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Samantha Cartaino

Arcadia University, scartaino@arcadia.edu

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Samantha Cartaino
Professor Crenshaw
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“Same Rules Apply”: Analyzing Image and Identity in Irvine Welsh's *Filth* in
Relation to the Scottish Independence Movement

Introduction

Excessive sex, drug abuse and violence never used to be associated with Scottish literature until the arrival of Irvine Welsh. In the first half of the twentieth century, it was poet Hugh MacDiarmid who defined Scottish tradition in literature during the Scottish Renaissance Movement (Schoene 11). MacDiarmid believed Scottish literature had become too influenced by the English after the poetry of Robert Burns, so he began to incorporate Scottish vernacular, political views and renewed national image into his poetry a way to revive Scottishness and Scottish tradition. Because of this, Welsh sees MacDiarmid as “a symbol of all that’s horrific and hideous about Scotland and Scottish culture” (Schoene 11). The problem with MacDiarmid’s work is that it created an urban image of Scotland that not only opposed Burns’ rural image (the one that the English began to shop around as the true image of Scotland), but tried to erase its entire existence. Welsh believes it is important to acknowledge England’s influence on Scotland as well as Scotland’s complex identity instead of trying to limit it like MacDiarmid tried.

One of the most complex aspects of Scotland is its political structure. There have been three major cycles of Scottish independence which took place in 1979, 1997 and 2014. The main concern for first devolution referendum in 1979 was Scotland’s oil reserve which was under English control. After it was revealed in 1970 that “North Sea oil could have made an independent Scotland as prosperous as Switzerland” if under Scottish control, a push for independence from England was increased but ultimately lost (Russell and Kelbie 1). In 1997 a second devolution referendum passed that allowed the creation of the Scottish Parliament while the 2014 vote was the major move for

independence. While it is common knowledge that art imitates life, Welsh has confirmed this thought with his creation of *Filth* and its political statement.

This is because the story follows Robertson, a drug-addled police officer in Edinburgh, Scotland trying to get a promotion to win back his absent wife while discovering he has bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Dealing with a fractured identity, he creates the perfect image of his wife Carole and dresses as her while presenting himself as a dutiful husband who has a tough, yet loving hold on his family. The 1998 book was recently made into a film released in 2013 and while a majority of the film follows the book, Bruce's inevitable suicide in the film is vastly different from the book.¹ This may be because Bruce's suicide in each format represents the Scottish political movements outlined by Welsh.

In an interview with NPR on September 11, 2014, Welsh spoke about his definitions for three phases of the Scottish independence movement of 1979, 1997 and 2014. According to him, the phases are as follows: the first phase was that Scottish people believed everything bad that was imposed upon them was England's doing, the second phase was that that Scottish people believed everything bad that was imposed upon them was their own doing, and the final phase is that the Scottish people are no longer concerned with placing the blame but are more interesting in moving forward as one nation (Inskeep 2014). It is important to note that all three phases are found in Bruce Robertson's suicide.

Through a psychoanalytic lens, it can be determined that Welsh deliberately writes Bruce Robertson to mirror Scotland and its various independence movements

¹ The book is my primary text for this thesis. The only time I will analyze the film is if there are differences from the book.

through the creation of stereotypical images of himself and his absent wife as well as the acceptance of a fractured identity through his death. The changes made to Bruce's suicide in the book and the film—the switch from blaming to accepting in the book and the switching from accepting to moving forward in the film— represent the changing reasoning behind the Scottish independence movements. The fact that Bruce accepts his identity through suicide in both the book and the film suggests Welsh is calling for the metaphorical death of false images such as the ones MacDiarmid incorporated into the complex Scottish identity and the acceptance of a multifaceted national identity as a way for Scotland to move forward together as an independent nation.

Part I: the Self, the Partial Object and the Other

Following Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, the Self, the partial object and the Other play an important part of *Filth*; Bruce represents the Self, his wife Carole represents the partial object and "Carole," or the image of his wife, represents the Other. Bruce is the Self who can be compared to the child in the "mirror phase." According to Lacan, the mirror phase occurs when the child tries to control its own image in the mirror (Wilden and Lacan 160). The reflected image of the child is considered the Other, or the subject the child bases their own identity off of. The partial object is the object that the child realizes is missing in the mirror phase. Further more Jacques Derrida's idea of presence in absence is defined as the child discovering the partial object because its absence creates a presence that the child needs to fill; "At the psychological level the partial object conveys the lack which creates the desire for unity from which the movement towards identification springs— since identification is itself dependent upon

the discovery of difference, itself a kind of absence” (Wilden and Lacan 163). Because of this, the child desires an ultimate Other from which their identity is rooted.

In *Filth*, Carole and “Carole” are two split beings with the former representing the partial object. Carole, Bruce’s wife in reality, is absent the entire story until the end, when she shows up at Bruce’s home in the book and when he sees her in the supermarket in the film. The fact that she is absent for the majority of the story is Bruce’s motivation to get the promotion at work and prove himself to her, or so he believes. He constantly thinks about how she will soon be crawling back to him because “she knows which side her bread is buttered on” (Welsh 23) or she is “seeing the error of her ways” (Welsh 53). This desire to control his wife drives Bruce’s actions, decisions and commentary, even provoking him to use the “games” he leisurely plays against his co-workers during downtime towards getting the promotion to Detective Inspector.

The usual games are described as the residue of the lack of physical and psychological freedom he receives while on and off duty; “The games are the only way you can survive the job. [...] The games are always, repeat, always, being played” (Welsh 3). Being a police officer consumes Bruce and makes him play games with himself and his colleagues as a way to relax from all the horrific crime scenes he experiences while on the job. Since Bruce sees the promotion as a way to win Carole back, he uses the games to trick and humiliate his colleagues into losing their credibility for the promotion. On what seems like thousands of occasions, Bruce repeats his motto, “same rules apply”— meaning that he will do whatever he wants to whomever he wants as long as it benefits him (Welsh 11). In the absence of Carole he uses his motto to create

“Carole,” the idealized version of his wife, as a way beneficial way to stitch together his identity.

Since Carole is no longer around, Bruce creates “Carole” as the Other. The lack of his real wife makes Bruce desire a loving wife and mother of his child whom he can easily control. Called “conscious demand” by Lacan, Bruce creates this idealized image of Carole as a way to create the home life he desires as well as exert the control he has always wanted (Wilden and Lacan 187). Because he does not have control over his own life, he tries to control those around him. Carole’s absence allows Bruce to create an image he can control, making himself powerful. Meanwhile at work, Bruce tells anyone who will listen about how wonderful his false wife is and how much power he has over her and their daughter Stacey. Bruce even controls the thoughts of “Carole” in the interchapters and intercut scenes of the book and film in which the audience believes she is Bruce’s wife, but it is actually Bruce dressed as her.

In controlling “Carole” and dressing as her, Bruce exhibits signs of identifying with her image because Bruce cannot identify with his own fractured identity. In the book he explains: “When Carole first left with the bairn we used to set the table for two and then we started wearing her clothes and it was like she was still here with us” (Welsh 343). Because he struggles with his own identity, an issue that will be explored soon, he dresses as “Carole” as a way to complete himself. This is also known as an “unconscious desire” for identity (Wilden and Lacan 187). Since Bruce lacks his own identity, he creates it with false images of himself and those closest to him. Another aspect that ties into Bruce’s “unconscious desire” for a unified identity is when it is revealed he has committed crimes as “Carole,” such as the murder of a student that Bruce has been

investigating the entire novel/film. Instead of explaining what happened to his superiors and seeking help, he protects “Carole” from being found out, showing that he wishes to keep “Carole” in tact because she is so important to his self-made identity.

Part II: Struggle with Identity

According to literary scholar Arttu Vilmi, “identities are formed by creating a sense of belonging together with people and by separating the ‘us’ from the ‘them’” (33). Bruce Robertson can easily discern “them,” but his problem lies within defining “us.” He constantly rivals almost every person he comes in contact with his entire life and is able to separate himself from them, but he does not know where he lies on the spectrum of identity. The reason Bruce cannot define himself is because he pushes against so many others, including his family, his social class and his own mental state. “Identities seem to be in a constant, fluid motion and always reconstructed in relation to other people and other contexts” (Vilmi 20). The problem with Bruce is that he does not believe that identity changes over time according to what is influencing him and he is not ready to accept his change.

One of the main reasons Bruce has trouble with identity is because of his childhood. For a majority of his childhood, Bruce is not aware that he is a product of rape and that the man he believes is his biological father is actually his adoptive father. Bruce never knew his biological father but only knew of him as “the Beast” because of the rumors that he was mentally disabled and out of touch with reality, as well as extremely violent (Welsh 381). While his adoptive father constantly identifies him with his biological father, Bruce fights off this identity even though he eventually follows in his

biological father's footsteps by assaulting various women throughout his lifetime.

Bruce's adoptive father takes out the anger of his wife's rape on Bruce by forcing him to eat coal, calling him the spawn of the devil and distancing him from his younger brother Davie (Welsh 387). With a severed connection to his brother and mother, young Bruce struggles to identify as a Robertson.

Bruce then accidentally kills Davie, and his extreme guilt is shown in the film through the multiple hallucinations he has of his little brother covered in coal dust standing over him (Baird, *Filth*). It is further explained in the book that Bruce gets sent away to live with his alcoholic grandmother who treats him slightly better than his adoptive father does. Even in school, Bruce is picked on by peers and teachers alike to the point where he cannot identify as a good student in fear of being bullied (Welsh 375). As he continues to grow into his adult years, Bruce is expected to work in the coal mines with his adoptive father like all the other young men in their town do. Since Bruce does not want to identify with the working class and his adoptive father, he turns towards the police force.

Another reason Bruce has trouble with his identity is because he does not want to identify with the working class as a young man, yet has to in present time in order to get the promotion to win back Carole. In his childhood from the book, Bruce identifies with the working class because his family is part of the coal miners in his town. In fact, his town is known for the coal mining industry, meaning that the townspeople are identified by their working status (Welsh 353). When Bruce cuts ties with his adoptive father and refuses to work in the mines with him, he also refuses to identify with the working class. The higher up he ranked in the police department, the higher up he saw himself in

society. There even came a moment in his life where he fights against the coal miners who were on strike and he gladly beat them into submission (Welsh 389).

As Bruce started to sever his ties with the miners and work his way up the police force ladder, he gained a great distaste for uniformed officers. In Lacanian theory, projection is the process of projecting emotions or ideas onto others instead of coping with them (Hurst 282). In refusing to identify as working class, Bruce projects his hatred of the working class onto others. He explains quite early on in the book how “Ray Lennox appears with a couple of uniformed spastics, who aren’t wearing their uniforms but are still uniformed spastics and always will be” (Welsh 189). He does not like people who identify with their working class status because it reminds him of his previous status as a reluctant member of a mining family. This is further exemplified in the film how he is never depicted wearing his own officer’s uniform until he commits suicide (Baird, *Filth*). Bruce is completely against identifying with his working status, yet he has to gain the promotion to please “Carole.” By gaining the promotion, Bruce will only be identified as “Detective Inspector” rather than by his name. This confusion over working class identity further muddles Bruce’s overall identity.

The last reason Bruce has trouble with his identity is because of his schizophrenic episodes. In the novel, Bruce’s childhood is relayed to readers by a tapeworm that is growing inside of him. Tapeworms obviously cannot speak but it grows a strong voice once Bruce is aware of its existence. Strangely enough, the worm calls itself “the Self” while calling Bruce “mine Host” and a secondary tapeworm, whom the Self falls in love with, “the Other” (Welsh 70). The main reason the Self gets a voice is because Bruce is schizophrenic and hears mainly himself, the Self and “Carole” all in his mind. Bruce

hears other voices but they are not identified. In the film, Bruce has several hallucinations in which he sees himself as a pig and different co-workers as an elephant, witch, lamb and wolf (Baird, *Filth*). Another clear representation of Bruce's struggle with personal identity in the book is the fact that he uses the pronoun "we" to refer to himself once he suffers his breakdown near the end of the novel. He also begins using the pronouns "we, I, we" such as "[W]e, I, we see her mouth going oval-shaped" (Welsh 235). This shows that he is struggling to pin down one identity and this affects his already altered mental state.

It turns out that Bruce cannot separate himself from "Carole" because of his struggles with his own identity. He identifies with "Carole" as a way to complete himself because he struggles with his family, social and mental status. The importance of Bruce dressing as "Carole" is the fact that he adopts an image, not an identity. He mistakes the physical and mental adoption of the clothing and wanted behavior of "Carole" as his own identity when it is actually just an image. Adopting the image he has created as his identity gives himself a false feeling of completeness.

Part III: Creation of the Image

An image is a "mental silhouette of the Other, who appears to be determined by the characteristics of the family, group, tribe, people or race" (Vilmi 25). When Bruce creates "Carole" he considers Carole's role in the family and their community and makes assumptions about what her role should have been in these environments. For this reason, "Carole" is an obedient housewife who takes care of their daughter and pleases Bruce emotionally, mentally and physically. In turn, Bruce paints himself as a dutiful husband

who has a strong, yet loving hold on his family. Because he uses stereotypes to form “Carole,” he also uses stereotypes to form his own self image because he believes their intertwined images create his identity.

According to Bruce, “Carole” is the perfect wife. In the book “Carole” is not physically described much other than wearing dresses and heels. However the film adaptation of *Filth* visually depicts “Carole” in high contrast lighting and a soft focus, making her look incredibly attractive during her dialogue from the intercut scenes (Baird, *Filth*). The interesting part about “Carole” is the fact that she wears sexy lingerie under these clothes. In one scene from the film, the director Jon S. Baird shows her in only lingerie as she talks about how much she wants Bruce to get the promotion so that they can be together once again. Lingerie under the professional clothing she wears shows the audience that Bruce wants a woman who will be proper in public yet sexual in private, meaning that she is exclusively his when they are alone. This exclusivity is still revolves around the idea of control that was mentioned earlier.

Another important aspect about the image of “Carole” is how she speaks. In the book, her interchapters are written very differently than Bruce’s chapters when it comes to dialect. “Carole” speaks without a strong Scottish dialect, saying things such as “I like going out. I don’t really mind being here at Mum’s but she can be very demanding” (Welsh 121). Meanwhile Bruce maintains a small-town Scottish brogue, saying things such as, “I got three sheets last night and this lighting is nipping my heid and my bowels are as greasy as a hoor’s chuff at the end of a shift doon the sauna” (Welsh 4). The difference in dialect makes “Carole” the outsider in a story blanketed in Scottish dialects of all kinds. This distinction is enhanced whenever “Carole” speaks about Bruce because

it is primarily about how much she loves him or how she cannot wait for them to be together again. She also focuses on her mistakes in their marriage and how she was too hard on her husband while he feels pressure from work while Bruce constantly talks about how horrible of a wife he thinks she is.

Bruce creates an image of himself that goes hand-in-hand with his image of “Carole” because he desperately wants to adopt their combined image as his identity. Vilmi also states that “the Self is always created by comparing and contrasting it to something that is imagined as the Other” (36). Bruce imagines “Carole” as the Other and basis his identity off of her image. He constantly shows himself as a caring father and husband, especially when he battles the last minute shoppers on Christmas Eve to buy presents for his wife and child who are not actually present (Welsh 262). He also tells his co-workers, who are fully aware that he is lying, how wonderful everyone is getting along at home and how well he is able to keep his girls in line.

It is obvious that Bruce bases his image of himself and “Carole” off of previous times together with the real Carole, when he thought everything between them was fine even though he was emotionally, physically and sexually abusing her. Near the end of the novel, he reminisces about a real moment they had together while on a ride at a carnival: “Us and her, [his daughter Stacey] tucked in the middle. The nuclear family, spinning, twisting, disoriented, but still huddled together” (Welsh 342). Bruce wants this image of his family to be his identity, and that is why he has created “Carole.” Since he has dealt with identity issues his entire life, he wants a clearly defined identity and he believes he can find that in “Carole.”

Part IV: Loss of Image and Acceptance of Identity

According to Lacan, the image must be discarded in order to attain true identity (Wilden and Lacan 185). Both the book and film versions of *Filth* feature the loss of “Carole,” but Bruce’s reaction differs in each medium. In the book, the image of “Carole” is partly shattered when he convinces himself that the real Carole is the cause of all his problems and then it is completely demolished once Bruce calls Carole and hears how different she sounds compared to “Carole.” Here, he cannot cope with the differences and lashes out against Carole and Stacey, only to have a brief moment of clarity in the very last moments of his life on earth. In the film, Bruce sees the real Carole, Stacey and Carole’s new lover in a grocery store (Baird, *Filth*). He calls out to them but they only look at him until Carole’s new lover ushers them out of the store. Both versions end with Bruce hanging himself, while he accepts his identity in death.

When Bruce calls the real Carole in the book, it is after he has convinced himself she is the cause of all his problems because she is not “Carole.” This realization takes place when he is caught playing “Carole” by some of his fellow police officers (Welsh 363). Here, the image of “Carole” is cracked once others acknowledge she does not exist; however, the image is fully shattered once he calls the real Carole and hears her on the phone: “Her voice is not the voice of the Carole we know. [...] It’s not her voice. I almost like this woman. She sounds like Carole before [...]” (Welsh 391). The last sentence is never finished, but readers can assume that Bruce means to say that Carole sounds like herself before he created “Carole,” the woman who agrees with everything he says. By getting in touch with the real Carole, he finally understands that “Carole” is not real. Because Bruce fixed his identity in “Carole,” this also means that his identity as the

dutiful husband is not real. He finally understands that Carole and himself are two different people with different identities and he cannot handle this and reacts violently.

Lacan says that positive views on difference can bring individuals and groups together while negative views on difference can isolate individuals and groups as well as cause violence among the people and groups who see themselves as different (Vilmi 24). When Bruce notices the difference between him and the real Carole, he decides to traumatize her. The second he hangs up the phone, he decides he must “[p]repare to do the cow” (Welsh 392). It is here where Bruce uses his motto, “same rules apply,” for the last time. Again, it means that he will do whatever he wants to whomever he wants as long as it benefits him in some way. He even goes as far to say “I only care about me and why I don’t care about anyone else” (Welsh 392). He decides to get back at Carole for himself out of revenge for what he believes she has done to him.

In reality, all his problems have been caused by himself but he cannot deal with the fact that his perfect world no longer exists. To get back at Carole, Bruce dons a shirt that reads “YOU CAUSED THIS” in big black letters and plans to hang himself when she enters his home (Welsh 393). While most men are last seen in a suit before they are buried, Bruce’s shirt, otherwise known as the last suit he will ever wear, is a reference to his wife. This symbolizes the fact that he has not accepted his personal identity and is still trying to connect himself to her. However, Bruce’s plan is thwarted because his young daughter Stacey is first through the door instead of Carole. Stacey, the one person in Bruce’s nuclear family he has neglected throughout the entire book, is the one to see him commit suicide before Carole.

Unable to breathe because of the belt around his neck (which is also a reference to the erotic asphyxiation he and a co-worker's wife used to take part in), Bruce screams out to Stacey in his mind and changes his feelings. In his last moments, Bruce changes his mind from blaming Carole to blaming himself because he sees his daughter before him. He thinks, "I want to live and make it up to her and Carole. [...] I've beaten the bastards but what a price victory" (Welsh 393). It is at the point that Bruce finally realizes all the harm he has caused himself and his family and takes responsibility by saying that he finally cares about them.

The film takes a slightly lighter note with Bruce still committing suicide but accepting his identity and moving forward. The instance that shatters the idea of "Carole" in the film is when Bruce sees his wife and child with his wife's new lover in a supermarket (Baird, *Filth*). Seeing his replacement in action makes him realize that he no longer has a place in his nuclear family and that they are moving on without him. He takes note of the difference between Carole and "Carole" and understands that "Carole" is not real, therefore his identity built around "her" is not real either. It is at this point that he understands all the wrong he has done onto others, especially his only friend Clifford Blades. Besides having a brief affair with his wife, Bruce also prank phone called her pretending to be a pervert and then framed Blades as the caller, which got him locked up in prison for a night and caused his other police friends to disassociate with him (Baird, *Filth*).

Bruce decides to kill himself but makes an apologetic video for Blades in which he gives the latter advice and apologizes for his actions. Near the end of the video he says, "I'm scared of the world. I just don't let people see it. [...] Sometimes it takes a

wrong-doer to show you what you're doing wrong. I'm sorry Bladesy" (Baird, *Filth*). At the point, Bruce blames himself for everything bad that has happened in his life and feels guilty about it. The video Bruce makes, which takes place in his home just hours before, also helps solidify his identity. He is shown in his pristine police uniform, sitting in a chair between two white columns with two lamps on stands over either of his shoulders. This symmetrical set up represents the fact that the symbolic order is back but he still does not look like he belongs in the proper and clean room because of the bruises on his face. The black and white checkered floor also symbolizes the games Bruce has been playing and will continue to play in death.

It is important to note that the scenes of Blades watching the video are intercut with Bruce preparing to commit suicide while the song "Creep" by Radiohead softly plays in the background. According to critic Claudia Gorbman, music in film is a way to help define the identity of the subject on the screen and it also helps the audience identify with said subject (Gorbman 45). In a way, the music indicates that Bruce is coming to terms with his own identity, especially with lyrics such as "But I'm a creep / I'm a weirdo / What the hell am I doing here? / I don't belong here" (Baird, *Filth*). These lyrics reinforce the fact that Bruce feels guilt for all the pain he has caused everyone.

Back at his home, Bruce is preparing to hang himself as Blades watches the farewell video. Bruce in his uniform, which is the first time the audience has ever seen him wearing it, ties a red and white scarf made by a character named Mary to a beam in the ceiling. Mary knit him a scarf of his football team's colors and the red of the scarf symbolizes his gritty and violent identity while the white symbolizes perfect image he tried to adopt a is identity. The combination of the two literally kill him in the end. As

Bruce ties the scarf around his neck and steps on the chair to commit suicide, he is presented with a choice between life and death.

In his final moment, Bruce accepts his identity. With tears in his eyes, he breaks the fourth wall by looking at the camera (as he had occasionally been doing throughout the film) as the audience hears “I don’t belong here” from the soundtrack playing in the background. With a smile, Bruce says “same rules apply” before laughing and falling off the chair (Baird, *Filth*). In this moment, he is no longer blaming himself or feeling guilty; he is just moving forward. He finally understands that his made up identity does not fit him and his real identity—which is comprised of several elements due to his schizophrenia—is different from what he has seen in others around him. Instead of death being a negative action against himself, Bruce kills himself as a way to preserve his identity in a world that works so hard to make him identify as one being.

Lacan says that in order to accept identity, one must distance themselves from false images and projections (Hurst 287). Through his death in both the book and the film, Bruce is able to reject the images he has created by realizing he and “Carole” are not one person. Although he blames himself in the book and moves forward from blame in the film, the outcome is still the same: Bruce dies without the false images but with a renewed sense of identity that he never had before.

The Scottish Connection

Bruce Robertson mirrors Scotland when it comes to identity formation and stereotypical images. While Bruce is considered the Self, Carole is the partial object and “Carole” is the Other, Lacan’s terms can also be applied to Scotland. When Scotland is

the Self, the partial object that makes the country seek out an “ideal” Other is the confusion over national identity. In the same way Bruce creates “Carole” as his other because of his confusion, Scotland perpetuates stereotypical images of items such as kilts and bagpipes as a way to solidify its identity.

Both Bruce and Scotland share a fractured identity. Scotland has seemingly always had a complex identity but it was enhanced by Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott and the visit of King George IV to Edinburgh in 1822. Scot, in charge of the event, wanted to prove to the English that Scotland was at peace with itself as well as loyal to the crown. For this reason Scott had Lowlanders and Highlanders alike dress in tartan kilts in order to prove Scotland’s unity even though kilts were only reserved for the Highlanders. Eric Zuelow, a professor of European History at the University of New England, explains, “Early tourists encountered a largely invented spectacle of Scottish history and traditions that was designed to create a unified memory of the national past, despite the reality of a sharp division between Highlands and Lowlands” (33). This was the beginning of Scotland’s creation of images.

Image is a “facade presented to others” while identity refers to “the inner construction of the self” (Vilmi 5). Simply stated, image is more of a stereotype that can be presented by the nation or outsiders while identity is created by the nation. In the case of Scotland, Sir Walter Scott presented the image of bagpipes and kilts to the tourists that visited Edinburgh during King George IV’s visit and these images have become Scotland’s national identity since then. It has become so ingrained in the national identity that tartan can be found in any touristy shop on Edinburgh’s Royal. This perpetuation and confusion has caused identity to be an even more difficult aspect concerning the whole of

Scotland. Also referred to as the “Braveheart effect” by scholars like Tim Edensor, the seeming acceptance of this image by Scottish citizens causes “ambivalences and conflicts about the constitution of Scottish identity and the representation of Scotland” (145).

However, the recent Scottish independence movements are proof that Scotland is coming to accept its national identity.

As stated before, Bruce’s changing feelings during his suicide in the book and in the film reflect Welsh’s reasoning behind the Scottish independence movements of 1979, 1997 and 2014. In the book, Bruce begins blaming Carole for his problems in the same way Welsh said Scotland previously blamed England for the country’s problems in 1979. It is common knowledge that Scotland and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher did not get along while she was serving in 10 Downing Street. Instead of going into detail about their struggles, this quote from Scottish comedian Frankie Boyle about Thatcher’s self-planned, £3 million burial plans sums up Scottish feelings towards the former prime minister: “For £3 million they [the English government] could give every person in Scotland a shovel and we would dig a hole so deep that we could hand her over to Satan personally” (Patterson and Leveson 2008). Bruce demonizes Carole in this way in the book, blaming her for all the issues he has faced over time by wearing the self-made shirt directed at her as he hung himself.

However, Bruce changes his mind when he sees his daughter Stacey entering the room and blames himself for everything horrible that has happened throughout the novel. This mimics Welsh’s reasoning behind the 1997 establishment of the Scottish Parliament; Scottish people believed everything wrong happening in Scotland was their fault, which is why they decided to start taking matters into their own hands. When Bruce says he

wants to live and reconcile with his family, this is his stab at trying to take responsibility for his actions.

Bruce's suicide in the 2013 film seems to pick up exactly where book Bruce left off; he starts by taking responsibility for his actions and apologizing in the video for his colleague. At the very last moment, however, he seems to change his feelings when he looks at the camera and smiles. It is at this point he is moving forward and mirroring Scotland's 2014 push for independence. Welsh further explains the reasoning behind Scotland's momentum:

It's not about looking back and saying whose fault it is. It doesn't really matter whose fault it is. The situation we are in now has arisen from [...] historical and cultural factors. And part of [these] factors are that all the things that bound Britain together as an entity—industry, empire, the spree decor from two world wars— all that's gone. The new stuff that we put in after the second world war—the welfare state, the national health service— that's been systematically destroyed by the three main parties, the Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal Democrats over the last 35 years. So there isn't really anything to sell the union on and this is why it's crumbling. (Inskeep 2014)

Welsh defines the reasons why the bond between Scotland and England is eroding. Even though the country just voted to stay in the United Kingdom, Scottish officials have yet again demanded more Scottish devolution, meaning that there is still a divide between Scotland and England (“Scottish Independence Referendum Results”). In the film, Bruce recognizes that he and Carole are two separate people with different identities. The erosion of their bond allows Bruce to embrace their differences in the way Scotland has begun doing. Bruce committing suicide in both the book and the film is an acceptance of his multifaceted identity and a declaration that he will not be changed by those around him.

Conclusion

Irvine Welsh deliberately writing Bruce Robertson to mirror Scotland is representative of him holding a mirror up to Scottish society and beginning the discussion of change. The character of Bruce is only able to accept his identity through death, suggesting nations or communities with fractured identities such as Scotland must metaphorically die. Whether that encompasses the “death” of stereotypical images, placing blame or a particular mindset, Scotland must accept its complex national identity in order to move forward as one. This means accepting the idea that some may identify with the Highlands versus the Lowlands, rural versus urban, Protestant versus Catholic or “Scottish” versus “British.” The duality within the nation must be acknowledged and respected.

It is important to note that the changes in Bruce’s suicide in the book and in the film were made over a period of fifteen years. This means that in fifteen years, Scotland has moved closer to accepting its national identity through independence movements. According to scholar and critic Antony Easthope, a singular national identity is impossible: “Identity [...] arises as a necessary coherency which can never escape the operation of which its temporary fixity is an effect. In this sense all identity is plural and disjunct” (Easthope 22). Identity is comprised of several different elements that continue to form and reform over time, which is why it cannot be fixed as singular.

That is why Bruce’s acceptance of his own disjointed identity in the film represents modern day Scotland’s acceptance of its disjointed national identity. The tartan image of Scotland is certainly a part of its identity but it is not the whole, which was what Sir Walter Scott made it seem. This is also similar to Hugh MacDiarmid’s limiting of

Scottish identity in his writing. Urban setting is part of Scottish identity but it is not the whole. The recent movements for Scottish devolution and independence show Scotland's desire to unearth and introduce other aspects of their identity to its own people and the world.

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