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Alfonso Gutiérrez – Sibaja

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Abnormality and Stigmatization in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*

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Abstract

The article proposes a reading of Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* that parts from previous criticism that mostly concerned itself with debating a supposed glamorization of heroin abuse. Instead, this article focuses on the discursive mechanisms that classify the novel's characters as abnormal subjects with a created need to be disciplined and normalized. Specifically, it addresses Mark Renton's classification as abnormal in terms of ideology and drug addiction and how such labeling is related to stigmatization. Theoretical considerations regarding abnormality, stigmatization and the psychiatric discourse from the works of Michel Foucault, Erwin Goffman and Thomas Szasz are incorporated to the discussion of Mark Renton's mechanomorphist construction and its violent implications.

Key words: abnormality; stigma; psychiatric discourse; normalization; mechanomorphism.

Resumen:

El artículo propone una lectura de la novela *Trainspotting* de Irvine Welsh que difiere de la crítica previa que mayormente se preocupó en debatir una supuesta glamorización del abuso de heroína. En vez, el artículo se enfoca en los mecanismos discursivos que clasifican a los personajes de la novela como sujetos anormales con una necesidad creada de ser disciplinados y normalizados. Específicamente se aborda la clasificación de Mark Renton como anormal en términos ideológicos y de adicción a las drogas y cómo tal etiqueta se relaciona a la estigmatización. Consideraciones teóricas de las obras de Michel Foucault, Erwin Goffman y Thomas Szasz sobre anormalidad, estigmatización y el discurso psiquiátrico son incorporadas a la discusión sobre la construcción mecanomorfizada de Mark Renton y sus violentas implicaciones.

Palabras claves: anormalidad; estigma; discurso psiquiátrico; normalización; mecanomorfismo.

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Steven Redhead explains that Irvine Welsh considers that in simple terms *Trainspotting* is about a group of “heroin addicts in a run-down Edinburgh estate” (as cited in MacLeod, 2008, p.89). Since its publication in 1993, this novel sparked many controversies concerning drug abuse in young adults. Such controversies and the spike of criticism from conservative groups even cost Welsh the possibility of receiving the renowned Booker Prize when two judges were so offended by the book that threatened with their resignation if the novel was chosen in the final shortlist (Schoene, 2010, p.viii). Despite the unfounded belief that Welsh’s seminal book glorifies drug consumption, Danny Boyle’s 1996 movie adaptation and Ewan McGregor’s acclaimed performance as Mark Renton catapulted the novel to new levels of worldwide acceptance. Among many aspects, this success can also be attributed to Welsh’s nonjudgmental depiction of a group of young adults that cope in non-acceptable ways with a hostile social environment. As Bert Cardullo (1997) puts it, *Trainspotting* “is neither a glorification of heroin use, an anarchist’s call for the destruction of society, nor, at the opposite end of the spectrum, a moralistic condemnation of drug addiction” (p.159). Above all, instead of being a moralizing agent, this novel is an opportunity to direct close attention to the narrations of social groups that are usually absent from the literary canon.

Trainspotting’s thematic concern and shifting narrative voice make the novel a fertile ground for discussions and examinations regarding social determinism and the construction of self. The story is set in a Scottish society that is fractured at many different levels and categories. For example, in Irvine Welsh’s iconic Leith, and so in the rest of his narrative universe, rather than imagining the self as an essential organic unity that unproblematically determines identity, the self is presented as fragmented and in a constant tension with its different components. In this regard Stuart Hall (1992) explains that in such cases the systems of meaning and the cultural discourses are pulling the self in different directions, shifting the subject continuously (p.598). This results in the creation of a subject with multiple identitarian positions. Each of these positions comes with a set of social expectations, aspirations and demands and it is not uncommon that, instead of being complementary, these social demands and assumptions stand in open contradiction among themselves. For instance, the novel makes clear that society’s expectations of Frank Begbie’s role as a conforming parent stand in total contradiction to what his male peers expect of him as the group’s psychopathic chauvinist muscleman.

In this novel the characters fail to integrate their subject’s positions into what society considers a healthy and appropriate self. Mark Renton, the most frequent narrator in the book, aware of their failure, describes his friends and himself as “a quartet of fucked-up people thegither” (Welsh, 1996, p.84). Such failure causes them to be socially classified as abnormal individuals and, hence, to be subjected to different ideological mechanisms of discipline and normalization. In the novel Mark Renton, willingly or not, interiorizes this imposed classification and thus victimizes himself by considering that he belongs to

“the lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth” (Welsh, 1996, p.78). Under these particular circumstances Welsh’s novel allows the reader to witness the myriad of implications that result of social and psychiatric stigmatization. The aim of this paper is to address Mark Renton’s classification as abnormal in terms of ideology and drug addiction and, also, to analyze the role of the psychiatric discourse in its attempt to normalize him. Nonetheless, before undertaking this hermeneutical endeavor it is important to address the theoretical considerations regarding abnormality, stigmatization and the psychiatric discourse from the works of Michel Foucault, Erwin Goffman and Thomas Szasz.

The Construction of Abnormality and the Mental Illness

It was Michel Foucault, in his *Lectures at the College de France* in the years 1974-1975, who first attempted to construct a genealogy of abnormality. In these lectures Foucault tied the history of the racialized and sexualized monsters of the past two centuries to the emergence of an apparatus of knowledge and power that normalizes individuals. This discourse of power relied on the conjunction of several disciplines that classified the so-called abnormal based on an expert’s opinion. During the 18th Century, this caused a merging of the judicial and medical classification so that what was considered a crime became a pathologic symptom that had to be controlled and normalized: “(...) as crime becomes increasingly pathologized and the expert and judge swap roles, this form of control, assessment, and effect of power linked to the characterization of an individual becomes increasingly active” (Foucault, 2003, p.38). This form of control is not repressive and destructive like in the sovereign power; in fact, it is founded on a norm that both qualifies and corrects based on the creation of knowledge (Foucault, 2003, p.50). According to Foucault (2003):

(...) the eighteenth century established a type of power that is not linked to ignorance but a power that can only function thanks to the formation of a knowledge that is both its effect and also a condition of its exercise (p.52).

This formation of experts’ knowledge and the merging of technologies of abnormality are what constitute the normative project that operates in modern disciplinary societies. Thomas Szasz takes on Foucault’s genealogy of abnormality and directs its attention to the psychiatric discourse as a mechanism of classification and normalization. Szasz (1991) explains that “the concept of illness, whether bodily or mentally, implies deviation from some clearly defined norm” (p.15). Therefore, any individual that does not comply with society’s normative project is classified as sick. In this way, “crime is thus no longer a problem of law and morals, but is instead a problem of medicine and therapeutics” (Szasz, 1991, p.8). The first problem that Szasz (1991) encounters with the merging of the scientific and psychiatric discourse is

that every abnormal subject becomes a sick person: “today, particularly in the affluent West, all of the difficulties and problems of living are considered psychiatric diseases, and everyone (but the diagnosticians) is considered mentally ill” (p.4). The second problem is that this discourse of generalized insanity frees humans of their moral responsibilities by privileging a psychiatric knowledge and language that de-ethicizes and depoliticizes human behavior (Szasz, 1991, p.2).

As it is implied from the previous paragraphs, this discourse is validated by “the imagery, and the rhetoric of science, and specially medicine” (Szasz, 1991, p.4). For Szasz (1991), the scientific rhetoric inside the psychiatric discourse disguises all mental illnesses and abnormalities as “states determined by nature” (p.195). This grants the psychiatric discourse an unquestionable privilege in the classification of human beings:

In psychiatry, all discussion of the problem of classification rests on the fundamental premise that there exist in nature abnormal mental conditions or forms of behavior, and that it is scientifically worthwhile and morally meritorious to place persons suffering from these conditions, or displaying such behavior, into appropriately named categories (Szasz, 1991, p.190).

When an individual is categorized as abnormal and, hence, as mentally ill, the discourse employed is ideologically justified in the basis of nature and science. According to Szasz (1991), the fallacy of thinking in terms of natural sciences allows the diagnosticians to classify people as if they were objects (p.192). This is detrimental for the humanity of those classified as mentally ill: “(...) to classify a person psychiatrically is to demean him, to rob him of his humanity, and thus to transform him into a thing” (Szasz, 1991, p.216). If this is true, a subject is human only when placed into the role of the diagnostician, but as soon as they swap the roles the subject will become an object to be observed, classified and controlled. Szasz (1991) employs the term *mechanomorphism* to explain the historical advent of this objectification based on the scientific discourse:

Since the advent of modern science, beginning with men like Galileo and Newton, the image of nature as a harmoniously functioning mechanical machine inspired another view of man. Instead of “projecting” himself into nature, man now “introjects” nature into himself. Whereas primitive man personifies things, modern man “thingifies” persons. We call this *mechanomorphism*: modern man tries to understand man as if “it” were a machine (p.199). This ideological transformation of individuals into machines pursues the goal of simplifying the moral implications of normalizing people. This is nothing more than a mechanism that subtly manifests power’s need of control and mastery over its subjects. This ideological

transformation of individuals into machines pursues the goal of simplifying the moral implications of normalizing people. This is nothing more than a mechanism that subtly manifests power's need of control and mastery over its subjects.

After considering all these theoretical implications of the ideology of sanity and insanity, Szasz (1991) calls for new understanding of abnormality. For him, mental illnesses should be reconsidered in terms of their true ideological manifestations: "(...) all the evidence (...) supports the view that what people now call mental illnesses are, for the most part, communications expressing unacceptable ideas, often framed in an unusual idiom" (p.19). He even suggests that mental illnesses should "be looked at fresh and more simply, that they be removed from the category of illnesses, and that they be regarded as the expressions of man's struggle with *the problem of how we should live*" (p.21). That is to say, psychiatry is an ideological mechanism that is more concerned in prescribing and monitoring normed social behaviors than in the wellbeing of individuals. It is, therefore, nonsensical to consider that the abnormal social behaviors that the psychiatric discourse claims to treat are going to be effectively cured with the use of medical taxonomy and technology. As Szasz (1991) puts it, "it is logically absurd to expect that [*medical interventions*] will help solve problems whose very existence have been defined and established on non-medical grounds" (p.17).

Szasz identifies several functions of the myth of the mental illness. For him, the classification of psychiatric patients functions as a way to define social reality (1991, p.212). In other words, this classification of individuals sustains an expected social behavior that defines normality. Another function of this myth is the legitimization of social control through classification and the illusion of treatment. In Szasz words: "Wherever we turn, there is evidence to substantiate the view that most psychiatric diagnoses may be used, and are used, as invectives: their aim is to degrade -and, hence, socially constrain- the person diagnosed" (1991, p.204). In another passage he bluntly affirms: "I have argued that to classify another person's behavior is usually a means of constraining him. This is particularly true of psychiatric classification, whose traditional aim has been to legitimize the social controls placed on so-called mental patients" (1991, p.213). Along with this social control, the myth of the mental illness encourages the collective delusion of assuming that without the disruption of psychopathologies society would be harmonious and satisfying for all individuals (1991, p.23).

Erving Goffman (1963) explains what is the impact of these classifications on the individual. He employs the term stigma to refer to "an attitude that is deeply discrediting" to the extent of transforming a whole person into "a tainted, discounted one" (p.12). This stigma is the source for a variety of discriminations against the abnormal individual:

By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class (Goffman, 1963, p.15).

Foucault and Szasz already addressed the theory that accounts for the danger and inferiority of the stigmatized person. Hence, Goffman is another voice that confirms the dehumanization typical of this taxonomy of normality. In daily life people label those who deviate from the norm as crippled, retarded or addicted without giving much thought to it. This is due to the interiorization of the discourse of inferiority constructed around stigmas.

Another way in which the individual is punished for its stigma has to do with social isolation and exclusion. Goffman affirms that a stigma “has the effect of cutting him [the abnormal] off from society and from himself so that he stands a discredited person facing an unaccepting world” (1963, p.31). The hostility of the world forces the stigmatized person to isolation, but, at the same time society assigns a collective identity to all of those who share a stigma. Nonetheless, the dynamics of these groups do not encourage a collective action against their branding as abnormals:

Those outside the category may similarly designate those within it in group terms. However, often in such cases the full membership will not be part of a single group, in the strictest sense; they will neither have a capacity for collective action, -nor a stable and embracing pattern of mutual interaction. What one does find is that the members of a particular stigma category will have a tendency to come together into small social groups whose members all derive from the category (Goffman, 1963, p.36).

These groups of stigmatized people play an important role in the overall construction of social identities. Finally, Goffman makes a division between normalization and normification. The first concept refers to the “attempt of society in bringing the abnormal to normality,” while the latter, is an “attempt of the stigmatized to present himself as normal” (Goffman, 1963). Both concepts are crucial for understanding Mark Renton’s stigmatization and his refusal to meet social expectations.

The last theoretical aspect to be discussed has to do with ideology. However, it is important to clarify that even though Foucault’s latter works dismiss the traditional Marxist concept of ideology, his genealogy of abnormality does not openly conflict with it. Traditionally, Louis Althusser’s Marxist approach to the concept of ideology, is read and usually placed in total contradiction with Michel

Foucault's works. Nonetheless, some critics, like Warren Montag, argue against the popular theoretical divorce between these two figures:

Perhaps it is now (that is, from a certain historical distance) possible to regard Althusser and Foucault (understood as proper names that denote bodies of work) as reciprocal immanent causes, dynamic and inseparable, no longer as creators of systems that must be accepted or rejected *in toto* (Montag, 1995, p.56).

Therefore, the fact that some of the analysis in this paper is sustained on Foucault's understanding of abnormality does not exclude the possibility of borrowing concepts from the Marxist ideological tradition. Slavoj Žižek, following the Marxist school of criticism, claims that the most elementary definition of ideology, which derives from Marx's *Capital* and can be summarized in the phrase "they do not know it, but they are doing it", is wrong. He explains that "it is not just a question of seeing things, that is, social reality, as 'they really are', of throwing away the distorting spectacles of ideology; the main point is to see how the reality itself cannot reproduce itself without this so called ideological mystification (Fiennes, "The Pervert's Guide to Ideology"). The mask is not simply hiding the real state of things; "the ideological distortion is written into its very essence" (Žižek, 2008, p.25). In a way, ideology is not a fantasy that is imposed on us to cover reality. For Žižek, ideology is our spontaneous relationship to our social world. You cannot escape ideology, you just can, by means of a critique of ideology, be aware of the distance between the ideological mask and a given social reality. Žižek explains that in a way, individuals enjoy their ideology and therefore all attempts to escape it hurts (Fiennes, "The Pervert's Guide to Ideology"). On his infamous documentary *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* he even coined a term for such pain: the extreme violence of liberation (Fiennes).

The Violence of Classification and the Abnormal Renton

In a way, we can understand *Trainspotting* as a collection of stories on how to fail to assume a social role. There are many examples for this, like Leslie and Sick Boy's unfortunate parenthood; the characters' inability and/or refusal to be part of the market's productive forces; and, the characters' toxic masculinity that ranges from psychopathic chauvinist males like Frank Begbie and womanizers like Sick Boy to sexually insecure males like Mark Renton. Thus, the question that arises is: If Thomas Szasz's definition of a psychiatric patient is taken for granted, can these characters be considered mentally ill? The answer is affirmative. From the perspective of power these characters are mentally ill because they "(...) fail, or refuse, to assume a legitimate social role" (Szasz, 1991, p.210). Their abnormality is

confirmed in a diagnosis because the real interest of the psychiatric discourse is moral and behavioral instead of medical. At the end everything is about sustaining the social normative project.

In Mark Renton's case his abnormality and, thus, mental illness results from his deviation from social expectations in regards to production, addiction and ideology. In regards to production, Renton's abnormality originates in his refusal to participate in Leith's labor force. When Dianne's parents confront him he is forced to lie in order not to be stigmatized as an abnormal. He pretends to be an art curator, an occupation that is highly praised by bourgeois values, instead of an unemployed individual who lives out of scamming the government. Renton's views regarding production and everyday survival are in open contradiction to those validated by society's normative project:

What he [*Renton*] did, at least work-wise, was nothing. He was in a syndicate which operated a giro fraud system, and he claimed benefit at five different addresses (...) Defrauding the government in such a way always made Renton feel virtuous, and it was difficult to remain discreet about his achievements (...) Renton felt that he deserved this money, as the management skills employed to maintain such a state of affairs were fairly extensive (Welsh, 1996, p.146).

At the eyes of society the main problem here is not Renton's fraud felonies, but his capability of surviving without participating in the formal market forces. In fact, Renton is somehow correct when he points out that to maintain the fraud system certain skills are needed. Thus, one has to ask oneself: What is the difference between Renton's fraudulent enterprise and a stock exchange speculator that makes a fortune out of other's loss? Both profit from someone else's money and their motivation is merely economical and not ethical. Well, the main difference is that one occupation is validated by society and the other one is not. As Ruth Helyer affirms, Renton "does not work in the accepted sense" (as cited in Schoene, 2010, p.67). He is aware of this ambiguity and therefore, does not hide the fact that he feels proud of his abnormal, and, hence, criminal occupation.

In regards to addiction, Renton deviates from society's expectations by becoming a heroin addict. The problem here is not his addictive behavior because society differentiates among different types of addictions; that is to say, some addictions are part of the norm and, thus, validated, and others are not. For example, if Renton's addiction were towards money and consumption, he would have been praised as a young educated entrepreneur, but as he prefers heroin, he is stigmatized as a junkie. For Scottish society drug addiction is not a symptom of social discontent but a pathological behavior that corrupts the purity of its young adults. In other words, from power's perspective, drug addiction is the main cause for the decomposition of Leith, but, in fact, one of the reasons Renton and his mates are doing drugs is to escape an already decomposed world. Kevin Williamson explains that heroin is used as a social painkiller:

“heroin is frequently used to blot out the pain of unemployment, lack of a future, stress, relationship breakups and boredom” (as cited in Schoene, 2010, p. 67). As Cardullo (1997) points out: “the book makes the characters' desire for chemically induced oblivion comprehensible, given the sordid, disaffecting environment in which they live: Leith, a working-class area of housing projects on Edinburgh's old dockside” (p.159).

On the whole, Renton knows that his drug addiction is condemned in ideological grounds. The faulty logic of the psychiatric discourse that condemns drug addiction is plainly visible for him:

Society invents a spurious convoluted logic tae absorb and change people whae's behaviour is outside its mainstream. Suppose that ah ken aw the pros and cons, know that ah'm gaunnae huv a short life, am ay sound mind etcetera, etcetera, but still want tae use smack? They won't let ye dae it. They won't let ya dae it, because it's seen as a sign ay thir ain failure. The fact that ye jist simply choose tae reject whit they huv tae offer. Choose us. Choose life (Welsh, 1996, p.187).

His classification as a drug addict, and, therefore, as mentally ill is made on the grounds of not following what ideology asks from him. In a way, Renton decides not to play ideology's cynical game and resorts to simplify his existence by the use of drugs: “Ah love nothing (except junk), ah hate nothing (except forces that prevent me getting any) and ah fear nothing (except not scoring)” (Welsh, 1996, p.21). To appropriate one of the chapter's titles from the novel, one could say that Renton takes drugs in psychic defense (Welsh, 1996, p.71). He needs to defend from the violence that originates in his classification as abnormal and from the hostile environment that at the end of the novel he tries to escape.

In a passage where Tommy asks Renton about the reasons for his drug use, Renton explains:

It kinday makes things seem mair real tae us. Life's boring and futile. We start oaf wi high hopes, then we bottle it. We realize that we're all gaunna die, without really findin oot the big answers. We develop all they long-winded ideas which jist interpret the reality of oor lives in different weys, without really extending oor body of worthwhile knowledge, about the big things, the real things. Basically, we live a short, disappointing life; and then we die. We fill up oor lives wi shite, things like careers and relationships tae delude ourselves that it isnae all totally pointless. Smack's an honest drug, because it strips away these delusions. (Welsh, 1996, p.89)

From this quote one can infer that heroin becomes a way for coping with the pain generated by being aware of how the ideological mechanisms work. Renton wants the ideological delusions to

disappear, so he can see reality in the face. However, as Žižek explains, it is impossible to escape ideology, one just reduces the distance between ideology and reality but never actually reaches it. This awareness is a tremendous source of pain for Renton, Žižek calls this pain: the extreme violence of liberation (Fiennes, "The Pervert's Guide to Ideology"). As a subject aware of this distance between ideology and reality, his insights are also a source of stigmatization. Throughout the novel, he develops a critique of ideological narratives and myths that manifest his futile desire of stripping reality of the ideological mask. It is not that he is unable to play ideology's game because of his drug addiction, in fact, his ability to use different language codes and his momentary and successful attempts to normification demonstrate that he just chooses not to do it. Furthermore, his interest in Kierkegaard's approach to subjectivity and truth and his conscious understanding of the psychiatric discourse as a means of social control make Renton an individual that is well aware of ideology's all-encompassing power. Therefore, he needs to be normalized.

When Renton and Spud are taken into custody for stealing some books, the first is sent to be normalized by means of therapy, while the latter is sent to be disciplined and punished. These both options represent the typical processes for dealing with abnormals. In the chapter "Searching for the Inner Man", Renton makes a great argumentation of how this therapeutic attempt for normalization is just about controlling individuals and enforcing certain idea of "mental health, or non-deviant behaviour" (Welsh, 1996, p.185). He opens the chapter by affirming: "Rehabilitation is shite; sometimes ah think ah'd rather be banged up. Rehabilitation means the surrender ay the self" (Welsh, 1996, p.181). This loss of self is nothing more than the acknowledgement that the relation between him and his diagnostician is one of subject-object. His criticism of this mechanomorphism is directly related to the idea of ideological dependence and control:

Why is it that because ye use hard drugs every cunt feels that they have the right tae dissect and analyse ye? Once ye accept that they huv that right, ye'll join them in the search fir this holy grail, this thing that makes ye tik. Ye'll then defer tae them, allowin yersel tae be conned intae believing any biscuit-ersed theory ay behaviour they choose tae attach tae ye. Then yir theirs, no yir ain; the dependency shifts from the drug to them (Welsh, 1996, p.187).

His classification as mentally ill instead of helping him emerges as a source for dehumanization and control. Renton cannot be normalized in medical grounds, because he is not really sick. He is ill only if seen through the eyes of power and the discourse of insanity. It is through this hostile classification that Renton is violently used as the depositary of society's blame.

The classification, as Szasz (1991) puts it, is an ideological mechanism “to rob a [person] of his humanity, and thus to transform him into a thing” (p.216). More specifically, Renton is transformed into an instrument/object that fulfills an important ideological purpose: that of uniting all fears from society in a single entity. In other words, the function of this classification is to trade all fears –like loss of identity, increase of poverty, instability of the financial market, invasion of privacy, etc- for one fear alone: abnormality. According to Slavoj Žižek, this ideological mechanism simplifies the social order (Fiennes, “The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology”). For example, consider the life of an ordinary Scottish worker in the town of Leith. His situation is one of perplexity: he is told ‘you are a Scottish worker and you should fulfill this set of arbitrarily imposed expectations’, however, for him nothing functions as it should be. Probably, he is exploited at his work, his identities are a source of discrimination, debts accumulate and his children are prone to walk the same path as his; just as Renton predicts of Begbie’s son: “That kid’s name wis doon fir H.M. Prison Saughton when it was still in June’s womb” (Welsh, 1996, p.171). However, as Žižek explains, this tension and instability is inherent to capitalism (Fiennes, “The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology”). It is the system’s violent nature that converts this man’s life into a constant struggle and anxiety. Then, how does the social hierarchical order resolve this? Well, by generating an ideological narrative that justifies these struggles and instabilities by blaming others.

This is a mechanism of deflection, in which this ideological narrative protects the status quo and blames others for its wrongdoings. This was what McCarthyism did in the 50’s in the United States, they deposited all their fears and complaints into a common enemy: communism. In a way, Scottish and British society takes the novel’s characters and stigmatizes them as a threat that is to blame for all social problems. It is as if the social order sacrifices the lives of those who deviate from the norm just for the sake of ideological self-preservation. This even goes to the extent of blaming the abnormals of their classification as “the most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat into creation” (Welsh, 1996, p.78). For example, Mark Renton’s parents blame the abnormals for making his son one of them: “ma Ma n faither suspect that ma drug problems ur due tae ma association wi the laddie Murphy” (Welsh, 1996, p.198). Similarly, Spud’s mother confronts Renton and his friends for being the cause of his son’s downfall: “If it wisnae for you n this crowd ay bloody rubbish, ma Danny widnae be in the fuckin jail right now!” (Welsh, 1996, p.170). Its bearers also interiorize their stigmatization as the source of all problems. Hence, Renton’s affiliation with his mates is based more on their stigmatization than in a deep emotional concern for each other. That is the reason for Renton’s constant claim of feeling lonely and his assertion that there are “nae friends in this game. Jist associates” (Welsh, 1996, p.6). Even though their stigma brings them physically closer, they are the victims of a terrible isolation. In summary, Renton’s classification as abnormal is violent and destructive but necessary for the ideological preservation of society’s normative project.

To conclude, *Trainspotting*'s depiction of the 'skag boys' is much more complex than a simple condemnation or glorification of violence and drug abuse. They are the victims of an ideological mechanism that is designed to benefit the status quo and to morally redeem society at the expense of placing them in a binary formula as victimizers of a supposedly harmonious society. These characters are stigmatized as dangerous because otherwise their role as recipients of blame and fear would be compromised and therefore the whole ideological narrative would be in jeopardy. The extreme pain that is inflicted in Renton is the cause for many of his problems; thus, his life becomes a never-ending cycle of failure and exclusion. Even though he is subjected to normalization by means of psychiatric therapy, the cycle will not break because he is not ill and therefore can not be cured and, mainly, because there is no real interest on helping him. On the whole, Mark Renton's case brings to the light an issue that is most of the time silenced by middle and upper class social narratives. On the present circumstances in which individuals are constantly being stigmatized, we should question the validity of the discourses that sustain those stigmas and call for a rehumanization of those classified as abnormals.

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