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**Selling Stories and Consuming Culture:  
The Connection between Literature and Marketing in  
Max Barry's *Syrup* (1999) and *Jennifer Government*  
(2003)**

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## **Abstract**

Literature and marketing are closely connected. This statement might be considered surprising. This thesis, however, aims to explore this connection by applying an interdisciplinary approach anchored in both marketing and literary theory. The multifaceted nature of the relationship between the fields can be discussed from various angles. The novels *Syrup* (1999) and *Jennifer Government* (2003) by Australian author Max Barry constitute the center of the analysis, which begins with a discussion of books as consumer products – including an examination of the novels’ paratext as product packaging. With the help of marketing theories such as content marketing, personal branding and guerrilla marketing, both books are then discussed in more detail, highlighting Barry’s criticism of consumer culture as expressed through his fiction. Individuals and their struggle against mass culture, corporations as representations of marketing’s influence on culture and the use of literary techniques for promotional purposes are major themes in both novels. As examples of postmodern fiction, the texts are linked to the subgenres of blank fiction and cyberpunk, which puts the novels and the issues they raise in a point of transition between genres and in between the twentieth and twenty-first century.

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# 1. Introduction

Connecting marketing with literature may seem surprising, since the former is usually created for mere profit and the latter is considered an art form. However, I argue that the fields of literature and marketing are indeed strongly connected and that their close relationship is established through culture. Both disciplines interact with culture through artifacts such as books, works of art or other forms of entertainment by creating fictional stories and characters that can be used as a means of identification. It is the aim of this thesis to explore this multilayered connection with the help of the novels *Syrup* (1999) and *Jennifer Government* (2003) by Australian author Max Barry. An interdisciplinary approach is necessary to scrutinize the various ways in which literature and marketing interact from different angles. The influential marketing professor Douglas B. Holt suggests a combination of “a cultural historian’s understanding of ideology, ... a sociologist’s charting of the topography of contradictions the ideology produces, and a literary critic’s expedition into the culture that engages these contradictions” (“What becomes an Icon” 49) to do this and it is this interdisciplinary approach which will bring the connection to life. This expedition into culture, grounded in both marketing theory and literary theory, highlights the many meeting points and interconnections of the two fields within consumer culture, taking into consideration societal circumstances, cultural ideology and cultural anxieties, with special regard to their reflection in contemporary literature.

Compelling stories and characters – whether real or fictional – can be sources of meaning in today’s fast-paced society, which is increasingly influenced by technology. While the connection between literature, art and culture is undisputed, the addition of marketing to this discourse needs further discussion. I argue that marketing is mainly connected to literature in two ways: Firstly, marketing makes use of culture by identifying consumer desires and creating narratives addressing these desires. This creation of narratives is a literary process, namely storytelling, and it utilizes literary devices to create myths. Secondly, the stories and characters created for building brands can become cultural icons and be discussed in literature, as strong brands can shape cultural ideology. The results of marketing and branding’s influence on culture can then

be reflected in literature. This two-way street of influence forms the basis of my analysis. Following recent marketing theory, which emphasizes the importance of a more interdisciplinary approach to marketing, I thus argue that literature, as a cultural institution, can be an important tool for marketing. Literature can be utilized in marketing both as a means of creating more compelling narratives and as a representation of culture to be utilized in understanding consumers. In this thesis, the use of literature in marketing will be grounded in marketing theory, discussing key concepts such as “the holistic marketing concept” (Kotler et al 18), content marketing and personal branding and will discuss them in relation to their representation in the novels.

I will explore both marketing’s use of literary techniques and marketing’s representation in contemporary literature with the help of Barry’s novels as examples of contemporary literature addressing cultural issues. With a professional background in sales, Barry now writes fiction that heavily satirizes and criticizes consumer culture and the marketing industry. *Syrup* tells the story of a young marketing graduate’s struggle for success, whose main task is the creation of a feature film advertisement for the Coca-Cola Company, a challenge he faces with the help of a savvy female executive. *Jennifer Government* is set in a world which Barry himself describes as “an alternate present ... [with a] tweaked ... social structure“ (Barry, *MaxBarry.com*). Corporations rule the world and individuals are defined by their professions, carrying their employers’ company names as last names. The struggle for power between global corporations throws the world into a state of war.

The theoretical framework for my literary analysis of the novels encompasses theory on postmodern fiction and its subgenres blank fiction and cyberpunk, as well as Roland Barthes’ theory on mythologies. The discussion of blank fiction will mainly draw upon James Annesley’s *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel*. With the heyday of blank fiction considered to have been in the late twentieth century, I argue that Barry is an example of the continuing development of this fiction, adapting to cultural changes as they develop. Many of the characters in *Syrup* are reminiscent of Ellis’ Patrick Bateman; they buy expensive clothes and create a personal image in order to secure their place in society. *Jennifer Government*’s more societal focus criticizes the growing influence of corporations and

marketing – a central issue in twentieth and twenty-first century mass culture, a common theme of blank fiction. Annesley states that “a broad range of mass cultural references” is one of the defining characteristics of blank fiction (*Blank Fictions* 84). In Barry’s novels, these references are mainly related to brands – more specifically, iconic brands. Iconic brands are considered to have established a fixed place in culture, having evolved to represent more than the advertised product. This reflects the interconnection between culture and marketing by showing that criticism of modern society is strongly intertwined with the position of brands within that society.

The main body of the thesis is divided into different areas of branding, connecting marketing theory and literary analysis of the novels to highlight the different points of contact of literature and marketing. The analysis begins with Barry’s own position in consumer culture as a producer of consumer goods who markets his work, followed by a chapter discussing books as products, including the paratext as product packaging. In addition to being cultural artifacts, books are consumer goods which are meant to be sold and thus are marketed to consumers. I argue that Barry’s novels are representations of cultural anxieties characteristic of the twentieth and the twenty-first century – for example the fear of a loss of individuality in an increasingly branded world. As the producer of consumer goods, Barry himself uses different strategies to promote and sell his novels. With a professional background in sales he understands the industry and is in a position to use its strategies to promote his own work while at the same time encouraging critical thinking by raising awareness of how it influences consumers. Barry uses literature as a mouthpiece to criticize modern society while being aware of and making use of his own position within it. This makes him an apt example of the complex relationship between society, culture and economics that defines consumer culture. Barry’s personal blog will be at the foreground of the discussion of his personal branding as an example of content marketing, a means of creating compelling text and other content in order to forge a more deep connection with consumers.

The use of material from an online blog is unconventional in an academic thesis. Since Barry’s novels have not been discussed by literary scholars to a great degree, his blog serves as a source of secondary material. Opening up the definition of literature and including the written word in the form of online content, I argue that this material

qualifies and helps to support the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis. Following my main claim that marketing text is connected to literature and can be read as such, texts written by Barry and published on his blog are considered part of his personal branding and content marketing strategy. Following the discussion of the Barry brand, the various instances of branding in the novels will be investigated, with regard to highlighting marketing's interconnection with and its influence on culture. Personal branding and cultural branding are key concepts, which will help illustrate the multifaceted representation of marketing in Barry's novels. An analysis of the use of naming in the novels and the use of brand names in reality leads to a discussion of symbolism and connotations. The possible results of global branding, as represented in the corporate world war that develops in *Jennifer Government*, are used to relate the society in the novel to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's influential works *Empire* and *Multitude*, the discussion of which adds a sociological aspect to the overall thesis, reinforcing the claim that culture and society are the main spheres in which literature and marketing interact.

The last part of the analysis begins with the discussion of literature and marketing in relation to art in more detail in order to round up the analysis of the connection between marketing and literature through culture. The creation of the Coca-Cola film in *Syrup* will be at the foreground, the discussion of which will explore the concept of storytelling and the creation of myths for marketing purposes. An exploration of the real anti-brand movement in Naomi Klein's manifesto *No Logo*, taking the discussion of art and marketing further in the form of "culture jamming" (Klein 281) as an opposition to advertising's promotion of ideologies will be followed by the conclusion, which will briefly summarize the findings and provide a look into the possible future of Barry's novels and characters as cultural icons.

## **2. Background**

Marketing, advertising and branding are central terms used frequently in this thesis and since they are closely connected, the following definitions are provided to demarcate the individual areas and clarify how I will be using the terms. Marketing is a broad field that includes different sub-disciplines. As an overarching concept it can be defined as a

company's efforts to promote and sell products. The task of marketing, however, is not limited to selling. It also includes "sensing, serving and satisfying the needs of customers in well-defined target markets" (Kotler et al. 5). The understanding of consumers necessary for identifying these needs and making use of them to build brands is gained from interactions with culture. Advertising is a tool for marketing communication. It is used to promote a product by emphasizing product features such as quality, price, novelty and superiority over competing products and adding emotional value to the product. By utilizing the power of the visual in combination with compelling stories, advertising plays on consumers' emotions. Advertisements promise more than a suitable product by embedding it in a storyline, appealing to consumer desires. If done successfully, new desires can be created by portraying a way of life consumers had not even realized they longed for. Branding is a means of adding emotional and symbolic value to a product. By creating a brand name, a logo, a distinctive design and packaging, symbolic meaning is given to the product. Brands can become tools for self-expression, as consumers consciously choose one brand over another based on what it stands for and what buying this particular brand reveals about their personality, fulfilling their basic desire for identification.<sup>1</sup>

Consumer choice is thus influenced by personal desires and the wish to cultivate a personal image. The struggle for identification and self-expression is an essential cultural desire as culture is the sphere in which people search for meaning and it is where they connect with others. Similarly to the way they choose particular brands, individuals make cultural choices concerning for example arts and entertainment to express themselves and to find artifacts to identify with. The need for identification stems from "the contradictions between ideology and individual experience [which] produce intense desires and anxieties, fueling the demand for myths" (Holt, "What Becomes an Icon" 44). Cultural ideology, including for example beauty ideals or the pressure to stand out as an individual in mass culture, creates pressure on individuals, who consequently search for meaning and artifacts to express themselves. An understanding of these cultural anxieties can be utilized by the marketing industry to influence consumers and build brand loyalty. By associating a brand with a certain ideology or cultural meaning such as for example freedom, independence or elegance,

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<sup>1</sup> All definitions are loosely based on Kotler et al. *Principles of Marketing*.



branding can target specific markets that will use these brands as a means of identification, binding consumers to the brand as loyal customers. Changes in cultural ideology thus need to be followed closely for marketing professionals to stay informed of peoples constantly shifting needs and desires. As a result, a more open approach to marketing, incorporating a greater variety of aspects and communication channels has increasingly been emphasized in recent marketing theory. Two of the most influential scholars of marketing theory, Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller, are at the forefront of supporting this shifting view. In *Marketing Management*, a textbook for marketers in which they discuss changes and developments in modern marketing, they introduce a more open approach and name it “holistic marketing” (Kotler & Keller 18). They provide an overview of the development of marketing, which I will briefly summarize in order to illustrate the background for the holistic marketing concept. With this concept, Kotler and Keller emphasize the importance of marketing’s close connection with culture and the need to employ a more interdisciplinary approach to marketing.

Kotler and Keller begin their account of marketing’s development with the “production concept”, which focused mainly on mass production and mass distribution. Moving on from this, product quality and innovation were increasingly taken into consideration as the “product concept” developed. These new, higher quality products were then advertised to people as a means of making a profit from the produced goods, disregarding whether those products were needed by the market or not. This “selling concept” then developed into the “marketing concept”, which aimed to put the consumer at the foreground. The identification and satisfaction of needs became more important as “creating, delivering and communicating superior customer value” (Kotler & Keller 18) became the core effort. According to Kotler and Keller, this is what marketing is largely defined as nowadays. They argue that in the Information Age, marketing needs to broaden its focus and consider a greater variety of aspects, applying the “holistic marketing concept” (18). It includes the cooperation of all departments of a company and encompasses factors such as communication, customer dialogue and relationships, financial and symbolic value.

The holistic marketing concept is an example of a more multi-faceted, interdisciplinary approach to modern marketing, incorporating cultural studies by engaging in a more customized dialogue with consumers and thus gaining a more

thorough understanding of culture and markets. Companies need to understand their customers in order to build successful brands. To do this, they need to identify and interact with the culture their customers live in. This understanding of culture gives marketers the possibility to target specific consumer needs, offer a solution for cultural anxieties and build strong brands with a loyal customer base. The interaction with culture connects various disciplines and points of view, and it is the foundation the connection between marketing and literature is built on.

As a cultural institution, literature can represent the zeitgeist of a generation. Changing ideological struggles such as the pressure of beauty standards, gender relations and individualism can be reflected in a culture's contemporary literature. Novels and characters can provide myths as a possible escape from reality or as a space for identification. They can become cultural artifacts and can help marketers understand consumer desires, allowing brands to offer myths of their own. Roland Barthes states that any type of sign, text or object could potentially become a myth. As culture imbues it with meaning, a sign is "adapted to a certain type of consumption, laden with literary self-indulgence, revolt, images, in short with a type of social usage which is added to pure matter" (Barthes 109-10). Words, texts, objects, images – all these artifacts can become myths according to Barthes and in literature, influential texts or culturally relatable characters often become myths. In marketing, myths are often stories told in the form of print campaigns or television commercials, built around products, brand names and logos.

The creation of advertising slogans is one instance of literary devices – such as symbolism and parallelism – being used for promotional purposes. Examples include the Amazon logo, in which the yellow arrow connects the letters a and z in the company name to reinforce the company's promise of carrying virtually any product from A to Z (Amazon.com), or Apple's slogan: "Beauty outside. Beast inside." (Mac Pro, Apple Inc.), using parallelism to emphasize the combination of design and performance that their products stand for by referring to a cultural artifact (*Beauty and the Beast*). The brand name Google is an example for a neologism that has evolved to become part of the English language as a verb – to "google". The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus* provides the following definition of the term: "to search for something on the internet using the Google search engine" ("Google"). Created by a

company, whose name and logo are now often associated with the internet as a whole, exceeding the company's original function as an online search tool. This is an example of how brands can influence culture. By building this strong connection between the brand name and an essential part of modern culture, Google has established itself as an iconic brand.

Another instance of marketing interacting with culture through literature is the publication of pieces of literature for promotional purposes. Examples include beauty books published by makeup brands to provide tips on how to create beautiful looks using specific products, as well as Wal-Mart's *LiveBetter* magazine, distributed in Canada, which combines, among other things, recipes, household or makeup advice and tips for childcare, seemingly tailored to the interests and needs of stay-at-home parents. The energy drink company Red Bull also publishes a magazine, *The Red Bulletin*, a name which uses a play on words to unmistakably link the magazine to their brand. In line with the brand's image, the magazine features articles on (extreme) sports and youth culture. The creation of such branded content makes use of the tangibility of a printed publication to create a stronger relationship with consumers. In addition to being presented with images and ideals in television commercials or billboards they pass by, consumers have something to hold on to and to take in at their own pace. Another advantage is that unlike a single printed advertisement in a regular magazine, these publications can be filled with promotional content from start to finish and the connection between the product and culture – with the help of celebrities, life advice and tips for wellbeing – can be made more deeply. The creation of branded content is part of what is defined as content marketing. A recent trend in marketing theory, content marketing is a strategy applied to make marketing more efficient by adjusting to today's consumer needs. The creation of content helps establish a dialogue between the company and its consumers by informing them and “answer[ing] questions and provid[ing] foundational information” (Lieb 2), giving consumers the feeling of being more closely connected to the brand through knowing more about it. Content marketing examples include company blogs and the use of other social media channels by companies to maintain a dialogue with their customers and to create enjoyable experiences such as online games or mobile applications.

While marketing can make use of literature and literary devices, its own influence on culture has, along with factors such as industrialization, globalization and advances in technology, created a culture that is heavily defined by consumerism. Although not much research has been conducted on the actual connection between marketing and literature, this influence of consumerism on culture and the issues it entails have been a common theme in postmodern literature. Barry's novels address various issues of consumer culture, including the struggle for individualism, the increasing power of corporations and the influence of marketing on the individual and society. Both novels share characteristics with postmodern fiction, most significantly parody, irony and intertextuality.

Intertextuality is used in *Jennifer Government*, connecting the novel to George Orwell's *1984* and Frederik Pohl and Cyril M. Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants*. The novel's antagonist John Nike reads *The Space Merchants* while traveling and is very upset about its portrayal of the future: "All these old science-fiction books were the same: they thought the future would be dominated by some hard-ass, oppressive Government. Maybe that was plausible back in the 1950s, when the world looked as if it might turn Commie. It sure wasn't now" (Barry, *Jennifer* 123). The depiction of a unlimited power and control over the world, executed by the government as a political institution appears laughable to John. George Orwell's *1984* is also referred to in the novel, in connection with Apple's actual 1984 advertising campaign which used the future vision presented by Orwell to create a brand myth based on individualism for its then-new product, the Macintosh computer. In *Jennifer Government*, this example is used in the context of developing a new Nike campaign. John Nike rejects the idea proposed by his team to use *1984* in an advertisement, ridiculing the fact that Orwell, too, presented a future society ruled by an almighty government. As one of the most powerful corporate executives, John is the epitome of corporate power and cannot even imagine the government ruling the world. It seems implausible to him that political rule could ever overrun corporate rule. The arrogance of company executives, considering themselves infallible, is reflected in John's reaction. Barry utilizes intertextuality to reinforce his criticism of society, both the society in the novel and real twentieth-century society, in which corporations gain more and more power. Linda Hutcheon

characterizes the function of intertextuality as a technique characteristic of postmodern fiction in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* as the following:

The intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the ‘world’ and literature. The textual incorporation of these intertextual pasts as a constitutive structural element of postmodernist fiction functions as a formal marking of historicity – both literary and ‘worldly’ (Hutcheon 124).

Both instances of intertextuality in *Jennifer Government* fulfill the purpose defined by Hutcheon. Intertextuality is used to comment on culture and society, situating *Jennifer Government* in history, referring to the past both in terms of social and political circumstances as well as the literary representation of those circumstances.

In *Technologized Desire: Selfhood and the Body in Postcapitalist Science Fiction*, one of the few secondary sources on *Jennifer Government*, literary critic D. Harlan Wilson classifies the novel as a “fringe science fiction novel”, linking it to the subcategory of cyberpunk, basing this classification on the near-future setting and “the filtering of truth, reality, and value through the sieve of the commodity” (Wilson ch 4). Reality is produced by the images and stories disseminated by corporations and identification happens through products and professions. Wilson also brings up the theory of hyper-consumption, which can be defined as consuming more than needed or intended (Ritzer 7), relating to the concept of conspicuous consumption as proposed by sociologist Thorstein Veblen. Carrying traits of different genres of literature, the position of Barry’s work within contemporary literature is not clearly definable. Both novels share characteristics with blank fiction and postmodern writing and *Jennifer Government* additionally has elements of science fiction. While these fields do not exclude each other, their interplay here supports my earlier claim of placing Barry at a point of transition, incorporating various factors and representing the changes in culture and literature at the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century.

Some of the most well-known examples of twentieth century literature as a representation of culture and cultural anxieties have been grouped together in the field of “blank fiction” (Annesley 2). Originating in the New York of the 1980s, the term

encompasses a movement in contemporary American literature. It is associated with writers such as Bret Easton Ellis, Jay McInerney and Douglas Coupland, whose works are “predominantly urban in focus and concerned with the relationship between the individual and consumer culture” (2). In both of the novels discussed in this thesis, Barry addresses these blank fiction issues. *Syrup* describes the pursuit of success in a world of deception as the main character Scat’s creative spirit is set against the conniving character of Sneaky Pete, who represents corporate power. In *Jennifer Government*, essentially all characters are in search of identification in a world ruled by corporations, an extreme form of consumer culture. What links Barry’s novels to the genre of blank fiction is “blank fiction’s relentless emphasis on brand names, popular culture and commodities, coupled with its detailed descriptions of consumerism ... [and] the reification of violence [and] decadence” (Annesley 136). Violence is mainly associated with the character of guerrilla marketing vice president John Nike. He issues a marketing campaign, the success of which is based on the killing of teenagers who buy the latest Nike sneakers. The implementation of this campaign ignites controversy among the most powerful global corporations, ultimately resulting in a state of war. Here Barry takes decadence to an extreme, painting a cutthroat picture of consumer culture. Significant here is the connection established between marketing and warfare. Barry makes this connection by choosing the discipline of guerrilla marketing. The term guerrilla marketing was coined by American business writer Jay Conrad Levinson in the mid-1980s (Levinson). It is a marketing concept focusing on creative, unconventional ideas to promote a product. Derived from the Spanish term and concept of guerrilla warfare, the use of this marketing strategy supports Barry’s depiction of marketing as a cruel industry. The implications of the novel’s antagonist being a guerrilla marketing executive are discussed in more detail in relation to corporate warfare.

### **3. Branding Literature**

#### **3.1 The Barry Brand**

In order to highlight Barry’s own position within consumer culture, not only as a critic but also as a producer of consumer goods, I will now present some of the efforts Barry has made to promote his novels. The ways in which he goes about marketing himself

and his books are examples of personal branding and content marketing. The discipline of content marketing reflects marketing's acknowledgement of the internet as a very important communication channel and Barry uses it successfully for building his personal brand and engaging his customers in a variety of ways. His main means of communication is his personal blog. Here he shares news about his novels, trivia, and writes about chapters and characters that were cut from the final versions, explaining his authorial choices. He also comments on frequently asked questions and reader feedback, maintaining a dialogue with his readers.

A blog is one of today's most common tools of personal branding. Personal branding is a concept that encourages people to establish themselves as brands in order to stand out on the job market or in society. The idea of personal branding is to emphasize personal strengths and build a compelling personal image (Peters). As a means of self-expression, this relates back to the desire for individualism in consumer culture and suggests the utilization of marketing strategies to overcome the struggle of how to stand out. Barry makes use of the possibilities of personal branding and content marketing by enriching his work with additional information and staying in contact with his readers. This makes him come across as an accessible writer who is self-critical and not afraid to share his doubts about his own work. These efforts can be seen as the establishment of a brand – the Barry brand. By offering personal pieces of writing, he adds emotional value to his products – his books – and creates customer loyalty by engaging with his readers. Barry's blog even has a tagline; "Max Barry | he writes things" is shown at the very top when opening the website in a browser. He has created a slogan for himself. It is reminiscent of slogans like "Nike – Just Do It" or "L'Oreal – Because you're worth it", making it evident that branding strategies are self-consciously used to promote Barry as a writer. At the same time, there is a certain irony to be sensed here. While Barry's 'slogan' fulfills the criteria necessary for a slogan – short, to the point, easy to remember – it is a fairly simple statement, not trying to highlight his talent or make him stick out from the pack but rather communicating a certain sense of irony. Unlike advertisers, Barry does not promise anything or emphasize any special qualities. He simply states a fact, again showing that he is taking neither marketing nor

himself too seriously. By making visible that he is just as critical of himself as he is of society, he creates authenticity and avoids appearing hypocritical.<sup>2</sup>

For the promotion of *Jennifer Government*, Barry developed an online game named *NationStates*. It was released in late 2002, just two months prior to the publication date of *Jennifer Government*. According to Barry, the aim of the free multiplayer simulation game is the following: “You create your own country, fashioned after your own ideals, and care for its people. Either that or you deliberately torture them. It's really up to you” (Barry, *NationStates*). In the game, the player is free to create a nation and make decisions that affect its development. In Barry’s own words, his reasons for creating the game were the promotion of the novel as well as the fun factor. It is an apt example of content marketing, and it shows that Barry knows his target market. The game seems to be created mainly for young adults, avid users of social media and online gaming, often referred to as “Millennials” (Howe & Strauss 3). *NationStates* helps build the Barry brand by connecting an enjoyable experience with the product, the novel. By developing this game and by using his blog as a main channel of communication, Barry shows that he is aware of current-day marketing challenges, setting his own brand apart from those of other authors and applying interdisciplinary strategies to connect with his market.

### **3.2 Books as Products – Packaging and Paratext**

Having discussed the position of the author as a creator of consumer products, the book itself will now be discussed. Beginning with packaging as the first point of contact with a product, the discussion of the paratext becomes interesting in the case of novels. Different literary theories disagree on the significance of the paratext; some disregard it entirely, claiming the true meaning of the text lies within the act of reading, for example. In this discussion of books as consumer products, the paratext lends itself to being considered product packaging and the inclusion of it can help add to the discourse

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<sup>2</sup> When *Syrup* was released, Barry decided to spell his first name with a double x in an attempt to reinforce the satiric tone of the novel. This was not well received. On his blog, he mocks himself for the idea, showing self-irony.



on the connection between marketing and literature, as it illustrates the position of literary works as consumer products.

In marketing theory, a basic distinction is usually made between three product levels: the core product serves to solve customers' specific problems and responds to their needs – it delivers the core benefit. The actual product, which is made up of up to five aspects: “a *quality level*, product and service *features*, *styling*, a *brand name* and *packaging*” (Kotler et al. 540, italics in original). It turns consumer needs into wants and, if successful, into demands. On the third level, benefits are added such as warranty, customer care, installation and delivery to create the augmented product. It is the combination of the three levels that ensures customer satisfaction. Especially on the augmented level companies are forced to continuously add to their offering because of high competition and increasing consumer expectations.

Packaging is an important part of the product and a helpful tool used in branding. By adding the logo, brand and product name, and possibly a signature design or color in the form of packaging, brand recognition can be increased and customers' attention can be engaged. As a first point of contact with the product, packaging can add to the brand value, like for example sophisticated packaging made from high-quality materials used to pack in high-quality products. A distinctive design can also help a certain product stand out in shops, which is especially important for everyday products offered by many different companies, such as some types of groceries or personal hygiene products (Kotler et al).

In the case of books, the paratext is what qualifies as packaging. The term paratext, coined by Gerard Genette, encompasses everything that surrounds the text. This can include the cover, quotes or a preface preceding the body of the text, the author's name or illustrations as well as an epilogue. Genette claims that the paratext is “at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (Genette 2). Considering the paratext of a novel or another piece of literature can thus help our reading of it by adding information and creating a specific context in which the text is meant to be read. In this discussion, the cover art and, in the case of *Jennifer Government*, the inside of the front cover are discussed as part of the paratext. While the concept of the paratext encompasses other parts as well, I will only regard those

elements that serve the purpose of highlighting the connection between literature and marketing, and thus relate to the main claim of this thesis.

Barry's novels have each been published with varying covers. The hardcover editions differ from the paperback editions and different international editions were published with various covers as well. I will focus on the American and Australian editions of *Syrup* and *Jennifer Government*, since a discussion of more international editions would extend the scope of this thesis too far. While the hardcover edition and the Australian paperback both show a glass of what looks like Coca-Cola (with the addition of a man appearing to be peeping above the black lower half of the cover on the Australian paperback cover), the American paperback cover shows a black-and-white picture of a man and a woman embracing each other while walking towards a car. The image of the couple is reminiscent of an advertisement, in the style often seen in clothing company advertising, targeting young adults. Barry himself did not have any influence on the cover designs and this particular cover, he writes on his blog, looks "like an ironic comment on marketing, only without the ironic part" (Barry, *MaxBarry.com*) in his opinion. The novel satirizes marketing and advertising and the choice of cover seems – in Barry's opinion – to fail to carry the satiric tone to the outside of the text. Returning to Genette's notion of the paratext helping readers to better understand the text, in this case the choice of the cover image has failed its purpose – at least according to the author's opinion.

*Syrup* was adapted to film in 2013. After the movie was released, the novel was re-published as a movie tie-in paperback edition, featuring pictures of the actors on the cover. Since the appearances of both 6 and Sneaky Pete have been completely changed for the movie script, this cover, too, fails to deliver any relevant information about the book. The appearance of both characters plays an important role in the novel and it is part of their personal branding, as will be discussed later. Changing their appearance influences essential characteristics of 6 and Sneaky Pete, and leads to a necessary separation of the novel from the film, the latter of which should be considered a work in its own right, with a very tenuous connection to the novel. The movie tie-in cover also puts the film in focus, which could possibly mislead consumers into thinking that the novel is an adaptation of the film, disregarding the original text. However, when considering the republication of *Syrup* after the movie release from a marketing

perspective, it can be seen as an attempt to develop and enhance the Barry brand, creating brand extension. Defined as “using a brand in one category to introduce products in a totally different category” (Tauber 27), brand extension can help establish a more diverse, multi-faceted brand. In the case of Barry’s work, the screen adaptation of *Syrup* could potentially attract new customers, increasing the novel’s success. These particular covers chosen for *Syrup* are examples of the problems that can arise from the author not being involved in the decision-making. At the same time they reflect the possibilities of using the paratext as product packaging and building an author brand as well as the interplay of images and text to create specific expectations.

In the case of *Jennifer Government*, the cover designs do not differ as greatly across editions. With a few exceptions, most editions show a single green eye with dark lashes, an eyebrow signaling a serious expression and a barcode just underneath the eyeball. Some covers display a complete female face, while many show the eye in isolation. The barcode is especially striking. It is slightly bent so as to not appear as simply printed on the cover in addition to the eye but – as is also revealed in the novel – as a tattoo. Barry was not involved in the creation of this cover, either, but he has stated on his blog that he strongly approves of it.<sup>3</sup> The cover was created by an artist, in agreement with the publisher. From the facts provided in the novel, it could be assumed that the eye looking at us from the cover belongs to the novel’s title character, Jennifer. Its look is serious, reflecting determination and willpower, traits which heavily define the character in the novel. Below the image, the title is printed in the same green color as the eye’s iris and below it is a quote by influential author Naomi Klein, calling the novel “Brilliant and hilarious”, printed in red. She is quoted by name with the addition of “author of *NO LOGO*” (also printed in green) – a connection made between the two books which I will pick up on because *Jennifer Government* realizes and exaggerates a number of issues raised by Klein in her powerful criticism of brands. At the bottom of the cover, we find the words “A novel by Max Barry”. The background color of the cover is white and the complementary colors of green and red stand out strongly against

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<sup>3</sup> In a blog post about the novel on maxbarry.com, Barry explains that the barcode in the image was intended to be the barcode for the US hardcover edition (and so it is for most editions) but on that very edition, someone changed the numbers so that they match the book’s ISBN but not its barcode. The idea to have an actual barcode as the tattoo connects the basic idea of its function in the novel with the book’s marketing.

the pristine neutrality of the white background. The connection between the title and the eye (and also *No Logo*) creates coherence and directs the reader's eye to the text, away from the capturing stare of the eye in the image. The colors red and green are also used in the world map printed on the inside of the cover, where they can be read as representative of the political circumstances in the novel. The details of the customized world map will be discussed in the chapter on corporate warfare later in this thesis. The consistent use of the colors red and green helps connect the attention-drawing eye image to the actual text, creating a flowing transition from the text's surroundings to the text itself. In this case, the paratext fulfills its purpose as defined by Genette; it sets the mood for the reception of the text and serves as a threshold, inviting the reader into the novel.

In early 2014, the paperback edition of Barry's novel *Lexicon* (2013) was released, featuring an image of an eye on the cover. The colors are different and the eye is made up of small words, relating to the story of the novel. However, the piercing, eye-catching image is reminiscent of the *Jennifer Government* cover. While Barry was also not involved in choosing the cover in this case, he has expressed that he is very fond of it, and has pointed out its resemblance to *Jennifer Government* as a good thing on his personal blog. Although not the author's choice, the resemblance between the two covers can benefit brand recognition. The noticeable design of both covers, each featuring a single eye, connects them and identifies them as coming from the same source, the same producer – Barry. This could benefit Barry, as readers who may have enjoyed *Jennifer Government* might pick *Lexicon* up at the store based on the similarity of their packaging. The eye can thus be read as a logo for Barry's brand. The general symbolic meaning of the image of an eye defines it as a window to the soul. It is also often used in spiritual circumstances and heavily imbued with different meaning across varying cultures. In combination with the barcode tattoo on the *Jennifer Government* cover, it can not only be read as inviting whoever picks the book up into the story, but also as representing the struggle Jennifer goes through. As a window into Jennifer's soul, it can be read as representing her personal struggle between the corporate and the political, following her changed ideology and her sense of justice to bring down the novel's antagonist John Nike, who stands for the cruelty of corporate rule.

## 4. Branding Individuals

### 4.1 Naming and Personal Branding

The concept of naming is another shared characteristic of literature and marketing. Carefully chosen names can be a tool used to imbue either a person or a brand with a specific meaning. In literature, it is most commonly used to evoke connotations about a character by the means of telling names, while marketing and branding make use of the concept to add value to products by carefully choosing brand and product names. In *Jennifer Government*, a combination of both is employed. In the novel, characters carry their employers' company names as their last names, resulting in everyone being identifiable upon a first introduction. This reflects, again in an extreme manner, how consumers use brands as resources for building identity in reality. In the novel, brand names and company names become defining factors, distinguishing people from each other based on whom they work for, disregarding personal character, values or ideals. In fact, brand characteristics influence personal traits and replace them in the process of identification. The concept of brand equity is transferred from products to people, resulting in their value as individuals being defined by the brand name they carry. Kotler and Keller define brand equity as follows:

Customer-based brand equity is ... the differential effect brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand. A brand has *positive* customer-based brand equity when consumers react more favorably to a product and the way it is marketed when the brand is *identified*, than when it is not identified. (Kotler & Keller 243-4, italics in original)

The way in which consumers react differently to non-branded products in real life is reflected in *Jennifer Government*. People's reaction to and view of unemployed people in the novel reflects how we are influenced by an identifiable brand name in reality. In the novel, those without employment lack a brand name, thus people react negatively to them. One example is the character Billy, who is first employed by the Bechtel company, and is accordingly named Billy Bechtel. After he loses his job, he becomes an

“unemployed wanderer” without a last name. He cannot admit to not having a last name, however, because he finds it “too embarrassing to announce yourself without a surname. People thought you were a bum” (Barry, *Jennifer* 25). In the novel’s society, having a job defines a person’s social status and an individual’s value, and unemployment is met with suspicion and contempt. In *Technologized Desire*, D. Harlan Wilson claims that unemployment is “a sign of immorality in contempt of the socioeconomic order” (Wilson ch 4) in *Jennifer Government*. People take pride in their professions and because they establish their own identity through commodities and brands, the state of being unemployed is offensive to them. With the production and marketing of goods as basic concepts building the foundation for the novel’s social order, anyone who does not actively participate in the upkeep of productivity is considered a failure. Another character living with the stigma of unemployment is Violet, a self-employed software developer. She is described by her boyfriend Hack Nike as “the only unemployed person he had ever met, not counting homeless people who asked him for money” (Barry, *Jennifer* 10). In terms of brand equity, Violet’s unemployment causes a negative reaction in other members of society because her brand is not identified. Another significant aspect concerning Violet is how her self-employment is not considered a proper employment, but rather a negative thing in the novel. In reality, self-made entrepreneurs are usually met with admiration, earning great respect for becoming successful on their own and taking a risk by not working for a large corporation, for example. In *Jennifer Government*, corporations rule the world and are thus considered to be the desired employers. Self-employment can be read as a failure to qualify for a corporate job. Barry reverses the views of global companies and small business owners, strengthening his portrayal of corporations as influencing society and the general mindset of people in their favor. Considering this inversion from the point of view of ideology, becoming successful based on personal strength and effort are basic pillars of the American Dream and self-employment is viewed as a marker for great personal prowess in American society. Barry seems to be portraying a reverse American Dream in his novel, which emphasizes the impossibility for individual success in the society of *Jennifer Government*.

The novel’s protagonist and title character, Jennifer Government, is another important example of how Barry utilizes the concept of naming. She was named

Jennifer Maher when she was a successful executive at the big advertising company Maher, approximately ten years prior to the events in the novel. For Jennifer, the change in professions – and thus, in name – reflects a change in ideology. In the power struggle between big corporations and the government, she chooses the political side after John Nike, the epitome of corporate cruelty, has broken her heart and abandoned her upon finding out she was pregnant with his child. Out of the love she feels for her daughter, Jennifer makes a conscious choice to switch sides and fight corporate rule. As direct opponents, Jennifer represents the political sector and John Nike represents corporate rule. Their personal power struggle symbolizes the fight for power that defines society in the novel.

The significance of John and his partner, who is also named John, as personifications of corporate marketing is also reflected in their names. Both named simply “John Nike” (Barry, *Jennifer* 4), they appear almost as clones, representing their field of expertise rather than being individuals. Hack notices how similar they are, even in their appearance: “Both Johns had good smiles ... He guessed everyone in marketing did. They had pretty similar faces, too.” (5). The first name John is one of the most common male first names in the English-speaking world, often used to give a name to unidentified persons in legal documents or unidentified victims of crimes. Usually referred to as “John Doe”, these people are given a standard name. As discussed before, the characters in *Jennifer Government* carry their employers’ names as last names and in the case of “the Johns”, this leads to the presentation of the two as individuals defined entirely by their professions.

The concept of naming is thus strongly connected to the building of identity in Barry’s novels. Apart from characters carrying the names of their employers, for many of Barry’s characters, naming or renaming themselves is a conscious choice. In *Jennifer Government*, an example of this is Buy Mitsui. He is a Frenchman who “thought that moving to a USA country was the best move he’d ever made, with the possible exception of changing his name from Jean-Paul” (Barry, *Jennifer* 16). In his profession as a stockbroker, the first name Buy is a clearly telling name, reflecting his profession of trying to convince people to buy stocks. It appears almost as an ironic comment on the urgency with which stockbrokers attempt to persuade their clients. Moreover, the name Buy can also be read as an internalization of consumerist values. Buy’s conscious

choice to pursue the American Dream and change his name to a word closely connected to the concept of consumption reflects his Americanized ambition. His character also serves Barry as a medium for contrasting Europe and America in the novel's world order. As Buy is introduced, his motivation for moving to America is explained as follows: "the EU was a socialist morass, with taxes and unemployment and public everything" (Barry, *Jennifer* 16), emphasizing the status of the United States as the perceived promised land of the free market. Buy is also another character representing the impossibility of realizing the actual American Dream in the novel's society. He ends up becoming quite depressed and overwhelmed by the stress and the pressure of his job and even attempts suicide. The freedom and endless possibilities of America are portrayed as an illusion in a controlled world, which can be read as sharp criticism of twentieth and twenty-first society as it is.

Another example of naming in *Jennifer Government* is presented in the character of Hack Nike. Hack appears to be his original name – no information on any acts of renaming is given – but it is rather unusual and can be considered a telling name. The noun 'hack' is defined by the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus* as "a journalist ... whose work is low in quality or does not have much imagination", and one of the definitions provided for the verb is "to get into someone else's computer system without permission in order to find out information or do something illegal" ("hack"). Hack's job as a merchandising officer at Nike is described as rather dull and insignificant. When John and John Nike approach him with the request of working for them, he is blinded by the seeming glamour of marketing and influenced by the executives' convincing and somewhat threatening nature. He thus signs the contract without reading the fine print stating that he has committed to killing people. Here, again, the cruelty of marketing's deceptive measures is reflected.

The meaning of hacking into a computer system is also represented, in the form Hack's girlfriend Violet. She develops a computer virus and offers her services to the ExxonMobil company. While Violet is the hacker, not him, it is significant that Hack is in a relationship with her at the beginning of the novel. His being drawn to a person who undermines systems is a recurring theme as he moves on to fall in love with Violet's sister Claire, who has joined an anti-brand movement. Together they embark on several activist sprees, tagging billboards and pretending to throw harmful chemicals



into a McDonald's restaurant to protest against big corporations. This portrayal of the actual anti-brand movement, which is presented by Klein in her influential book *No Logo* will be discussed in more detail in a separate chapter.

In *Syrup*, naming is also utilized by Barry to emphasize certain aspects of his characters and it is closely connected with the concept of personal branding. The main character Scat consciously changes his name in an act of adaptation:

I used to be Michael George Holloway, but I had no chance of getting into marketing with a name like that. My potential employers, who had names like Fysh, Siimon and Onion, didn't even think I was making an effort. The least I could do was echo their creative genius by choosing a wacky, zany, top-of-mind name myself. For a while, I seriously toyed with the idea of calling myself Mr. Pretentious. But when sanity prevailed, I chose Scat. It sounded kind of fast-track (Barry, *Syrup* 7).

In this paragraph on Scat's renaming, Barry mocks the concept of personal branding, again appearing to be self-critical of his own knowledge and use of the concept. Scat's conscious and careful choice of a new name is the first step in the construction of his personal brand, the version of himself that he establishes in accordance with what he considers the rules of personal branding in consumer culture. The term "personal branding" was coined by management specialist Tom Peters in his 1997 article "The Brand Called You", explaining that highlighting individual skills and qualities are essential for people to stick out from the masses of consumer culture. With the example of emailing, Peters explains how personal names are equal to brand names in the process of personal branding: "The name of the email sender is ... a promise of the value you'll receive for the time you spend reading the message" (Peters 3). In the novel, Scat chooses a name resembling those of other marketing executives, and thus adds value to his own personality, attempts to fit into the industry he is trying to enter and appears as another example of Barry's criticism of branded identity.

Scat is not the only character in *Syrup* who applies strategies of personal branding. The female lead character 6 is an apt example of the importance of building a personal image in modern society – and especially in the world of marketing. Although

she claims “6” to be her given name, Scat does not believe her and considers she has renamed herself as part of her personal branding efforts. In combination with her attractive, stylish appearance and her claim to be only 21 years old and homosexual, her brand appears to Scat as very well constructed. He is convinced she is just very good at her job, marketing herself really well, creating a unique personal brand: “I know what she’s doing: that everything she tells me is to build this marketing image, but I can’t resist it. I know Coke is one part faintly repulsive black syrup, seven parts water and forty-two parts marketing, but I still drink it. Perception is reality” (Barry, *Syrup* 20). Here, he directly links her personal branding efforts with the general view on marketing presented in the novel as well as with the central brand: Coca-Cola. Barry’s criticism is clear: marketing deceives consumers, who willingly believe what they are told. He hints at Coca-Cola’s success being based more on its marketing efforts than the quality of the actual product and ridicules the way in which consumers willingly buy into marketing myths, even when they are aware of their falsehood.

6’s name is an especially interesting instance of naming. Significantly, it is spelled in numerical form, not as the word “six”. This way, her name appears rather as a symbol, and could even be considered a logo. It sets her apart from the rest of society and even from other members of the marketing world who choose unusual names for themselves. Scat does not believe 6’s story of her parents renaming her every year in accordance with her age until they died in an accident when she was six years old. This story seems to him like part of an emotional branding strategy, a concept used to “emphasize [a brand’s] personality and forge an intimate connection with customers” (Holt, *How Brands* 21). Considering 6’s life story from this point of view allows for another conclusion: she could be building her personal brand not only to establish herself in the world of marketing but also to connect with Scat and make him susceptible to her branding myth in order to manipulate him, playing on his somewhat naïve nature. Scat consciously decides to believe 6’s myth: “6’s fantasy world is threatening to overwhelm me. Her lies are so obvious that I can’t help but believe them a little” (Barry, *Syrup* 24). She succeeds in drawing him in and making him believe in her brand, using marketing strategies to convince him.

The character of 6 also lends itself to an interpretation from a gender perspective. The representation of women in literature has been discussed throughout

time. From the ideal of the “angel in the house”<sup>4</sup> to the concept of hysteria and “the madwoman in the attic” (Gilbert & Gubar), women were usually presented as pure, feminine creatures whose main purpose was to please and be decorative rather than show character or have an opinion; or they were portrayed as mentally unstable or seductive, promiscuous and not deserving of being acknowledged and embraced by society. While this view of women is rather dated, it serves as a suitable foundation for the discussion of 6 as a modern portrayal of a female character who makes use of certain ideals and gender roles.

The image of women presented in advertising began with the portrayal of the caring housewife, usually associated with household products, medicine and groceries. While these advertisements represented the actual role most women had in society, they emphasized the importance of this role; influencing women and encouraging women to be even better housewives who take better care of their families by buying certain products.<sup>5</sup> Advertising thus did not merely represent reality – it helped shape culture by portraying and maintaining a specific image of women in public. Nowadays, women are mostly portrayed in terms of attractiveness. While many advertisements and commercials do portray the modern woman as a successful and independent professional, her attractiveness is always at the foreground. The normative image created for women is one of beauty, fitness, elegance and youth and it is disseminated through mass media, creating an ideal of what a woman should look like, which has been repeated until it became culturally accepted as the norm. In *Imaging in Advertising*, Fern L. Johnson comments on this phenomenon:

The repetitious barrage of these themes complement the larger discourse of beauty ideals and fantasies permeating daily life in a media-saturated society. Perpetually circulating visual and verbal images of ideal beauty tantalize the consumer with cosmetic products for attaining these images, and lace these images with messages about both youthfulness and sex (Johnson 106).

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<sup>4</sup> Victorian image of the ideal Victorian woman, based on poem by Coventry Patmore

<sup>5</sup> For more on the history of advertising, see Dyer, Gillian. *Advertising as Communication*

Combining the visual and the verbal, advertising pairs images of women with verbal imperatives in the forms of slogans such as “Be a force of beauty” (BareMinerals) or product names like “Be Delicious” (DKNY) and thus feeds the desire for self-expression, offering women a means of identification, although limited to the normative image of beauty and youthfulness. This brief discussion of women’s portrayal in both literature and marketing can be applied to the female lead in *Syrup* - the marketing executive 6.

6’s appearance is described as elegant and stylish and narrator Scat continuously emphasizes his attraction to her. Her clothes and styling are always described in the colors white, black or red, complimenting her jet-black hair. She wears white dresses, black suits, has long fingernails painted black and even her eyes are described by Scat as “so dark they are like night” (Barry, *Syrup* 94) and even as “big black lagoons” (198). In combination with her dress consisting of white, red and black, 6’s image is reminiscent of Snow White. White and red are also the colors of Coca-Cola, accounting for a reflection of the brand in her identity and reinforcing the claim that 6 is a character with a constructed identity. The particular combination of red, white and black has been analyzed in terms of symbolism and has for example been considered to represent three major concepts: “heaven and chieftainship (white), blood spilling as in war (red), and sexual desire and regeneration (black)” (qtd. in Vaz da Silva 241). 6’s character combines all these qualities. She is a leader and expert of her field and Scat sees her as an almost divine creature. When Sneaky Pete actively works to sabotage Scat and 6’s work on the advertising movie for Coca-Cola, 6 shows that she knows how to stand up to him, fighting the battles they are faced with. Described as a sensual, attractive woman, she plays with Scat’s attraction to her by claiming to be homosexual but also being intimate with him. 6 also represents regeneration, as she continues to fight for her place in the marketing world, even after being defeated several times. In one of their confrontations, Sneaky Pete claims that 6 is “more style than substance” (Barry, *Syrup* 108), trying to aggravate her and make her lose her composure. While she does get upset, 6 replies with a list of accomplishments she and Scat have achieved, which is something Sneaky Pete cannot reply to. Her question “What have you done?” (108) remains unanswered and Sneaky Pete winds his way out of the argument. It is in this confrontation that 6 seems to act as a foil to Sneaky Pete. They have both established a

strong personal brand and a distinctive image. The decisive difference between the two, however, is that while Sneaky Pete might know how to influence people, 6 actually understands how to create successful marketing campaigns. She does have the substance he is lacking, making this confrontation another ironic comment on the shallowness of marketing, which too often seems to succeed by offering “more style than substance”.

The colors red, white and black often associated with female heroines in stories and fairy tales, often representing ideal womanhood (Vaz da Silva 242). While in fairy tales, emphasis was on red and white, in *Syrup*, Scat’s description of 6, the addition of the color black is essential. Her black hair, nails, eyebrows and eyes are repeatedly emphasized, along with the mesmerizing effect they have on Scat. It becomes clear here that 6’s sexuality, but also her strength and potential destructiveness are defining factors of her personality, reflected in her personal style. Returning to the notion of product packaging, 6’s style reflects essential aspects of her personality, similar to the way packaging can evoke certain expectations about a product. As a woman in a patriarchic society, 6 builds a brand emphasizing assets and qualities that will give her the possibility to influence the men around her. She realizes that the male executives do not take her seriously or acknowledge her skills, because she is a woman:

If I was a man, I’d be a hero...I’m a woman in a dick-measuring contest...Business is a man’s game, and they don’t like me playing. Opening my mouth is a challenge to their masculinity...I’ve seen every woman who showed a glimpse of femininity fall out of the dick-measuring contest...Like everyone else, I go around trying to convince everyone that my dick is the biggest...Perception is reality (Barry, *Syrup* 91).

Since 6 is described as what is considered an attractive woman in Western society, Barry seems to be playing with beauty standards as presented in and, more importantly, created by marketing and advertising. The pressure to be visually pleasing, wear makeup, have great style and confidence and be feminine is high on young women nowadays. While advertising often uses attractive women as eye-catchers and role models (in terms of appearance), 6 is aware of her beauty as well as her position in the

business world. She consciously uses her attractiveness to manipulate the men around her. Again, Barry has marketing strategies turned on their head and used as weapons against the industry. The contrast between her appearance as alluding to connotations of ideal womanhood and her determination and business sense make 6 the clever Snow White of the marketing industry – a woman who has much more to offer than her appearance but cleverly uses her beauty. This strategy is most successful with Scat, who is mesmerized by her personal brand and falls under her spell, giving 6 the possibility to use him for both his creativity and his masculinity, which gives the two the respect from the marketing executives 6 is denied in this patriarchy.

Sneaky Pete's assistant, named "@" (Barry, *Syrup* 201), is a foil to 6. Her appearance is the exact opposite of 6's. Scat describes her as follows:

Then my eye is caught by the person sitting next to [Sneaky Pete]. It's a girl, and she is the blondest person I've seen in my life. Her skin is virgin snow and matched by hair so white it seems to glow, the effect is slightly blinding. From an exquisitely manufactured face, eyes like blue pilot lights watch me coolly (201).

@'s glowing, light appearance, light blue eyes and blonde hair contrast with 6's dark eyes and hair. Her name, which is merely a symbol and not a word or even a proper name, also contrasts 6's symbolic name. Her decisive demeanor and stylish appearance upset 6 because it is obvious that Sneaky Pete is trying to defeat her and Scat by employing a woman who has similar personal qualities to those of 6 – determination and business sense. 6 calls @ a "copy", stating that Sneaky Pete has "stolen" her (Barry, *Syrup* 202, italics in original). Scat reads Sneaky Pete's employment of @ as showing "he's worried. It shows he's so impressed by [6] that he had to make a copy" (202). Sneaky Pete's assistant thus appears as a construction, not a real person. He has created her in order to use her against Scat and 6. Significantly, @'s appearance is reminiscent of a Barbie doll – blue-eyed, fair-skinned and blonde. She can thus be read as adhering to another ideal of femininity, a creation of the marketing industry. Sneaky Pete seems to be using her merely to upset and sabotage both Scat and 6, she is like a doll controlled by him. When @ tries to seduce Scat in order to sabotage his relationship

with 6, while warning him that they have no chance against Sneaky Pete, Scat resists her and reports the incident to 6. She is upset, seeing through Sneaky Pete's scheme: "@'s a pawn. Trust me, this is all Sneaky Pete" (Barry, *Syrup* 232). Both Scat and 6 see through @ and Sneaky Pete and their knowledge of the marketing industry and its means of deception prevents Scat and 6 from being deceived by Sneaky Pete.

Unlike @, 6 is self-controlled and she is a strong female character. Her character and her relationship with Scat show how both literature and marketing influence culture by creating and maintaining social norms such as beauty ideals. Barry plays with these norms by creating a character who conforms to several of these ideals and consciously makes use of them to defend her position in a patriarchic society. This is reinforced by opposing 6 with a doll-like female character who is controlled by a man. I read Barry's portrayal of these women as a criticism of the influence wielded by both literature and media on cultural ideology. The characters of 6 and @ highlight how women are frequently treated in marketing and advertising: they are meant to be attractive but are not taken seriously. 6 is skilled as well as visually pleasing but most of the men at Coca-Cola (and especially Sneaky Pete) do not take her seriously, and show more respect to Scat. What makes 6 a special character is that she knows how to use marketing's image of women against the industry in order to succeed.

6's business sense and ability to create a strong brand are what helps her and Scat prevail. It is the combination of her professionalism and Scat's creativity that gives them the necessary skills to create the successful Coca-Cola movie. The collaboration of 6 and Scat represents a multifaceted approach to marketing, relating to the claim that a traditional, strictly theoretical approach is obsolete and hinting at the previously discussed development that lead to the "holistic marketing concept" (Kotler & Keller 18). The two characters combine creativity and a talent for storytelling with business sense and marketing knowledge. This becomes even clearer in the development of the feature film advertisement Scat and 6 produce for Coca-Cola.

Another character in *Syrup* who has built a strong personal brand and who carries a very obvious telling name is the villain, Sneaky Pete. It is revealed that his given name is Yuong Ang and in Scat's first description of him it becomes clear that everything he knows about Sneaky Pete is based on information provided by others, since Sneaky Pete himself is "far too cool" (Barry, *Syrup* 9) to speak about his

background - or almost anything else, for that matter. Similarly to the character Buy in *Jennifer Government*, Sneaky Pete has emigrated to the United States to pursue the American Dream: “ ... in the end he had to come to America because the Japanese haven’t learned the same absolute respect for marketing that [the U.S.] have and as such find it difficult to justify marketing salaries of more than a million dollars a year” (Barry, *Syrup* 9-10). Here, again, Barry ridicules the view of the United States as the promised land of marketing and professional success. Similar to Barry’s portrayal of the American Dream in *Jennifer Government*, the dream is presented in a distorted way in *Syrup*, different from the way it is commonly understood. Sneaky Pete does become successful in the United States, but not through hard work. In accordance with Barry’s criticism of America and especially of the marketing industry, Sneaky Pete’s success is based on deception and betrayal. Scat, who is determined to gain success through working hard, is presented as having great difficulties to achieve the American Dream. By displaying America as a place where success is achieved through trickery rather than personal dedication and hard work, Barry criticizes the influence of marketing on cultural ideology.

Scat’s admiration for the marketing industry’s possibilities for success is also reflected in his view of Sneaky Pete. Scat describes him as “the coolest person [he has] ever met” (Barry, *Syrup* 9), and he appears very susceptible to Sneaky Pete’s personal branding. The very obvious telling name “Sneaky Pete” is another example of Barry’s parody of how people willingly believe the lies told to them by marketing. In his personal branding efforts, Sneaky Pete has created a product name that does not promise any positive qualities – on the contrary, his name is almost like a warning, clearly pointing at the fact that he cannot be trusted. While it remains unstated whether he chose this name for himself, it appears as a mockery of marketing, relating to the portrayal of naming earlier in the novel. Similarly to the way Scat realizes 6 is constructing a personal brand, which he cannot help but believe in, he trusts Sneaky Pete despite the obviously negative name. In combination with the mysterious flair he has given himself, Sneaky Pete fascinates Scat so much that Scat is blind to his roommate’s conniving character. On the other hand, the name is the only thing seemingly giving Sneaky Pete’s betrayal away. He uses his mysteriousness – not speaking much, always wearing sunglasses so his eyes are not visible and the creation



of a successful reputation – to cover up his doings. While using Scat’s admiration for him to influence his choices about how to market his soda idea, Sneaky Pete secretly undermines those plans. By using his influence and connections in the marketing world and by being actually sneaky, he backstabs his supposed friend and earns the profits for Scat’s idea. Later in the novel, Sneaky Pete is described by Scat as looking “like an advertisement” (Barry, *Syrup* 104). His expensive clothes and sunglasses give him an aura of luxury, making him appear like a construct of marketing. The irony of Sneaky Pete having earned the money to afford this luxury through the marketing industry emphasizes Barry’s satire of the shallowness of materialism.

While brand names are generally meant to highlight a product’s quality or evoke positive connotations, actual products, such as a perfume named Poison or an energy drink named Burn, do successfully sell, despite their seemingly negative brand names. Similarly, in *Syrup*, Sneaky Pete is successful despite his name evoking obvious negative connotations. True to the general concept of “All advertising is good advertising”, he could be relying on the fact that although his name does not highlight any positive qualities, it does attract people’s attention. A reason for this could be that the strategy at work here is irony. People do not expect products to actually confirm the negative connotations evoked by the brand name because they read them as ironic, expecting the products to be of even higher quality because such a risky brand name was chosen for them. The new soda Scat invents falls under this category, too. With the name “Fukk” (Barry, *Syrup* 14), which can easily be considered offensive, it is meant to “be the drink of cynics” (19), thus targeting a specific market with a particular sense of humor which will cause those people to be amused by the product name, rather than annoyed or offended. In *Jennifer Government*, Barry also hints at the fact that products can be sold successfully despite negative connotations, presenting John Nike as having “pioneered the concept of marketing by refusing to sell any products [which] drives the market *insane*” (Barry, *Jennifer* 5, italics in original). John takes the strategy of negative marketing to an extreme with his campaign involving the killing of teenagers.

Another reason for the success of negative brand names could be that people trust the company enough to believe in their products and not let a seemingly negative brand name deter them. In the case of Sneaky Pete, Scat gives an example that made him trust his roommate, not expecting to ever be stabbed in the back by him, showing

he had trusted the person he thought he knew enough to not feel warned by the obviously negative name: “He leaves me little piles of the change I forget to take out of my dirty clothes because it would be heinous to take it, but he will sign the deal with Coca-Cola and bank my three-million-dollar-check” (Barry, *Syrup* 37). Sneaky Pete’s politeness is part of the creation of his personal brand – an actually sneaky way to deceive Scat.

Naming is thus used in both novels as a means of identification, especially in the case of those characters who change their names. Whether they are trying to fit in, stand out or impress others, their names reveal carefully chosen bits of information about their personality.

## **4.2 Branding on the Body – Tattoos and Logos**

The practice of tattooing as a means of brand identification plays a central role in *Jennifer Government*. The origin of the verb ‘(to) brand’ lies in marking ownership by burning the owner’s name, an identifying number or logo into the skin of livestock. This was done with a hot iron and has later developed into tattooing for example cattle or sheep in order to declare them as property. While the origins of tattooing humans have a different history, it is interesting to base the analysis of the brand tattoos in the novel on the practice of marking ownership, especially with regard to the concept of branding. The *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary and Thesaurus* provides the following definition for the noun “brand”: “a mark that is burned or frozen into the skin of an animal such as a cow to show who owns it” (“brand”). In modern usage, branding mainly refers to manufactured products, as previously discussed. However, the connection to the marking of ownership and the practice of tattooing plays an interesting role in the discussion of *Jennifer Government*. The title character Jennifer carries a barcode tattoo under her left eye. Toward the end of the novel, she reveals what it stands for and why she decided to get it: “It’s Malibu Barbie. My tattoo. It’s the product code for a Malibu Barbie. ... I was the Mattel account manager. Plus I lived in Malibu. So I got the tattoo” (*Jennifer* 327-8). This very factual explanation of such a

visible display of brand identification shows Jennifer's changed perspective on the marketing world and consumer society.

As her former self, a successful advertiser, she decided to brand herself for life. When a former colleague speaks about Jennifer's past success, it becomes clear that she must have been proud to carry the product code for a successfully marketed product as an unconcealable mark on her face: "She was one of the best at the biggest ad company in the world. She ran campaigns for Coke, Apple, Mattel... she could sell anything. Why do you think she got the tattoo?" (129). During that time, the barcode tattoo was a mark of success, showcasing her identification as part of the marketing world. Having turned her back on this world, she now seems to be embarrassed by it and in fact does not speak about it until the end of the novel, after she has defeated her arch enemy John Nike, and justice seems to have won over consumerism. Throughout the novel, marketers she encounters recognize her and refer to her by her old name Jennifer Maher. The barcode tattoo thus fulfills the purpose of actual barcodes on manufactured products: product identification. Since it is a tattoo, Jennifer's mark is also irreversible, which makes it a token of ultimate brand identification. The placement on the face reinforces this, as it cannot be covered up or hidden. Jennifer has decided to identify herself with a product, which has earned her great success in the marketing world, turning herself into a product in the process. Similar to the original practice of branding livestock to mark ownership, her tattoo identifies her as belonging to Mattel (in a figurative sense), with the only difference being that she made the choice to get tattooed. It was her decision, which shows that she had, at the time, internalized the values of marketing and felt she was defined by her commercial success. Her practice of getting branded reflects the subordination of personal identity to professional recognition, which is a characteristic of the novel's society, where a person's value is measured according to their success in the working world. Jennifer's change in ideology appears even more extreme when taking into consideration how strongly she once identified with the marketing industry. The fact that a barcode, when scanned, does not only identify a product but also provides information about its price adds another aspect to Jennifer's tattoo. By putting a barcode on her body, she puts a price on herself, on human life – a practice reflected at several stages in the novel as common in this branded world, which treats people as products. The value of a person is measured in

accordance with their professional success and Jennifer has chosen her own value as a person to be determined by the success of her work as an advertising executive. In the power struggle between the political and the economic sector, which eventually develops into a power struggle between global corporations, individuals are only considered in terms of consumers. They are seen as part of a mass and their value is determined by their ability to either contribute to their employers' success, or by their willingness to purchase products. In both cases, people are seen as a means of creating profit.

The novel's antagonist John Nike hints at another instance of brand identification in the form of tattoos, after he has developed and executed a plan to kill the government president:

I've given you a world without Government interference. There is now no advertising campaign, no intercompany deal, no promotion, no action you can't take. You want to pay kids to get the swoosh tattooed on their foreheads? Who's going to stop you? ... You want to reward consumers who complain about your competitors in the media? ... You want the NRA to help you eliminate your competition? Then do it. Just do it (Barry, *Jennifer* 233).

With the defeat of the government, corporations are now freer than ever to do as they please. Since public institutions like the government, the police and the National Rifle Association (NRA) have been privatized and now act as companies, they can freely form alliances with other corporations, such as Nike. As an employer, the NRA also gives its name to its employees, such as the character Billy NRA. John Nike takes advantage of this by utilizing the NRA as a personal provider of armed forces in his quest for corporate warfare. The fact that all major companies – and, subsequently, their consumers – are grouped into two major customer loyalty programs named “US Alliance” and “Team Advantage” makes these collaborations possible and increases their threat to society. The programs' aim is not merely to sell more products by offering benefits, but rather to make customers choose sides and become loyal to certain

brands as well as building power by connecting the largest, most influential companies. Gregory Nike, the vice president of Global Sales explains:

You think anybody buys Nike because they get frequent flier miles? Give me a break. ... We have US Alliance and Team Advantage, and there aren't more than five major companies in the world that haven't signed up with one of them. The more companies joined in, the more customers signed up, and so the more companies want in (Barry, *Jennifer* 125-6).

Here it becomes clear that the true purpose of these alliances lies in eliminating competitors and gaining profit. The motivation is clearly economic and the way in which this develops into a world-war scenario again reflects the power of the corporate over the political in the novel's world.

Corporate rule thus appears as unlimited and unrestricted, and John presents this to his fellow executives as a great success of the corporate over the political. Unaware of Jennifer, who is still determined to reverse this development and bring John himself to justice, the US Alliance members consider John's speech a valid justification of his instigation of the corporate world war. They decide to keep him as a member of the alliance, condoning his actions and valuing corporate freedom and financial success over the freedom of their customers. Reinforcing the cold-blooded nature of marketing and consumer culture that focuses on profit and treats consumers like commodities, Barry has John Nike end his speech with the real Nike slogan "Just Do It". As a cultural brand, Nike is given the power to interact between the corporate world and society and culture and influence all areas equally, steering the global war.

As the war evolves, a group of teenagers actually carrying logo tattoos appears shortly after John Nike gives his speech. In custody of Jennifer's government partner Calvin, fugitive Billy NRA, who is hiding from his current employer, witnesses a violent encounter between US Alliance and Team Advantage members. In a square in Los Angeles, where both McDonald's (US Alliance) and Burger King (Team Advantage) restaurants are located in close proximity of each other, a group of teenagers appears and starts a fight based on the rivalry. They are described as wearing "all baggy clothes and tattoos" (Barry, *Jennifer* 290) and as they approach, Billy

realizes: “their tattoos weren’t ordinary designs: they were logos. He saw a lot of Nike swooshes and NRA designs. The leader had a US Alliance logo on his shaved head” (290). These teenagers appear to have internalized consumerism so much that they identify with powerful brands, displaying this identification by wearing their logos as visible tattoos – a conspicuous display of brand identification. Unlike Jennifer’s tattoo, their brand is immediately clear, unmistakably associating them with one of the two sides that are waging war against each other. The logos serve the same purpose as on actual products, marking ownership and turning individuals into commodities. And they define the value of a person, “serv[ing] the same social function as keeping ... clothing’s price tag on” (Klein 28) by equaling a person’s worth with the worth of the brand he or she is identified with. The logo tattoos thus serve a similar function to Jennifer’s barcode tattoo, again defining people as a commodity.

The significance of the teenagers carrying logos as tattoos, as opposed to brand names or barcodes, is an instance of symbolism. As has been previously discussed, symbolism is an important factor in the creation of brands. Logos are visual images symbolizing both the brand and the ideological values connected to that brand. Used both in literature and marketing, symbolism is a tool used to evoke specific connotations upon encountering a verbal or visual sign. If a brand evolves to reach iconic status, its logo can become a symbol that is used in cultural circumstances, such as pieces of literature or art, establishing the brand’s cultural significance. Adorning its products with the company logo also helps brands “turn its faithful adherents into walking, talking, life-sized” (Klein 28) advertisements. By displaying a specific brand’s logo on their clothes or even their skin, consumers do not only define their own identity based on their choice of brand but they also – perhaps unintentionally – advertise the brand to other people.

Since tattoos are commonly used for self-expression and often display very personal messages or images, the use of logos as tattoos shows the invasion of privacy by brands and the way in which they are used as a means for identification. Materialism has taken over and associating oneself with a particular brand seems to have become more important than standing for something as an individual. The relation to reality of this aspect of the novel is closer than one might think. The struggle for individualism in mass culture is a real issue of the twentieth and the twenty-first century, especially

among young people. Tattooing brand names as a means for self-expression may seem far-fetched, however, the practice of tattooing has in fact been used for promotional purposes. In 2011, for example, the clothing company Ecko offered customers a lifetime discount of 20% at all its stores if they get the Ecko logo tattooed on their bodies (Turco 2011). Another example is a company named “TatAd”, which connects brands with people who are willing to get logos tattooed on their skin in exchange for money. While the integrity of the agency is questionable, its website *TatAd.com* states numerous examples of successful matchups, justifying its practices by stating that people advertise brands anyway by wearing them so they should be paid to do it. Again, what seems an extreme idea thought up by Barry making use of his artistic freedom appears not so far-fetched and actually close to reality.

## **5. Branding Culture and Society**

### **5.1 Schools and Public Space**

In *Jennifer Government*, the world is branded to the core. The government, the police and other public institutions have been privatized and are run like corporations, advertising their services and charging people for services such as the prosecution of criminals. As has been discussed before, literature can be a tool to both express or identify cultural anxieties and this factor in the novel can be interpreted as clearly related to the anxiety caused by the growing influence of corporations in the twentieth and twenty-first century. As an example, the discussion of threats to privacy, which was sparked by the revelations about the extensive surveillance of personal data on a global scale by the National Security Agency uncovered in 2013, makes the topic of surveillance and privacy highly relevant, even years after *Jennifer Government* was first published. While Barry is painting an extreme picture in his novel, some discussion of real-life practices helps highlight how strongly intertwined marketing and culture actually are in the present day. The real examples will be taken from *No Logo*, in which Klein dedicates an entire section to the issue of invading public space.

According to Klein, the use of public (cultural) events as opportunities for advertising brands shows a connection between marketing and culture established by

marketing executives in order to connect with consumers in a way that appears to them less forthright than traditional marketing:

For ... companies, branding was not just a matter of adding value to a product. It was about thirstily soaking up cultural ideas and iconography that their brands could reflect by projecting these ideas and images back on the culture as 'extensions' of their brands. Culture, in other words, would add value to their brands (Klein 29).

In this quote, Klein summarizes the beginning of cultural branding. The next step in utilizing culture for brand building is using public space – buildings, public transportation, parts of towns or entire cities. Rooted in sponsoring and beginning with the sponsorship of city redevelopment, branded cities have become a reality.<sup>6</sup> In *Jennifer Government*, Barry has expanded this concept to the whole world. Every part of this world is branded; even streets carry company names such as the “Bechtel Eastern Freeway” (258).

Another type of public institution that has been invaded by brands in the novel is the school. The character Hayley McDonald's, who is one of the teenagers killed in the Nike marketing campaign, attends a high school sponsored by McDonald's. As an example of brands influencing even the youngest members of society, “Mattel Primary School”(Barry, *Jennifer* 273) is attended by Jennifer's daughter Kate. Since children and teenagers are a demographic who is still in the process of finding and building identity, an early connection with them raises the chances for lifetime brand loyalty, making them an attractive target market for brands. McDonald's has often been criticized for its marketing targeted at children and the use of toys and playhouses to attract them. Mattel has also faced harsh criticism in the real world. The company's perhaps most well-known product is the Barbie doll. The iconic doll's look and stature have been strongly criticized, as they are considered to communicate unhealthy and unrealistic beauty standards to young children. It seems no coincidence, then, that Barry has chosen these two companies as school sponsors in the novel.

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the branding of public space, see Klein's chapter “No Space”



Early in the novel, Hayley prepares to give a presentation and the use of regular notepads at her school seems to her old-fashioned, especially in comparison to other branded schools: “McDonald’s-sponsored schools were cheap like that: at Pepsi schools, everyone had notebook computers. Also their uniforms were much better. It was so hard to be cool with the Golden Arches on your back” (Barry, *Jennifer* 8). McDonald’s is here presented as considered to be embarrassing rather than “cool” in the opinion of teenagers, ridiculing the company’s real-life efforts to be popular among the young. Peer pressure and the real desire of teenagers to fit in are cultural anxieties used to influence this young market. By offering appealing brand identities, brands fuel the competition among young people and profit from their attachment to the most appealing brands. Schools are the main space of development for children and teenagers, as they are not only educated but also learn important social rules and behavior here. In her chapter on branding in schools, Klein defines the development and introduction of new technology as the door opener for brands to enter schools and to “all but eliminate the barrier between ads and education” (Klein 88). Beginning with providing computers and projectors for schools, companies began sponsoring school food and sports equipment and some even broadcast commercials on school television channels (88). The infiltration of young minds is thus another reality depicted in Barry’s fiction, reflecting the influence of marketing on culture and society.

This “marketing of cool” (Klein 63) and the targeting of an influential part of society for profit show how companies can benefit from knowing the culture and the society they are selling their products to. Literature is a popular tool for marketing in schools: in the form of study guides, guidebooks and printed advertisements, brands attempt to blend into students’ everyday use of books, even encouraging teachers to teach branded content in their classrooms or having students develop advertising campaigns as school projects: “Teaching students and building brand awareness, these corporations seem to believe, can be two aspects of the same project” (Klein 89). Students are used to receiving written messages and knowledge in print form at school, which might possibly make them more responsive to marketing materials using the medium of literature. Being surrounded by brands on a daily basis might create brand trust among young people, increasing the probability of their becoming customers and being loyal to the brands they grew up with.

In the novel, the fact that Jennifer's daughter Kate attends a Mattel-sponsored school adds another aspect to the discourse in this thesis: Jennifer used to work for an advertising agency and her past success is linked with the Mattel company – especially in the form of her barcode tattoo. By sending her daughter to a Mattel school, Jennifer thus hands her brand loyalty down to her daughter. This concept is referred to as brand inheritance and it encompasses the use of certain products based on seeing and experiencing family members use the products (Thunder:Tech). The concept is closely related to word of mouth marketing, which extends the pool of people looked to for product advice to society as a whole. In *Syrup*, Barry has narrator Scat explicitly define word of mouth marketing:

[It is] every ad exec's worst nightmare. If it wasn't so powerful, marketers would try to pretend it didn't exist...the problem with advertising is that lots of people tend not to believe it. You might think that after a company spends several million dollars on an advertising campaign, the least the general public could do in return is swallow the thing whole, but, unfortunately, this is not true. Instead, most people tend to place more credibility in the opinion of their friends (Barry, *Syrup* 21-2).

It is true that considering other members of society as influencers of consumer choice is becoming increasingly important for marketing as consumers are more connected than ever and can easily share product recommendations through modern technology. Again, the importance for marketing to change its approach from traditional advertisements and adapting to the changes in culture and society becomes evident. The use of content marketing utilizing the internet and making use of social networks as a means of influencing word of mouth marketing is one possible approach. By creating compelling content – with the help of literary techniques and storytelling – marketers can reach influential word of mouth marketers such as bloggers and journalists.

By writing a personal blog, Barry seems to try to influence word of mouth marketing as well. His close dialogue with readers and his openness towards questions and criticism can be read as a means of connecting with an influential group of modern influencers: other bloggers. Running a personal blog has become a common tool for

personal branding and by associating himself with this group of influencers, Barry might hope to affect his own reputation positively.

## **5.2 Cultural Brands – Nike and Coca-Cola**

Barry has picked two of the world's most successful companies, which have developed into cultural brands, for both his novels. In *Syrup*, the main plot involves the creation of an advertising campaign for the Coca-Cola Company and in *Jennifer Government*, the central conflict revolves around the Nike corporation. While Barry states in the author's note preceding the novel in *Jennifer Government* that the use of actual company names is "for literary effect only", it signifies the brands' position as cultural icons. In order to highlight that brand names like Coca-Cola and Nike can nowadays be considered as cultural artifacts, I will give a brief definition of the concept of cultural branding and then look at how the two companies have employed the strategies and successfully built cultural brands, comparing Barry's presentation of them with their real life brand image. Reinforcing the main argument of this thesis, I will use the findings to illustrate the connection between literature, culture and marketing.

In *How Brands Become Icons*, Holt defines a cultural icon as "the most compelling symbol of a set of ideas or values that a society deems important" (Holt 1). People, institutions, objects or brands can all become cultural icons. The creation of a compelling icon based on identity value – meaning that it can be used for self-expression – is at the core of building a cultural brand. If done successfully, the brand name and its logo will evolve to stand for more than what the company produces, it will symbolize the added ideals and values of the brand. Such an iconic brand can then be referenced in movies, books and other media as a cultural artifact. By employing cultural branding strategies, brands thus aim not only to influence culture, but also to become a part of it. The association of a particular brand with a specific ideology requires a deep knowledge of culture and the creation and performance of myths is what mainly distinguishes cultural branding from other branding strategies. Holt states: "The right identity myth, well performed, provides the audience with little epiphanies – moments of recognition that put images, sounds, and feelings on barely perceptible

desires” (Holt *How Brands* 28), ascribing companies the role of “author” (14), reinforcing the importance of storytelling. It is thus a strategy in cultural branding to identify even the slightest trends and desires in consumer groups and then write powerful stories speaking to these desires. Marketing should thus be one step ahead of cultural developments and this can be achieved by strongly connecting a brand with that culture and maintaining a dialogue with consumers.

Barry’s use of Nike and Coca-Cola in his novels, instead of using fictitious brands, thus emphasizes the brands’ status in culture. He uses their iconicity to create a stronger bond with reality, making the criticism of consumerism more tangible and closer to reality. His readers likely know both brands and some might even identify with them or be loyal customers. The effect of raising awareness of how we are consumed – in the sense of being eaten up – by brands and by marketing is made stronger by this connection to real life. Barry introduces the Nike brand in the form of the two Johns convincing Hack to sign the contract to kill people for their marketing campaign. This first impression of the brand is ripe with criticism. With the help of the exaggerated cruelty of the two executives, Barry paints a very negative picture of the Nike brand in the very first chapter of *Jennifer Government*. He uses the company’s real image, which carries connotations such as determination and willpower, and gives it a very different direction. The power of persuasion, a skill that is important in marketing, is used to coerce the unsuspecting Hack into signing the contract, portraying marketing as an industry that will stop at nothing to reach its objectives.

The cultural significance of the Nike brand in reality is undeniable. With its long tradition of sponsoring events and endorsing athletes, the company has secured its place as a cultural icon:

What Nike did was to view ‘performance’ ... broadly enough to tap into the anxieties and desires of Americans who were not competitive athletes. Nike proposed that a particular sports myth about performing beyond all expectation provided a powerfully motivating metaphor for the ideological anxieties Americans faced as globalization hit the American job market. (Holt *Cultural Strategy* 2)

An example of how Nike makes use of the myth in the twentieth and twenty-first century is the “NikeiD” campaign. With this campaign, the company alludes to modern society’s desire for self-expression and for standing out from the crowd. Nike states the idea behind the service is to give “consumers a more hands-on design experience and the power to design and create footwear, apparel and equipment for themselves, for their friends, and even to be purchased by others around the world“ (Nike, Inc. 2007). The possibilities for the customization of shoes and apparel include color, cushioning and the addition of a personal ID – a field on for example shoes reserved for free text such as names or numbers. Especially the possibility to add a personal name or number to the products alludes to the concept of personal branding. Nike tries to become a true part of people’s constructed identity. The myth sold to consumers in the NikeiD campaign is that of young, athletic, stylish people who wear a brand that promises “everyday excellence” (*Nike.com*) and it equals sports with freedom. Wearing a Nike product has become a statement and it is for this reason that the Nike brand is one of marketing theory’s prime examples for successful branding.

In *Syrup*, the Coca-Cola Company is at the foreground and it is used as a symbol for ideology. For the main character Scat, employment with the company symbolizes the American Dream. He dreams of selling his new soda idea and it is Sneaky Pete who points him towards selling the idea to the world’s largest soda manufacturer.

Scat’s pursuit of the American Dream is explicitly stated in the introductory paragraph of the novel: “I want to be famous. Really famous. I want to be so famous that movie stars hang out with me and talk about what a bummer their lives are ... I want it all. I want the American dream” (Barry, *Syrup* 1). Here, again, Barry gives a summary of what seems to a slightly distorted conception of the American Dream. The pursuit of happiness is associated with great fame, and the place where that dream can be realized is Hollywood. To Scat, happiness means success and financial prowess and his plan is to achieve his goals by coming up with an idea that will instantly make him rich. This represents a way of thinking which is also representative of actual American ideology. America is considered the country of endless possibilities, based on its citizens’ perseverance and “the conviction to follow through: to work at it until it pays off”

(Barry, *Syrup* 2). Scat sees the marketing world as his chance to realize his dream. While his marketing education was rather accidental: “I majored in marketing because I was late for registration”(4), it has helped him understand that a single idea, sold to the right people, in the right way, can make him rich and successful. The use of the marketing principle “perception is reality” (6) reflects Scat’s view of marketing as a creator of images and foreshadows his upcoming struggle for the creation of the right image to become successful, beginning with his personal image and continuing with the creation of the Coca-Cola movie in collaboration with 6. Scat’s use of an iconic brand as a means for realizing his American Dream and finding his own identity reflects the interconnectedness of brands and ideology.

The significance of the Coca-Cola Company in relation to marketing and ideology is thus an important factor in the novel. Its status in the real world is also one of great cultural significance. Holt calls Coca-Cola “a favorite example of emotional branding” (*How Brands* 22), and he states that it is the company’s efforts to forge a deep emotional relationship with its customers through the creation of myths, which has helped Coca-Cola become an iconic brand. Holt also claims that “emotional attachment is the consequence of a great myth” (28) and with its history of over 120 years and tradition, the Coca-Cola Company has established a strong brand myth, continuously adjusting it to shifting developments in society and culture. During World War II, for example, the company’s efforts to support American troops helped it build a strong brand connected to patriotism, appealing to the heart of the American people. The black soda became “so well-entrenched in the nation’s culture that a 1942 ad for the U.S. Rubber Company asserted that among ‘the homely fragments of daily life’ American soldiers fought for were ‘the bottles of Coke they’ll soon be sipping in the corner drug store’” (Pendergrast 195). Symbolizing America as a country and communicating a sense of home, Coca-Cola deepened its connection with the country’s people by adjusting its myth to the needs of people in a time of war – a sense of security and hope for better times.

### 5.3 Storytelling and the Creation of Myths

As has been previously mentioned, the creation of myths plays a central role in the establishment of successful brands. Storytelling is a means of creating and performing myths by embedding products in compelling stories. Marketing makes use of narrative techniques and literary devices to create these stories; the promise of a great quality product is no longer sufficient to truly connect with customers. By constructing a storyline around the marketed product, industry professionals can connect cultural and personal values and ideals such as luxury, wellness and happiness to their products. The promise of a better life and the possibility of self-expression are frequently used myths. Storytelling, as a combination of narratives created both on the commercial side in the form of advertising as well as on the consumer side as sharing of experiences with the product, is a powerful tool combining literary techniques and marketing strategy.

As a major communication tool, advertising “circulates images of cultural importance by contributing to socialization and honing attitudes and behavior” (Johnson 1) and it is the sphere in which powerful images are combined with compelling text in the practice of storytelling to create myths. These myths do not only make use of cultural knowledge in order to speak to specific anxieties, they also create new desires and cultural ideologies. The relationship between advertising and culture is close and it is a two-way street. Literary techniques are used for promotional purposes and, if successful, to influence culture. While academic discourse on advertising has mainly focused on the visual aspects<sup>7</sup>, the verbal part of advertising will be discussed in this chapter to present advertising as a point of connection between literature and marketing. The interplay between the verbal and the visual is essential for the success of advertisements. In *Syrup*, this issue is addressed when Scat and 6 are secretly hired by marketing vice president Gary Brennan to produce a feature film advertisement for Coca-Cola, while their opponent Sneaky Pete works on the same project, officially endorsed by the company. In the course of their endeavor, the importance of storytelling is clearly reflected as a central aspect of advertising and as the tool connecting the fields of marketing and literature.

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this, see Johnson chapter 1

The basic aim of advertising is to make consumers buy certain products. It is used to persuade them that they need the products to improve their own lives in a certain way. Persuasion can be attempted with the help of both narrative and images. In legal and political circumstances, persuasion is often associated with strong speeches, convincing words and arguments. These “advocacy messages” have been the main focus of persuasion research for a long time, disregarding the fact that today “public narrative predominates over public advocacy” (Green & Brock 701). Following the argument of Green and Brock, who classify advertising as advocacy and emphasize the importance of taking narrative into consideration, I will use their “transportation theory” to reinforce my previous claim. Green and Brock’s hypothesis is based on the power of narrative to “transport” (701) its recipients into another world. Made possible by the readers’ expectation of entering a fictitious world, the suspension of disbelief makes it less likely for them to be critical of the story they are presented with. Using the example of advertising, Green and Brock point out that initial doubt in the authenticity of the story told in such public messages would entail that customers are “unlikely to suspend disbelief” (Green & Brock 702), making it more difficult for advertisements to convince them. As a consequence of narrative transportation, Green and Brock list a “subjective distancing from reality” (702), which results in an unawareness of real life elements contradicting the narrative message. Another possible consequence of the process is a change in attitude evoked by the narrative.

With these concepts in mind, the development of the Coca-Cola feature film in *Syrup* can be seen as a representation of the transportation theory in advertising. When Gary Brennan first presents the idea of making an advertising feature film to 6 and Scat, he claims it will “redefine what advertising is all about” (Barry, *Syrup* 141) and emphasizes that while the movie’s sole purpose is to promote Coca-Cola, the company is “very concerned about making a good movie, not just a good ad.” (141) This reflects the previously discussed tendencies in modern day marketing to step away from traditional strategies and interact with culture in order to reach customers. The creation of a feature film advertisement can be considered an instance of content marketing. The big budget, high profile movie produced by the pair’s opponent Sneaky Pete represents traditional marketing strategy, trying to impress customers with the help of powerful images but forgetting about identifying and engaging with their needs, particularly the



need for identification. Scat uses the statement made by the Coca-Cola board's chairman, who claims that he feels something is missing from the movie, to raise two important points:

The first thing missing ... is a sense of fun. This film takes itself too seriously, and that, sir, is not something our customers like. Nor is it something Coca-Cola likes ... But there's something even more important missing ... and that's identification (Barry, *Syrup* 177).

These two aspects are essential to the connection between literature and marketing. As a talented marketer, Sneaky Pete has created an advertisement – with all the characteristics of a television commercial. It has a sleek style, a plot that is easy to follow, and a high amount of action and special effects, catching the viewer's attention with powerful images. The lack of what Barry here refers to as fun and identification reflects the need for storytelling in marketing. The emphasis on creating compelling, likeable characters and offering consumers space for identification reinforces the need for using literary techniques for successful marketing campaigns. The combination of compelling stories and entertaining images comprises the basic structure of advertising: the interplay between visual and verbal text. In the above quote, the importance of knowing the target market's culture and maintaining the brand image are also hinted at, showing the complexity of things to be considered in advertising.

The film produced by Scat and 6 has a very low budget and is done with the help of Tina, a film student and 6's former roommate. As a clear opposition to the blockbuster produced by Sneaky Pete, their version relies on a carefully chosen script with a good story and likeable, relatable characters. While their project is well received by the board, the decision is made in favor of Sneaky Pete's movie "Backlash". However, Scat and 6 are put in charge of adapting it to make it more relatable – their storytelling skills are thus valued and considered useful for making a better film. The powerful images of the first version of "Backlash" are meant to be combined with a compelling story created by Scat and 6 to create a successful film, which in the novel is described as "an ad that people will pay seven [dollars] to see" (Barry, *Syrup* 141).

6 and Scat have shown their understanding of using storytelling and narrative in order to make a good film. They have used their production as a means of persuasion to achieve what 6 defines as their main goal: “We won. We set out to wedge ourselves into the project, and we’ve done it” (183). As trained marketing professionals, they have used marketing’s own techniques to influence the executives, essentially defeating the industry with its own weapons. Barry ridicules the marketing world with this plot twist, showing that while its main occupation is to influence consumers, the industry is not immune to its own strategies. Now that they have achieved their goal, Scat and 6 return to doing what is expected of them. The Coca-Cola board seems to have employed them for their storytelling skills but what Scat and 6 do is actually only use storytelling techniques to make the movie more convincing, not to create a product of quality, as Scat reminds his partner: “6, who cares if the plot’s shaky? It’s an ad” (Barry, *Syrup* 208). Their combined knowledge of marketing and storytelling gives them the necessary tools to create an advertisement story that is “presented as entertainment, rather than as [a vehicle] for attitude change” (Green & Brock 703). Scat and 6’s interdisciplinary approach to the production of a cultural artifact for promotional purposes reflects the main claim of this thesis, the interconnection of literature and marketing in consumer culture.

## **6. Branding War**

### **6.1 Guerrilla Marketing**

After having discussed different branding strategies employed to influence culture, this chapter discusses a more unconventional approach to marketing and branding: guerrilla marketing. The term’s relation to guerrilla warfare is especially significant in *Jennifer Government*. The novel’s villains, John and John, are both guerrilla marketing professionals.

Guerrilla marketing is a concept focusing on creative, unconventional ideas to promote a product (Levinson 5-6). Originally suggested for small businesses, guerrilla marketing was meant to attract consumer attention by employing low-cost measures like handing out leaflets or hiring people to carry large signs. In modern marketing, large

corporations have begun to create guerrilla marketing campaigns in order to achieve greater profits by applying unconventional means of promotion. The need for new, creative ways of promoting products is reflected in the increase of large-scale guerrilla marketing campaigns. As consumers become increasingly immune to the large amounts of conventional advertising they encounter on a daily basis, marketers are forced to develop creative ideas to connect with their target markets. John Nike represents this basic concept by trying to increase profits without spending a large amount of money. His idea to hire snipers to kill teenagers who buy the new Nike sneakers takes an amount of effort on the company's part that is very small compared to large-scale marketing campaigns featuring expensive displays or high-profile athlete endorsements. His reasoning for the expected success of the campaign is based on ideological factors: "We take out ten customers, make it look like ghetto kids, and we've got street cred coming out our asses" (Barry, *Jennifer* 6). Here, he relies on the cultural effect of exclusivity, expecting people to want a product that seems to be so exclusive that others would kill to have it. John Nike knows the target market for the new Nike sneakers well enough to be able to predict the success of this campaign. Teenagers and young adults who are in the process of building their identity are susceptible to the concept of exclusivity. His cultural understanding of the target market enables him to create a campaign that plays on customers' psyche and their need to stand out from the crowd by owning a unique or at least highly exclusive product. By making it seem like the shootings were an act of envy, committed by other teenagers, the Johns rely on the power of word of mouth marketing. They are trying to increase the demand for their product by sparking rumors about its ideological value, which is supposed to appear so high that some might even kill to obtain the shoes. The criminal act to be committed for the promotion of the new product does not pose a moral dilemma for the marketing Johns:

You're a funny guy, Hack. Yes, it's illegal, killing people without their consent, that's very illegal ... But the question is: what does it cost? Even if we get found out, we burn a few million on legal fees, we get fined a few million more . . . bottom-line, we're still way out in front (Barry, *Jennifer* 7).

The marketing executives are essentially putting a price tag on human life, showing that they value the company's profit higher than anything else. The unlimited power of corporations becomes very clear here. Even committing murder does not have any major repercussions for corporations since there is no authority to bring them to justice.

The concept of guerrilla marketing is based on the concept of guerrilla warfare. The term "guerrilla" is Spanish; it is a "diminutive of *guerra* war" (*Collins English Dictionary*). Developed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, guerrilla warfare was understood as the opposition of larger armies by smaller, less organized groups. This connection to actual warfare is especially significant in the context of the corporate war evolving in *Jennifer Government*. Barry turns the concept on its head by having one of the world's largest corporations employ a guerrilla marketing campaign that ignites a global war. Reflected here are the essential non-existence of small companies and the unchecked freedom of corporations to do as they please. John and John, as marketers – more specifically, guerrilla marketers – represent the cutthroat nature of the marketing industry. By having them start an actual war connected to their marketing efforts, Barry uses them as examples symbolizing the potential dangers of corporate rule.

## 6.2 Corporate Warfare

In the branded world under corporate rule that *Jennifer Government* is set in, the central global conflict that develops as the plot proceeds is one of corporate motivation. The competing customer loyalty programs "US Alliance" and "Team Advantage" have drawn all of society into their power struggle. The war is mainly instigated by John Nike, who is pushing for a collaboration of US Alliance with the NRA, to arm the union against rival Team Advantage. Los Angeles is one of the central areas of warfare. As Jennifer and Calvin land there during their mission, they are greeted by a sign saying "WELCOME TO LOS ANGELES – HOME OF US ALLIANCE!" (Barry, *Jennifer* 261) and in the midst of customers fighting each other in the streets to get the best bargains, they spot a US Alliance billboard saying "GO HOME, CARPETBAGGERS" (263). While the term 'carpetbagger' can generally be defined as an "opportunistic or exploitive outsider" (*Random House Dictionary*) its use in the context of warfare

directly links to the American Civil War, after which the term was used to refer to Northerners who went to the South after the war had ended to become politically successful or to make money (*Random House Dictionary*). This connection presents the war in *Jennifer Government* as parallel to the Civil War, making it the second war ever to be fought on American ground and reinforcing its significance on a global scale.

The global state of war in the novel is reminiscent of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri define as the concept of “Empire”. In their philosophical manifesto *Empire* and its successor *Multitude*, they claim that the state of Empire is one of constant war. In addition to various nation-states, they list “corporations and institutions” (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* xii) as part of the network that Empire is comprised of, equating the role of the economic with that of the political sector. The society Barry creates in *Jennifer Government* is an example of what the two philosophers describe as “a global order that is not only fractured by internal divisions and hierarchies but also plagued by perpetual war” (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* xiii). In the novel, most of the English-speaking world has been turned into American territories, and corporate rule has bypassed political rule as the government and public institutions have been privatized. The most powerful people in the world are company CEOs and marketing executives and it is them who end up instigating a worldwide conflict, making Barry’s novel an exaggerated representation of the actual power struggle between the political and the economic in modern society: “In the postmodernization of the global economy, the creation of wealth tends ever more toward what we will call biopolitical production, the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another” (Hardt & Negri, *Multitude* xiii). In the novel, this is the case as the boundaries of the economic, the political and the cultural have been blurred. Power has shifted to the economic, which now influences all other sectors and the political as well as the cultural sectors struggle to keep their place in this society. The similarities of the society in *Jennifer Government* and twentieth-century society are thus evident. While corporations have not overruled politics, their growing influence on society and culture is undeniable. Hardt and Negri strongly connect this kind of world order, which they claim is already a reality, to the development of mass production and globalization. The interconnectedness of the

economic and the cultural put in a global, political perspective is the definition of Empire.

Corporate rule in *Jennifer Government* is visualized by an illustration on the inside of the book cover. A customized world map shows that most of the English-speaking world is under American corporate rule: Australia, the United Kingdom and Ireland and South Africa as well as South America and most of Southeast Asia. Even Russia – with the note that it is “U.S.-affiliated, not fully absorbed” – is part of what is called the “United States Federated Economic Blocs”. The world is divided into three groups, the other two being the “Non-United States Federated Blocs” and the “Fragmented Markets: Full Data Analysis N/A”. It is clear that the United States rule the world and the disclaimer at the bottom of the map, stating “‘U.S.A.’, ‘United States’ and ‘Australia’ are registered trademarks of US Government PTY LTD.,” adds the corporate focus to this world order. It also portrays the world’s countries as individual brands, which appear to be owned by the global company named the United States. This adds national ideology to the list of things taken over by corporate rule, reinforcing the notion that national borders have been blurred and identification happens on a strictly corporate level, denying any other means of identification.

The countries belonging to the United States are colored in green. The other blocks are marked in a dark yellow and a reddish orange, similar to the colors on a traffic light or the general use of the colors where a range of red meaning ‘stop’ or ‘danger’ to green meaning ‘go’ or ‘safety’ is applied. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri claim, “the distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow” (xiii). The choice of colors for the *Jennifer Government* world map is also reminiscent of the opposition between red as a symbol for communism and green as signifying the free market, strengthening the status of the US as the leader of the free world.

Although people are treated as commodities and defined by their professions, some characters in the novel make choices which appear as alternatives to surrendering to corporate rule. The main character Jennifer and the character of Hack Nike stand for this opposition. Instead of accepting society as it is and allowing corporations to define their identity, both characters choose different paths to oppose corporate rule. Jennifer joins the government and begins to hunt down John Nike to end the big corporations’

reign of terror. Hack becomes part of an anti-brand group of activists. These alternate choices reflect that it is possible to stand out even in mass culture, a concept Hardt and Negri define as the “multitude”:

The multitude is composed of a set of *singularities* – and by singularity here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different. The component parts of the people are indifferent in their unity; they become an identity by negating ... their differences. The plural singularities of the multitude thus stand in contrast to the undifferentiated unity of the people (Hardt & Negri, *Multitude* 99).

The majority of people in the novel accept their role as being defined by products and brands and many enthusiastically choose sides in the war between corporations. Lead by materialism, they are portrayed as willing to fight each other for the best bargains – another aspect of the novel closely related to reality, as many different product launch events have actually been overshadowed by violence between customers. Hack and Jennifer have different reasons for deciding to stand up against the oppressive society they live in. For Hack, the moment of awakening is triggered by an activist group lead by his girlfriend’s sister Claire. He joins them and becomes an activist hacking billboards and opposing corporate rule with anti-brand activities.

Jennifer opposes corporate rule by turning her back on the corporate world and becoming a government agent in order to bring John Nike to justice. She leaves her former self behind and changes her mindset, becoming a symbol of what Hardt and Negri consider “the creative forces of the multitude that sustain Empire [which] are also capable of autonomously constructing a counter-Empire, an alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges” (Hardt & Negri, *Empire* xv). Although corporations have taken over the world, Jennifer decides to fight on the political side and try to help it regain control, displaying self-determination in the process.

Barry thus creates characters that could possibly become cultural icons based on their opposition of corporate rule, speaking to a cultural anxiety, which is taken to an extreme in the novel, but in fact present in the real world. This reflects the

aforementioned use of literature as a means to express these anxieties – and, in turn, the possibility for marketing to identify them.

## 7. Branding Art

### 7.1 Literature, Marketing and Artistic Merit

After the production of the Coca-Cola film in *Syrup*, Scat has a significant conversation with Tina, which provides a suitable introduction for the discussion of literature and marketing in relation to art. Scat asks Tina whether she minds the fact that a group of marketers at a large company have actually approved of her film, her “artwork”. Tina argues that the film is not a piece of art, giving the following explanation:

Art and marketing can't coexist, ... It's either one or the other. ... I made the film for you with the intention of appealing to a bunch of corporate suits. That I used artistic techniques to do it is irrelevant. ... You can't take artwork and just tweak it to be more commercially appealing. ... Not without destroying its artistic merit (Barry, *Syrup* 186).

Introducing the argument of artistic value adds another aspect to the discussion of literature and marketing. The basic difference in the two fields and their relation to art lies in their purpose. Some argue that literature as an art form exists in its own right, not depending on reception and response. Following this line of argumentation, literature has no target audience; its existence is justified without a reader. Others claim that the true meaning of a literary work only comes into being in the act of reading, considering the purpose of literature to lie in its reception. Similarly, there has been disagreement about the purpose of art. Aesthetic approaches consider art to be valid based on its mere existence, while opposing voices state that art need to be received and interpreted in order to truly be meaningful.<sup>8</sup>

A factor that is often disregarded in these discussions, but is essential for the consideration of the purpose of marketing texts, is the ambition for profit. Works of art

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the question of the purpose of literature, see for example Jean-Paul Sartre *What is Literature?*



can be sold and authors can, if successful, make a living out of writing. However, literary theory does not seem to take this factor into consideration. Marketing text is doubtlessly tailored to a specific audience and meant to serve a certain set of purposes: the selling of products and the creation of loyal customers. This purely commercial use of text, as a type of literature, contrasts with the perception of art being valid in its own right. The importance of the reader, receiver, or in this case the customer is important. Unlike in the discourse on art and literature, however, the receiver's task is not simply to give meaning to the text by reading and interpreting it. The receiver is expected to obtain the artifact and thus validate its existence by putting it to use. Marketing's *raison d'être* lies in the triggering of an economic exchange.

The above quote from *Syrup* directly addresses this conflict. Tina clearly separates art from marketing by stating that any work of art produced with the intent of being used for commercial purposes has no artistic value. According to her, a work of art is defined by the intent of its creation. When 6 argues that marketing is much more widely received than art because of its mass distribution to a large audience, Tina counters her argument by stating that marketers "confuse popularity with quality" (Barry, *Syrup* 187). While targeted to a large audience, marketing materials are not created with the intent of being aesthetically appreciated. Artistic – literary – techniques are used to create profit. This intent makes it impossible for marketing to be considered, or received as, art.

By introducing the notion of artistic merit, a fundamental question is raised by Barry. He uses the character of Tina to openly criticize marketing as misusing artistic and literary techniques for commercial profit. This goes along with his overall depiction of marketing as a merely profit-oriented industry, but also reinforces the claim that the fields are connected in the first place.

## **7.2 Anti-Branding and Culture Jamming**

In *Jennifer Government*, the opposition of corporate rule is reflected in the anti-brand movement instigated by the activist group which Hack Nike joins. In *Syrup*, the representation of anti-branding is not as strong. It is reflected in the character of 6's

roommate Tina, who serves Barry as a mouthpiece for explicitly stated criticism of marketing. In this section, I will contextualize both portrayals of the opposition to consumer culture with the help of Klein's book *No Logo*.

A real anti-brand movement has developed over time and with the increase of corporate power, the voices protesting it have become louder: "With commercialism able to overpower the traditional authority of religion, politics and schools, corporations have emerged as the natural targets for all sorts of free-floating rage and rebellion" (Klein 287). Advertising as a means of creating a hyper-reality and communicating normative ideals to consumers is seen as an obstruction to individualism and considered to limit personal freedom. While there are different approaches as to how radical their messages and measures should be, the various groups opposing consumerism and influential corporations share this conviction. Many use existing advertisements and alter their messages, others rework billboards to create new images out of them and some even purchase billboards of their own to display their own messages opposing those of commercial billboards. In a practice termed "culture jamming", art is used to alter billboards, making a point against advertising by reclaiming public space (Klein 279-85).

In *Jennifer Government*, Hack first joins the activist group after overhearing their criticism of people not standing up to the big corporations, stating Nike as an example: "Hack started. For a second he thought they were talking about him. Then he realized they weren't. Then he realized they were" (134). Upon realizing that so far he had simply been part of the mass ruled by corporations, Hack decides to join the group. Unawareness and ignorance are the central points of criticism here. Corporations can use their advertising to influence people because they let themselves be manipulated. The first billboard the group decides to hack is an advertisement for the clothing company The Gap. In order to protest the beauty standard of underweight women, they add a speech bubble saying, "Feed me" to the billboard featuring a skinny model. (192) The controversy within the movement mentioned above is represented by a group member named Thomas, who annoys Hack by "spray-[painting] over-obvious slogans on [the] billboard jams" (Barry, *Jennifer* 243). When they alter the message of a Nike billboard by changing the text from "I CAN SHOOT THE MOON" to "I CAN SHOOT 14 KIDS", Thomas adds the line "NIKE KILLS ITS CUSTOMERS", which Hack finds

too straightforward (227). The opposition of their approaches to “culture jamming” or “adbusting” (Klein 279) reflects the different levels of intensity in the real-life movement. While some desire to turn advertisers’ own work against them, others simply wish to express blatant messages.

The conflict between Thomas and Hack can also be read as an ironic comment on the necessity of using marketing’s own weapons to oppose the industry. Unless the activists communicate their messages in the same way marketing does, consumers might not pay attention to them. Hack’s criticism of Thomas’ blatant slogans thus reflects the need to adapt to the methods used by advertisers, the same way they have adapted to culture to communicate their messages. An industry that relies on channeling desires and creating ideologies has cleverly undermined modern culture and found its way into people’s consciousness. Therefore it must be opposed in creative ways, to demonstrate that consumers are not mere masses of unsuspecting minds ready to receive marketing messages. By finding creative ways to oppose advertising, Hack and the other activists can express themselves as conscious objectors. Adbusting is thus presented as another means of building identity and a true alternative to the acceptance of corporate rule.

Another protest executed by the group is the distribution of flour (tinted in green by harmless food coloring) at a large McDonald’s restaurant. Proclaiming that McDonald’s essentially poisons its customer, Hack, Claire and Thomas jump up on the counter and urge people to leave. Interestingly, their stating of facts does not affect the customers. Only when the activists put on gas masks and declare that they will now poison McDonald’s do people get up and leave the restaurant (Barry, *Jennifer* 244). Raising awareness does not necessarily entail action on the part of those addressed. It is presented as difficult to break people’s brand loyalty and the lack of surprise at the proclamation of the cruelty of McDonald’s shows that while consumers seem to realize how bad the food is, they buy and ingest it anyway, reinforcing Barry’s denunciation of noncritical consumption.

Hack is later identified by McDonald’s as one of the group members through the “cooperation from a couple of stores” (Barry, *Jennifer* 257) that helped track the groups approach to the mall in which the restaurant is located. In the parking lot, he used his Visa card to pay and “[s]ince Visa’s in US Alliance ... [the company received] one

billing address for a Mr. Hack Nike” (257). Despite the group’s efforts to oppose corporate rule, they cannot escape its power. The alliances of corporations have grown and become so influential that people are identifiable no matter where they go. They cannot avoid using things like credit cards – especially since many places no longer accept cash – and thus leave traces of personal data in the system, which can be used to find and identify them. Here, Barry addresses a modern cultural anxiety and links the issue of surveillance to the fear of being controlled by corporations. With the actual advance of technology, the possibilities for keeping track of every individual have been facilitated. This issue has become even more important in recent years, showing that Barry’s novels reflect both twentieth and twenty-first century culture’s anxieties and issues.

The activist group’s attack on the McDonald’s restaurant is later reported to John Nike by a young executive who works for Pepsi: “...A McDonald’s store got attacked this morning in the Australian Territories. People are saying it’s a grass-roots protest” (Barry, *Jennifer* 249). The use of the term “grassroots” emphasizes the political significance of the opposition to corporate rule in the novel. In his article “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination”, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai provides the following definition of the term:

A series of social forms has emerged ... to create forms of knowledge transfer and social mobilization that proceed independently of the actions of corporate capital and the nation-state system ... These social forms rely on strategies, visions and horizons for globalization on behalf of the poor that can be characterised as ‘grassroots globalization’ or ... ‘globalization from below’ (Appadurai 3).

Applying this definition to the activism of the group surrounding Claire and Hack in *Jennifer Government*, their actions can be interpreted as true oppositions and alternatives to corporate rule. As a form of social mobilization, the group reclaims power, representing the possibility of resisting the power of corporations and marketing. While they do not represent the cause of the poor, but rather the independence of citizens and individuals, this small group of people takes a stand against mass culture,

turning advertising messages against the industry and opposing corporate control. In a world where corporate rule has replaced political power, a grassroots protest appears as a reclaiming of power by the people, using the advantages of globalization to make their voices heard.

The representation of an opposition to corporate rule is less explicit in *Syrup*. None of the main characters join an activist movement. However, Barry has created a character who expresses explicit criticism of marketing. 6's roommate Tina is very open about her contempt for marketing and not afraid to tell Scat directly: "I hope they pay you well for strangling the youth of this country with cultural conformity" (Barry, *Syrup* 56). With this being one of the first things she ever says to him, her attitude becomes immediately clear. Interestingly, while she continues to express why she hates marketing, she opens a can of Pepsi and drinks it. When Scat points this out to her, she seems "wounded" and states, "I just like the *taste*" (Barry, *Syrup* 56, italics in original). Tina's use of Pepsi's taste as a justification for her drinking it is heavy with irony on Barry's part. Just before Tina enters the apartment, Scat and 6 have a conversation about the different sodas 6 has in her refrigerator. They discuss how marketing affects consumer opinion more than product quality and 6 ends their conversation with the words: "Taste is *marketing*" (Barry, *Syrup* 54, italics in original). Tina is thus used as an example of marketing's inescapability. No matter how much she disapproves of it and thinks that her awareness of how it manipulates people somehow makes her immune to it – she still uses consumer products. The defense of her consumption symbolizes the internalization of marketing in culture. She does not realize that the taste she enjoys has been created to increase sales, too.

The question of taste in terms of marketing Coca-Cola is also ridiculed by Barry in one of the 15 sections title "mktg case stud[ies]" (Barry, *Syrup* 5), which are placed throughout the novel. Early in the story, narrator Scat introduces the abbreviation "mktg" (5) for marketing, explaining that it is necessary to shorten the word when taking notes during classes at university because of the amount of information provided by the teachers. The use of this abbreviation in the sections intercepting the flowing text thus appears as though the reader is presented with notes possibly taken by Scat. All section contains satiric, ironic advice on how to market specific products, heavily criticizing actual marketing practices with the help of exaggeration. The "case study" on

Coca-Cola reads: “Never, never discuss taste. Taste is 90 percent psychological and it doesn’t sell cola; it’s roughly a tenth as important as image. There have been studies” (Barry, *Syrup* 18). The ironic comments in these sections can be read as a means of expressing explicit criticism of marketing while mocking the tone of literature on marketing theory, reinforcing Barry’s satiric depiction of the industry and blending explicit criticism with the fiction of the novel’s main plot.

## 8. Conclusion

Barry’s novels present criticism of marketing and consumer culture in a satiric way. Strong characters, who either oppose the ideology of corporate rule or use the marketing industry’s own weapons to undermine it, reflect the possibilities to oppose the growing influence of corporate messages and corporate control in consumer culture of the twentieth and the twenty-first century. The discussion of the novels has shown that the disciplines of literature and marketing are connected in numerous ways. The central sphere of interaction is consumer culture and as examples of postmodern literature, both *Syrup* and *Jennifer Government* reflect the cultural anxieties of their time, including the struggle for individualism and the fear of growing corporate influence and surveillance. Marketing can influence culture in ways that can then be reflected in and criticized by the literature produced by that culture. At the same time, marketing, branding and advertising make use of literary devices and techniques to wield that influence in the first place.

It has been shown that an interdisciplinary approach to marketing and branding can increase the influence of brands on culture and consumers. On the other hand, such an approach can also help understand the marketing industry better and raise awareness of its methods of persuasion. The characters in Barry’s novels, who oppose corporate rule and consumer culture in different ways, could possibly become cultural icons. Similar to other literary heroes of the twentieth and twenty-first century, Jennifer or Hack could appeal to society as reflecting hope in a society that is increasingly influenced by marketing and consumption. Until now, Barry’s novels and characters have not reached cultural iconicity, which shows the unpredictability of cultural ideology. Both marketing and literature can attempt to influence culture, but despite the

possibly influential methods they employ in order to connect with people, chance and coincidence play a central role and remain uncontrollable factors. The establishment of a story, a character or a product can be promoted, but not forced or controlled. This shows that while modern society may be strongly influenced by consumerism and corporations, it appears to not be entirely controlled in the way society is in *Jennifer Government*.

The power of the narrative has been discussed as a central concept in both literature and marketing and future development in marketing theory is likely to rely even more on the creation of compelling stories and characters as modern society continuously develops. The increasing importance and complexity of modern technology and the growth of communication through the internet continuously create empty spaces – personal, face-to-face communication seems to decrease, which can lead to the development of a cultural desire for identifiable characters and closer personal relationships. Fictional characters, created by literature or marketing, could become more important and influential as individuals search for meaning in them as substitutes for real human contact.

The ongoing development of culture and marketing's adaptation to this development will possibly also offer possibilities for a further discussion of the connection between literature, culture and marketing. As literature also adapts to cultural developments, the relationship between the fields will likely continue to be close. For example the emergence of e-readers and the publication of more and more novels and other forms of literature in digital form are likely to create new possibilities for marketing to interact with literature, for example in the form of digital advertising and mobile marketing. This can possibly be an interesting field of future research in the study of how literature and marketing interact with each other through culture.

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