svetlova note the troublesome tendency where “scholars use the notion of performativity that suits them more” (6). They trace some of the interdisciplinary approaches being taken up with performative economics in the past decade in their recent edited collection *Enacting Dismal Science: New Perspectives on the Performativity of Economics*.

For example, Callon argues that there is not necessarily opposition between "those who articulate statements to those who make them function" in the market, and this makes the economy a site of "co-performation" ("What" 335). Economic theories alone are not enough, since active participation will always be required. What is key, then, for Callon is how the performative work of the market is a "shared anthropological program" that encourages a "common sense [that] refers to 'the market economy' to talk about the economy," which helps to establish neoliberalism as "an overall logic" ("What" 343). Callon observes that one of the crucial components of this converging neoliberal common sense is "the disentanglement of things and humans" ("What" 343), the continued support of the fiction of the fetishized commodity. Callon also makes claims that recall Felman's dismissal of true/false statements and Percy's description of the power of the symbolic complex. For instance, he does not say that economic theories are "true" simply because they reshape the world when acted upon; instead, "it is preferable to say that the world it supposes has become actual" ("What" 320). Therefore, the issue at hand is no longer one of "truth as reference" but, rather, "truth as success or failure" ("What" 321). Here Callon notes how performative economics, similar to other performative modes, amounts to social construction: "To predict economic agents' behaviors an economic theory does not have to be true; it simply needs to be believed by everyone" (322).[15] When that kind of socially-determined common sense comes about,

[15] Callon appears to conflate performativity and social construction, which is a frequent methodological move of economists. While theorists like Butler or Johnson would take issue with this muddling, this collapsing of terms makes sense from an economic perspective. When economics functions performatively, there is little distance between the utterance of an economic theory and its socially-constitutive performance. In other words, the very performative utterance of an economic theory or decision often immediately shapes the market according to the utterance. (Think, for example, of the Federal Reserve announcing that interest rates are being raised or lowered. The performative utterance

the performative pressure of the symbolic complex gains strength with every reiteration. This further entrenches the seemingly sensible conclusions that neoliberal values and ethics are natural, especially when it so expertly hides the "the uneven distribution" of economic tools and information ("What" 343).[16]

Thus, the work of performativity, as conceptualized from Austin to Callon, is multifaceted. It is, on the one hand, active and agential, a form of willfully naming things and executing tasks by the words one speaks. On the other hand, it is also an avenue for the construction of powerful social norms, values, and ethics, which can be legitimated in a way that makes them appear natural so as to discourage critique. This latter facet dovetails with neoliberal discourses of common sense, where the laws of the free market are accepted as natural and actual, even the very model for existence. Though the aforementioned critics helpfully conceptualize the neoliberal extent of a performative economics, Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* further address the transnational and subjective qualities of such a performativity. Both novels target the performative impulses that are inherently part of the political pressure created by neoliberal systems of governance to become *homo*

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nearly simultaneously adjusts the social landscape via market response.) Though theorists like Butler or Percy would argue that there is a space, either temporal or physical, between performative utterances and normative social construction—that gap being the very site where resistance can happen—the simultaneity of economic performative utterances forecloses that space somewhat. It is in this space of foreclosure that we can begin to understand the performative power that economics and economies hold.

[16] Callon's theories also carry within them a description of how the performative work of neoliberalism generates its key representative figure, *homo oeconomicus*. Foucault reminds us that viewing any person as *homo oeconomicus* does not mean they become or are anthropologically economic; it simply means that their behavior is viewed and read through an economic lens, which is also when *homo oeconomicus* "becomes governmentalizable" (252). For Foucault, this means that *homo oeconomicus* is "the basic element of the new governmental reason formulated" (271). According to Wendy Brown, the common sense governing this individual is that "well-being is easily sacrificed" for "macroeconomic growth" (82-83). Percy similarly identifies this willful sacrifice under the hypnotic power of the symbolic complex—a surrender of the self to neoliberal values.

oeconomicus, put the market first in all things, view oneself as a unit of earning potential, and act accordingly, but they do so in a way that emphasizes the transnational scope of a free-market ideology. *Gone Girl* addresses how a textually-driven neoliberal performance unavoidably becomes entangled with the transnational work of multiple privatized entities. *The God of Small Things* explores how the financial flows of Western investment into developing nations initiates an embodied performativity in deference to the power of the market, which simultaneously destroys indigenous cultural practices by further subjugating these countries to their former colonizer. These two novels narrate the different ways performativity either affords or denies opportunities to circumvent neoliberalism's violence.

***Gone Girl* and Performativity as Escape**

Flynn situates her novel squarely within a neoliberal discourse of common sense, performativity, and agency, where performance requires a rendering of the self in deference to the cultural common sense of the free market. This financialization of the self affects how one regards, understands, moves within, and works against reality. Agency in this novel is available within neoliberalism, but it must take on deceptive and murderous qualities. Through the character of Amy Dunne, Flynn shows how this form of agential decision-making is specifically neoliberal in its performance. *Gone Girl* explores neoliberal performativity and its transnational aspects in several ways. First, while the novel does envision the performative-as-performance, it also spotlights the performative-as-language or, rather, writing-as-performance. Flynn situates the act of writing as an agential space, a locus of creation and self-determination, even an avenue

to freedom. Yet, at the same time, writing in *Gone Girl* is frequently presented as a performative space that further ensconces the writer within the neoliberal ideal of personal responsibility. Second, the novel carefully catalogues how the performative agency Amy seizes is dependent on transnational structures that facilitate neoliberal financial transactions. Though Amy never seems aware of it, her ability to stage her own murder depends on privatized financial ventures like plasmapheresis and the mortgage-lending industry, where the latter enhanced market liquidity and the ability to the US to invest surplus capital abroad. Third, because of its interest in writing-as-performance and the transnational scope of neoliberal networks, *Gone Girl* productively connects with much of the aforementioned scholarly conversations on performativity, albeit with one significant alteration: Flynn's novel shows that if neoliberal performativity is to successfully become an agential tool, it will require completely subverting and recreating what we consider to be common sense to the point that it is unrecognizable as reality—but even *that* subversion is quickly co-opted once again by neoliberal values. In this way, *Gone Girl* emphasizes how neoliberal performativity is itself a form of capitalist production and that the kind of normative reasoning neoliberalism propagates ultimately diminishes agency.

Gone Girl persistently refers to the performative impulses of contemporary life. One of the central concerns of the text is how saturated everyday experience is by external media, so much so that instances and references are too numerous to catalogue in the space allowed here. Characters repeatedly acknowledge their tendency to view and understand the world through narrative tropes provided by television, film, and literature, tropes that ultimately determine the character's cultural expectations and

responses to various events. For example, when Nick is unsure how to answer some of the police detectives' questions about Amy's disappearance, he grows frustrated over his inability to come up with the right "lines," but eventually does express his exasperation in "the way it should have been said," even if these "usual husband phrases" ultimately seem and feel disingenuous (Flynn 48). Nick believes that somewhere out there the perfect intangible script exists for him to tap into.

Flynn creates a setting for this performative landscape that is specifically tied to the turbulent effects of neoliberalism. Nick and Amy rent a large house in a "failed development" in North Carthage, Missouri, that "screams Suburban Nouveau Riche"; the entire development is "a miniature ghost town of bank-owned, recession-busted, price-reduced mansions, a neighborhood that closed before it ever opened" because of the housing crash of the late 2000s (Flynn 4). The town is home to a shuttered mall killed by the recession that now remains "two million square feet of echo" (Flynn 72). Additionally, Desi Collings, Amy's now-wealthy childhood friend, lives on Lake Hannafan, which he likes to think of as possessing a rich history. But the lake is nothing more than a privatized venture, recently manmade by an oil developer, and it becomes a place to dump hazardous waste, a burial site for the excesses of capitalist accumulation (Flynn 339).[17] Flynn constructs an environment for her narrative that Emily Johansen has identified as the "neoliberal gothic," where "everyday life under neoliberalism might itself properly be understood as gothic," which "points to the instabilities at the heart of

[17] Similarly, Desi builds a "Swiss château," but "on an American scale," which Amy thinks he does to try to pretend he is at Lake Como. Desi continues to imitate tropes, building an odd simulacrum. He (re)models his house on past experiences of visiting the Swiss Alps, but the one key thing it is missing is that which cannot be copied—the mountains, the natural realm. It is certainly not for lack of trying, though. Desi has, on a smaller scale, manipulated nature with his glass greenhouse that is carefully calibrated and climate controlled to grow tulips year round (Flynn 339-40).

neoliberal … practices" ("Neoliberal" 31, 33). It is a world of collapse, not prosperity; decay, not progress.

Within this setting, Flynn foregrounds the dominance of a common sense that takes its cues from the effects and values of late capitalism, a rendering that recalls Percy's symbolic complex. Nick observes how he has come to depend on everyday simulacra and admits he prefers pre-packaged experiences:

> It seemed to me that there was nothing new to be discovered ever again. Our society was utterly, ruinously derivative … We were the first human beings who would never see anything for the first time. We stare at the wonders of the world, dull-eyed, underwhelmed. … I can't recall a single amazing thing I have seen firsthand that I didn't immediately reference to a movie or a TV show. … I've literally seen it all, and the worst thing, the thing that makes me want to blow my brains out, is: The secondhand experience is always better. The image is crisper, the view is keener, the camera angle and the soundtrack manipulate my emotions in a way reality can't anymore. I don't know that we are actually human at this point, those of us who are like most of us, who grew up with TV and movies and now the Internet. … We are all working from the same dog-eared script. (Flynn 72-73)

While Nick's observation recalls Percy—that "wonders of the world," such as the Grand Canyon, are impossible to truly behold as if seeing them for the first time—Nick is markedly different than Percy's clueless consumer because Nick fully understands that he is acquisitive, not inquisitive, yet he does not view this mode of existence as the loss

that Percy does. If anything, it is preferable, since unfiltered reality would do little to stir Nick's emotions. A byproduct of this form of common sense is that reproductions become the standard against which reality is judged, for the "wonders of the world" are "immediately reference[d] to a movie or a TV show." (This, of course, implies that Nick knows reality when he sees it, a claim that Amy certainly challenges throughout the novel with her actions that call attention to just how poorly he understands her.) Pratt reminds us that these tropes, genres, and other mediated forms have this kind of power because fictive texts possess a performative, generative strength similar to everyday utterances (89-92). Nick's attitude, then, contains a passivity where there is little exchange or even competition for reclaiming authentic experiences that Percy claims we lose in the face of prepackaged experiences.

Nick's description of society's mediated and secondhand structure as "derivative" further alludes to an underlying economic cause of these effects, what with the dual meaning of that word. Derivatives are a key practice in the economic present, where they offer protection against credit risks associated with securitized assets. These financial instruments provide insurance to buyers against credit defaults and increase consumer confidence in mortgage-backed securities (MBS), what is already an incredibly risky form of capital investment. Derivatives, however, ballooned into their own profitable, unregulated industry leading up to the financial collapse, worth an estimated $26 trillion in 2006 (Unterman 89).[18] Nick's use of the term "derivative" takes on a greater significance with this financial parallel in mind. Just as derivatives enable

[18] Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee extensively cover in *Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of Risk* how the reliance on derivatives has dramatically changed the global work of capitalism, as well as our cultural understanding of what faithfully or accurately represents that contemporary reality.

investors and institutions "to balance credits risks and protect themselves against negative credit events" (Unterman 90), the derivative structure of society that Nick describes in the above excerpt helps him become inured to reality. Secondhand experience is a form of insurance, a safety net that shelters him from what is actually happening. In this sense, Flynn articulates yet another way we can understand how late capitalism affects not just economic processes but also our forms of cultural production and preferences of reception. If the goal or desire is to have this derivative lifestyle "manipulate [our] emotions," as Nick puts it, its attainment would mean the removal of any risk or surprises.

Amy, however, does not share Nick's penchant for predictability or passivity, acting instead on the neoliberal ethic of self-investment and self-promotion that was part of her childhood. If Nick is a passive consumer, Amy is a competitive producer—with a little help from her parents. Her competitiveness specifically stems from being the living inspiration for her parents' best-selling children's book series *Amazing Amy* that generated their wealth. Amy "need[s] to be Amazing Amy, all the time" (Flynn 45), a commodification of the self that Amy herself describes as a late-capitalist form of production that endlessly reproduces her until any original sense of self disappears. Reflecting on her childhood, Amy claims, "I was always a product," forced to fit the mold of *Amazing Amy*, who "has to be brilliant, creative, kind, thoughtful, witty, and happy" (Flynn 224). Because of this, Amy knows she has "never been more to [her parents] than a symbol," a loaded signifier, one that cannot step out of character, lest she negatively affect the marketable franchise of her literary alter-ego (Flynn 259). Indeed,

Amy's parents have turned her into a brand, making her at once "Amy and *Amy*," both human being and lucrative narrative character (Flynn 245).

The *Amazing Amy* books play a key (per)formative role for Amy because they impart a facet of neoliberal common sense onto her life by responsibilizing her. Wendy Brown identifies how one of the hallmarks of neoliberalism is, as a form of governance, its replacement of hierarchies with systems of management and administration where market logic presides over all decision making (127). One of the results of this political shift is the greater emphasis on responsibilization, where the individual, as self-unit of human capital, is accountable for her own ability to thrive or survive. That does not mean individuals are responsible for bearing that burden as much as they are "being *responsibilized*" or made responsible (Brown 133, emphasis in original). Part of the goal within a neoliberal ethic of responsibility (or responsibility for the self) is that it outsources the state's burden of governance. Indeed, the idea of responsibilization makes it "increasingly unfeasible"—i.e., the opposite of common sense—for an individual to blame the market or the economy for any undesirable turn of events (Biebricher and Johnson 205). This is because the individual's responsibility extends not just to her actions, but also "the respective outcomes"; thus, technologies of subjectification encourage individuals "to think of themselves and act responsibly" (Biebricher and Johnson 205). Alison Howell argues that responsibilization is not just about "bouncing back," but about "bouncing forward" in the sense that subjects become more and more prepared for "emergency preparedness and disaster response" (69). Rhetorically, people have been responsibilized in neoliberal governmentalities through the "appeal to freedom" method—"personal freedom, possibilities of self-realization and maximization

of quality of life"—as well as "responsibilization through threat to personal control," where uncertainty is productively used to influence behavior (Pyysiäinen et al 217). The idea here is that responsibilization is not just about acting peaceably, being financially conscientious, and morally upright; it is also about being prepared for the worst and knowing how to navigate traumatic situations when they occur.[19] Notably, Amy criticizes the childhood pressures *Amazing Amy* placed on her as "an unfair responsibility," the likes of which meant "knowing you aren't allowed to disappoint" (Flynn 259). This responsibilization, though, along with preserving the success of her parents' book series, also encourages Amy to don a specific kind of textually-rooted performance that aligns with what readers know and expect *Amazing Amy* to be.

The responsibilizing work of *Amazing Amy* also encourages Amy's development as an economic individual, which signifies an increased value of competitiveness within neoliberalism. Early theorizations of neoliberalism no longer viewed exchange as the most important aspect of the market; instead, it became competition, which needed to be preserved and protected from governmental intervention (Foucault 119, 147). Early neoliberal theorists also encouraged the idea that individuals should view them*selves* as enterprises to help the market become "the formative power of society" (Foucault 148). American neoliberals took this idea and developed it even further, regarding all "behavior as economic behavior," to the point that *homo oeconomicus* becomes an "entrepreneur of himself" and pursues competition above all else (Foucault 252, 226).

[19] Susanna Trnka and Catherine Trundle also examine numerous social and communal forms of responsibility that "effectively [counter] the increasingly prevalent tendency of public and political figures to define and discuss responsibility in largely neoliberal terms" (137). For more on the responsibilizing methods of neoliberal states, see Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* and Jonathan Joseph, *The Social in the Global*.

Amy brings a sense of competition to her relationship with Nick, gladly putting on a performance to get what she wants. "For someone like me," she says, "who likes to win, it's tempting to want to be the girl every guy wants," and when she first met Nick, she "was willing to try" different personalities (Flynn 223). Here, love is first and foremost a competition for Amy, something to dominate. However, moments later, she contradicts herself, saying, "I thought we would be the most perfect union: the happiest couple around. Not that love is a competition" (Flynn 224)—except that for her, it is. Raised to entrepreneurialize her self by blurring the lines between Amy Dunne and *Amazing Amy*, she has no qualms about enlisting another performance to woo Nick.

The pièce de résistance of Amy's neoliberal performances is the fake diary she writes to frame Nick for her "murder." Like her connection to *Amazing Amy*, the diary is a vehicle of neoliberal performativity because, as a site of enunciation, it initiates real-world consequences for Nick by naming things into reality. Additionally, it responsibilizes him and creates a stock-character role for him to fill—the jealous, abusive, murderous husband.[20] Through these efforts, Amy executes what Butler describes as a type of performative resistance in that Amy reorders seemingly stable cultural signifiers and rearticulates what "cannot be predicted or controlled" (*Bodies* 219). In the end, the diary creates an alternative form of common sense because it pushes the limits of believability, successfully subverting normative expectations of human behavior.[21] The diary also continues the thread of competitiveness in Amy's life, and she

[20] The diary, though meant for the police to find, is also written to manipulate and manage the reader, since the plot twist midway through *Gone Girl* is that the diary entries one has been reading have been fabrications all along.
[21] Amy's escalating competitiveness is reminiscent of Jeffrey Nealon's description of neoliberalism as not a new development of capitalism but, rather, its latest intensification. What Nealon means by this is that

embarks on constructing the alternate story precisely because her and Nick's lived narrative is too "predictable … perfectly average … amusing," the wife to a cheating husband who picked a younger woman over her (Flynn 234). The problem with this narrative is not just its banality, but also that in the end, if she does nothing, Nick wins. "So I began to think of a different story," she says, "a better story … that would restore my perfection" (Flynn 234). The diary is recuperative in its goal of eliminating the tired trope that her life with Nick has become.[22]

The diary also depends on various larger transnational neoliberal structures and enterprises as Amy constructs it to her advantage, a dependence that reveals the neoliberal extent of her performativity. In order for the diary to be believable, Amy has to painstakingly recount past events and even create new ones for the later entries that take place after she and Nick move from Brooklyn to North Carthage. These later entries after the 2008 financial collapse and their move to the Midwest connect to various

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the 2008 financial collapse was not "the abandonment of free-market ideology"; instead, the economic crisis and the attendant response to it were simply the latest extensions of rampant economic privatization (2). Accordingly, older methodological approaches to capitalism will likely fail to account for the chaos of neoliberalism. Such nostalgic methods cannot be a sufficient critical tool; instead, theorists need "to construct a vocabulary to talk about the 'new economics' … and their complex relations to cultural production" (Nealon 14-15). Nealon's description of how a new vocabulary is required to make sense of the effect of the free-market economy on contemporary culture echoes the very problems that Amy's actions pose in the novel. Specifically, the notion that she would write a fake diary to frame Nick for her "murder" presents a new vocabulary because it is such an outlandish idea that defies common sense. Indeed, few characters in the novel are able to accept the idea that she falsified her murder. Or, if they make an attempt to understand it, they do so by trying to fit Amy's actions into their own preconceived notions of what does and does not make sense. These attempts to make sense of Amy's actions rely on established forms of knowledge, the kind reminiscent of Percy's symbolic complex. The desire for and dependence on stable ways of understanding the world is the exact obstacle in the way of people's ability to understand that Amy is in fact not dead but, rather, spent years methodically planning her revenge on Nick for cheating on her. They have insufficient critical tools for demystifying Amy's myriad performative impulses.

[22] Amy's fake diary functions in similar ways to the documentary in Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* and Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* in that it is a form of media that seems to try to work outside neoliberal values even as it helps to reproduce them. Not that Flynn positions Amy's diary as a vehicle of critique against neoliberalism; rather, it is another example of a narrative form that can easily fit within neoliberal values.

neoliberal enterprises. First, the Dunnes' housing situation cannot be divorced from larger transnational concerns. Though terms like "the Great Recession" or "the financial crisis" have become shorthand for the housing collapse in the US, its scope is certainly global, for the movement of capital "transcends national borders and creates strong interdependence of world markets" that depend on vast amounts of money available in investments from asset securitization (Unterman 102). Annie McClanahan notes that the securitization of mortgages "greatly increased market liquidity," which enabled investors to use the value of a mortgage as liquid assets that could "flow across the country"—or "across the globe"—"in a single keystroke" (*Dead* 7). One result of this securitization was that Middle Eastern oil money could flow back into the US to help pay for new housing developments, especially in the Midwest where the Dunnes are (McClanahan, *Dead* 7).[23] Indeed, the questionable lending practices and global movement of liquid assets out of the US has helped to balloon an international marketplace that no amount of US oversight and regulation (or lack thereof) could properly account for, so much so that the "international debt market has outgrown the national approach to governing securities transactions" (Unterman 78). An American worker, for example, may choose to allocate a portion of her paycheck to a pension fund. Those contributions could be invested in the MBS market without her knowledge, capital that would then go on to help develop any number of other financial products and markets around the globe (Unterman 92).[24] So while the Dunnes move to North Carthage after losing their jobs

[23] See also Louis Hyman, *Borrow: The American Way of Debt*.
[24] The MBS market is a massive source of capital for investors. In 2006, the US Federal Reserve Board estimated it reached $5.139 trillion (Unterman 93). Investors initially believed that these securities promised low risk as long as they were collected in a large enough pool; however, the housing collapse

and rent a house in a failed development, their move from Brooklyn is not just an ironic American journey westward. The availability of their rental home—and many of the houses on their street—can be understood as having been built precisely because of the transnational movement of liquid assets beyond US borders. It is a house comprised by oil-backed, mortgage-supported investment, a home that ties the Dunnes' "McMansion" (Flynn 8) to other parts of the globe entangled in the financial crisis.

Additionally, other emblems of the housing market assist Amy's efforts to gather incriminating information on Nick that can contribute to her diary's creation. Amy deceives Andie, Nick's mistress, into accepting her Facebook friend request sent from a fake profile. She takes her profile photo from "a popup ad for mortgages (blond, smiling, benefiting from historically low interest rates)" (Flynn 248). Just as the image tricks Andie into unquestioningly accepting Amy's friend request, its connection to "historically low interest rates" recalls the predatory work of the housing market. Adjustable-rate mortgages, where borrowers' monthly payments increase to often unsustainable amounts, and loose lending requirements for mortgage credit became commonplace in the early 2000s (McClanahan, *Dead* 6). That Flynn has Amy select a photo from an advertisement peddling mortgages is telling because just as the questionable lending practices of the housing market preyed upon and ruined millions of people's finances, Amy uses materials from the world of real estate to monitor Nick and formulate ways to destroy his life.

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came to prove that a large collection of high-quality mortgages would promise low risk, while a massive pool of sub-prime mortgages did not yield a higher credit quality (Unterman 87).

Amy also relies on the privatized pharmaceutical world surrounding plasma donation to write her diary entries. Nick's mother, Maureen, and her friends donate biweekly, and she suggests donating plasma is an agential choice, something Amy should consider trying if money is tight: "It might be a nice way for you to get some pin money—it's good for a girl to have a little cash of her own" (Flynn 155). Maureen believes there is a level of individual responsibility tied to donating, almost a kind of self-investment. But Amy sees something else: A room of donors of low socio-economic status turning part of their bodies into money to partially mitigate their poverty. Amy describes the scene as less than human, where the donors are "strapped to churning machines" as if "they are being harvested" or "being *farmed*" (Flynn 156, emphasis in original). Flynn's inclusion of the plasma bank in *Gone Girl* is a careful one, as plasmapheresis is a massively profitable privatized enterprise. As of 2014, plasma pharmaceuticals were more than an $11 billion annual market, and not coincidentally hundreds of new plasma centers opened during the Great Recession, with donations skyrocketing from 12.5 million in 2006 to 23 million in 2011 (Wellington). The US and a handful of other countries are the only ones that compensate plasma donors, and as a result, they obtain more donations, which enables them to provide most of the global supply of plasma-derived medical products (PDMPs) (Grabowski and Manning 151). The US currently leads the world in plasma procured from donors—roughly 70% of the world's supply—and there is great economic incentive to have such high numbers (Wellington). The protein in donated plasma is necessary for the creation of various pharmaceuticals manufactured by for-profit corporations, and the larger the amount of plasma there is for the fractionation process (where it is rendered usable), the cheaper

that process will be, which means that "[l]arge pools [of plasma] maximize profits" (Wellington).[25] Since most countries place tighter restrictions on donation frequency and volume compared to the US, there are substantially "lower *per capita* plasma levels observed outside the United States" (Grabowski and Manning 157).[26] As a result, the US is able to dominate global trade of PDMPs, since many countries lack a domestic reserve to draw from and have to buy from the US (Grabowski and Manning 158). Though plasma is a crucial necessity for a wide range of patient-care procedures, it is also a tremendous generator of wealth for Western pharmaceutical corporations, and donors are not compensated on a fair comparative scale.[27] It is an international market the US continues to conquer.

Amy's utilization of plasmapheresis as she constructs her diary persona has significant implications for how we understand neoliberal performativity, for this brief episode in the novel skews the notion of individual responsibility. As noted earlier, plasma donation is presented two ways in *Gone Girl*: It could be viewed positively, a kind of agential self-investment that procures funds for personal use, therefore increasing one's capital and mobility. Or, it can be viewed negatively, as Amy does, by regarding plasmapheresis as an end-of-one's-rope decision made when encountering

[25] For a breakdown of the attendant costs related to producing PDMPs, see Victor Grifols, "Financing Plasma Proteins: Unique Challenges."
[26] The ethics and safety of US plasma donation is highly questionable for myriad reasons. See Darryl Lorenzo Wellington, "The Twisted Business of Donating Plasma" and Lucy Reynolds, "Selling Our Safety to the Highest Bidder: The Privatisation of Plasma Resources UK."
[27] Because of the questionable ethics surrounding US plasmapheresis, other nations have attempted to limit the amount of commercial plasma they import from the US, though to various degrees of success. See Paul Gallagher, "'Is There No Limit to What This Government Will Privatise?': UK Plasma Supplier Sold to US Private Equity Firm Bain Capital" and Meera Dalal et al., "Paying for Plasma – Canada's Double Standard?"

financial constraints for any number of reasons.[28] But this negative view of plasmapheresis comes from "Diary Amy," the novel's most unreliable narrator. Left unwritten in the diary is Amy's actual utilitarian purpose behind including the plasmapheresis episode, a purpose that offers a third way of viewing plasma donation and its connections to individual responsibility: The financial aspect of donating plasma is unimportant to Amy, but what she does need is a way to manage Nick's future decision-making abilities after the authorities discover she is missing and investigate her possible murder. By pretending to faint at the sight of blood and needles at the plasma bank, Amy insures that Nick's eventual theory of how she faked her murder by cutting herself won't stand up to scrutiny when compared against this event in the diary. Which is all to say that Amy's exercise of individual responsibility in the performative construction of her diary is specifically aimed at removing Nick's agency or, rather, his ability to respond substantively to her individual decisions and manipulations.

Amy's performance here is neoliberal in two specific ways. First, she accepts her own responsibilization by planning ahead with future disasters in mind—that is, she works to create a narrative that could free her from Nick and any other future financial disappointments. She and Nick lose nearly everything because of the recession, and rather than lament the existence of systemic injustice and greed, Amy does what neoliberal ideology positions as the appropriate response of enterprising individuals: stay competitive and prepare for the worst. Second, Amy's performance is also chiefly aimed at responsibilizing Nick in a way that will exculpate herself and place all the blame for

[28] Wellington lists numerous motivations in his article that drive people to donate plasma: to make ends meet from unsustainable employment, to buy food, to help pay for college, and to provide for one's children.

their unhealthy marriage and her “death” on him. It is, thus, a responsibilization of Nick that seeks to take away his individual freedom, all while she initially leads him to think that he is the one in control. By starting the day of their anniversary with her usual scavenger hunt of poems-as-clues that lead Nick to his gift from her, Amy allows Nick the illusion of being the clue finder, the investigator in charge, when in reality she is leading him from one prearranged spot to the next, every one of them stocked with incriminating evidence against him.

All of this is for Amy’s benefit and for Nick’s detriment, a move that notably echoes the responsibilized structure of plasma collection. Plasmapheresis is a for-profit venture in the US, but the rhetoric surrounding it constructs an image of the responsible, beneficent donor, as if there are not larger social structures generating economic inequality that drive someone to consider donating. Those who donate are assured of their own altruism and forthrightness in choosing to extend life to patients critically in need of plasma.[29] Wellington argues that such rhetoric obfuscates what is really taking place—that donors become “like cows milking [their] own udders”—but he misses the point here. The image of an individual milking oneself does not disguise what is taking

[29] To use a personal example, one of the plasma banks in my locale (College Station, Texas) is part of UK-based Bio Products Laboratory, which places significant emphasis on the heroic qualities of the donor on its website:

> By donating plasma, donors are offering a lifeline to someone in need. Whether it’s a wounded veteran who served our country overseas, an expectant mother anxiously awaiting her new arrival, or a young child trying to live a healthy and normal life, your donation makes a *huge* difference. … Consistent donation is critical to maintaining an adequate supply of plasma—that’s why we view regular donors as big heroes. And we believe if you do good, you should be rewarded, so our donors are compensated for their time and efforts. (“Why Donate”, emphasis in original)

It is worth noting here the patriotic and heteronormative language that places the donor within the larger picture of the nation-state’s progress and hopeful future. On the one hand, donors are lauded for their willful donation, but on the other hand, they are simultaneously responsibilized with certain expectations of what constitutes a good citizen.

place; instead, it *clarifies* the neoliberal concept of responsibilization at work. There is never any confusion as to why people donate plasma: They are short on money, they need some quickly, and a market has been created with a demand for a supply that they can immediately provide with their bodies. Donors are informed that they are doing something good and selfless for humanity, and while that may be true in some measure, they are also helping support a multi-billion-dollar privatized industry. In the neoliberal paradigm, it is not important that plasma banks exist and are growing because of economic inequality; what matters is that the opportunity for making money through them is there, and the onus of not taking advantage of their existence to earn some extra capital is on the individual. Similarly, Nick does not really have a choice when it comes to playing the game Amy creates for him, for he must try to locate the clues and evidence Amy plants against him before the police do. This, as Amy has fashioned it, is his responsibility, whether he wants it or not.

The various privatized sectors Amy utilizes to strengthen the seeming factuality of her diary's narrative help her construct a false tale, albeit one that is recognizable. Because the diary creates and then plays upon certain familiar tropes—the unhappy marriage, the philandering husband, the midlife crisis—Amy's constructed narrative fits within a shared cultural lexicon that can continue to "stage-manage" Nick's life (Flynn 47). In reality, though, she is constructing an alternative common sense, one that Nick eventually deciphers but knows no one else would believe. By reaching such a space of agential control, Amy knows that she has essentially won because nobody can contradict the narrative she has performed and established around her and Nick. Upon resurfacing in Nick's life and dominating news headlines, Amy knows she is safe. One law

enforcement official, who shares Nick's theory that Amy falsified her own murder, observes that any other narrative is "less credible than Amy" because she has "pure public opinion" on her side (403), meaning that common sense, or the version of it that Amy has tapped into and constructed, is more powerful than actuality. People in North Carthage accept this fetishized production of Nick as authentic—fetishized because it obscures what is actually going on—because they fail to recognize the existence of performative realities. Amy's use of a neoliberal common sense to manipulate familiar cultural and artistic forms helps obscure the ethical and moral problems of what she actually is doing. The diary activates a new social reality by producing Nick's world, and while it is easy to read Amy as psychopathic here, Johansen reminds us that Amy's actions "follow the logic of normal neoliberal subject formation" ("Neoliberal" 42). That is, she has done everything to fashion and preserve herself in an entrepreneurial way. Amy's parents' creation of her self has already been described as a capitalist form of production thanks to *Amazing Amy*. That upbringing, however, becomes the model for her performative control of Nick, for the diary casts him in the easily-recognizable role from daytime movies of the estranged wife-killer, a familiar motif that ignites people's hatred toward Nick and clouds their ability to think outside this commonly-sensible image.

Amy's own troubles are noteworthy, though. Her diary's performance may liberate her from her marital and financial situation toward that hallmark of neoliberal values—individual freedom—but her encounter with freedom is terrifying. Upon successfully staging her kidnapping and murder and leaving North Carthage, Amy's future success becomes tied to money in a way that problematizes how free she truly is.

Her cash will eventually run out, leaving her the two options of "die" or "get money" (Flynn 280), which is to say that to not die is to have money or, rather, that access to capital is on par with life itself. Then, for a brief moment, Amy experiences true freedom when she is robbed of all her cash and feels "the pure wildness of being on [her] own for the first time in [her] life" (Flynn 325); however, all she encounters in the face of that prospect is horror. She hates it and realizes she has no idea how to survive. Amy's perspective that her options are not between life and death but, rather, between death and money provides a dark comment on what constitutes livable, meaningful life within neoliberalism. In the setting of *Gone Girl*, predicated as it is on financial competition, to exit the market and its dynamics of financial exchange is tantamount to death. Without money, Amy has few options for survival in the world, let alone mobility. In a sense, she has stumbled upon true freedom after being robbed, but it is not the kind of individual freedom that neoliberalism imagines—freedom, that is, to enter the market and participate competitively. Flynn depicts a purer sort of freedom as finding oneself tethered to nothing, including the market.

It is telling, then, that Amy's ability to reenter life is made possible by her two narratives becoming marketable. Since disappearing, sales of the *Amazing Amy* series "have skyrocketed," which means her "irresponsible parents can finally pay back [her] trust fund" they borrowed against—"[w]ith interest" (Flynn 352). Amy's return to the neoliberal world after exiting it, however briefly, is on par with reclaiming the position of *homo oeconomicus* by entrepreneurializing the self and finding ways to market one's existence. She does precisely that. Beyond *Amazing Amy*'s resurgence, Amy's fabricated tale of assault, kidnapping, and rape that she gives to the police after returning to Nick

eventually lands her a book deal. Events like these show how Amy's actions are not merely a riff on postmodernism, construction, and unreliable narrators by Flynn; instead, *Gone Girl* "imagines a world where one scrapes off anything disconnected from one's state as *homo economicus*" (Johansen, "Neoliberal" 45). Tellingly, writing this future memoir signifies to Amy that she is "officially in control of *our* story" (Flynn 406, my emphasis)—not just hers, but continually in control of writing Nick's, too.

It is worth stressing that such a virtuoso performance exists within a space of privilege. Amy is White, blonde, attractive, and it certainly helps that she comes from money with a successful children's book series attached to her. Amy knows this; it is why she can count on her story being quickly picked up by major news networks, which enable her to monitor the success of the diary's performative impact on Nick from afar. This element of privilege is important. While Nick and Amy do lose their jobs and much of their savings in the financial collapse, Amy is still able to stay at home when they move to Missouri while Nick manages a bar. She uses these long days alone to meticulously plot against Nick by conducting extensive research and creating the fake diary. *Gone Girl*, then, examines a certain kind of neoliberal privilege where mobility and time are not in low supply, meaning Amy possesses a level of agency within her performance that someone from a lower class or the working poor simply would not have. This is why it is crucial to keep in mind Austin's arguments about the cultural and temporal relevance of performative utterances. The text and form of neoliberal performativity will change from place to place and time to time. The kind of neoliberal performativity Amy embodies in *Gone Girl* is just one mode, a form aimed at personal gain and fully focused on the self.

Though the textual work of Amy's neoliberal performativity continues till the close of the novel, Nick does manage to complicate the degree to which we regard her assertion of agency as successful. He tells Amy he pities her because "every morning you have to wake up and be you" (Flynn 415). The comment deeply troubles Amy, and it is significant in light of neoliberal conceptualizations of freedom. Amy's perpetual performances and efforts to cash in, though enabling her freedom to enter the market, only imprison her. She remains tethered to *Amazing Amy*, Cool Girl, Diary Amy, or any other number of roles she has put on or had put upon her. Nick's comment recalls Percy's claim that unwittingly acquiescing to performative pressures results in a loss of agency; however, that is not Amy's situation. Amy is keenly aware of her utilization of performances and eager embrace of them. But Nick suggests that Amy loses something in the process. In her efforts to write her fake diary and create an alternate life, Amy falls victim to Butler's warning about the risks of performance—that rewriting signifiers "can never be understood as a controlling or original authorship over that signifying chain" (*Bodies* 219). Amy's diary and masterful alibis certainly have "expand[ed] the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible" (Butler, *Gender* 29), but Nick understands that the endless performances have only subsumed Amy instead of taking her to a place of freedom. As a case in point, the charade does not stop when she returns to Nick. She must continue the false narrative of her abduction and assault for the book deal she signed. Self-made product that she is, the market has her. While Nick cannot prove Amy's lies, he can exact some form of retribution by identifying how her performative management and responsibilization of others is not actually liberatory for

her. Her attempts at utilizing neoliberal performativity to her advantage are ultimately ineffectual if the end goal is some form of escape to freedom.

The God of Small Things **and Performative Resignation**

Unlike *Gone Girl*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* casts a bleaker vision of performativity within neoliberalism. Performativity, language, narrative, and how they intertwine are at the heart of the novel, which explores how performances are often initiated in deference to the West and its capitalist investment in India's post-independence modernization. Roy casts the influence of the West in India as private American corporations and American cinema, and she sets one Indian family's intimate conflicts (what she terms "the Small Things") within the larger political impetuses for putting on a performance (what she labels "the Big Things"). These "Big Things" are constituted by India's mid-twentieth-century dependence on developmental loans from such entities as the World Bank, and Roy positions economic incentives as one—if not the—motivation behind performative utterances and actions. The influence of neoliberal ideology in post-independence India has notable local effects in the novel. First, the Kathakali dancers exemplify how Indian cultural practices and art have been irrevocably altered by continued economic degradation. The Kathakali are specifically performance artists whose livelihood and cultural standing have been exoticized and essentially put up for sale in order to attract Western tourists. Second, Roy creates an overt metaphorical rendering of how the neoliberalization of India's economy trickles down to affect everyday life. When a concessions vendor at a movie theater sexually abuses Estha, the young boy in the family, Roy establishes a symbolic representation of what

the World Bank and companies such as Coca-Cola have done to India's economic infrastructure and environment. Roy's political essays further clarify this overt metaphor, which points to the ubiquity of Western economic involvement that saturates local infrastructure and produces small-scale forms of trauma. These local forms of violence further foreclose the ability for someone such as Estha to locate meaningful existence beyond the violence of neoliberalism.

Roy highlights the entrance of neoliberal investment in India with the novel's setting by foregrounding how India has opened itself up to foreign investment and what effect that has had. *The God of Small Things* conveys an image of India similar to the one she excoriates in her essays, a nation where protections for the environment and human life are secondary to profits that can be made by welcoming Western corporations and accepting loans from the World Bank. In India, Roy reads the current "age of Empire" as a time when democracy has been replaced by neoliberal capitalism (*Public Power* 5), and she does not mince words on what the effect is politically. The World Bank's leaders, none of whom is democratically appointed, "make decisions on [India's] behalf" ("Come September" 75), and Roy has made a careful study of the violent consequences of such financial dependence.[30] Developing nations like India open

[30] Roy notes it is common for the World Bank to buy its way into nations' political processes with funding for development projects. For instance, with the Narmada Valley Project in India, the World Bank "was ready with its checkbook *before* any costs were computed, *before* any studies had been done, *before* anybody had any idea of what the human cost or the environmental impact of the dam would be" ("Greater" 28, emphases in original). Further, the World Bank also funds aid and development agencies that, in turn, fund NGOs to go into India and help fill gaps left by the closure of public services that frequently occurs in the wake of its reliance on World Bank funding. Roy identifies this as standard procedure for the World Bank: It creates a problem and then it provides loans to help finance the cleanup. As a case in point, Roy references how

> David Hopper, the World Bank's vice-president for South Asia [from 1978 to 1987], has admitted that the Bank does not usually include the cost of drainage in its irrigation projects in South Asia because irrigation projects *with* adequate drainage are just too

themselves to international investment, and "the unrestricted entry and exit of massive amounts of speculative capital … effectively dictates their economic policy," which enables institutions such as the World Bank to "virtually write" the rules for developing nations by buying their way in and forcing the direction of public policy (*Public Power* 21-22). In *The God of Small Things*, Roy underscores the environmental consequences as just one aspect of India's dependence on the World Bank. Estha and his sister Rahel's childhood home in Ayemenem is along a river "that smelled of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans" (*God* 14), and the river eventually becomes "just a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to sea" and contains "unadulterated factory effluents" (*God* 119). The nearly nonexistent river vanishes due to a saltwater barrage constructed downriver "in exchange for votes from the influential paddy-farmer lobby" that would control incoming salt water to produce "two harvests a year instead of one. More rice, for the price of a river" (*God* 118).

I will return to the role of the World Bank in *The God of Small Things* in a moment, but it is noteworthy how Roy uses her novel to underscore how India's land and resources are not the only things for sale. Other aspects of Indian life, like arts and culture, are also marketed for Western consumption, which Roy most compellingly conveys with her portrayal of the Kathakali dancers, performance artists who depict

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> expensive. *It costs five times as much to provide adequate drainage as it does to irrigate the same amount of land*. It makes the cost of a complete project appear unviable. ("Greater" 70, emphasis in original)

Yet the World Bank finances unviable projects anyway, destroying land and the livelihood of farmers, and then offers to loan money to the affected areas to finance the recovery, which places developing nations deeper into debt. This scenario happened in Pakistan with the Mangla dam in 1967 and the Tarbela dam in 1977 ("Greater" 71). Investment of capital from the World Bank into India, though, is "a miniscule fraction of the actual cut in public spending" (*Public Power* 42). As a result, India today "pays back more money to the Bank in interest and repayment installments than it receives from it," which Roy contends is the Bank's plan all along ("Greater" 29).

lengthy epic narratives from Hindu religious tradition. The Kathakali and their performance art have been swallowed up by economic concerns in deference to the buying power of the West, which diminishes their cultural relevance from within India. In Roy's novel, the Kathakali become little more than commodities and marketing tools used to facilitate the sale of other local products. For instance, Estha and Rahel's uncle, Chacko, budding capitalist that he is, uses the image of the Kathakali in an advertisement for the family's pickling business, Paradise Pickles & Preserves. He purposefully enlists this emblem of culture as an economic form of cultural appropriation, arguing it lends their pickled products a "Regional Flavor and would stand them in good stead when they entered the Overseas Market" (*God* 46). The Kathakali also appear at a Cochin Airport souvenir shop in the form of "papier-mâché masks" and on a "*Kerala Tourism Development Corporation*" sign (*God* 132-33). That Roy places the Kathakali in service to the tourism industry further points to the neoliberalization of Indian arts and culture. Indeed, there is a clear connection in the past half-century between the privatization and commodification of nature and the creation of new markets for medical tourism and ecotourism (Mosedale 13-15). Specifically with India, the state has been instrumental in branding the nation not as a developing country plagued by poverty but as a modern hub of ecotourism (Hannam and Reddy 81-82).

But these uses of the Kathakali image are only part of the picture. The neoliberal impulse to economize all things also alters the dancers' performance art in significant ways. Roy depicts the Kathakali visiting a five-star hotel each evening where Western "tourists [are] treated to truncated … performances ('Small attention spans,' the Hotel People explained to the dancers). So ancient stories were collapsed and amputated. Six-

hour classics were slashed to twenty-minute cameos" (Roy, *God* 121). Not that the hotel guests pay attention, though. The Kathakali are there to simply add a veneer of exoticized authenticity to the tourist's experience of India. In his careful study of the kathakali tradition, Phillip B. Zarrilli notes that this entrance of Western capital via tourism has significantly altered the structure and style of the dance since at least 1969, which is, not coincidentally, the same year much of Roy's novel is set in.[31] New, shorter performances have either been created or adapted specifically for foreign audiences. Zarrilli acknowledges that some of these edited-down versions carry honest attempts to present tourists with performances that still capture something of traditional Indian culture. Most, however, are "highly romantic/orientalist repackagings" that reductively present India as some mystical jewel of the East; further, it is not uncommon to find "inept performances by third-rate, ill-trained performers which capitalize on the naivete of foreign tourists willing to pay for just about anything that seems 'indigenous' while

[31] Roy's choice of 1969 allows her to place the events of the novel amid the historical backdrop of the rising Naxalite movement and show how Indian Marxism is little more than an empty performance in its own right. She explores why it is ineffective through the characters Chacko and Comrade Pillai, both of whom are more interested in their own financial or political gain than they are in combating economic inequality. Chacko turns Paradise Pickles into a capitalist factory and sleeps with its female workers, and his sister, Ammu, sees through him as nothing more than "the old zamindar mentality—a landlord forcing his attentions on women who depended on him for their livelihood" (*God* 63). Comrade Pillai's Marxist sincerity is compromised by his desire for political advancement. With a position open in the Legislative Assembly, he considers how he can cause Chacko's workers to form a labor union and give him a "future constituency" prior to the upcoming elections (*God* 114). Roy positions both men as "pharisaic" (*God* 266) precisely because their ostensible Marxism fails those who are economically and socially disenfranchised the most, untouchables like Velutha. Marxism fails Velutha because, card-carrying member though he is, economic concerns cannot overcome the caste system, and Roy chiefly criticizes how communism in India "never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community" (*God* 64). As a result, the "Marxists worked from *within* the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to" (*God* 115). Therefore, when Velutha turns to Pillai for help after being caught having an affair with Ammu, who is outside his caste, Pillai uses Marxist rhetoric to distance himself. He reminds Velutha the "Party was not constituted to support workers' indiscipline in their private life" and that the "[i]ndividual's interest is subordinate to the organization's interest" (*God* 271). For historical accounts of the Naxalite movement in India, see Sumanta Banerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari: A History of the Naxalite Movement in India*; Biplab Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*; and Prakash Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India*.

on a two-week sun, surf, and sand holiday" (Zarrilli 178). What Roy imagines here runs directly counter to the kind of politically-resistant potential within performativity that Butler envisions. Rather than "expand the boundaries of what is … culturally intelligible" (*Gender* 29), the Kathakali dancers change their art to conform to what a Western tourist might think is culturally intelligible. Nothing about their performance for the tourists is undertaken to establish an alternative mode of discourse; even if they were to try, Roy implies that the tourists would not even notice it anyway. The culturally intelligible space created for the Kathakali is to be background noise, a prop for a certain Western experience or reading of the stereotyped East. Roy indicates there is no way for their performance to speak into or speak against that new zone whose boundaries have been redefined by the work of incoming capital.

Accordingly, there is a utilitarian imperative behind the dancers' decision to exoticize themselves for tourists—namely, "to stave off starvation" (*God* 218). But Roy goes further by considering what happens with the Kathakali after a day of subjecting themselves to such embarrassment. Every night they "jettison their humiliation" over the "truncated swimming-pool performances" by returning to the Ayemenem temple "to ask pardon of their gods. To apologize for corrupting their stories. For encashing their identities. Misappropriating their lives" (*God* 218). They effect this atonement by performing their traditional dances uncut, and not for any audience—just themselves. Roy emphasizes how the Kathakali dancer was formerly held in high cultural esteem, but as India achieved independence and pursued industrial modernization, he became "unviable. Unfeasible. Condemned goods," and his children instead aim to enter a world of more Westernized positions and careers (*God* 219). But a Kathakali dancer, whose art

is his whole life, cannot simply enter the modern world and participate in it. So he becomes subservient to it, and in his despair, "he turns to tourism. He enters the market. He hawks the only thing he owns. The stories that his body can tell" (*God* 219). The Kathakali dancer's only option is to accept the commodifying imperatives of the market and further commodify himself.

As a result, he "becomes a Regional Flavor" (*God* 219), which is a key line where Roy connects the two separate instances of that term in her novel that are divided by more than two decades. If Chacko's use of the Kathakali dancers in his advertisement for Paradise Pickles was done to lend his products regional flavor, that act reappropriated the kathakali image, but not in a way that somehow subsumed the dancers themselves or their art. But in the shift from adding regional flavor to becoming regional flavor, Chacko's advertisement stands as an authoritative performative enunciation. It changes the cultural stance toward the Kathakali by refashioning them as a mere sidepiece of everyday life in Kerala, instead of a central aspect of its cultural and religious identity. By performatively establishing the Kathakali as simple commodities in service to his business' sales, Chacko, in a neoliberal turn, takes a formerly non-economic space of life in Kerala and economizes it as a tool in service to the market and his desire to one day enter an overseas market. Though that overseas plan never materializes for Paradise Pickles, Chacko's purpose in using the Kathakali as a regional flavor nevertheless ends up coming true later on when the far more powerful economic force of Western tourism restructures the meaning of the kathakali tradition.

However, by the later portion of the novel, the Kathakali no longer lend regional flavor; they have become it and, thus, have been completely objectified. My use of the

passive voice there is slightly disingenuous, though, for Roy suggests that the Kathakali exercise a form of limited agency in that change or what Jane Elliott calls a neoliberal form of "suffering agency" ("Suffering" 84), where neoliberal ideology may tout the all-important preservation of the individual's freedom to choose, but as neoliberal policies and practices generate greater inequalities across the globe, the choices left to people and communities are often few and not too promising. So while the Kathakali make the decision to enter the market and peddle their performance art, the freedom within that choice should hardly be overstated. The hotel chain presents the dancers' art as a regional flavor, but such an orientalized and exoticized artistic display only lends further ostensible authenticity to the prepackaged symbolic complex of what it is like to encounter the "real" India as a world traveler. The difficult task at hand now for the Kathakali dancer is "the reverse of an actor's struggle—not to *enter* a part but to escape it" (*God* 220, emphasis in original). Performance here is not a space of agential effort; it is to be subsumed by the neoliberal apparatus of Western tourism.[32]

This instance of economy-based cultural appropriation is also directly linked to the legacy of colonialism in India. This is evidenced by the location of the hotel that the

[32] Petri Pietiläinen argues that Roy's novel runs the risk of depending heavily on "a new kind of western imperialism … in the cultural sphere … promoting the idea of useful Otherness" (107). He suggests that *The God of Small Things* "shows how important the Western literary markets are for non-western writers" and how "third world literature, especially prose, might be in fact written primarily for the consumption of the Western market" (108). These arguments echo some of the concerns raised by Graham Huggan in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, and Roy has more recently responded to these types of arguments in *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, clarifying that she is well aware *all* texts—not just hers—circulate in problematic political ways due to the direct connection many private corporations have with the publishing world. Parama Sarkar notes that Roy knows her novel could be commodified in a way that plays to preexisting Western assumptions about India, and Sarkar argues that this Kathakali scene allows her to "construct her critique against globalization and hence repudiate potential accusations of deliberately inviting the western gaze" (228). Likewise, Alex Tickell suggests that Roy makes clear her "awareness of the involuntary, assimilative demand which global capital makes in its encounter with local postcolonial cultures" (112), whether that is with the Kathakali or her own novel.

Kathakali visit, which sits on a former rubber estate, what Roy terms the History House throughout the novel. Part of that house's history is on display on the grounds of the hotel, though it is hiding in plain sight. The estate's "old colonial bungalow" is still there, now "surrounded by smaller, older, wooden houses … that the hotel chain had bought from old families and transplanted" in order to display "[t]oy histories for rich tourists to play in" (*God* 120). Other older cultural artifacts are scattered about and labeled as if in a museum to form a symbolic complex that continues to give guests a feeling of authenticity while on the grounds of the hotel, despite the fact that developers "built a tall wall to screen off the slum and prevent it from encroaching" on the visitors' experience (*God* 119). Additionally, Roy presents this entire production as the final nail in the coffin of any effective Marxism within Kerala, for "old Communists … now worked as fawning bearers in colorful ethnic clothes" while serving drinks to the hotel guests (*God* 121).

The hotel also literally covers up and overwrites what the History House embodied in the late 1960s—failed Marxism and caste violence, for it is to the History House that Velutha, an untouchable, flees after being rejected by officials in the Communist Party. There he is beaten to death by Kerala police—possibly for his extra-caste affair with Estha and Rahel's mother, possibly for his Naxalite sympathies (it could be either; Roy leaves it ambiguous). While Velutha is being tortured, Roy calls it "History in live performance" as the policemen "[act] with economy" (*God* 293). The play on words with *economy* here signals the threat that Velutha and anyone like him represent in post-independence India. As a member of the Naxalite movement, Velutha, and any other sincere Marxist, poses a legitimate danger to India's—and the West's—

plans for modernization. Indeed, Roy notes elsewhere that, for "the wealthy, estate-owning (pickle-factory-running), feudal lords" in Kerala, "communism represented a fate worse than death" (*God* 64), because plenty of profits were to be made in a postcolonial India intent on modernizing and expanding its industrial and capitalist modes of production.

History is further in live performance when Estha and his family go to see *The Sound of Music*. At the theater, he is sexually abused by a concessions vendor, a man Roy simply names the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, which equates his existence to the products he sells, much like the commodified change the Kathakali dancer has undergone in the twentieth century. Roy structures this character as an overt metaphor for the World Bank, personifying the international lending group and its work in India in the guise of this one vendor. In this way, Roy creates a local and intimate treatment of the World Bank that corresponds to Bret Benjamin's arguments. Benjamin reminds us that, beyond public policy, the World Bank's effect on different aspects of culture within developing nations should not be understated, for it "affects … social forces" and shapes "the very idea of culture" by influencing "the practices and routines of everyday life" (xii). So while the World Bank and other similar financial institutions alter macroeconomic concerns, they also produce normative pressures that contribute to neoliberalism's cultural hegemony where individuals are forced to accept its decisions. Because of neoliberalism's cultural influence, the World Bank is not some "reified abstraction of global capitalism" but "a powerful political actor" that has a material effect in former colonies (Benjamin xxii). That materiality is captured by the refreshments for sale at the movie theater.

The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man embodies how the local (i.e., the Indian nation) can perform the oppressive work of the West (i.e., the World Bank's investments). This is represented by the presence of Coca-Cola behind the concessions counter. Coca-Cola in India is an example par excellence of a multinational corporation's complicated relationship with and influence in a nation's developing communities. The company has faced accusations of "creating water shortages, polluting groundwater and soil, and exposing its customers to toxic waste and pesticides" (Yaziji and Doh 115). The groundwater and pesticide accusations specifically connect to Coca-Cola's effect on agricultural communities. While the company has cut back on the amount of water it uses and partnered with water conservation companies, it continues to fight opposition within India.[33] Roy's placement of Coca-Cola in this scene at the theater alludes to how "commodities simultaneously bear witness to the exploitation and violence that bring them into existence" (Lutz 63). Notably, the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man offers Ammu a Coke when she takes Estha out of the theater a second time because he feels nauseous. She declines the drink, and when Estha tries to refuse the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's offer of free candies, Ammu says, "Take them, Estha … [d]on't be rude," before demanding, "Say thank you" (*God* 104). Not only is Estha forced to take what he does not want from the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, but the expectation is that Estha will be grateful for what the man behind the counter has to

[33] For further accounts of Coca-Cola's use of pesticides, see Margaret Burnett and Richard Welford, "Case Study: Coca-Cola and Water in India: Episode 2"; R. Harish and Bharathi S. Gopal, "Coca-Cola in India: A Responsible Corporate Citizen?"; and Neeraj Vedwan, "Pesticides in Coca-Cola and Pepsi: Consumerism, Brand Image, and Public Interest in a Globalizing India." On resistance to Coca-Cola's expansion, see Henrick Berglund, "The Popular Struggle against Coca-Cola in Plachimada, Kerala" and the *FRPT-FMCG Snapshot* articles. On allegations of groundwater depletion, see Jonathan Hills, "Coca-Cola and Water in India." And on Coca-Cola's attempts to address said groundwater depletion, see Alyssa Carroll, "'Have a Coke and a Smile': Is the Aqueduct Alliance Coca-Cola's Solution to Escape Future Liability for Groundwater Depletion?"

give. This depiction corresponds to Roy's aforementioned descriptions of the World Bank, which initiates projects and policies in India that the general public did not ask for but becomes burdened with all the same.

The imagery throughout this brief scene and its irony are significant. When the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man forces his penis into Estha's hand, Roy positions the World Bank and its influence within developing nations as one tantamount to sexual assault, to the irreversible trauma of people forcing themselves onto their victims and taking away their will and control.[34] The lyrics from the song "Maria" in *The Sound of Music* play in Estha's head, including the line "How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand?" right before he is abused. The answer is that Estha does so by force. There is no agency here. Estha "held [the man's penis] because he had to" (*God* 98). The man's ejaculation into Estha's hand is self-serving, neither procreative nor productive, other than producing within Estha the perpetual fear that the man could come out to his family's house and assault him again. Yet the World Bank's self-narrative is one of productive development. Roy plays with this word "development" in this scene, even if she does not actually use the word. Development is the ostensible goal of the World Bank's funds, yet Roy emphasizes throughout her novel that the material results of the group's involvement in India is environmental havoc. And as far as Estha goes, he exists in a state of arrested development for the rest of his life because of the abuse. All that develops from the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's shared resources is a brutalized investment that lacks any sort of return, and it places Estha forever in its debt.

[34] For an excellent reading of how Roy situates trauma as the fallout from globalization, see Joanne Lipson Freed, "The Ethics of Identification: The Global Circulation of Traumatic Narrative in Silko's *Ceremony* and Roy's *The God of Small Things*."

Estha becomes numbed to the world almost immediately, and it is because of that trauma that he and Rahel learn they can never navigate the Western world with the kind of ease that someone such as Amy Dunne does in *Gone Girl*. Upon returning to the theater after being abused, Estha understands that Baron Von Trapp in *The Sound of Music* could never love him or Rahel because they are not "[c]lean children, like a packet of peppermints" the way his seven children are (*God* 100). The wealthy, picture-perfect, and White setting onscreen does not become a form of media that creates a powerful symbolic complex and constitutes reality, like the allure of film and television does for Nick in *Gone Girl*. Here, instead, the kind of logic displayed on the screen is "the process by which the children internalize the racist, neo-colonial ideals that view them as inferior to white Europeans" (Lutz 70). Estha and Rahel do not engage with a form of media and determine a way to use it as an outlet for agency. Roy does not allow for the productive and performative possibilities visible earlier within Jane's documentary, You's self-help books, or Amy's fake diary. In the same way that the World Bank suggests that India is making progress toward greater development, its involvement largely holds the former colony back from recovering after its long history of colonization. Likewise, Estha looks to *The Sound of Music* and realizes he could never be part of such a polished world after what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man has done to him, and this is devastating for Estha to realize since he "pretended not to love [the Von Trapp children], but he did. He loved them" and the beautiful, clean lives they lived (*God* 100). Roy additionally suggests this sort of violence is unavoidable. In the theater lobby, "the orangedrinks were waiting. The lemondrinks were waiting"—everything, along with the Coca-Cola, is "waiting" (*God* 96). Waiting for Estha are the

products created by Western multinational corporations, produced locally, disseminated throughout developing countries, and sold to their citizens as part of the neoliberal common sense rationale that it is best for a developing nation to open itself to privatized industry. The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man obfuscates the higher powers that orchestrate and execute such transnational financial exchanges, since he is one of the locals, but regardless of his role as a conduit and the invisibility of financial power, the result is still as real and tangible as Estha's abuse.

It is worth noting two things here—how Roy's explicit politics in her novel are similar to the didacticism in Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* and how Roy's polemical writing stands in stark contrast to Flynn's more muted strategies in *Gone Girl*. Both Roy and Ozeki place a political urgency in their texts by pursuing narrative styles that directly confront the reader in order to underscore as clearly as possible the dire economic and cultural consequences at play in the India and Japan of their respective novels. In this way, Roy plainly conveys an unequivocal message: Nothing good has come from neoliberalism in India. Roy ends up fashioning her novel in a way that sharply distinguishes it from a text such as Flynn's, for in *The God of Small Things* characters do not have the luxury of the kinds of obscure political or financial dependence that Amy displays in *Gone Girl*. Amy's utilization of aspects of the housing market and plasmapheresis seems almost incidental at times, as if she does not truly understand the economic or political implications of those enterprises. In some ways, she is quite aloof, which Flynn emphasizes when Amy at one point does not know how much a gallon of milk costs. That same blasé attitude is wholly absent from *The God of Small Things* in such a way that Roy suggests neoliberal practices are constitutive of the very fabric of

everyday life in India, and if we, as readers, were to come close to thinking otherwise, Roy is quick to place the neoliberalization of India on the surface of her text. It is inescapable, is never in the background, and hardly provides agential space to those caught within its influence.

Indeed, Estha, Rahel, and their family are incapable of avoiding conscription into certain predetermined scripts. They prepare a lengthy performance for Chacko's British ex-wife Margaret and daughter Sophie when they come to visit. The effort to receive them is titled the "Day of the Play" (*God* 130), with the front verandah of their house possessing "the dignity of a stage" (*God* 158). Their performance carries both political and economic pressures. For Ammu, it is imperative that Estha and Rahel make a good impression. She wants "a smooth performance," the kind that would be worthy of a prize if there were an "Indo-British Behavior Competition" (*God* 139). Ammu is painfully conscious of the colonial history between their two nations and does not want anything to happen that would make her or her family appear backwards in Margaret or Sophie's eyes. Because of the orientalist and exoticized stereotypes of India, Ammu loathes the possibility that they would be expected to behave like "some godforsaken tribe that's just been discovered" (*God* 171). But the suggestion that Estha and Rahel are theoretically taking part in an Indo-British Behavior Competition recenters the capitalist pressures of this moment. Being visited by family from England can never be only a visit. The history between these two countries is too fraught and violent for it to be anything but a competition.

Accordingly, Roy casts the family's performance for Margaret and Sophie in financial terms. When Chacko presents Sophie to his mother, Mammachi, she draws her

close to her nearly-blind eyes "[t]o read her like a check. To check her like a banknote" (*God* 166). Later, the family's cook mistakenly tells Rahel, "When [Sophie] grows up … she'll raise our salaries" (*God* 175). Though there is certainly no likelihood of this happening, these two moments still reveal the economic imperative behind the family's performance. Even though Margaret and Sophie are part of their extended family, they still represent the imperialist power and authority represented by England that elicits deference. Their shared colonial history can never be divorced from its capitalist prowess, now channeled through the ability of former colonial powers to affect developing nations through their lending backed by accumulated liquidity. The only way to approach, read, and understand Margaret and Sophie is to regard them like checks or banknotes. Additionally, the family members conscripted into this Play do not control when, where, and how their performances take place because "the Play went with" Sophie wherever she walks about (*God* 177). She and Margaret bring with them everything England represents to India's history, and Estha, Rahel, and their family cannot refuse to follow the script.[35]

The Play, however, falls apart, and Roy envisions a larger ripple effect connected to this disappointment. The family does not play their polished roles as they had hoped,

[35] Incidentally, Velutha is the only one who can successfully exit the Play and the pressure of performance. He is even able to extend that freedom to Rahel when she "slip[s] out of the Play and [goes] to him" (*God* 166). Rahel looks to him for reassurance outside of the Play, asking, "*We're* not here, are we? We're not even Playing," and Velutha responds, "That is Exactly Right … [w]e're not even Playing" (*God* 173, emphasis in original). Devon Campbell-Hall suggests that "Roy's representation of Velutha as . . . pushing against the restrictive boundaries challenges not only the traditional caste distinctions but also postmodern distinctions of globalized class systems and systems of production" (53). In other words, minimal though his appearance in the story is, Velutha could be an agent of productive change due to his disregard for economic and cultural norms. However, Velutha's brutal murder suggests that, while he may be able to "exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility," as Butler puts it, he cannot "effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible" (*Gender* 29).

oftentimes becoming frustrated with one another and bickering in front of their guests. Roy observes, "The Play had gone bad. Like pickle in the monsoon" (*God* 139), explicitly describing the success of Paradise Pickles as somehow contingent on the success of their performances, thus raising the performance to the level of a business venture. This culinary simile for the Play connects to the way Mammachi's first batch of pickled goods "had absorbed oil and expanded, making the bottles leak," a problem she never is able to fix. Even "after all those years, Paradise Pickles' bottles still leaked a little. It was imperceptible, but they did still leak," and "Mammachi wondered whether she would ever master the art of perfect preservation" (*God* 159). Here Roy makes an overt allusion to Salman Rushdie's classic novel of post-independence India *Midnight's Children*, where each chapter is represented in the narrative as a jarred and sealed pickled food, into which Rushdie's narrator, Saleem Sinai, preserves the memories of his life. But Roy alters Rushdie's metaphor significantly. Saleem's intent with pickling is to lock in memories, a way to preserve his—and thereby India's—history. Mammachi's (and later Chacko's) pickles, however, are housed in bottles that do not seal properly, meaning that anything they symbolize will spoil before too long and have to be thrown out. Saleem's pickle bottles stand for an attempt to represent the moment of Indian history at independence. They are authoritative, agential inscriptions, while Roy connects Mammachi's bottles to a different site of enunciation—the family's performativity driven by economic concerns, their continual efforts to ingratiate themselves to the modernizing work of neoliberal capitalism in India. It is a performance Roy suggests they cannot avoid, and if "the art of perfect preservation" requires a performance that has not "gone bad," the spoilage of Mammachi's bottles further implies

that these efforts will be impossible. Indeed, by the end of the novel, the Communist Party shuts down Paradise Pickles, and even more "rice fields [are] sold (along with [the family's] mortgages) to pay off the bank loans" that Chacko initially applied for to modernize the business (*God* 266). They lose nearly everything.

Performances in *The God of Small Things* are ineffectual, and Roy extends the absence of agency within performativity across her novel to broader areas of commerce. A brief scene at a train station narrates different images of economic inequality—underpaid porters, homeless people, starving people, beggars missing limbs. Roy labels the station "Society's circus. Where, with the rush of commerce, despair came home to roost and hardened slowly into resignation" (*God* 285). In a place overrun with attempts at neoliberal modernization, all of society becomes performative in that it resembles a circus or carnival of chaos, and Roy, like Percy, argues that these performative effects of the economy propagate the absence of hope. Percy, for his part, claims that attempts to extricate oneself from the prepackaged world of the symbolic complex will only meet frustration. While "seeking an immediate encounter with being," one will likely find instead "desperate impersonation," and Percy underscores that the façade of the performed complex signifies the loss of hope (52). With her description of the train station, Roy does not envision what Butler describes as a productive possibility of performativity—the "difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure" (*Bodies* 241). One reason for this impossibility is that a debilitating economic repetition is at play, where the deference of everything to the market "generates a contrasting cycle of repetition that, unlike the cycle of the natural world, creates social paralysis" (Lutz 69). In *The God of Small Things*, militant colonial occupation may be

over, but a new force of domination has filled that void, one that continues to be irrevocably detrimental.

If J. L. Austin was reluctant to discuss the role of ambiguity or equivocation within performative utterances, both Flynn and Roy foreground different forms of ambivalence over the success of performativity within neoliberalism. *Gone Girl* envisions performance as an open-ended pursuit, one that provides ample space for agential choices; hence, Amy is largely successful in achieving her goals. But the only way she can construct her performative narrative is to subvert cultural common sense by taking well-established forms of meaning and knowledge and twisting them, so much so that her dogged efforts to stage her own murder would be difficult for anyone to fully grasp. Amy's actions are hardly, to reference Butler again, "culturally intelligible" (*Gender* 29). In this way, Flynn suggests that a space outside of any hegemonic cultural common sense can be reached performatively, but the stability of that space will have a very short shelf life. The fact that Amy returns to Nick and their life together and secures a lucrative book deal to help further market herself starkly emphasizes just how difficult it is to extricate oneself from the performative pressures of neoliberalism. If anything, Amy's actions only further entrench her within neoliberal logics and structures. Not that such an exit is really ever Amy's goal to begin with. She wants money, wants more of it, and wants back what she and Nick lost in the financial crash. Her performative work, geared as it is toward naming a new reality into existence, is always supported and guided by the apparatuses of neoliberalism. Indeed, it is merely a happy accident that she is robbed of all her money while on the run and has the opportunity to experience a truer

sense of freedom, if even for just a moment. But the market inevitably calls her back; she never really meant to leave.

But even Amy's performativity, with its seemingly successful execution, is never an option in *The God of Small Things*. Roy's novel presents an environment where both neoliberal values and the rigid caste system—the text's different indomitable forms of cultural common sense—combine into a deterministic landscape. Any performance in Roy's narrative is initiated with the hegemonic reach of Western capital in mind. The performances are deeply ingrained, to the point that Roy situates local individuals like the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man as the ones metaphorically carrying out the more intimate and traumatic work of transnational lending groups like the World Bank. Additionally, through Chacko and his efforts with Paradise Pickles & Preserves, Roy tracks how the continued spread of capitalist practices affect indigenous cultural forms such as performances of the kathakali tradition. Thus, *The God of Small Things* envisions and narrates Jameson's familiar observation as a novel that "attempt[s] to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world" ("Future" 76).

Though a fuller examination is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that both Flynn and Roy consider how the different expressions of performativity in their novels are received by intended audiences. Amy watches the evening news like a hawk to gauge how her plan is unfolding and how the discovery of the fake diary affects Nick's ability to maintain his innocence in her apparent murder. Similarly, we as readers are made to take note of the ways Western tourists do or do not pay attention to the Kathakali dancers, as well as what Estha and Rahel think as they watch the repentant, unabridged Kathakali dance back at the Ayemenem temple one evening. Artistic

production and performance are fairly meaningless without their reception by audiences, and if art can be significantly determined and influenced by neoliberal ideology, we must also explore how it affects artistic reception if we are to construct a fuller understanding of artistic engagement within neoliberalism. This very subject, the focus of the next chapter, has been taken up recently by Latin American novelists who question how the acts of reading and interpretation are, in their own right, critical responses to neoliberalism.

CHAPTER V

RECEIVING THE NEOLIBERAL TEXT IN ALEJANDRO ZAMBRA'S *MULTIPLE CHOICE* AND SAMANTA SCHWEBLIN'S *FEVER DREAM*

Recent work on literature and neoliberalism has taken up the issue of genre to query how representation functions or changes within the context of the increasingly immaterial movement of capital. At the core of these concerns is what it means to use art to represent how financialization has made the movement and work of capital more invisible. Different terms have been used to describe these changes in generic conventions. Some novels embody a "microeconomic mode" where "life-interest" drives the narrative and "constitutes the reterritorialization that accompanies the deterritorialization of the subject in contemporary capital" (Elliott, "Microeconomic" 219); other novels resemble "bureaucratic narrative[s]" whose characters become "administrative subject[s]," which "emphasizes the depersonalized and routinized repetition of formulaic rhetoric" (Johansen, "Bureaucracy" 417). Within film, "Korea's IMF cinema" and its utilization of CGI monsters to metaphorize social ills not only depicts "the anxieties surrounding today's massive capital flows and seismic geopolitical shifts but also speaks to questions of [the] digital materiality" that has replaced the material costumed or animatronic monsters of past films (Jeon 88). Other filmmakers reshape the horror genre to portray "the increasing inextricability of horror and securitized credit" in relation to the 2008 mortgage crisis, and when these films refuse to reconcile the conflict, they explore how the "collapse of credibility and mutuality in the economy also entails a crisis in the ways culture is able to write—and underwrite—

economic ideology" (McClanahan, "Dead"). These scholars describe how artists have responded to the social and cultural changes neoliberalism generates, and implicit within these arguments is the suggestion that readers and viewers are cognizant of these changes as well. That is to say, there is an underlying faith in an audience's critical reception of a politically motivated novel or horror film.

However, it is not uncommon for literary studies of neoliberalism to focus more on the text itself than its reception. As Terry Eagleton notes, literary theories of the reader and reader reception have long played second fiddle to textual analysis, despite the fact that literature is meaningless if not for the reader's interaction with it (64). This chapter seeks to begin to fill that gap by turning to the subject of consumption or reception, the follow-up to artistic production in Theodor Adorno's concerns over the commodification of aesthetics. Within the context of contemporary neoliberalism, I trace how reception and, more specifically, reading are often rendered as forms of consumerism, but I consider two novels that show how reception is also a politically significant act. Alejandro Zambra's *Multiple Choice* (*Facsímil*) and Samanta Schweblin's *Fever Dream* (*Distancia de rescate*) are two experimental novels chiefly invested in querying what readerly reception becomes within neoliberalism by telling stories about the reception of neoliberalism itself. Each narrative envisions in different ways how the reception of neoliberalism becomes a creative and even communal event where readers work together to establish new forms of knowledge that critique the damaging work of neoliberal ideology. By doing this, Zambra and Schweblin also create stories that invite the reader's participation, a move that places them within a long tradition of literary playfulness that extends back to some of the most notable Latin

American writers—Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, and Carlos Fuentes, among others. Similar to the aforementioned scholars, I read Zambra and Schweblin as using their texts to experiment with genre in ways that interrogate the work of neoliberalism within their specific cultural contexts, but with the added caveat that both Zambra and Schweblin's novels produce a meta-reflection over what reception becomes within neoliberalism.

I choose these recent Latin American novels because they come from specific transnational neoliberal contexts. Zambra is from Chile and Schweblin is from Argentina, two nations that have complicated, brutal histories with the transnational export and forced importation of neoliberalism via the installation of right-wing dictatorships, and these histories inform the content and form of each novel.[1] For instance, Zambra writes *Multiple Choice* as a standardized test, copying the form of the exam he was required to take while living under Augusto Pinochet's regime. The novel presents literature and reading as wholly saturated by the neoliberalization of education and knowledge, yet it also plays with the form of the standardized test to show how social and cultural meaning can be experimented with in the multiple choices open to the reader with each question. Zambra's parodying form breaks the fourth wall frequently to address the reader with the questions or answers, and this encourages collaborative meaning-making by revising the form of the standardized test, recasting its monolithic authority, and turning it into a space that critiques how neoliberal policies have affected

[1] Though Argentina and Chile have similar starting points for the growth of neoliberalism in their nations, their paths have diverged in the past 40 years. Tomás Undurraga explains how capitalism has developed a stronger hegemonic hold in Chile than in Argentina in "Neoliberalism in Argentina and Chile: Common Antecedents, Divergent Paths."

Chilean communities. Yet even as Zambra explores these possibilities, he simultaneously casts doubt over how politically significant a reader's agency is.

Schweblin constructs *Fever Dream* as a neoliberal horror story, where the effects of corporate agribusiness in Argentina play out in frightening ways. As the main characters, David and Amanda, try to pinpoint the moment Amanda was poisoned by agrichemicals on a soy farm, the novel interrogates the form of neoliberalism itself and how it affects the way stories are told. I contend Schweblin uses the characters' interpretations to query what it means to represent neoliberalism in artistic form as well as how to read it. It is telling that Amanda and David disagree over what the most important moment is surrounding her poisoning and, therefore, how her story should be constructed through the act of interpretation. Through Amanda and David's collaborative reconstruction of Amanda's poisoning, they query what the most significant part of a neoliberal story is. *Fever Dream*, then, eschews the notion that reading is primarily a consumptive act; instead, it prefigures the ontological immediacy of the interpretive community that reading can offer—that is, reading with others is vital to making sense of our movement and being in a world dominated by neoliberalism.

Before turning to the novels, I first consider how the ubiquity of neoliberal ideology has reshaped our understanding of consumerism broadly and reading practices specifically. On the one hand, these changes re-entrench preexisting assumptions about what the "right" forms of literature are (i.e., genres of high distinction, texts that translate into the most lucrative forms of cultural capital). Given neoliberalism's often-totalizing reach, an individual's interpretive engagement with art is certainly not immune to becoming just another economic act. If part of literature's movement around the globe

is facilitated by its status as a commodity, artistic reception unavoidably is consumptive to an extent. Neoliberal ideology positions consumption as one exercise of the freedom of choice to participate in the market; therefore, artistic reception can also be conceptualized as a form of self-investment, part of the entrepreneurial spirit that drives economic subjects to increase their social worth by engaging with the cultural capital that art offers.[2] On the other hand, I consider how more traditional theories of reception from the likes of Wolfgang Iser, Roland Barthes, and Stanley Fish both confirm and complicate certain neoliberal values. Particularly salient for this study is Fish's consideration that reception most successfully and productively takes place within a community of collaboration, a claim that challenges the neoliberal emphasis on individualistic self-investment.

That is to say, while literature and reading can certainly lend themselves to the work of propping up *homo oeconomicus*, literary reception and interpretation are not totalized in such a way, either. It is the latter possibility I consider through my examination of Zambra and Schweblin, both of whom, I argue, depict how artistic

[2] While there is little consensus over the extent to which the economy has influence on culture (and vis-a-versa), it has long been understood that artistic reception is caught within the work of the market's influence. On the one hand, to view or read art is to consume, which is to say that the viewer or reader is on the receiving end of the processes of literary production by purchasing or exchanging art. In this sense, to be a reader is just one of many behaviors that contribute to the makeup of *homo oeconomicus*. On the other hand, as noted in chapter two with Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, reading also carries the potential of enabling the reader to participate in the work of literary production. To consume is also to produce in a creative and collaborative manner, not merely to use up what one has purchased. The discourse surrounding the "cultural economy," initially rooted in Adorno and Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical arguments, has since spawned a diverse conversation across academic disciplines. For arguments over whether culture has a greater effect on the economy or vice versa, see Paul du Gay and Michael Pryke, *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life* and Andy C. Pratt, "Beyond Resilience: Learning from the Cultural Economy." Others have called for a return to Bourdieu's work on the classist function of taste within artistic reception; see Sarah Hinde and Jane Dixon, "Reinstating Pierre Bourdieu's Contribution to Cultural Economy Theorizing." More recently, Carolyn Hardin has argued that disciplinary methods from cultural studies would be beneficial in helping the academy better understand the political work of financial activity; see "The Politics of Finance: Cultural Economy, Cultural Studies and the Road Ahead."

reception is itself a politically significant response to neoliberalism. In both *Multiple Choice* and *Fever Dream*, reception is distinct from actual reading in the sense that the characters in each novel are not reading books; however, they are engaging with and trying to make sense of the effects of neoliberalism, meaning that neoliberalism becomes the text itself that is received and interpreted in these narratives. For Zambra, reading is an act of collaborative meaning-making predicated on playful experimentation with artistic form that invites the reader to participate. For Schweblin, reading is a catalyst for political action where the reader is encouraged to dissect and critique the violence of neoliberalism. In both novels, the writers' experimentation with genre is the vehicle for such political critique.

Literary Reception and Consumerism within Neoliberalism

Cultural concerns over artistic reception and genre have long been tied together within the world of literature, where the kind of literature one reads has often been viewed as a cultural source for economic and social self-betterment. Since the early eighteenth century, people in middle and upper classes have been encouraged to fill their ever-increasing leisure time with more refined hobbies, ones taken up with the arts and "polite literature" (Woodmansee 88). By that, critics meant books that led the reader to a deeper "reflection and meditation," not genres devoted to "entertainment and diversion" (Woodmansee 90). The concern was that such middle- or lowbrow reading would lead to numerous books being consumed, but few actually digested and absorbed.[3] A person's

[3] For more on the great "reading debate" (90) of the 1700s in Germany, see Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (specifically chapter four). Historically, there has been a misleading understanding of what it actually means to consume, with scholars long assuming that

reading selections, then, have the potential to become a weighty cultural signifier of social status, both in terms of how readers think of themselves and how others view those readers. It is plain to see, then, that reading (and its cultural and economic significance via its connection to consumerist concerns) is not some new development and, therefore, cannot be attributed to the rise of neoliberal ideology. However, the extent to which reading and reception are regarded as possessing cultural importance help to lend them as ready participants in the neoliberal drive to economize and commodify nearly all aspects of life. Indeed, sociologists and literary theorists note how both consumerism and reading practices have become neoliberalized in unique ways, which are important arguments to take into consideration.

One way that contemporary forms of consumerism bolster different aspects of neoliberal ideology is visible in the rise of the "enterprising consumer," a figure that is markedly entrepreneurial, competitive, and happy to demonstrate these characteristics in

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the process of using goods is entirely different from the processes that produced those goods. Janice A. Radway argues that this mistaken view stems from the original meaning and use of the word consumption: "to refer to fire or to other destructive natural forces which annihilated the elements upon which they acted" ("Reading" 8). The problem here, especially in relation to consuming literature, is that reading is rarely a one-time event that leaves the physical materials of the book exhausted. Given the sheer number of used bookstores in the US alone, reading is certainly not consumptive in the original sense of the word, since a physical copy of a book lives on long after it has been read once, twice, or even three times. Yet even so, "the metaphor [of reading-as-consuming] has been taken too literally," and within this misunderstanding, Radway locates the war waged over which books count as "serious" literature and which ones are regarded as nothing more than mindless entertainment ("Reading" 9). The well-worn idea here is that mass-produced texts are less nourishing in light of how they lend themselves to being quickly consumed because of their subject matter—romance, mystery/thriller, horror, etc.

The anxieties over the act of reading and, more importantly reading the "right" kinds of literature have been covered extensively, especially in regards to early US history. See Steven Fink and Susan S. Williams, *Reciprocal Influences: Literary Production, Distribution, and Consumption in America*; Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A Radway, *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940*; Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas, *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers' Interactions with Literature, 1800-1950*; and Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public*. This is a debate that continues today in a broader context among more "elite" literary figures as well as, notably, within the general public: see Arthur Krystal, "Easy Writers"; Lev Grossman, "Literary Revolution in the Supermarket Aisle: Genre Fiction Is Disruptive Technology"; Joshua Rothman, "A Better Way to Think about the Genre Debate"; and Neil Gaiman and Kazuo Ishiguro's conversation in the *New Statesman*, "Let's Talk about Genre."

the public sphere (Brooks and Wee 218). This specific form of *homo oeconomicus* is predicated on an "achievement model" of consumption (Brooks and Wee 221), where the consumer's success is something to be celebrated. Further, new forms of consumer citizenship, what are known as relationship management marketing (RMM) or "cause marketing," are promoted in business schools, where the consumer's purchasing power is presented as simultaneously capable of benefiting social causes (Cabrera and Williams 350). What makes RMM neoliberal is its appeal to the responsibility of consumers while also promoting the idea that their participation in the free market will generate broader social change (Cabrera and Williams 351).[4] These contemporary forms of consumerism fit within Michel Foucault's conceptualization of neoliberal governmentality, where the emphasis on governing the self replaces the governance of the population, what Foucault terms "conducting the conduct" of others (186). Sam Binkley, however, argues that consumerism within neoliberalism is never so cleanly mapped, since the "economic

[4] There are significant possible consequences with this type of consumer citizenship, given its highly individualized structure compared to an older Keynesian model that took the larger social good as its focus:

> This neoliberal model of consumer citizenship has potentially disastrous implications for a democratic society. Because businesses privilege the social concerns of wealthy and elite consumers, society will never address issues such as stable employment, living wages, and universal health care. Under the regime of neoliberal consumer citizenship, these issues can enter the public agenda only if they become the concerns of profitable customers, which is unlikely granted their privileged position in a class stratified society. (Cabrera and Williams 363)

Not all agree with Cabrera and Williams' negative assessment, though. Kim Humphrey tracks the "deep political ambiguities of ethical consumption" that can form "an opposition to the neoliberal," though admittedly in "largely incremental" ways (99). Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser contend that, though consumer activism may be a byproduct of neoliberalism, it does not mean that political efficacy and consumerism have to be diametrically opposed (13). Henry Jenkins also notes how culture jamming has evolved into forms of "fan activism" that have been successfully "deployed toward explicitly political ends" (147). Similarly, Rob Shields argues that consumers can challenge power systems through their buying habits, to the point that consumption becomes an active process where both the self and society are created via the consumer's appropriation of different styles and codes that turns into something else entirely; see "Spaces for the Subject of Consumption." See also Steven Miles, "The Neoliberal City and the Pro-Active Complicity of the Citizen Consumer"; Sally Robinson, *Authenticity Guaranteed: Masculinity and the Rhetoric of Anti-Consumerism in American Culture*; and Colin C. Williams*, A Commodified World? Mapping the Limits of Capitalism*.

objectives plotted by market researchers and finance ministers" cannot accurately explain how consumers are motivated or motivate themselves as rational, responsibilized subjects (351). Binkley suggests this is because the mentalities and habits that govern an individual's purchasing ability are often less regimented than any concept of governmentality might hypothesize, what with the "expressive and ephemeral dispositions" involved in poor credit, impulse buys, and taking on unnecessary risk (352). Consumerism is less "instrumentally ordered" and more "playful," a process encouraged by the seeming separation of consumption from production (Binkley 353). Risk, however, is not outside the purview of governmentalities, since taking on risk is a key component of the contemporary financial landscape. Even if, as Binkley argues, theories of governmentality fail to accurately account for the logics of consumption, the neoliberal logic of responsibilization still remains and explains away the consumer's loose spending as a lack of self-control, the failure to successfully conduct his/her own conduct.

Beyond the broad scope of consumerism, others have argued how literary reception itself has been neoliberalized. Rachel Greenwald Smith observes how certain assumptions we carry about what literature can "do" mirror neoliberal social expectations, such as the belief that literature is most meaningful because of the "affective hypothesis" surrounding it (i.e., that reading stories of others' personal experiences can increase our compassion and empathy) (2). Smith contends this hypothesis is specifically neoliberal because it responsibilizes the reader as an entrepreneur of the self who is "strategically networking" their feelings in different "emotional alliances" (2). Since the development of the self is a crucial imperative of

neoliberalism, emotions and what one does with them become "resources to develop and manage," and feelings then turn into "yet another material foundation for market-oriented behavior" (Smith 6). Smith's points echo the eighteenth-century mindset surrounding the worthwhile nature of reading that Woodmansee describes. However, Smith adds that reading is no longer just a hobby or discipline in the twenty-first century that, if the right titles and genres are consumed, helps signpost one's belonging in a certain socioeconomic class; reception becomes a kind of discipline to manage, like stocks in a portfolio of the self. Reading becomes more than a marker of social class; it also has the potential to mark a social conscience. This is yet another example of neoliberal self-conduct that helps place and map the economic subject, and it is why Smith rejects Jameson's argument that artistic reception helps people locate themselves within the massive map of global capitalism's reach so as to better establish agency within it. For Jameson, art enables a person to understand at least some of the capitalist space they live within and to then critically interrogate it ("Cognitive" 349). He calls for formalist experimentation to aid the viewer or reader's cognitive mapping, while others have called for a mapping of affective experience of the reader.[5] Smith argues, though, that both forms of mapping still play into neoliberalism's responsibilization of subjects. Individuals are now bombarded with all kinds of information, data, and content that encourage "the cultivation of subjects who can locate themselves" within a system and then "make smart entrepreneurial decisions" (Smith 78).[6]

[5] See Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*.

[6] For example, some writers' attempts to metatextually reveal their role behind the curtain as the author are not as successful as we may think because they are simultaneously "emotionally absorptive"; texts like these "[mirror] the neoliberal dynamics of agency by appearing to offer freedom from the constraints of various systems" even as they also dictate to readers how they should feel about what they are reading

This idea that one's connection with literature can help to cultivate a certain refined and cultured version of the self has long been part of general attitudes toward reading. Pierre Bourdieu famously argues that "consumers of cultural goods, and their taste for them, are produced" (1), the implication being that the reception of a material good, such as a work of art, plays a significant role in shaping how we understand the consumer. Therefore, two processes of production take place when art is consumed: the initial production of the artwork itself but, more than that, the reception or consumption of that artwork also produces an end-product—the recipient or consumer. Bourdieu identifies significant social stakes within the struggle Woodmansee describes. The dispute over highbrow versus lowbrow literature is tantamount to a clash over what constitutes "cultural nobility" (Bourdieu 2). Within this dispute is the clear potential for a classist divide, which Bourdieu strongly criticizes, and he specifically lambastes the postmodern turn toward "art which imitates art" (3). While others argue that such art can be read as a response to and even protest of the pervasive effect of late capitalism on culture, as discussed in chapter two, Bourdieu suggests this critique could be lost on the reader or viewer. This is because self-referential art has a deep sense of its own history, and an informed engagement with that art necessitates an understanding of that artistic history. The so-called "naïve spectator" potentially will not have the "cultural competence" to grasp what artists are doing with their art—for a variety of reasons: lack of education, cultural difference, or fewer economic opportunities (Bourdieu 4).

(Smith 79). That is to say, the postmodern form of directly addressing the reader can be more limiting than liberating.

Bourdieu seems to suggest that some people lack the intellectual capacity to comprehend what an artist is doing in a self-reflexive artwork, a claim we should regard with skepticism. Yet at the same time, his point that a culturally normative respect for high forms of art can increase social and classist divisions is worth remembering, for a key aspect of this classist divide is simply one of access, where many people do not have sustained "contact with works of art" (Bourdieu 4).[7] Bourdieu's data analysis confirmed that upper classes do have the educational and financial means to appreciate and understand art about art, while working classes prefer art that is more representational and about the "ordinary circumstances of life" (5). Behind this separation in artistic taste is a chiefly economic rationale. High art invites and encourages a "pure gaze" that "give[s] primacy to that of which the artist is master"—issues of form or style and how they have changed throughout the centuries (Bourdieu 3). Therefore, hyperreal art about art rarely deals with day-to-day experiences and conflicts that someone from the working class might know all too well. This pure gaze—of the artist and the privileged receiving audience—is supremely ironic in that it distances itself from the world because of the desire to avoid feeling the terror of economic necessity; this distancing effect is most apparent in the aestheticization of common objects and practices—clothes, cooking, etc.—which can divest them of their useful function (Bourdieu 5).[8] The

[7] It is worth noting here that John Fiske argues that these classist debates quickly turn from the political to the personal by becoming more about the subjects in each social division or class to the point that "critical discrimination" carries "a dimension of social discrimination" (103).
[8] As a contemporary example, consider how the Western demand for the "super-food" quinoa has had a negative effect on indigenous Latin American communities that can no longer afford the rising prices of a crop that has long been a staple part of their diets. See Timothy Keen, "The Battle for Quinoa: The Bittersweet Reality of Globalization."

creation and pursuit of taste, then, creates a tension in artistic reception across classes between style and function, luxury and necessity.

What Bourdieu's research helps to clarify is how there is an attendant economic value to certain forms of literature, a value that is economic because of how it quickly translates into cultural forms of class distinction. Though Bourdieu does not reference or pretend to be studying neoliberal ideology, we can understand his arguments on cultural forms of distinction and the cultivation of taste via one's reading choices as correlating to certain neoliberal values. Indeed, similar to what Smith describes, Bourdieu notes how literature itself becomes a form of self-investment, a way to distinguish oneself from those who are not well read. Within both Bourdieu's arguments and a neoliberal approach to the socio-cultural significance of reading, there is the implicit understanding that literature "does" something for the reader. This conviction is also at the heart of reception theory, but the difference between its approach to reading and a neoliberal rendering of reading is how reception theory stresses the importance of the reader's agency and social situation while interpreting texts. In other words, the political significance of reading is at the forefront of reception theory, not its economic import. Reception theorists, that is, do not understand the reception of literature as an investment in *homo oeconomicus*, but as an act that further places oneself within society. To reference Anna Kornbluh's assessment of literature, mentioned earlier in chapter one, reception is an engagement with that which is immanently critical, since literature imagines alternative social possibilities.

Which types of literature—highbrow, lowbrow, or experimental genres—are best suited for engaging readers' political consciences is something that reception theorists

often disagree over. For instance, Wolfgang Iser argues that, in order for readers to make sense of what they are reading, they have to be familiar with either the literary conventions or "prevailing codes" specific to the text that determine how its meaning is produced, codes that are rooted in forms of social knowledge (29). Iser claims that the most compelling literature is the kind that helps readers become critically perceptive to the way they are constituted and informed by these social codes. Literature can help readers identify and question certain cultural assumptions they hold onto when "gaps" or "blanks" in the text encourage them to see "familiar reality with new eyes" and thereby question the automaticity of different norms and mores (Iser 169, 181). The hypothesis here is that literature is capable of changing readers, of bringing their assumptions to light for productive scrutiny, but some of Iser's points are not as socially progressive as they seem. As Terry Eagleton notes, Iser describes how "the act of reading produces a kind of human subject which it also presupposes"—one who does not hold tightly to ideological convictions, is already open to questioning traditional values, and is then "simply returned to himself or herself as a more thoroughly liberal subject" (69). Thus, Iser's arguments put forth a "closed unity" that confirms Bourdieu's reservations about artistic reception because Iser describes how the reader who would be most deeply moved by a work of literature is the reader who already possesses the critical and interpretive skills necessary to identify when a literary work properly conforms to standard conventions (Eagleton 69). Literature in this vein is little more than self-congratulatory, helping the reader to feel good about his preexisting progressive values. That "closedness of the circuit" involving a reader and a text mirrors the cultural distancing of high art that Bourdieu describes, since it marks out a space "to which only

certain kinds of texts and readers need apply" (Eagleton 70). Thus, Iser's theory of reception is one that largely preserves an elitist status quo.[9]

In contrast to Iser, Roland Barthes claims the only socially consequential literature that moves the reader is the kind that cannot be accounted for by a "hermeneutics based on the exclusive search for the signified" (*Pleasure* 39). Hermeneutical analyses such as these run the risk of confirming the older social codes Iser describes. Rather than reading books that "continually repeat the same structure, the same meaning" over and over, literature that captures the "bliss" of "the erotics of the New" is what will truly encourage the reader to see the world in different ways (Barthes, *Pleasure* 40). These kinds of books would confound the cultured reader who is dependent on literary conventions, and Barthes suggests alternative forms of social and cultural meaning most forcefully come to the reader in letting go, in joyfully exulting in the playfulness and slipperiness of language. This theory of the untethered reader, however, also suffers from classist assumptions of a different shade than Iser's. Eagleton notes that while Iser's theories were more normative, Barthes conceptualizes "a private, asocial, essentially anarchic experience" (72). The problem here is that both Iser and Barthes "ignore the position of the reader in history" by too often hypothesizing

[9] Jean-Paul Sartre argues, however, in *What Is Literature?* that this form of address or understanding between the author and reader is difficult to avoid. A book's reception is not somehow outside of the text but, rather, is part of its very construction, since writers produce their work with potential readers in mind or, at the very least, have their potential audience predetermined for them because of the language in which they write.

reception as if readers "encounter texts in a void," when in fact their readings will be impacted by their social and historical circumstances (Eagleton 72).[10]

It is more likely that readers occupy portions of ground within both Iser and Barthes' conceptualizations—that is, being a socially-constructed reader and an agential maker of meaning. Stanley Fish explores these possibilities, claiming there is no such thing as an "objective and self-contained text"; instead, he focuses on the act of reading itself and describes a text as "the basic data of the meaning experience" (22). By this, Fish means to underscore how there is "no direct relationship between the meaning of a sentence … and what its words mean" (32). In a literal sense, he is correct. The various lines, dots, and slashes that comprise words are little more than arbitrary shapes that carry zero objective meaning; the fact that they possess any meaning to a reader's eyes at all owes to what we as a society have agreed upon over time. But it is precisely that social significance of arbitrary markings that causes Fish to also fall in line with Iser. Though Fish does not share Iser's view that texts carry any objective social meaning, he does note, more so than Barthes, how the reader is socially situated. Therefore, Fish's claim that a text does not possess any meaning until a reader interacts with it is not tantamount to an interpretive free-for-all. His assertion that "interpretive strategies" are not "arising" from a text but, rather, are "making" a text still leaves room for the influence of social norms on the reader (168). Indeed, this is why "interpretive communities" share similar approaches to interpretation, for "these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is

[10] Hans Robert Jauss more closely attends to the social and historical situatedness of texts by articulating how literature exists within a specific historical context, but that its reception—the "changing horizon of experience" of its different readers over time—will alter the historical context of the work (8).

usually assumed, the other way around" (Fish 171). The wild playfulness of Barthes' theory is not actually feasible, since the reader that meets a text and creates meaning in the act of reading is still a "social construct whose operations are delimited by the systems of intelligibility that inform it" (Fish 335).[11] Therefore, while we could read T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* in a supremely unorthodox manner, Fish suggests it is unlikely to happen because of the different social apparatuses that influence our interpretive strategies before we ever encounter the text. Interpretation remains, as Eagleton puts it, a "constrained affair," since the self remains governed by a fairly stable set of social practices that are not so easily cast off (75).[12]

These arguments complicate some of Bourdieu's claims about artistically-rooted classism, for while a reader's social situation does affect how he/she receives a text, Fish's arguments suggest that the genre of a narrative and its high or low quality does not keep reception from being its own agential act of meaning-making. Similarly, Jameson argues that we should not read the downturn in representational art as a loss of objects, but as a "local failure" of language (*Postmodernism* 137). It is a breakdown that reveals how the connection between words and things is losing its particularity. Jameson is referring here to the work of poststructuralism that questions just how successful the work of representation in art can be. Specifically in relation to literature, language's limited ability to represent reality provides two productive possibilities: Hegel's, who suggests we can now turn our thoughts toward new concepts of "universal" meaning; or, the *nouveau roman*'s, where art embarks on a perpetual deconstruction of signification

[11] For similar arguments about the process of negotiation the reader enacts and enters, see Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding."
[12] Yağmur Demir traces the nuanced differences between these theorists' various concepts of the reader. See "Disparity among the Concepts of 'The Reader' Proposed by Reader Response Critics."

that turns "the sign itself into a mere image" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 139). Granted, the latter does lead to a greater specialization of reading, viewing, or interpreting, which is precisely the subject of Bourdieu's lament, but Jameson does not view this shift as necessarily classist. While high art's eschewal of traditional uses of referentiality and chronology may not appeal to the masses, that is not the same as saying these art forms are removed from reality. If anything, they are inherently truer to life because the jumbled patchwork and collage of seemingly disparate images and noise "fulfills the present" by providing "new equipment for registering the raw material of everyday life"; this means the postmodern artist endeavors to teach viewers how to read the present by giving them "an index of [art's] democratic accessibility" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 145). As a result, an artist "renders reception (or consumption) indistinguishable from production" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 146). Jameson's point here is significantly different from Bourdieu's. While Bourdieu asserts that the act of consuming a product produces a consumer, Jameson claims that art about art invites the viewer into the production process. In other words, to consume is not to *be* produced; to consume *is* to produce, to participate in the artwork's continued creation of meaning. This is why Jameson pictures artistic reception as possessing an inherently "democratic accessibility," and it is a progressive faith shared by Fish—that our interpretations of texts happen best within a communal context. Though art about art does not give readers the easy option of "instant recognition" that more realistic or representational forms of art tend to offer (*Postmodernism* 146), the key takeaway for Jameson here is that art becomes less passive.[13]

[13] Jameson does concede, however, that this form of art about art still often alienates viewers since it often

I argue, however, that the agential potential of reception is not so straightforward within neoliberalism today because of the ways, noted earlier, that literary reception and consumerism have changed as neoliberalism has spread. Jameson's identification of the democratic possibilities of consumerist reception are overstated; after all, the postmodern shift in artistic form and content is also evidence of art's further co-optation by late capitalism, an argument Jameson himself makes. This is evidenced by literary markets, where readers are often targeted in ways that further economize literature and its profitability. For instance, cultural and economic apparatuses such as best-seller lists are quite effective at manufacturing consumer taste, given the different creative and manipulative means an author or publisher can take to land their book on one of those lucrative lists.[14] Then again, the commercialization of cultural enterprises does not always have negative social consequences. As a reading public grows, the cultural elite can potentially have its values challenged by long-excluded or marginalized social groups (Miller, *Reluctant* 7). Specifically, adjustments to methods of commercialization generate different types of consumers, one of them being the "citizen consumer" who makes a determined effort to turn "consumption into a political act" that resists some of capitalism's more harmful work (Miller, *Reluctant* 17). These consumers view their purchasing power as existing within a larger set of "moral principles," which makes their consumption less about what they can get out of it and more attentive instead to "public

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not "a useful vehicle for their imaginative experience." Democratic though its potential may be, it can often be off-putting. Explaining postmodern art's structure as "play" does not necessarily make it anymore appealing, what with the extent to which "leisure is as commodified as work" (*Postmodernism* 147).

[14] Laura J. Miller notes how the best-seller list has become a proven method to increase profits around specific titles; see "The Best-Seller List as Marketing Tool and Historical Fiction." It is worth noting, however, Mark Fidelman's findings that websites like Goodreads with their recommendation algorithms are beginning to replace the dominance of bestsellers lists within the book-purchasing market.

outcomes" (Miller, *Reluctant* 200).[15] But I contend that even this citizen consumer is fashioned by—and formulated as a response to—the growth of a market-driven culture that becomes not a monolith to resist but, rather, the basis from which to build a social identity that works within the system instead of outside of it. In this sense, culture appears to be at the beck and call of the economy, less of an antagonistic relationship and more one of capitalist complicity.

Yet, at the same time, we must be careful not to approach consumerism, reading, and reception in such a way that accords a homogenous, totalizing reach to neoliberal ideology, which is one of the mistakes that Smith makes. Her dour assessment of neoliberalism's totalizing reach merits questioning, for there are certainly ways in which the novel form and readers' reception of it forms a space of substantive political critique. For example, Leigh Claire La Berge and Quinn Slobodian assert that Smith's account runs the risk of furthering the act of "reading as neoliberals" instead of "reading for neoliberalism" (611). Since the market is "only one of a range" of systems, we should embrace a critical approach that seeks to identify how people do not fully fit the concept of *homo oeconomicus* (La Berge and Slobodian 609).[16] There is space within literary

[15] See also Ted Striphas, *The Late Age of Print: Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to Control*. Similar to Miller, Kim Becnel argues in *The Rise of Corporate Publishing and Its Effects on Authorship in Early Twentieth-Century America* that corporate publishing, at least in the US, should not be read as only "corrupt[ing] or dilut[ing] art and literature," but also as "facilitat[ing] communication" by helping to introduce new writers to readers (2). Ann Haugland disagrees, describing the 1980s as moment in book publishing when the emphasis of importance shifted from the literary merit of a book's content to whether or not a book could sell. Using *The New York Times Book Review* as her sample size, Haugland finds that the editors attempt to "uphold the standards of literary culture" while simultaneously having to fulfill "commercial obligations" and review less "serious" texts that sell well, like mystery thrillers (796).

[16] La Berge and Slobodian identify the method of "surface reading" put forth by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus as an effective strategy for reading for neoliberalism. While such a critical approach could certainly miss some of the fetishized aspects of neoliberal capitalism's work, its contention that even on the surface texts bear witness to certain truths about contemporary life is worth remembering when psychoanalytic and Marxist literary approaches have long maintained that a text's meaning is necessarily hidden or buried (Best and Marcus 1).

texts, as well as our reception of them, to understand the limits of neoliberalism's hegemony and call attention to it. While literary reception can certainly be understood within the economic bounds of consumerism, there is something more at work than the mere exchange of material commodities. People and their various actions—including the act of reading—do not perfectly fit into neoliberal conceptualizations of the economic subject. To regard them in such a way is dangerously reductive.

Indeed, there are ways that literary reception does not fit within neoliberal values and ideals, and literary scholars have found this to be true of more middlebrow or lowbrow texts. Genres that seem to be targeted primarily toward readers' self-interests or entertainment—self-help books and romance novels, respectively—actually help readers locate themselves within a community in profound ways.[17] These findings question the assumption that only more cultured, "serious," or highbrow forms of literature lead readers to undertake thoughtful critical inquiry. Though one could certainly read a self-help book or romance novel in a self-indulgent manner, these texts are not automatically

[17] For example, Debra Grodin's research about self-help books and female readers identifies a paradox: While reading self-help books is inherently a "private act," it also "offers contact with a community of others who are not easily accessed in everyday discourse" (405). In fact, many of Grodin's interview subjects took issue with passages in self-help books that encouraged a form of individualism or striking it out on one's own, since few believed that independence and happiness were directly correlated (413). What many of the women believed was that taking ownership of one's life meant putting *more* work into relationships and their community (Grodin 414). While self-help books certainly contain language geared toward the reader working on improving the self, Grodin's interviewees also carried "a sense of the self as socially constructed through contact with others who have similar problems" (416). Reading, in this instance, helps create a more intimate form of Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities," only here the belief is specifically that one belongs to a wider network of people who also understand what it means to be a divorcee, widow, recovering addict, etc.

Similarly, Radway's research has challenged sexist and gendered assumptions about romance novels and book clubs, showing how they successfully function as communal spaces where readers can critique and question patriarchal society and its values. See *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* and *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. For additional arguments on specific examples of how Book-of-the-Month clubs carry significant political potential, see Elizabeth Long, "The Cultural Meaning of Concentration in Publishing" and Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (specifically the third chapter). Caroline J. Smith also argues that the dismissal of "chick lit" in literary studies misses the significant critique of consumerism levied by such texts; see *Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit*.

disclosed from initiating substantive cultural critique that happens within the context of an interpretive community. These findings challenge the belief, visible as far back as the late 1700s, that certain genres of literature are not culturally beneficial, and they also correspond with Fish's arguments that reading is not passive but, rather, an inherently creative act that produces culturally significant forms of meaning. In other words, our understanding of reception needs to remain open to the possibility that genres often dismissed for their ostensible lack of critical capacity or genres that bend or play with certain formalist expectations can have political significance. This, as Lyn Hejinian notes, is the power of the "open text," which "invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies" (43). Literary reception produces "subsequent compositions" that preserve the text's content from becoming fixed or static; therefore, "it resists reduction and commodification" (Hejinian 43).

Zambra and Schweblin's novels that experiment with genre contribute to these ideas by providing a meta-reflection on the work of reception itself. *Multiple Choice* and *Fever Dream* consider various aspects of neoliberalism's effect in Chile and Argentina, respectively, and tackle the issue through wildly different generic conventions. Both remain open texts that cannot be easily reduced to a cohesive, homogenous meaning due to their complexity and difficulty. But they are not closed off from readers; instead, their narratives invite readers into the creative process. As a standardized test, *Multiple Choice* turns the reader into the test-taker, and *Fever Dream*, playing as it does with the conventions of the horror genre, asks the reader to be watchful for the imperceptible work of neoliberalism that affects individuals in catastrophic ways. Zambra and

Schweblin each pose formalist questions over what exactly the nature, shape, and function of literature should be within cultural contexts whose history involves neoliberal dictatorships and toxic agribusiness, which makes their writing quite different in comparison to the rich legacy of Latin American authors that precede them.[18] Indeed, an emphasis on locating or recuperating a Latin American identity or cultural heritage is not to be found here, which Brett Levinson notes has long been part of the Latin American literary tradition. The "uncanny *presence* of origins," not their loss, but their stubborn persistence despite instances of violence or dislocation are a subject of significant focus for mid- and late-20th-century writers (Levinson, *Ends* 17, emphasis in original). It is an identity of "convergence," the perpetual cultural "changeover" from indigeneity to colonialism to dictatorship to democracy (Levinson, *Ends* 18).[19] But Zambra and Schweblin are more interested in the after-effects of neoliberalism's dominance in their respective cultures. Not that neoliberalism is somehow over or has exhausted itself, but *Multiple Choice* and *Fever Dream* examine in different ways how it imbues their generation and contemporary life with certain unavoidable experiences and

[18] Some Latin American literary scholars are beginning to return to the question of form, eschewing the tendency for political questions to overshadow an attentiveness to the meaning of individual works themselves. This shift is recognizable in the recent creation of the journal *Forma*, as well as within the work of Héctor Hoyos (*Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel*), Alessandro Fornazzari (*Speculative Fictions: Chilean Culture, Economics, and the Neoliberal Transition*), and Emilio Sauri (*Crisis and Modernism: Culture, Economy, and Form in Twentieth-Century U.S. and Latin American Literature*).

[19] Levinson suggests that the many Latin American treatments of identity are driven by the effort to "transpose the limit of the subject … into the being beyond translation" (*Ends* 25)—that is, into a figure that encapsulates the myriad historical shifts and transitions that Latin American cultures have experienced. Levinson asserts, then, that translation itself is a "proper name … an identity" (*Ends* 25). The effort, then, is to create "a language for the boundary or intersection between domains of sense" (*Ends* 25-26). What this means is that "the contrary of poiesis, therefore, is … common sense" where all forms of social convention combine to build a shared cultural understanding (*Ends* 26). This disruption of common sense, Levinson suggests, is why Latin American literature has relied on Magical Realism as a narrative mode for so long, since it clarifies "Latin American history … itself as incapable of accounting for its own origin" and, thus, "represents a demand for myth." It is a project of "dehistoricization" (*Ends* 26).

conflicts. For Zambra, that dissemination is chiefly educational; for Schweblin, it is laced within the fabric of everyday experience. The commonality between both novels is the effort to contemplate and interpret these different received events. Neoliberalism is the text itself in *Multiple Choice* and *Fever Dream*, received in specific forms for characters to consume and comprehend.

This Is a Test: Reading and Controlled Choice in *Multiple Choice*

Multiple Choice both narrates and enacts the complicated efforts that arise when navigating a text. Its structure mimics the form of the version of the Chilean Academic Aptitude Test Zambra took in 1993 as a high school student living under Pinochet. Split into five sections—Excluded Term, Sentence Order, Sentence Completion, Sentence Elimination, and Reading Comprehension—the test's 90 questions are condensed narratives over a variety of subjects: the test itself, relationships, memory, everyday circumstances in Pinochet's Chile. The multiple choices attached to each question are often playful in that they allow readers to change the content and meaning of some question's narratives based on their selections. Thus, *Multiple Choice* explores the positionality of the reader within a neoliberal space that is marked by controlled choice—the illusion of freedom via the ability to choose from a limited set of options. Zambra depicts this positionality in two ways. He traces the political contours of controlled choice by connecting it to the influence of the Pinochet regime. But he also interrogates literary forms of controlled choice by writing a book as a standardized test, and in doing this, Zambra questions what a reader's agency is within neoliberalism. Throughout the text, he shows there is a limit to how innovative readers can be with their

interpretation by calling attention to the test's limits that are influenced by social, political, economic, and cultural horizons. Because of its innovative structure, *Multiple Choice* may be more accessible to a wider reading audience, but it can still only be engaged and understood within a specific context—that of neoliberalism's effect on specific social and normative structures.

Chile has a long, violent history with neoliberalism. The US-backed coup d'état in 1973 helped install Augusto Pinochet's right-wing dictatorship that facilitated the entrance of neoliberal reform from the University of Chicago's Department of Economics. Economic inequality grew rapidly in Chile, but Pinochet's place in power was further strengthened in 1975 through the US-supported campaign Operation Condor that aimed to quash any leftist resistance against the dictatorship and its economic reforms. Concentration camps and detention centers were set up, where men, women, and children were illegally detained, subjected to horrific sexual abuse, tortured, and/or executed. Today, Chile officially recognizes that around 40,000 individuals were victims of imprisonment and torture under the Pinochet regime, and the official number of those killed or whose bodies were never found—people referred to as the "disappeared"—numbers more than 3,000 ("Chile").[20]

The content of Zambra's text is decidedly less violent, yet he uses the standardized test form to refer to parts of Chile's history to comment on such issues as dissent, subjectivity, and freedom or the lack thereof. His focus on these topics is facilitated by his formal experimentation, for to discuss the standardized test is to take up

[20] For more on the violence required to install neoliberalism in Chile, as well as the role the US played in it, see Ruth Blakeley, *State Terrorism and Neoliberalism: The North and the South*; John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents*; and Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*.

the issue of the neoliberalization and privatization of education, where "high-stakes testing" has come to place students within a "particular regime of efficiency [and] labor productivity" (Backer and Lewis 194-95). Indeed, the standardized test is geared toward subject formation, for educational systems are being altered so as to incorporate neoliberal managerial styles that place the responsibility of outcomes from standardized tests on students and teachers (Gunter 204). The rise of high-stakes testing and the forms of accountability they engender also signifies how market values have been extended to education (Ambrosio 317).[21] *Multiple Choice* concedes this reality while also experimenting with the test's form to imagine how the reader (and test-taker) can play with and subvert its purposes. While there is an element of wishful thinking here—the standardized test, after all, does not allow the test-taker to rewrite its rules—Zambra focuses on the specific moment the text is taken, locating it as the site of multiple forms of knowledge that the reader/test-taker encounters. It is during a test that the subject engages with different options and choices to select as answers to the questions, and Zambra understands this as a productive narratological juncture. Though there may be one official "right" answer to an exam's question, Zambra uses the multiple choices attached to each question to explore the contingencies of meaning and, thereby, the problematic extent to which neoliberalism can be an overarching and unifying principle for everyday life.

This experimentation with form fits within Zambra's vision of what the novel is and should do as a genre. For Zambra, books should "set their own rules," and the novel

[21] See also Harry Torrance, "Blaming the Victim: Assessment, Examinations, and the Responsibilisation of Students and Teachers in Neo-liberal Governance." And as Henry A. Giroux has shown, higher education has also been negatively affected by neoliberal reforms (8).

form does this successfully because it "remains pretty much undefined" in terms of what it should or should not do ("Alejandro").[22] He describes *Multiple Choice* as a search into "how much [he] had internalized the test" when he took it in 1993, and writing it became a "game" where he could "make it [his own]" ("Rumpus"). Because of this playfulness, there are two forms of reception to consider with *Multiple Choice*. First, there is the subject taking this hypothetical test and what level of subject formation or subjective reformation and agency exist within Zambra's rearticulation of what the form allows or discloses. Second, there is the reader of *Multiple Choice*, who is presented with an opportunity, as La Berge and Slobodian put it, to read for neoliberalism. With such a focus in mind, *Multiple Choice* is an example of a neoliberal aesthetic that not only queries its own limits and possibilities, but also invites the reader to ask these same questions about their role as consumers of and participants in different neoliberal forms like standardized tests.

Multiple Choice is concerned with the neoliberalization of form, both in terms of narrative form but also in regard to the kinds of official forms one would fill out, such as a test.[23] Because of its unique form, Zambra suggests in an interview this text is chiefly concerned with what it means to read:

[22] At other times, however, Zambra refuses to clarify what genre *Multiple Choice* fits within: "I just didn't want to define this book, I didn't want to put it under any label. There is this tradition here in the States of identifying the genre on the cover, 'a novel,' 'short stories,' and the idea of making it clear in that way terrified me, mostly because it's not even clear to me. So I wanted to play with this practice" ("Rumpus"). Indeed, the Penguin English edition of *Multiple Choice* turns the book's title itself into a test question on the front cover. Underneath the title are five options: A – Fiction, B – Nonfiction, C – Poetry, D – All of the above, E – None of the above. The bubble next to each appears to be slightly shaded, as if a test-taker labored over which answer to choose and selected each one at different points, before eventually erasing all of those choices. In other words, *Multiple Choice* may be all of these genres or it may be none of them.
[23] Little scholarship focuses on Zambra's formal experimentation. The majority attends to subjects of nostalgia, memory, and irony in his work and how they comment on life during and after the Pinochet regime. On nostalgia, see Héctor Hoyos, "The Telltale Computer: Obsolescence and Nostalgia in Chile

> You can read [*Multiple Choice*] in sophisticated ways, but I like the idea that this book deals with unsophisticated approaches. I mean, some people don't even read books—most people. They don't read novels, short stories, or poems; they read forms and fill the blank spaces. So it is exciting for me to imagine that readers who are not used to literary structures might understand this book under a different light. When you read a novel, you know what to expect because you've been reading novels for a long time. But if you don't and you happen to be—who knows why—reading this book, maybe you just try to answer these questions. And maybe you know the structure of the standardized test better than you know literary structures. ("Rumpus")

Multiple Choice, then, offers a kind of egalitarian possibility. Zambra's intent to produce an "unsophisticated" novel confronts some of the classist assumptions inherent within literary taste that Bourdieu identifies. More specifically, any social capital that reading literature carries becomes something of a moot point with Zambra's experimental text because a certain level of access is opened up to the reader in two ways. First, the conventions of what a novel should do are unimportant for no other reason than they are

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after Alejandro Zambra" and Bieke Willem, "Metáfora, Alegoría y Nostalgia: La Casa en las Novelas de Alejandro Zambra" and "Desarraigo y Nostalgia. El Motivo de la Vuelta a Casa en Tres Novelas Chilenas Recientes". On memory, see Luisa Fernanda Barraza Caballero and María Rita Plancarte Martínez, "Memoria y Naufragio en *Fromas de Volver a Casa* de Alejandro Zambra"; Mary Lusky Friedman, "Tales from the Crypt: The Reemergence of Chile's Political Memory"; Edgar Tello García, "Justicia Cósmica: En Torno a la Recuperación y la Memoria en Algunos Mundos Descolonizados"; Elizabeth Osborne, *Remembering the Remote: Family, Memory, and Television in Post-Pinochet Chilean Culture*; María Angélica Franken Osorio, "Memorias e Imaginarios de Formación de los Hijos en la Narrativa Chilena Reciente"; and Valeria de los Ríos, "Mapa Cognitivo, Memoria (Im)política y Medialidad: Contemporaneidad en Alejandro Zambra y Pola Oloixarac." For irony, see Bieke Willem, "Narrar la Frágil Armadura del Presente: La Paradójica Cotidianidad en las Novelas de Alejandro Zambra y Diego Zúñiga."

altogether absent in *Multiple Choice*; in no way does it resemble a traditional novel and, therefore, the uninitiated reader, who likely does not share the pure gaze of the high artist that Bourdieu describes, is not at a disadvantage when reading it. If anything, the uninitiated reader may have an advantage over more cultured readers who carefully curate their tastes. The standardized test, because of its ubiquity, amounts to a kind of common or universal language that the uninitiated reader can readily identify. Second, there is no reason why the reader, whether uninitiated or cultured, cannot participate in the work of Zambra's text itself. Choosing to answer the questions is an actual option for every reader, since each edition of *Multiple Choice* has an answer sheet as one of its final pages, like a blank Scantron waiting to be filled in. As a material object, Zambra's text encourages the reader's participation, which lends a greater significance to the ways the narrative voice addresses the reader at different moments throughout the test.

For the reader/test-taker, *Multiple Choice* is an opportunity to interrogate, play with, and alter the meaning conveyed through the questions; however, at the same time, the test's questions and answers repeatedly remind the reader how that same play and construction of meaning is ultimately ineffective in terms of its ability to do something all that transformative. Zambra foregrounds this limitation with the book's Spanish title. Though I mainly refer to Megan McDowell's English translation of *Multiple Choice* in this chapter, there are noteworthy differences between the English version and the original Spanish. For one, Zambra titles his narrative *Facsímil*, an imitation or reproduction.[24] In terms of the subject formation standardized tests encourage, the

[24] Another significant difference between the two translations occurs in the first section of the test, Excluded Term. The singular terms that comprise each of the 24 questions have only occasional correspondence across languages. The progression in English is: Multiple, Choice, Yours, Five, Blink,

Spanish title, more so than the English translation, suggests that the test creates a kind of simulacrum of the individual. In this way, Zambra's text addresses the place or role of literary production within late capitalism and intersects with Jameson and Baudrillard's arguments on the rise of recycled dead forms as examples of the hyperreal. In postmodern theory, one concern is that literature becomes just another commodity that is quickly mass-produced, and one response to that problem is play and experimentation. Zambra specifically calls attention to our underlying expectations of what literature or novels should do or should look like, and *Multiple Choice* fits within his aim to avoid writing stories that look like "conventional ones" ("Alejandro"). At the same time, though, his title suggests that play and experimentation may do nothing to alter the test's hyperreal production.

The experimental possibilities are visible throughout the text. The test's five sections chart theoretical and actual opportunities for the reader to contribute to the construction and alteration of meaning. The test's first section, "Excluded Term," immediately foregrounds a specific irony about the test. The purpose of this section is that the reader "mark the answer that corresponds to the word whose meaning has no relation to either the heading or the other words listed" (*Multiple* 1). Therefore, this

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Body, Mask, Bear, Teach, Copy, Letter, Cut, Heartbreaking, Blacklist, Childhood, Protect, Promise, Pray, Blackout, Raze, Spare, Pause, Silence, and Silence (Zambra, *Multiple* 3-10). Here, the terms progress from available options (and, therefore, the semblance of agency) to the body under duress before another shift toward words that suggest education is tantamount to indoctrination. In the Spanish, the terms are: Facsímil, Réplica, Educar, Copiar, Borra, Letra, Junta, Salvavidas, Máscara, Apagón, Allanar, Resisténcia, Proteger, Prometo, Guardar, Secreto, Digo, Familia, Culpa, Nueva, Toser, Silencio, Silencio, Silencio (Zambra, *Facsímil* 15-19). This progression immediately starts with words that imply education is merely indoctrination before moving quickly to words that denote violence and destruction.

McDowell says the significant differences between the translations exist due to the Spanish edition's "dependen[ce] in part on wordplay and cultural references" that would not carry over into English ("Steeped"). Indeed, because of the text's "technical gymnastics … it required a re-write in the original Spanish"; thus, "McDowell and Zambra collaborated on entirely new content to convey the effect of Zambra's original idea" in the Spanish version (McNamara).

portion of the test is an active exercise in establishing meaning and correlation—that is, a certain form of cohesion within a subset of words. Yet that cohesion is achieved precisely through exclusion or removal—the introduction of a gap. The selection of one of the five choices as the word to be removed would, in some cases, demonstrably alter how one should understand what the heading means. For example, Question 12 is the word "cut," paired with five choices (see figure 2). To select "wound" as the word to remove significantly changes how we understand the word "cut" in this instance. A "wound" certainly fits as a synonym for "cut," but it does not correspond with the four other options, so it should be the word to exclude.

12. CUT

A) erase
B) annul
C) blot
D) expunge
E) wound

Figure 2. Question #12 in *Multiple Choice*. Reprinted from Alejandro Zambra; *Multiple Choice*; Penguin; 2016; p. 6.

As a result, the remaining four words establish a textual or legal context for the word "cut," but the option "wound" simply does not go away after being selected. Here. Zambra highlights how the standardized test leaves behind a kind of textual and, therefore, cultural detritus for the reader/test-taker. If "wound" is selected for exclusion, its presence as a signifier still remains on the page for the reader/test-taker. The very process of eliminating it from an array of options bestows a greater significance onto it.

That is to say, it is in the standardized test's very process of simplifying knowledge that it calls attention to alternative and contingent forms of meaning. Question 12 raises the implicit question: Why not primarily think *wound* when you read *cut*?

In a more overt manner, Question 23 calls attention to the political significance of further reducing the meaning of words (see figure 3). Whichever word is removed from the five choices paired with "silence" would speak volumes to the reader's/test taker's views on what silence amounts to within the Pinochet regime.

23. SILENCE

A) fidelity
B) complicity
C) loyalty
D) conspiracy
E) cowardice

Figure 3. Question #23 in *Multiple Choice*. Reprinted from Alejandro Zambra; *Multiple Choice*; Penguin; 2016; p. 10.

What is more, Zambra does not provide a clean set of four coherent choices and one aberrant option here as he does in Question 12. With Question 23, choices A and C correspond while B, D, and E seem to have more in common together. No matter which word the reader/test-taker selects, an incomplete picture of the etymological possibilities of the word will be accounted for in the completed test. The reader/test-taker, however, will have still engaged with the possibilities, with what is left behind. Thus, the standardized test—or, at least, Zambra's version of one—envisions how to educate a

student productively, not so much because of what the test does say but because of what it could say.

Similarly, the reader/test-taker has some creative agency with the Sentence Elimination section. The myriad sentences that constitute each question build to form short narratives that can change depending on which sentence(s) the reader chooses to eliminate. These edits, much like in the Excluded Term questions, dramatically change the content in some instances. Question 57 gives the reader/test-taker the option of cutting sentences that refer to curfew put in place by Pinochet's regime (see figure 4).

57.

(1) A curfew is a regulation prohibiting free circulation in public within a determined area.
(2) It tends to be decreed in times of war or popular uprising.
(3) The dictatorship imposed one in Santiago, Chile, from September 11, 1973, until January 2, 1987.
(4) One summer evening my father went out walking with no destination in mind. It grew late, and he had to sleep at a friend's house.
(5) They made love, she got pregnant, I was born.

A) None
B) 5
C) 1, 2, and 3
D) 4 and 5
E) 2

Figure 4. Question #57 in *Multiple Choice*. Reprinted from Alejandro Zambra; *Multiple Choice*; Penguin; 2016; p. 39.

But without these sentences, the question's story would become a short account of a father meeting the narrator's mother. Or, depending on which sentences are cut from Question 62, it could be a personal story about how a woman does not talk to the narrator on the elevator, or it could become a story broadly about "Chilean identity," the precarity of interpersonal relationships, and what it means to feel like one "inhabit[s] the worst country" in the world (*Multiple* 47). But as with the Excluded Term questions, the reader's/test-taker's selections (or eliminations) do not elide his/her interaction with a set of options that tell a much more complex story. The reader/test-taker, then, becomes acquainted with the reality of his/her agency to tell a story a certain way through how he/she decides to read (or answer) it, and the story could just as easily become something else entirely.

These passages point to how the reader's reception of a text provides a creative array of interpretive options. It is a type of encounter with the unconventional that Zambra has described elsewhere as the "melodrama, that perpetual domestic ordeal" of wrestling to figure out what a text means ("Empty" 91). The idea for Zambra is that "the best books are those that we didn't know we wanted to read," and these will be books that are not formulaic or full of "strategic excellence" ("Empty" 92). They will be "books that don't know what they are saying" ("Novels" 223). It is crucial to stress here that Zambra is placing his and his contemporaries' work within a political trajectory and artistic tradition that is not simply trying to achieve an "erotics of the New" (Barthes, *Pleasure* 40). What Zambra describes here are texts that are necessarily incomplete in their meaning. Though that can seem to recall the disorienting playground of meaning Barthes theorizes, *Multiple Choice* specifically calls attention to its own unfinished

nature, its own condition as an "empty book" (Zambra, "Empty" 91). The generating force behind such an experimental project is not mere playfulness; instead, Zambra identifies it as a distinctly Chilean form of writing that owes to poet Pablo Neruda. Neruda was adept at creating an "abyss between what is said and what is written," formulating "an elegant stutter, a literary phrasing that favours circumvention and endless digression" and draws the reader in (Zambra, "Novels" 226).

This kind of incomplete writing that generates a collaborative form of reading is what Zambra suggests necessarily follows the previous generation of writers who were censored during Pinochet's dictatorship. As Carlos M. Amador contends, the greatest casualty of the regime's "censorship and terror" was "the very fabric of signification and communicability"; it attacks "the modalities of the sayable and reconfigures the possibility for sites of language to occur" (21). As a result, "self-censorship" became the standard practice for Chilean artists who sought to find creative ways to say what could not be said under the regime (Amador 24). That censorship affected Zambra as a reader, who grew up reading "dead Chileans … since the living ones were finishing up their exiles or perpetual house arrest of those years" ("Novels" 224). Only in the early 1990s did this change, what Zambra calls a "late meeting" with these writers' books ("Novels" 225). But now, because of that history and experience with reading, Zambra and his contemporaries "distrust fluidity, the ease of words" and "distrust writing, as well" when they set about telling their stories ("Novels" 226). There is a certain kind of distance that Zambra implies it is difficult or impossible to get circumvent.

Zambra connects this exteriority to "growing up in this shitty silenced world with the idea that we were not the protagonists—we were the secondary characters of history"

to the point that “we were not able to tell our own stories and they were not as important to tell as other’s stories” (Zambra and Taneja). Yet *Multiple Choice* seeks to work against that exteriority by using the form of the standardized test to show how immersed Zambra is (or any of his peers were) in that history, since the test form always presupposes a social construction of the test-taker. Hence, why Zambra notes he is not “outside of” but “within what [he] is observing or parodying or criticizing” (“Free” 278), so much so that he repeatedly remarks in interviews how “the subject of all books is belonging,” an attempt to regain the interiority with a community or sense of history (Zambra and Taneja). *Multiple Choice* embodies this simultaneous exteriority/interiority by alienating the reader with its odd form even as it draws the reader in with the very familiarity of is standardized-test structure. Thus, Zambra’s book may be formally experimental, but it is still deeply familiar since the standardized test has its own conventions and attendant social expectations. In this way, the reader is invited to bring his/her “interpretative strategies” to the text to produce something new or provocative (Fish 168), even as those strategies and the reader him/herself are always already socially constituted, too.

Zambra carefully charts these limitations the reader/test-taker faces in other parts of *Multiple Choice*. For all the experimentation and play within its structure and questions, he showcases how difficult it is to work outside the confines of neoliberal structures of meaning-making. For example, some questions in the Sentence Order section do not allow the reader/test-taker to rearrange the narrative that the question sets forth, as is the case with Question 36 (see figure 5). The implication here is that there is only one possible way the sentences could be ordered, only one story that could or

should be told through these sentences.

36. Scars

1. You think about how the shortest distance between two points is the length of a scar.
2. You think: the introduction is the father, the climax is the son, and the resolution is the holy spirit.
3. You read books that are much stranger than the books you would write if you wrote.
4. You think, as if it were a discovery, that the last point in the line of time is the present.
5. You try to go from the general to the specific, even if the general is General Pinochet.
6. You try to go from the abstract to the concrete.
7. The abstract is the pain of others.
8. The concrete is the pain of others colliding with your body until you are completely invaded.
9. The concrete is something that can only grow.
10. Something like a tumor, or the opposite of a tumor: a child.
11. In your case, it's a tumor.

A) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 – 11
B) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 – 11
C) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 – 11
D) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 – 11
E) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 – 11

Figure 5. Question #36 in *Multiple Choice*. Reprinted from Alejandro Zambra; *Multiple Choice*; Penguin; 2016; p. 24.

Zambra uses the limitations within Question 36 to specifically comment on the difficulty in narrative creation while living under Pinochet or how difficult it might be for a Chilean author *not* to write about the violence of that period. The four-sentence sequence

from numbers five through eight speak to this dilemma; likewise, the limitations within the answer choices suggest that the only option is to try to move from the general to the specific, the abstract to the concrete. Zambra equates the general with the abstract and attaches a level of abstraction to Pinochet, as if the violence of his regime is not wholly real. This question also informs readers about their role in this text. If what is real only feels abstract until it invades one's own feelings and space, how might the writer or any other creator of meaning and content move from the abstract to the concrete? The reader/test-taker is now in a position along with the writer to render content in a powerful way. Indeed, earlier in the Excluded Term section, Zambra includes "novelist" as a synonymous option for Question 11's word "blacklist" (*Multiple* 7). He positions the figure of the writer and specifically the novelist as presenting a substantive threat to educational and political structures that would encourage blind acceptance.

If the novelist, for Zambra, wields a certain kind of power, it is because of the lasting power of words. Question 58 in Sentence Elimination is a brief story about how words cause memories of regret, but the reader/test-taker cannot cut any sentences (see figure 6). This underscores the message of the third, fifth, and ninth sentences—that words remain regardless of the interlocutor's or reader's role. The reader's/test-taker's ability in the Excluded Term section to create cohesion by removing a word is now wholly absent in Question 58. Here, Zambra notes how the reader occupies a space of powerlessness because of the permanence that words—read or written—have. But that same powerlessness speaks to the strength that words carry. Whether there is or isn't the luxury of elimination or erasure, Zambra theorizes how readers have encountered a text that stays with them.

58.

(1) I didn't want to talk about you, but it's inevitable.
(2) I'm talking about you right now. And you're reading this, and you know it's about you.
(3) Now I am words that you read and wish did not exist.
(4) I hate you.
(5) You would like to have the power of a censor.
(6) So no one else would ever read these words.
(7) I hate you.
(8) You ruined my life.
(9) Now I am words you cannot erase.

A) None
B) A
C) B
D) C
E) D

Figure 6. Question #58 in *Multiple Choice*. Reprinted from Alejandro Zambra; *Multiple Choice*; Penguin; 2016; p. 40.

This is why we can understand Zambra's rendering of the standardized test and its self-reflexive comments as a more open-ended genre of narrative than initially meets the eye. He invites readers to consider how they are being constituted by the test and to understand what its form accomplishes. This is more explicitly explored in the three stories that comprise the Reading Comprehension section at the end of *Multiple Choice*. These stories literally query what is comprehended in the act of reading and show how the limitations enforced by the standardized test encourage creative forms of resistance. The first story, about two brothers who decide to cheat on the test, acknowledges that a neoliberal education does not allow students to "form opinions or develop any ideas" of their own; instead, they have to "play the game and guess the trick" (*Multiple* 65). But

Zambra envisions how a byproduct of this limitation is that the decision to cheat removes a student from the very isolationism that the test encourages: "[T]hanks to our cheating, we were able to let go of some of our individualism and become a community. It's sad to put it this way, but cheating gave us a sense of solidarity" (*Multiple* 66). Not that there is much waiting for them beyond the test; as one of the students' former teachers tells them, the test only prepares them "for a world where everyone fucks everyone over" (*Multiple* 71). In a sense, the students learn to play the game of the test but do so in a way that provides them with precisely the kind of education the test itself is incapable of imparting—the ability to think outside the box.

This resistance via a refusal to blindly follow rules is later equated to a form of existence in the section's third story. The first-person narrator, a father, comments that he understood his young son "existed" when he realized he "couldn't fool [him] anymore" (*Multiple* 93). If *Multiple Choice* is a genre or narrative form that circumscribes and limits the reader/test-taker, that same limiting structure also contains alternative modes of knowledge that challenge what would otherwise be inculcated in the reader/test-taker. To prove one's existence, then, is to show that one knows what the standardized test is up to, to refuse to be fooled by it any longer. Similar to how Fish argues that a text does not objectively mean anything, Zambra also delegitimizes the standardized test's ostensibly inherent objectivity. Yet at the same time, *Multiple Choice* defies the straightforwardness of Fish's attempt to conceptualize texts as "the basic data of the meaning experience" (22). A more concrete apparatus of authority surrounds the standardized test than a novel or any other genre. Though Iser, Eagleton, and Fish are correct to note that there are social conventions at play around literary texts that inform

and guide how we read them, the standardized test is governed by a sharper authoritarianism: the reader/test-taker either does or does not select the right answers. Thus, the productive and creative potential of Fish's interpretive communities are more limited in the hypothetical scenario of *Multiple Choice*. Likewise, Barthes' hope for the playful or the erotically new are nowhere to be found, and if there is anything meaningful that an interpretive community like Fish's can yield from *Multiple Choice*, it appears to be this: To find solidarity in a community that will cheat on the test, a test that prepares you to get fucked. *Multiple Choice*, unique structure aside, simply repackages for the reader what he/she already knows.

With that in mind, it is telling that Zambra reflects on what the purpose of a story is near the end of *Multiple Choice*, literally asking it of the story about the brothers cheating. Question 73 queries, "The purpose of this story is" but only the last two answer choices seem remotely plausible: "D) To legitimate the experience of a generation that could be summed up as 'a bunch of cheaters.' And to entertain," and "E) To erase the wounds of the past" (*Multiple* 76). The two options are diametrically opposed. The former honors the difficulties of living under the Pinochet regime; the latter tries to blot it out. But option E is an impossibility in a literary sense, which the beginning of the third Reading Comprehension story acknowledges when the narrator imagines his son one day being able to erase his painful childhood memories of him, before the narrator observes, "I know that is impossible" (*Multiple* 89). Memories, a form of reception in their own right as repeated readings of events in one's own life, are not merely something to accept passively. This is where Zambra's self-reflexive work with *Multiple Choice* is most forceful. The entire text is a memory, an imaginative recall and re-

presentation of his contact with the standardized test in 1993. While that is in the past, Zambra understands how the test lives on for him, so he uses it to continue critiquing that past.

The violence of the Pinochet regime may be abstract to many, but to others it is not, and Zambra understands that legacies and histories can continue to be remade and reshaped. They continue to be an open text. In Question 64, a series of sentences narrated by the son of Manuel Contreras, the head of Pinochet's secret police, Zambra has Contreras fight against the author's and reader's ability to effect, if not revisionist history, the placement of incriminating words in the mouths of those in power who destroyed the lives of many. Contreras' son notes, "This is not me talking. Someone is talking for me. Someone who is faking my voice," and he concedes the possibility that "people will think that there is something true in what [his] fake voice says" (*Multiple* 52). This is the author's choice, an action tantamount to "searching for words to tattoo on [Contreras' son's] chest using the biggest drill he has" (*Multiple* 53). The author bypasses the subject—Contreras' son—and directly reaches out to the reader to explain with a wink and a grin that both he and reader get to have their fun now. Nothing about the past is changed, but how the past is discussed does. Again, whether the uninitiated or cultured reader picks up *Multiple Choice*, Zambra extends the invitation to them to seize the narrative once again and remake it through an official form with which many are familiar. In this way, the solidarity that the boys cheating on the test discover is also shared between Zambra and the reader. Their frustration over inequitable political and educational structures becomes mutual.

In the end, the agential efficacy of such a test is suspect at best. Zambra himself demurs over the actuality of a reader's agency at the end of *Multiple Choice*. The father narrating the third Reading Comprehension notes his son "can't erase" his painful memories of his father, which will continue to drag "out ever longer the absurd film of life" (*Multiple* 95). The inability to erase or substantively change what has actually happened in one's life remains, but if that is the case, it is all the more imperative to make greater sense of the severity and emotional heft of what occurred. In many ways, this is Zambra's project: To reassess what it means to grow up under Pinochet and be subject to the educational standards of those days. How that time is spoken of is a continued exercise in reception, one that does not have a standardized form but is, instead, predicated on innumerable contingencies of meaning. If that is the case, this imperative to recount what has been received is deadly serious, and the high premium placed on interpretation is more fully explored in Schweblin's novel—namely, if the violence of neoliberalism cannot be changed, let us at least make sure to get the story right.

Absorbing and Interpreting Neoliberal Fallout in *Fever Dream*

If *Multiple Choice* contains a lag time of two decades between its subject matter and publication, the focus of Samanta Schweblin's *Fever Dream* is more immediate. The novel describes the ongoing conflict in Argentina over chemicals used in privatized agribusiness that are causing detrimental health effects. The cash crop at the center of *Fever Dream* is genetically-modified (GM) soy, and Schweblin uses its ubiquity in Argentina as the backdrop for her novel. In this way, *Fever Dream* accomplishes two

things. First, by using classic tropes from the horror genre—a disturbed child, ominous houses, a possible pandemic—Schweblin turns neoliberalism into its own literal horror story. Doing so casts the effects of neoliberalism in an alternative light, one that implicitly challenges the narrative of common sense surrounding it. Second, and more importantly for this study, the horror of neoliberalism becomes the text within the text of *Fever Dream* to the point that the characters in the novel literally absorb the fallout of neoliberalism and have to work together to make sense of what has happened. The main characters, David and Amanda, try to pinpoint the exact moment Amanda was poisoned by agrichemcials on a soy farm. They disagree over what the most important moment is surrounding her poisoning and, therefore, how her story should be recounted. Accordingly, *Fever Dream* is chiefly a work about reception and interpretation, one that also carries concerns over artistic form, for Schweblin's novel explores how the different ways events are received and understood also affect any retelling of those events. *Fever Dream* suggests that neoliberalism's effects are so indomitable as to determine the form and content of literature itself, but Schweblin articulates this by making the work of neoliberalism legible within the familiar horror genre.[25] This formalist strategy makes neoliberalism both recognizable and uncanny all at once as a way to understand and critique its exploitative work.

Schweblin offers a compelling account of the suffering connected to the detrimental effects of GM soy farming in Argentina, which have been carefully studied

[25] Literary scholarship has only recently turned to Schweblin's work. Rodrigo Ignacio González Dinamarca examines how Schweblin utilizes the horror-genre trope of the monstrous child and argues that the character of David in *Fever Dream* functions as a canvas onto which adults' fears are materialized. See "Los Niños Monstruosos en *El Orfanato* de Juan Antonio Bayona y *Distancia de rescate* de Samanta Schweblin."

in recent years. Argentina's political economy is one predicated largely on "neoliberal extractivism," where natural resources are controlled, manipulated, and exported by massive private corporations for financial gain; of all the different methods of resource extraction—mining, fracking, GM farming—the "golden egg" of Argentina's socioeconomic growth is the soybean (Leguizamón, "Gendered" 2). Argentina is the third largest global grower and seller of soybeans, and by 2015, 52% of its cultivated land—what amounts to 20 million hectares—was devoted to the crop (Leguizamón, "Environmental" 685). The nation's transition to a model of neoliberal agribusiness has developed steadily since 1991, backed by World Bank and IMF credit and policies of deregulation (Leguizamón, "Modifying" 150-52).[26] The result has been immensely profitable for the "corporate-state elite" and middle-class landowners who lease their land for soy production, but it has dramatically increased deforestation and "the violent displacement of many peasant and indigenous families" (Leguizamón, "Environmental" 685). Pollution has also become a key factor in Argentina with significant biological and ecological consequences. In 2013, cancer rates were found to be "two times to four times higher than the national average" in the Santa Fe province, which is a nexus of soy production; further, in the ten years since biotechnological methods enabled the rapid growth of agribusiness in Argentina, "children became four times more likely to be born with devastating birth defects" in Chaco, the nation's poorest province (Warren). Further, streams near "intensive soy production regions" carried elevated levels of insecticides, high enough "to cause acute and chronic toxicity to aquatic invertebrates"

[26] Monsanto especially has been a key player in the efforts to help "embed" the soy industry into Argentinean life (Delvenne et al 155-58).

(Hunt et al, "Insecticide" 123).[27] As soy production levels have increased, "rural populations started to report an increase in the incidence of certain pathologies which they associated to the use of glyphosate," the herbicide more commonly known as Roundup (Arancibia 2). Indeed, pesticide and herbicide sprayers, such as crop-dusters, have been reported for failing to respect laws that establish 50-meter boundaries around schools, and the haphazard chemical spraying has not only caused students to faint, but it has also ruined those schools' sources of clean drinking water (Warren).

Despite its precarious aspects, the soy industry remains a central component of everyday life in Argentina.[28] Schweblin captures the importance of soy in *Fever Dream* by building the novel around the crop's effects. She does this subtly. References to soy are few and rarely lingered over, so much so that to say *Fever Dream* is a story about soy production in Argentina is not entirely accurate. Instead, one could easily read the novel and leave it knowing very little about the contemporary role of soy in Argentina. It is as if industrial soy production is not really there in *Fever Dream*, even as it drives the story in significant ways. That is to say, Schweblin's novel is anything but polemical or didactic.[29] It is a novel invested in critiquing and understanding that which hides in plain sight, and Schweblin's careful construction of the catalyzing role soy plays in *Fever*

[27] This could considerably alter "ecosystem functioning," since some of the most adversely affected invertebrates, such as shrimp, "play an important role in leaf litter decomposition" (Hunt et al, "Species" 708).
[28] The nation's economic stability hinges on the crop, as has been recently evidenced. A severe drought in 2018 triggered Argentina's latest financial crisis, devastating soy growth and leading the government to ask for a $50 billion loan from the IMF ("Argentina"). Analysts predict, however, that normal weather patterns in 2019 will help the soy crop—and, therefore, the economy—rebound (Landstreet).
[29] There are, however, more overt clues about how to read the book within the novel's design depending on which translation you are reading. While Riverhead's English translation book design gives little away, the cover illustration by Patrice Ganda for Literatura Random House's Spanish edition is more forceful. It shows a bird standing on a soy plant, but instead of each plant growing pods of soy beans, they sprout grenades, one of which the bird clutches in its beak, unaware of its destructive potential.

Dream is one of overt subtlety, which further highlights what her text is truly invested in—making sense of Argentina's contemporary landscape by interpreting the fallout caused by neoliberal enterprises, such as corporate agribusiness. Schweblin does so by playing with the notion of consumption, and since soy is produced for consumption, the irony in *Fever Dream* is that there are other forced forms of ingestion that people are unwittingly subjected to, and these lead to the artistic work that the novel undertakes: critical reception through David and Amanda's book-length conversation. Neoliberalism itself becomes the text within *Fever Dream* that demands interpretation and explication; it is what the characters—and, therefore, Schweblin's readers—receive.

In this way, Schweblin presents neoliberalism and its work in Argentina in fatalistic ways. To be subjected to pesticides and herbicides is beyond the individual's control.[30] All that is left for Amanda to do is to try to come to terms with what has happened to her. But Schweblin uses *Fever Dream* to cast a vision of conflict over what is the most responsible reaction for characters like David and Amanda. David is adamant that the most important thing to determine is the precise moment when Amanda was poisoned. This, for David, is the organizing principle for how a neoliberal story should be told. Indeed, when Amanda becomes distracted or wanders onto narrative tangents when recalling past events, David is quick to interrupt and say, "This doesn't matter," to bring her back to the topic of her poisoning. But Amanda's tangents reveal her convictions about what matters most in a neoliberal story—not the moment of violence itself but, rather, the consequences that come afterwards. For Amanda, this specifically

[30] Schweblin's fatalism does not extend to the role of literature itself, however. She argues, "Literature can't be informative, didactic, or indoctrinating, but it can leave a real mark on your fears, open new windows in your mind, make yourself question something you had never thought about before. And sometimes that is as important as factual information, even more reliable" (Patrick).

has to do with her daughter Nina and her concerns over who will care for Nina after she dies from being poisoned. David, then, interprets neoliberalism as a political story, while Amanda reads it as personal.[31] As *Fever Dream* shows, those two considerations are messily entangled and never mutually exclusive, but Schweblin underscores how the individual "reader" of neoliberalism and its effects brings his or her own investments to the work of reception. The only way, then, to tell a more comprehensive contemporary story of neoliberalism is through collaboration. It would seem David and Amanda might disagree over what Fish calls "interpretive strategies," but their understanding and formation of knowledge is best preserved through their interpretive community nonetheless. David and Amanda need each other to better make sense of the political economy they live within.

Indeed, among the novel's many tensions is the movement back and forth between the characters' different investments. For Amanda, her individual responsibility as a mother is of paramount importance. David, however, wants to establish facts, and he consistently tries to make this Amanda's focus as well. Ironically, this becomes Amanda's new individual responsibility, replacing her maternal imperative. Throughout *Fever Dream*, Amanda describes her responsibility in terms of the "rescue distance" she feels tying her to her daughter Nina (*Fever* 19). Amanda defines rescue distance as "the variable distance separating" her from Nina (*Fever* 19), a kind of invisible thread or rope

[31] Schweblin herself describes being caught between these two motivations while writing *Fever Dream*:

> But in the middle of the writing process, I found myself in a big "politics" dilemma. I could say names, companies, cities, government [sic], I could be really concrete about the negligence underlying this story. But on the other side, it is a very intimate and personal story, and the more testimonial my narrator become [sic], the more away from the reader I felt. At the end, I made myself this question: what would be more effective as an alarm of danger for the reader? Being informative, or achieve a very authentic feeling that something really serious and real is happening, and that this is closer to the reader than he thinks? (Benson)

connecting them that feels relaxed when situations are not threatening and taut to the point of breaking when danger is around. The purpose of this rescue distance is "to get out in front of anything that could happen … because sooner or later something terrible will happen" (*Fever* 127).[32] The limited capacity that rescue distance possesses for providing adequate safety and security is highlighted at the moment Amanda is poisoned. While she and Nina wait for their friend Carla, David's mother, who works at a soy farm, they watch men unload barrels of what is assumedly pesticides and herbicides. Nothing dramatic takes place. Amanda and Nina watch the men work, a moment that "happens slowly and pleasantly" before Amanda notices that she and Nina are soaked from sitting on the ground that is saturated with chemicals, of which David says, "*This is it. This is the moment*" (*Fever* 86-87, emphasis in original).

That this scene is unremarkable is precisely what makes it compelling, for it underscores how limited rescue distance (i.e., Amanda's responsibility) is in its efficacy. Though Amanda and Nina are sitting next to each other, Amanda perceives no danger, no feeling of tautness in the invisible rope tying her to her daughter. About this moment, David asks, "*What's happening with the rescue distance*," and Amanda replies, "Everything is fine," unaware that this is the instance when she is poisoned (*Fever* 88-89, emphasis in original). Though we can—and many do—question and critique the extent to which neoliberalism constitutes an ethical or just form of common sense, Schweblin here shows that the effects of neoliberalism are at the very least

[32] That Schweblin titled her novel *Distancia de rescate* in the Spanish is noteworthy, for it suggests that Amanda's notion of rescue distance is the nexus of the narrative itself. McDowell, the novel's translator, agrees, identifying rescue distance as "the book's driving concept" (Gregovich). However, the title *Fever Dream* was selected for the English translation due to that phrase's higher level of cultural familiarity with English speakers.

commonplace, so much so that a usually hypersensitive mother like Amanda could be oblivious to the potential violence of something as seemingly innocuous as visiting a farm to see a friend. This scene is markedly different from earlier in the novel when Nina plays next to a pool by herself and Amanda watches from afar, ready to run and snatch her if she falls in. At the soy farm, however, Amanda does not know to be on alert.

Neoliberalism's saturation—literal and figurative in this novel—is not legible, at least not to Amanda, and this is exactly what David is invested in helping her understand. Amanda has trouble grasping David's perspective, though, and she tellingly finds a way to make "the important thing" within her story an aspect of her fault, asking, "Is it because I did something wrong? Was I a bad mother? Is it something I caused?" (*Fever* 169). David does not answer, so she concludes on her own, "When Nina and I were on the lawn, among the barrels. It was the rescue distance: it didn't work, I didn't see the danger" (*Fever* 170). The problem, for Amanda, is not that big agribusiness has brought dangerous chemicals into contact with different water supplies, animals, and humans; the problem, as she interprets it, is that she did not know how to properly read for such threats. The reality of neoliberal agribusiness has become her burden to bear, has further responsibilized her role as a mother and added another layer to the different threats a person must account for when seeking to protect either herself or her child. Amanda reads her poisoning not as something for which a corporation such as Monsanto could be held liable, but as something for which she is ultimately responsible. Schweblin shows Amanda here as adopting a neoliberal mindset, where the laws of the market play

out, everyday life on national and personal levels is reshaped, and individuals are expected to respond and account for those changes accordingly.

At no point, however, does David intimate that the fault lies with Amanda; his efforts to understand and interpret her story do just the opposite. David wants to establish what exactly happened to Amanda and how it occurred, but he cannot divine that information alone and requires Amanda's help to collectively read and re-read her story. Ultimately, then, David's emphasis on collaboration and communal interpretation is a direct counter to the hyper-individualistic ethos of neoliberalism broadly and to Amanda's rescue distance that places the weight of neoliberal capitalism's sublime work on her own shoulders. That Amanda is certain she is somehow at fault for what has happened emphasizes the necessity of interpretive community. David, who as a young boy was poisoned via a water source tainted with chemicals, is personally invested in Amanda's story because he has experiential knowledge to contribute to her interpretive work. But the determination to make sense of a neoliberal environment marked by violent consequences is not merely a personal quest for him; instead, he views making sense of Amanda's story and the precise moment of her poisoning as "*very important for us all*" (*Fever* 2, emphasis in original). He can help Amanda read neoliberalism differently than she otherwise might on her own, and to catch the "important details" they will have to work together, for Amanda notes, "I can see the story perfectly, but sometimes it's hard to move forward" (*Fever* 6, 5). David relies on Amanda's recall, while Amanda depends on David's careful observation and attentive encouragement to focus in on the specific events that led to her poisoning.

But even as David and Amanda try to interpret the ways that neoliberalism has affected them, they each tend to take on rather neoliberal approaches to the text of Amanda's poisoning. Though both of them are "reading for neoliberalism," to borrow La Berge and Slobodian's terms, they also frequently slip into the habit of "reading as neoliberals" (611). David, for instance, is intent on understanding the root causes of Amanda's accident. In doing so, he frequently instrumentalizes Amanda's story, disregards much of what she believes to be important, and responsibilizes her with a pressure to remember specific events. He essentially mines her story for its worth in an effort to locate something that is useful to him. He often seems less interested in her impending death than in gathering information. With Amanda, she is less interested in assigning culpability than David is. Instead of his narrower focus, she tries to determine what the larger social effects of her poisoning point to, thus eschewing an individualistic mindset by focusing instead on Nina and other ill children in the area. Yet even so, her adoption of a self-narrative of responsibilization is a thoroughly neoliberal approach to her own story. By blaming herself for not being responsible enough to account for or anticipate certain hazards, Amanda repeatedly casts herself as the neoliberal subject who is accountable for managing her own navigation of everyday forms of risk.

Since David and Amanda have their differences and disagreements, their collaboration as an interpretive community yields conflicts not only over what the most important parts of Amanda's story are, but also in terms of what can or cannot be done with a story. For example, Amanda wants to focus on how David was saved from his poisoning, a separate story that he claims "*is not important*" (*Fever* 55, emphasis in original). Amanda disagrees, believing that it is "the story we need to understand,"

which David dismisses, arguing that "*it has nothing to do with the exact moment*" (*Fever* 55, emphasis in original). But Amanda cannot eschew the responsibility she feels "to measure the danger … to calculate the rescue distance" and determine what will happen to Nina (*Fever* 55). David agrees that the rescue distance is "[*v*]*ery important*" (*Fever* 44, emphasis in original), but with the caveat that it helps him understand what motivates the events that make up Amanda's story, though not necessarily how one should respond to her story.

In effect, David's dismissal of some of Amanda's concerns rewrites or reshapes her story and how it is constructed. Both have different investments in what is the story most worth telling. But beyond their disagreements, David also makes more explicit and frustrated efforts to alter Amanda's story. When Amanda recalls why she later goes to the soy farm to visit Carla, David repeatedly interjects, "*That's a mistake. … Talking to Carla is a mistake. … This is the moment to leave town, now is the time*" (*Fever* 78, emphasis in original). On the one hand, these exclamations humorously fall within the trope of the horror genre and the stereotyped image of the audience fruitlessly pleading with a character to avoid impending doom; on the other hand, David's pleas suggest his own limited efficacy in helping Amanda interpret and put together her own story. While there are decisions to make, such as which details to focus on and which ones to dismiss, the actual events of the story do not change. Even so, David repeatedly wants Amanda to change course with her story, as if it can be rewritten, pleading with her, "*Don't leave Nina alone. It's happening right now! … Don't get distracted. … It's happening*" (*Fever* 88, emphasis in original). What Schweblin depicts here is a more subdued image of narrative construction than Zambra places in *Multiple Choice*. While David and Amanda

could certainly tell her story in many different ways, the key, macro-level concerns of that story remain the same. The objective or inherent meaning of texts that Fish is largely dismissive of are found to be much more insurmountable in *Fever Dream*, given how the entire landscape of the Argentina in Schweblin's novel is awash with chemicals directly harmful to life thriving. In that sense, the ability to tell a different story or construct a new kind of meaning is woefully limited.

But if the story cannot be changed, David suggests that the least they can do is piece together Amanda's experience accurately. Later in the novel, David reminds Amanda they have "*been through all of this … four times*" and that the frustration for him is how Amanda "*know*[*s*]" what happened but does not "*understand*" (*Fever* 110, emphasis in original). David asserts that the extent to which an individual is entangled within and affected by the violence of neoliberalism is difficult to grasp, which is precisely why it requires careful interpretation. Amanda's knowledge that she has been poisoned is not enough; for David, the point of recall and retelling involved in interpretation is to address the *how* of Amanda's situation, not only the *what*. Thus, through the difficulty of recall, Schweblin shows how neoliberalism and its effects continue to defy the very common sense it purportedly represents. That is not to say others do not understand how to connect the dots, for Carla ties David's earlier illness to the "sown fields all around us" and how people "come down with things all the time," and she assesses it with the fatalistic observation, "It happens" (*Fever* 95-96). Even Amanda later suspects the pervasiveness of the soy fields somehow relates to the urgency of her story. When observing how the "soy leans toward us now," she

remembers recognizing how that was “the moment to talk but [she was] immobile in the languid silence” caused by the poison beginning to numb her body (*Fever* 118).

These passages point to the necessity of collaboration when attempting to make sense of the work of neoliberalism. If, as Schweblin portrays, neoliberalism results in growing amounts of destruction, then Amanda’s recollection that she was unable to take advantage of “the moment to talk” implies there may come a time when it is too late to discuss the consequences of neoliberalism. David, however, claims that the story will keep going because Amanda “*still* [*hasn’t*] *realized*” and “*still need*[*s*] *to understand*” the specifics of what happened (*Fever* 131, emphasis in original). Yet at the same time, “*going forward with this story doesn’t make any sense*” to David if Amanda is “*not going to understand*” (*Fever* 140, emphasis in original), for at that point it will be impossible to clearly establish the events and their causes. Amanda, however, presses on with the story, rejecting David’s claims that the details she wants to dwell on are unimportant, and she talks about them anyway so that he will have to “listen to it all” (*Fever* 142). Indeed, David disappears from the final ten pages of the novel, either silent or absent from Amanda’s side, frustrated as he is by her unwillingness to focus on the details he wants her to.

But their collaboration has already had its necessary effect, for Amanda is able to establish a unified reading that connects the different threads in her story—the rescue distance and the soy fields. She concludes that the “important thing” to grasp is how “the rope is finally slack, like a lit fuse, somewhere; the motionless courage about to erupt” (*Fever* 183). The rope of rescue distance is now “slack” because Amanda’s impending death has severed that connection to Nina. But that same invisible rope that signifies

protection and a person's assumed responsibility for protecting her child in a dangerous world now becomes a fuse leading to a metaphorical powder keg; however, the potential for an explosion is left vague. Amanda locates it only "somewhere" because the impending explosion certainly cannot come from her, near death as she is. But she clearly understands—with David's help—how her frustration and outrage at the horrors that have befallen her family are not hers alone. Indeed, David and Amanda's entire conversation takes place at a hospital where many children have been brought, some of whom "*were born already poisoned, from something their mothers breathed in the air, or ate or touched*" (*Fever* 151, emphasis in original). As David tells Amanda, "*there aren't many children who are born right*" in the unnamed rural setting of the novel (*Fever* 157, emphasis in original).

Amanda's sorrow is not hers alone but, rather, shared by many other mothers, fathers, and siblings in Argentina. It is against that backdrop of a poisoned collective that Schweblin casts Amanda's interpretive conclusion. On the one hand, Amanda's reference to a future explosion comes across as a fierce warning and rousing call to political action; on the other hand, Schweblin simultaneously renders it as an image of impotence. Though there is now a "lit fuse" that will enable "courage … to erupt," the fuse is "slack," not a taut straight line, which implies a long, meandering path for the flame to take before eventually reaching its explosive potential. Further, since the rope is only "somewhere," in some indistinct location that is potentially impossible to locate, the impression is left that some significant action will not happen anytime soon. What's more, the courage that provides the fuel for any sort of political or social movement is

"motionless." For all the kinetic energy in the novel's final image, Schweblin repeatedly waters it down with equal measures of stasis.

We can understand this stasis in light of how effective the rope of rescue distance has been earlier in the novel. Amanda tells David, "My mother was sure that sooner or later something bad would happen, and now I can see it with total clarity, I can feel it coming toward us like a tangible fate, irreversible. Now there's almost no rescue distance, the rope is so short that I can barely move" (*Fever* 76). That the rope constituting Amanda's failed rescue distance is now the rope to light a powder keg of social indignation provides an ambivalent image of a way out of or against neoliberalism. If the rope of rescue distance failed, why would it suddenly be successful as a fuse? Instead, what Schweblin constructs through Amanda's repeated use of the rope's imagery recalls the narrator's comment on the power of narrative in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. There, the narrator claims that fate and narrative trajectory are the same (Hamid 181), and Schweblin expresses a similar observation through Amanda's inherited conviction that "sooner or later something bad would happen" that would render rescue distance pointless. Throughout *Fever Dream*, David's fruitless efforts to change the direction of Amanda's story mirror her later responses to his desire to rewrite the ending: "It's already done" (*Fever* 82).

There is, however, more that can happen than just accurately pinning down the causes and totality of neoliberal destruction; *Fever Dream* neither presents nor advocates for merely cataloguing the degradation of our present landscape. In this way Schweblin shares Anna Kornbluh's view on the dubious efficacy of realism as a politically substantive formalist approach. Instead, Schweblin suggests in interviews that telling

these stories and working together to tell these stories is in and of itself a productive kind of fate:

> The tie with David is that when things become so bad that it's all disasters in the world, when everything is so terrible, the small drama between two or three characters might be really important. It might be the beginning of something really deep, where a simple question helps you know where the evil starts—and if you know where the evil is, you can fight against it. When that happens, everything becomes dangerous. In some ways, that's why the "rescue distance" gets broken: Everything in the world Amanda inhabits is dangerous. (Patrick)

That is to say, there may be only one endpoint that Amanda's story could reach despite David's best efforts to reshape it. But even those attempts are a productive exercise for Schweblin, who regards stories as "a kind of spell capable of moving things inside us that we couldn't move by ourselves" (Benson). This is precisely what happens with Amanda and David. As co-authors of her story, they are able to collaborate to determine which details should be included to constitute the most accurate and moving story, and though they have disagreements over what should be included and excised, their dependence on one another sharpens the focus of the story rather than clouds it. If narrative trajectory and fate are synonymous, Schweblin at least points to how different choices can be made to help the narrative trajectory more powerfully reach its fate.

In this way, Schweblin extends David and Amanda's story as an invitation to her readers. The characters' efforts to make sense of what has happened to Amanda is an act of reading, a form of making further sense of the neoliberal fallout they have already

received and consumed. *Fever Dream* occupies a similar space for readers, inviting us to discern how a text affects us in its account of neoliberalism's contemporary consequences. Schweblin does not overstate literature's potential here; the rope of the "lit fuse" is still "slack," and who is to say what can productively erupt from a "motionless courage"? *Fever Dream* gives no hypothetical answer. But if the consumption of neoliberalism has devastating effects, Schweblin asserts that the effects of consuming literature should not be dismissed, either. Though she admits it makes her "sound more mystic than [she] would like," she holds to the belief that "the reader gets some beauty from the book in exchange for some darkness that grows in his mind … [and] obliges him to looks for some beauty in his surroundings"; in this way, the "best stories take control of [the body]" as they are attentively consumed (Benson).

Fever Dream depicts the reach of neoliberalism as terrifyingly indomitable, drawing up the sublime work of neoliberal capital as foreclosing the possibility that literature itself can do much to rewrite the social, cultural, and economic landscape. This does not stop Schweblin from calling for a productive eruption that is political in nature, but the timeline for any such productive explosion is "slack" at best. Part of this stems from the ways that David and Amanda, as noted earlier, each attempt to read their entanglement in the effects of neoliberalism in rather neoliberal ways. That is to say, each falls into the trap La Berge and Slobodian describe: "reading as neoliberals" when they could be "reading for neoliberalism" (611). Both David and Amanda miss the mark at times, and at other times they acutely understand the ramifications of what is happening to them and around them through the neoliberalized world of agribusiness in Argentina. This amounts to Schweblin's comment on the immense difficulty in

producing a coherent interpretation and articulation of what exactly neoliberal ideology effects in the present.

The stutters and stops of David and Amanda's collaborative storytelling point to the complications that arise when trying to describe what can often seem to defy explanation. Schweblin identifies one way of circumventing that difficulty as relying on and refashioning familiar tropes, such as the horror genre. What that amounts to is an uncanny production of an established form, which in its own way alludes to the mechanized production of soy in Argentina: Crops have been grown since the beginning of time, but not like this, not on this scale, and not with such violent repercussions. That is to say, neoliberalism can take familiar aspects of the world and alter them to an unrecognizable extent. This creates challenging work for literature in the neoliberal present, a challenge that other writers have recently taken up as well: How does one translate the present when seemingly familiar parts of everyday life are either no longer recognizable or have become altogether improbable in their reality?

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: TRANSLATING THE NEOLIBERAL PRESENT

In his recent work of nonfiction, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh expresses disappointment over how fiction rarely deals with climate change in any serious manner, and in the event a text does venture into such territory, "the mere mention of the subject is often enough to relegate a novel or a short story to the genre of science fiction" (7). Ghosh wonders if the topic is simply "too wild" to be satisfactorily handled in fictive form, and, if that is the case, he argues that such an inability "will have to be counted as an aspect of the broader imaginative and cultural failure that lies at the heart of the climate crisis" (8). That is to say, "the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination" (9). If climate change is difficult to imagine and, thus, hard to render into a believable narrative that is not automatically shuttled into the realm of fantasy or science fiction, Ghosh suggests that we could be staring down a problem with the novel itself.[1] He argues that a penchant for realism continues to handicap the narrative possibilities of the novel, for he claims that "the modern novel, unlike geology, has never been forced to confront the centrality of the improbable: the concealment of its scaffolding of events continues to be

[1] Ghosh's characterization of science fiction discounts its connections to realism, though. Flannery O'Connor's observation about the inherent realism of fantastical stories is worth remembering:

> Fiction is an art that calls for the strictest attention to the real—whether the writer is writing a naturalistic story or a fantasy. I mean that we always begin with what is or with what has an eminent possibility of truth about it. Even when one writes a fantasy, reality is the proper basis of it. A thing is fantastic because it is so real, so real that is is fantastic. … I would even go so far as to say that the person writing a fantasy has to be even more strictly attentive to the concrete detail than someone writing in a naturalistic vein—because the greater the story's strain on the credulity, the more convincing the properities in it have to be. (96-97)

essential to its functioning" (23). As a result, the irony of realism, the narrative strategy that still holds court for most novels, is that "the very gestures with which it conjures up reality are actually a concealment of the real" (Ghosh 23). Rather than debate the benefits and drawbacks of realism as a narrative mode, I bring up Ghosh's comments to draw our attention to the way that current economic, social, political, and ecological crises generated by capitalism also spotlight the difficulty for literature to represent certain contemporary phenomena. Novelists have grappled with this challenge in their work over the last 40 years, as evidenced by Hergé's final story *Tintin and Alph-Art* and more recent works, such as Vivek Shanbhag's *Ghachar Ghochar* and Yoko Tawada's *The Emissary*. All three, in different ways, explore a common question: What does it mean to produce art and/or represent contemporary life and its conflicts within a system of global capitalism?

At the core of Ghosh's concerns is how very real global ills remain ignored or altogether unseen in fiction, as if they are not central components of how a narrative should be told. His mandate for literature is that it should make the invisible visible; however, to do so requires working against centuries of narrative methods and influence. For one, Jacques Rancière notes it has long been true that literature is marked by "a partition of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear" (10). These efforts produce in narrative form a "common world" (Rancière 10), and if ecological crises are too fantastical for literature, as Ghosh suspects they are, such data may not fit into readers' common vision of what the world is like. When Rancière argues that literature's political work has long been "a specific link between a system of meaning of words and a system of visibility of things," he identifies

the dominance over literary form that writers such as Flaubert and Balzac continue to wield (12). While their realist modes eschewed the social hierarchies of older literary forms, their narrative approach did not necessarily open up a more democratic style of literature, for their methods were "displaying and deciphering the symptoms of a state of things" by cataloguing the mere matter of everyday life and experiences (Rancière 18); or, to put it another way, "the rhythm of the future had to be invented out of the commodities and fossils of the curiosity shop," which is tantamount to "converting any scrap of everyday life into a sign of history and any sign of history into a poetical element" (Rancière 22-23). Flaubert and Balzac's work may seem like an attempt to make the invisible visible by foregrounding the materiality of everyday life to decipher underlying social and political paradigms, but literary realism just as equally stands as a fetishized treatment of the commodified realm, a narrative decision to focus on the surface in such a way that further obscures political and economic realities instead of clarifying them.

My point here, in conjunction with Ghosh and Rancière, is that the last 150 years of industrialized capitalism make it more and more difficult to render the invisible visible and make sense of it in narrative form. More recently, with the advent and ascension of neoliberalism, this has become even truer. As neoliberal economies became more predicated on immaterial and risky financial tools, "the culture of derivatives posits itself as a space lying beyond the power of representation, one that is discernible only through quantification" (LiPuma and Lee 65). Issues of finance are at their core issues of representation, and changes within methods of finance significantly influence cultural efforts that attempt to depict everyday life. This trickle-down effect of the economy to

culture has long been in place. Franco Moretti notes how the rationalized aspects of modern life eventually affect forms like the novel in "a process that begins in the economy and in the administration, but eventually pervades the sphere of free time, private life, entertainment, feelings" (381). What this means, then, is that contemporary global literature faces a tall task of translation, and here I use translation in the broadest sense—rendering a topic recognizable or, at the very least, legible for an audience. Though Ghosh suggests that the period of the Anthropocene is where this challenge is rooted, other scholars argue we are beyond that timeframe. Instead, the global growth of capitalism—an intentional expansion that was necessary if capitalism were to survive—has moved us to what Jason W. Moore calls the Capitalocene.[2]

The Capitalocene argument regards capitalism as a "world-ecology" buoyed by three processes: primitive accumulation, territorialist power facilitated by the privatization of property, and new forms of knowledge that alienated people from land while science began to "read" nature for the sake of capitalist accumulation (Moore 85-86). Moore notes that the Nature/Society split meant "the web of life could be reduced to a series of external objects" where Nature was placed in service to accumulation (87). Eventually the work/energy rhythms of nature become "incorporated" into capitalism as its metabolism "through the double internality: flows of power and capital into nature, flows of nature in capital and power" (90). Moore argues that the movement to new

[2] Moore prefers the Capitalocene argument over that of the Anthropocene because the former provides three unique arguments: it acknowledges that the history of capitalism is "a relation of capital, power, and nature as an organic whole"; it covers the history of "the relations of power and re/production premised on the cash nexus"; and it discredits the Eurocentric argument that capitalism grew out of eighteenth-century England (81). This last one specifically points to the Anthropocene's "fundamentally bourgeois character" that erroneously portrays "capitalism's socio-ecological contradictions [as] the responsibility of all humans" (83).

uncapitalized spheres for the sake of exploiting their resources has been the pattern since 1450, not just the Industrial Revolution (92). Capitalism was "*specifically organized* to treat the appropriation of global nature in the pursuit of the endless accumulation of capital" from the very beginning (Moore 110, emphasis in original). A nation or empire's movement from one place to the next to harvest its resources when a site has been depleted is nothing new. It typifies capitalism. This, for Moore, is the horrific "genius of capitalism"—that it regards nature as a "free" gift, free in the sense that there has been no thought as to the repercussions (112). Moore's arguments speak to two of Ghosh's concerns: First, the environmental destruction that is a result of capitalist expansion is an old tale, which makes its noticeable absence from literature all the more troubling, and second, it is a tale that is markedly global in scope, given how capitalism has had to traverse the planet in search of untapped resources once it exhausts other markets. That is to say, Ghosh's arguments about the lack of imagination necessary to narrativize climate change is simultaneously an indictment of literature's inability to depict at least one of the effects of global capitalism.

However, while fiction on climate change may be scarcer than Ghosh would prefer, post-war writers do frequently attempt to depict other chaotic aspects of a global capitalist system.[3] In the three decades spanning the end of World War II and his death, Hergé wrestled with what it meant for *Tintin* to satisfactorily portray reality in a world

[3] Ghosh's claim that fiction on climate change is scarce is overstated to an extent. Recent scholarly work points to the not insignificant amount of fiction on this very subject: see Antonia Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions: Representations of Global Warming in American Literature*, and Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. Furthermore, Ghosh himself, though claiming to be "at a loss" when trying to come up with a list of writers who produce such narratives, names quite a few: J. G. Ballard, Margaret Atwood, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Barbara Kingsolver, Doris Lessing, Cormac McCarthy, Ian McEwan, and T. C. Boyle (124-25).

increasingly defined by international conflict and the transnational movement of capital. Stories such as the aforementioned *The Red Sea Sharks* place Tintin and his companions in more global or transnational conflicts than ever before that take them to regions of the world they had not previously visited. What stands out from these later stories is Hergé's awareness of the way that art generally—and *Tintin* specifically—circulates within global markets often dominated by the interests of private corporations. Hergé was less than encouraged by what that meant for *Tintin*'s legacy, and these concerns are most forcefully expressed in his final story, *Tintin and Alph-Art*, where he considers the broader ramifications of his own work's global circulation as a commodity. In *Alph-Art*, Hergé returns to the issue of art's lasting value first broached in *The Broken Ear*, only now the commodification of art is the central conflict.

Alph-Art pointedly makes fun of the notion of art for art's sake through Captain Haddock's fledgling appreciation for abstract art. The artist Ramó Nash specializes in large canvases of capital letters, and when Haddock encounters the famous opera singer Castafiore at a gallery with Alph-Art on display, she remarks, "It's fantastic! … so simple and at the same time so rich, so noble and so basic, can reach the whole world. … In it we return to the origins of civilisation, don't we?" (Hergé, *Alph-Art* 8). Here, in a pointed self-criticism of what he had tried to do with previous stories, Hergé situates the canvases of block letters as an art that is universally accessible.[4] Haddock does not

[4] After the accusations of racism surrounding *The Red Sea Sharks*, which I mentioned in chapter one, Hergé initiated a larger plan in the 1960s to remove *Tintin* from historical contexts altogether in an effort to maximize his appeal for reading markets. This included revising, yet again, stories that had already been published. The hope was that this would reshape the titular character's image and universalize the series' appeal (Peeters 306). By eliminating specific historical markers from past stories, Hergé aimed to take Tintin out of contexts that locked him in time. For example, *Land of Black Gold* underwent a complete rewrite. The first version in the 1940s centered on conflicts between England, Palestine, and Israel;

understand what is so grand about the paintings, but is persuaded to start dabbling in fine art anyway. His purchase of a large capital H made of Perspex repeatedly elicits questions from Tintin and others about what the artwork is and what it means. Haddock responds, "Nothing! … Nothing at all! It's a work of art! And a work of art isn't *for* anything! Art is art!" (Hergé, *Alph-Art* 12, emphasis in original). Haddock frustratedly has this conversation three more times with people who want to know the same thing: Yes, we see it is an H, but what is it *for*? This scene acts as a poststructuralist jab at artistic meaning, for Haddock loves the H because he believes it clearly stands for his last name, referring to it not just as Alph-Art but also "Personalph-Art" (Hergé, *Alph-Art* 12). Haddock's definition of a stable signifier is meant to be laughable, for the H could just as easily stand for any appellation that begins with the letter H. The art that Haddock is attracted to is an open-ended signifier, freely floating and lacking any meaningful signification. We can read Hergé as Haddock in this scene and *Tintin* as the letter H. Hergé had specific attachments and invested meaning with *Tintin*, but no work of art is so long-standing that its significance and value remain stable. Hergé, via Haddock's frustration, critiques the idea that art could simply exist for itself, even if Hergé had tried for a moment to do the same with *Tintin* by writing stories that were more timeless and removed from history.

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however, two decades later, Hergé changed it into a story about rival emirs fighting over oil, which he felt would make the plot more timeless (Peeters 209). Hergé stated that he wanted *Tintin* to "acknowledge its era without running the risk of being too dated; of bearing witness to the times while remaining timeless" (qtd. in Peeters 309). Realism was no longer the guarantor to *Tintin*'s success as it had been at the start; now, it was the perceived obstacle to the series' legacy. Dehistoricizing efforts were, of course, ultimately futile, and by the time Hergé started to sketch *Alph-Art*, he had already abandoned efforts to make *Tintin* timeless and universal, as evidenced by the penultimate story, *Tintin and the Picaros*, which returns the series' characters to the unstable political conflicts in San Theodoros.

The question "Yes, but what is it *for*?" is equally applicable to the entire *Tintin* corpus, just as the attendant concerns over art and meaning cannot be divorced from the neoliberal connection elsewhere in *Alph-Art* of artistic production to the world of commodities, foreign trade, and arts funding from the private sector. For example, it is telling that Emir Ben Kalish Ezab, first seen in *The Red Sea Sharks*, reappears in this story as an oil tycoon trying to enter the world of high art. In a televised interview, he explains that he has come to Europe to buy different landmarks, such as the Eiffel Tower, to take back to Khemed and turn into oil derricks. This recalls Sarah Brouillette's arguments about the work of the creative economy, where art helps—in this case, quite literally—to buoy the political and economic work of nation-states. When denied the Eiffel Tower, the Emir then offers to buy the Beaubourg Centre, which he notes was built as a refinery before quickly being turned into a museum. He has decided to return home and build his own fine art museum but "like a refinery on the outside, just to keep up with the fashion" (Hergé, *Alph-Art* 10). The goal with the museum is "to make Khemed into a modern country resolutely moving into the future" (Hergé, *Alph-Art* 11). Tintin eventually discovers that the Emir is caught in a scheme run by an underground ring of forgers intent on selling perfect replicas of high-priced art. At one of the forgers' meetings are Mr. Gibbons, a giant in imports and exports who first appeared in *The Blue Lotus*; Mr. Trickler, the American oil representative who tried to orchestrate the war in *The Broken Ear*; and the Emir with his sights set on a modern museum (Hergé, *Alph-Art* 43). The meeting takes place at the villa of a religious guru, Endaddine Akass, who locks up Tintin once he discovers their work as art forgers. Hergé clearly draws the reader's attention here to the ways art is now fully entangled in the world of foreign trade and

transnational politics and how funding for the kind of cultural capital that the Emir's museum represents is not divorced from the money generated by the private corporate sector involved in oil production.

Hergé, however, passed away before finishing *Alph-Art*, and his work stops with a sketch of Akass' henchmen leading Tintin off at gunpoint to drown him in liquid polyester and turn him into a sculpture. Hergé left behind many sketches and notes of possible endings for the story.[5] Most provocative is the possibility that Akass is actually Tintin's chief nemesis from numerous earlier stories, Roberto Rastapopoulous, in disguise and finally successful in eliminating Tintin.[6] Hergé also considered having Akass sell fake art pieces to the Emir, likely to fill his future museum. In that instance, the Emir's oil money would be paying for the art and, thereby, financially supporting the forgery market. These sketches also show that Akass possibly has in mind for Tintin's sculpture to find its ultimate resting place in Khemed at the Emir's museum. Thus, *Alph-Art* returns to the setting of the museum, that weighty metaphor from *The Broken Ear*, albeit with a key difference for the entire *Tintin* corpus. Instead of the admittedly worthless Arumbaya fetish, now Tintin himself would be the artwork placed in a

[5] For the notes and sketches of possible endings, see pages 54-62 of *Tintin and Alph-Art*. Hergé considered introducing various plot lines: drug trafficking; a conflict at an embassy that would bring in the fictional nations of San Theodoros, Borduria, and Syldavia from past stories; the possibility that Haddock takes up painting only to ultimately resume his alcoholic habits; and the more likely resolution that sees Tintin escape.

[6] It is worth noting that Rastapopoulous had become the consummate corporate cosmopolitan in *The Red Sea Sharks*. In that story, he owns Arabair, which traffics Sudanese and Senegalese as slaves after intercepting them on their way to Mecca, and he is also a "shipping magnate, newspaper proprietor, radio, television and cinema tycoon, air-line king, dealer in pearls, gun-runner, trafficker in slaves—the man who helped Bab El Ehr to seize power" from Emir Ben Kalish Ezab and throw the Middle East into political and economic chaos (Hergé, *Red Sea* 31). In this complicated plot, the simple resolutions of past *Tintin* stories disappear. It is telling that, immediately after discovering the kidnapped Sudanese and Senegalese onboard the ship, Haddock murmurs dazedly, "That cargo … I just can't make it out" (Hergé, *Red Sea* 44). By the story's conclusion, he and Tintin simply return home with no sense of triumph, a denouement that suggests they "are incapable of exiting from the global commercial network" and its chaos (Apostolidès 202).

museum. The fetish in *The Broken Ear* exists metaphorically to question the value of *Tintin* as a reproducible commodity, but in *Alph-Art* metaphor disappears in place of a straightforward articulation of the question instead: What does it mean if *Tintin* is nothing more than a commodity in a time when the art world is overrun with influences from the competitiveness of foreign trade? The earlier sections of *Alph-Art* laugh at the notion that art exists for itself. The sheer repetition and mounting frustration of Haddock's claims that art does not have to be *for* anything weaken with every iteration. Too many competing narratives and financial interests circulate around the production of art—as symbolized by the presence of Gibbons, Trickler, and the Emir in this final story—for art to simply exist as an end in itself. *Alph-Art* shows that nothing is so pure. Likewise, a *Tintin* story could never be outside current events, politics, history, and time in the way that Hergé briefly hoped was possible.

Additionally, *Alph-Art* interrogates the meaning of *Tintin* the text and Tintin the character when placed within this highly financialized and commodified realm. It is ironic that Tintin will be literally changed into a sculpture. According to Akass/Rastapopoulous, the sculpture will be passed off as an original done by César Baldaccini, "authenticated by a well-known expert," sent off to a museum, and then "could be entitled 'Reporter'" (Hergé, *Alph-Art* 48). Here Hergé shows his understanding that *Tintin* is out of his hands as a material object. The authenticity of Tintin-as-sculpture (or *Tintin*-as-text) will have to be verified by someone else, and the credit of the work would be attributed to a sculptor who actually never touched the work. Any claims Hergé can lay on his work are irrelevant here, and that kind of authorial silence also extends to Tintin. The character's sculpted self will be labeled "Reporter," a

nod to the graphic series' place as a site of enunciation that represents the world in all its varied periods across the *Tintin* corpus. But as a drowned individual entombed in liquid polyester, Tintin will speak no more. Instead, *Tintin*/Tintin can now be shipped about, enter new markets, and even be put to work in a nation's creative economy.

Two more recent literary examples further clarify the difficulty in narrativizing the global spread of capitalism's influence. If Hergé was concerned about *Tintin*'s place as a commodity, Vivek Shanbhag's *Ghachar Ghochar* considers the challenge posed to language itself. The novel tells the story of the changes that take place in an Indian family as they move from poverty to exorbitant wealth over the success of their spice business. The family's newfound wealth negatively impacts their relationships with each other and their larger community. Shanbhag emphasizes that the problem is not just one of money, but it is also a syntactical conflict, for the narrator, the adult son in the family, has trouble articulating what specifically has made life so unbearable. On the one hand, he very clearly states what the problem is: their greed and pride. On the other hand, those are only effects, secondary responses to causes that are otherwise left vague in the text. Little is said or understood about the family's business. The son knows they buy spices in bulk from Kerala and then repackage and sell them; there is also the possibility that the business has unsavory connections, for his uncle who runs it pays for a large security detail. Beyond that, nothing else is said. Thus, what specifically has led to the family's greed and pride (i.e., what economic factors or structures contribute to their skyrocketing wealth) remains a mystery. All the reader can gather is that the family's involvement in food production occurs on an industrialized scale in an India that continues to quickly modernize.

The son is not even sure what goes on at work, for his title as director of the firm is solely nominal. The fact that money has changed their lives is undeniable; just how exactly it has done this is less certain. Shanbhag underscores this with the novel's title, two words that aren't actually words at all. Soon after marrying his wife Anita, the narrator hears her use the term *ghachar ghochar* to describe a bunch of string tangled in a knot. When asked what that means, she tells him it was a phrase her brother made up when they were children, a spur-of-the-moment neologism he shouted out to express his frustration over a tangled kite string he could not finesse. After that, it "entered the family's vocabulary" and grew to simply mean anything messy or entangled, such as when Anita's brother "fell in with the wrong people, and everything became *ghachar ghochar*" (78, emphasis in original). The next day, the narrator tries to use the phrase in a playful manner, but Anita does not laugh because for her the words are not meaningless. The narrator admits, "Of course, those words could never mean to me all that they meant to her; nor would I ever utter them as naturally as she did" (78). The linguistic implications here are significant. Though there is a specific material point of reference for the first time *ghachar ghochar* was used, the phrase eventually becomes an apt descriptor for other forms of entanglement, chaos, and brokenness. The suggestion here is that the confusing way different aspects of life become entangled defies language, so much so that these situations are waiting for a better descriptor to come along. It is as if Anita's family lands upon the perfect syntax to capture their frustration or dismay over different conflicts with words that mean nothing and everything simultaneously.

Notably, the narrator identifies similar limits of language when trying to describe what it felt like to fall in love with Anita for the first time: “The rush of these feelings all at once is too much to describe. Language communicates in terms of what is already known; it chokes up when asked to deal with the entirely unprecedented” (75). Words fail the narrator because he does not have a preexisting reservoir of knowledge to pull from as he describes how he feels. The fact that language has trouble dealing with “the entirely unprecedented” echoes Ghosh’s frustration with literature’s seeming inability to narrativize what has heretofore been regarded as improbable. The suggestion here is that language is perpetually behind, always trying to catch up to the present yet never really able to. The only recourse, then, for Anita and her family is to create new words as an effort to jump in front of the unprecedented. That the phrase *ghachar ghochar* is created on an exasperated whim and not after careful deliberation is also telling. Shanbhag, like Ghosh, suggests that time is of the essence when it comes to describing reality accurately, and though the words are meaningless initially, they eventually come to signify exactly that which could not be described and signified earlier. The phrase creates new vernacular space or, rather, catches up to the space that has already been created. Over time, Anita feels these words deeply, which is why she does not appreciate the narrator’s use of it in jest. For her, *ghachar ghochar* now stands as a phrase full of appropriate significance and implication.

Though the narrator initially uses it jokingly, by the end of the novel he too comes to take the word seriously and understands how it perfectly describes what is causing his family to fall apart after their wealth increases. In this way, Shanbhag navigates the difficult terrain of how to describe that which defies understanding or

recognition, and it is important to note that his novel goes beyond merely describing the work and effects of capitalism as sublime. To label something "sublime" is, in its own clever way, an effective method of describing the indescribable by describing just how indescribable it is. To acknowledge that a system or structure is too massive and intricate in its totality to grasp all at once is not the same as throwing up one's hands and confessing to have no idea how anything within that system functions, the latter of which is precisely the predicament of Shanbhag's narrator. As a case in point, quite a bit is known and understood about capitalism and how it works. But to say with certainty we understand all of it is simply impossible. The sheer global scale of capitalism's movement defies such tall claims. However, that kind of sublimity is not the same claim that Shanbhag's narrator makes. His frustration is instead tantamount to admitting he cannot comprehend what wealth has done to his family and how it did it, and the novel charts his journey toward recognizing that entirely new terms, such as *ghachar ghochar*, will have to be employed if some level of existential understanding is to happen.

Shanbhag's novel asserts that to translate such experiences into satisfactory terms is an issue of time, one where the signifier always arrives a little late, perpetually left in the dust of the signified. For language to get out in front of the work of capital and its effects—economic and social inequality, cultural conflict, ecological devastation—and create narratives that capture the present is an impossibility that Shanbhag describes and Ghosh laments. Shanbhag shows that language and its descriptive capabilities arrive late, limited as they are in their capacity only to describe what is already known or in the past; Ghosh, however, identifies how most cli-fi is automatically relegated to the ranks of science fiction—that is, futuristic and fantastical, also removed from the present. If there

is any success or encouragement from Shanbhag's novel, it is that *Ghachar Ghochar* comes close to translating the present by narrating just how impossible that very task of translation is. But by articulating how difficult it is, Shanbhag also provides a tentative prescription: linguistic experimentation.[7]

Yoko Tawada arrives at a similar conclusion in her novel *The Emissary*, where midway through she poses a question that falls within her larger concerns about the work of language, writing, and literature: How do you call attention to that which is invisible, nonrecurring, or an absence? In *The Emissary*, the earth is "irreversibly contaminated" (23), and nations install isolationist policies in response. South Africa and India were the first to decide to "withdraw from the global rat race in which huge corporations turned underground resources into anything they could sell at inhuman speeds while ruthlessly competing to keep the lowest production costs," which meant "discontinuing all other imports and exports" (95-96). Japan, where the novel is set, followed suit due to the conviction that "each country should solve its own problems by itself" (42). In what many critics have read as a post-Fukushima commentary, *The Emissary* describes a ravaged world where successive generations in Japan become feebler, to the point that the elderly now care for increasingly frail children who lack energy and the ability to keep most food down. The novel follows Yoshiro, a novelist, who cares for his great-grandson Mumei. Reflecting on the changes Japan has experienced in his more than 100

[7] Such a conclusion on Shanbhag's part can sound like a contemporary recycling of Ezra Pound's modernist mandate to "make it new," which in some ways makes sense. Many scholars of literary transnationalism chart a resurgence of literary modernist thought and practice in literature across the globe, what has been labeled as "transnational modernism" or "new modernist studies." See Jessica Berman, *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism*; Peter Kalliney, *Modernism in a Global Context*; and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism beyond the Nation*.

years of life, Yoshiro recalls past efforts to revitalize Tokyo as more and more people fled the city for locales where food would grow. For a moment, others briefly admired Tokyo's citizens, who were "the very first to give up their electrical appliances, as a model of the most advanced lifestyle" (51). The problem, however, is that "'nonuse of existing machines' was difficult to market as a new product. To make 'revitalization' a success, you really needed something people could see" (52). Accordingly, Tokyo became a ghost town.

The complications with marketing Tokyo's past also mirror difficulties throughout *The Emissary* that Yoshiro faces with the limitations of language. As part of Japan's isolationism, the use of foreign words is discouraged if not illegal. Yoshiro knows that the "shelf life of words" keeps becoming briefer, and when they disappear, there are "no heirs to take their place" (4). In this diminished linguistic landscape, Tawada questions what it means to translate the present and near future into narrative form. On a social level in *The Emissary*, there is direct resistance in Japan to using language that references the inevitability of death. For example, a "physical examination" at one's doctor becomes a "monthly look-over," since *physical* sounds too much like *phthisical*, the latter conjuring up images of "asthma, tuberculosis, and death" (19). Similarly, "fallout" is a word one dare not utter, lest people be reminded of Japan's brutal nuclear history (17). Further, the work of the novelist is rendered in a negative light. Yoshiro suspects that people resent writers who are "too busy penning their gloomy, perverse novels" and miss out on day-to-day events they could write about (68). Others confirm Yoshiro's suspicions. His rebellious grandson wryly opines that novelists

traffic in “dead lines,” not deadlines (70), and Mumei’s nurse suggests that the paper novelists write on could just as helpfully be used as a diaper for infants (73).

In terms of what writing produces, Yoshiro is not too optimistic about what books can accomplish. He believes they face an impossible task, especially when he thinks of sickly Mumei as the reader:

> A raw, honest treatment of the problems they faced every day would only end in frustration at the absence of solutions, making it impossible to arrive at places one could only reach in books. Creating an ideal fictional world for his great-grandson was another possibility, although reading about an ideal world wouldn’t help the boy change the world around him any time soon. (16)

Yoshiro’s latter concern is that idealistic narratives fall into the realm of fantasy, and he does not believe such literary endeavors are helpful in any substantive way. For someone such as Mumei, whose physical limitations are severe, reading about an ideal world could register as a form of cruelty, an insulting reminder of what is impossible. Yet at the same time, Yoshiro seems to hold out hope that Mumei may be capable of “chang[ing] the world.” His added qualifier that it cannot happen “any time soon” presupposes that it could occur at some point. But the former option for narrative—realism—does not seem any more productive than idealism. Realism, for Yoshiro, would only produce fatalism and highlight the lack of solutions for Japan’s contemporary social, political, and ecological situation. Yet, even so, Yoshiro again acknowledges a glimmer of hopeful potential within books: They help you to reach places in ways that

no other medium can. Whether or not those places can ever be actualized in real life, Yoshiro does not say, but they are present in books at the very least.

This is the central tension within Tawada's writing: Narrative affords writers and readers different options, but are any of them beneficial? Tawada chiefly answers that question via Mumei by tracing different ways that writing and narrative bring him hope and excitement. More than that, they shape and present the world to Mumei in compelling ways. For instance, the words *Naumann Mammoth*, written down on their calendar to denote an upcoming lecture, were "themselves … an animal that would start moving if only he stared at it long enough" (23). It is difficult for Mumei "to take his eyes off the name from which he believed a living creature might emerge" (23). Tawada playfully suggests here that, with enough imagination, representation in writing succeeds in establishing the referent. The novel explains this as the changeover between two- and three-dimensional representations, where the most impactful artistic rendering occurs. For example, pressed flowers fascinate Mumei, because they are "so different from ordinary pictures" with "their original forms squashed down from three dimensions into two" (61). The pressed flower occupies a middle space. It is not an outright artistic re-creation of the referent through representation, but it is also not quite the referent itself, either. The pressed flower is neither a mere reproduction of the real nor does it capture the flower's former real potential and glory of being fully in bloom. Instead, it captures the moment of decay and abstraction that Mumei finds so arresting. The change between dimensions is referenced again at Mumei's elementary school when he and other students' study a world map. It is outdated, made before an earthquake pushed Japan even farther from the Asian continent, and when Mumei observes out loud that the earth

is round, the other students become angry over learning that the flat map is “a lie” and only a “flat drawing of a sphere” (123). However, Mumei is surprised to learn that the globe is cut in a different spot depending on where one lives and that, when spread out, it becomes “a different map of the world” (124). That there are “other, different maps” circulating in other locales causes Mumei to gasp (124).

The students’ response of indignation to the flat map is a compelling corrective to the fascination over a pressed flower. If the flower’s movement from three dimensions to two is engrossing, the map’s presentation of two dimensions as actuality or accurate depiction of what is otherwise three-dimensional feels like a deception to the students. The representational work of writing has often been referred to as a kind of mapping, as noted earlier in chapter four, and it has more recently been referenced again by British novelist Tom McCarthy in his keynote address at the Society for Novel Studies conference in 2016, the title phrase or theme of which was “The Novel in or against World Literature.” In his address, McCarthy describes “the basic cartographic question and the basic question of literature, of the novel” as “How do you put the world on paper?” (167). McCarthy reminds us that all maps rendered on sheets of paper contain flaws since that same flat piece of paper cannot smoothly cover a sphere. It will contain imperfections to the point that all two-dimensional maps are “projections—and projections, being drafters’ conventions, are both arbitrary and flawed” (167). At some point, portions of the map “distend,” and the “poles themselves cannot be represented at all”; if someone attempts to correct that error, the equator will “undergo infinite distortion” (167-68). With these impossibilities assured, McCarthy eschews the pursuit of verisimilitude; instead, he understands “the prerogative of the novelist” is simply

"getting lost" as he or she tries to "pinpoint some location or event," all while understanding that the search will likely yield only "the chance movements of debris round global flows" (166). That is to say, with *The Emissary* in mind, the novelist will at best come close to producing a pressed flower, something that is abstracted in its "projections … arbitrary and flawed," yet also kinetic in its capture of "chance movements."

At one point, Mumei wonders if some material objects can "still be there … even after the words for them had disappeared" or if it is possible that "they change, or disappear, along with their names" (98). Like the outdated map in his classroom, some words become outmoded signifiers because the imposed political isolation negates the use of foreign terms. But Tawada suggests these efforts are slippery at best. A baker Yoshiro frequents, referring to some of his baked goods, says, "[W]e used to call this German bread. Officially it's Sanuki bread now … people don't seem to remember that *bread* is a foreign word" (14, emphasis in original). Certain outmoded or outlawed signifiers still slip in, relics of earlier times perhaps, but words that recall and refer to a different politics all the same—in this case, a time before Japan's isolationism. Tawada answers Mumei's musings here: The signified does not disappear with the signifier. Even if words, their representative abilities, and how they are put to different uses amount to little more than McCarthy's "projections," something is still captured and preserved like a pressed flower. It may be little more than a dead shell of something's former, fuller actuality—Yoshiro's grandson's assessment of a novel as "dead lines" seems nicely apt by now—but even that is a form of mapping that provides some semblance of orientation about the world and one's place within it. It is, to return to the

challenges Yoshiro believes books face, neither realism nor idealism, but some kind of middle ground instead, a capturing of the passage point between third and second dimensions.

To synthesize the ideas briefly charted here, what Tawada does in *The Emissary* both attains and misses the gauntlet Ghosh lays down for fiction. While her novel comes close to cataloguing the active loss of life within the destruction of the environment, it also seems too future-oriented in its setting for Ghosh's taste. The other option, though, as Shanbhag notes, is a sort of lag time that always plagues the narrativizing ability of language in its attempts to make sense of the world in the present. Language and its ability to describe, represent, and recreate always arrives a little too late. Indeed, to move beyond the political, social, and cultural evolution that global capitalism initiates is, as Hergé concludes, a futile effort to undertake with one's art, and he certainly tried. But attempts to lend universal meaning to one's art and give it a timeless sheen is hardly something that can be effected through a force of one's will. Narrative distance is an illusion in its own right, one that Ghosh argues makes little sense to pursue, even if its seems the novel has done a fairly decent job of it when it comes to issues of climate change. Hergé also stopped pursuing narrative distance, concluding *Tintin* with the image of his work entombed and silenced by the different influences and interests of global capitalism. From a stance of literature-as-mapping, though, Hergé's conclusion is hardly fair. *Tintin* still produces a specific map of the world, as does Shanbhag's novel. They may be diagnostic and after-the-fact, outdated like the map in Mumei's classroom, but they are still useful in their ability to orient or explain a certain history of orientation.

It is telling that after seeing both the Naumann Mammoth lecture scheduled on the calendar and the outdated map being brought out in class, Mumei thrusts his arms into the air and shouts “Paradise!” (23, 120). Both the lecture and the map symbolize forms of knowledge, vehicles through which information about the past will be disseminated. That the topics of discussion—the mammoth, the world—no longer exist or no longer resemble the form in which they are presented is insignificant to Mumei. A certain paradisiacal wonder remains regardless. But what elicits awe from Mumei—and notably moves him beyond the realm of language by causing him to gasp instead of shouting “Paradise!”—is learning that there are other maps, other ways of seeing the world. This, Tawada suggests, is what continues to be the truly breathtaking potential of literature, and it is the same goal Ghosh hopes contemporary literature would shoulder: to narrativize the world and all its changes in ways that map that which is still largely uncharted. As the global reach of capitalism continues to reshape our world and reorient our ways of seeing it, literature can do the same, albeit imperfectly. Since, as Tawada notes, there are places one can “only reach in books,” such a cartographic and linguistic search is an ongoing process. One often hears the phrase “an exchange of ideas,” as if ideas are chiefly intended for passing around to the extent they are reduced to their exchange value and nothing more. However, since ideas, theories, and ideologies have material consequences in their social aspects (Plehwe et al. 5), their use value should not be so easily dismissed.

Ghosh, Hergé, Shanbhag, and Tawada all emphasize the difficulty and necessity of making the world legible through artistic narrative form; the methods for achieving that end are many, but engaging with these attempts to, as McCarthy says, “put the

world on paper" is a socially consequential act. Such narrative endeavors are entangled in the work and effects of global capitalism to the point it may all seem *ghachar ghochar*, but novelists continue to try to chart and map forms of understanding in the midst of it. It will likely require new narrative approaches, lexicons, and imaginative risks to create accurate global renderings, but that, Ghosh argues, precisely formulates the nexus of where literature must focus now: the improbable.

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