ROLE OF TELEVISION IN CONSUMER SOCIETY
IN *NIGHT TRAIN* AND *ABOUT A BOY*

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Abstract: Since the Frankfurt School, essential points of cultural studies have changed rapidly up to zeitgeist. While cinema and radio were primary concerns of those studies for their early stages, television and internet have replaced them in our postmodern world. However, academic researches for cultural effects of internet are still fresh; television has been subjected even to criminology after Birmingham School. This study examines relation between television and ideology in respect of their effects for fictional characters of Martin Amis's *Night Train* (1997) and Nick Hornby's *About a Boy* (1998). When Amis's Mike and Jennifer realize author's dystopic world, they evaluate suicide as a foremost option. On the other hand, Hornby's cosmos is clearly more open to utopian dreams but there is still suicide in his world. Within consumer society and popular culture all the characters of the novels live, society is more prone to suicide and crimes for Strain theories. Television, as consumerism's and popular culture's most crucial 'apparatus' triggers various negative attitudes leading to suicide as the eventual peak; but, because it blurs distinction between fact and fiction consumer society cannot be aware of what is really going on around and that's why suicide rate is still limited. In post-modern world, life is not imitated anymore; life mimics screen: screen of mass-media, of cinema, of television, of stores which are tools of popular culture that educates us and teaches what to think, how to think, how to perceive 'the other', how to dress, what to desire; in short, how to live. This paper argues how violence and suicide on screen are imitated and how ideology and hegemony reach to audience through the screen in the two novels.

Keywords: Consumer Society, Popular Culture, Television, Strain Theories.

Gece Yarısı Treni ve *Bir Erkek Hakkında* Romanları Örneğinde Tüketim Toplumunda Televizyonun Rolü

Öz: Frankfurt Okulu'ndan bu yana kültürel çalışmaların ana unsurları zamanın ruhuna göre hızla değişmiştir. Erken dönemde sinema ve radyo bu çalışmaların temelindeyken, post-modern dünyada televizyon ve internet bunların yerini almıştır. İnternetin kültürel

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etkileri üzerine akademik çalışmalar hala çok taze olsa da; Birmingham Okulu'ndan sonra televizyon kriminolojiye bile konu olmuştur. Bu çalışma, televizyon ve ideoloji arasındaki ilişkiyi Martin Amis' in *Gece Yarısı Treni* (1997) ve Nick Hornby'nin *Bir Erkek Hakkında* (1998) kitaplarındaki karakterlere etkisi bağlamında incelemeyi amaçlar. Mike ve Jennifer Amis'in distopik dünyasının farkına vardıklarında, intiharı öncelikli bir seçenek olarak değerlendirmeye başlarlar. Hornby'nin dünyası ise ütopik rüyalara çok daha açıktır fakat yine de bu dünyada intihar da vardır. Gerilim teorisine göre post-modern dünyada toplum intihara ve suça daha çok meyillidir. Tüketim ve popüler kültür ideolojisinin en hayati aparatı olan televizyon bu çalışmanın karakterlerin hayatlarında gösterdiği gibi toplumu nihai noktası intihar olan birçok olumsuz davranışlara iter. Yine de, gerçek ile kurgu arasındaki farkın televizyon tarafından muallaklaştırılması sebebiyle günümüzdeki intihar oranı sınırlıdır çünkü insanlar etraflarında aslında neler olup bittiğinin farkında değildirler. Post-modern dünyada yaşam artık taklit edilmez; aksine, popüler kültürün aracı olan 'ekranı' (medyanın, sinemanın, televizyonun, mağazaların ekranları) taklit eder. Ve bu ekranlar bize ne düşüneceğimizi, nasıl düşüneceğimizi, ötekini nasıl algılayacağımızı, nasıl giyineceğimizi, ne arzulayacağımızı; kısacası, nasıl yaşayacağımızı öğretir ve bizi bu yönde eğitir. Bu çalışma, bu iki romanda ekrandaki şiddet ve intiharın nasıl taklit edildiğini ve hegemonya ile ideolojinin izleyiciye ekran vasıtasıyla nasıl ulaştığını göstermeyi amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tüketim Toplumu, Popüler Kültür, Televizyon, Gerilim Teorisi.

Introduction

As today's mostly watched screen, television has been in one of the focal points of Cultural Studies since the Frankfurt School which handles it as a tool of mass entertainment in its early stages. Moreover, "from the classical Frankfurt School perspective, commercial television is a form of what Horkheimer and Adorno and their colleagues called culture industry" (Kellner,2009:30). Such a full-scale entertainment was surely a part of commercial zones of capitalist enterprises and to stress the situation the Frankfurt School declared television as a cornerstone for culture industry in that production process of Fordism was replaced by a similar process. Accordingly, Marx's grundrisse/circuit (production-distribution-consumption-production) ensured by unqualified standard workers' standard and mass production was reformed for culture from the same point of capitalist industry. Yet, instead of Ford industry, it was the Frankfurt School who coined the term 'culture industry' which Horkheimer and Adorno used for the first time in the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).

The circuit continues just as inspirer of culture industry. As the first phase, action of unqualified standard workers becomes the means of commodification; then, standardization takes place of standard production and at last, mass-

production transforms into massification. Hereby, construction of a capitalist society is built and so, duplicate production of values, life-styles and desires becomes the only matter to standardize "uniformity and homogeneity of needs, thought, and behaviour" (Kellner,2002:40). This post-war mass society means end of individual who is enculturated by dominant patterns of capitalism. For that kind of mission of social formation, television is the best communication tool to capitalist ideology whose commercial imperatives impose a conformist social order; therein homogenous needs can only be replaced with new ones. Within this context, fashion in various fields of life reaches most of the corners in life as Lyotard asserts "one listens reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and retro clothes in Hong Kong" (1984:76). This post-modern condition is a result of global consumerism which dates back to Nazi dominance in Europe that prompts the Frankfurt School to examine how Nazi ideology affects millions of people and manages to "transform a man into a nobody" (Anders,1963:360) with help of media instruments. Still, the time when advocators of the movement get on the stage; "low" and "high" culture are splatted up considering Marx's famous distinction between employer and proletariat. However, the Frankfurt School has cleared the way for cultural studies; popular culture of postmodern condition comes into existence as juxtaposition by means of later practices. Marcuse, a prominent philosopher associated with the Frankfurt School, places television as an apparatus of dominant ideology which is later theorised by Althusser (1970) who reveals how ideology reaches to society. Before him, Marcuse presents television as an early deconstructive element imposing rebellion and conformity to family norms for the sake of capitalist goals to individualise people firstly in the most crucial foundation of society:

> The repressive organization of the instincts seems to be collective, and the ego seems to be prematurely socialized by a whole system of extra-familial agents and agencies. As early as the pre-school level, gangs, radio, and television set the pattern for conformity and rebellion; deviations from the pattern are punished not so much in the family as outside and against the family. The experts of the mass media transmit the required values; they offer the perfect training in efficiency, toughness, personality, dream and romance. With this education, the family can no longer compete (Marcuse, 1966:97).

Beside negative effects of television, David Foster Wallace, a famous American novelist in recent epoch, thinks that it mimics people and shows "what we as audience want to see ourselves as" (1998:152). For him, television offers the best way for writers to observe people. He claims that "if we want to know what American normality is--what Americans want to regard as normal—

we can trust television" (1998:152). On the contrary, French cultural theorist Baudrillard approaches television as a "deflective screen, which is no longer a mirror." (2001:216) He believes in endless reproducibility of hyper reality in that "simulation is the ecstasy of the real. To prove this, all you need do is watch television, where real events follow one another in a perfectly ecstatic relation…" (2001:190) While Wallace handles it as a writer, Baudrillard appraises television from the context of audience who is a decoder of the encoding apparatus (Hall,2006:117) that presents "phantom" (Anders,1963:358) as an idealistic orientation over reality. For this reason, audience becomes passive consumers alienated from the real world. Wallace's position in a postmodern world is the old stance of Plato's doctrine of imitation which is not anymore approved as a reflection of world because "if art no longer reflects, it is not because it seeks to change the world rather than mimic it, but because there is in truth nothing there to be reflected, no reality which is not itself already image, spectacle, simulacrum, gratuitous fiction" (Eagleton,1985:62). Commodity, then, becomes an image constructed by producers "in order to remain in power" (Lowenthal,1984:14); not a reflection of society's needs. In this regard, capitalism prepares consumers for adjustment to a future situation (new desires, tastes, fashion, etc.) to sustain the circuit of production as Hausknecht coins the term as "anticipatory socialization" (1963:378).

Since almost everybody has one from high income groups to lower ones, television's audience is not a class group anymore. The expanding gap between low and high has been fulfilled since Marx by popular culture which "have its own genuine characteristics: standardization, stereotypy, conservatism, mendacity, manipulated consumer goods" (Lowenthal, 1984:14). While consumerism was only provided by a certain elite group in the first two phases of capitalism, it has been stretched globally to any part of social classes in post-industrial facet. Even if the poorest ones have no chance to consume many of its productions, capitalism always sell dreams with help of television centred in majority of each kind of houses throughout the world. However, it is not possible to raise a consensus on the taste of the whole populace of world, universality of some common wishes and desires such as strong feelings for power, money, ego, passion, sex and love resulting happiness or sadness (but always dissatisfaction) suffices necessity of global capitalism to ensure sustainability of consuming productions. Despite the fact that working class-based culture begins to be displaced by newer mass-produced culture, British Cultural Studies try to protect working class culture against mass culture. Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson paved the way Frankfurt school had opened. But, Stuart Hall was more political in nature on account of mobilising oppositional youth subculture and active audience that formed its identity against capitalist hegemony's standard and dominant models. Besides, what makes studies of Birmingham distinctive from earlier

cultural researches based only on dominance is that "employing Gramsci's model of hegemony and counter hegemony, it sought to analyse hegemonic, or ruling, social and cultural forces of domination and to seek counterhegemonic forces of resistance and struggle" (Kellner, 2002:37). Just as the Frankfurt School had been affected by structuralism, British Cultural Studies was in close interest to poststructuralism. However, the two approaches have the same background, "the most recognizable and possibly the most important theoretical strategy *British* cultural studies has developed is that of 'reading' cultural products, social practices, even institutions, as 'texts'" (Turner, 2003:71). While doing this, alongside its contributions to anthropology, psychoanalysis, philosophy and knowledge, structuralism helps Birmingham Centre to discover on which structures the world is built. In this manner, Saussure invites us to think about cultural and social dimensions of language which is not a natural born but culturally constructed because he says that "we can say that what is natural to mankind is not oral speech but the faculty of constructing a language, i.e. a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas" (Saussure,2011:10). In this respect, if television is a sign, then it naturally has signifiers just as everything inside of it is a sign and its audience is signifier. Even so, constructors of the signs have their own ideology to be signified through language. For structuralism, the order we see in the world is the order we impose on it. There is no more reflection but we have human consciousness nominated as a structuring mechanism and through it we project its structures onto the world to limit and organise conceptual systems originate within. Language is the most fundamental structure of human mind that produce meaning by structuring the world in terms of binary oppositions and their relation to each other. On the basis of structural approach, Cultural Studies concentrates on how language in differing cultures shapes its own identity:

> Reality is made relative, while the power of constructing 'the real' is attributed to the mechanisms of language within the culture. Meaning is revealed to be culturally grounded – even culturally specific. Different cultures may not only use different language systems but they may also, in a definitive sense, inhabit different worlds. Culture, as the site where meaning is generated and experienced, becomes a determining, productive field through which social realities are constructed, experienced and interpreted (Turner,2003:12).

Then, in prospect of language differences, each culture needs to have its own unique world. In this way, Saussurian reality prompts Althusser's definition of ideology "through which men interpret, make sense of, experience and "live" the material conditions in which they find themselves" (Hall,2006:20). Ideology presents world's numerous cultures a standardization

through which we form and shape our consciousness of reality not by our own cultural structures but by ideology. Because ideology is unconscious, it is internalized and thus it is not easy to recognize its existence or its results as Althusser reforms Freudian consciousness according to class societies in history. He alleges that "the eternity of the unconscious is not unrelated to the eternity of ideology in general" (Althusser,2014:255). Furthermore, as it had created various classes, ideology presented us a new and an unstable standard culture: popular culture after World War II.

Within that mass culture, our own unconscious is not generated by individually, but culture shapes it because individuals learn to speak in the language and customs of their culture unconsciously as Lacan proposes that "the unconscious is the Other's discourse" (2006:10). Thus, unconscious of us is constructed by the ideology of others and so, "our view of ourselves is composed from a repertoire given to us, not produced by us, and so we are the subjects, not the authors, of cultural processes" (Turner, 2003:21).

Besides, as it comes to poststructuralism there are flexibility of signifiers and multi-various meanings of the signified. In this manner, British Cultural Studies encourages hope for a possible revolution and shifts the paradigm from dominance of ideology to resistance of subcultures such as punk culture, black culture and their reflection in music: rock, rap and jazz. The emphasis of cultural studies places on audience rather than media texts produced by television's encoding systems. Birmingham School, especially Hall, presents us how multiple audiences decode the messages sent by ideology. However, he favours youth subcultures against leading models of life; it is experienced in recent time that how popular culture has managed to reach even the lowest cultures who may even consume suicide note of Kurt Cobain as t-shirts to stress meaninglessness of life but at the end they take their position in capitalist circuit as consumers. In most of the fields of society, ideology succeeds sustainability of consumption because it is unconscious and has powerful controlling apparatuses.

About A Boy **and** *Night Train*

About A Boy, published in 1998 by Nick Hornby, is a popular postmodern novel in that a thirty six years old, single, rich, conformist, consumer and untroubled man, Will creates a boy in his mind to attract women and attends an association for single parents because he thinks that single fathers are more adorable. Marcus, on the other hand, is the other protagonist who is a natural outcome of divorced parents on account of his loneliness in life and a creation of Hornby's earlier experiences. He says in an interview that "I used to be an English teacher and I'd always been rather haunted by one particular boy that I used to teach; and he was a sort of prototype for Marcus in *About A Boy*"

(Thomas,2004:168). The boy's parents are from South-Africa and he struggles in a mixed-raced school in England and Hornby replaces African background with a reference to English hippy culture to be able to create Marcus. In the same interview, question of another match-up between Will and Hornby occur Simon Thomas's mind instantly but Hornby replies that "I think he was more based on single friends that I knew" (Thomas, 2004:168). As an existentially free man in appearance, Will has no responsibilities and boundaries to parents, children, and a family until he meets with Marcus who unconsciously educate Will to make him a normal and standard grown man in a postmodern world. In the same world, Will consciously but half-heartedly teaches him how to adapt his age as a child who listens to music from his mother's (Fiona) generation and he is raised as a vegetarian without his consent. In that recent world order the novel fictionalised, most of people do not believe in marriage anymore and divorcement rates are at the highest in history. In this sense, Güneş clearly portrays the situation with its results:

> On the one hand, marriage has become less and less important in the views of young men and women; and, on the other hand, the proportion of divorce has increased dramatically, causing the emergence of single parenthood, which has been a blow to heterosexual relations and traditional marriage, and which eventually has also altered the roles and identities of man and woman in the contemporary period accordingly (Güneş,2011:62).

In the novel, there a numerous single parents (Fiona, Rachel, Suzie, Katrina) and they even constitute a regular meeting called SPAT with other females who are not mentioned. Will is the only single male parent in there with an imaginary boy and a divorced wife. However, the story seems like a lad-lit, majority of the characters are women as Elder remarks that "Nick Hornby is supposed to be a guys' writer, but his female characters keep bursting off the page and screen" (2015:50). Among various single female parents of the story, this paper underscores Fiona to be able to find the reasons behind her attempt to suicide in association with Mike Hoolihan and Jennifer Rockwell's actualised suicide in Martin Amis's *Night Train* and examines the novels by their relation to popular culture and its most effective apparatus television.

Aside from their characters, both Amis and Hornby share also a same ground which is ground of American writing style. However, *Night Train* is placed in an imaginary American city and the story of *About a Boy* is built in London, their creators express the motivation behind their writing style triggered by America. Amis says that "there's undoubtedly a kind of gravitational attraction exerted by the centre of the world. Things that happen in Washington matter all over the world, and that has long ceased to be the case for London" ('Author Martin Amis on Leaving England and Finding America').

Moreover, Hornby tells his own reasons that "both Zadie and I write about our own cities and countries, but we probably both feel that we've been shaped much more by American writing than by our own. It's that American simplicity and inclusivity, its soul, its lack of allusion…" ('An Interview with Nick Hornby').

As a result of lack of a father and husband figure in Fiona and Marcus' house, insufficiency for sense of belonging and security ensured by constitution of a nuclear family with its all members comes into existence in life of Fiona and Marcus in different directions. However Fiona is economically free in the story, she needs a male figure and meets with other men after divorcement. On the other hand, Marcus unconsciously shows his insufficiency for a father through his idea of connecting Will and Fiona to secure his mother after the attempted suicide because he thinks that "two wasn't enough, that was the trouble. He'd always thought that two was a good number, and that he'd hate to live in a family of three or four or five" (Hornby, 2002:75). After his mother's top of the depressive actions, Marcus becomes a controller in house, of Fiona, of television and of its soaps because for him "soaps were full of trouble, and he was worried that the trouble in the soaps would remind his mum of the trouble she had in her own life." (4) Besides, popular culture changes so rapidly that it is easily seen in the story how different generations have different desires and wishes. Will is the figure of the last phase of that culture with posters of music stars using drugs on his wall, with his *Ray Ban* glasses and with his *Paul Smith* clothes. Additionally, he earns a livelihood by his father *Santa's Super Sleigh* consumed by majority of society specifically in each Christmas again and again. As a passive conformist bereft of any responsibilities like work or family, he spends much of his time in front of television. That's why; ideology can easily reach to him through media elements and make him a standard consumer in popular culture. However, all of the characters in the novel are parts of the same post-modern world; Fiona and Marcus cannot chase recent popular culture because they still listen to Joni Mitchell songs from 1980s while the story is depicted in 1993. Moreover, Marcus gets his first *Adidas* shoes thanks to Will whereas his friends in school, especially Ellie with her Kurt Cobain t-shirt, live at the centre of the recent popular culture. On the contrary to Will, Marcus "was not a brass-rubbing sort of a child, or a puppet theatre sort of a child, or even a child at all; at twelve, his childhood was over." (84) Will compares and contrasts his childhood with Marcus' time and sees how youth culture resist against law and order through crime, drugs and prostitution. However, he seems to take a share in Hall's position for Cultural Studies, by saying that "they were on the menu now" (84) he neglects role of ideology imposing new menus to be consumed:

Films? Video arcades? Ice-skating? Museums? Art galleries? Brent Cross? McDonald's? Jesus, how did anyone get through childhood without falling into a slumber lasting several years? If he were forced to relive his childhood, he would go to bed when Blue Peter had ceased to exert its allure and ask to be woken up when it was time to sign on It was no wonder young people were turning to crime and drugs and prostitution. They were turning to crime and drugs and prostitution simply because they were on the menu now, an exciting, colourful and tasty new range of options that he had been denied. The real question was why his generation had been quite so apathetically, unenterprisingly law-abiding —especially given the lack of even the token sops to teens, the Australian soaps and the chicken dippers, that passed for youthful entertainment in contemporary society. (84)

With his close relation to popular culture, Hornby does not narrate historical stories but recent ones. By asserting that "To me, Elvis Presley is a greater artist than Virginia Woolf..." ('An Interview with Nick Hornby') he shows how his interest in popular culture stands over his concern in literature. Like Hornby, Amis favours popular desires rather than canons of literature:

No one wants to read a difficult literary novel or deal with a prose style which reminds them how thick they are. There's a push towards egalitarianism, making writing more chummy and interactive, instead of a higher voice, and that's what I go to literature for (Muir:2003).

Martin Amis's *Night Train* is a postmodern detective story published in 1997. The novel is based on detection of a heavenly-being, happy and beautiful astrophysicist Jennifer Rockwell's suicide. As a male-like and male-named police officer, Mike Hoolihan does a "psychological autopsy" (Amis, 1999:83) for the reason behind the suicide.

Martin Amis's fictional world in *Night Train* is dystopic while Marcus manages to construct a utopian extended family in *About a Boy*. On the one hand, although he lives at the midst of postmodernism, he can save his hope for future in spite of its ontological dominants. On the other hand, Amis's postmodernism asks basic post-cognitive questions towards those dominants such as "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it? What is a world?" (cited by McHale from Higgins, 2004:1) Astrophysicist Jennifer deals with black holes in universe in that she may present us a romantic point of view to escape a fragmented, ambiguous and alienated postmodern world she lives in. Yet, she seems happy with her life and her suicide perceived as a "pubic disgrace" (74) by postmodern society's remained morality shocks everyone because none of them can resolve on what grounds she needs a suicide after a marvellous and successful life. Above all, her father Colonel Tom asks Mike to find a murderer for the reason that he does

not even think about possibility of a suicide by his daughter and says to Mike "Bring me something I can live with." (29)

Behind Jennifer father's wish, there underlies the connection amidst language and ideology in that the relationship between denotative meaning and connotation of a word in a language can easily be related that the latter may present wider social dimension of the word as a sign constructed by outside forces. According to OED, suicide means "the action of killing oneself intentionally." ('Oxford Dictionaries') But to social language, it may signify "public disgrace" (74) as it does in *Night Train*. For Turner:

> We need to understand the social dimension of the sign: the ways in which culture supplies us with the signifier, the form, and the signified, the mental concept. A conventional system of classification is of some relevance here: the distinction between literal and associative meanings – or denotation and connotation. (Turner, 2003:14)

Then, Hoolihan begins the detection to remove the disgrace and to find answers by tracing clues leading to more clues because her post-modern world is not the world of hard-boiled or British Golden Age detective stories. On the other hand, postmodern sleuths are not as successful as the previous ones in solving crimes because "The detective is unable to impose a meaning, an interpretation of the outside occurrences he is asked, as a sleuth, to solve and interpret. Reality is so tentacular and full of clues that the detective risks his sanity as he tries to find a solution." (Tani, 1984:76) Because postmodern detective novels are pastiches of the earlier genres and parody them, postmodern detectives are not obsessed with finding closures. However, Mike traces the clues just as former colleagues at first; she discovers ontological dissolution of Jennifer towards the end of the story at the very time when Mike begins to realize her own existential nihilism:

> Mike's world, by contrast, is one of emotional and economic determinism, cause and effect, discipline and punishment. Significantly, she tries to import improper, positivist analysis to Jennifer's postmodern quandary. She seeks a mimetic, rationalist universe containing answers, logic, and order, yet in the end, she symbolically –and ironically –inherits Jennifer's contingency and indeterminacy (Keulks,2006:164).

Thereupon, she begins a psychological autopsy and seems to question the night train (referring to suicide in the novel) that "If Jennifer Rockwell would kill herself, those with less talent, less intelligence, less beauty should choose to live?" (Keulks, 2006:164) While Mike struggles for finding a killer just as in classical whodunits, then she becomes conscious of necessity for a why in a

psychological autopsy and so the story is shifted to detection after a "why". Jennifer's suicide changes Mike's life from the top on down that she says "Jennifer Rockwell inside of me, trying to reveal what I don't want to see." (83) While they are mostly different by means of binary oppositions (ugly-beautiful, sad-happy, having family- having no family and so forth), the most common feature of Jennifer and Mike is that both of them do not watch television. There is no TV in their lives; that's why, they can go beyond the wall of postmodern world where fact and fiction is blurred by ideological apparatuses. While Jennifer has a screen that is the screen of a telescope, it shows the true reflection; reflection of atmosphere. Yet, by the time she removes her eyes to look at the postmodern world with her bare eyes without any screen, she can see what actually happens in the world; the world Mike lives in with crimes, murders and violence who is unable to aware of Jennifer's life seeming wonderful once upon a time. Without any ideological screen, the rift between fact and fiction is bridged and life reflects itself as it is. Mike recognizes as she comes across with her dead body that neither Jennifer nor her life is worth to live. In other words, Jennifer becomes Mike's 'screen', a spectacle creating its own spectator, through which she begins to watch the actual condition of the post-modern world she has been neglecting. For this reason, Jennifer and Mike becomes a screen for each other in which they both see how life is televised and simulated. In Mike, Jennifer sees how that police woman's life is encircled by crime, violence and darkest sides of the earth. With Amis' Baudrillardan vision of postmodern simulation, *Night Train* shows how fiction and reality is intertwined in that fiction does not mimic reality anymore but fiction becomes reality. In this sense, by using characteristics of postmodernism such as hyper-reality and faction, Amis depicts that an old lady Mrs. Rolfe, a neighbour of Jennifer, is not able to distinguish a real gunshot from the one staged on a cop show in television. Additionally, Mike remarks on how gangsters in the city emulate actions of mafia not from their previous generations in Sicily but from movies about the Italian gangs. Inside of such a simulacrum, only Mike is aware of the condition outside not of her inside:

> TV, etcetera, has had a terrible effect on perpetrators. It has given them style. And TV has ruined American juries forever. And American lawyers. But TV has also fucked up police. No profession has been so massively fictionalized. […] But this was Colonel Tom I was talking to. So I spoke the plain truth (Amis,1999:29).

However, Mike is able to cope with post-modern world's the worst crimes with her own eyes possibly because of professional deformation, Jennifer cannot even deal with the world she sees as an outsider after observing the sky.

Likewise, Mike is unable to overcome the reason behind the suicide of Jennifer who is the figure of perfectness in a terrible world. At last, Mike begins to think that if Jennifer can commit suicide after a happy life, then why she cannot do it with an unfavourable one? That's why, in the first page of Vintage version of *Night Train*, the New Yorker's acclaim for Amis puts forward that "It isn't a whodunit, or even a whydunit, but it may be the first work of a new, very Amisian, and postmodern genre, the whynotdoit" (1999:1). The point is that both Mike and Jennifer look for a change but it is not a revolution against dominance of outside forces as it is in British Cultural Studies. It is just a desperate reaction to Martin Amis's invincible postmodern fictional world as Mike confesses "Homicide can't change and I don't mean the department. It can evolve. It can't change. There's nowhere for murder to go. But what if suicide could change?" (125)

Conclusion

In short, popular post-modern novels *Night Train* and *About a Boy* are in close relationship with popular culture, consumer society and their effective apparatus (television) by means of novels' characters' suicide attempts prompted by crises of postmodernism. Wilde's striking inversion of traditional mimesis "life imitates art far more than art imitates life" (2016, p:22) can also be transformed into "life imitates screen", screen of mass-media, of cinema, of television because by these apparatuses enculturated, massified, standardized people of popular culture makes meaning in their lives. They learn what to think, how to think, how to communicate with 'the other', how to dress, what to desire; in short, how to live. And the teacher is culture and its screens. In the two novels, it is popular culture teaching and educating the characters and television operates as its most crucial apparatus in their lives. Giroux broadens Raymond William's "permanent education" (cited from Giroux,2004:63) of culture into "pedagogical force of culture" in that "Culture now plays a central role in producing narratives, metaphors, and images that exercise a powerful pedagogical force over how people think of themselves and their relationship to others" (Giroux,2004:62). While Hornby's Fiona, as a regular tele viewer, attempts not to commit suicide under the direct influence of television in which she sees post-modern's world reflection; her son prevents Fiona to continue watching violent scenes due to possible future results because "representations of violence on the TV screen are not violence but messages about violence" (Hall,2006:120). And, she is unable to decode the encoded messages behind; hence, she may try suicide for the second time. The reason behind her hopelessness for life is that she cannot catch up with rapidness in change of popular culture in which divorcement is turning into a fashion and makes her a lonely, single parent who tries to fulfil the gap of a father figure in Marcus' life

but fails most of the time. Fiona neglects messages or codes of popular culture and what she sees is just her loneliness on television. So, Marcus does not allow his mother to imitate the scenes she watches. On the other hand, Amis' Jennifer also fails to cope with the postmodern condition by the time she realizes by not watching television that people around have been consuming what ideology presents fiction or simulation as reality. Moreover, she becomes a mirror for Mike to notice how her life is conditioned at the centre of postmodernism's fragmented, chaotic and alienated world. While Jennifer and Mike handle suicide as a desperate reaction to that dystopic and inescapable land, Fiona prefers it without conscious of its grounds which directly absorbs her into growing loneliness and responsibility of being a single parent. She consumes her own life.

Within this direction, it is necessary to find certain strains or stressors behind Fiona and Jennifer's suicidal actions. As a prominent but mostly attacked part of sociological and criminological researches, Strain theories play a social-psychological role in explanations of crime, deviance, delinquency, suicide and so forth. Since Robert Merton tried to understand social structures behind committing crime with his first work in 1938, Strain theories have undergone changes to be able to cope with postmodern condition. For Merton, society has five "modes of individual adaptation" (1968:194) to cultural goals which have institutionalised means in that conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion circle repeatedly just as in Marx's grundrisse. An individual may accept that modes of adaptation to remain in social structure (as it is for the Frankfurt School) or s/he can resist to change (as it is in British Cultural Studies) "the existing cultural and social structure rather than to accommodate efforts within this structure" (Merton, 1968: 194). On the other hand, with his General Strain Theory (GST) in 1992, Robert Agnew succeeded to construct a general overview for various postmodern slippery strains prompting society to oblige to crimes in a fragmented, contingent and alienated world controlled by outside forces. To Agnew, GST can be applied to a range of grounds to explain the causes behind crime rates triggered by strain that "refers to negative or adverse relations with others." (1992:61) That relationship may include differences in gender, race, social status, religion leading to crime and deviance. Among others, suicide is one of the most common results of social and psychological strains in an individual's life. Suicide comes into existence after four types of strains: "value, aspiration, deprivation and coping" (Zhang, Lester, and Tan, 2013:230). Zhang, Lester, and Tan examine 72 suicides and their strains documented in biographies or suicide notes. "Of the 72 suicides, one had no strains, one had all the four strains, four had only one, 30 had two, and 36 had three strains. The most common strain was aspiration strain (97%), followed by deprivation strain (89%), value strain (54%) and coping deficiency strain (4%)." (230) Fiona's psychological strains clustering series of negative

events precede the suicide. Inside of that "strain clusters" (see Agnew), Fiona has "aspiration" for being a good mother and for not being lonely, "deprivation" of a husband and "coping deficiency" with divorcement and single-parenting. On the other hand, as a figure of perfectness it seems that Jennifer does not to aspire for anything, she is deprived of nothing and she does not have such things as divorce or single-parenting to cope with until her suicide. Besides, as deprived of everything Jennifer has got in life, Mike aspires for many things, and still she can cope with the deficiencies in her life because she is unconscious for what she is actually living. Nevertheless, by the time she detects Jennifer's suicide psychologically she discovers her own real identity in the postmodern world. For this reason, suicide becomes a choice for her just like it did for Jennifer because the world they live in is impossible to be changed and thus the only reaction may be given is just suicide. Even so, question of why other characters both in *Night Train* and *About a Boy* do not commit suicide is also a key matter for suicide researches. Van Orden et al. asks that "if all individuals in a society are exposed to the shifts in social forces, why then do only particular individuals, and a very small subset of them at that, die by suicide?" (2010:9). The answer is that reality "itself already image, spectacle, simulacrum, gratuitous fiction" (Eagleton, 985:62) and such a "simulation is the ecstasy of the real" (Baudrillard,2001:190). In that simulated world, most of the people are made unconscious through ideological apparatuses of outside forces. Television "where real events follow one another in a perfectly ecstatic relation…" (Baudrillard,2001:190) is one of the best and imposes what ideology needs in an infinite circuit to be able to create a passive and consumer global society who is after never-ending and malcontent desires giving a sense of pseudo-happiness that is material oriented. At the final point, those who have value, aspiration, deprivation and coping strains become the closest ones for suicide handling it as an ultimate desperate reaction against the invincible postmodern epoch. However, Hornby connects everyone in the end thanks to Marcus and thus saves Fiona; he creates a mass single-parents society in which he standardizes each of them through a romantic point of view. As a television addicted, Will normalizes Marcus to place securely in popular culture. On the other hand, Amis narrates that Jennifer and Mike become a screen for each other and watch the world beyond phantoms and relates both the characters with suicide as a desperate but an active reaction to postmodern condition. While Hornby favours sustaining the order, Amis prefers a desperate revolution.

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