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Feel-Good Giving: The Mythic Construction of Generosity in Millions

Abstract

The question of what generosity is and how it is practiced in relation to the neoliberal contexts of late capitalism has emerged as a subject of interest across a variety of fields. Instead of placing emphasis on the recipient and the cause or structural inequalities contributing to the need for generosity, new practices of giving have appeared on a variety of media platforms and have been performed by a host of celebrities, sports figures, and politicians that emphasize the giver's moral goodness.

By using a critical cultural studies approach, this dissertation demonstrates that in the visual culture of humanitarianism representations of generosity in popular films articulate current neoliberal constraints on human dignity and presumed goodwill. These visions of generosity enforce a neoliberalized idea of givers and takers. The dissertation argues that the film *Millions* (2004) proposes an intriguing counter-narrative to prevailing notions of neoliberal feel-good generosity by using Catholic and Marxian discourses. In its focus on two young boys who find and consider what to do with a bag of stolen money, it imagines generosity as relational, less calculated for personal gain and excessive in its indulgence. The movie identifies the need for collective giving and relational generosity rather than blaming the poor for their conditions.

This dissertation therefore considers the film, *Millions* (2004) as a cultural forum (Newcomb and Hirsch 1983/1994) through which viewers are encouraged to analyze "naturalized" understandings of generosity by reflecting on calamities and conditions of inequality that challenge "feel good giving" and "project of the self" approaches to generosity. *Millions* explores the gap of disconnect between us and others and how money can mediate the desire for connection. This film therefore provides the cultural space for considering the unconscious lived relations regarding what a child learns about money and giving and how what he learns is taught and reproduced.

I conclude that as films and cultural artifacts like *Millions* draw upon explicit religious themes and imagery, they further provide a contextual space for critical religio-political reflection, where viewers may uphold, maintain, or transform their understanding of how to be independently or collectively generous in relation to their religious traditions and larger system of beliefs.

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Program

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Grace Y. Chiou

June 2015

Advisor: Lynn Schofield Clark

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Framework.....	2
Synopsis.....	8
Method of analysis	13
Chapter One: The Neoliberal Norm	15
Neoliberalism, Ideology and Ideological Reproduction.....	19
Neoliberal Waters.....	24
Givers, Takers, and Workfare: Re-conceptualizing Generosity in Politics.....	32
Giving and Taking in Popular Culture	38
Conclusion.....	51
Chapter Two: The Cultural Production of <i>Millions</i>	53
Framework.....	56
<i>Millions</i> and the Neoliberal Structure of Feeling	58
Sites of Meaning.....	61
Text:.....	62
The Production of <i>Millions</i>	69
Testing Boundaries: The Intentions of the Writer and Producer Team.....	73
Danny Boyle’s interest in money	73
Catholic Influence	76
Catholicism and Depicting Generosity in <i>Millions</i>	80
Critical Response: Viewer Interpretations.....	82
Conclusion.....	96
Chapter Three: Providing a “Decent” Home: Need, Greed, and Altruism.....	99
Chapter Four: Uninhibited Generosity	139
Magical Realities and Risky Business.....	141
Greed is Good.....	149
Irreducible Otherness in Distant Suffering.....	152
Pennies from Heaven.....	153
Between Heaven and Earth:	155
Chapter Five: Money Talks: The Ties Between Private Lives and Public Choices.....	173
Individual Ownership and Social Solidarity.....	178
Charity Starts at Home	190
Conclusion: Altogether and All at Once	204
References	216

FIGURES

1	Margaret Thatcher personally congratulates the Patterson family	110
2	Working-class Cunningham neighborhood.	117
3	Cunningham suburban home	118
4	Anthony with toy snake	149
5	Start of title sequence	155
6	End of title sequence	155
7	Layered introduction of St. Clare	158
8	Walking to Pizza Hut	161

INTRODUCTION

Every Super Bowl, the winning team receives shirts, hats and sweatshirts identifying themselves as the champions. Immediately after the victory, vendors also capitalize on the moment by selling souvenirs emblazoned with the name and logo of the winning team. Another set of championship merchandise also exists, but as these alternate items display the name of the losing team, created in case that team instead had been the victors, these latter items remain locked away (Jenkins 2014). What happens to the unused and unusable goods? The NFL¹ and companies such as Kohl's, Dick's Sporting Goods, and Sports Authority donate them to World Vision, a Christian aid organization, which then distributes it all in a foreign country (Rovell 2013; Falsani 2011).

These incorrect shirts can thus be seen in disadvantaged countries such as Haiti, Uganda and Sierra Leone (Leahy 2010; Jenkins 2007), and so this act of charity becomes a comical global dissemination of misinformation every year. It can also be unsettling to know that those t-shirts deemed unacceptable for North Americans are deemed by someone or some group to be perfectly fine for outsiders typically in the global South. This practice of donating unwanted clothing raises a series of questions. Is the decision to

¹ Notably, the NFL is a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(6) of the Internal Revenue Code as a trade or industry association (Dosh 2013).

donate the shirts more noble than repurposing the clothing or destroying it?² When and how did other countries become a wasteland for those American goods deemed unusable for American consumers? And how is it that “giving” has generally come to be conflated with an act of giving away anything unusable or unwanted? This type of generosity seems to indicate our desire is not to give away our best, but to instead offer up our refuse and trash. But as this dissertation suggests, we must ask: Is this really generous?

Framework

This dissertation examines the dual interaction of how generosity is informed by economics and religion and how it is collectively imagined in the public sphere. Following Roger Silverstone’s (1981) understanding of the mythic nature of television and by extension popular film, I argue that popular culture, film and television carry certain messages contributing to the public understanding of generosity (see also Newcomb & Hirsch 1994). Therefore, a close examination of popular cultural artifacts can reveal both the constraints that shape our culturally accepted ways of understanding, and can sometimes also reveal the ways that those constraints can be challenged through counter-narrative (see also Hall 1993). *Millions*, a film directed by Danny Boyle, is one example of a film that expresses such a counter-narrative. I first watched the film ten years ago and was struck by the film’s representation of generosity as a complex series of actions and wanted to come back to the film’s narrative as I considered the structure of generosity today. The film’s plot follows the adventure and challenges 7-year-old Damian Cunningham faces as he encounters a large pile of money and desires to give it

² Prior to the 1990s, these shirts had been destroyed. World Vision approached the NFL to donate the sweatshirts to colder locales (Bixby 2013).

away to the poor. The film thus provides a cultural forum through which viewers might examine money as a cultural sign, as used within everyday life, and as constructed by the media, state institutions, the Catholic tradition, and non-profits. Damian's mission and his everyday activities can be analyzed against core concepts of class, identity, structure and inequality. In addition to structural issues, *Millions* presents fundamental questions regarding the human condition and the desire for connection, security, relationships and love. Can money buy happiness? Alternatively, does giving away money buy happiness?

The film portrays an Althusserian understanding of neoliberalism as cultivated through social institutions. Damian is shown to receive lessons on the economic meaning of money and neoliberal capitalism as the naturalized economic system from his family, school and media. The depiction of media as playing a role in naturalizing our understanding of money is interwoven through the film's narrative, which includes embedded advertisements on E-Day and a semiotic discussion over use value versus exchange value. Chapter Four discusses three embedded advertisements functioning as public service announcements (PSA) for the upcoming financial conversion from the British sterling to the Euro on E-Day. These PSAs situate the cultural context the film establishes for its characters as "the media today constitute the inventory of symbols, values and ideas out of which sense is made locally and globally" (Hoover 2006, 13). Anthony Giddens articulates that in modernity a person is reflexive about how he or she relates to the social world incorporating both lived and mediated experiences in daily life (1991, 1-9, 181-208). Continuing the conversation of John McMurria (2008), Montez de Oca (2012) and others on how the media reinforce ideological concepts regarding private philanthropy and charity, this dissertation considers the way *Millions* has a meta-

discussion on media representations as a means to encourage the viewer to consider the role media play in constructing and reinforcing certain concepts of ideological generosity.

Conversely in Damian's experiments in generosity and his imaginative role play with non-present others (the saints), he demonstrates resistance to the hegemonic call to be and to act in more self-interested ways. Thus my dissertation considers the unconscious lived relations regarding *what* Damian learns about money and giving and *how* he proceeds, in the process inviting the viewer to consider their own definitions of money and its usages. As this work will discuss, the film links together various components of what I will term a neoliberal structure of feeling, and contrasts this with Damian's religiously informed experiments in giving. Neoliberalism cultivates an indulgent and self-protective self where others are a secondary consideration. Although *Millions* is not a perfect text, the film challenges neoliberal assumptions of generosity through a series of contrasts and provides a location for personal reflection on generosity and the limits of neoliberalism. In order to understand what I refer to as how the neoliberal worldview influences cultural understandings of generosity, I will briefly introduce neoliberalism and explain how it relates to the film.

The concept of economic neoliberalism is drawn from the work of Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, and holds free market competition "as the dominant reference-point of economics" (Couldry 2010). This belief in free markets includes two claims: that market efficiency can best allocate scarce public resources, and that the market is a morally superior form of political economy because individuals are expected to be rationally calculative beings with a duty to the self (Peters 2001, 118, 91). With the opening of markets heralded by globalization, wealthy countries such as the

USA and the UK adopted neoliberal policies and they spread internationally in the 1980s.

In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey connects the components of this economic framework to social well-being. He writes:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (2005, 2)

However, experts agree that the ascendance of neoliberalism as the normative framework has resulted in greater inequality of economic growth both between countries and within countries (Couldry 2010).

Broadening the neoliberal free market theory, Nick Couldry discusses the effects of neoliberal doctrine on political, social, and organizational order (2010, 4-5). The emphasis on market competition and privatization transforms values regarding human happiness such as fulfillment at work, friendship, a sense of mutual trust and a sense of community into “market externalities” (Layard 2005, 67-69). These affects become secondary to the economic need to be a financially responsible citizen. The neoliberal individual constitutes a site of independence and competitiveness who also has the freedom of choice as a consumer in the free market. In this system, individuals need to maximize their own capital (labor skills) into a profitable return (salary) (Couldry 2010). For Marx, the capitalist pursuit of accumulation, private property and profit leads to a pale and empty life where people are valued as a means to an end rather than as an end in themselves. In *The German Ideology*, Marx envisioned a communist society of “community with others [where] each individual [has] the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions” (1970, 83).

This dissertation specifically focuses on *Millions*' contrasting depictions of what I will term *ideological generosity*, which appears in the guise of feel-good giving, and *relational generosity*, which may come at personal expense. I use the term 'ideological' to reference the dominant beliefs of western society that unconsciously underlie political action. As I will argue, ideological generosity presents itself as self-less but operates to secure power and perpetuate the capitalist system. Rather than optimism that neoliberalism will be the agent of social change and social progress, these chapters contribute to the body of work critiquing its injustices, analyzing how it has conditioned motivations for generosity. *Millions* addresses both the national need for generosity within the minimal state and privatized polices and the functional role philanthropy plays in our globalized society. First, authors have highlighted that neoliberalism's inequalities require generous individuals as a counterbalance to the dismantling of welfare. Second, philanthropy plays a role in international policies and relationships. Žižek points to how neoliberalism requires charities and philanthropy to sustain the social order. He argues, "The ruthless pursuit of profit is counteracted by charity. Charity is the humanitarian mask hiding the face of economic exploitation" (Žižek 2009, 19). His assertion that neoliberalism requires charity points to how those with capital maintain their position of privilege as philanthropists. In addition, since social welfare is privatized in neoliberalism, charities work within a market system and compete for funding utilizing celebrities and spectacles in their fundraising (Einstein 2012; Chouliaraki 2013; King 2006). Samantha King's (2006) *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* considers the emergence of consumer-oriented philanthropic solutions to social problems. The latest confluence of feel-good giving and capitalism can be seen in the "buy one-give one" marketing ploy. TOMS

Shoes and Warby Parker are two companies in the “conscious capitalism” trend that give shoes and eyeglasses, respectively, to another individual in need upon one’s purchase.

The founder of TOMS, Blake Mycoskie proclaims, “I wanted to make it easy to make a difference” (Hulsether 2013). This form of giving incorporates both a sense of ease and places those in need as an afterthought to one’s own consumption.

Whereas some in the film embrace what I have termed ideological generosity that comports with these neoliberal ideas of power, privilege, and philanthropy, the character of Damian instead embraces a combined Marxist and Catholic framework. This framework informs his actions and reflects a more conscious effort to utilize relational generosity for the good of others based on human dignity, trust and solidarity. In another context, Father Greg Boyle, a Jesuit priest, signifies the sentiment of relational generosity with his rhetoric of kinship, relationship, “taking delight in”, “standing in *awe* and not judgment of others” (Boyle 2015). Fr. Boyle’s work with Los Angeles gangs is based on Catholic liberation theology and is animated by a “preference for the poor” and their daily struggles (Rutten 2010). Similarly, Damian’s haphazard giving to the poor contests the neoliberal narrative of rewarding only hard-working and deserving individuals. By demonstrating how *Millions* critiques ideological generosity, my dissertation illustrates how the film presents a forum³ for audiences to uphold, examine, maintain or transform their understanding regarding acts of giving.

³ Although Newcomb and Hirsch apply the concept of a cultural forum to television series, these concepts can be extrapolated to understand the varied messages engaged in a single film (1983/1994).

Synopsis

Millions begins with a fictional scenario taking place on E-Day, when the UK transitioned from the British sterling to the euro. It is a week before this transition is to take place, and two brothers, Damian (age 7) and Anthony (age 9), must decide what to do with 265,000 pounds (approximately \$500,000 US) that has bounced off a train and into Damian's playhouse and that will be worthless once the financial transition occurs. Damian believes the money is from God and wants to use it for a higher purpose. In this fantastical tale, he encounters Catholic saints who guide him along his mission to give it away. Saints continuously appear in the film and Damian correctly announces his knowledge of who they are. Represented as material beings, the saints are a part of empirical reality in the world of the film, delineated as spiritual beings only by a thin floating halo above their heads. In contrast to Damian's intentions and Saint-inspired actions, Anthony devises multiple plans for the money including banking, investing and spending it before the bills lose their value. As the two boys act upon their desires for the money, their undertakings reflect Marxian and Catholic discourse (Damian) and neoliberal principles (Anthony).

Damian receives lessons in capitalism from Anthony, his widower father and a nonprofit worker at school reflecting neoliberal ideals. Anthony's expertise in the language of real estate and multiple strategies to protect and grow the money's value demonstrate he is well-versed in capitalist logic and the basics of neoliberalism. This concept of the neoliberal individual is reflected in the film both by his belief in home ownership and by the way Damian's father emphasizes the need for self-reliance, hard work and a stiff upper-lip. Both Damian's brother Anthony and Damian's father appear

to have relationships built on the performance of work, and both seem to have a lack of intimate friendships. Instead Damian operates through a framework of creativity, vulnerability and relationality. He crafts his own playhouse and gives money to others without strings attached. His actions and subjectivity contrast with how his brother and father are alienated to themselves.

In the film Damian has finished constructing his playhouse when he has a vision of Saint Clare. As they are talking, a heavy black Nike bag falls out of the air crushing him and his house. At first Damian and Anthony enjoy playing with the money as if the stacks of cash are game pieces. After being inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi to give the money to the poor, Damien sees a group of African men with halos, the Martyrs of Uganda 1881, working on his playhouse and rebuilding it. In this scene and the following one at school he learns about giving to the cause of clean water in Africa. The film creates a contrast between learning about instituting water well in Africa from a conversation with one of the Martyrs and from a nonprofit “ask” at school.

Around the playhouse, the group of martyrs also surrounds the field praying for rain. One character forcefully explains how expensive clean water is in his country; people cannot even afford to wash their hands and end up dying from disease. He says, “You don’t need fancy hospitals or medicines to make life better, just a well. And you can build a well for as little as one hundred pounds.” His physical presence is tough and serious; this man is not weak or pitiful in his request. This simple and human proposition radically challenges the non-profit’s flat, institutionalized and mechanized process of giving. The martyr’s voice and representation is an example of the way *Millions* reimagines the “poor” as animated and dignified beings. Each of the saints Damian

interacts with is similarly active and “real,” interacting with physical objects and individuated with their own distinct personalities. This characterization of the saints, as materially real for Damian, reflects his desire to connect with others even if they may be figments of his imagination. Therefore *Millions* also offers the power of imagination in regards to how viewers relate to humanitarian appeals.

After meeting the Martyrs in the field, Damian goes to school where he again learns about the need for clean water in Africa through a non-profit’s presentation. This part of the story reinforces the “Othering” of Africa as a site of non-agentive subjects who are recipients of Western largesse. The presentation highlights disparate conditions between the UK and the global South and how the rhetoric of philanthropy enables the West to serve as a continuing savior to African countries, reinforcing power relations from colonialism. These scenarios not only reinforce the power and privilege of the West but the notion that the recipients should be properly grateful. In the school scene, giving to the clean water charity is mediated through three formats: the rhetoric of the spokesperson, the posters for the cause, and an automated trashcan that has been converted into a receptacle for donations. The robotic machine confronts the children to donate their loose change and declares “Chuck it in the bin!” Thus students throw away their change to benefit communities in Africa. This system of discarding one’s useless items into a trash bin enacts a sense of paternalism, providing a self-congratulatory sense of generosity and superiority. The trash can imagery also normalizes the act of giving/throwing away money via good intentions. This scene connects generosity, race and power relations by raising the issue of who is superior and inferior in the transaction of generosity. The meaning of the trash bin reflects the wealth of first-world countries

that can afford to throw away their money and teaches the students to pity the poor.

Timothy B. Tyson's memoir, *Blood Done Sign My Name*, recalls how shoes, books and hand-me-downs were given to the black community following the appropriate "ask": coming to the back door with hat in hand, and effusions of gratitude (2007, 24-25). The Super Bowl/WorldVision example referenced at the beginning of this chapter also characterizes this model of giving away cast-off goods.

In addition to this small lesson on social norms and good deeds, this rich scene demonstrates how non-state institutions work in conjunction with the capitalist system. The non-profit presentation also has a component of helping the children learn about money. The state requires a working class labor force to perpetuate economic growth so children must understand the signification of money. Ultimately, the school lesson on the financial transition speaks to hegemony and education as a form of securing capitalism as the natural economic structure through its production and reproduction.

Lastly, the film also involves ethical questions in charitable actions and social locations. *Millions* addresses the question of social segregation and charity through the gentrification of Damian's neighborhood. Part of the plot is the Cunningham's move into a new home in a planned community. Within this context Damian is searching for someone poor in order to give him or her money. This activity raises the question of how we encounter people in need and the exchanges between giver and recipient. The viewer sees Damian's struggle to identify who is poor, his treatment of them and their response. Therefore, Damian is growing up in the context of consumer capitalism where relationships between people's inequalities with each other are the focus of discussion so much as the magical commodity and the desire to insulate oneself from risk. In the

modern real estate market, houses and buildings magically appear; people buy them without any concern for whether or not the laborers were paid or treated fairly in the construction process. Anthony discusses buildings and homes in the language of markets and capital as a means of setting up this contrast between an ideological and relational approach to considering goods and people. In Chapter Three of this dissertation, I further highlight the social transition that occurs as Damian's family steps up the social ladder and moves into a middle-class home. In other words, the Cunningham house becomes a semiotic index of home ownership and symbolic of middle-class social mobility.

The narrative threads of moving also evoke the need for the family to move on after the death of Damian and Anthony's mother, tying together material gain, emotional loss and the desire for connection. In fact, the desire for human connection is an overriding discourse in this film. *Millions* explores the gap of disconnect between us and others and how money can mediate that desire. In addition to illustrating Marx's critique of a capitalist system and the commodity fetish, *Millions* highlights how individuals use money to satisfy emotional needs, which in turn can erode relationships. The film implies that the neoliberal framework which emphasizes home ownership, consumption and the enterprise self as detrimental to human happiness as it limits understandings of how to be human and devalues human relationships.

Thus, the story of *Millions* interweaves complex narratives around giving and growing up, greed and need, the significance of material objects and money and their uses. While it incorporates elements of fantasy, it promotes a relational model of generosity and proposes that good outcomes can come from self-interest. It examines the terrain of meaning and how it is constructed within the realms of religion, media and

culture. Damian's unconventional attitude and behaviors beckon the viewer to consider the cultural value of generosity and how it is informed by Catholic social teaching.

Method of analysis

I employ content analysis and semiotic methods to understand the film's representations and how they work at a cultural level. This approach to meaning involves denotation and connotation. Drawing upon Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of the sign, one of the key works to understand this method is *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes. According to Barthes, denotation operates at the first-order of meaning and moves to a second set of signifieds and broader ideologically framed messages or meanings. The process of signification constructs certain meanings and views in society that appear natural and common sense, or as what Barthes termed "myth." Parallel to the way Barthes revealed the performance of wrestling as a "demonstration of excellence," generosity as a modern cultural convention has become what Lilie Chouliaraki calls a "project of the self" (Barthes 1972; Chouliaraki 2013). Therefore, it is possible to highlight the representations of generosity in *Millions* and connect them to broader ideologies of power and the neoliberal definition of the individual as an active, enterprising agent.

This work is organized in the following manner. Chapter One introduces neoliberalism as an ideology in order to set up a clear understanding of neoliberalism as an economic, political and social order. It also overviews the popular discourse of giving as ultimately self-beneficial or in the service of promoting self-sufficient neoliberal citizens. Chapter Two considers the film's sites of meaning production: author, text and

viewer response. This chapter highlights the Catholic upbringing of director Danny Boyle and producer Frank Cottrell Boyce. I will argue their backgrounds inform their understanding of generosity, poverty, and the nature of being human. I compare the import they place on collective giving against viewers' interpretations of individualized action. Chapter Three addresses the neoliberal definition of citizenship as home ownership as a means to generate private capital and to insulate one from outside risks. Chapter Four introduces Boyle's nuanced understanding of the human being as interdependent and as more than an economic actor. In addition, it connects this understanding of the self with Damian's experiments in giving. Finally, Chapter Five connects Damian's religious imaginary and desire to help the poor with Catholic social teaching on the "preferential option for the poor." I argue in this chapter that relational generosity must be the premise for financial generosity.

CHAPTER ONE: THE NEOLIBERAL NORM

*It's just, it's nice to know, at the end of the day, I can look in the mirror and say, "Michael because of you, some little kid in the Congo has a belly full of rice this evening." Just makes **you**...feel good [emphasis added].*

—Michael Scott, played by Steve Carell, *The Office*, “Casino Night”
(NBC).

Being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience.

—Susan Sontag

During the summer of 2014, the ALS ice bucket challenge illustrated a confluence of media and charity. This campaign conveyed a creative narrative that included documented, highly public demonstrations that involved dumping a bucket of ice water over one's head, and then using Facebook tagging to challenge and shame friends into also participating in charitable giving (ALSA). As the challenge went viral, the challenge itself and the story of the challenge flooded Facebook pages and celebrity news. The visual spectacle involved not only dumping buckets of ice water but also more personalized efforts involving toilet water (Matt Damon), breast milk (Olivia Wilde), or

cash (Charlie Sheen). Many individuals participated by themselves, as families, or en masse. Although there were instances of various cold-water challenges occurring earlier in the year, it was when individuals and celebrities personalized their challenge via the mediating bucket that the movement donating to the ALSA went viral. *CBS News* reported over 17 million video uploads on Facebook featuring people undertaking the ice bucket challenge, and a record one billion YouTube views for those watching (2014). The ALS Association website has taken on this unofficial movement as their own, with a message of thanks to three million donors on their website, alsa.org. The campaign generated over 115 million dollars from July 29, 2014, and was thus deemed a success for charitable fund-raising.

I begin with this illustration in order to set the context for this chapter's argument regarding changing notions of generosity and its representation. I argue that exhibitions of self-effacement and morality as depicted in the ALS ice bucket challenge reflect a shift in emphasis within the visual culture of humanitarianism: one that accentuates givers over receivers. For example, one could note the lack of information regarding ALS in the videos and instead the spotlight on donor creativity. The bodies of ALS sufferers became a prop for donors to generate a social media sensation. In this vein, modern promotion of giving in media and marketing of humanitarian causes themselves highlight the role of the donor over the cause or beneficiary (Raddon 2008; Trope 2012). In addition to public displays such as the Ice Bucket challenge, what Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser (2012) and others term commodity activism has also been marketed as a form of political engagement. Why is it that generosity has become more commonly presented through the

neoliberal discourse as a method for self-promotion, self-improvement or self-gratification through public exhibition or commodity activism? How do such representations work to secure ideological commitments to a certain type of giving and receiving? To address these questions, this chapter examines the impact of the neoliberal structure of feeling on the social process of generosity. In order to understand the pervasiveness of neoliberalism, I will review the concept of ideology to see how neoliberalism may be understood as an ideology and how it is largely uncontested and echoed in society including in media representations.

While various ideologies are at play in any society, including neoliberalism and religion, the predominance of neoliberal thought in Western societies leads to the saying, “we are all neoliberals now” (Harvey 2005, 13). Various authors have cited the neoliberal seep into all aspects of our lives beyond the field of economics. Understanding neoliberalism and the neoliberal subject is critical to seeing how generosity is constrained as utilitarian concept. As an economic, political and social framework, neoliberalism structures everyday action and is grounded in the body. The feminist reminder that “the personal is political” directs my attention to how neoliberalism has constrained the definition of the individual as a quantifiable being based on market principles relating to his or her economic output. In addition, this output is demarcated between re-productive labor and productive. The most valued labor is “productive” and seen as innovative and enterprising. “Re-productive” labor is viewed as merely reproducing the status quo. The biopolitical effects of neoliberalism are intimately tied to one’s affective being and thus grounded in the body as one stresses, labors, and desires to be a proper neoliberal citizen.

As noted in the introduction, my research connects the broader effects of neoliberalism and its emphasis on the autonomous self with representational depictions of what it means to be a giver or taker. In this chapter, I will elaborate on the discussion of neoliberalism as a pervasive ideology and connect this with discourse on humanitarian appeals related to the “need” for generosity and study the representation of “how” to be generous. I will explain how neoliberalism operates as an ideology and provide examples of the neoliberal seep in popular film and television programs which cultivate a norm of the enterprising self, the need for private, good citizens (individuals and corporations) and the villanization of the poor. I build my analysis of the media discourse of generosity upon the foundational work of Roger Silverstone and his investigations into media and everyday moralities. Silverstone first noted with Eric Hirsch that morality is tied to everyday actions and should be studied in conjunction with their mediation—the various formats, contexts, forms and genres of media—that shape and enact morality (Silverstone and Hirsch 1992; Silverstone 2007). In the media age, they argue, interpretations of generosity are also connected to its mediations. As neoliberalism has become the normative order shaping modes of Western life, this chapter begins with a discussion of the role of neoliberal ideology, which builds a foundation for understanding the current construction of generosity. Later chapters will further build upon this foundation, reading the cinematic world of *Millions* in relation to its counter-representation of generosity.

Neoliberalism, Ideology and Ideological Reproduction

Economists assert that the concept of the gift is a fundamentally economic one involving the transfer of goods and services. From this perspective, one must draw upon the current discourse on neoliberalism to gain insight into the current economic milieu and also connect this scholarship to the practice of giving. Neoliberalism, according to Michael Peters, is the predominant economic framework, “the most powerful, reigning global metanarrative” (2001, vii). Neoliberalism’s viewpoint regarding social welfare and social good are evidenced in policies such as privatization and the dismantling of the welfare state. Neoliberalism has its own moral values championing competition and self-moderation and what Foucault termed “responsibilisation” (Amable 2011, Peters 2001). The neoliberal approach to giving that is articulated in the ice bucket challenge and in *The Office*’s fictional character Michael Scott’s self-oriented discussion of giving quoted at the beginning of this chapter is not the only way to think about this issue of generosity, however. Some theorists, such as Marcel Mauss (1967), assert a connection between giving and moral values, noting that giving is a social practice with its own histories and expectations that are rooted in specific cultural contexts. Mauss also recognized the social dynamics of power in his scholarship on the cycle of giving, which he articulated as giving, receiving and reciprocation. The dynamics of power are a fundamental concern for those in cultural and critical studies. Thus scholarship on ideology and hegemony should also be applied to this study on giving and its neoliberal mediations.

The process of hegemony involves signification and the struggle over meaning. British cultural studies emphasized popular culture as a site of production and

reproduction of hegemony (see Hall and Jefferson 1976 and Hall et al. 1978). Jonathan Storey expounds on the politics of signification as a way “to make the world (and the things in it) mean in particular ways and with particular effects of meaning” (2010, iix). Through the encoding and decoding of texts, media representation can contest or reinforce social reality. Popular culture is understood as the interplay “between the interests of dominant groups and the interests of subordinate groups; between the imposition of dominant meanings and resistance of subordinate meanings” (2010, 49). Storey goes on to remark upon two significant moments in cultural studies placing import on culture and power. First is Raymond Williams social definition of culture, which transitioned from defining culture as a network of shared meaning to an expanded definition consisting of both shared and contested meanings (Storey 2010, ix). Second was the introduction of Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and the acknowledgement of resistance and incorporation, structure and agency in the development of culture. According to Gramsci, hegemony is a useful model for understanding the way that subordinates consent to the taken-for-granted way in which the powerful define terms and create systems that support their interests.

The hegemonic presence of neoliberalism allows for a rich study of this ideology as a mode of shaping subjectivity and social relations. In addition to operating as a set of norms, Brian Ott and Robert Mack identify that societies are structured by ideology and neoliberal ideology in three other ways: limitation, privileging and interpellation. These authors succinctly define ideology as “... a system of ideas that unconsciously shapes and

constrains both our beliefs and behaviors” (2014, 138). Referencing Louis Althusser’s definition of ideology, they continue that ideology is:

The way that we unconsciously define the world around us, the explanations about the world that we take for granted, and the unquestioned beliefs that we hold are all the result in some way of our cultural ideologies. (2014, 138)

Similarly, Stuart Hall fleshes out how ideology works as a basis for social and cultural understanding. He defines ideology as: “those images, concepts, and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and ‘make sense’ of some aspect of social existence” (2000, 271). Hall attends to ideology and racism, informing my study regarding the role of knowledge and power in decisions of generosity and human valuation. This dissertation extends Hall’s explanation of how race and social inequalities were naturalized in the media so as to consider the naturalized explanations for voluntary charity and generosity as a solution to poverty and other social inequalities. Inscribed in the everyday, ideologies influence one’s ideas of giving and taking as one faces opportunities to be generous toward partners, children, friends, coworkers, and strangers.

Critical theorist Louis Althusser was particularly interested in the reproduction of ideologies and structures of power. Whereas Marx saw ideology as a reflection of dominant material relationships that created “false consciousness,” Althusser posed a different understanding of ideology that informs the previously cited definitions from Ott and Mack and Stuart Hall. Building on Jacques Lacan’s “reality” principle, Althusser argued that ideology comprises the set of ideas and beliefs, the representational means, through which individuals understand reality. In addition, Althusser articulates, “ideology

has a material existence... since an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice or practices” (1971, 112). Ideology informs common practices and rituals, even the act of saying “hello.” Thus Althusser’s definition of ideology is more pervasive and more “material” than Marx’s. This formation of ideology proceeds by interpellation, where subjects are called into social subjectivity and into an understanding of one’s place in the world. Following Althusser’s example of a police man hailing one as a subject, film studies uses interpellation to analyze how texts “invite people to recognize themselves and identify with a position of authority or omniscience while watching films” (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 70). As mentioned, *Millions* includes an examination of the various institutions hailing Damian into neoliberal subjectivity and his resistant standpoint. In addition, the film invites its viewers into a vivid portrayal of neoliberalism and enables the viewer to question their own interaction with the material objects of everyday life including money, their desire to give, their dwellings, and in-person and mediated requests for donations from strangers.

In Althusser’s conception of power, he categorizes various social institutions such as the media, family, church, and schools as ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) who are primarily involved in the reproduction of dominant ideologies. Althusser developed the notion of ideology as inter-articulating and mutually reinforcing through various institutions of power in both the dominant ideology and in the private domain. ISAs enter into the private domain challenging a distinction between private and public. For example, neoliberalism has been argued as not only a set of economic policies entailing a roll back of state assistance but it has entered into the private domain of the home where

families are primarily responsible for the welfare of its individuals. This operation of power conveyed via a collapse between public and private in ISAs functions similarly to the neoliberal collapse of public/private identified by Foucault. As a more deterministic approach, Althusser's interpellation restricts individual agency and the possibility for resistance. Stuart Hall's critique was that only the "dominant ideology" would seemingly ever be reproduced (1977, 78). Recognizing the possibilities for alternate ideologies that resist, challenge, or alter the present ideology, Antonio Gramsci's formation of hegemony includes the process of securing consent. Hegemonic beliefs become common sense as a majority of people adopts them and as certain beliefs are viewed as natural, inherent, inevitable and unchangeable. People thus "consent" to their own oppression. Later in this chapter, a recent study by Shildrick and MacDonald (2013) reflects on the ways people living in poverty accept social systems of poverty rather than admit they might be in need of assistance themselves. This study demonstrates the serious stigma associated with identifying as a "taker." Yet Hall offers the hopeful reminder that "hegemony is never permanent" and meaning can be contested (1997, 48). This sentiment is echoed in Michel Foucault's statement that: "Where there is power there is resistance" (2009, 315). Both Hall and Foucault resist ceding too much agency to structures of power and see the potential for individual agency and social change.

Gramsci's view of hegemonic shifts as "war of position/war of movement" incorporates this power/resistance dialectic. Some recent events point to the possibilities for social change among marginalized sectors and recognition of their contributions to the public good. For instance, women have progressively gained recognition for their

contributions in the workplace and service. In 2010, the first women pilots who flew in missions for World War II were honored as members of the military. These women who had served had never officially recognized for their service (Baran and Tundel 2009). Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (2001) created a counter-narrative on working-class labor. Her book recognizes the contributions of the working class and their challenging work contesting the idea that their work is mindless and menial but involved stamina, focus, memory, quick thinking, and fast learning. Very recently fast food worker protests have gained some traction in increasing worker pay (Gasparo and Morath 2015). As groups continue to gain more equitable conditions and acknowledgement for their achievements there is potential for greater receptivity towards historically marginalized groups including the poor and working poor and greater acknowledgement and thanks for their contributions.

Neoliberal Waters

The rich have ~~markets~~, the poor have ~~bureaucrats~~.

The rich have state-help, the poor have self-help.

— Ananya Roy

In order to understand acts of compassion as they are practiced currently, it is helpful to summarize key points in the neoliberal cultural context. Moreover, generosity is correlated with neoliberalism as the citizen-state relationship continues to evolve (Žižek 2009, Raddon 2008). This section highlights specific attributes of neoliberal

ideology and follows with a discussion of the role that generosity plays within neoliberalism.

In neoliberalism, the social is inscribed in economic terms built upon the premises of rationality, individuality and self-interest. Collapses occur at junctures between the state and market and between the public and private. Michael Peters (2001) identifies three values underlying the neoliberal commitment to free markets. In relation to socio-economic-political spheres, neoliberalism is founded on the premise that the market is more efficient than the state at distributing public resources. Another key component of neoliberal reasoning is a return to a “primitive individualism”, an individualism that is ‘competitive,’ ‘possessive,’ and often encoded in terms of ‘consumer sovereignty’ (Peters 2001, 19). Lastly, the ideal of freedom trumps that of equality. In noting that *homo economicus* has become the central figure in neoliberalism, Thomas Lemke articulated that all personal aspects of life have been financialized. Lemke writes, “By encoding the social domain as a form of the economic domain, cost-benefit calculations and market criteria can be applied to decision-making processes within the family, married life, professional life, etc.” (2001, 200). Neoliberal reasoning in modern life requires constant self-management and self-improvement to “optimize” one’s wellbeing (Ong, 2006).

Overall, neoliberalism has limited our modes of thinking and redefined the nature of our actions through neoliberal rationality. In her discussion on neoliberal hegemony, Doreen Massey stresses how even our imaginations have been financialised. She remarks: “That markets are natural is now so embedded in the structure of thought that even the fact that it is an assumption is rarely brought to light” (Massey 2011, 33). This is

echoed in Marxist economist, David Harvey's discussion on neoliberalism as common sense:

... neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on the ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world. (2005, 3)

Massey, Harvey, and Lemke's remarks highlight the normalization and immanence of neoliberal ideology.

Capitalism's persistence and ability to mutate has prompted several scholars to discuss the inability to conceive of an end or viable alternatives to the financial system. In 1991, Frederic Jameson provocatively stated:

It seems easier for us today to image the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations. (xxii)

This sentiment continues to catalyze theorists critical of capitalism. Following various emancipatory moments in 2011 including the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, Slavoj Žižek concluded:

The main victim of the ongoing crisis is thus not capitalism, which appears to be evolving into an even more pervasive and pernicious form, but democracy - not to mention the left, whose inability to offer a viable global alternative has again been rendered visible to all. It was the left that was effectively caught with its pants down. It is almost as if this crisis were staged to demonstrate that the only solution to a failure of capitalism is more capitalism. (2012)

One of the key icons of neoliberalism, Margaret Thatcher, often proclaimed: "There is no alternative" to capitalism. Her assertion underscores the affective command of neoliberalism that hails us into its operations. Neoliberalism has become the water Western cultures swim in.

Foucault's explanations of neoliberalism tie together the impacts of economic shifts and its effects on the social body and how it is governed. In his genealogy of "advanced liberalism" or neoliberalism, Foucault orients us to how the individual has been discursively constructed as pragmatic *homo economicus* (the economic man), the individual who is "an entrepreneur of himself" (Foucault 2008, 206). The entrepreneurial self is also embedded in David Harvey's definition of neoliberalism:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that propose that human well-being can best be advanced by *liberating* individual *entrepreneurial freedoms* and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework to appropriate such practices [italics added]. (2005, 2)

Freedom becomes a central discourse within the individualized body of rights and is also concerned with independence from the sovereign (Foucault 2008, 41-42). Nicholas Rose identifies this dominant style of government in Great Britain and other advanced liberal democracies as *governing through freedom* (1999, 62). Although neoliberal ideology frames the ideas of entrepreneurial freedoms positively, a growing body of work on neoliberalism cites various outcomes of growing inequalities as a result, especially in the area of housing (Harvey 2014; Bourdieu 2005; Couldry 2010; Duggan 2004; Glynn 2009; Hanan 2010).

As individuals are constructed as independent bodies, government structures are no longer key to supporting and facilitating social good. Foucault cites this changing relationship between individual and government in the transition from liberalism to neoliberalism. Political liberalism and neoliberalism are founded on the premise of minimal state intervention in the affairs of the economy. Foucault explained, "the

question of the frugality of government is indeed the question of liberalism” (2008, 29). The notion of limited or frugal governance expanded from questions of state operations into the private sphere where frugality was incorporated into the norm of self-policing. In neoliberalism, new interpretations of personal freedom produced technologies of governance. This new form of social organization from state governance to internalized self-policing and surveillance is termed a disciplinary society.

Foucault terms this method of creating and managing the population biopolitics. He defines biopower as a mode of governing consistent with neoliberalism that brings “life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge/power an agent of the transformation of human life” (1978, 143). It is the right to make live and to let die (Foucault 2013, 62). Biopolitics consists of technology to control populations by governing apparatuses such as policies, agencies, and agents. He identifies the two poles in biopower. First Foucault cites viewing the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, and the extortion of its forces. Second the species body becomes biological machinery becoming a basis of collective well being and reproduction (Foucault 2008, 143 and 139). Through biopolitics, neoliberalism has crafted self-governing, entrepreneurial, and economically-minded individuals or what Foucault calls the enterprise society.

In addition to this self-disciplined body politic, the lines of governance were also re-drawn between state and market. According to Foucault, the genesis of American neoliberalism crystalized from critique of the New Deal and overarching Keynesian policies (2008, 216). In this new formation, the state defers to the market as a mode of

governance and thereby the market dictates state policies. Overall three collapses occur: one between the state and the market, the second between the market and the social, and the third between the public and the private.

Therefore, Foucault's theory of the economy illuminates the neoliberal transition of both the state and economy where market principles are applied to the social. His insights capture how the "government operates through technologies that perpetuate norms, which allow for a fluid merger of the economy within all aspects of life" (Rossman forthcoming). In other words, neoliberalism seeks to turn all social and cultural practices into market forms that can be exploited and reappropriated as normative behaviors. For example in the United States, one can exercise their rights to freely choose and purchase their own health insurance on the market instead of being limited by a nationalized health service. They can also volunteer or donate to causes they privately choose while the government continues its policy of welfare state retrenchment.

Nicholas J. Kiersey describes the operations of biopolitics more fully in creating a field of capital-subject assemblages of *homo economicus*. He explains:

Government works through this 'market milieu' to create incentives and disincentives, shaping how entrepreneurs think and act towards others and themselves. In this sense, neoliberal governmentality seems to deploy the market as a kind of technology of the self. (2011, 35)

Neoliberalism is able to collapse the social and the political through the individual rationalization of the market and implementation of control onto the population. After the 1980s, government approaches included not only formal economic policies advocating free market and privatization of public services, but was ultimately dedicated to the operation of market competition as an end itself.

Ong relates neoliberalism to definitions of being human, citizenship and ethics. Concerned with the intersection of neoliberal logic based on biopolitics and contemporary modes of life, Ong notes the issue of ethical subject formation. Instead of a universalized notion of the human related to Enlightenment ideas of shared humanity, neoliberal governmentality “relies on market knowledge and calculations for a politics of subjection and subject-making that continually places in question the political existence of modern human being” (Ong 2006, 13). Foucault had captured this with his statement, “For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” (“Right” 2013, 47). Under Clinton, the test of citizenship was tied to the idea of “individual responsibilization” with the passage of “workfare.”⁴ During the George W. Bush administration, his administration sought to increase home ownership upon which citizens composed an “ownership society.” Upon signing the American Dream Downpayment Act December 16, 2003, he said:

This Administration will constantly strive to promote an ownership society in America. We want more people owning their own home. It is in our national interest that more people own their own home. After all, if you own your own home, you have a vital stake in the future of our country. (Bush 2003)

In addition to this limited view of citizenship in an “ownership society,” he also proposed the privatization of Social Security and health care and the abolition of the progressive tax code. In his second inaugural address, President Bush made his argument for “preparing our people for the challenges of life in a free society... by making every

⁴ In 1996, president Bill Clinton signed the “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act” that required welfare recipients to participate in “workfare programs” (Peters 2001).

citizen an agent of his or her own destiny.” This rhetoric of individual responsibility is also remarked upon in Mary-Beth Raddon’s “Neoliberal Legacies: Planned Giving and the New Philanthropy.” She argues that citizenship is now depoliticized and collectivist orientations diminish in comparison to individually oriented donating and fundraising. Good citizenship no longer correlates with contributing to distributive policies such as progressive taxation but rather relies on voluntary giving.

As a result of the predominance of neoliberal ideology, where one labors to be self-sufficient in a state of uncertainty, the self becomes a privileged site in social relations out of necessity and contingency. The competitiveness and insecurity found in the neoliberal structure of feeling crowd out moral precepts or care for the poor. Sarah Glynn succinctly concludes:

Neoliberalism appeals to individual self-interest over wider community interests. In its very nature, it sets the individual up in opposition to the old sources of solidarity in the community; its implementation breaks down the older sites of community building and shared experience” (2009, 62-63).

In addition to a social structure which privileges the self, scholars have also argued that neoliberalism is a method of restoring class privilege (Duménil and Lévy 2005; Ventura 2012). Cary Wolfe connects the neoliberal self with its most significant consequences. He asserts the neoliberal frame envisions others and other life as forms of utility and what Heidegger has called “standing reserve.” In his analysis of Heidegger’s exposition of “enframing” or this mode of quantification, exploitation, and instrumentality, Wolfe writes: “The effect of this enframing is thus twofold: not only are human beings cut off from a more authentic relation to the natural world, they are also cut off from an authentic relationship to themselves” (2012, 4).

Givers, Takers, and Workfare: Re-conceptualizing Generosity in Politics

By providing an overview of the development of neoliberalism and neoliberal values, one begins to understand the cultural framework in which generosity is construed. As neoliberal hegemony promotes the productive, competitive, and consumerist aspects of individuals, charitable causes and recipients of charity are evaluated based on these ideals. For instance, some of the backlash against the successful ALS ice bucket challenge concerned whether this “orphan cause” would be economically responsible in handling and allocating the incoming floods of donations without wasting it. This paternal language is often applied to welfare recipients as they face concerns that they will squander their benefits on alcohol or drugs. The organization, GiveDirectly, was frequently interrogated by journalists for its decision to give away money to Kenyan villagers without terms or conditions. The primary concern was that the poor cannot properly gauge positive externalities, use economies of scale, or have poor rationality (Starr & Hattendorf 2014; MacAskill 2012; Goldstein 2013; Glass 2013). MacAskill generalizes that professionals are better to discern the best use of donations since “the poor, like most of us, may discount future benefits more heavily than we would like” (2012). This paternalistic attitude, although moderately qualified, still contains an attitude that the poor are unable to make proper choices or be financially responsible. Television reality shows have also reinforced this neoliberal attitude towards the poor by scrutinizing their lifestyles to determine clear categories of deserving and undeserving poor. Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains that generosity is most commonly

defined as a readiness to give more than is expected, that which is magnanimous and liberal, it is more frequently conceived of as a conditional or limited gift. This is perhaps residual meaning from its earliest usage related to aristocratic birth or nobility and their social power to choose when and how to give.

This section highlights the way generosity is constructed as a neoliberal project spread through policy, ideology, and governmentality. In regards to government policy and giving generously to vulnerable populations, recipients have faced increasing setbacks and restrictions. Conservative leaders, President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, initiated market principles into social welfare in the United States and Britain, respectively. While there are differences in each country's cultural context and the role of welfare in each, there is much crossover as the origins of welfare policy in the U.S. were based on British Poor Laws.

To begin understanding the historical trajectory of privatization and limited welfare, the United Kingdom serves as an extreme model. Thatcher began the state-sell off of public services including the state airline, the state oil company, the state ports, the state steel producer, the state telephone operator, the water utilities, and the gas utility. She also initiated a view that poverty did not exist in England, or if it did exist it was the result of poor financial management. The following quote summarizes her point of view:

Nowadays there really is no primary poverty left in this country . . . In Western countries we are left with problems that aren't poverty. All right, there may be poverty because they don't know how to budget, don't know how to spend their earnings, but now you are left with the really hard fundamental character-personality defect. (Thatcher 1978)

Thatcher fails to mince words with this direct assault on those who have failed financial management of their resources. Her paternal attitude suggests that if only welfare recipients acted responsibly utilizing thrift and hard-work they would not be in their predicament. Thatcher's attack on the working-class included destruction of the National Union of Mineworkers and numerous mining communities during the Miners' Strike of 1984-85.

American presidents similarly instituted the neoliberal model of privatization across social services. Notably it was the United States who pioneered supplanting or transforming rights-based income support in the United States (MacLeod 2009). The government's role serving those in need has been restricted on the basis that individuals were expected to find avenues of employment and be self-governing. In conjunction with policies outsourcing certain welfare services, many public utilities and services such as water systems, parking oversight, the prison and education system were sold to private ownership or subcontracted. These private corporations such as private incarceration programs promote themselves by claiming to save taxpayers money while generating income for themselves while typically affecting the nation's most vulnerable citizens (Stillman 2014).

Corresponding with the government drawback from social welfare is the diminishing public opinion regarding public assistance. While individuals and individual organizations gain acclaim for working to solve social issues, less notice is paid to the overall social system of poverty, hunger, disease or homelessness that is tied not only to diminished acts of civic virtue such as paying taxes, social movement activism, or even

taking care of people within one's neighborhood, but increased exploitation, injustice and oppression as well. Moreover, blame and condemnation of the poor absolve a larger social and economic order overlooking systematic biases, barriers, or impediments to personal success other than one's personal ability to compete. Jared McLeod's *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood* (2008) covers the pernicious way social inequality is reproduced from one generation to the next. Structural barriers to economic well-being that are not included in contemporary vilification of the poor are "contemporary social prejudice, labor market stratification, the availability of suitable child care, or the unequal distribution of harms associated with the changing structure of the American economy" (Brodkin 1993, 652-653). Instead the poor are constituted as society's enemy to affirm definitions of social norms and deviance in work, marriage, and the domestic code (Handler and Hasenfeld 2005; Mitropoulos 2012).

The neoliberal strategy encouraged the private sector of foundations, corporations, and individual donors to resolve problems that government had failed to solve. Reagan initiated a Task Force to investigate a "private sector initiatives" effort. Subsequent American Presidents continued these methods. George H. W. Bush's 1988 message of a "thousand points of light" promoted private volunteerism. Despite campaigning with the claim, "I feel your pain," President Clinton added work requirements to the federal cash assistance program, Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) (Schmid 2008, 75). Next the compassionate conservative, George W. Bush initiated the disappointing "faith-based initiatives." Stephen Mansfield describes the latter's policies as the vision of "a society

committed to *individual responsibility* and reliance on God rather than slavish reliance on government [italics added]” (2004, 99). However, faith-based social services often reproduce inequalities by channeling funding through churches that give to causes or areas they were comfortable with rather than in areas which were most desperately in need (Boyle 2011).

Over many years, scholars including Mark Chaves and Robert Wineburg have been studying the engagement of the religious sector and have concluded it is unrealistic and untenable to suggest that most religious groups will be able to offer the types of long-term social services provided by the government (Chaves 1999, 2001; Chaves and Wineburg 2010; Wineburg 2001, 2007). Chaves and Wineburg assert that these policies are less about improving social services than about political strategy and religious ideology.

Generosity has its own truth effects where public assistance for some is socially acceptable and commendable and for others begrudgingly given. The othering and demonization of the poor that occurs in poverty porn indicates both new levels of vitriol towards the poor and a corresponding disregard for social equality (Shildrick and MacDonald 2013, Jones 2012) . This is reflected both among public opinion and public officials. One might recall Mitt Romney’s remarks about the 47% who are dependent on the government. He described this dependent group “who believe that they are victims, who believe the government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name-it. That’s an entitlement.” He added that, “My job is not to worry about those people. I’ll never convince them they

should take *personal responsibility* and care for their lives [italics added]” (Madison 2012). The prominent neoliberal emphasis on personal responsibility is prevalent in his comments. In addition, Romney has lumped into the 47% the elderly, college students, and low-income families (Madison 2012).

The growing field of privatized social efforts operates as an extension of the neoliberal project. Žižek (2006) has commented that charity is built into the current economic system; neoliberalism requires charity to sustain itself. Following the neoliberal project to dismantle public welfare, scholars have noted the emergence of a “shadow state” and offered critical analysis (Wolch 1990; Gilmore 2007; Peters 2001). Michael Peters defines the shadow state as an informal sector comprised of volunteers, church-based groups, charity organizations, private foundations, and trusts that administer to the gaps in social service needs (2001, 91). Some commentators term this a “non-profit industrial complex” or a “charitable industrial complex” underscoring the corporatization of social welfare. The privatization of welfare engages market provision of services, workfare, and entrepreneurialism as a solution to social problems.

Building upon these authors, Mona Atia (2013) concludes that charity works to justify and reinforce privilege. These privatized efforts to care for the less fortunate condense the ideology of charity into a naturalized order where individualized efforts to share a little with the poor are the appropriate solution. Not only has the current method of private-public partnerships and corporate philanthropy been viewed as the most effective solution to social concerns, everyday morality has become a utilitarian prospect. Paralleling biopolitical policies such as health insurance discounts for joining gyms or the

growing field of self-help, counseling and life coaching, generosity is promoted as individualized methods for workplace success, better relationships, smarter consumption, and improved health and well-being. Generosity has thus become a key aspect of neoliberalism, as the current economic system requires that individuals act out of generosity to fill the gaps that government is unwilling to address and as generosity through giving has become a biopolitical response of self-discipline and self-betterment that justifies privilege and obscures systemic inequities.

Giving and Taking in Popular Culture

What you appreciate APPRECIATES.

— John Ruhlin

Popular media in the U.S. has endorsed the shadow state method by highlighting good works of private citizens. Television shows: *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, *The Philanthropist*, *Secret Millionaire*, *Undercover Boss* and films such as *The Blind Side* or *Pay It Forward* all promote the idea that the kindness of strangers (or corporations) will resolve social concerns such as poor housing, access to medical supplies, better employment opportunities, and additional funding for charities. (It should be noted that *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, *Undercover Boss*, and *Secret Millionaire* are adaptations of British productions, which may serve as a reminder that neoliberalism and its shadow state are not unique to the U.S. The neoliberal climate has engendered the popular narrative that private efforts are the most efficient and effective answer to social

concerns. The pilot episode of *Secret Millionaire* even features the message that through hard work and determination anyone can become a millionaire (Blauvelt 2011). During the show, Dani Johnson, a former welfare recipient “boot strapped it” and became a millionaire within two years after starting a business out of her car trunk.

Not only do film and television illustrate stories of personal success through hard-work and enterprise, the logic of generosity follows a similar vein. Generosity is also highlighted as a means to produce and empower successful, private citizens. For instance, celebrity philanthropist Oprah Winfrey has articulated that the purpose behind her giving to build the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls is to instill the lesson that “we are responsible for ourselves, that you create your own reality by the way you think and therefore act” (Gien 2007,160). In addition, she proclaims, “you cannot blame apartheid, your parents, your circumstances, because you are not your circumstances. You are your possibilities. If you know that, you can do anything” (Gien 2007, 217). Oprah’s rationale for generosity is constructed within the neoliberal ideology of freedom, choice, and self-reliance. It reinforces and validates her own personal empire built around consumption with the idea that others can emulate her life too. Janice Peck (2008) and Kathryn Lofton (2011) have demonstrated how Oprah’s promotions of self-help/triumph of the mind philosophies are iconic of how neoliberalism is lived out and expressed in daily life and current religious practice, respectively.

Blaming the poor and a panoptic fascination with the lifestyle of poverty is reflected in British television programming. *The Guardian* has written about this trend of dissecting the lifestyles of the poor. The newspaper highlights *Nick and Margaret: We*

Pay All Your Benefits and *Why Don't You Speak English?* (Collins 2013). These shows indicate a wide resentment against those who receive social services as “takers” from “responsible” taxpayers. *Nick and Margaret* pairs up four “taxpayers” with four “claimants”. In one episode a self-employed woman grocery shops with an unemployed woman advising her that chicken fillets are more cost-effective than a whole chicken because “it’s mostly bone.” An estimated 4.55 million viewers tuned in to *Nick and Margaret* scrutinizing the poor’s shopping habits and evaluating their lifestyles. Episode 2 evaluates immigration in England and whether depicted families are choosing to integrate and how they are contributing (or not) to British society. Additional programs in the poverty porn category are the *Benefits Street* reality television show featuring welfare recipients and the BBC documentary, *Britain on the Fiddle*, which catches fraudulent benefit recipients on camera. These shows utilize the dichotomy of “us” versus “them” to stigmatize the poor. They also reflect the neoliberal concern regarding self-regulation as a criteria regarding deserving or underserving beneficiary status.

The hegemonic role of giving is secured through the process of signification and the ability to make meaning. At the intersections of giving and neoliberalism, chains of denotative and connotative meanings enable certain understandings of givers and takers in discourses of philanthropy and giving. Typically philanthropy is correlated with giving money and the presentation of an oversized check. The philanthropist is most often portrayed as a white, older male. This representation correlates with an overview of the *Chronicle of Philanthropy’s* top 10 philanthropists of 2013. This group includes images of six older white males: George Mitchell, Philip Knight, Michael Bloomberg, Charles

Johnson, Irwin Jacobs and Jeffrey Carlton (DiMento 2014). These men hold top positions in mega-corporations and government. Similarly the undercover bosses and secret millionaires-turned-philanthropists on television may be more diverse in gender and age, however they are primarily white, middle-aged individuals.

In contrast, the associated meanings related to welfare begin with its mediations in the forms of food stamps and welfare checks. Another link in the welfare chain of meaning has been the “welfare queen” who abuses the system and lives in wealth or the promiscuous single black mother who was irresponsible. A representation of someone on the street in need of charity conjures pictures of a drug addict or alcoholic asking for spare change. These possibilities illustrate the neoliberal preoccupation with poverty based on the immoral behavior of the poor (Peters 2001). The moral political economy relies on a renewed commitment to individualism and emphasis of notions of self-reliance and personal responsibility (Mead 1992; Gilder1981). Thus welfare recipients fail neoliberal standards of citizenship. Givers are viewed favorably for their noblesse oblige while the recipient falls to the bottom of the social hierarchy. Evelyn Brodtkin insightfully argues “what is really being morally constructed is not poverty as a condition but the poor as an ‘enemy of society’ who either because of perverse policy incentives or deviant cultural traits behave in ways that ensure their impoverishment” (1993, 649-650). She summarizes this train of thinking writing, “The poor *are* the enemy and they are *different*” (651). Together the idolization of givers and the demonization of takers reinforces and normalizes social inequality.

The intersections of blaming the poor and social inequality are exemplified in the popular film, *The Blind Side's* depiction of a black community. In the movie, the American Dream narrative comes to fruition as Leigh Anne Tuohy rescues homeless Michael Oher from the street and adopts him into her family. She empowers him with knowledge and insights into football and hires a tutor to assist him with his traditional education. With his size and strength he is recruited to college football and later becomes a first-round pick of the Baltimore Ravens NFL team. In contrast to Tuohy's example of generosity, Michael's mother and his black community called Hurt Village, constitute a mire of stereotypes including poverty, family breakdown, ignorance, drug abuse, violence, and gangs. Montez de Oca's analysis of the film highlights how the film's depiction of Michael's biological mother as a crack addict who is sexually irresponsible aligns with the view that contemporary racial inequities stem from minorities' own poor choices. He writes:

Thus racial inequality results from minority's unwillingness or inability to take advantage of the economic opportunities afforded them by a race neutral society (e.g., McWhorter, 2003). The logic of laissez-faire racism both demonizes poor African Americans for not assimilating to white norms and it distances affluent whites from the violence of white supremacy that structures U.S. society. (2012, 135)

Tuohy's actions as a good, caring, responsible citizen contrast with the failures of Oher's mother, community and the state reinforcing the ideological feel-good generosity rather than addressing any possibility of the structural inequalities at work. These representations utilize clear binaries between good and bad citizens and moral behavior. In contrast *Millions* acknowledges ambiguity and plurality in meanings and ways to be in the world. As a counter-narrative *Millions* treats each character with

generosity. Even Damian who is often interpreted as a saintly child, continues the morally questionable practice by giving away stolen money when he learns it was stolen. The film recognizes the giver and taker in each individual character and stresses interdependence over polarizing treatment of any character.

One example of a counter-narrative to the popular representation of the poor as the only recipients of government support is from a group called the #Global POV Project. One of a series of videos on poverty and inequality the group has created is a December 2013 YouTube video titled, “Who is Dependent on Welfare With Ananya Roy.” Professor Ananya Roy at the University of California at Berkley highlights the misleading conception of the poor’s welfare dependence since both wealthy and poor sectors receive government aid. In reality, both rich and poor receive state help. However, specific connotations are attached to varying forms social welfare. Government support in the form of tax deductions and government subsidies for real estate or a 15 percent preferential rate on capital gains are socially acceptable, whereas welfare is a source of social shame (Roy 2013). In this video, Roy pushes common conceptions of welfare and dependency by demonstrating that it is the wealthy that are primarily dependent on welfare by receiving government entitlements and subsidies that buttress their social position. In contrast, the negligible amount of public assistance given to the poor is stigmatized as welfare. One of her conclusions is that “the rich have state-help and the poor have self-help” highlighting the lack of an actual ‘free’ market. She asserts that neoliberal policies contribute to a systematic reproduction of wealth inequality which benefits those who already have social advantages.

This YouTube video is an interesting counter-narrative in several respects. In contrast with the TV and film examples that operate with an optimistic and victorious tone and high production values, the video has critical commentary and visually rough connections between points using sketchbook animation and quick transitions. In addition to her clear, teacherly manner, Roy situates herself as one of the welfare recipients as she receives a mortgage tax deduction allowing her to live with a view of the Golden Gate Bridge. Roy highlights social acceptability in the discourse regarding generosity for those who already have and also how state policies reproduce unequal social conditions. She cites a statistic that 24 million was spent on public assistance housing for the poor while 72 million went towards home ownership subsidies. This video stands in contrast with the consistent promotion of feel-good generosity in both popular literature and academia normalizing its practice as privatized actions supports the neoliberal hegemony wherein the wealthy are able to draw upon structural resources more readily while funds for the poor are derided as welfare. While self-care is a basic priority in neoliberalism, those who have failed to be self-sufficient are accused of dependency and self-victimization.

Public condemnation for people on assistance has also spread to those who were previously “off-limits”—those who are ill or disabled—are now being criticized in British tabloids as taking from hard-working citizens (Shildrick and MacDonald 2013, 296). Poverty, hunger, and homelessness are attributed solely to the failures of the poor themselves. The 2010 *British Social Attitudes Survey* findings highlight that less than one in ten of the population give structural explanations for inequality (NatCen 2010, 15). Regardless of where they sit on income scales, people tend to underestimate income

inequality in the UK (Bamfield and Horton 2009). This misunderstanding of inequality also occurs in the US (Weissman 2014). The *British Social Attitudes Survey* found that a majority believes that inequality is either an “inevitable part of modern life” or that “people in need are lazy” (NatCen 2010, 14). In a glaring example of hegemonic practice, the British primarily believe poverty is self-generated, few actively support wealth redistribution despite a majority agreement that the gap between high and low incomes is too large (NatCen 2010). Shildrick and MacDonald demonstrate that the poor themselves shy away from the view that they are in need and instead pride themselves on “managing” and “getting by.” They have accepted hegemonic explanations for the undeserving poor and fail to see a need for political or economic change. In this cultural milieu, the poor deny they are denotatively poor or create a distinction that they are not one of “them” i.e. a member of the undeserving poor.

In contrast to the increasing disparagement of the poor, donors and benefactors receive greater levels of commendation and philanthropic social capital. The title of philanthropist seems to be widely attached to actresses, singers, athletes, and corporations. It is increasingly common to see celebrities listed by their name, occupation, and philanthropist. For example, “Eva Longoria, Actress-Activist-Entrepreneur-Philanthropist” is how Eva Longoria was captioned in a feature for the *Los Angeles Times* (Ali 2014). This trend is reflected in the fact that *The Hollywood Reporter* began an annual Philanthropy issue in 2011. Thus, giving by the wealthy is commonly tracked and acknowledged in the media as social capital whereas smaller gifts are aggregated and become anonymous despite the fact that many givers earning less than

\$100,000 may be giving a larger portion of their salary and never receive individual recognition. Common citizens less frequently receive attention for their contributions or good deeds unless their gifts are extraordinarily heroic. Motherhood, which has been identified as one of the most generous acts by researchers such as James E. Swain et.al (2012) at the Science of Generosity project, and in Buddhist and Catholic texts, is not commonly discussed as an act of generosity except around Mother's Day which plays into the neoliberal denigration of caregiving as women's work and merely reproductive.

Increasingly, philanthropy is a public display for us to identify ourselves as moral and pro-social. Sociologists have studied philanthropy in conjunction with the rise of individualism and the role of charity in relation to one's personal identity (Grube and Piliavin 2000; Lee 1997; Lee et al. 1999; Piliavin and Callero 1991; Aaker & Akutsu, 2009). Pierre Bourdieu similarly highlighted giving to the arts and cultural groups as an indication of cultural capital and personal distinction. In addition, the media selectively features acts of generosity by celebrities that sensationalize these acts. For instance recent headlining stories of generosity include Brad Pitts' \$16 million contribution to rebuilding New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina and Ellen DeGeneres' \$10,000 tip to waitress Sarah Hoidahl (Howard 2012; AP News 2013). Even small gestures such as when Amy Adams gave up her plane seat to a U.S. soldier receive notable mention (Sacks 2014). Thus we hold up celebrities as key agents of social good misrecognizing and privileging those at the top and unseeing how power and privilege can come at the expense of others.

Other scholarship on philanthropy acknowledges the hegemonic role of giving by the wealthy to neutralize social antagonism and restore one's conscience (Storey 2010;

Buffett 2013). John Storey has interpreted Charles Dickens' *The Christmas Story* as a case for charity. Scrooge must learn how to be charitable to neutralize social antagonism based on income inequality. To secure his position of wealth, Scrooge must learn how to give and redistribute a portion of his money rather than risk social upheaval. Storey adds the reflections of a middle-class factory owner, Mr. Fairbanks who, after attending a reading of the novel, decided to be charitable himself and close the factory Christmas Day and give every worker a turkey (2010, 141). Storey adds that, "Charity allows us to congratulate ourselves on the fact that we give. Although it relieves suffering, it does not change the causes of suffering... [It] does not disturb the hierarchies of wealth; in fact it safeguards them" (2010, 143). In Storey's eyes, charity is essentially a sustainable form of self-interest.

In a similar vein, Peter Buffet, son of Warren Buffett, has publicly criticized the charitable-industrial complex as "conscience laundering." In an op-ed for the *New York Times*, he writes:

As more lives and communities are destroyed by the system that creates vast amounts of wealth for the few, the more heroic it sounds to 'give back.' It's what I would call 'conscience laundering' - feeling better about accumulating more than any one person could possibly need to live on by sprinkling a little around as an act of charity. But this just keeps the existing structure of inequality in place. The rich sleep better at night, while others get just enough to keep the pot from boiling over. (2013)

Those with wealth and privilege are able to utilize philanthropy as a means to buttress and secure their own social position and maintain a system of inequality. The same conditions that concerned Charles Dickens in 1843, Marx and Engels as they collaborated

on the Communist Manifesto (1848), and current economists such as David Harvey in 2014 have continued to reproduce themselves.

While Scrooge's social redemption revolves around a change in spirit, philanthropic giving operates as a form of social control (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001; Wagner, 2000). Historian James D. Anderson (1988) has detailed the rigid stipulations John D. Rockefeller attached to his educational donations based on race. Blacks were limited to funding for vocational and manual arts education only whereas whites received funding for liberal arts studies. In addition, others have questioned the interests served by overseas initiatives such as school building or agricultural programs in Africa, Asia and South America and whether they were more in service of U.S. foreign policy or global capitalism (Harvey, 2005; Loewenstein, 2014; Motter, 2010; Rey, 2012; Gay, 2002, Ong 2006).

The call to be generous has become normalized as a pragmatic call to action in one's personal life. In the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestseller, *Give and Take*, author Adam Grant promotes generosity as a method for professional success. The *New York Times* profile of the book was titled: "Is Giving the Secret to Getting Ahead?" (Dominus 2013). Generosity in this book is tied to one's pre-established network of relationships. Professional consultant John Ruhlin, who works with businesses and corporations such as Caesar's Palace, Shell Gas and NFL sports teams, has been promoting Appreciative Leadership and strategic appreciation. Arguing for the importance of gift giving in one's professional and relational life, Ruhlin teaches that gifts open doors by making oneself stand out and be more memorable

(<http://johnruhlin.com/>). Other recent work focuses on the role philanthropy plays in cultivating a moral and purposeful life. In sociology, Christian Smith and others have also compiled research showing the benefits to one's self in being generous such as greater health and overall well-being (Smith and Davidson, 2014; Harbaugh, Mayr & Burghart, 2007; Lyubomirsky, 2007; McGowen, 2006). Finally in *Survival of the Nicest: How Altruism Made Us Human and Why It Pays To Get Along*, Stefan Klein asserts a scientific argument that generosity is an inherent quality in human beings. He states that humans "became first the friendliest and then the most intelligent apes." Then the author ties altruism to practical benefits: as protection against loneliness and depression, happier and healthier selves, economic rewards, and a longer lifespan. These authors all tie generosity back to its practical and positive benefits for the self.

This overall method of tying generosity to self-interest has been called "the paradox of generosity" or the "paradox of giving" by authors (Smith and Davidson 2014; Schaper 2007, Zick 2004; Ruhlin). Scholarship recognizes and reinforces the belief that serving others is a method to serve oneself. Self-sacrifice is confined to the willingness to write additional emails or take greater interest in one's neighbors. The consistent labor promoting acts of giving places the emphasis on giving as a form of self-service and benefit. The rhetorical focus is upon the giver rather than in the interests of others.

Clearly generosity in the form of acknowledgement, wealth, and social policies follows the general definition of ideology as common sense in a neoliberal society which has become normalized and involves limitations, privileging and interpellation. Albeit one cannot claim complete insight into other's motivations or actions, my concerns with

issues of power and social recognition are connected to the ways generosity has become a site of self-serving ease. An alternative viewpoint to these approaches to generosity can be found in Ralph Waldo Emerson's articulation that a gift must derive from oneself. He defined a gift as coming from one's self and a "real gift" must be painful to give (Emerson 2014, 26). Emerson's essay on the gift was a forerunner in challenging the economic exchange or debt and credit in his writings (Shapiro 1999).

Most notably in the field of economics, leading scholars do not conceive of increased philanthropy as a solution for inequality. Nobel Prize winner, Joseph Stiglitz's recommendations for economic reforms in his book *The Price of Inequality* (2013) do not include asking those at the top to give more to charities. However, it does call for market regulations, greater financial transparency in banking, and more effective competition laws. Stiglitz also calls for an end to corporate welfare and hidden subsidies and tax reforms. These policies will certainly impact the 1% who are in control of these institutions. In addition to corporate reform, he advocates for improving access to education, helping ordinary Americans save, and a universal health system. Thomas Piketty's much talked about *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014) asserts the need for a global system of progressive wealth taxes to reduce inequality and the concentration of capital in the hands of a few. Despite the greater social prominence of the impact of charities, philanthropists and acts of generosity, current methods of philanthropy only act as a filler for reduced government support and operate as social currency for celebrities.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the concepts of neoliberalism and biopolitics and the ways that they have been justified and normalized in various locations within society and represented in various cultural artifacts. Following the values of neoliberalism and the construction of the neoliberal subject, those who fail as competitive, economically productive, self-disciplined citizens deserve social shame and blame. Their own financial mismanagement and risky behaviors are at the root of their problems. Any welfare they receive is interpreted as *taking* from productive, good citizens. Media outlets reinforce these beliefs by surveiling these social actors. These representations of the poor are biopolitical in depicting the barest aspects of existence including the food one purchases and the management of one's own resources as the poor struggle in their daily lives. As discussed, 'poverty porn' captures the undeserving takers and villainizes them, ignoring systematic factors contributing to their current situation. Those who meet neoliberal standards are eligible to receive gifts from corporate sponsors and volunteers. Meanwhile those who magnanimously give to charities, philanthropies, and foundations garner recognition for their acts of kindness and pro-social giving earning the title of philanthropist or celebrity activist. However certain motivations for generosity such as bringing about equality, democracy and dignity remain unreached when generosity is neoliberalized—made to reinforce neoliberal values and sustain conditions of injustice.

This neoliberal milieu conditions and constrains the meaning of generosity. Through the lens of neoliberal conditioning, generosity conforms to a similar process of cost/benefit analysis and related assumption of a “deserving” and “undeserving” poor.

Instead, this chapter has critiqued these definitions and representations highlighting the ways the rich receive “state help” and the poor must depend on “self help.” My next chapters explore the concept of generosity through the film *Millions* as a cultural forum for meaning production. The film’s counter-narrative re-imagining various concepts including that of giver and taker and playful consideration of giving allow for a range of understandings on how to give instead on only having one normative example. Using a media studies approach that considers producer, text, and audiences, *Millions* enables various perspectives on generosity that redirects attention away from the self towards the needs of the beneficiary, the community, or God.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF *MILLIONS*

We only have what we give.

—Isabel Allende

Chapter One focused on the hegemonic neoliberal discourse pervading popular culture, highlighting television and films that cultivate a neoliberalized understanding of givers and takers. Through my analysis of the comments of its creators and its critics, this chapter introduces the film, *Millions*, which disrupts neoliberal norms and assumptions including the central role money plays in our lives. This chapter will examine the film's cultural production including the intentions of the writer/director team drawing upon cultural production studies regarding the constraints of the studio system and auteur theory, narrative analysis of the film, and interpretive readings of the films by film critics and individual viewers. A comparison of the intentions and production process of producer team Danny Boyle and Frank Cottrell Boyce in conjunction with audience interpretations illuminates a gap in interpretations on generosity in practice but both remain within a neoliberal framework. Although the film has its failings, I argue that the film provides an intriguing counter-narrative to feel-good generosity with its representations of giving and taking. Chapters Three and Four follow with more detail on

specific scenes and textual elements regarding neoliberal citizenship, ownership and the neoliberalized self. Chapter Three highlights scenes of the central characters and their move from an old to a new home, which invites a deeper reflection on neoliberal values such as a privatized culture, home ownership and self-sufficiency that reduce overall levels of social trust. Chapter Four unpacks the various scenes that feature the central character, 7-year-old Damian, as he engages in acts of generosity. This focus unfolds as an exploration of how his haphazard generosity defies neoliberal calculation but also demonstrates the need for a collective spirit of generosity and relational generosity.

As this chapter will discuss, *Millions* is characterized by its distortion and exaggeration of a child's desire to give, which then invites the viewer to consider the nature of the self and the ties binding a person to his or her communities. This invitation to consider alternative conceptions or worldviews is part of the inherent appeal of film-going and film-viewing. Art not only engages our emotions and our intellect, but it also challenges our expectations regarding social norms and every day conduct. The immersive and expressive experience of film lends readers agency to confront their socio-political ideologies regarding personal responsibility, social democracy, civic belonging and social welfare through the escapades of two boys. As this chapter will argue, the film's story operates as a counter-narrative to the dominant cultural ideal of living the "good life." It illustrates the power of counter stories to "expose the construction of the dominant story by suggesting how else it could be told" (Harris, Carney, and Fine 2001, 13). While *Millions* is told from a child's point of view, Danny Boyle did not intend for it

to be a children's film. With the original philosophical tagline "Can anyone be good?"⁵, *Millions* is an existential exploration of the human condition and the development of greed.

The nuanced and complicated storyline speaks to adults about the concept of capital, our aptitude for neoliberal cost-benefit calculations, and social concern for others. This independent film affectively and effectively encapsulates the tensions between individualism and collectivism as well as local and global during its 2004 production post-Thatcher as debates revolved around the UK joining the European Union. Informing this story of social welfare is Damian's Catholic beliefs and encounters with saints.

I will introduce the theoretical framework for my in-depth discussion of the writer/producer team and their Catholic childhoods as well as the production process of the film. Next I analyze the film itself as a text and how it provides a multiplicity of standpoints and methods to re-imagine giving from the neoliberal feel-good master narrative. The film's resistance against polarizing definitions produced interesting interpretations among viewers. In particular evangelical Christians approved of the film's religious and charitable message. However by interpreting it as a family film, many were dismayed by Boyle's use of more adult themes.

This chapter includes a discussion about contemporary film as an expression, to use Raymond Williams' term, of the "structure of feeling" of the neoliberal era. But before moving to a deeper discussion of how the text itself expresses what I will term a neoliberal structure of feeling, it is important to recognize the various constraints that

⁵Later, "Can anyone be good?" became "You can change the world." (Lyon 2005).

shaped this film. In particular, I begin with a discussion of producer Danny Boyle's discussion of his experience in making the film, the constraints he and writer Frank Cottrell Boyce confronted in relation to the limits of the studio system, and the particular Catholic sensibility that informed the film's narrative and hence its critique of generosity as practiced and understood within neoliberalism. This is an important starting point, for as Mayer et al. (2009) and Hesmondhalgh (2010) point out in order to understand a film and the meaning-making of audiences, the material economic, political and technological factors in the film's production and distribution should be considered.

Framework

Scholars in various fields have considered the cultural work of art and religion as activities that frame, exclude, focus, organize, and re-present elements of the known world to construct meaning. Brent Plate has asserted that *films create worlds* bridging the "semi-permeable boundaries between the world-on-screen and the world-on-the-streets" (2008, 2). Through various production aspects including lighting, framing, camera movement, costuming, acting and editing, films actively create and reshape elements of the lived world capturing the attention and imagination of the audience. Plate continues by drawing a parallel between the operations of film and that of religion. Both create worlds comprising of myths, rituals, symbols, and doctrines with "prescriptions for a better life and imaginative tools for re-viewing the world as it is" (2008, 2-3). Thus in religion and in film, there is an initial lived world of existence and a second world of

idealization and projection. In these realms of “worldmaking”, inhabitants are shaped by particular standards and desires.

Leading cultural theorist Raymond Williams also considered the affective work generated in art and its influence on personal experience. Williams recognized and affirmed the distinctive role of emergent art in a capitalist society and how it provides access to the “structures of feeling” of a particular time (1977, 128). Structures of feeling engage responses in our lived experiences that often exist “at the very edge of semantic availability” of our consciousness (1977, 134). Williams notes that structures of feeling are not generally realized in institutions or ideologies; they are “elements of impulse, restraint and tone... thought as felt and feeling as thought” (1977, 132). He continues that they are able to “exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action” (1977, 132). According to Williams, art and psychology can reflect these social tensions more readily. As one artistic form, films can then be drawn upon for their insight into these emergent forces in order to read and analyze or what Williams’ calls to “diagnose” the present. While in Chapter One, I examined neoliberalism as an ideology, the lived experience of neoliberalism may feel more ephemeral or transitory in the rush of daily activities. The concept of structure of feeling enables a qualitative discussion about the experiential component of neoliberal policies and the sociality of affect. Utilizing Plate and William’s concepts of *worldmaking* and *structures of feeling* as a foundation for reading the film *Millions*, I unpack how private goals and public issues are coded in a neoliberal capitalist framework. *Millions* depicts the affective tiredness resulting from the

need for self-governance and “lifebuilding”⁶ in neoliberalism, and then connects these symptoms with our limited sentiments toward others.

Examining the film a decade following its release, *Millions* depicts the social anxieties engendered in neoliberalism and connects them to consumerism and our moral relationships to those near and far. Its primary discourses of neoliberalism, social welfare, and acknowledgement of human dignity and voice seem more apparent today than critical reviews appreciated a decade ago.

Millions and the Neoliberal Structure of Feeling

Central to the film’s narrative is the stress and anxiety cultivated in a neoliberal system and the correlated lack of social trust and care. In this ecology, the brothers’ growing understanding of greed and adoption of adult attitudes towards money and material objects operate as a fun house mirror for the audience, who might then build a more dynamic reflection of generosity and charity.

Millions is a misunderstood and underappreciated film that represents generosity as impractical, haphazard, and over-the-top within a world that favors pragmatism and rational behavior. Damian expansively showers cash on the “poor” people he encounters, only to be disappointed with the results. In contrast to predominantly culturally accepted scripts of successful giving or giving to “worthy” causes, the counter-narrative illustrated in *Millions* calls attention to how givers are also takers and presents people as ends not

⁶ In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Lauren Berlant defines “life-building” as those necessary activities in the work of “having a life” such as work, familial duties and social obligations.

means. This narrative builds upon a tradition of tricksters and confidence men⁷ reflecting a paradox that the capacity to be deceived or exploited indicates a general sense of social confidence and trust. The poor in the film are characterized as somewhat misleading towards Damian's desire to give to the poor. The Pizza Hut group grows in numbers multiplying from a single friend and the Latter-day Saints were poor out of religious conviction not abject poverty. In his analysis of the trickster, Neil Harris says, "To be human is to be cheated, to be victorious is to become inhumane. The alternative to false confidence is a society without faith or charity" (1981, 223). The film provides a contrast to other ideas of deceiving poor such as the welfare queen or the irresponsible poor who mismanage money. Damian's youth and wide-eyed visage enables the sense that he is innocently trusting. This also stands in contrast with his neoliberal brother who is suspicious of friends and foes. I would argue that the neoliberal self must have an attitude of suspicion towards others as one insulates oneself from outside risks. One component of giving today is the careful work involved in selecting charities to give towards as some are frauds or viewed as inefficient in their work. For instance, Charity Navigator which calls itself "Your Guide to Intelligent Giving," has become a recommended and trusted site for researching organizations as have the Better Business Bureau's National Charity Report Index and GuideStar. Ken Stern's *Charity for All* (2013) covers the inefficiencies and mismanagement of the Red Cross following 9/11. A general attitude within

⁷ P.T. Barnum exemplifies the trickster and master of showmanship based on good-natured deceit. The concept of social confidence and social suspicion also appears in works by Daniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, works by James Fenimore Cooper, and Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* (Harris, 1981).

neoliberalism seems to be either that philanthropists such as Bill Gates knows best or that individual givers must be wary of requests for money and responsible in their giving.

Millions alters all these assumptions in its plot. The “poor” recipients prove themselves greedy, the “good” citizens seek their own agenda and self-interests as well. Instead of suspicion and distrust, *Millions* reminds us that believing in people is generative by confronting the paternalistic attitude towards giving that neoliberalism fosters. In the neoliberal environment where other people are not to be trusted, one might expect a giver to be wary and distanced from strangers who are takers. And yet instead, Damian often uses giving as an approach to initiate relationships with others. Rather than using money to mediate and distance himself from strangers, Damian willingly chooses it as a medium to engage them. The conclusion to this chapter will bring together these thoughts on what has become a normative understanding of generosity and its reproduction and the possibilities for new possibilities.

In this chapter, I also compare the meanings produced during processes of encoding and decoding. Director Danny Boyle and screenwriter Frank Cottrell Boyce closely collaborated on the film drawing upon their Catholic backgrounds. Catholic saints play prominent roles as does the Catholic principle of care for the poor and marginalized. In decoding, film reviewers failed to acknowledge the film’s discourse on charity in relation to societal values of individualism versus collectivism. After its DVD release, evangelicals appropriated the film for its moral message and prominent religious character. Although the evangelical Christian interpretation was rooted in the idea of greater social good, their blog posts on the film emphasized individual over collective

effort in line with neoliberal principles. Stuart Hall's model on meaning construction is helpful to understand their reception as will be discussed below.

Sites of Meaning

Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model explains that moments of meaning construction occur at each site of encoding and decoding, recognizing that texts are both structured for potential interpretations but that audiences are also active decoders. For Hall, meaning is always a social production, an articulation; the world has to be made to mean. The cultural field is a space of articulation, disarticulation and re-articulation according to particular ideologies and social interests. Since different meanings can be ascribed to the same text, meaning will always be a site of struggle and negotiation. Within the single text of *Millions*, Damian, Anthony, and Ronnie convey multiple, differing positions on life and money with which audiences can sympathize and discuss.

The encoding process involves areas related to production where a message producer encodes the message and transforms experiences and ideas into a meaningful discourse. In approaching the text, meaning becomes "cued" (Bordwell and Thompson 2010) by the structure of the narrative and less determined. Hall and scholars in audience studies recognize more agency in viewer interpretations, suggesting that viewers have differing cultural competencies and discursive experiences that shape their understanding of the messages. Jonathan Storey asserts that cultural studies is concerned with the social meanings of texts, how they are appropriated and used in practice. He distinguishes between meaning as *ascription* and *meaning* as inscription. For him, cultural studies is "a

means to discover the meanings people make, the meanings which circulate and become embedded in the lived cultures of people's everyday lives" (2010, 50). These meanings can be both 'resistance' and 'incorporation.' This chapter will engage each site of meaning production to consider the varying perspectives the film produced and the disconnect between the intentions of the filmmakers and viewers.

The film resists neoliberal definitions of the self as merely productive and the idea that only certain people are worthy of generosity. This viewpoint draws from the Catholic belief in the dignity of all people and the recognition of individuals as more than producers but also spiritual beings with fears, flaws and failures. In addition, Damian's desire to be in relation with others resists the neoliberal desire to be self-protective and cautious and suspicious of others. Rather he openly desires to give and connect with his brother and "the poor" he encounters. However the film remains within the neoliberal framework of individual action and cannot escape some of the sentiment that the poor are takers and that the global South is in need of generosity. This next section delves into the motivations of the writer/producer in their development of *Millions*.

Text:

In addition to the film's message on giving and philanthropy, the film captures the correlation between neoliberal thinking and the capacity for social confidence. As a text, *Millions* demonstrates the process of ideological reproduction as his brother, father, and school urge neoliberal agency and tutor him to see himself as a business which must think with market rationally, generate profits and have a good brand and image. The film

allows the viewer to examine the state of our neoliberal selves, the way we manage our neoliberal relations and understand neoliberal social organization.

The film evokes the question, “What is money?” and “What ends does it serve?” through the various desires and escapades of the Cunningham brothers, 7-year-old Damian and 9-year-old Anthony. The young main protagonists highlight cultural norms relating to money, inviting the viewer to consider the ways that capital signifies deeper desires connected to the neoliberal structure of feeling, such as the need to find security in our possessions. In addition to this self-focused dynamic, the film explores how these conditions shape our social interactions. It also introduces the concept of how money mediates our relationships. *Millions* examines significations of money and gifts juxtaposing religious, Marxist and neoliberal beliefs that influence how we engage with others and how money, as well as concepts of giving and taking, mediate those relationships. The film operates as a site of struggle and negotiations as viewers see themselves within the positions of Damian, Anthony and Ronnie, the father and are reflexive on their own views of generosity.

In its critique of neoliberalism, *Millions* follows a process similar to methods laid out in J.K. Gibson-Graham’s *the End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. She and her collaborators identify the goal of “hoping to enable ourselves and others not only to imagine but also to strengthen and build non capitalist enterprises and spaces” (2006, ix). Thus as Plate and Williams alluded to the ability for film’s to create alternate worlds, the film follows the model of Gibson-Graham in its resistance to capitalism. Gibson-Graham claims the need for three steps in achieving this

aim: deconstructing the hegemony of capitalism, producing a language of economic difference, and cultivating subjects who desire and inhabit noncapitalist economic spaces (2006, x). This collaborative process involves new rhetoric in discussing the economy and economic possibility, re-engagement of civic agency as subjects of noncapitalist development, and collaborative action to create alternative economic organization and spaces (2006, x). These three steps are evident in the film's narrative structure and are the basis for my textual analysis. Damian's youthful speech, religious subjectivity, active imagination, and disjointed actions inform his uninhibited generosity. Although the last scene is problematic, the final actions of the family involve collective action implying that pooling resources results in the most transformation.

Millions reflects the process whereby neoliberal ideology shapes our logic into a rationalized paradigm of costs and benefits. Demonstrating the redefinition of housing in an ownership society, the narrative event of moving houses, which will be thoroughly explored in Chapter Three, becomes one of the primary vehicles for this examination of the effects of neoliberalism on lived reality. From the liberal to neoliberal transition where one shifts from the perspective of owning oneself as property to owning themselves as a business, the neoliberal perspective cultivates the sense that the human is a collection of assets (Martin 2000). Not only does one manage their assets as in their skills and traits, but their property assets. The film's moving scenario enables a material analysis of homes and their transformation and abstraction from a source of shelter to a source of capital and a form of personal security.

Next, neoliberal hegemony is made visible through language. As Damian's brother recites standard real estate facts, his dialogue highlights the naturalized language of neoliberalism and renders visible and intelligible the capitalist practices neoliberalism has obscured. While the premise of a ten-year old boy well-versed in advanced real estate knowledge and understanding of financial transactions elicits humor, children currently are a coveted marketing audience. Juliet Schor's *Born to Buy: the Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* notes that children are the new consumer citizens. Boyce iterates this concept of the child consumer. He explains: "When I was first working on it [*Millions*], I thought the comedy would come from the fact that children don't really understand money. I came to see that the real comedy lay in the fact that they understand it so well" (2005). Finally, Damian's character affirms various noncapitalist desires and practices. Instead of being consumed with capitalist concerns of material or financial accumulation, Damian's primary interest is the lives of Roman Catholic saints. Drawing upon Catholic ontology that stresses the inherent worth and value of humans as human beings rather than exploitable beings, Damian is encouraged to give to the poor.

In *Millions* various ideological state apparatuses including the family, media, school, and religion transmit neoliberalism in everyday activities. Damian's family has a predominant role in transmitting and reproducing neoliberal ideology. His brother, Anthony, advises Damian on neoliberal attitudes towards money, consumerism, real estate, and strangers. The premise of the story serves as a metaphor for the self-sufficient individual in neoliberalism; Mr. Cunningham is a single father trying to provide for his family without social support. He exudes neoliberal angst in struggling to pay bills and

trying to increase the family's social capital through better housing. Anthony's character represents the idea of family as a site of ideological reproduction since his mindset is a similar to his father's. Mr. Cunningham is the genesis for neoliberalism in the family but Anthony is the arch-neoliberal.

Mass media is also depicted as a source of neoliberal values. Embedded public service announcements for the upcoming monetary switch and corresponding school presentations for a water charity feature values tied to capitalism including imperialism, patriarchy, objectification, and racism. Harvey has noted: "Contemporary capitalism plainly feeds off gender discriminations and violence as well as upon the frequent dehumanization of people of color" (2014, 8). *Million's* meta-discussion on the media promotes the belief that media is a source of ideology that reinforces dominant values such as objectification of women and essentializing representations of race.

School also serves ideological interests in *Millions*. In the space of All Saints School, students learn the necessary skills they need as employees. Education and training are key sectors in how nations promote their economic competitive advantage and encourage future national prosperity (Peters 2001, 85). This is exemplified when the lesson on monetary transition becomes an opportunity for students to develop proper attitudes of themselves as philanthropists to a third world deserving of pity. Upon graduation, individuals transition from passive welfare consumer to an "enterprise self" whereby they are responsible for their own security.

Most interesting is the role of the religion in the film as it is somewhat at odds with the critical theory and also the neo-Marxist view of religion as complicit in an

overall critique of capitalism's dehumanizing effects. For Althusser, the church functions as a site of ideological reinforcement. Similarly Foucault asserted in his history of governmentality that Christian institutions utilize pastoral power. Christianity inaugurated the "art of conducting, directing, leading, guiding, taking in hand, and manipulating men ... an art with the function of taking charge of men collectively and individually throughout their life and at every moment of their existence" (Foucault 2007, 165). However in relations of power and domination, Gramsci's formation of hegemony includes resistance and transformation as the dialectical "other." While the Catholic church has not called for an end to capitalism⁸, it does include calls for its transformation including the preferential option for the poor and a rejection of policies that force single mothers with preschool children to work outside the home (Massaro 2007, 120). Yet for Damian religion offers an alternative ideology to dominant social norms. He relies on stories of church figures as voices of rebellion against normative behavior. Therefore religion opens up a space for Damian to engage others rather than as a tool for power or manipulation. Religion becomes a source of imaginative possibility; Sandhu calls religion in the film "an engine for the imagination" (2005).

From a look at the text, the movie world of *Millions* reinforces the process of ideological reproduction identified by Althusser. Proper normative attitudes and behaviors include optimism in the capitalist project and taking on the role as an enterprising self with social obligations to the poor are normative behaviors. The family,

⁸ Although Popes Benedict and Francis have been vocal regarding the limits of capitalism, the USCCB and the Catholic church affirms the building a healthy economy and providing employment opportunities. Part of *Economic Justice for All* states: "Poverty is intimately linked to the issue of employment" (1986, no. 196).

mass media, and school are all sites for this ideological reproduction. One becomes primarily invested in oneself and the objects of one's desires in the attainment of the 'good life.' In contrast, Damian is constantly in relationship with and invested in someone else (his mother, saints, 'the poor'). His attachments are toward another being, not another object. While Anthony tightly controls and holds onto the cash, Damian throws it away, dumping it into the hands of others and even into a bin. Both Anthony and Ronnie's attachment to money prove destructive, as the original thief violently seeks the cash. *Millions* articulates Lauren Berlant's concept of *cruel optimism*, a scenario where "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (2011, 1). Their attachment to the cash invited danger and harm as the thief threatened Damian and destroyed the house looking for the cash. In addition, overall attachment to money and fantasies of the good life were self-destructive, heightening Ronnie's anxieties over paying credit cards and causing dissention between the brothers. The neoliberal fantasy of the good life becomes a barrier to the very thriving that motivates our attachment to this illusory object in the first place. *Millions* responds to the popular conception of the 'good life' and stresses the cruelty inherent in a livelihood that is increasingly impossible to attain. The movie develops an alternate perspective through Damian's character where people are a worthwhile investment, wealth is a shared resource, and generosity should be relational, not transactional.

This chapter brings together the various sites of meaning making contrasting the concept of collective generosity in the production of the film and viewers' primary take-away of independent giving. While the religious imaginary was invoked by producers

and in the text, not all critics evoked this imaginary in their responses to the film. Critics floundered in analyzing the critique of capitalism embedded in this film about generosity and instead seemed to read the ideas of money and generosity through a neoliberal lens rather than seeing the film itself as a critique of that lens. The varying interpretations demonstrate the film's polysemic possibilities in its range of ideologies in the Cunningham characters. Moreover, the text itself depicts the difficulty in finding an alternate to the dominant paradigm of consumerism and neoliberal structures as they are repeated and reinforced in the media, at home, and at school. In the film world and lived reality, money becomes a sacred totem. The issue of money and the sacred are brought forward in viewer interpretations. Christian viewers responded to the idea of money as a useful tool for ameliorating social problems. Other viewers were more cynical about using money for social solutions and pointed to the pressing social issue of resolving personal debts for oneself or that of friends and family.

The Production of *Millions*

Cultural studies, while still considering the analysis of the text important, also must look to cultural production. The 'cultural studies of production' attends to the media producers and the ways media "producers make culture" (Mayer 2009). Consequently, this sections highlights the interactions of the writer and producer team and how their own backgrounds and beliefs informed this film.

The bleeding lines between cinematic worlds and lived experience collide in multiple ways in the production of *Millions*. Producer Danny Boyle's life and fascination

with Catholicism and its saints are re-presented in the relationships between Damian, the 7-year-old central character, and the fantastical saints with whom he interacts throughout the film as he considers various options regarding how he might give away the money that he has found (Crocker 2013; Overstreet 2005; Suozzo 2005; Dunham 2011). This imaginative tale complicates and distorts denotative meanings in order to examine social construction of belief: both belief in the operations of capital and having an expansive belief in people.

The *Millions* story itself did not fall neatly into either the family film or Christmas genre. Danny Boyle himself had previous success with grittier, violent movies on drug-culture and murder, *Trainspotting* and *Shallow Grave*. In addition the studio production system found itself constrained by the typical timing of when Oscar-contenders, Christmas films, and summer blockbusters are released. This confluence of factors resulted in the film having difficulty finding an audience in the theaters. However it gained an audience among American evangelicals upon its DVD release. The film was produced by Pathé Pictures in England and distributed by Fox Searchlight in the US; Fox Searchlight specializes in the US distribution of independent and British films.

Millions performed modestly at the box office, having only a limited release in the US. With production costs of \$9 million, it earned \$6.6 million in the United States showing in 340 theaters (Dicker 2005; Box Office Mojo). Boyle recalls that Fox Searchlight promoted the film with free screenings hoping word of mouth would help generate a larger audience.⁹ Worldwide the film earned \$11.8 million total and shown in

⁹ Boyle himself was concerned over ticket sales as Fox Searchlight wanted 50,000 people to see *Millions* at special invite screenings before it open[ed]. He writes, “You can't help gulp at all those lost customers, but

340 theaters (Box Office Mojo; Willmore 2005). In addition to its theatrical release the film was shown at a several film festivals. *Millions* was screened at various film festivals: 2005 8th European Union Film Festival in Chicago, 2004 Toronto Film Festival, Boulder International Film Festival, and the New York International Children's Film Festival (Keser 2005; Winter 2004; Smith 2005; Dargis 2005). Although the film is set at Christmas, Fox Searchlight postponed its December release to avoid competition with Oscar contenders through the December 26th release deadline and several Christmas family films coming to theaters: *Polar Express*, *Christmas with the Cranks*, and *Surviving Christmas* (Boyle Podcast). In the US, Fox Searchlight distributed *Millions* in March; in the UK, Pathé launched it in late May to gain a bounce from US distribution. *Millions* opened alongside many summer movies in the UK such as *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*, British director Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins*, family oriented *Kung Fu Hustle*, and Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (Wilkinson, 108; Dougan 2005). Roger Ebert gave the film an outstanding review and listed it in his top ten 2005 movies. It now appears on lists for top Christmas films (Philips 2014; Singh 2012; Kulzick 2011; Dickerson 2012; Duralde 2010). As recently as 2010, it was featured at the Telluride Film festival (Telluride Film Festival). The movie continues to circulate among Christian and Catholic audiences. According to Boyle, "right wing Christian audiences in America" boosted DVD sales of the film (Bradshaw 2013, 17: 21). He adds that the film has earned Christian awards that he has not acknowledged because he claims they had "misread the film" (Bradshaw 2013, 17:22).

the theory is that as Americans love sharing their feelings with each other, then for each person that likes it, that's potentially five other ticket sales, and so on and so on..." (Boyle, Director's Diary 3.)

Millions was one of the first projects for its writer, Frank Cottrell Boyce. Boyce has written for the longest running soap opera in production, *Coronation Street*, and scripted films: *Welcome to Sarajevo*, *24 Hour Party People*, and *Hilary and Jackie* (Hemley 2010; Whitney 2009). As a writer he rejects the typical three-act structure in cinema, finding human interactions less tidy (Boyce 2008). (*Millions* is written as a five-part film.) Boyce recalls, “*Millions* was one of the earliest scripts I wrote, it just took a long time to find a home because if you’re trying to make a family film in Britain you’re up against people like Pixar, which is really tough” (Whitney 2009). The eventual filming of *Millions* jump-started his illustrious career as a children’s author when he wrote the film script into a book.

During the director’s commentary, Frank Cottrell Boyce noted that he had difficulty finding a director for the script of *Millions*. After several other directors declined the project, Danny Boyle agreed to the project. With Boyle on board, production funding was easy, as his film *28 Days Later* had earned \$45 million (Dicker 2005). Together they rewrote the script for a year with only one of Boyce’s original scenes remaining (Murray 2005). As Boyle was directing the film, Boyce wrote the script into a children’s book at Boyle’s suggestion. Boyce remembers, “Danny said, ‘If you’re so keen on children’s books, why don’t you write one? You could write one based on *Millions*. It’s going to be quite a hard film to place so it would be handy if there was a book” (Whitney 2009). Their symbiotic process resulted in Boyle filming a scene with Saint Peter that Boyce had written exclusively for the book. Boyce notes:

One embellishment was a chapter comprising entirely of one long speech by St Peter. “I wouldn’t have dreamt of putting that into a script, but when Danny read

it he got really sulky because he thought it was the best thing in the book and it wasn't in the film. Eventually he sulked his way into a reshoot – being Danny he found a way of shooting it – and it became a really good bit of the film.” (Whitney 2009)

Boyce's book version of *Millions* was bestowed the prestigious British Carnegie Medal award announced in a press release called “Million to One Outside Scoops CILIP Carnegie with First Novel” (Carnegie Greenaway site). The film received some recognition, winning the 2005 British Independent Film Award for Best Screen Play, 2005 Sarasota Film Festival Best Picture and Phoenix Film Critics Award for “Best Live Action Family Film” in 2005 (Weinberg 2005).

Testing Boundaries: The Intentions of the Writer and Producer Team

Danny Boyle's interest in money

Boyle has gained acclaim for his oeuvre and process centered on the imagination and playing with norms. *The Guardian* praises his dynamic abilities and called Boyle “Britain's dominant cinematic stylist” (Linklater 2009). Alexander Linklater continues that one of his dominant themes involve “windfalls of cash that act as illusory objects of desire” (2009). Throughout his film career, money has been a source of fascination for Boyle. Boyle explores the concept of money, what it represents and what it can really buy (Levy). He frequently examines money in relation to specific historical contexts and the cultural milieu. He recalls that *Shallow Grave* was made in response to the Tory Thatcher administration and a period where “greed is good” (Dunham 2005, 93). *Shallow Grave* (1994) features the disintegration of trust and murder among flatmates who find their dead roommate's cache of money. Within *Millions* similar dissension occurs over the use

of money between the brothers. However, the concept of money as a social good is also encoded. As he made *Millions*, Boyle felt optimistic as the Blair party began investing in education (Boyle, Director's commentary). In an interview with John Suozzo, he explains the film is "made in the Tony Blair era, [and] reflects the Labor Party trying to do good in the country. It felt like a different era in Britain" (Dunham 2005, 93). As a reflection of this hope for a renewed communal spirit, Boyle continues:

I was simply looking for him [Damian] to do a good deed... We actually found a company called Water Aid, a charity that we gave some money to that builds wells in Africa. A bigger question is whether water should be a public utility or privatized. We felt it was urgent to highlight this problem. (Dunham 2005, 93)

Therefore, Boyle was not only concerned with the issue of personal giving but the way charitable funding is tied to broader issues involving the privatization of resources or creation of public utilities.

Boyle himself retains working class sensibilities and is rather modest. After winning Oscar for Best Director, he made the grand proclamation, "Everyone was saying my dad will be able to graze sheep on his lawn now!" (Dunham 2010, ix). Similarly, his character Damian is more humble and unassuming. Damian is not yet tainted by greed and wants to use this money to help others rather than himself. He gradually learns about greed as the recipients spend lavishly on themselves. Meanwhile, his brother is more concerned with using the funds for his own gratification. Interestingly, Boyle creates a story where it is difficult for both brothers to fulfill their goals. He notes, "The film shows how difficult it is for both of the boys to achieve their wishes, either to spend it quickly on consumer luxuries or desirables or on the other hand to redistribute it" (Levy

2005). Therefore while the movie mixes in imaginative elements and faith, it also has a sense of realism, where our actions are constrained by our own self-interest, contexts, and the actions of others. More than a didactic message about how to spend money, Boyle promotes the idea of social confidence, defined by Boyle as “faith in people and the goodness that can come out of that” (Dunham 2005, 95).

The movie’s production itself revealed a notable fact regarding the social import of money. Boyle reveals that it is a crime to burn either real or fake money in England. He jokes that therefore, he is unable to discuss what they actually did in filming since Damian lights a pile of money on fire in one scene (Dunham 2005, 91). In making the act of burning real or fake money criminal, England has effectively sacralized its physical form. The law against burning real or fake money reflects Durkheim’s proposition of the sacred and profane whereby sacred objects are “set apart” and treated with care and respect. In his explanation of the sacred, Gordon Lynch explains that “the sacred is not just that which we highly value; it is the meaning of fundamental realities around which our lives are organized... If we want to see what is really sacred in their lives, we need to understand what they would kill or die for...”(2012, 26). The story in *Millions* demonstrates David Worley’s argument regarding ‘monetary sacrality’ using Emile Durkheim’s concept of the sacred and collective effervescence. Worley (2003) sees money as the current symbol that binds moral order in modern societies. It is through money that we make sense of our world and monetary sacrality is reinforced through institutional practices such as in this English dictate. While Boyle does not explicitly say that money is or is not sacred, his films (*Shallow Grave*, *Millions*, *Slumdog Millionaire*)

do encourage viewers to question how people assign sacred and social value to money. *Millions* has been described as *Shallow Grave* for children in its subject matter of desire for wealth and the dissension money can cause in relationships. While Boyle playfully alters the significance of sacred icons and objects, he demonstrates that money does not need to be the root of all evil. It can be the conductor of miracles. Boyle toys with the physical object of cash as a building block in the cash Jenga game, an item for wallpapering, or something from which to build a fire in order to deconstruct monetary sacrality and expose its most banal properties. In a sense he fetishizes the object of money in order to call into question both the sacrilization of money and the critique of its sacralization.

Lastly, in a move combining movie fiction with earthly reality, *Millions* generated funds for building wells in Africa. First, the cast and crew opted to donate the money intended for cast T-shirts towards building a well in Africa through Water Aid (IMDb). In addition, Boyle set a percentage of the film's profits for the organization. Frank Cottrell Boyce also dedicated proceeds from his book, *Millions*, to the group (Carnegie Greenaway). Thus the narrative event where the family donates to an African community became an off-screen reality.

Catholic Influence

Millions has been Boyle's only foray into making a film with children. It is also his only film without an R rating from the MPAA in the US (IMDb Trivia). He frequently creates films with eccentric characters in unusual circumstances across genres

from drama, horror, to romance. This *Inside Reel* quote in 2007 explains his deviations in genre and lends insight into directorial choices:

One of the great things about changing genres is that you have to relearn your skills each time. I love the challenge of not knowing the rules and having to learn them again. Then you see if you can avoid the rules, or ignore the rules, or see what you can make work (Sirk Productions).

His directorial decision to play with social expectations in *Millions* is summed up with the original marketing tagline in England: “Keeping it unreal” (Sheahen 2005). In *Millions*, former Catholic Boyle and practicing Catholic Boyce bend the definition of ‘miracle’ as they incorporate the concept into this film on philanthropy. Boyce’s script notes define miracle as:

mir·a·cle (mr-kl) n.

1. An event that appears inexplicable by the laws of nature and so is held to be supernatural in origin or an act of God: “Miracles are spontaneous, they cannot be summoned, but come of themselves” (Katherine Anne Porter).
2. One that excites admiring awe. (Boyce, Art).

Therefore, in the producers’ eyes, a miracle straddles both supernatural and humanism where human action can also acquire the status of ‘miracle.’ *Millions* references the narratives of saints as miracle workers. In addition, Damian’s own acts of generosity elicit awe as the needy line up at his doorstep for help.

Millions was Boyle’s first family film and also his most autobiographical in relation to his Catholic upbringing. The film clearly incorporates components of Boyle’s own background and interests including working class life, faith, miracles, and morality. Boyle dedicated *Millions* to his parents; his mother had wanted him to be a priest (Dunham 2011, xix). His father was a manual worker and his mother a server at a canteen. He grew up serving at mass everyday before school and went to mass twice on

Sundays. Boyle had studied to enter priesthood but when he was 14 a priest suggested it might not be the best profession for him (Dunham 2005, 95). Much of Boyle's life spills into the film world, informing Damian's character. For example both his mother and Damian's mother bestow their philosophy of believing the best in people (Linklater2009).

Damian's character reflects Boyle's fascination with saints. Damian exuberantly reads about and shares his knowledge of the saints wherever he is: at home, at school, and during a neighborhood meeting. *Millions* incorporates Catholic saints into Damian's everyday life, locating the supernatural as part of his normal reality. St. Clare, St. Francis, the Martyrs of Uganda, St. Peter and St. Joseph all appear and talk to Damian. Boyle notes that he intended the saints to be live figures for Damian, "They are not statues; they are real to Damian" (Thomson 2005).

Deviating from the stereotype that saints are perfect beings, *Millions* captures the idiosyncratic nature of the saints to create a powerful reminder of the human capacity for compassion beyond the confines of neoliberal rationality. Screenwriter Boyce reminds us that, "People think of saints as vaguely nice and virtuous but in fact they were often difficult, mad, driven by a different energy" (Ebert 2005, Wins). Boyle explains his understanding of the Catholic icons and his ideas regarding their characterization:

We wanted the saints to have personality; we didn't want them to be pious or sacred or sanctimonious. We wanted them to be real people because they were and to the boy they are real people. They fizz with personality. Like Saint Peter who is probably number two in the world, we cast him with a Newcastle accent, which is a town in the Northeast of England. That says something very emphatic about him, casting him as Newcastle. It is a very blue-collar, working-class town with a very defiant character. (Dunham 2005, 95)

Utilizing his background knowledge of the saints in conjunction with contextual cues from England, Boyle's saints are compelling figures. The vivid representation of the saints seems to contrast with the routinized nature of modern society where individuals need to conform and become consumer citizens.

While some historical information on the Catholic figures is revealed in the film, much of their backstories go unexplained. Boyce's script notes includes 'A user's guide to saints' with brief encyclopedic descriptions of five saints and how they helped others (Art). The entries are for St. Nicholas, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare, St. Roch, and St. Joseph. Each individual championed the cause of those with less social power and voice: children, the poor, animals, and women. His first entry is on Nicholas of Myra (St. Nicholas). This account includes the gruesome details from St. Nicholas' most famous miracle of saving three children during a famine:

Perhaps Nicholas' best-known miracle was the resurrection of three young boys who were murdered, chopped up and pickled in a vat of brine. This led not only to the creation of the Santa Claus legend, but also to his becoming, amongst other things, the patron saint of children, coopers, grooms, mariners, pawnbrokers, poor people, shoe shiners, spinsters and students. (Boyce, Art)

This fantastical story reflects the tone of *Millions*—part inspirational good works and part horror tale. Unbeknownst to Damian for the primary portion of the film, the robber who had thrown the money off the train has discovered that the boys have the money and becomes a menacing threat at the end of the film.

Catholicism and Depicting Generosity in *Millions*

Overall the film's theme of giving builds on one of the foundational principles of Catholicism, which promotes an orientation toward generosity and charity toward the poor (Groody and Gutiérrez 2014, 4). More recently in 20th Century Catholic social teaching the concept "preferential option for the poor" emerged from Latin American liberation theology seeking to bring about social justice. Daniel Groody and Gustavo Gutiérrez add, "The preferential option for the poor seeks to acknowledge the multifaceted scope of poverty while standing in solidarity with the socially insignificant and excluded" (3-4). In addition to poverty's economic aspects, they highlight its intersection with culture, race, religion and gender. Informed by this Catholic import on caring for the poor, Damian decides to follow the example of St. Francis and St. Clare and deny himself and give the found money to the less fortunate. Damian's acts of generosity are prompted by an encounter with Saint Francis of Assisi. In the film, Damian has just released a set of birds mimicking the first act of St. Francis. St. Francis then appears and explains his next miracle was healing a leper. Notably St. Damien of Molokai is known as the Leper Priest who volunteered at the leper colony in Molokai in 1873 (Daws 1984). St. Francis and Damien are connected as Robin Hood-type figures and for their care of the ostracized. In one sense, St. Francis is known as a robber for having sold some of his father's cloth to rebuild the church St. Domiano of Assisi (Farmer 1997, 191). In *Millions*, Damian unknowingly gives money that had been stolen to those he considers poor. Damian then follows St. Francis' and St. Damien's example by reaching out to socially marginalized people in his neighborhood. St. Clare also left a

wealthy family to join the religious life after encouragement from St. Francis (Boyce, Art; Regan 2011, 19). Clare never left the convent of Assisi and is known as a great medieval contemplative (Farmer 1997, 104). Her character relates to Damian as he isolates himself in his playhouse. John Regan (2011) also explains that Damian and Anthony are also the names of saints known for their good works. Damian repeatedly asks if the other saints have met Saint Maureen; he believes his mother has become a new saint. Boyle had joked that it was difficult to find a name that had not been beatified for the mother (Murray 2005). Finally they used “Maureen.”

While he is no longer a practicing Catholic, Boyle finds similarities between the imaginative capacities of Catholicism and filmmaking. In his opinion, both saints and films are “captivating” mediums that entail drama (Dunham 2005, 95). Boyle explains the significance of using saints as characters:

There is a sense of theatre in Catholicism. The drama and extreme stories that surround the religion and there are incredible Gothic tales about a lot of saints. They are quite violent, very dramatic and captivating, and that is the whole point of them, just like the movies, to captivate. That is the whole idea—to catch you in the headlights and captivate you. (Dunham 2005, 95)

A similar viewpoint is expressed in *Roman Catholicism in Fantastic Film*. The book begins by asserting “a fascination with the ways in which the stuff of Catholicism—its supernatural claims, its rituals and artifacts, its moral exigencies and contradictions—have appealed and continue to appeal to filmmakers in the fantastic genres” (Hansen 2011, 1).

Catholicism not only contributed to the film’s plot, but also its overall hopeful tone regarding the possibilities of generosity. In conjunction with Damian’s religious

sentiments, Boyle shot the film in the summer to capture youthful wonder and energy. The scenes feature green fields and bright blue skies even though it is supposedly December. Regina Hansen argues that a Catholic sensibility sees the fantastic or marvelous all around; Catholicism teaches that the supernatural interacts in everyday life. Poet Seamus Heaney captures this upbeat optimism in his recollections on his Catholic upbringing. On an episode of *Charlie Rose*, he describes “the sense of eternity and the sense of grace and god-filled space... inner expansiveness of consciousness and the supernatural sense of a universe drenched in radiance” (*Charlie Rose*). Mark Browning notes that the film’s set up conveys “the upbeat optimism of Damian’s view of the world, where the sun always seems to be shining” (2011, 102).

In their partnership developing *Millions*, Boyle and Boyce meld their own perspective and background knowledge of Catholicism into the realm of cinematic fantasy and faith. They demonstrate a flair for drama and exuberance for the unusual in the actions of Damian and his encounters with historical saints. The movie becomes a living example of how film production itself speaks to lived experience and how film and religion work to construct meaning in the process of worldmaking.

Critical Response: Viewer Interpretations

This section analyzes audience responses and compares the intentions of the producers with audience reception of *Millions*. In addition to reviewing critics’ reviews of the film, I scoured various Christian website reviews and searched for blog posts of individuals who had seen the movie and commented on it. I focused on reviews with

commentary that went beyond a simple “I liked it” or “I hated it” and that also revealed some aspect of the reviewer’s worldview and/or religious affiliation. The varying reactions to the film clearly demonstrate Hall’s theory on how interpretation differs based on cultural location. Hall recognized that meaning was likely to be asymmetrical between the message producer and audience. The interpretation of *Millions* illustrates this communicative aspect of the film as it had a wide viewing audience that read the film along a continuum of oppositional, negotiated and dominant positions. Boyle’s reputation as a critically acclaimed director generated initial interest in the film. Pop culture sites familiar with Boyle’s previous films such as *Ain’t It Cool News*, professional press, and film festival attendees reviewed the film (B. 2014). Many viewers seemed thrown off by Boyle’s choice to direct a film where the general premise is on a young boy’s charitable giving. In addition to finding it overly sentimental, some dismissed the film for a lack of coherent narrative. Others appreciated the film’s efforts to explore the complexity of self-interest and generosity. The overall response was highly positive with an average 87% critic approval rate and 78% among audiences on the site *Rotten Tomatoes*. The movie also gained a following among evangelical Christian and Catholic audiences. The religious response to the film created another trajectory of meaning construction when it became an object of theological reflection. As noted earlier, Boyle was dismissive of appreciation from fundamentalists, as he did not intend for the movie’s focus to be about religion. However, the audience response seems to demonstrate that the most coherent articulation of a critique to capitalism and neoliberalism is embedded in religious communities. Based on Boyle’s upbringing he would likely implicitly if not explicitly

understand this. Yet, it seems that he was surprised, if not dismayed, that fundamentalists also had this interpretation. Boyle seems more amenable to writer Frank Cottrell Boyce's progressive Catholic form of religion than more conservative branches of Christianity.

Based on its complex discourses, various schools and film clubs featured *Millions* as a learning tool. The Into Film Film Club features the movie on its website as one of its recommended films calling it "the best of the best! A hand-picked collection of the best, most ambitious, imaginative, absorbing and all-round excellent films." Four hundred and forty nine youths reviewed it and rated it an average of 4 out of 5 stars (Into Film). It continues to be shown in various film programs for children such as the Morpeth Secondary School Film Festival in 2012 (Into Film, 2012). In addition, Amazon reviews are available from class D2B3 and separately one student mentioned she saw the film in religion class (Amazon Review "Religion Class," Dec. 8, 2007).

Most critics appreciated the film's careful portrayal of children and found the movie enjoyable and smart. The topic of greed and self-interest was clearly picked up by most reviews while religious reviews noted Damian's virtuous character. Professor Jay Greene cites Damian's growing awareness of greed and the prevalence of self-interest as the film develops. He explains the film's premise as "the cute and cuddly story of a little boy who tries to charitably give away a duffel bag full of cash, only to discover that we're all so evil that every grownup he approaches about it tries to take the cash for himself" (2010).

Others articulate the themes of materialism and consumerism. Clodagh Weldon draws a parallel between Damian and the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-30 where

Jesus challenged the rich individual to give away his possessions and help the poor. Weldon believes that, “Boyle clearly wants to make the point that they [Damian’s wealthy neighbors] *are* (spiritually) poor precisely because they *are not* (materially) poor, - they do not have “treasure in heaven” (Mt 19:21) (Weldon 2006). While Boyle may be pointing to the richness found in serving others, he was not advocating religious conversion. Reviewers failed to link neoliberal capitalism, greed, and lack of social confidence together, typically only citing the correlation between capitalism and greed. Meanwhile, religious viewers believed the film encouraged religion as a social solution. Thus, the entire neoliberal structure goes unquestioned by most viewers even though viewers did question the topics of greed and capitalism generally.

Individual responses to *Millions* seem tied to the viewer’s identification with the character of Damian and his magical perspective on the world, which elicited a range of responses from cynicism to optimism on the topics of miracles and charity. Professional critics not only critiqued the movie based on its formal elements, but also their own opinions on acting generously. Sukhdev Sandhu, named 2005 Critic of the Year by British Press, highlighted that *Millions* can be an opportunity for self-reflection. He writes, “*Millions* most recalls pictures from the golden age of Ealing; it succeeds in holding up a mirror to the nation in order to make it not merely laugh but pause for self-scrutiny. It is likely to amuse both children and adults. And, best of all, to enchant them” (2005).

Broadly reviewer responses fall into a continuum of four categories from an oppositional to a dominant reading: cynicism/greater identification with Anthony’s

character; guilt/association with Ronnie, the father; identification with Damian's child-like faith and rejection of the secular; and identification with Damian and aspiring to be more generous. The cynics did not identify with the general premise and found the film purely sentimental. The guilty response recognized that an influx of wealth would be spent selfishly; one's own needs preceded that of others. This response falls in line with the idea that neoliberalism crowds out generosity in service of self-interest. Those who identified with Damian either found his view of the world refreshing or agreed with the moral message of doing the right thing. Lastly there were those who wanted to be Damian and give more generously. Within those who identified with Damian are many evangelical Christian and Catholic reviewers, their interpretations of the film illuminate the concept of *worldmaking* and the ways audiences ascribe their ideologies and their desires for the world when reading a scene.

Despite a growing appreciation for more nuanced family films such as Alfonso Cuarón's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004) and Pixar creations, many critics panned the movie as an exercise in wish fulfillment. Jessica Winter at *The Guardian* begins her review by proclaiming, "The basic ingredients of *Millions* raise many a red flag: two young boys mourning the death of their mother try their hand at philanthropy." She concludes, "*Millions* falls into too many of its own sentimental traps" (Winter 2004). Film reviewer, Chris Tookey complained:

Millions isn't fast-moving or exciting enough to appeal to children, and the adults who would most appreciate its mixture of hard-edged cynicism and feel-good soppieness won't pay to see a film that's so obviously designed to be wish-fulfillment for the young. Much of *Millions* is fresh and endearingly quirky, and part of me would love it to be a hit. **But I don't believe in miracles** [emphasis added]. (Tookey)

Despite his overall appreciation for the artistry in creating *Millions*, Tookey inserts his disbelieving worldview into his review in opposition to a film conceived around belief and miracles. In a film forum called KJ's Movie Corner, Dr. Lecter gave it a C+ writing, "It has its sweet moments and I thought the cinematography and score were quite great, but I never bought into the story. I guess it's just not in my character. I was annoyed by the young boy too" (2004). Most scathingly Nick Schager at *Slant* calls the movie one Sally Struthers would love (2005). These critics found *Millions* overly fantastical and find Anthony a more accurate representation of an actual boy. Mark Browning summarizes this type of commentary by saying that the film "failed to find its audience on general release partly due its ambition and to the sad fact that an intelligent children's film is something of a generic rarity" (2011, 7). Despite how Boyle entrusted the character of Damian with an ability to experiment in order to find an alternative to dominant modes of thinking about giving/taking, these viewers condemned the film as merely wishful thinking. It is notable that audiences tend to see young people as having less agency which constricted how viewers made meaning of the film. Much of the response was either attraction or repulsion around the notion of the film's sentimentality.

Another response to the film was in relation to the neoliberal structure of feeling and the exhaustive demands of lifebuilding. Ted Gideonse, a blogger and contributor to *Rolling Stone* magazine, illuminates the illusory hope of being altruistic based on socio-economic location by disclosing his own crippling burden of personal and student debt. In his post, "Danny Boyle gives us Millions (of Reasons to feel Guilty)", Gideonse makes a list of his personal debts and writes how the film was guilt inducing. He says, "*Millions*

fed my anxieties—my guilt and fear and childhood fantasies and adult daydreams” (2005). For him, the idea of winning a lottery would realistically go to paying off his student loans. His second goal would be to: “Pay off all my friends’ debts so that they can live the lives they want to live, and not work for the Man until kingdom come.” Although Gideonse does not specifically affiliate with Ronnie, Damian’s father, they have a similar reaction. Ronnie wants to do the right thing (and return the stolen money) but instead chooses to keep the money in order to pay off credit card debts. Gideonse disassociates from the actions of Damian and aligns more with the father’s pragmatism.

More positive responses to the film connect with the film’s imaginative idealism. Critics frequently cited the film’s charm and buoyant optimism in its nuanced portrayal of children and the subject matter. Roger Ebert gave the film an outstanding four stars exclaiming the family film has “limitless imagination and surprising joy” (2005). A former altar boy, Ebert seems to find resonance in the representation of Catholic saints and Damian’s religious imaginary (McDannell 2008, 14). Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian* wrote it was “A jolly half-term outing” in which “Danny Boyle ventures into the tricky genre of the old-fashioned kids’ movie, and brings it off reasonably successfully with gentle and sweet-natured charm” (2005). In the U.S., Manohla Dargis at the *New York Times* proclaimed *Millions* was “heartfelt” and an “emotionally delicate children’s movie” that had an “infectious sense of fun” (2005). Dargis adds, “One of the pleasures of the film is there’s never any doubt that this soulful child feels as deeply as any adult: Damian may be a squirt, but he is also an existential hero.” Selecting the film as one of the NYT Critics’ Picks, she enjoys the creative exploration of children. Dargis

adds, “*Millions* is about the secret world of children, in particular that miraculous, tragically brief interlude when the young imagination—not yet captive to crippling adult conventions like time, space and rational thought - takes boundless flight” (2005). These reviewers enjoyed the movie’s fantastical events finding it an escape from earthly constraints and adult responsibilities but poignant in its storyline.

Christian viewers particularly affirmed Damian’s standpoint and child-like faith. Both professional reviews and personal reflections on the film tout the idea of viewing the world with eyes of faith. *Christianity Today* (CT), one of the leading evangelical Christian magazines, published a lengthy glowing review by Jeffrey Overstreet with a corresponding Bible Study available for purchase (2005). The accompanying CT Bible study covers the themes it divines from the movie: moral strength versus greed, spiritual transformation, visions of saints, and righteousness in a wicked world (Littleton 2006).

Overstreet begins his review referencing the Bible and praising the hero in *Millions*: “A particularly reliable source once said, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’ When he said this, he was referring to children like Damian” (2005). He claims the story both makes him feel like a kid again, but also an enjoinder to be a better grownup. Overstreet proclaimed *Millions* his favorite film of 2005 and published additional pieces promoting the film in *Christianity Today*, on the Patheos website, and in Seattle Pacific University’s *Response* magazine (2005; 2005; 2013). In *Response*, he adds his rationale for admiring the way the film is told from Damian’s perspective: “Sometimes, it takes a child’s conscience to humble the proud and break hard hearts open” (2013). Weldon had echoed

this idea by quoting John Henry Newman in her review: “The heart is not commonly reached through reason but the imagination” (Weldon 2006). In his analysis of *Slumdog Millionaire*, Boyle’s 2008 film, David Bordwell asserts that using children as a narrative device secures audience understanding and empathy. He argues, “We have all been children” (2009). Boyle’s use of Damian’s perspective can and does engender some audience alliance and compassion for the character.

Other religious reflections on the film similarly appreciate Damian’s simplified and innocent view of the world. This reaction made its way into blog posts, denominational movie reviews, as well as a church service bulletin. In 2012, Squinch a self-identified Christian pastor and blogger, wrote about *Millions* as one of his favorite Christmas films to watch in addition to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. He says, “*Millions* is a quirky, lovely film that invites you to see the world through the eyes of the main character Damian, to view things from his child-like, faith-filled imagination – *which is mostly the very thing I need to keep my faith alive and agile*” (2012). Squinch furthers his description citing Damian’s ability to access the spiritual world and interact with saints and has a “robust belief that God exists and is working everything together for good. He’s so open to grace and miracle.” He also says that *Millions* reflects the “joy of self-donation.”

In his blog called Signs of Grace, Rick Jackson titles his post on *Millions* “God Does Not Rob Banks!” This quote from the movie reveals Jackson’s affinity with Damian’s binary vision of the world where God is virtuous and there is a clear demarcation between right and wrong. He notes, “In the end, this film reminds me of the

power of a child's faith and why Jesus cares so much for the little ones" (2010). Squinch and Jackson's commentary agree with what they see as Damian's child-like faith, demonstrating a trust and assurance in God.

The film also garnered an endorsement from a review by Gregg Tubbs for the United Methodist Church for its message on Christian charity that is a "simple, almost first-century-style, Christian philosophy that sometimes seems neglected today" (Tubbs). A July 2009 parish bulletin for St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Westwood (Los Angeles, CA) includes Barbara Murphy's contemplation on Damian's actions. She agrees with the film's lesson that a miracle can be "dead simple." She writes:

Jesus could have indeed made those few pieces of food become a feast for thousands. Aren't we the hands of God who bless, break, give, and eat? Aren't we the ones who feed the hungry for God? We have little to give in the enormity of need, but that boy saw so many hungry people and did what he could. (quoted in Sister 2009, "Millions")

For Barbara, Damian's example is a reminder that each person is called to do what they can for others. Citing 1 Corinthians in the Bible she adds, "Paul talks about the gifts each of us are given by the Spirit of God and no one is less important than another. We all have our role to play in the passion" (2009.) Squinch and Barbara interpret the film as a reminder of one's personal responsibility, leaning away from an interpretation of corporate action and collective responsibility.

Most interesting was one Christian response where the author identified with Damian and 'came out' as a Christian. Writing for the *National Review*, a neoconservative magazine, Frederica Mattewes-Green is openly moved by the film and adds she is personally a Christian. She writes, "In an entertainment culture that

generally mocks religion and ridicules the supernatural, this kind of warm, positive presentation of what Christians call “the communion of the saints” is a delight...” (2005). Mathewes-Green argues that she feels this film positively accepts religion and religious experience that she thinks is typically mocked in the media. The movie has convicted her to donate more financially:

Personally, I was surprised, then delighted, then honestly moved by this film. I’m a Christian, and I believe the saints are present around us in a way very much like what Damian experiences (in my case, invisibly, natch), but I sure never thought I’d see someone make the case on a movie screen. I’m grateful. And, yes, I think the movie does have a message. It’s that we should give to the poor, and that our gifts do good, sometimes a great deal of good even with small amounts of money. It sounds sappy stated that way, but the film builds the case effectively, by storytelling rather than lecturing, and arrives at a climax that brought tears to my eyes. I walked out of the theater calculating ways to increase my charitable giving by 50 percent. If only a few people out of each audience do the same, it will make a big difference. Miracles do happen; people make them happen; Danny Boyle starts them happening by making a movie like *Millions*. (2005)

Frederica Mathewes-Green expresses that she appreciates the film for demonstrating her own viewpoint about wanting to personally do good and that “miracles can happen.” Despite hoping that others will also contribute, her main focus is on her own actions, reflecting the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility.

Interestingly, Christian writer Dick Staub’s interpretation of Damian streamlines his actions as simple and without any self-interest. He writes a blog post connecting *Star Wars*, *Millions* and World Vision. He likens Damian to a Jedi, one who serves others without thought for a reward (2005). Part of Damian’s motivations is a desire to reconnect with his mother. In this world entailing the communion of saints, he hopes to

see his mother again. Some have interpreted that Damian is able to see his mother at the end of the film as a reward for his good works.

Conservative audiences found something to like in *Million's* message of generosity, as well. For example, during a talk on religion and media at the neoliberal 2011 Ethics and Public Policy¹⁰ forum titled "Faith, Film, & Culture: The Challenges, the Prospects", Michael Flaherty mentioned *Millions* is a great movie. The popular website rooted in Judeo-Christian ethics and American conservative values, the BrothersJudd.com also recommends the film (2006). Neoconservatives and more fundamentally religious groups may have an affinity for the movie's moral certainty, view of child-like faith, and denotative reading of Damian's actions as support for autonomous action. According to Wendy Brown (2006) the appeal of neoconservatism is its moral certainty that compliments neoliberal rationality. The site, Milkplus.com, also saw this binary framework in its interpretation. The reviewer summarized its view as, "Apparently, the message here is that we're all either greedy sons-of-bitches or holy fools" (2005). *Millions* simultaneously was seen as a movie with an overwhelming positive view of individuals or an understanding that everyone is grasping and acquisitive.

Yet Boyle's broader aim is addressing a communal responsibility for social welfare over a neoliberal privatized vision of personal autonomy. He conceives of generosity as a collective effort rooted in his Catholic sensibility. Although Damian acts independently in the story, the successful conclusion is a joint effort by the Cunningham

¹⁰ This conservative group has the logo, "Defending American Ideals" and proclaims its aims of applying the 'Judeo-Christian moral tradition to critical issues of public policy' ([http://eppc.org/about/.](http://eppc.org/about/))

family, not a result of Damian's own efforts. Although Boyle cultivates a dynamic film for personal examination, I argue that the film's ending does create an alternative to the neoliberal privatized vision of personal autonomy. The film demonstrates the failure of the neoliberal system to resolve social needs and demonstrates that a wide range of needs have not been met by private charity. There was one review that did specifically identify corporate rather than individual themes. In the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Catholic News Service Media Review uses the term "societal philanthropy" in summarizing the film's plot, which more closely aligns with Boyle's intentions and my assertion that the film specifically provides alternate ways of conceiving of givers and takers (2005).

Although religious audiences approve of the film's message regarding charity and virtue, certain scenes also offended some viewers. The religious response to the film as a form of theological reflection is quite notable. Many of the evangelical reviews read the film denotatively. Reviews from Focus on the Family's *Plugged In*, Dove Foundation, and ChristianAnswers.net all cite *Millions* for various categories of offense including: sexual content, violent content, crude language, drug and alcohol and other negative elements (Lyon 2005; Lukens; Wooten). Evangelical Christian and some Catholic comments frequently fixate on the scene where Anthony is looking at lingerie online and Damian asks about nipples. This scene is part of Damian's development from child to adult but audiences were more offended the film would show a breast up close. Thus these viewers primarily viewed the film on a denotative level of meaning, looking at pre-determined categories of un-Christian activity independent from the context of the entire

film. Due to a profane remark, the Dove Foundation reviewer chose not to give the movie the Dove Seal of Family Approval. The author mentions that the film's message is that true wealth has nothing to do with money and that "Damian is a good boy" whose intention is "using the money to help the poor" but it does not give further commentary on the concept of generosity or giving. The *Focus on the Family* review ultimately disparages the film's message regarding Damian's actions. Arguing that the film depicts misleading theology in an oblique attack on Catholic vs. Protestant approaches to goodness, the critic argues that the film credits Damian and the idea of human goodness over the need for "the power of Jesus" as the underpinning for good acts (Lyon 2005). Another theologically conservative Christian site, Christiananswers.net asserts that the message of the film is centered on the famous passage in 1 Timothy 6:3: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (Wooten). This summarizing, though, fails to address the question of generosity and how it might be performed.

In contrast to the evangelical Christian reviews in the Dove Foundation and *Focus on the Family's* Plugged In, Steven Greydanus, a writer *National Catholic Register* and a regular contributor to *Catholic Digest*, was more amenable to the film. Cautioning that viewers will need to have discernment when watching the adult content, The Decent Films review by Steven Greydanus generally approves of the film. He remarks that the presence of saints themselves is remarkable but also that "*Millions* is less about the saints themselves than about the purity of Damian's faith and desire to please God. The review for the film on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Catholic News Service recommends the film for adolescents and above, without detailing any theological

critiques: “The script dramatizes the themes of money and its complexities and the need for societal philanthropy without being heavy-handed, making this ideal entertainment for older adolescents and up” (Forbes 2005). This seems to confirm Colleen McDannell’s observation that Catholics tolerate more moral and doctrinal ambiguity than Protestants (2008, 29). The Catholic reviews of the film were overall positive and took away from the film Boyle’s intentions regarding collective generosity.

This Catholic response and the critique of neoliberalism drawn from liberation theology will be more fully considered in Chapter Five. The next chapters proceed through the film’s plot with chapters on the narrative events of moving, practicing generosity, and the idea of loving one’s neighbor and relational generosity.

Conclusion

Notably the space of religion can be a place to reinforce dominant narratives or as an alternate source of values and relationality. Religion interpreted through a neoliberal lens shrank humanity by focusing on individual action and personal behavior over foundational truths such as grace and the sacrality of human life. *Millions* challenged the reduced view of humanity and of generosity that is common in neoliberalism; film reviewers seemed to miss this aspect of the film, unfortunately. Instead conservative Christians criticized the film theologically for emphasizing human ability over God’s power. Despite these opinions, *Millions* holds liberatory potential, carving out a space for an imaginary that does not cordon off religion’s message – the possibility of human and thus societal transformation – as ‘opiate.’ In fantasizing that others would live more

comfortably, Damian experiments with generosity giving to different people in different ways, encountering failures and success. Perhaps it is this willingness to experiment that most frustrated audiences, so enamored with the grand narrative of capitalism's promise found in Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*. In challenging rather than articulating a neoliberal perspective on giving, *Millions* failed to garner the same success that *Pay It Forward*¹¹ or *The Blind Side* attained.

Millions offers a sustained look at generosity addressing the broader social and cultural constructs of who we give to and why. Do we have an orientation towards ourselves or towards the needs of others? What does our method of giving say about us now? While the premise may seem simple—a young boy wants to give to the poor—neoliberal rationale, ethical dilemmas, and social constraints disrupt his goal. While producers Boyle and Boyce incorporated issues of privatization v. public welfare, gentrification, and consumerism, they explicitly make religion a channel for imaginative possibility and radical generosity. Audiences responded to the film with various emotions: cynicism, guilt, conviction, and hope. Their interpretations reflected their personal values rather than disrupting their initial views on generosity. In the neoliberal age, most critics and some viewers who chose to comment online responded to a dominant assumption that charity is an autonomous act founded on individual responsibility. While Damian attempts to engage the poor and interact with them, viewers fixated on the idea of financial generosity, reproducing the neoliberal norm of viewing all aspects of human life as economic transactions and demonstrating how capital controls

¹¹ *Pay It Forward* (2000) made \$33.5 million and *The Blind Side* (2009) earned \$256.0 million in the United States (Box Office Mojo).

us. Ultimately the film's Catholic roots founded in principles of human dignity and mutual dependence enable a path forward in countering the self-focused project of generosity towards a collective attachment towards others and expansive giving. This next chapter highlights the British right-to-buy policy alluded to in *Millions* with their move from a house that resembles a council house and into their new materialist suburban home and how good citizenship in this case is not about good deeds but about home ownership and individual achievement.

CHAPTER THREE: PROVIDING A “DECENT” HOME: NEED, GREED, AND ALTRUISM

Englishman's home is his castle.

– English proverb

Home is where the mortgage is.

– American proverb

Fences make good neighbors.

– Robert Frost

In this chapter, the effect of neoliberalism on everyday life is examined by focusing on the concept of dwelling and the redefinition of housing from meeting basic needs into a privatized commodity as a vehicle for accumulating wealth. One of the primary rights in both classical- and neo- liberalisms is the right to personal property (Bobbio 2006). The second is freedom *from* the state. Together these individualistic principles have contributed to an erosion of the notion of society. The forces of neoliberalism have increasingly pushed the responsibility for the hungry, poor, and homeless into the private sector or abdicated responsibility for such concerns altogether. Drawing from Raymond William's structure of feeling, Roland Barthes' mythologies,

and David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's elements of film construction, I will elaborate upon the British context in *Millions* to unpack the ideological meaning of housing and its relationship to the neoliberal restructuring of human needs and our relationship to others. The movie connects modern consumer subjectivity, self-interest and the privatization of needs and desires to the abstraction that occurs in capitalist commodification. This process is depicted as destructive and detrimental whereby finding personal *meaning* and ontological security becomes tied to one's *means* and values. In this insular system, the independent citizen can privately pick and choose between causes to act upon if they so desire. In contrast, Damian's resistive tactics to neoliberalism privilege denotative over connotative meaning and finds personal meaning by valuing interdependence, engaging others and committing to the common good through giving. It also recognizes that private acts are not sufficient to ameliorate overall social inequality.

Millions draws attention to houses as cultural signs and the importance of home ownership in Western societies in relationship to the fundamental utilitarian concept of housing "as a roof over one's head." Home ownership and owner-occupation have been naturalized through policy decisions and presented as the ideal form of citizenship in neoliberalism (Hanan 2010; Glynn 2009). While having shelter pertains to essential human needs, home ownership is tied to other normative values such as family, personal responsibility, consumerism, and individual achievement. John McMurria has written about the priority of land ownership in neoliberal thought. "Ownership societies" are founded on the belief of personal fulfillment through laboring to attain and maintain property (McMurria 2008, 319). In England, Margaret Thatcher enforced her vision of a

“property-owning democracy” as leader of the Conservative party. Her administration dramatically helped people ascend the property ladder through the sale of public assistance housing. The United States later borrowed this policy from the British example during President Reagan’s term. Both markets incorporated the values of freedom, social mobility and the right-to-buy in home ownership, encouraging housing sales and creating unstable conditions leading up to the 2008 mortgage crisis (Islam 2014). Demonstrating how housing connects economic, political and social dimensions, this chapter considers the ways *Millions* critically portrays the ideology of home ownership in Anglo-Saxon societies where the state has increasingly sought to transfer risks onto individuals. The film draws upon social values embedded in various homes in order to confront the image of middle-class homes as a cultural form of security, stability, and independence. In addition, the concept of housing relates to broader issues of addressing human needs through public or private means.

Authors in the field of cultural theory such as Raymond Williams and Roland Barthes have connected the ways material objects are embedded with social values and tied to one’s identity. These theorists enable my analysis of the suburban Cunningham residence as a semiotic index of home ownership and symbolic of middle-class social mobility. In addition, this distinction becomes clearer in comparison with the other structures in the film: the first family home, Damian’s playhouse, and Anthony’s potential penthouse.

Raymond Williams had the insight that culture itself is material and that material life includes cultural processes. William’s focus on ‘cultural materialism’ was elaborated

in several of his works including his 1958 essay “Culture is Ordinary.” Williams cited the Marxist tenet that “a culture must finally be interpreted in relation to its underlying system of production” and broadened the understanding of culture with the dictate that “a *culture* is a *whole way* of life [italics added]” (1989). His concept “structures of feeling” became the framework for understanding a “whole way of life” as the meanings and values in lived social experience. “Structures of feeling” may be defined as a generational mood or *zeitgeist*, not necessarily shared across the social classes. For example, Americans across classes and all walks of life during the 1950s-70s felt the nuclear threat as children performed air raid drills in schools, and families built bomb shelters. Accompanying the economic downturn of the late 1980s and deregulation of labor markets, Sherry Ortner (2013), Stanley Aronowitz (2003) and Huw Beynon (2001) describe the general affective mood of insecurity and uncertainty among workers of all levels. Corresponding to job fears, Ortner adds other concerns: loss of home, loss of social identity, and “downward mobility.” Individuals also felt amorphous anxieties including fear of racial Others and fear of crime and violence (Ortner 2013, 16-17). A structure of feeling can be identified through cultural forms and conventions related to the historical period within the built environment and aspects of style in dress or comportment. In the age of neoliberalism, the spread of global capitalism is marked by the proliferation of consumer commodities. Scholars have lamented these signs as well as the equally deplorable demolition of the proactive welfare state (cf. especially Bourdieu 1998; 1998a; 2001; Chomsky 1999; Touraine 2001; Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005; Plehwe et al. 2006). The representation of homes in *Millions* allows a discursive

consideration of the cultural milieu in relation to job anxieties, home ownership concerns, and fear of others.

Roland Barthes also elaborated upon the cultural cues of everyday power relations. In his collection of essays, *Mythologies*, Barthes observes popular culture as signs, or languages that communicate meaning. In his semiotic approach, he illuminates how the ruling class has invisibly defined objects and activities. In his final chapter, “Myth Today,” Barthes points out that in a capitalist society, significations have been naturalized to reflect bourgeoisie values through repetition. Concepts that have been historically constructed go unquestioned as part of common sense. He writes: “Semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal. Now this process is exactly that of bourgeois ideology” (Barthes 1973, 142). Home ownership can be considered one of the mythological components of financial success as reflected in the American Dream or the English “property-owning democracy.” In England, neoliberal policy specifically promoted ownership as traditional and natural, a means of social stability, and a particular relationship between citizen and state.

Construction of meaning in film has been analyzed for narrative and stylistic elements in the ways they elicit meanings and interpretations. Bordwell and Thompson pose there are four types of meanings in a film: referential, explicit, implicit and symptomatic (2010, 62). Referential meaning related to specific components of the film’s plot that references things or place already ascribed with significance. This analysis draws upon the viewer’s referential understanding of the British setting and the cultural

import on suburban housing. The film's subject matter of moving and valuing houses references a period of expanded home ownership in England through privatization of public housing. Regardless of a viewer's familiarity with Thatcherism, home ownership is already ideologically invested with significance in Western cultures as an ideal. Therefore most people aspire to a middle class home with a yard and garden. In addition to referencing this social context, the film ties together the explicit moments of Damian's interaction with the poor and acts of generosity to the social milieu. Therefore, it is also important to tie together the various explicit meanings in the film to grasp the overall system of understanding the neoliberal impact on generosity. Implicitly the film references the process of growing up and understanding the social demands of learning the way capital functions. Lastly, altogether the film works alongside and contests the popular depictions of generosity in popular culture. According to Bordwell and Thompson, "symptomatic meanings reminds us that meaning, whether referential, explicit or implicit, is largely a social phenomenon" (2010, 65). Following a brief summary of the referential meaning of housing as it was revolutionized under Thatcher, this chapter incorporates other explicit and implicit meanings rooted in housing to elaborate on *Millions'* use of symptomatic meaning use to critique the ownership society and the cultural form of middle-class homes.

Margaret Thatcher spurred the "golden age of home ownership" during her term as the longest serving Prime Minister of the 20th century in Britain. As a grocer's daughter from Grantham, Thatcher guided the country away from Keynesian based welfare economics and towards neoliberal policies centered on privatization of housing,

public services, and utilities. Under neoliberalism's society of individuals, a person is solely responsible for their own life and comes to believe that one is not entitled to assistance from the larger social structure. Pat O'Malley explains this as *prudentialism*, "a technology of governance that removes the key conception of regulating individuals by collectivist risk management, and throws back upon the individual the responsibility for managing risk" (1996, 197). He explains that supporters of this method of governance cite its efficiency since individuals will be motivated and "driven to greater exertion and enterprise by the need to insure against adverse circumstance—and the more enterprising they are, the better safety net they can construct" (O'Malley 1996, 197).

For Thatcher, family, not government, was the source of social well-being. She once intoned, "Family life is the bed-rock on which the healthy society must be built." In post-war Britain, home ownership and public rental housing had both vied as significant forms of residence (Ronald 2008, 75). As Thatcher focused on encouraging cohesive and moral family life with home ownership, she sought to reform the public assistance housing system with Right-to-Buy (Moore 2014). Buying a home in a market system corresponded with the neoliberal principles of exercising one's freedoms and expressing oneself through one's choices and conduct. Within the private sphere of the home, the family could manage their own affairs and be responsible for their own outcomes without government interference. Although Thatcher's investment on the family appears to be a sensible, rational, and favorable method of structuring society, the outcome of such an approach in neoliberalism produces an inward-focus on one's own needs and fear and isolation from others.

Thatcher's policies also reflected a suspicion regarding big government and her conceptualization of the individual and citizenship. A general feeling regarding the government can be encapsulated by Ronald Reagan's statement on limited-governmentality: "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are, 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help.'" According to neoliberal ideology, the erosion of the welfare state *frees* the individual from the meddling influence of the welfare state society. Thus in Thatcher's definition of "society", the individual and family are at the center of expanding concentric circles of obligation. Reliance upon private volunteerism signified that citizens would be independently responsible to "care for others and look first to themselves to care for themselves" (Thatcher 1976). In the same speech were her more infamous remarks on family and "society": "There's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families...*Society for me was not an excuse, it was a source of obligations [italics added]*" (Thatcher 1976). Thatcher's remarks attack a particular kind of society: the society of the welfare state. Patricia Ventura, who deems Thatcher the arch-neoliberal, explains, "Here we see that the social good is expressed as an individual obligation *to* society, not an obligation *from* society either to assist the individual or to make society as a whole better" (2012, 30-31). By promoting personal saving, housing investment, and asset accumulation as components for personal welfare, Thatcher intended to shift responsibilities for well-being back onto individuals (Ronald 2008, 83). Ventura poses that the neoliberal agenda is an overall method of restoring class privilege to the wealthy which had been reduced by regulation, taxation, and the creation of public enterprises such as water, electric, pensions, healthcare, and education

(2012, 8). Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy (2005) have also argued that neoliberalism is also founded on the re-establishment of class power to economic elites.

They write:

Although it is true that neoliberalism conveys an ideology and a propaganda of its own, it is fundamentally a new social order in which the power and income of the upper fractions of the ruling classes – the wealthiest persons – was re-established in the wake of a setback (9).

Rhetorically, Thatcher espoused that home ownership would revive personal character and unify Britain as a free nation. She had diagnosed the British welfare state as having a lack of what Shirley Robin Letwin categorizes as “vigorous virtues” in her book, *The Anatomy of Thatcherism* (1993). Letwin argues that Thatcher used such policies as privatization to encourage the spread of ownership because she wanted to create a society of vibrant individuals who were self-sufficient, upright and independent-minded. British dependence on state handouts such as social housing had weakened personal responsibility and initiative. Therefore expanding home ownership would lead to a more prosperous nation as citizens practiced thrift and hard work. Ownership was also a form of security, investment, and social status. Giving citizens a larger stake in society through expanded property ownership would limit the appeal of Socialism and ameliorate what Thatcher called Labour’s ‘divisive doctrine of envy’ and bitterness between the haves and have-nots (Thatcher 1974). To the *News of the World*, she declared, “It makes them [the general population] more readily aware that prosperity, if it is to be achieved by anyone, must be achieved by everyone, that it cannot be grabbed at someone else’s expense” (1974). Thatcher continued that she felt Britain could address its current economic troubles by recognizing individual personal responsibility: “Without

this sense that we are indeed one community, one nation undivided, I do not think we can conquer inflation, and remain a free people.” However by emphasizing personal responsibility and a stable family situation as methods to reach prosperity, the resulting question became “why can’t everybody do it?” This social conservative standpoint that attributes welfare dependency to a lack of personal character continues to be echoed by her Conservative successors and American Right characterizations such as the “welfare queen.”

After Thatcher’s election in 1979, her administration began the privatization of public housing and other policies to increase home ownership. The Housing Act of 1980 and subsequent legislation of 1984, 1986 and 1988 revolutionized the British housing market (Ronald 2008, 127). Whereas the government had overseen between a third and half of the houses built in the previous thirty years, house builders would determine future planning. The Housing Act also extended right-to-buy council homes (public assistance housing) to its tenants at a significant discount. Lastly, government policy transferred subsidies from house building to the support of mortgages or rents. Over one million council homes were sold in the following decade (Gulliver 2013). Whereas ownership had only just reached 50% in 1971, ownership climbed to 70% by 2005 (Ronald 2008, 56). Through their purchases, public assistance renters became “respectable” homeowners and moved into “the new petit-bourgeoisie” (Palmer 2004,179).

While right-to-buy was extremely popular, the policies overall resulted in increasing economic and social disparity. Right-to-buy was promoted as a policy to

broaden the base of house owners to those who may otherwise been unable to afford it. However, as public rental houses were sold, the majority of homes were not rebuilt creating a significant housing shortage and rising house prices. Almost half of the housing subsidies went to high-income owners with the largest mortgages (Gulliver 2013). An investigation by *The Daily Mirror* also revealed that a third of former council houses sold in the 1980s are rental properties owned by wealthy landlords (Sommerlad 2013).

While a portion of the housing went towards concentrating wealth, some of the new owners could not afford the additional costs of ownership compounding inequality. Inability to pay for costs beyond mortgage payments such as taxes, insurance, utilities and maintenance and repairs might lead not only to mortgage default and foreclosure, but loss of down payments, and the destruction of credit ratings (Rohe and Watson 2007, 5). In a pertinent example, a *Telegraph* article records the history regarding 39 Amersham Road, one of the first homes bought through the program. An iconic photo captured the moment as Thatcher presented the Patterson family house keys (fig.1). The stress of mortgage payments later contributed to the Patterson's divorce and the single mother's inability to pay thereafter. In a 2002 interview, Mrs. Patterson said: "If I'd foreseen the end of my marriage I'd never have bought. I got trapped there without enough cash to cover bills." Yet she expressed her continued devotion to right-to buy and Mrs. Thatcher saying, "But I don't blame anyone. It was my decision to make that investment. I still remember the day Mrs. Thatcher came to tea. I am still committed to right-to-buy" (Hall, Hough, Evans 2013). Thus despite her troubles, Mrs. Patterson had internalized the

neoliberal principles on the value of home ownership and that by her own choices, she alone was responsible for the loss of her home.



Figure 1: Margaret Thatcher personally congratulates the Patterson family after their purchase of council house 39 Amersham Road. Photo from Hall, Hough Evans 2013

Ultimately the Housing Act contributed to a housing crisis based on limited housing and furthered inequalities between high-income and low-income homeowners and between home ownership and social housing.

The obsession with ownership began to falter with the worldwide economic downturn and defaults on American subprime mortgages starting in 2007. In the following years, home ownership in the U.S. fell for four straight years; the first time rates decreased in a quarter of a century. For the first time since the 1950s, house ownership also fell in Britain from 2007-2008 (*Economist* 2009). Therefore, contrary to the discourse of unity and stability professed by Thatcher and similarly intoned by American presidents, home ownership in practice does not necessarily result in economic security, upward mobility, or social well-being (Conners 2011, 2). In the English case,

the “property-owning democracy” has shown itself to favor those with wealth and further inequality rather than work to broaden prosperity. The concept of “housing” was no longer recognized as a process that facilitates human dwelling, but instead redefined as a physical aggregate of dwelling structures and housing ‘properties.’ Ideologically housing was viewed as a commodity whose significance was determined by its economic value and its currency within a market. The state was no longer viewed as a provider of housing as a social good. The market would best provide housing through market agents (Dodson 2007, 75).

Another referential meaning tied to middle-class homes is the cultural connection between ascending the property ladder and future prosperity and proper socioeconomic advancement. This connection has been naturalized and part of cultural expectations through repetition and as part of neoliberal values. For instance, John Berger explains in *Ways of Seeing* the connection between landscape painting and private property as a signal membership within the privileged classes. He cites a painting by Gainsborough titled “Mr. and Mrs. Andrews” which reflects the couples’ proprietary attitude toward the land and estate. Berger asserts, “The point being made is that, among the pleasures their portrait gave to Mr. and Mrs. Andrews, were both “the ability of oil paint to render their land it all its substantiality” and the satisfaction of seeing themselves depicted as landowners (1972, 108). Berger’s remarks identify the cultural gratification found in home ownership.

In addition to the satisfaction and pride accompanying the claim of ownership, cultural attitudes envision the home as a place of refuge. Various authors recall the

repetition and idealization of home as a fortress from problems and stresses of life. John Ruskin, nineteenth century art critic notes: “This is the true nature of home. It is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from injury, but from all terror, doubt and division.” Halle writes it is a “respite from the perceived hustle and hubbub of the outside world, especially the world of work” (1996, 70-71). Thus one of the most popular American home style television series, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, capitalized on these ideas that a proper home indicated a break from illness and tragedy. Running for nine seasons, the show provided needy families with rebuilt, larger and fully furnished homes stocked with new appliances from the benevolent corporate sponsor, Sears. These homes imply relief from personal tragedies and a more hopeful financial and personal future. Yet critical analysis of the show as a neoliberal project (McCarthy 2007; McMuria 2008; Esch 2009) highlights that the show’s dramatic and heartwarming tales are an:

especially clear example of how personal responsibility is valorized and assistance is shifted from the state to private groups, in this case, a telegenic team of carpenters and decorators led by Ty Pennington who come to the rescue of families whose problems are never traced to systemic injustices or the lack of effective federal social programs (Esch 2009, 90).

McCarthy describes the program as a “neoliberal theater of suffering” (2007).

Films have also been a part of conveying middle-class values such as suburban homes. According to Richard Bulman, the predominant worldviews articulated in Hollywood films are the normative cultural values of the middle-class (material goods, rational calculation, and a belief in the efficacy of individual effort). Relaying the real estate adage “Location, location, location!” many films have borrowed the theme of living on the right/wrong side of the railroad tracks. These films build upon the premise

that where one's home is situated shapes one's lifestyle and sense of community. Although not a Hollywood film, this distinction regarding the locale and lifestyle influences the action in the independent film *Millions*.

The four houses depicted in the film each represent a specific understanding of houses as social markers and highlight issues of class, social division, and social and spatial mobility. Both Anthony's explanation of moving house to build equity and later potential upscale house purchase are indicative of the capitalist desire for accumulation and the abstraction of houses as commodities. These more expensive homes also signify personal success and the triumph of the individual as a consumer. In contrast, the working class Cunningham residence and Damian's playhouse refer to the denotative meaning of houses along the basic need for shelter and a place of being.

The first Cunningham home is set in a working-class neighborhood. The multiplication of connected row homes conveys anonymity; these homes are built for functionality, rather than as signs of status. The film begins with the family moving from the working class home into their newly built suburban home, the second example of a house. In the director's commentary, Boyle remarks how moving houses often means significant personal changes: meeting new people, making new friends, and going to a new school. The family's move up the property level also positions the viewer within middle-class culture and Anthony's consumerist beliefs. Third is the playhouse Damian constructs by himself from moving boxes. In contrast to middle-class consumer values, Damian's undertaking underscores the pleasure, leisure, and shelter found in a home. Last is the penthouse apartment Anthony visits as a possible investment purchase. This

place extends the discourse of real estate emphasizing commodification and property values. Illustrating Marx's theory on the alienation of things, the suburban house and penthouse reflect the lack of an explicit relationship between laborers and production in capitalism, the stresses of home ownership, and the capitalist ideal of accumulation.

In addition to the narrative progression and scenes regarding physical building construction, these houses can be read according to their aesthetic qualities. In *Looking at Class*, Judith Williamson comments that class in film must be decoded based on the *mise-en-scene*. While gender or race are more apparent, class is read based on markers such as accents or diction, clothing, and interiors. From these cues, "The audience can tell in seconds which class they are watching. They can tell if someone's house is middle-class, working class, or aspirational ..." (2001, 107). My understanding of these shelters relies on both the narrative events and aesthetic details drawn from the *mise-en-scene*.

Boyle sets the stage in this film to explore questions of stability and loss through the ways the brothers deal with the mother's death, the new house, and a mysterious bag of money. The loss of their mother looms over the viewer's understanding of the ways the children are behaving. While Damian seeks the company of saints, Anthony utilizes the mother's death to gain sympathy and treats. The sign of a true neoliberal capitalist, Anthony bends the situation in his self-interest. Moving into the new house is posed as an optimistic event; however, the brothers part ways as they respond to the space differently. Damian dislikes having his own room and stays outside, taking delight in the outdoor playhouse and his attempts to give away the money. His brother isolates himself inside his own room playing video games. The advent of money brings on a series of conflicts

between the boys as they negotiate its value and uses. Whereas in the beginning of the film, the brothers ride their bikes and play with one another as they imagine the new house, they seldom play together following the move to the suburban home. The new house and money both represent the possibility of personal fulfillment and gratification, yet the remainder of the movie is primarily filled with differences of opinion, argument, and tension.

The very first scenes introduce the storyline that the boys will move into a new home. The reason for the transition to a new home is partially suggested by the mother's passing. Although her death is not explicitly stated in the opening scenes, the father stands in the doorway of the house remembering happy memories of the mother singing "Happy Birthday" and talking to her sons. The scene features a darker foreground with a brighter background. The narrow foyer is dim and unlit but outside is brighter with the daytime sky. Consequently, the backlit father appears haunted by the past as he faces forwards into the entryway. He shuts the door, signifying he is closing the door on those shadowy memories and that chapter of his life. This house has been polluted by past memories and is no longer a good refuge. Therefore, the move parallels an effort for the father to transition the family out of mourning through the purchase of a new house. This scene operates similarly to the premise of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* wherein grief is ameliorated through the discarding of one home for another.

This working class home reflects the denotative meaning of housing as shelter and refuge. When Damian seeks protection later in the film, he runs to this home instead of the newer suburban house. This house is actually a safe haven. In the layout of this

narrow home, the attic is accessible from the stairway rather than through a bedroom. Damian hides in the attic when running from the robber. This becomes an important distinction from the suburban home where the robber has access to Damian through the attic door in his room. This design feature of the urban connected home relays a possible benefit of lower-income housing. Despite lower property values, they include certain security features rooted in their design that are missing in more expensive homes. Urbanist Jane Jacobs endorsed close-knit row homes for their greater sense of community and advantage of having “more eyes of the street.” In other words, areas of higher density may combat crime due to their collective nature and greater number of neighbors. The security cultivated by people within the community can be compared to the isolation, gates, and hired police found in wealthier neighborhoods I will discuss further in the chapter.

An aesthetic transition occurs as the family travels from the working-class home to the larger and nicer middle-class home. The principal colors for the old house are the white trim around the homes and chipped white paint in the doorway, wide grey cement road and muted brick houses. The homogenous homes are simple and the roofing consists of flat, straight lines. The sky also appears overcast. This bleaker background stands in contrast with the signifiers and the scenes of their new home. For instance, several of the moving boxes are bright red, their sofa cushions are red, the moving van is a deep blue, and the family car is also a true red (fig. 2).



Figure 2: Working-class Cunningham neighborhood. Shot of the working-class neighborhood creates a contrast between the brighter colors of the family's car and moving van and the muted brick houses. Foreshadowing the instability of the new house, the moving van is dramatically angled. (From *Millions*)

The family travels a distance past an open field, past a shot of power plants and then onto their new home. The billowing stacks operate as a transition between neighborhoods similar to the trope of living on the wrong side of the tracks. As they approach their new neighborhood, green trees and grass separate each single-family home. In this scene the smoke stacks are shadowed in the distance and the foreground is clear and bright. Upbeat music trails them as they wind through the streets. The family arrives at a warm toned brick house stands by itself and has a green lawn. In comparison to the utilitarian conformity of the row homes, the individual home and soft surrounding bushes is compellingly set in nature.

In their new “green oasis”, the family is where they should be: in a middle-class home filled with comfort, a new sense of privacy, and “safe” from grief. The lawn becomes a symbol of the family's middle-class status. However its care and maintenance

is also one of the new responsibilities that accompany upward mobility. In the working class house, the house was only a stopping point to return to an outside site of labor. The suburban home itself represents labor in its upkeep in order to keep up appearances. The outward appearance of the home corresponds with their social identity as part of the middle-class (fig. 3).



Figure 3: Suburban Cunningham home. In this frame only the suburban Cunningham home is in view. It is significantly larger and more pleasant with the curving white trim, rounded tiles, and greenery.

The strain of ownership presents itself after the family moves in. At first as they are moving in, the father cheerfully asks, “Is this fantastic, or what?” Sounding like a real estate agent, Anthony replies, “Surprisingly spacious with attractive views.” Although the viewer did not see the interior of the former house, Anthony’s announcement points to a contrast between the houses. The exterior shot of the narrow and connected row houses entails a limited outdoor view consisting of pavement or a similar house (fig.2). The shots of the new home’s interior include multiple visual planes to create the illusion of depth to highlight the expansive space. The camera tracks

between rooms to give the viewer a sense of its flow. In addition to the bright interior views, the exterior views from this house would also be pleasant. As a single standing home, each wall of the suburban home would have a possible window to a neighboring lawn. The nice, more expensive home and sunny skies signal the expectation of a brighter future. Anthony has another reason to find security in the new home as it will probably determine his future class location. Thomas and Dorling's report for the UK housing charity, Shelter, indicated that: "A child will not easily be able to earn their way out of their social position in the future. A social position that will be increasingly determined by their parents' housing wealth" (2004, 6). Although the move is foreshadowed with a sense of optimism, the house becomes a source of anxiety and a sign of false security when the house is later trashed by the robber.

Ownership of this suburban house is accompanied by additional financial burden. At one point Damian's father stresses, "I work every minute God sends just to cover the mortgage to give you a decent home." This statement demonstrates the way the family's standard of living in the middle-class home becomes defined as "decent" and normative, no longer a sign of moving up the property ladder. The middle-class home echoes the general anxiety and affective neoliberal isolation as the father tells Damian that they are on their own. Not only is the father worried about his individual responsibility for house payments, he is also responsible for the general welfare of the family. He tells Damian: "Look around. No one is smiling down on us Damian. No one is looking out for us. So we're looking out for ourselves." His statement both rejects Damian's spiritual perspective and highlights the anxious structure of feeling in a neoliberal state with

declining welfare support. The father feels he must rely on the house as his primary financial asset and source of stability.

The geopolitical context of the new Cunningham house plays its own contributing role to the story and the concern for safety and security. The new home is introduced to the viewer with a shot of the chalk outlines of the new neighborhood. Explicitly connected to the plot is that the Cunningham's new home is part of a planned community. Each division has been named after coastal areas in Europe: Lundy, Fastnet, German Bight, Cromarty. Notably Lundy, Fastnet Rock and German Bight are isolated locales in reality. However, the Cunningham's cul-de-sac is called Cromarty. The name Cromarty signifies a small town aesthetic as Cromarty is actually a seaport town in Scotland known for its cottage homes. The naming convention for the neighborhood romanticizes the new house within a nostalgic lifestyle of a close-knit neighborhood. The resulting spatial division between the cul-de-sac homes due to individual lawns and the sense of community, appears just right-- not too close-knit like the row homes, and not isolated like islands.

Although the house is not gated, the planned community reflects aspects of the gated housing phenomenon in America. Setha Low's *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America* evaluates the sociological and economical factors that are leading people to move from non-gated communities to gated communities. She attributes their motivations to a desire for safety, stability, security, and a sense of community that many people feel have been lost in recent years. These connotations can also be mapped onto the new Cunningham home and dealing with the

loss of the mother. This new home cues viewer expectations that the new family will be sheltered from other troubles. Low uses an analogy that “the gates and walls represent parents, protecting the individual from physical harm as well as providing the sense of psychological well-being originally experienced at home as a young child” (Low 2003, 90). The new home is supposed to act as a nurturing influence in lieu of their mother’s presence. In addition, the father’s financial investment in the home demonstrates a type of commitment to the family. The perceived benefits of a materially nicer home incorporate a sense of security and protection.

In Low’s ethnography, she details the extra security measures of these supposedly “safer” more-expensive neighborhoods. She recalls setting off burglar alarms when opening doors to get a breath of fresh air and feeling locked behind guards, gates, and walls. Ironically, the protected environment of these gated communities heightens one’s feeling of being threatened. Gated communities cloister one away from class difference and reinforce one’s lifestyle living among others who are of a similar middle to upper-middle-class status. Low explains how “landscape aesthetics function as a suburban politics of exclusion, often referred to as making everything ‘nice’”(2003, 19). Homes operate as a viable and socially acceptable option to erect physical barriers to social fears such as lower-class individuals or racial Others. They keep these others out and in their place.

The film addresses the role of gentrification and class in housing. Anthony is aware that the higher property values of the new suburban community restrict their family’s neighborhood to a more exclusive population. In response to Damian’s proposal

of giving money to the poor, Anthony responds, “Where are you gonna find poor people? ... Not round here. The house prices keep them out.” As Damian searches for poor people to give away money, the people he meets on the street have come into town by bus or train. They do not reside in the town, apparently unable to afford the more expensive lifestyle. Thus gentrification works not only to limit the appearance of and interaction with social Others but also the potential to assist them as well.

The new neighborhood has its own community police to safeguard the area. Security becomes another responsibility of the private sector in the neoliberal state. In addition to the provision of home ownership as a type of risk management, prudent citizens must invest in property security as well. Instead of relying on the uniform provision of security from the state, self-reliant actors work with their “community” to coordinate “their” police to provide the services they require (O’Malley 1996, 202). Although these police seem more interested in being fed while they are at work, they do offer some advice and guidance on the predestined prospect of robbery. After the Cromarty residents move in, the police hold a community meeting to discuss security in this middle-class development. Everyone has gathered in a neighbor’s house as a policeman warns the group about the potential for burglary during the Christmas season. He tells them, “Statistically you’re going to get burgled. Now, not all of you, but some of you, soon. Probably this week... next. When you are, call me.” The ability to afford living in a middle-class neighborhood presumably implies possession of more expensive belongings that would appeal to robbers. A quick scan around the neighbor’s house includes an older antique clock hanging on the wall, a gold edged mirror and a large

screen TV. Right away, the neighborhood's appeal of safety and security is directly contested by its inherent siren call to thieves.

Full of self-assurance, one of the Latter-day Saints offers a Biblical solution to the police warning. First he alarms Damian's father by saying the problem is that the houses are built on sand. In a veiled manner, the Saint is alluding to a Bible verse in Matthew 7 about houses built on sand, not the actual physical construction of the home. He continues with, "If you store up your treasure on earth, it will be stolen. But if you give it away, then it can't be stolen." His recommendation is to view the house as a physical object that can deteriorate. Instead of placing one's trust in a house, being generous is the best way around overvaluing material possessions or hoarding them. The Latter-Day Saint alludes to a religious belief in the importance of a spiritual home over an earthly, temporary one. The movie suggests the more one tries to guard or value their physical goods the more likely they may be lost. Thus, any initial hope for stability and prosperity designated by the investment in a new home is undermined by warnings from the community police and religious sentiments.

The signification of owning a suburban house as a locus of safety and security are critiqued on multiple levels. Materially, the house is subject to wear, tear and physical destruction. In addition, houses with higher property values are beacons for thieves and robbers and thus susceptible to loss of property. Even with the added protections such as community police, robbery seems inevitable even in the eyes of the law. Finally, middle-class homes also signify a form of greed beyond meeting the basic need of shelter. The

desire for a single-family home with a lawn represents the insatiable capitalist desire for more wealth and better goods.

A Marxist material analysis of the process of building houses is also available from the film. As Damian and Anthony lay down on the chalk outlines of the new development, the house assembles around them. This building scene of the new home operates on multiple levels of meaning: shelter and living space, part of moving on, and moving up. Connotatively, the house is a new experience for the boys. As they run through the allotted land, they imagine their new rooms. They continue to explore the house as the new rooms go up. With repeated exclamations of “Whoa!” and giggles, they roll around on the floors. It is their new castle. Boyle explains in his commentary that the construction of the house is a montage of shots done in CG and stop action (Boyle). It includes the frame of the house going up, the brick being laid, a staircase going up, wiring coming down and the outer panels of the house assembling, grass rolling and the roof being tiled. This combination of shots resembles part of a children’s show or video game with the claymation and fast action. The house is, on one level, part of the children’s fantasy and imaginative possibility.

On the other hand, this fantasy has a darker side. The house seems to go up by magic. No workers are shown laboring over the house or are tools part of the equation, diminishing the amount of work and effort it takes to assemble. For instance, the grass seems to unroll itself and the bricks connect themselves. In a Marxian maneuver, this sequence demonstrates a separation of the instruments of production and labor invested in the house itself. The laborers are no longer connected to the object of their labor and

creativity. As depicted in the movie, laborers become invisible in a capitalist society. Ultimately, the Cunninghams will own the home, not the original workers. In Marx's concept of alienation of the thing, the worker is alienated from the very things he or she produced as the fruit of their labor will not belong to them either legally or psychologically (Serber 1998, 77). In *Millions*, the house becomes a commodity separated from its value based on human labor and instead has exchange value. Its mystical creation exemplifies commodity fetishism.

Marx describes the transition of goods from their use value to having a magical quality which "transcends sensuousness" with an essay on commodity fetishism. People in a capitalist society thus begin to treat commodities as if value inhered in the objects themselves, rather than in the amount of real labor expended to produce the object. In *Gundrisse*, Marx points to this abstraction of labor:

... labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any form. Such a state of affairs is at its most developed in the most modern form of existence of bourgeois society—in the United States.

Sturken and Cartwright explain how in commodity fetishism, "exchange value has so superseded use value that things are valued not for what they do but for what they cost, how they look and what connotations can be attached to them" (2009, 435). In this vein, the new suburban house is "better" because of its greater expense, newer aesthetics, and the associated connotations of home ownership as social capital.

Therefore, Damian is growing up in the context of consumer capitalism where inequalities between people are not the focus of discussion so much as the magical commodity. In the modern real estate development market, houses and buildings

magically appear; people buy them without any concern if the laborers were paid fairly or treated fairly in the construction process. The quality of materials and building process itself may go unexamined. Buildings and homes are discussed in the language of real estate—mortgages, taxes, and interest rates. Instead of considering the creation of the home or its use value, Anthony concentrates on its financial exchange value and whether it will continue to increase.

In addition to Marx, Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilization* also highlighted the way capitalism treated all human existence as an abstraction (1934,168). Mumford's critique on "carboniferous capitalism" and the "destruction of the environment" was an argument against the twentieth century promotion of machine technology as an unqualified boon to civilization. He called this a "paleotechnic world" citing the abstraction of realities into money, prices, and capital shares. In addition to the brutal treatment of the environment; Mumford articulated the "starvation of life" in capitalism which its subjugation of labor. He wrote, "mechanical industry had begun to treat the worker solely as a means, human beings were dealt with in the same spirit of brutality as the landscape" (1934, 172). Mumford's work came ten years before critical theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno concluded that abstraction is integrated in the commodity form and that the capitalist system of production and exchange leads to the domination of nature and of humans.

Although Anthony is still a child (10 years old) and carrying his stuffed toy snake, he is well informed on the financial valuation of the home. On the ride over to the new house, Anthony begins a lesson on finances and the meaning of money in relation to real

estate for Damian. Anthony instructs him to “start with the money.” Damian recites the lesson that “You start with how much you’re paying, how much you got for the old one, mortgage, interest rates, stamp duty, solicitor’s fees.. how much you’ll get if the new one goes up in value. That’s called equity.” Anthony’s iteration of these terms demonstrates adult cognition regarding financial gain and investment exceeding base physical needs. It also expresses the valuation of the home based on market terms rather than a focus on its utility value.

Anthony’s obsession for real estate as a vehicle for asset accumulation is reiterated in two more scenes. Looking at real estate ads, he tells Damian purchasing property would be a good way to invest their funds. If they bought property, that would grow in value and then they would have even more money. The capitalist system depends upon the production of desire and sustaining high levels of unsatisfied need to generate continued consumption. Anthony represents the trust placed in rising house prices and need for more wealth to keep sorrow and grief at bay. Doling et al. has noted the legacy of 1970s’ house-price inflation in establishing the “enduring belief that home ownership is one of the best, if not the best, investment accessible to ordinary people” (1991, 110). In addition to securing an investment asset, Anthony’s acquisition is a form of retail therapy.

Although the middle-class house symbolizes a move up the property ladder, Anthony is aware there is always something better. In one scene Anthony views a penthouse with a realtor. Whereas the shots of the middle-class home emphasized the inner size of the home, this upper class locale features an overview of the city below.

Anthony's explanation that the purchase would be for investment purposes echoes an aspect of the neoliberal system in which houses are commodities to be bought and sold rather than lived in. This house represents consumerism in its ideological guise as a generator of the common good. Comaroff explains how consumerism post WWII refers to the active promotion of a material sensibility by Western states and commercial interests (Comaroff 2001, 4). This has been termed by scholars such as Lizabeth Cohen as the duty of the citizen consumer. According to the realtor, the value of the penthouse apartment has primarily increased due to good schools in the neighborhood. This house's value is also disconnected from labor or its own utility, but based on its surrounding context. This example of commodity fetishism reflects the connections between financial wealth and social capital. Greater wealth is tied not only to better property and higher property values but also better educational resources.

As a point of comparison between the magical construction of the middle-class house, Damian is shown building his playhouse. While the father and older son focus on settling in, Damian leaves the home. In a low angle shot, he's pushing a big box across the floor. It looks like he is partaking in setting in. However, the next shot is of him carrying the box up the street. Only the box and his legs moving below it are visible. He is no longer part of the inside action and excitement moving into the house. The camera follows an amusing sight of the top of the box moving through the field of tall grass. One assumes that Damian is still underneath walking. After he pushes the boxes up a hill, he works on creating his playhouse. He carries more boxes to his building site, tapes sides together, cuts out windows with scissors, and surveys his own work. This scene pertains

to Damian's relationship to material things. His is not a magical world where things move by themselves. As an artisan worker, Damian animates materials and is in possession of the final product. The playhouse is significant as his creation and site for pleasure and memory and imagination. This structure is also his spiritual refuge. The camera showcases that his book *Six O'Clock Saints* lays face down on the floor as if he were reading it. When St. Clare visits him in the playhouse she calls it an "hermitage" indicating its function for religious experience or reflection.

Although it is a crude structure, his playhouse seems more meaningful and pleasurable to Damian than his room in the new house. It becomes a site of enjoyment as he feels the rumbling of the train passing. The construction of the house has been built from empty boxes that will probably become trash, yet Damian's labor gives it value and the piece of his mother's dress furthers its personal meaning. At the end of the film, Damian, Anthony, his father, and Daisy gather together and enjoy the rumblings of the playhouse together. The finale establishes the playhouse as the definitive site of unification over any of the other homes.

Another interpretation of the playhouse is connected to its location on public space. Whereas the suburban house can be identified as belonging to someone, the playhouse is located on open land and available for sharing. Damian never tells anyone who has come into the space to go away. Rather St. Clare settles into the playhouse almost as if it were her space too. When the robber is investigating the house, Damian asks him if he is poor and tries to address his needs. Although Damian is proud after

building the playhouse and finds ontological pleasure there, it is ultimately not his possession of ownership.

This playhouse demonstrates an alternative way of relating to material objects and how it is through instruction that one is inducted into the capitalist system of financial transactions and material possessions. In contrast to Anthony and the overall cultural mindset of consumerism, it is notable that Damian takes the time and effort to build his own playhouse instead of wishing for one available for purchase. Marx's concept of alienation critiqued the separation of individuals from what gives a human life meaning: actions in the world that makes the world his. In a capitalist system: one "does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels miserable and not happy, does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind" (Marx 1975, 326). The playhouse instead follows Marx's desire to see man as a creative being and a reminder of the idea of labor and ownership. Through Damian's creation, the film suggests Damian's creativity and his ability to engage in spiritual meaning.

Not only is Damian's mother accessible through his memories and memorialization of her, Damian seems to have a more fluid sense of death and life. The film differentiates between the different ways Damian, Anthony and the father deal with the emotional loss of the mother. For Damian the dead are still part of our world through saints as mediators of the dead. He has visions of and talks to saints as if they are in existence. The movie reinforces that the saints are real to Damian through their characterization and depiction. For instance Saint Clare settles herself into his hermitage and smokes a joint. Saint Peter has a fascination with keys and has a more cynical

attitude. They function as both a child's imaginary friends and guardian angels offering companionship and protection. Damian hopes that they will serve as a bridge to his mother. He frequently asks the saints if they know a Saint Maureen, his mother. Meanwhile Anthony turns his mind to the prospect of financial strategy placing his faith in the material world. His father concentrates on work and self-reliance to cope with his loss.

The location of the new Cunningham house and specifically the site of Damian's new playhouse close to train tracks lead to a major narrative event where a bag of money falls on the playhouse, crushing it and stunning Damian. Reinforcing the ideology of newer homes and better futures, the family's new house has been named Serendipity by the building planners. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the meaning of the term serendipity is "the faculty of making happy and unexpected discoveries by accident. Also, the fact or an instance of such a discovery." Ironically the house itself is not an accident; it is part of a planned community. The viewer is cued to view moving into a new house and finding the money as potentially happy occasions. The viewer might expect a reversal of fortunes since the family has been dealing with a significant emotional loss. With the advent of monetary windfall, the film suggests an age-old question, "Does money bring happiness?"

In various ways, the film rejects the solution of money as a means to personal fulfillment. In contrast to a consumerist approach to finding happiness in material objects, the serendipitous event occurs at Damian's playhouse. A large bag of money falls from the sky bouncing right onto the cardboard boxes. This seems to be the actual

serendipitous event; magical money comes at the site where labor and the object of labor were conjoined. The money bursts open to a choir of heavenly proclamation. Damian believes the money has come from God and he believes it is something to give away rather than hoard.

Just as the house is a false sign of security, the tenuous nature of money and its value is repeatedly emphasized. The monetary switch means that the government will burn the unused bills. Money is never secure from theft; the burglars steal it from the train, the heist goes wrong and a bag of money ends up with Damian. The burglars then trash the Cunningham's source of financial security, their middle-class house, in search of money. Damian rejects the importance of money by giving it out haphazardly and burning some by the railroad tracks. The meanings of money as physical object or financial placeholder are deconstructed in the film.

Damian's understanding of money is based on an object's material meaning and their presence or absence. As his understanding of objects is based on denotative, first-order meaning, he first relates to houses based on their physical attributes. During Anthony's lesson on real estate he thinks, "We're moving houses, the new one's got a green door." Damian continues with his oppositional standpoint on finances: "Personally I think, so what? Money's just a thing, and things change. One minute something's there and you cuddle up to it. The next minute it's gone, like a Malteser." Damian points to the ephemeral physical nature of money rather considering the financial value physical bills signify. Money holds less significance to him. In conjunction with this prudent reminder regarding the physical nature of money and its conversion into an object with inherent

value, the viewer is reminded of Damian's innocent nature via his metaphor of money as a dog one can hold and cuddle.

When Damian first sees the bagful of money that has landed on the playhouse, he is unsure if the money is actually physically present. He gets his brother's confirmation that the money exists and it is not one of his visions. At this beginning setup of the film he states, "and in the end, it turns out it wasn't about the money after all." Damian's perspective on money entails a reminder that 'money isn't everything' and that Damian has not been interpellated into the ways money operates institutionally. For him, money can be used as a tool to pursue what he cares about (the needs of others) rather than his own material comfort. Money serves as a tool for altruism rather than conspicuous consumption.

In *Millions*, the ideals of individualism, consumerism, home ownership and neoliberalism contrast with a more collectivist ethos against materialism or greed. While Thatcher espoused that the citizen's responsibility was to their neighbor, the archetype neoliberal in the film, Anthony, uses money as a form of power and control. Instead of the Thatcherite obligation towards his neighbor, Anthony is consistently suspicious of strangers. The character that is actually concerned for the welfare of others does not operate with a neoliberal mindset. Whereas Thatcher proclaimed the universal appeal and unifying potential of property ownership, the brother and father seem to be the loneliest characters within the narrative. Damian is more open and willing to connect, unconditionally giving money to his neighbors and strangers on the street. The neoliberal promotion of property privatization, privatization of public utilities, and private

volunteerism are reconsidered at this juncture between the intersections of need, greed, and altruism.

While Damian voluntarily and anonymously gives money away and feeds a group of underclass people on the street, the school is supporting a charity that builds clean water wells in Africa. In school, the charity presentation reflects a neoliberal demand or obligation the citizen has towards others. This corresponds with both the privatization of public goods and the upward accumulation of wealth in neoliberalism. The film transforms the humanitarian endeavor of providing clean water into a demanding proposition from an inhuman object, the mechanized bin.

In contrast to the individual desire to give or keep money, the demanding nature of institutionalized generosity as charities is highlighted. The film critiques the aggressive nature of charities and their idea of a generous gift. Charities are using E-Day as a chance to ask students to give their money away. A representative named Dorothy comes to the school and operates a moving container for the children to place their money in inside. The machine is actually a moving trashcan and confronts the children, moving among them. Through Dorothy's control, the bin is actually given a prophetic ability to see and is rather demanding and authoritative. She says, "Give me your money. C'mon empty your pockets. Every copper." This resembles a type of God-enforced tithing. This giving follows a religious regulation whereby an authority is watching you. This is not an anonymous donation box. In a comparison of conditional and unconditional giving, Damian gave to the neighbors in the middle of the night without any external

compulsion. Giving to the bin will be done in the sight of fellow students and following the approach of the moving and demanding bin.

The giving machine is literally called “the bin.” Rather than making the act of charity a significant or meaningful action, giving is paralleled to the mundane action of throwing something away. Dorothy commands the students to “Chuck it in the bin!” She has been explaining that while a twopence is not valuable to each person, they can collect the money and together support building a well in Ethiopia. Their combined, disposed of money becomes an easy gift for the “poor” African community.

Dorothy’s presentation also highlights an interesting disparity between Damian and the other children. At first Dorothy asks the group, “Who feels sorry for poor people?” This strangely worded question contrasts with Damian’s straightforward “Are you poor?” However, while Damian seems to be genuinely motivated out of concern, Dorothy’s question is more regimented. The children immediately all raise their hands in the correct response. Dorothy points at them and sternly says, “Correct Answer.” Yet earlier the other students have been running away from the bin rather than giving. The act of giving by the children is demanded, a hegemonic form of ‘common sense’ which calls for an automatic correct answer. The children are inducted into giving rather than inherently motivated to do so. However, Damian actually stops in front of it. After a short, reflective pause, he throws a large wad of money into the bin; the viewer later learns the amount is 1,000 pounds (approximately \$2,000 US).

Contrary to the inhuman bin’s demand to give, Damian received a more effective and humanizing lesson on need through an interaction with the saints. In this scene,

Damian is walking to his playhouse after school. He sees a group of African men working outside repairing his boxes that had been destroyed from the moneybag. He declares, "Martyrs of Uganda 1881." The saints are so realistic that one of them transfers blood to Damian's hand when they shake hands. He had been beheaded. Some of the saints are singing and praying for rain. One of the saints explains to him that in his country, water costs 1/10 of a person's daily income. Water is a privatized resource in Uganda. In that country, clean water has become so expensive they can't afford to wash their hands. He tells Damian "You can build a well for as little as 100 pounds." The man seems angry as he works on Damian's hermitage. He is not weak or desperate. Instead of begging for help, he states a factual argument. This experience motivates Damian at the possibility of supporting building a well and supporting people with extreme needs. For them the standard of accessible clean water would make a significant improvement in their lives. He then proceeds to give generously at the school the next day. In fact, Damian wants to give the woman all of the cash to which Anthony vehemently disagrees. The contrast between these scenes invokes the dignity of the human person as well as the dignity of different human cultures and societies. It also highlights an opportunity to reconstruct the socially imagined "ask." Not as still, silent images, but as living, active beings in community.

This tension between need and excess is reiterated as Damian tries to give money to the stranger by the playhouse (the robber) and the Latter-day Saints. After Anthony gives the stranger a jar full of change he tells Damian that the amount should be "more than enough for his needs." The scene cuts to a view of the brothers watching the Latter-

day Saints bike past with piles of electronics attached to their bicycles. After Damian had stuffed cash in their mailbox, they have bought an assortment of commodities including a television, blender, color printer, and a foot spa. Despite being called to live simply in community and exhorting their neighbors to be generous and not living for material things, the Latter-day Saints illustrate that they too cannot resist the call of material goods. In conjunction with the way the father and brother continue to redefine the standard of what is decent or needed, the film highlights how fundamentals such as water are the true standard of basic human needs. A fuller consideration of Damian's alternate, other-focused and unconditional giving will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Millions deconstructs and critiques the cheerful prospect of a new middle-class home and its corresponding significations of physical and emotional security and prosperity. Anthony's explanation of housing as equity and real estate express the neoliberal emphasis on property as a form of security and the freedom of choice. However, the film weakens any argument regarding the idealization of home ownership. Owners incur the increasing stress from increasing housing payments, home maintenance and fears of others. Not only does one fear robbery, general anxieties over social others become heightened. These anxieties inhibit and compromise relationships. The "poor" are viewed with suspicion or as part of a forced social obligation. The film suggests even moving across the railroad tracks cannot shield one from loved ones or unforeseen losses. At the same time, the securities provided by a welfare state and the possibility of social housing disappear in market systems promoting home ownership, personal responsibility, and building equity. Personal standards of need continue to escalate while the basic needs

of others are viewed as nominal or substandard. Charity in this system becomes a forced demand because most people are only concerned with their own “needs.”

CHAPTER FOUR: UNINHIBITED GENEROSITY

Somehow we must be saved together.

—Dorothy Day¹²

Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.

— “Anthem” by Leonard Cohen¹³

When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.

—Dom Hélder Pessoa Câmara, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Brazil from 1964-1985¹⁴

This chapter relies on *Millions* to illuminate the dehumanizing qualities of neoliberalism and the hegemony of neoliberal giving. The previous chapter explored the ways that capitalism challenges social trust. In this chapter I build upon this premise by exploring the way *Millions* foregrounds the theme of objectification. First, I consider the

12 Day, Dorothy. 1997. *Loaves and Fishes*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

13 Cohen, Leonard. 1992 “Anthem.” Sony/ATV Music Publishing (UK) Limited.

14 Quoted in Edwards, Todd L. 2008. *Brazil: A Global Studies Handbook*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 277

neoliberal fetishization of money and illustrate the ways this functions in the character of Anthony. Then I note the ways that this is contrasted in the characterization of Damian, who represents a counter approach to money and its relationship to security. I describe Damian's approach as not only a counter-narrative to neoliberalism, but also as a narrative that draws upon Catholicism's concern for distributive justice. In contrast to neoliberalism's self-focused and optimizing orientation redirecting giving into projects of the self, the imperfect and idiosyncratic beings (people and saints) whom Damian interacts with directs the viewer's attention toward their humanity and toward the idea of human flourishing. The film juxtaposes trust in market functions and rationalized, personally fulfilling behaviors tied to consumerism with Damian's idealistic faith in people and the magical presence of saints. Neoliberal consumerism is portrayed as ultimately unsatisfying and alienating whereas Damian's generosity provides acceptance and gifts. This chapter relates the neoliberal structure of feeling to limited, paternalistic neoliberal giving and Catholic ontology to unconditional giving and solidarity. Through Damian's religiosity, *Millions* challenges the idea of the deserving recipient or the choice model in giving with unlikeable and unlovable characters and by reflects on the idea of self-interested giving. Additionally, the extensive needs portrayed in the film highlight the limitations of Damian's private works to effect large-scale social changes.

The previous chapter demonstrated that neoliberal structure of feeling is overwhelmingly insecure leaving individuals to find security in objects, especially home ownership. This atmosphere is perpetuated through the ideology of an ownership society and privatization of state resources. Consequently, both state concerns and social

problems of the citizenry are privatized. In this society of individuals, communities do not collectively organize for the common good. *Disciplining the Poor* explains that this process means, “matters of shared consequence, once addressed through decisions about how to organize collective life, are recast as a personal problem to be solved through rational choices” (2011, 22). In neoliberalism, self-discipline is upheld as the sine qua non of freedom. Therefore individuals independently work to secure their own needs. Instead of solving social problems through social solutions, they also privately choose to help others working as volunteers, charitable givers and/or providers of services (Crenson and Ginsberg 2002). Recipients prove their deservingness through positive attitudes and perseverance in the face of adversity as depicted in *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (McMurria 2008; McCarthy 2007) or meeting specific requirements to rejoin the workforce as required in American welfare policies such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (Ventura 2012). In addition to privileging rational choices and self-discipline, the neoliberal structure of feeling includes assurance in markets, competition over resources, technophilia, and fear of others. Sherry Ortner describes this dog-eat-dog world where “Neoliberalism pits rich countries against poor countries, rich people against poor people, and poor people against each other” (2013, 89).

Magical Realities and Risky Business

Millions utilizes magical realism in telling this tale of money and saints. These two motifs of magical money and magical beings highlight aspects of imaginative thinking in neoliberalism and religion. The associate meanings of the film’s narrative

events emphasize that contrary to what viewers might expect, money operates in a magical way for Anthony and only as a material object for Damian. Despite the neoliberal emphasis on rationality and normative values of fitting in and financial gain, neoliberal capitalism also entails greater market risks, speculations, and market instability as expressed by the terms “casino capitalism” (Susan Strange), “disaster capitalism” (Naomi Klein), or alternately as a faith proposition—a gospel of salvation. As discussed in Chapter 3, Marx described the process of *fetishistic misrecognition* in capitalism and how commodities are imbued with mystical qualities. In addition to these irrational components of neoliberal capitalism, this chapter continues to draw up the neoliberal affective reality of insecurity, self-reliance and mistrust as depicted in Anthony’s suspicion towards others and meager giving.

By focusing on self-reliance, neoliberalism obscures certain qualities in humanity either appropriating the desire for love and acceptance or re-casting them as characteristics to overcome. The emotional work and the social norm of acting happy has become one of the biopolitical tools of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism stresses individualism in the vein of self-governance and the individualization of risk in being entrepreneurial and self-reliant (Rose 1999). One must acquire and optimize oneself in order to compete in the market with entrepreneurial ventures and capital accumulation. Thus, other qualities of being human, our follies, imperfections and idiosyncrasies are cast as aspects to overcome through self-improvement (Cruikshank 1999). Cultural theorist, Mari Ruti points to the monotonous and robotic nature of the current cultural mantra of happiness and the marketing of living healthy, well adjusted lives. In her words

this is because: “Simply put, grumpy waitresses are bad for the economy” (2014). Ruti expresses that it is our insensible and eccentric actions that reveal our actual individuality and character. For her, “character pertains to what is least tangible, least intelligible about our being, including the inchoate frequencies of desire that sometimes cause us to behave in ways that work against our rational understanding of how our lives are supposed to turn out” (Ruti 2014).

In contrast to neoliberalism, the magical reality Damian lives in enables him to be more invested in humanity and the common good. From his alternate standpoint, Catholic saints are real friends and companions, and haphazardly giving large quantities away is a perfectly acceptable thing to do. Rather than casting judgment upon others, his alternate perspective points toward ultimate concerns such as solidarity with others and a desire for a more equitable society. Damian unconditionally gives to strangers and neighbors by seeing their inherent worth as human beings and not just productive beings.

Therefore, the unique and imperfect characters in *Millions* including protagonist Damian, creates a space to rethink neoliberalism’s social expectations to conform and to act rationally. The film communicates this difference in magical thinking and perceptions of reality between the brothers through narrative events and their associate meanings with elements of the mise-en-scene. Boyle’s rich characters accentuate the very imperfections and unique personalities found in humanity. The ability to make every character distinct is notable as neoliberalism typically diminishes human faculties leading to the contemporary crisis of voice and democratic practices (Couldry 2010; Crenson and

Ginsberg 2002). The brothers' differing giving styles illustrate neoliberal conditional, paternalistic assistance compared with Catholic unconditional grace.

Despite the valorization of personal responsibility in neoliberalism, financial strategies are embedded with increasing risk entailing greater levels of irresponsibility. Comaroff and Comaroff cite practical instances of magical money such as pyramid schemes and prosperity gospels. For them, these “enchancements, that is, of a decidedly *neoliberal* economy whose ever more inscrutable speculations seem to call up fresh specters in their wake” (2001, 2). Comaroff and Comaroff briefly identify and describe how financial risk is at the heart of capitalism and recall previous descriptions of the ways the Western financial system was compared to a game of luck. For instance Susan Strange (1968) borrowed the term “casino capitalism” from John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946) and his famous *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*. She claims the international financial system now resembles a “giant gambling hall.” Economist, Joseph E. Stiglitz concurs that the financial industry “now largely functions as a market in speculation rather than a tool for promoting true economic productivity” (2012, 24). Hyman Minsky also used the terminology when proposing the financial instability hypothesis, which argues that most forms of capitalism tend toward instability. Similar to Marx's theory of the commodity, Comaroff and Comaroff explain the end conclusion of this drive to replicate money through exchange “enables the speculative side of capitalism to act as if it were entirely independent of human manufacture” (2001, 10). In this system, humans become invisible or non-actors while markets magically coordinate themselves with an invisible hand. When necessary governments intervene to

buttress the neoliberal system as the United States Government did in the U.S. banking crisis. For instance, this approach is reflected in Anthony's view of money as something that is handled with discipline, as noted in the previous chapter and as will be expanded upon further below.

The backers of neoliberalism failed to objectively analyze these magical operations to foresee and consequently accept failures in the market system. The neoliberal hubris in market functions believed the system was "too big to fail." Economic historian Robert Skidelsky has remarked: "behind the efficient market idea lay the intellectual failure of mainstream economics. It could neither predict nor explain the meltdown because nearly all economists believe that markets were self-correcting" (Skidelsky 2009, 36). Economists placed their own trust in the infallibility of the market regardless of previous warnings of the potential collapse more than a decade ago (Gray 1998; Soros 1998). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, millennial capitalism of the moment was presented "as a gospel of salvation... invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2010). Instead neoliberalism has clearly heightened levels of inequality rather than promote justice (Couldry 2010; Hanan 2010; Duggan 2003; Klein 2007; Harvey 2005, Glynn 2009).

Both Naomi Klein and David Harvey have asserted that economic crises have been purposely directed into opportunities to transform old economic regimes into neoliberal ones. Klein's characterization of "disaster capitalism" is founded on examples from the New York City debt crisis in the 1970s, the collapse of the Soviet Union in

1989, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Harvey's definition of neoliberalism as a system of "accumulation by dispossession" entails the manipulation of economic crises. The four components of neoliberalism he delineates are: 1) the "privatization and commodification" of public goods; 2) "financialization," in which any kind of good (or bad) can be turned into an instrument of economic speculation; 3) the "management and manipulation of crises"; and 4) "state redistribution," in which the state becomes an agent of the upward redistribution of wealth (2005, 159-164 passim). Angela Mitropoulos connects these concepts of risk and accumulation of wealth arguing that the distinction between gambling and insurance is in the service of reproduction of wealth through genealogical lines. She writes:

... at the very center of the conflicts over the creation of this boundary was the implication that life and death had become the objects of a commercial contract, but the need to distinguish insurance from gambling was predicated on the requirement that the distribution and transmission of property be seen as natural and/or rightful, just as the questions of life and death should be construed as a matter of divine providence and natural proclivity rather than something brought about by transaction. (2012, 79)

These markers of neoliberalism highlight how state policies can be attributed to greater inequalities rather than enacting collective solutions to social problems. For Joshua Hanan the supposed rational "market objectivity" of 40 years of neoliberal rule has brutally attested to the opposite. He continues:

... the performance of this regime has been anything but ethical. Whether observed in terms of the recent housing bubble or the countless other "shocks" that have come to characterize its reign, neoliberalism's perpetual tendency to create misery and hierarchy throughout the world undercuts its "rational" rhetoric." (2010, 194)

In general, arguments against neoliberalism cite that it is not only risky and volatile for economic growth but also damaging to the social good through its predatory measures and social deprivations.

Millions illustrates the neoliberal affects of assurance and knowingness through Anthony's character. Drawing from Foucault's technologies of the self, Barbara Cruikshank (1999) has argued that self-esteem is one of the modern biopolitical tools in neoliberal rationality. Developing self-esteem is a method of self-discipline and self-assessment that produces the responsible and enterprising subject required in a neoliberal state. This method of "self-care" involves performing cost/benefit analyses for previously extra-economic activities. Anthony's actions and representation reflect the utilitarian ethos of the neoliberal subject and their consequent limited concern for others. Anthony carefully redirects the windfall of money into a neoliberal schema of investments and conspicuous consumption to maximize the benefits for himself. By insuring himself against welfare dependency, he is living responsibly and being a positive citizen. Those without self-esteem are not fulfilling their social obligation as responsible citizens and are instead contributing to the social ills of the nation and their costs (Cruikshank 1999, 232).

The discourse of self-esteem becomes another method of devaluing and dehumanizing social others. Cruikshank build her argument on the technology of self-esteem through laws enacted from 1990 California Task force findings. Despite a lack of scientific proof connecting violence and self-esteem, Assembly Bill No. 3659 asserts:

The findings of the Commission on Crime Control and Violence Prevention included scientific evidence of the correlation between violent antisocial behavior and a lack of self-esteems, to wit: "A lack of self-esteem, negative or criminal

self-image and feelings of distrust and personal powerlessness are prevalent among violent offenders and highly recidivistic criminals.” (1999,104)

If these citizens only had enough self-esteem they would be able to discipline themselves to act responsibly and rationally curing their “welfare dependency”. Thus by not participating in their own empowerment, they are failing their social obligations of “responsible citizenship” and are categorized as lower-class citizens.

Although Cruikshank concludes that a state of esteem means citizens who will become more fully engaged citizens who will join programs and volunteer, she adds, “most importantly they work on and improve their self-image.” In a consumer society, this priority becomes a never-ending treadmill of fulfilling consumer desires. Both religious leaders and historians have described the modern consumerist attitude where one’s own needs precede and exclude the needs of others. Pope Benedict calls this “a right to excess” in affluent societies. Historian T.J. Lears has also termed the underlying goal for self-fulfillment in consumer culture as the “therapeutic ethos” in consumerism (Lears 1983). Alternately others have argued that consumption has become a form of religious practice. In *The Sacred Santa: Religious Dimensions of Consumer Culture* (2002), Dell deChant asserts that the religion of consumption revolves around a calendar year of ritual acquiring and consuming culminating in the holy day of Christmas. This religion is founded on the myths of success and affluence that are primarily communicated through advertisements. These consumerist attitudes are incorporated in the film’s narrative primarily through the character, Anthony, the background context of Christmas, and the embedded media advertisements.

In *Millions*, Anthony conceives of a wide array of excess goods he could purchase with the money. His consumerist mentality reflects the pleasure and leisure found in consumption as a form of retail therapy. Although it is the Christmas season, his attitude towards others remains one of suspicion or exclusion. Instead of considering the needs of others, he is usually seen with purchases he made for himself. He only gives once in the film, compared to Damian's boundless offerings. In addition, this act is personally beneficial since he is actually misdirecting someone rather than offering a gift for the other person's well-being.

Greed is Good



Figure 4: Anthony with toy snake. Anthony carrying his stuffed snake during moving day

Anthony's character highlights the temptation of consumer goods and is correlated to the persuasive serpent in the Garden of Eden. His stuffed animal snake alludes to this representation (fig. 4). As a sign, the snake is culturally coded as a figure that tempts and deceives. In various sources, including the Talmud, Philo Judaeus, and

Clement of Alexandria, the serpent is denoted as a source of concupiscence or evil thoughts (Hunt 2003). The viewer may recognize serpent-like traits in Anthony; he has a shrewd storehouse of real estate knowledge and knows how to manipulate situations to his advantage. He also demonstrates cunning and a desire for power in his interactions.

Anthony uses others for his own ends, manipulating both friends and strangers and objectifying women he sees in advertisements. For instance after school Anthony and Damian receive candy for free from the local shop after Anthony has told the shopkeeper, “Our mum’s dead.” He advises Damian that this ploy works every time. His character also tempts Damian with the lure of consumer culture and the accumulation of things. At first the boys play with new gadgets on a smaller scale such as walkie-talkies. Later Anthony is online looking at a woman showcasing a scuba scooter. He tells Damian, “We could have one of them. We could have one each. We could have a whole fleet.” For Anthony the money is an opportunity to buy simply because they have the means and a continued effort to purchase his way out of grief. One might draw from this example that in neoliberalism, one deals with one’s insecurities and disappointments through retail therapy.

Anthony begins with novelty purchases, but they soon become more luxurious and more expensive reflecting the accumulating desire in consumerism. The serpent allusion recalls how Adam and Eve were tempted to eat the forbidden fruit. Despite living in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were persuaded by a sense of deficiency and a desire for knowledge the serpent offered. In Genesis 3:5 the serpent claims, “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,

knowing good and evil” [NIV]. This sense of dissatisfaction in what one has is also a component of consumerism. As Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright note:

...the paradox [with consumerism] is that those needs are never truly fulfilled, as the forces of the market lure us into wanting different and more commodities—the newest, the latest, and the best. This is a fundamental aspect of contemporary culture—that it gives us pleasure and reassurance while tapping into our anxieties and that it promises what it can never fulfill. (2009, 274-275)

Anthony acts as the serpent, tempting Damian with conspicuous consumption. At first it seems that Damian follows along with Anthony’s example. During the community safety meeting, Damian mimics his brother’s earlier example by getting extra sweets from a neighbor by saying, “My mum’s dead.” Yet when Anthony expresses his pleasure by proclaiming “Results!” Damian questions the ethics of the strategy. Later when Damian desires to help out the poor, Anthony cautions him against others and directs him toward neoliberal enterprises instead. In one scene, Damian invites a woman to join them at Pizza Hut; Anthony tries to pull him away and tells him she just wants money. At this, the girl adamantly protests by saying she is hungry. When they have finished the meal, Anthony remarks that small-scale gifts are an ineffective use of the money and real estate is a better option. In the only scene Anthony is shown giving a gift, he tells Damian that small amounts such as a jar of change are sufficient for people in need. In comparison to his toys and potentially buying a penthouse (elaborated in Chapter 3), Anthony’s jar of change implies that neoliberal care for others is comparably smaller than one’s own concern for the self.

While Anthony acts as a proper neoliberal subject by securing his own well-being, Damian’s unexpected actions drastically differ from his brother’s carefully

thought-out business strategies. Damian's small-scale giving frustrates the idea of assured positive outcomes and deserving recipients by highlighting the undeserving qualities in everyone. The alternate structure of feeling incorporated in Damian's inclusive perspective entails interdependence, trust, unconditionality, solidarity, and acknowledgement of others. It is a willingness to see others as human others and treat them as such. Director Boyle's emphasis on the quirks and strong personalities of the saints and other characters reminds the viewer of the inherent uniqueness of every individual. Not only does this create a memorable film, but it also enables greater empathetic judgment. It captures how media scholars Roger Silverstone and Lilie Chouliaraki have tied together media and morality through proper distance and also Nick Couldry's recognition of voice.

Irreducible Otherness in Distant Suffering

Chouliaraki argues for a morality founded in the *theatricality* of human communication (2013, 22). She explains that this communicative structure is not confined to the theatre but allows human vulnerability to be "an object of our empathy as well as of critical reflection and deliberation" (22). Theatricality is based on the objective space of the stage that invites the viewer to gaze on the human condition. Chouliaraki continues with her firm belief that we must insist on reclaiming this space where "the irreducible otherness of distant suffering that exists beyond us ... makes a demand not in the name of an authentic self but in the name of justice" (22). Couldry is also concerned with the ways we relate to others through the topic of voice and the ways "offers of voice

are increasingly unsustainable; voice is persistently offered, but in important respects denied or rendered illusory; and at the root of these contradictions is a doctrine [neoliberalism] that denies voice matters” (2010, 1). In the film, Boyle captures the importance of voice and strength of humanity especially during the scene with the Martyrs of Uganda. The Martyrs *voice* their concern over the affordability of clean water their forceful claims resonate more strongly in comparison to the charity worker’s condescending presentation. This is how *Millions* fosters a counter-narrative that challenge the silencing that occurs within neoliberalism’s tendency to value some voices more than others.

Pennies from Heaven

Despite Damian’s belief in the magical properties of money it remains a material object to satisfy basic human needs such as hunger or thirst. A common motif in the film becomes the way money circulates in a magical way for Damian. Although the act of mailing money is not magical, it can be imagined as money flying across distances. Damian believes that money can be heaven sent and arrive as gifts falling from the sky. In the beginning of the film, Damian holds a letter addressed to his mother that says she may have already won £10,000 (\$17,000 US). As a sign of his trusting nature, Damian carefully reads the instructions, which his father tosses aside. When money seemingly falls out of the sky onto his playhouse, he believes that it is from God. The film captures his interior subjectivity as Damian looks up at the star-shaped sun glowing and one hears

the sounds of a heavenly chorus. He gives donations to the water organization and Christian groups through the mail to magically change the lives of others.

Yet, however amazingly money can fly into and out of one's life, Damian still sees and understands money as a material object. For Damian, money is an object that can come and go. Similarly, the title sequence depicts the ephemeral nature of money by the appearance and disappearance of the word "millions." At first, white noise appears on the screen in a jagged pattern (fig.5). The white snow begins to dissipate and only a small font "millions" is left (fig. 6). One can imagine the white pattern resembling bills falling from the sky. This snowy screen relates to the way analog television screens had interference or incorrect input during bad transmission. The clearing of the screen implies a greater clarity in one's view. Thus the final screen with the word "millions" in small font conveys the message from his mother: "The money makes it harder to see what's what." The blurry screen resembles the way money can mask other facets of life including human others. Damian's understanding is that money is only one component in life and other factors block one's ability to comprehend it clearly—as a material object. Damian's understanding of money as an unpredictable event can be interpreted as childlike, but it reflects the adage that "money can't buy happiness."

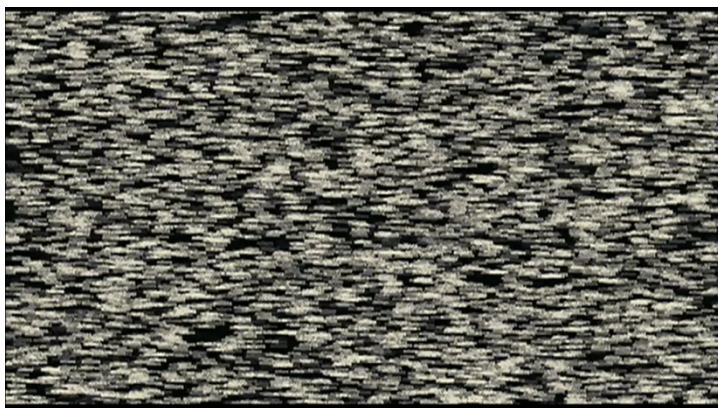


Figure 5: Start of title sequence. Beginning of title sequence with word “millions” overlapping (From *Millions*)

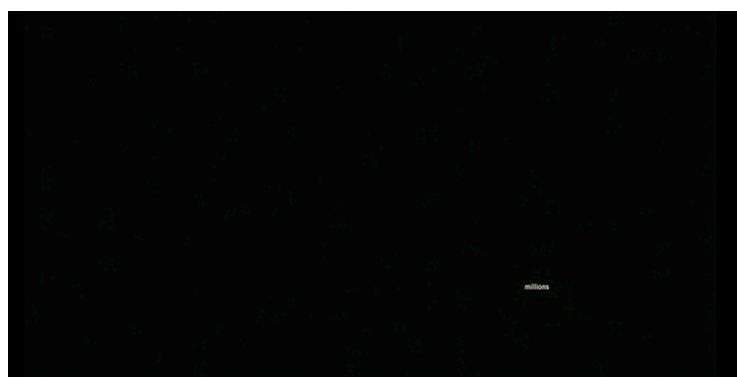


Figure 6: End of title sequence. Only the word “millions” appears. (From *Millions*)

Between Heaven and Earth:

Damian’s logic and actions relate to meeting the basic needs of others. Furthermore, his haphazard and lavish amounts of giving contradict Anthony’s careful strategizing and minimal giving. Damian recognizes that other people’s basic needs are not being met and chooses to generously offer what resources he has available. He does not cast requirements, constraints or expectations on the recipients. His method of giving contrasts with the neoliberal solution that redirects those in poverty towards work or neoliberal frameworks of giving such as pay it forward. His motivations for giving are

ties to his appreciation for Catholic saints and the Catholic perspective regarding humanity.

Despite his lack of formal institutionalized practices, Damian has a strong understanding of the Catholic tradition and its stories. He is clearly a religious person but he more independently follows the Catholic traditions than strictly belonging. He is not shown going to church, carrying a Bible, or praying. This might be a reflection of Danny Boyle's ambivalence to the Catholicism now and mild backlash against his highly religious upbringing. The primary indication of his Catholic beliefs is his interest in saints and his interactions with them. In these sacred experiences, the saints who appear to him serve as guidance counselors and friends. They empathize with his situations and guide him along the way. His form of religiosity resembles Robert Orsi's explanation of religion as "relationships between heaven and earth" (2005, 2). His relationship with the saints enables him to have a greater insight into religious narratives and the human component in them. For instance, in enacting the Nativity Story, Damian wants to emphasize that Joseph must have been excited to be having a baby countering the play director's recommendation that Joseph would have been tired after the journey.

In contrast to neoliberalism's dehumanizing ethos and lack of voice, each character in the film is memorable and unique in their quirks and characteristics and even unlikeable or unlovable. In Catholic ontology each person is a reflection of God and thus held in high regard (Genesis 1:26-27). The Catholic emphasis on human dignity also means a promotion of human well-being. According to Thomas Massaro's introduction to Catholic social teaching this means, "we must also pursue an allocation of resources that

allows all people an opportunity to live in a manner commensurate with their innate worth” (2007, 15). In addition each person has “inestimable value” and is “more than the sum of our possessions and accomplishments” (2007, 17).

Echoing Ruti’s critique on the loss of character, Massaro adds, “human life has a distinctive character such that human subjecthood resists quantification or reductionism, whether economic, behavioral, or scientific in nature” (2007, 17). This view of the human person significantly differs from the neoliberal understanding of humans as the self-sufficient and productive *homo economicus*. He pairs the Catholic value of individual life to the call for solidarity and a responsibility towards others in the community. Massaro asserts that solidarity is the standard by which Catholics can judge social policies and institutions based on their effectiveness at “bring[ing] diverse people together in a closer bond of friendship and communion” (2007, 17). In addition to these qualities of solidarity and responsibility, Catholic social teaching is founded upon three principles: universal social membership, preferential option for the poor, and the concept that people should not be placed in impossible situations. In Massaro’s explanation of the latter, he articulates that, “As creatures with physical needs, human beings exhibit a *fragility* that responsible public policy must take into account [italics added]” (2007, 40). *Millions* ties together the distinctive, rich, and irreducible nature of humans with their material and embodied existence with the recognition of and call to care for the poor and vulnerable.

Throughout the film, various saints appear and interact with Damian. Their personalities are distinctly un-saint like. Saint Clare smokes a joint; Saint Peter is crabby; and the Martyrs are angry. Damian’s favorite stories of the saints involve defying social

conventions, norms, and expectations by taking vows of silence, refusing to obey familial obligations to marry and maiming and killing others.¹⁵ Although the saints live in both Damian's imagination and magical reality, they are active human agents in their cinematic portrayals and Damian's understanding of them. The saints Damian sees also interact in the world the same way as anyone else in existence. They open doors, hold objects, and can even bleed. When Damian meets Saint Clare, both her material reality is emphasized, as is her individual personality.

Her material presence is reinforced through a photo collage sequence and her interaction with physical props. When Damian meets Saint Clare, the scene begins with layered pictures of Damian and the nun falling on top of one another (fig.7). The pictures have been shot from above. Next, the crane shot zooms in from above to show Clare sitting across from Damian.



Figure 7: Layered introduction of St. Clare (From *Millions*)

¹⁵ Robert Orsi cautioned that saints have been used in discrepancies of power to enforce cultural structures, norms and expectations. He writes: “The saints are never innocent, nor are the effects of their presence singular” (2005, 4).

The photographs imply there is evidence of her material existence through her photographic indexicality and as the viewer sees her inhabit the same space as Damian. Her material reality is reinforced as she begins to smoke. In addition to her material presence, her human identity is underscored by her transgressive behaviors. Boyle seems to highlight her physical reality in order to fortify the viewer's understanding of Damian's subjectivity and to demonstrate that the saints are real people, not just heavenly figures.

While the saints are depicted as unique and personable beings, the recipients of Damian's gifts are equally memorable. Following St. Francis of Assisi's suggestion to use the money to help the poor, Damian follows this plan dogmatically. In a reflection of the neoliberal alienation in his cultural milieu, Damian is not even sure where to find people in need. As he reaches out to random individuals, each of the recipients turns out to be a type of "bastard." The characterization of them as undeserving people imply that Damian's motivations for generosity diverge from neoliberal conditionality and the ideal of a deserving recipient. The first set of recipients at Pizza Hut is deceitful, greedy and unthankful. The second set, the neighborhood Latter-day Saints, are selfish and hypocritical. Next, institutional charities are criticized for being aggressive and patronizing in their tactics. Finally, Damian's mother asks him to give to the person in his life that seems the most privileged financially and who has been harsh and mean towards Damian. While other media representations of those in need have evoked pity (Hughey, 2014; Chouliaraki 2013), Boyle re-imagines and redefines the poor and needy in a negative light or rather in their full humanity.

These scenes address the issue of trust in giving. These recipients are surely unworthy of Damian's gifts. Yet by contrasting the greedy appetite of arch-neoliberal Anthony to these similarly greedy characters that are in need, the viewer can recognize that everyone is undeserving in some way. A neoliberal evaluation of giving relies on trusting that one's good deed is a worthwhile effort toward a "good" and deserving person who has already been striving to improve their lives [insert deserving *Extreme Makeover* recipient here]. *Millions* reverses this proposition by portraying the idea that everyone is in need of material and relational generosity, even when it does not appear so.

In Damian's first act of charity, the poor deceive him and they prove they are undeserving. Damian displays a relational willingness to share with a young woman on a street corner who is passing out *Big Issue* magazines. First, he gives her cash for the magazine and tells her to keep the change. As she thanks him and mentions she has not eaten all day, Damian asks if she would like to come to Pizza Hut with him and Anthony. This casual moment of charity becomes a chance for exploitation. She asks if she can bring a friend. In addition to Damian, Anthony, the woman and her friend, three other people follow (exceeding the request of one friend) (fig.8).

They rapidly order different types of pizza. A close up shot of pizzas with slices rapidly disappearing parallel the concept of everyone grasping at their piece of the financial pie. The pizzas are named: Meat Feast, New Yorker, and Farmhouse, conveying the group is eating lavishly. As they are talking one man asks who will be paying. Anthony interjects that Damian has saved birthday money to treat them. Instead of being

astonished or appreciative that a child has chosen to be generous, the strangers eagerly jump on this opportunity to order extra dessert.



Figure 8: Walking to Pizza Hut. Damian and Anthony lead a growing line of people going to Pizza Hut.

A striking component of this scene is how unlikeable, and thus human, the “poor” are represented. First is the growing number of people joining in when at first, the girl had only asked if “a” friend could join. Next, the group is avaricious in their appetite with their rapid orders and quickly disappearing slices. When the time comes to order dessert, they eagerly order. On the one hand, these hungry people have a chance to feast and are taking full advantage of it. They are acting properly by attending to their own needs. On the other, they are merely displaying the same greed characterized by Anthony in his desire to consume more under the auspice of “self-care.” This group of recipients adheres to the competitive neoliberal structure of feeling by showing that lower class citizens also are grasping for a greater piece of the pie. This scene dramatically conveys

the pervasiveness of neoliberalism and how it has hegemonically secured the consent of marginalized groups. We are all enterprising neoliberals now.

This scene also highlights broader concerns related to the need for generosity in a neoliberal state. Two people at the table are in their mid 20s, one looks more middle-aged and the last person seems older. One might think, where there is one disadvantaged person, there are bound to be others. The movie opens up a space to see social issues such as hunger, poverty, and homelessness are not limited to individual cases, nor certain age groups. In contrast to the school scene discussed in Chapter 3 regarding raising money for clean water in Africa, this scene highlights needs in England. Both Western nations and the global South have marginalized and vulnerable others who require acts of generosity. For instance, the BBC reports that in 2011-2012 one in five children in the UK lives in poverty—a total of 2.6 million living in absolute poverty (Harrison 2013). Neoliberalism has created an uneven view of the distribution of resources obscuring the issue of poverty in Western societies. Žižek (2006) poses that charity is a necessary practice in neoliberalism by the nature of the system that causes intense concentration of wealth at the top. *Millions* brings forward this issue of uneven distribution of resources and how it affects a range of individuals.

This image of Damian “breaking bread” with the group is striking for its collegiality. Everyone is at the table eating together, including Damian and Anthony. This scene captures values of dignity, community and equity. Similarly, a common event in the early church was meeting together to share meals and the sharing of resources as described in the Book of Acts. Michael Katz contrasts these ideals of solidarity against

“considerations of productivity, costs and eligibility [that] have channeled discourse and need, entitlement and justice within narrow limits bounded by the market in his history of welfare in the United States” (1990, 3). Thus this complicated scene has both played upon neoliberal feelings toward the poor and yet demonstrated that the poor are “one of them.” The poor here can be categorized as undeserving; they have shown themselves to be misleading and opportunistic. In addition, hunger exists both in Western contexts as it does in the global South. Westerners must recognize conditions of inequality in their own nation and not obscure pressing social issues. Damian is happy to be sitting with this group and eating with them. He has not aggrandized his gift towards the strangers seeking recognition of his “good works”.

The theme of neoliberal self-interest among recipients is considered through the portrayal of the Latter-day Saints. Within Damian’s neighborhood, a group of three young men share a single house. They are seen frequently riding bikes together in tandem. They serve as an alternative example to the cultural ideal of single-family home ownership. Most likely these men are renting the home while on a religious mission, rather than owning. In addition, their uniform of white shirts, ties and suit jackets function counter-culturally in a consumer society where personal style is a form of distinction (Bourdieu 1979). However, their conformity lends another interpretation. These men signify an understanding that religious individuals should conform to and obey institutional rules. Damian spies one of the young men riding his bike and asks, “Are you poor?” The young man says they live simply without a dishwasher or microwave, so in a sense yes, they are poor. He explains their lifestyle is “very basic and

there is no cash in the house.” Damian responds enthusiastically to the Latter-day Saint by saying “Brilliant!” and running off. In response to the man’s answers, Damian concludes they are poor and gives them a donation that night by stuffing cash into their mailbox. St. Nicholas joins him and when Damian is disappointed the mailbox is full, he is told “The poor are always with us.”

In this moment, the film once again veers away from the neoliberal script of giving. Damian’s anonymous act and Saint Nicholas’s response are notable in comparison with the neoliberal drive to “end poverty as we know it.” While the neoliberal solution is to redirect the poor towards the workforce and eliminate people from welfare rolls, Saint Nicholas’s statement asserts the never-ending need to care for one another. In addition, Damian is enthusiastically willing to continue his charitable work. His actions immediately follow the Pizza Hut scene where he had been deceived and Anthony tried to redirect him. Undeterred and not suffering from donor fatigue, Damian is once again giving away money. Damian’s enthusiasm to give is framed as the appropriate attitude to giving, what Boyle describes as the sense that “we’re all in it together” in his director commentary. While Damian’s religious perspective emphasizes the never-ending needs of others, the neoliberal self focuses on their own never-ending needs in a consumer society.

In addition to Damian’s enthusiasm to give, his generosity has been relatively mundane and simplistic. His only condition has been that the receiver should be “poor.” He has not placed definitions around the meaning of poor. If he had stricter qualifications, the Latter-day Saints would not be eligible, as they seem to have the basic

necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Nor does he place conditions or expectations around his gift. He secretly gives the money to the religious men without expectations of what they will do with it. He does not leave a note or any directions. Damian does not ask anything in return of the people he helps or righteously rebuke them for dishonesty. The anonymity of his giving to the LDS men and the unappreciative response from the Pizza Hut group contradict the current trend of “feel good altruism” whereby altruism has been framed within the ideology of consumer choices and refocused as a project of the self (Chouliaraki 2013).

The consequences of this narrative event expose the hypocrisy of traditional religious adherents and their neoliberal framework. When the LDS men receive the donation, they interpret the gift as one for their personal benefit. The Latter-Day Saints purchase a digital television, microwave oven, dishwasher, and foot spa. They explain they had been praying for comfort and encouragement when questioned about their purchases later. Their acquisitions reveal that their prayers were inward-focused; for material encouragement and their own comfort as they live sparsely, and not the spiritual well-being of their neighbors. Despite their outward religiosity and decision to live in community, these men are unsatisfied and continue to pursue their own welfare. Their new, modern goods seem like luxuries in comparison to the other needs posed in the movie: clean water, bus fare, homes or homes within the vicinity of work. Even the denotatively religious group follows the neoliberal ethic of “self-care” first and succumbs to the consumerist therapeutic ethos. Boyle’s negative representation of the Latter-day Saints in their relative versus absolute need and self-focused hypocrisy are another

example of the unlikeable recipient. Damian has once again given to undeserving recipients.

The issue of community needs is juxtaposed with the requests of Christian organizations. Directly following the Latter-day Saints declaration that God was answering their needs, the scene cuts to Damian stuffing envelopes with donations to Christian organizations: the Samaritans, Oxfam, Christian Aid. In general, philanthropic organizations seek money both to pay for overhead costs such as mailings and their causes. While he is sorting the donations, St. Peter appears and warns Damian about donating to the groups. He says, "For Christ's sake, don't tick those little boxes, the ones about putting you in touch with like-minded organizations. You'll be besieged man. I'm telling you!" This is a humorous reflection of how even a saint thinks charities are aggressive in solicitations. Boyle depicts skepticism towards institutional religion by highlighting the hypocrisy of the Latter-day Saints and St. Peter's cynicism towards Christian solicitation. Instead of encouraging Damian to give freely to the Christian groups, St. Peter warns him he will be deluged with mail.

At the end of the film, Damian is charged with the challenge to be generous toward the primary bastard in the film, his brother Anthony. All through the movie, Damian has listened to and accepted Anthony. However they reach a breaking point and the boys end up in a huge argument. Anthony rages, "It's all your fault.... You and your weird stuff. Chucking money away. Talking to yourself. Seeing things... And me... Sticking up for you! For what? You're just a loony and you should be locked up." Damian is heartbroken and says, "Don't say that, please don't say that." Overall, Damian

is set apart from others from his religiosity but the money has caused a severe divide between the brothers. Anthony's true feelings regarding his brother's eccentricities erupt and he angrily poses that Damian should be separated from society. The boys seem irrevocably divided with different viewpoints regarding money and people.

Damian angrily leaves the house by himself and has a vision of his mother. When his mother appears, she does not encourage him to continue this quest of giving to the poor. Rather she advises him to believe in his brother. She says, "He's got a good heart. He just doesn't know where it is... Be good to him..." In addition she adds, "You must remember there's always enough good to go around. You've just got to have a bit of faith you know. If you've got faith in people, that makes them stronger." While the mother's advice sounds humanistic it is informed by Catholic teaching which is centered on the sacred individual and emphasis on relationality based on the Trinitarian relationship. Her advice is actually the hardest to practically apply as Damian and Anthony have oppositional viewpoints and their relationship has become highly charged. All along, Anthony has treated Damian and others paternally through a neoliberal hierarchy. The mother's advice of believing in people reaffirms values of equity and social support.

The mother's rejoinders highlight a more expansive attitude towards others, which seems to be significantly missing in neoliberalism. In neoliberalism those who are feared or disliked are excluded and separated through physical boundary work such as building gates and fences (Low 2003) and political policies such as institutionalization (Soss, Fording, Schram 2010). While neoliberalism is theoretically a neutral economic practice that distributes wealth along market principles, it also includes the ease of "feel

good altruism,” commodity activism or even giving money strategically. The challenge from the mother, to be generous to one’s opponents, appears impossible and counter to neoliberal principles. However the Catholic principles of mutual need cultivates the belief that everyone is a “bastard” in need of salvation and grace. Everyone recognizes that they themselves are in need and thus are not allowed to cast blame or judge others. Instead each individual is in need of the other in order to do God’s work. Damian needs his brother, just as his brother needs him.

At the very end of *Millions*, a miracle occurs which parallels St. Peter’s retelling of the parable of feeding the 5,000. St. Peter had explained to Damian that the feeding of the 5,000 or the Fishes and Loaves story was not a miracle created by Jesus but rather the result of “selfish bastards” who shared from their own supply of food. After Damian has been frustrated by all the turmoil from the money, including division between him and his brother and the robber’s revenge, he burns money on the railroad tracks. It appears to have burned away or been blown away in the wind. The next morning, Dorothy, the father’s girlfriend, announces, “It was fun while it lasted, huh?” She gets up and leaves, but returns. She tosses 6,310 euros onto the coffee table. Next the father admits to keeping 11,400 euros and adds it to the pile. Finally Anthony also throws down some money, 4,780 euros. He claims he liked the feel of the wedge of cash. They all look at Damian, who the viewer assumes has not taken any money. Typically in the movie, Anthony is the one to narrate financial amounts. In a reversal, this time it is Damian summing up the money. Reflecting the retold Fishes and Loaves story, his selfish family

members unexpectedly contribute money and Damian's "miracle" has been making money grow from nowhere.

Therefore, the film's narrative concludes that miracles really can result from originally selfish desires. As a nod to the reality of the self-interested neoliberal self, *Millions* incorporates this as a both/and component of generosity. The actual miracle occurs when the family pools the money symbolizing a combined effort at generosity. While this one time giving benefits the neoliberal water charity, the miracle occurs when there is a collective method of giving. Reflecting Boyle's vision of a post-Thatcher society where "we're all in it together," this movie seems to be asserting that generosity is possible in neoliberalism when people come together to solve social issues. On the other hand, these acts of generosity still succumb to neoliberal logic via grand gestures that can gain one social capital with the title of "philanthropist." The result of the combined funds leads to a seemingly happy and satisfactory conclusion for Damian's story.

Instead of following his original method of giving by distributing the wealth among many, Damian follows his brother's neoliberal model of investing the funds in one large-scale project. In the final scene, the Cunningham family runs through a desert toward a pipe of running water. An African community is pumping out overflowing water and celebrating. Damian's family joins the group playing in the water. This scene signifies that the running water is actually miraculous. The whole community is shown delighting in the basic element of water. Damian has finally made a difference in providing one of the most basic needs for someone else. He is responding to the appeal

from his friends, the Martyrs of Uganda, who had championed and given voice to the cause of accessible water with force and dignity.

Ultimately the ending of *Millions* tempers our expectations of generosity with the hegemony of neoliberal generosity. At first Damian operates through relational Catholic methods. Yet from a neoliberal standpoint these smaller instances of haphazard giving prove disappointing and frustrating without “results.” Damian then follows a neoliberal model of giving where a larger amount is donated in a bold statement. The gesture becomes self-gratifying, as Damian can feel good about the gift and the re-unification of his family. The film implies that Western societies have more than enough resources and it is a matter of people’s willingness to share abundantly that can create larger changes. This can occur through a paradigm shift in seeing others as human others. The reemphasis on human attributes, both admirable and unlikable, refocus the underlying reason of giving. If saints are given “sinner” qualities then what are the conditions one needs to meet in order to deserve generosity? Along with the question of conditionality in giving, the film advocates a greater trust and belief in others. At one point St. Peter tells Damian that the young boy in the Fishes and Loaves tale made everyone else seem bigger. Rather than the neoliberal distrust and suspicion of others, this act of giving and sacrifice enabled the “selfish bastards” to demonstrate their better selves. This theme leads to an overall betterment, not the recognition of the philanthropist. Michael Harrington echoes this collective hope in an American context that “when we join, in solidarity and not in noblesse oblige, with the poor, we will rediscover our own best selves... we will regain the vision of America” (1984, 13).

The Cunningham family parallels St. Peter's narrative after Damian has unconditionally loved them. Finally, even though some aspects of generosity may be exploited, generosity can make a substantial impact in the existence of people across the world. Meeting the basic requirement of clean, running water becomes an exceedingly generous act for people who need it. Boyle is advocating that generosity is possible in a neoliberal world. However, it is clear that social problems are in need of wider solutions than privatized giving. Samuel Moyn describes the re-legitimization of humanitarianism in the post-Cold War morality as a series of "individual entitlements." But this development has been at the cost of ignoring "the relevance of economic and larger structural relationship for the realization of those entitlements" (Moyn 2010, 225). While *Millions* strongly promotes the underlying interconnections and imperfections of humanity that must be at the foundation of generosity, it remains within the neoliberal policy of privatized solutions.

This chapter demonstrates the normalization of neoliberalism across social realms and into the territory of generous actions. Giving and receiving in blockbusters such as *Pay It Forward* operate within neoliberal principles that prioritize self-care and rational actions. Damian's first attempts at being generous challenge norms in media representations which privilege deserving recipients and rationalized philanthropy. His actions towards the undeserving seem irrational, inefficient and ineffective. While his giving transforms into a hegemonic operation based on a one-time generous gift, the narrative events maintain that Damian has subverted traditional philanthropy through a collective gift. But by demonstrating that saints are also sinners and recasting the

neoliberal individual, Boyle reorients the viewer to our definitions of being human and how deserving one may be. Instead of neoliberalism's valuation of one's life according to one's utility and ability to produce and consume, Boyle highlights non-capitalist modes of thought valuing human fragility and solidarity.

**CHAPTER FIVE: MONEY TALKS: THE TIES BETWEEN PRIVATE LIVES
AND PUBLIC CHOICES**

It is good to rely upon others for no one can bear this life alone.

—Friedrich Hölderlin

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

—Luke 12:34 [NIV]

It is more blessed to give than to receive.

— Acts 20:35 [NIV]

*Charity starts at home.*¹⁶

—English Proverb

This chapter unpacks the counter-narrative in *Millions* to “love your enemy” in continuing the discussion on the neoliberal framing of the self/other founded on delineations of productive and unproductive bodies that constrain generosity. The neoliberal way of life is premised on being self-protective and self-indulgent. Consequently practicing generosity is construed as self-improvement and ultimately as a form of self-love. Religious forms of charity are generally based on love for and pleasure

¹⁶ Considered one of the most widely abused proverb as an excuse not to give, Thomas Henry Stokoe explains that “But while declaring that our charity must begin at home, it is far from implying that it must end there” (1859, 8).

in the well-being of others. The Biblical advice in Matthew 5 to “turn the other cheek” and to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44 [NIV]) relays the radical call to love even in pain and hurt. Generosity in this sense requires humility and self-denial; it is relational. Loving one’s enemies works in the larger understanding that we live *with* and in relation to one another, not as isolated beings. Instead of the binary distinction of self and other, recognition of our dependence upon and need for other can cultivate generosity in a manner not of noblesse oblige or self-congratulations but for the purpose of the common good.

In *Millions*, Damian’s capacity to love and extend generosity to social outcasts appears easy; it is loving his neighbor, who is both his brother and enemy, that is most challenging. The film inquires as to how we love others *in* their otherness. How do we love and connect with people who hold differing ideas or who hold our ideas in contempt? The narrative in *Millions* attempts to position viewers into a space that allows questioning the neoliberal assumptions of understanding generosity as a simple act of helping an Other. It raises the question of relational generosity and how that may be undertaken. In the film, money is the primary medium for testing Damian’s religious faith, yet Boyle underscores that relational generosity can be more difficult than monetary generosity. Loving one’s neighbor proves both banal in providing basic needs such as food and water but also incalculable in meeting someone else’s deeper desires for recognition, security and love. It seems in the latter, these spiritual needs are the primary foundation for extending ourselves towards the other. Without this recognition, attempts

to care are empty acts that St. Paul calls a “resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1 [NIV]).

The film juxtaposes the religious perspective that money is a communal resource and a source of equity and the neoliberal perspective that money is private and a signifier of personal effort and success. Placing the brothers’ activities side-by-side illuminates the way money has become the determining measure of good in both the neoliberal frame and in religion. The ability to be “good” or do good is dependent on having more money. Anthony “invests” in himself; Damian “invests” in the poor. Anthony is bound to the material world where people work to eat and are cautious in conditions of risk and death. Rather than exposing himself to insecurity, Anthony seeks to insulate and insure himself with a personal fortress of wealth. For Damian, despite loss, there is still community and abundance. His outlook is fueled by his playful imagination and a religious world of mystery. For him, the good life is a place without poverty, one that can be rectified by money. Even with his imaginative capacity, the ending does not imagine a solution other than one supplied by money. Nevertheless, Damian’s joyful quest to give to the poor contrasts with the alleged joy found in the material “good life.” In his playful acts, giving becomes the focus and the subject, not Damian himself. Similar to the act of playing music, writing, or other types of creation, one becomes directed towards the process itself.

In addition to the dominant logic of money as a measure for goodness, the neoliberal modus operandi of individual choice has influenced religious action. Individual choice is the basis of how we make decisions and the context of how we

understand our social experience. However, the fallacy of the self-contained individual is exposed as the private emerges in and influences public actions. Private pain can be an instigator of public violence. But private pain and personal vulnerability can also serve as a foundation for mutual understanding. At this juncture of self and affect, money can facilitate violence or serve as a bridge. *Millions* simultaneously fetishizes and devalues money to emphasize its role in our relationships and its connection to the way we treat others.

This last chapter considers the importance of thinking through religious principles on money regarding how religious people use money and its religious motivations. *Millions* draws from specific Catholic principles that tie together money and social ethics. Money can be an avenue for social good, not merely for personal well-being. The film brings to the forefront the universal Catholic principle regarding the dignity of all human beings and liberation theology's preferential option for the poor that affirms them. The emphasis on human *dignity* differs from humanitarian discourse on human *rights*. Whereas it is possible for both a neoliberal and a relational generosity to respect the dignity of the person, relational generosity mandates respect of dignity, whereas this respect is largely not the point in neoliberal generosity: the focus is on the giver and the receiver, and not the relationship between the two.

Dignity is not only about the distribution of wealth but the valuation and treatment of the person. It is prior to the law. Cary Wolfe makes a useful intervention in the discussion of rights in his separate discussion on the blurring distinctions between

“humans and other animals.” He makes a connection between rights and economics

claiming:

...when genuine issues of justice and injustice are framed in terms of rights, they are thereby distorted and trivialized. ...The rights model...is concerned not with justice and compassion but with ‘a system of entitlement’ and with who gets what within such a system. Instead...what is crucial to our sense of the injustice done to animals is our repulsion at the brute subjection of the body that they so often endure. (2012, 17)

Wolfe articulates that animals and all living beings have ontology before the law; however they become framed inside and outside of it to delineate who counts and who does not. In this discussion on private and public uses of money, concepts of ownership, neighbors, and generosity are articulated through a Catholic lens premised on universal dignity. This ideal attempts to bring all life into the frame with its focus on the poor. The movie demonstrates an alternate, decentered mode of understanding money first through Damian’s perspective on ownership and the self/other connection, and second by his allocation of money in contrast to his brother’s endeavors.

Millions makes apparent the connections between beliefs and action through its portrayal of the ways we use money. While money is an abstraction, a sign, it mediates and ratifies human thought. Paolo Virno pinpoints its conceptualization through “the idea of equivalency” where money is a placeholder “which is in itself utterly abstract, [it] acquires a concrete existence, even jingles inside a wallet. A thought becoming a *thing*” (Virno 2013, 261). The ways characters use money materially reflects their thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes towards God, themselves, and others. Our money, our possessions, and our religious beliefs are all commonly considered to be private matters and

maintained within the private domain. Prohibitions around speaking about money, religion, or politics in polite conversation defies the ways each topic has a public and social dimension tied to public obligations. This tension between personal and public in moral obligations comes to the forefront in *Millions* as characters strategically use their money.

Individual Ownership and Social Solidarity

The historical import on social justice in the Catholic Church is connected to Biblical principles and also following Gustavo Gutiérrez's generative treatise regarding "preferential option for the poor" in his *Theology of Liberation* (1971). According to the U.S Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) *Economic Justice for All*:

Jesus takes the side of those most in need. As followers of Christ we are challenged to make a fundamental 'option for the poor' —to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. (1986, no. 16)

The Catholic principle of "preference for the poor" recognizes systematic injustices and insists that Christian life involves solidarity with the poor through social and political action. Preference for the poor recognizes that healthy societies can only be achieved by meeting the needs of all its members (USCCB 1986). For the larger Christian community and Catholics in particular, part of their religious identity is connected with the image of God as standing on the side of social justice.

In its social teachings the Catholic Church demonstrates solidarity with and an ethos of serving the poor and socially marginalized. For Paul Farmer and Gustavo Gutiérrez, a preference for the poor means accompanying the poor in their daily

struggles—“their experience of exclusion and nonlove, of being forgotten, of having no social rights”, raising a prophetic voice in the public square, and working to transform unjust social conditions through action (2013, 27). Countering any belief that poverty is the will of God, Gutiérrez says “Indeed, to be for the poor is not to accept their poverty” (2013, 29). Based on the final judgment elaborated through the story of the sheep and goats, Jesus welcomes those who have used their resources to care for others in corporal acts of mercy. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* elaborates upon the issue of social solidarity in its proclamations on the universal destination and the private ownership of goods. In its teaching on ownership, it states: “In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself” (2404). It also connects personal economic temperance to care for one’s neighbor in order to create relations of equity.

In order to convey the prominence given to social justice, it is fitting to quote the *Catechism* at length:

In economic matters, respect for human dignity requires the practice of the virtue of temperance, so as to moderate attachment to this world's goods; the practice of the virtue of justice, to preserve our neighbor's rights and render him what is his due; and the practice of solidarity, in accordance with the golden rule and in keeping with the generosity of the Lord, who “though he was rich, yet for your sake . . . became poor so that by his poverty, you might become rich.” (2407)

Therefore, not only does Catholic doctrine emphasize economic solidarity but also an aspiration and alliance with the poor predicated on the respect for the dignity and inherent worth of all people. This foundational teaching is reflected in Pope Francis’ encouragement in *Evangelii Gaudium* to the Catholic community to be a “church of the

poor and for the poor” (2013). His message is validated in a personal manner and made concrete as he has made church reforms and lived a more modest lifestyle.¹⁷ Anthea Butler articulates that Pope Francis’ emphasis on the poor is a return to the traditional language of Church that has been subsumed by Protestant Evangelical doctrines on the body (Kugler 2013). More than doctrine and duty, Father Gustavo and Father Boyle speak of friendship, equity, and intimacy with the poor. Father Gustavo says, “If there is no friendship with the poor and no sharing of life of the poor, then there is no authentic commitment to liberation, because love exists only among equals” (1973, xxxi). This call to be in relationship and friendship with the poor is an interesting component of Damian’s quest in his gentrified town and in the company of his suspicious brother.

In the premise to give away money, *Millions* references tensions between religious communities and interpretations of wealth. Some narratives assert the lifestyle of monasticism and a rejection of wealth. Therefore, the way one handles money becomes a test to pass or fail. One fails by idolizing money and coveting it; one passes by holding it loosely. Others see material blessings as a sign of God’s approval. The prosperity gospel, sometimes called health and wealth gospel, is connected to ministries led by Oral Roberts, Joyce Meyers, and Joel Osteen as well as in Black Pentecostalism led by Rev. Ike, Carlton Pearson, & E. Bernard Jordan (Coleman 2000; Walton 2009; Harrison 2005; Lofton 2011). Currently, an extremely popular Christian narrative connects the responsible use of money to the sign of being a good steward. The latter is in

17 Although this alliance with the poor is not always realized, the history of the Catholic Church has periods of reforms following abuses of wealth as called upon by the Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits (Kreis 2002).

a sense, embodied in Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace ministry.¹⁸ Of these threads involving religious theologies on wealth, *Millions* draws upon the lives of St. Clare and St. Francis.

These Franciscan saints took vows of poverty and maintained that their respective orders would not own property (Bangley 2005). Referencing these figures guides the trajectory of the film around the question of personal choices regarding wealth and religious belief and implies that an authentic religious life involves a rejection of material wealth at least to a certain extent. The Catholic paradox of "both/and" articulated by Pope Benedict XVI is apparent as one utilizes wealth for social good in itself but also recognition that giving to others is an act towards God¹⁹. Within the Bible, caring for others is not optional; God says the treatment of the poor, alien, and widow reflects one's treatment of God himself. In the passage Matthew 25:34-46 God proclaims care of the hungry, thirsty, clothes-less or sick should be performed as if God was the individual in need. "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" (Matt. 25: 40 [NIV]). Therefore, this theological measure is not only rooted in social concern founded on dignity for the human person but a fundamental respect for God. Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker ministry and Mother Theresa's Missionaries of Charity exemplify these high standards of

18 Ramsey has a large following for his financial advice. In one story, Ramsey discusses how he lost his Jaguar in financial misfortune but following better stewardship of his resources was able to purchase another one (Ramsey 2012).

19 Pope Benedict's "both/and" theology recognizes that humans enact good on earth but in reliance upon God's grace (Filtreau 2005).

Catholic care. Damian carries on this principle in the ways he gives to those he identifies as “poor” without hesitation.

In addition to serving God, these saints lived in community with others. Their common life is based on the early life of the apostles in the Book of Acts where “the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and one soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (Acts 4:32 [NRS]). Generosity and sharing was a form of life. While St. Francis and St. Clare lived a specific vocational calling to monasticism, their actions and sense of unity counter the commodification and consumerism rampant in late capitalism. On the basis that religious people should demonstrate a religious life, *Millions* addresses the question of validating religious beliefs based on how one handles his or her money for the benefit of others. Similarly, Damian’s handing of the money is monastic in that he distributes it generously.

Damian’s general attitude towards ownership and resources is collective, not individual. In his actions during the film, Damian demonstrates that rather than seeing the money as his alone, he never seems to outright lay claim to it. His understanding of life conveys the sentiment in Mother Teresa’s quote that “we belong to one another.” The film expresses the concept of interdependence with one another and other forms of life. Notably, Damian’s first act with the cash is an act of generosity towards animals where he releases birds from a cage. His actions parallel the stories of St. Francis, who is noted for his love of all creation and especially as a friend to animals. St. Francis was able to communicate with them, preached to birds, released rabbits and fish and tamed a wolf

(Feister). Thus the film alludes to a sense that collective welfare extends beyond the anthropomorphic to other animals and even our environment.

The purpose of money in Damian's eyes is for collective welfare and becomes the motivation behind his giving. Chapter Three highlights the way he situated his playhouse in a public field. By building the shelter in a public place he could not be considered the owner. Later, when Damian finds the money, he shares it with his brother without reservation and then with the community around him. Upon seeing the money, Anthony begins using the cash as if he has an actual claim to it. However, following a kind of Imperialistic logic of "finder's keepers", the cash really belongs to Damian. Despite this fact, he never challenges Anthony over ownership of the money or his use of it.

Damian thinks the money has come from God. Within many Christian communities, giving is advocated based on the belief that all wealth comes from God. Thus one is merely the steward of wealth, not the primary owner of it. Similarly, Damian never displays ownership of the money. In contrast to a cultural belief in "finder's keepers,"²⁰ or private ownership of land, money or possessions, Damian freely gives to his brother, neighbors and strangers. While Catholic teaching highlights social solidarity and the responsibility of each individual towards others, neoliberalism emphasizes one's responsibility towards the self and self-management in an uncertain world.

According to cultural theorist Terry Eagleton, the capitalist success ethic requires a rationale for actions, a point and purpose. Encoded in this logic, acts of generosity

²⁰ Finders keepers logic follows the neoliberal enterprise drive to capitalize on one's resources in contrast to the more ethical practice of attempting to locate the original owner of something that has been found. This is complicated by knowledge that the money has been stolen that the viewer is aware of and Anthony suspects.

require an end reward as justification. The neoliberal rhetorical explanation for generosity is often to “empower” others to achieve their own personal success. For instance, celebrity philanthropist Oprah Winfrey has articulated that the purpose behind her giving to build the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls is to instill the lesson that “we are responsible for ourselves, that you create your own reality by the way you think and therefore act” (Gien 2007, 160). In addition, she proclaims, “you cannot blame apartheid, your parents, your circumstances, because you are not your circumstances. You are your possibilities. If you know that, you can do anything” (217). Oprah’s rationale for generosity is constructed within the neoliberal ideology of freedom, choice, and self-reliance. It reinforces and validates her own personal empire built around consumption with the idea that others can emulate her life too. The American Dream narrative comes to fruition in *The Blind Side* as Leigh Anne Tuohy adopts homeless Michael Oher into her family. She empowers him with knowledge and insights into football. With his size and strength he is recruited to college football and later becomes a first-round pick of the Ravens. In contrast to this philosophy that generosity is in one’s own benefit, Eagleton alludes to Aristotle’s formation whereby acting well is itself a reward. Aristotle remarked: “It is not as though the reward for virtue is happiness; being virtuous is to be happy” (quoted in Eagleton 2003, 116). Neoliberalism’s need to dignify and rationalize giving with a reward removes the natural dignity of giving itself, whereas giving should be its own reward without the need for legitimation or benefit to the giver.

The logic of individualism is also observable in Western practice of religion today. Although the Catholic Church affirms an alliance with the poor, this is mostly

enacted voluntarily. Previously, creating infrastructure, such as building orphanages, hospitals and schools, was a predominant practice; now practices of generosity become a means to perform one's personal religious identity. In this era of globalization and global media, Stewart Hoover and Monica Emerich have noted that many people draw from a variety of symbols and resources to construct an expressive and unique 'self' (2012, 4). Although the religious quest has become personal and individualized, people must authenticate their beliefs through their public appearance, performance and practices. Financial responsibility becomes an indicator to validate religious belief. Using money for personal benefit or improper uses of money has disgraced church leaders whereas personal financial restraint is seen as validation of religious beliefs.

Damian ostensibly encapsulates the current understanding of religion as an individual project and authorized by the self. Stewart Hoover (2006) has argued that especially in the West, religious practice has predominantly become a mission to construct and articulate an individual religious self. Jeffrey Mahan elaborates that today religion "is not inherited but chosen, developed, and performed" (2014, 27). Religious identity is constructed and developed rather than inherited or rooted in a singular tradition. As addressed in Chapter 4, Damian is understood to have a Catholic identity and his mother was a religious influence, he expresses this through his rhetoric, interactions with saints, and giving. His religiosity is not institutionally based. Damian does not follow institutionalized practices of going to church service, praying, or reading the Bible. His primary religious text is the children's book, *Six O'clock Saints*, a collection of fictionalized and idealized stories about the saints. Appearing consistently

with the book, he interprets the stories as messages of social subversion and disorder, rather than adherents to strict dictates or social propriety. Damian is so immersed in the lives of saints that they become the primary narratives through which he views and relates to everyday life. He interjects their stories in relation to his various activities—while he is moving, at school, and at a community meeting, becoming a type of evangelist for the saints. The saints become an even larger presence in his life as they appear to him throughout the film. Therefore, although Damian appears to be acting individually the witness and encouragement of the saints surround him. He is not alone. Guided by the stories of their lives, Damian's faith and empathy for the poor is signified by haphazard and unrestricted giving.

Damian's giving reinforces his outspoken religiosity. His mission to give away the discovered cash is rooted in his religious beliefs and follows the encouragement and instruction he receives from Catholic saints. St. Francis's prescribes that he gives away the money to the poor. This recommendation references the Catholic social teaching on preferential option for the poor.

Corresponding to the religious standpoint, Damian's attention is directed toward the care of others, not himself. Not only is Damian concerned for his neighbors, he reaches out to complete strangers and attempts to give in ways that cannot be reciprocated. This principle is highlighted in this passage in Luke:

When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. (Luke 14:12-13 [NIV])

While his brother uses the money to gain friends and influence people, Damian gives to people he may never see again, who take advantage of him, and may not be likeable. His giving often comes at detriment to himself. Although Damian does seek the presence of his mother, this relationship is founded on seeing people as an end, not a means to an end. His desire for community and relationship is not selfish according to Catholic teaching, but the recognition that humans are social beings rooted in mutual need. Therefore, the actions depicted in *Millions* specifically reject neoliberalism's individualistic orientation and emphasis on self-advancement that trumps the desire for intimacy and relationships.

The church's systematic call to care for the oppressed and marginalized stands in contrast with the notion of optional and privileged ability to make individual choices. Damian's abundant giving diverges with how giving to the poor in neoliberalism is contested and debated. Catholic social teaching specifically supports care for one's enemy and desire to see the other's good, even advancing their good above one's own (Philippians 2: 2-3). Old Testament practices such as gleaning and jubilee were meant as a systematic counterbalance to inequality. The command to "love your neighbor" comes from the Good Samaritan narrative whereby one's neighbor is one's enemy. This proscription operated both individually and collectively whereby Jews were called collectively to recognize their culturally despised enemy at the expense of one's time, safety, energy and money.

The limits of defining one's neighbor are considered in Luke 10: 25-37 when an expert in Biblical law asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25

[NIV]). In response, Jesus tells a story where among a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan, only the Samaritan takes the time to help a Jewish man who had been robbed, beaten and left half-dead on the side of the road. The expectation in this story is that one of the religious individuals, the priest or the Levite, a temple worker, assists the man. However, Jesus tells a story where the Jewish enemy, the Samaritan, takes a risk stopping on a remote road to help the injured man. The Samaritan not only comes to his aid but also takes him to an inn and pays for all the expenses for his care. The first step in the Samaritan's concern was compassion for the Jewish stranger, then a need for his financial generosity. This story is referenced by the U.S. Catholic Council of Bishops' "What We Believe" section as an example of "recogniz[ing] the dignity in the other and car[ing] for his life." The Good Samaritan tale enables recognition of the other by telling a story where a Jewish man was in need of help, essentially asking the law expert to identify and imagine himself in place of the Jewish character. By seeing himself as the person in need, the Jewish expert can appreciate and value the typically despised Samaritan as a human being he needs (Catholic Answers). This story engages imaginative role-playing in order to challenge the cultural and racial divides of the day.

Corresponding to the Good Samaritan narrative, Damian takes care of people at the edges of his neighborhood who are typically considered social enemies or at the very least irritations for infringing on one's time or personal space with their requests—those who are rarely accorded attention nor socially privileged. He treats people on the street to a meal, stuffs money into the mailbox of his Latter-day Saint neighbors and drops a roll of cash for the cause of building water wells. The first and the latter scenarios are

typically viewed as optional cases for generosity. There is no requirement that Damian give to people on the street or humanitarian causes. The second group is typically avoided and often the butt of social jokes and commentary; *The Book of Mormon* Broadway hit being the latest. Damian does so without first assessing these people on the basis of their productivity but rather on the principle of loving one's neighbor. They too need recognition, care, and validation.

Damian breaks social norms in his consideration of these individuals. The normality with which he treats sharing with them and giving to them breaks from predominant neoliberal narratives of zoning off or flight from undesirable people (Mike Davis, 1999; Cohen, 2003; Ahmed, 2004). Neoliberalism allows the inclusion of the poor and working class to a certain extent as a group in which to define oneself against, not with. Agamben's formation of the *inclusive exclusion* illuminates the scenario whereby the poor are simultaneously inside society while outside of many of its privileges and operations. Catholic social engagement attempts to bring inside and make visible those who have been marginalized.

A separate parable involving an interaction between Jesus and a Samaritan woman in John 4 breaks the racial and cultural divide and adds gender. This account highlights Jesus breaking both social and religious customs in communicating with her. While the Good Samaritan places the outsider, the stranger, as the hero of the narrative over the religious characters, this story singles out an individual who would typically be socially disregarded and invisible in Jewish culture. *Millions* follows the Biblical

command to love one's neighbor as oneself and show "concern for everybody." Both stories emphasize values of equality, compassion, and recognition.

Charity Starts at Home

Although primarily *Millions* revolves around the issue of money, the film's distinctive contribution is its conceptualization of generosity- both as unrestricted financial giving and relationality with one's enemies. Coming back to the dialectic between private and public, Damian appears primarily outwardly directed in his unrestricted concern for the financially poor. Yet the film also follows the rapport between the brothers and the ways they treat one another. At first it is Anthony who is relationally generous, he demonstrates mild interest in his brother's fascination with religion. In one of the first scenes as the family is moving, Damian relays a story about St. Anne, the patron saint of moving, where angels transported her home from the desert to Italy. To this, Anthony asks a follow-up question asking, "Was she in it [the house] at the time? When the angels did the... you know the airlift?" As the movie continues, Damian offers Anthony grace, listening to his plots and never attempting to alter his brother's capitalist viewpoint despite their contrasting attitudes towards money. He continues to seek out his brother and desire his friendship. Although the brothers do argue as events progress, the film culminates in their reunification. This narrative element contributes to a narrative construction of relational generosity, as will be discussed in more detail later on.

This movement between the brothers where Anthony moves one step forward, then backwards as Damian takes a step, illustrates the actions needed in solidarity and collaboration. The brothers are not simply individuals with distinct viewpoints but beings responding to and interacting with one another. In our current social world as we move between the private and public, sharp lines of demarcation and verbal abuse, even bullying and trolling, mark debates and public discourse on politics and religion. We prioritize our individual sense of personhood over responsibility to others. Public shaming seems the norm in comparison with attempts to acknowledge another's perspective or even having curiosity regarding another's opinions. The Biblical command to "love your enemy" is viewed as an unproductive disruption, draining one's personal energy and resources. It falls outside of the primary ontology of the self as entrepreneurial and the need to build one's human and financial capital. Karen Armstrong, author of *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, articulates that "People don't want to be compassionate, they want to be right." Armstrong contends that our concern for our own position and ourselves overrides any consideration for others. Her book offers twelve practical steps on practicing compassion in a Charter for Compassion. Drawing upon these observations, one can conclude that in both our private and public lives, being generous listeners and generous readers may be the most effective means of living with one another.

Bringing together brothers at opposite ends of ideological spectrums, Boyle recognizes how our identities can be developed in opposition to one another. However, this opposition fuels new possibilities. At the end of the story filled with difference and

division, Anthony willingly offers his unused portion of the cash to Damian. He has learned to let go of the money and be generous. Together, the brothers form an alliance with Ronnie and Daisy, pooling together the cash they had divvied up. While Damian gets his wish of contributing to the well building charity, he also adopts Anthony's accounting prowess. He has gained a new skill or understanding from his brother. This collaboration results in a physical creation independent of all of them, the water pump in Africa. This structure can be seen in Anthony's eyes as "results." Collectively the family demonstrates how a sum can be greater than its parts and even in opposition, good outcomes can be produced.

Various disciplines have begun to problematize the juxtapositions of self/other, enemies and contagions along the question of mutual need. The area of biopolitics is pioneering a re-examination in understanding how the self is constituted and in need of the other. In connection with the articulation of generosity, biopolitics is one arena that highlights the use of rhetoric in the creation of an enemy that is, in reality, required for one's existence. Through the metaphor of immunity, theorists articulate how contagions once primarily represented as outside threats are essential for survival (Haraway 2014; Esposito 2014; Wolfe 2012). I draw upon these authors as further support of how the Other is discursively constructed and misrecognized corresponding to the 1% as givers and 47% as "takers".

In her article, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies Constitutions of Self in the Immune System Discourse," Donna Haraway examines how the immune system is a map for "recognition and misrecognition of the self and other... a plan for meaningful action

to construct and maintain the boundaries for what may count as self and other in the crucial realms of the normal and the pathological” (2013, 275). Counter to the discourse in the 1980s constructed around an aggressive war against external threats such as viruses, bacteria, etc. that created a metaphorical binary of Self and Other, Haraway utilizes several examples including one from Nobel-Prize winning immunologist, Niels Jerne’s theory of immune system self-regulation. This theory is based on an active internal image where an antibody molecule could “act functionally as both antibody to some antigen *and* as antigen for the production of an antibody to itself” (291). Thus “‘self’ and ‘other’ lose their rationalistic oppositional quality and become subtle plays of partially mirrored readings and responses” (2013, 291). In Haraway’s argument against the rhetoric constituting the “self as a defended stronghold”, she makes room for the experience of death and finitude which she finds inhospitable in the liberal discourse on the individual. For her, “life is a window of vulnerability. It seems a mistake to close it” (2013, 297). Robert Esposito also takes on the concept of immunity explaining that the “proto-functional principle that all parts of the body, including toxic germs that come to infect it from the outside, when looked at a little farther away, ultimately contribute to the body’s health and safety” (330). Angela Mitropoulos addresses the semantics of defense and invasion that create boundaries between productive and unproductive bodies or reproduction and production that enacts hierarchies based on gender, class, or race for exclusion. These distinctions connected to capitalist appraisal lose sight of what is most necessary for survival—our dependence on those we label as threats to our well-being. The capitalist social contract that acknowledges self-interest retains its power by

discourses blaming others as contagions and threats to the national body and finding ways to minimize certain forms of labor as merely reproductive. Far from an ethos of generosity, this system functions on the ability to sacrifice many for the benefit of a few.

Millions attempts to reconfigure our ideas of care and social concern within the neoliberal system that privileges bodies that are able to insulate themselves from risk privately over others. Although it succeeds on the level of renewing the importance of social trust and community, the film fails to address the hierarchy in ranking givers themselves. The topic of the giver is rendered invisible in the discussion of who is given to and methods of giving. Who actually gives the most in our society?

Chapter One briefly addressed the issue of gaining recognition and social capital through giving. Instead of those who top lists ranking monetary giving, can we imagine Damian's recipients of gifts as the primary givers in society? As the *Big Issue* girl asks to bring a friend, the chain of followers can be seen as generosity practiced among the poor in sharing resources and opportunities. By using a percentage measure or one of proportionality, the ways the homeless share with one another can be much greater than the percentage the most financially generous contribute. Or could we recognize migrant workers and refugees who work on farms or meat processing plants as perhaps the most generous contributors in the contribution of their physical labor? Boyle presents the possibility to reconceive of the poor as the most generous in society, as I will continue below.

Certainly the film effectively demonstrates the neoliberal crowding out concern for the "poor" and the ways the poor have become invisible through gentrification.

Millions emphasizes the immanent nature of neoliberalism that prioritizes continuous consumption and housing ownership. Instead of blaming the poor for their lack of ingenuity and resourcefulness, the poor are shown in the movie to take advantage of the scenarios presented to them. By alluding to the invisibility of the actual poor, more attention to the structural causes of widening economic inequality could be addressed as well as the need for food stamp programs, healthcare, childcare, and education. The movie pointedly notes the issue of discrimination and residential segregation, and social isolation. (When Damian invites the *Big Issue* girl to Pizza Hut, Anthony clearly tries to pull him away, shying away from the girl.) Yet it is unable to demonstrate the political and decisions which reduce social benefits and direct spending to certain causes over others. In addition, Damian, retains his position of privilege and gains renown for his actions. The poor he attempts to help are portrayed as having the same neoliberal mindset as Anthony that operates within the film's critique of neoliberal thinking. The primary focus on the depiction of the poor recognizes their communal orientation to share.

Boyle's solution to individualism is community and the value of ensuring basic needs. Boyle offers various examples of communities. The group at Pizza Hut is an assembly of poor and homeless friends who had invited one another to join the feast. The Latter-Day Saints also live communally as they proselytize. This collective principle seems to fly under the radar as these characters themselves do not seem particularly likeable in their greed or because they were sharing creature comforts, not necessities. Instead Boyle valorizes the African community that receives the water pump. Boyle seems to play upon a neoliberal assumption about the "deserving poor" who are

appreciative of generosity and whose situation seems far removed from those who are generous. This concluding scene highlights the ethos of sharing resources together and an appreciation for one of the most basic human resources, clean water. As highlighted in Chapter Two on viewer interpretations, viewers did not pick up on the concept of communal sharing. The reviews I found did not admire communal living or remark upon personal sacrifice or that love for one another trumps individual self-interest. The takeaways revolved around individual giving rather than collective pooling together. This interpretation may be the result of the series of random gestures Damian makes that places an emphasis on his individual actions over the ending that highlights collective giving as an alternative to individualistic giving.

Since the film distorts typical perceptions of saints and sinners, the role of giver or philanthropist could have been challenged and reimagined. My vision of this possibility is drawn from Barbara Ehrenrich's *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, an exploration of trying to make ends meet in the service profession. In her conclusion, she re-conceptualizes the gift and the role of philanthropist:

When someone works for less pay than she can live on—when, for example, she goes hungry so that you can eat more cheaply and conveniently—then she... has made you a gift of some part of her abilities, her health and her life. The “working poor,” as they are approvingly termed, are in the fact the major philanthropists of our society. (2002, 221)

In Ehrenrich's opinion, it is truly those on the fringes that give their bodies and efforts for the livelihood of others that are the true givers in society. This type of giving is not a

choice but constituted out of necessity on the giver's part and collusion from the enterprise system that capitalizes on cheap labor.

In 2010, Stephen Colbert made a similar argument by participating in an exposé for the United Farm Workers 'Take Our Jobs' campaign in which he worked on a farm. During the *Colbert Report* episode, Arturo Rodriguez, president of United Farm Workers claimed:

Most of the food on your table has been harvested and cared for by unauthorized workers. U.S. agriculture would need to hire one million citizens to replace the immigrant laborers. Mass deportation of agriculture workers would cause the collapse of the agriculture industry as we know it. (Zak 2010)

Take Our Jobs' recognizes the intense labor these workers enact that enables Americans to have cheap produce. Similarly, Marx had illuminated the monstrous, vampire-like qualities of capitalism that sucks the vitality from and stunts the laborer. He wrote: "Capital is dead labor which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks" (Marx Capital, 233). Capital is formed from the excess surplus value derived by draining the living.

Not only is the physical exertion of manual and service laborers a component in the capitalist engine, another set of "philanthropists" in the United States generate revenue for the country through ticket fines and fees imposed by law enforcement. A report from the Department of Justice investigators has cited the city of Ferguson, Missouri's strategy of using its municipal court to aggressively generate record-breaking revenues. According to the report, "Investigators found Brockmeyer had boasted of creating a range of new court fees, "many of which are widely considered abusive and

may be unlawful” (Swaine 2015). Not only were the poorer citizens harshly penalized and then imprisoned when unable to pay the fines, officials were found to be writing off offenses for their own friends and themselves. The Justice Department report continues highlighting how Ferguson officials used the rhetoric of blaming “certain segments” with a “lack of personal responsibility” in these cases of systematic racial bias and abuse as they condoned their own lack of responsibility (Epstein 2015).

Ehrenrich makes the appeal that the proper response to the current unjust socioeconomic reality is shame: “the appropriate emotion is shame—shame at our *own* dependency, in this case on the underpaid labor of others” (2002, 221). *Millions* briefly acknowledges the ways the poor face challenges such as unaffordable housing, increased travel times to reach work, and low wages. Damian is troubled as the homeless detail these hardships. In addition to the economic uncertainty and precarious conditions in the context of Damian’s neighborhood in England, it also introduces the global need for clean water, food and housing. *Millions* prioritizes the more stereotypical humanitarian plea from the hungry children in Africa over the issues of the underclass citizens. However, a sense of postcolonial awareness might have served Danny Boyle as he conceived of the final ending.

The family joyfully celebrates with an African community that has a new well built by their contribution. Sadly, this trite ending invokes the colonial narrative of a white savior bringing civilization to native lands. This unproblematic conclusion ignores the ways Western countries have contributed and perpetuated a system of global inequality. Žižek asserts: “In a superego blackmail of gigantic proportions, the developed

countries are constantly “helping” the undeveloped (with aid, credits, and so on), thereby avoiding the key issue, namely their complicity in and co-responsibility for the miserable situation of the undeveloped” (2013, 394). Boyle has been unable to imagine a solution outside of the current neoliberal system tied to race and power. He remains within the logic of making the right choices of how we choose to spend our money and resolving social concerns through one’s volition rather than at a broad level. In *Millions*, Damian and his family make the acceptable choice to give to an established charity. Notably, why is it that despite lavishly giving out sums of cash to people in England the family did not simply give a community cash to distribute themselves? A more systematic approach could have been rallying the community to build a system of wells or paying for housing for the poor he had met so they did not need to travel so far to work.

Despite the ending’s shortcomings, relational generosity is an important intervention in the primary care for others. A generosity founded on the other’s well-being and not one’s own, out of personal moderation even sacrifice, and in a manner which expects no return. This begins prioritizing the other person and a willingness to accept their opinions and selves. Personal differences are not opportunities for shaming or shunning. Instead the brother’s retain their differences but also embrace their difference. In addition, the mother’s affection for Damian is based on her love towards her child and not correlated with his “good works” and personal choices. In one line she touchingly mentions that having Damian is her “miracle” and key into heaven. Damian and Anthony’s relationship draws in the act of placing faith in one another acknowledging each person’s vulnerability and difference. Perhaps it is out of their

shared loss and knowledge of death that allows the brothers to come to an understanding and find the ability to love one another. Mrs. Cunningham reminds Damian to have faith in his brother, despite that he is the arch-neoliberal character. Anthony, she tells him, has a good heart, “he just doesn’t know where it is.” Capitalists have hearts, even if they are misplaced.

In this age of individualism, generosity is an interesting bridge in creating continued links between the individual and the collective. Irrespective of religious teachings, it remains a celebrated virtue in today’s society. Why is it that so much of neoliberalism is directed toward promoting the idea of generosity through celebrity philanthropy, reality television, even crowdfunding for causes (ex: GoFundMe, Fundanything, GiveForward, YouCaring²¹)? These campaigns are a result of a capitalist drive working against unionization, affordable healthcare, living wages and income equality. Citizens now use social media as platforms to raise money to address various personal, national and international needs. This barrage of promotion in need of generosity also indicates the conservative tension in neoliberalism whereby we still need some force and method that connects individuals to their communities. Neoliberalism needs generosity. As neoliberal citizens, we crave its stories to ameliorate our sense that the system does not work. Stories celebrating giving and the human spirit gloss over the structural inequalities prompting the need for generosity in the first place. We also contain generosity within the discourse of personal choice that maintains the logic of our

²¹ These are websites designed for personal fundraising. For instance, GoFundMe’s About Us page claims over \$770 million has been raised for personal causes and life events under the categories such as medical, emergencies, memorials and charity (GoFundMe).

own consumer culture that enables our current spending habits and permits us to go about our daily lives without guilt.

The best place for ending the movie may have been right after the mother's reappearance and command to Damian to love his brother. This perhaps is a place to drive home the "poverty" everyone faces and the need for relational generosity. We can be poor in a multiplicity of ways—materially and spiritually. If Damian and the viewer are able to recognize the battles every individual might be facing it would engender more lasting reforms. I am reminded of how Ehrenreich discovered that some welfare recipients began calling TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) "Torture and Abuse of Needy Families" (2002, 233). Citing the ways this welfare process was similar to incarceration with a mug shot, fingerprinting and interrogation into a child's paternity, the author notes how this institutional harassment kicks people while they are down. Adding indignities as people seek financial support to live illustrates the overall lack of social trust and respect for human dignity. One might ask if our current system is even actually generous. As welfare recipients are treated as criminals and viewed as leeching from the state and more regulations are placed against providing food in public spaces, public money is channeled into lobbying, super PACs, and government surveillance. In addition, corporations such as Wal-Mart offer low wages to their workers who then require welfare assistance in order to pass along low prices to shoppers (including their own employees). The myth of generosity hides the vampire that is sustained by the lives of the poor.

The both/and logic at work in *Millions* constructs generosity within the tension of individual choice and structural solutions. First, we might consider our own acts to insulate ourselves and desire for self-gratification. If we truly wanted to remove people off welfare rolls, this must begin with by looking at oneself in the mirror and one's time and own checkbook. How do we allocate our money and how much of it might go towards what we blame the poor for wasting their welfare checks on —drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes— or other forms of retail therapy and stress management? Can we imagine ourselves working in the hot sun, bent over picking blueberries and other crops? How much time do we spend inanimate on the couch watching television? Is it fair to call those managing two jobs lazy or not working hard enough for their welfare support? In addition, the fallacy that we have earned the right to our money with our own self-efforts refuses to acknowledge the exploitative mechanisms of capitalism that drains and stunts the lives of our neighbors. Yes, generosity requires great care, desire for another's well being, and recognition of the other built upon vulnerability, mutual need, and interdependence. It also asks us to turn away from the mirror, step off the pedestal and give freely and abundantly even at our own expense. Instead of saying: "I'm worth it" or "I'm loving it", let us begin with the goal of saying "I'm sorry" or "Can I help you with that?" Perhaps we can offer to cook a meal for our neighbors or pay their next month's heat and electricity bills. Perhaps even when money is the medium of giving, can one make a large donation anonymously? *Millions* exposes the need for unity predicated on being with others that requires relational generosity and from which instigates the need for greater income equity and distributive justice.

Despite, the looming shadow of neoliberalism and neoliberalism's understanding of generosity, Boyle's juxtaposition between Damian and Anthony, as stand-ins for Catholicism and neoliberalism, problematizes many assumptions around personal responsibility and innovative enterprise. Catholicism's emphatic call to recognize and raise the living conditions of the poor founded on the premise of human dignity challenge the capitalist ethos of making the conditions of the poor invisible. The film questions neoliberal approaches to money and its ability to generate equity concluding that creating conditions of equity relies on respect for human dignity and relational generosity. Similarly the area of biopolitics reinforces the need to examine how we view members of our society and who is included and/or posed as threats. Biopolitics engages how we construct our bodies and our relationship to others, becoming more sensitive to harmful fallacy of the self-sufficient individual. The political form of neoliberal generosity allocates welfare through a system of morality checks and dehumanization. Private enactments of neoliberal generosity often involve paternalism, self-gratification for the giver, and fall back into neoliberal norms of efficiency. These forms of giving operate within the neoliberal narrative of using money to "save" others that focuses more on the dignity of the giver. Relational generosity asks for a de-centered and de-privileged self that focuses on the dignity and agency of the receiver.

CONCLUSION: ALTOGETHER AND ALL AT ONCE

How then shall we live?

—Francis A. Schaeffer

Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "what are you doing for others?"

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

My interest in *Millions* has been sustained by the critical need to evaluate the role of generosity in neoliberalism and the problematic ways in which generosity is reinforced in the media as a project of the self with some personal benefit. In this concluding chapter, I will review the ways that the film *Millions* has set up a series of contrasts that encourage the viewer to question what is ultimately a taken-for-granted understanding of generosity that is rooted in neoliberal assumptions. Instead of creating clear-cut binaries, the film holds in tension the oppositions between: individual action/collective action, saints/sinners, giving/taking, richness/poverty, and financial generosity/relational generosity with *both/and* logic, not an either/or conception. What does it mean to be rich or poor? What are the multiplicity of ways we conceive of these terms and are they only financial? I will also explore how the film further asks its viewers to question the suppositions underlying a neoliberal understanding of generosity, in particular pointing to

the ways that the film suggests that perhaps giving could be less determined and controlled and affirmed as the desire for a collective good life and human equity.

Chapter One provided an overview on the current discourse in films and television that emphasizes the moral goodness of the giver and celebrates private and corporate philanthropy in the service of creating empowered and self-sufficient citizens. This framing cultivates a norm of feel-good giving. Invisible in the discussion is whether giving might sometimes be painful or why generosity has become a never-ending call. I argue that feel-good giving re-inscribes the neoliberal formulation of life as self-focused and enterprising, always negating the Other to a secondary consideration. While media representations highlight generosity as promoting a society of free and enterprising individuals, it makes invisible the idea that the quest for the self can come at the expense of others. In addition, the social norm of applying connotative meanings to people and objects has also limited the capacity to be concerned with resolving fundamental human needs.

Chapter Two begins my analysis into how *Millions* addresses assumptions of generosity and posed a counter-narrative to neoliberal generosity. The film provides a strong example of popular culture as a location for debate; it is a site of “both/and” for consensus and contestation, not as a place of rigid assumptions. I juxtapose a narrative analysis with the intentions of director Danny Boyle and scriptwriter Frank Cottrell Boyce against the interpretations of film reviews and viewer responses. As a cultural forum, the tale challenges our assumptions of the poor, highlights the predominance of the neoliberal imaginary, and playfully explores how to be generous and who needs

generosity. Despite Boyle's envisioning of generosity post-Thatcher as a more unified social response, viewer responses reinforced neoliberal messages in popular culture and society as an individual and privatized matter. Following the continuum of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, one would expect a dominant reading to cohere with a neoliberal understanding of generosity. However Boyle has created an oppositional text that contests the dominant neoliberal view of giving and philanthropy. Viewers responded by negotiating the film's counter-narrative by reading the film as an opportunity to rethink their own methods of generosity but mostly within the accepted hegemonic understanding of generosity. In this way the film operates as a cultural forum to provide a space for various perspectives to be included and debated. Each character reflected a different standpoint on whether generosity could be conditional or relational and viewers often identified with a specific character. The interpretations of the viewers reinforce the view of other scholars and myself regarding the neoliberal grip on our interpretations. As neoliberal beings directed towards concentrating on individual and privatized actions, viewers engaged the story in relation to their own personal actions. The only review found in my research that broached the film's concept of collective giving was from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Catholic News Service review. Thus the Catholic-informed film was read along the meanings that the filmmakers had tried to cultivate. As Massey had asserted, the predominant method of reading the film as a story of individual action reveals our neoliberal imaginaries. It appears that viewers today cannot read against a neoliberal grain.

The film contests the idea of feel good giving by introducing the concepts of collective giving, losing personal recognition in giving, and giving founded on personal dignity and accepting the whole person, not just their enterprising abilities. Damian's experiments challenge the accepted norm that giving should be carefully strategized and calculated. His giving and love for his neighbors exceed neoliberal calculation. Rather than villainizing Anthony, the film sympathetically depicts Anthony spiritually poor but materially rich and contextualizes the norms of objectification and privatization. The counter-narrative in the film—that giving should be collective—affords an opportunity to challenge normative concepts of individual choice in giving; giving and taking; and sinners and saints. Neoliberal giving envisions individuals and local institutions as the solution to redress issues of poverty or inequity. Since neoliberalism can be tied to strains of Protestant Calvinist tradition, it is notable that the market for the movie later expanded among evangelical Christians. Although interviews with Danny Boyle included in Chapter Two suggest his intentions were to question the individual nature of giving, the film's conclusion is unable to resolve the issue of providing basic needs through means other than individual giving.

In my eyes, the conclusion of the film asserts that individual giving is unable to resolve the issue of providing even basic needs to others. By coming together and pooling their individual amounts, the family was able to fund a single community water well. However, their own community in England is economically pressed and strained. Individuals seeking private assistance and contributions to public systems line up outside the Cunningham home. The film asserts that the economic, educational, media, and

political systems reinforce privatization and the logic of individual enterprise. The economic costs of this milieu are reliant on consumption of consumer goods. For me, the film indicates that systematic infrastructure needs to be in place to make resources such as clean water and transportation inexpensive and widely available.

The need for collective resources also points to concepts of collective contribution and a loss of authorship. The film interjects losing control and authorship in giving with anonymity and collective contribution. When Damian gives anonymously to the Latter-day Saints, he mimics the way he first received the cash himself. The possibility of giving without public recognition and control seems to disrupt the neoliberal desire for self-glorification while leaving the possibility that in one's own mind self-satisfaction can be derived. Matthew 6:3-4 [NIV] encourages a type of anonymous giving in which individuals themselves forget their actions. It states: "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." The verse prior notes that those hypocrites who publicly proclaim their good works have already received their work. The call to quietly care for the poor without self-importance and aggrandization sounds counter-cultural and outside of the neoliberal imaginary. Although generosity can bring personal satisfaction to some degree, generosity does not need to be pleasurable. In relational generosity, giving others the benefit of the doubt or forgiving one's enemy is often humbling and difficult. Following the Good Samaritan model, being generous may also place oneself at risk, pose disappointment and/or come at expense to oneself.

The collective coming together at the end of the film demonstrates the loss of individual recognition in giving. Although this formulation reunites the nuclear family (a strong neoliberal theme), on a broad level their contributions get lost in the collective tally as an overall total in the end. At first Damian starts with his amount and the total grows larger with the addition of the father's, Anthony's and Daisy's cash. As the total cash amount grows, Damian does not announce specially the contributed amount from each character. This form of losing personal acknowledgement in the total pool also shifts towards a collective and group effort over individual recognition.

Millions also uses a "both/and" logic to redefine terms: givers can be takers, takers can be givers, sinners can be saints, and saints can be sinners. The general acerbity of many characters, both saints and humans, reinforces the human component in giving. Giving is a project between imperfect beings. The film reminds its audience that as a human project, giving can fail and recipients are not always likeable. Chapter Four exposes how the need for generosity is greater than one might expect. When Damian attempts to give to the homeless, the recipients tell their friends creating a tension that these characters are taking advantage. In addition the same chapter discusses the unlikeable nature of the Latter-day Saint characters. While these characters represent the neoliberal framework of individuals as rational and enterprising, Damian himself has an odd persona. His religious sensibilities and fantastic imagination are at odds with what is socially expected. Thus, in this film, relational generosity takes priority as other modes of being such as Damian's are brought into the frame.

Relational giving is founded on respect for human dignity regardless if one has met certain requirements or has demonstrated certain abilities. This contrasts with neoliberal generosity, which is directed towards producing personally responsible and deserving citizens. Rather than being seen for outward accomplishments or even inward qualities of “saintly” temperaments, *Millions* alludes to the unique lives of both saints and sinners as worthwhile. Chapter Five focuses on the way *Millions* contests neoliberal generosity with a Catholic framework and draws upon the preferential option for the poor. All beings are in need of relational, material, and financial generosity. Boyle makes an almost sacrilegious move by depicting the Pizza Hut group as more closely resembling the characterization of the irascible and prickly Saint Peter and one of the Martyrs of Uganda than that of the upright Latter-day Saints.

The film also explores the tension of using money to resolve the children’s grief over their mother’s death. Anthony is generous to himself. Despite all his enterprising plots to find comfort in the money and things, Anthony was most in need of relational generosity. Damian attempts to find his bearings by being financially generous and giving away the money. He is also in need of relational generosity from his brother and reassurance of his mother’s love and continued presence even in death.

Millions recognizes this milieu in which “we’re all neoliberals now” in this quest for the self, but advocates a fuller picture of humanity and draws upon Catholic ideals to make giving a project of solidarity and fellowship rooted in human dignity. Therefore the concept of poverty or being in need is not only a financial one, as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has underscored. The film’s message asserts that poverty and seeking social equity

needs to be pursued with a form of generosity that is both relational and financial. Damian and Anthony's relationship as well as the consistent support of the saints demonstrates a theme of interdependence over the neoliberal ideal of self-reliance. In these chapters, the limits of neoliberal dogma asserting the primacy of the nuclear family and private ownership have linked this inward logic away towards collective recognition. The film's incorporation of care for the poor and allusion to the Catholic option for the poor is a push toward receptivity and affirmation without conditions and demands.

Millions also pinpoints the emphasis on connotative meaning in neoliberal societies that efface the importance of human lives. Chapter Three overviewed the neoliberal impetus places on home ownership. Houses are assessed as containers of capital and signifiers of social mobility and social capital. Chapter Four also commented upon the objectification of women in service of the male gaze in capitalist media and advertising. Manual labor and women's lived experiences are erased in aspiration of "the good life" which is no longer defined as access to affordable housing and universal access to economic resources but rather individual belongings. In contrast, Damian sees the world connected to the use value of objects and embraces the confusing and mystical beings he encounters.

By posing these various contrasts to encourage viewers to question our dualistic understanding of generosity, the film also raises other normative questions such as whether generosity should be an individual project. Whose lives are privileged as generosity relies upon individual choice? Religious systems demonstrate a counter-proposal to the ways we privilege certain bodies as more innovative and productive. In

answer to Judith Butler's questions: "Whose lives count as lives?" and also, "What *makes for a grievable life*?", Catholicism shines a light on those lives that have been cast aside and left vulnerable (2006, 20). The Bible specifically draws attention to the poor, the orphan, the widow and the alien as lives that always already have value and worth and deserve protection and care. For instance Zechariah 7:10-11 states, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: Administer true justice, show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the immigrant or the poor" [NIV]. James 1:27 calls care for the vulnerable "religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless." This analysis has demonstrated that the film succeeds in expressing this emphasis regarding human dignity, as it turns our attention away from viewing humans as quantifiable resources and towards the individual as a life worthy of respect.

Rather than being seen for outward accomplishments or even inward qualities of "saintly" temperaments, *Millions* alludes to the unique lives of both saints and sinners as worthwhile. All beings are in need of relational, material, and financial generosity. Furthermore, the depiction of the Pizza Hut group more closely resembles the characterization of the irascible and prickly Saint Peter and one of the Martyrs of Uganda than that of the upright Latter-day Saints. From this line of thought, I would like to advocate we continue to raise questions regarding the discourse of good citizenship based on private choices, ownership and privatization as authors in many fields have already done (Mitropoulos, 2012; Hanan, 2010; Duggan, 2012; McMurria, 2008; Ong, 2006). *Millions* manages to link the relationship between neoliberal citizenship as ownership and

consumption as argued by these authors and attempts to imagine privileging human connections and human voice instead.

Through my dissertation I have tried to make clear the dominating conception of life as a project for meeting and exceeding one's own needs. Rather than living out of the need to buttress oneself, this dissertation has explored the question: Can we live in a place of vulnerability and permeability? What might that look like in film and TV representations? Can we make room to prioritize the lives of our families, friends and strangers in more "authentic," more hospitable, or more open-handed ways? What can we give of ourselves? How can we give collectively?

The film does have some shortcomings in its structure and portrayal of giving to the African community. *Millions* primarily focuses on Damian and Anthony's independent actions in the world reinforcing the neoliberal sense of the Subject as an active agent. In addition the conclusion places the Other, the African citizens, in a subordinate role. The community seems as if it is expecting outside help with the children waiting on a hill as if they are watching for an event. In addition the overjoyed community seems properly grateful. When comparing them to the Pizza Hut poor who seemed avaricious, the African community has the "correct" response.

Yet, *Millions* labors to complicate the lines around self-interest acknowledging humanity in its follies and less appealing sides. The film seems to be a precursor to recent films such as Noah Baumbach's *Frances Ha* and the Coen Brother's *Inside Llewyn Davis* which embrace the protagonists' mistakes and imperfections. Furthermore, *Millions* raises the issue of giving which may fail and which may come at personal risk. The

recent film *Calvary* (2014) most fully demonstrates the sometimes serious dangers that accompany the self-sacrificial and intensely difficult act of striving to love people in the wounded places that they take up residence. Father James' willingness to die is an extension of his willingness to love. My work lends itself to further consideration of the representations of triumph and success broadly from success narratives such as *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *Seabiscuit* and *The Blind Side* to featuring characters who fail and more nuanced understandings of what it means to pursue your dreams (*Frances Ha*, *Inside Llewyn Davis*). Starting with *American Beauty*, there have been more films articulating a critique or pointing to the emptiness of materialism and the drive to consume. I have contributed to this body of work through examining how *Millions* represents pursuing generosity in a flawed and more human way. In addition, my future research can build on this foundation to construct a genealogy of representations of generosity. Popular culture remains a valuable space to create and reflect upon a fuller picture of humanity than the neoliberal push towards consumption and appearance.

Within *Millions*' framework of collective giving founded on human dignity, Boyle conceived of *Millions* aspiring to highlight our interconnectedness even to strangers across the globe. The film poses the counter-ethic of relational generosity and forms of generosity without either conditions or condemnations. It seeks to re-engage an idea of humanity comprised of weakness, creativity, friendship, ingenuity, and inimitability. While the film's structure falls short in making clear the need for collective giving and challenging interpretations of the global south as in need of white saviors, it opens a space of inquiry regarding what generosity is and why we need it. Although the

nature of the gift and the possibility of a “true” gift can always be questioned, my hope is that we can have the courage to attempt to deal generously with one another, believe the best in one another, and be willing to give our best even when it may come at our expense.

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