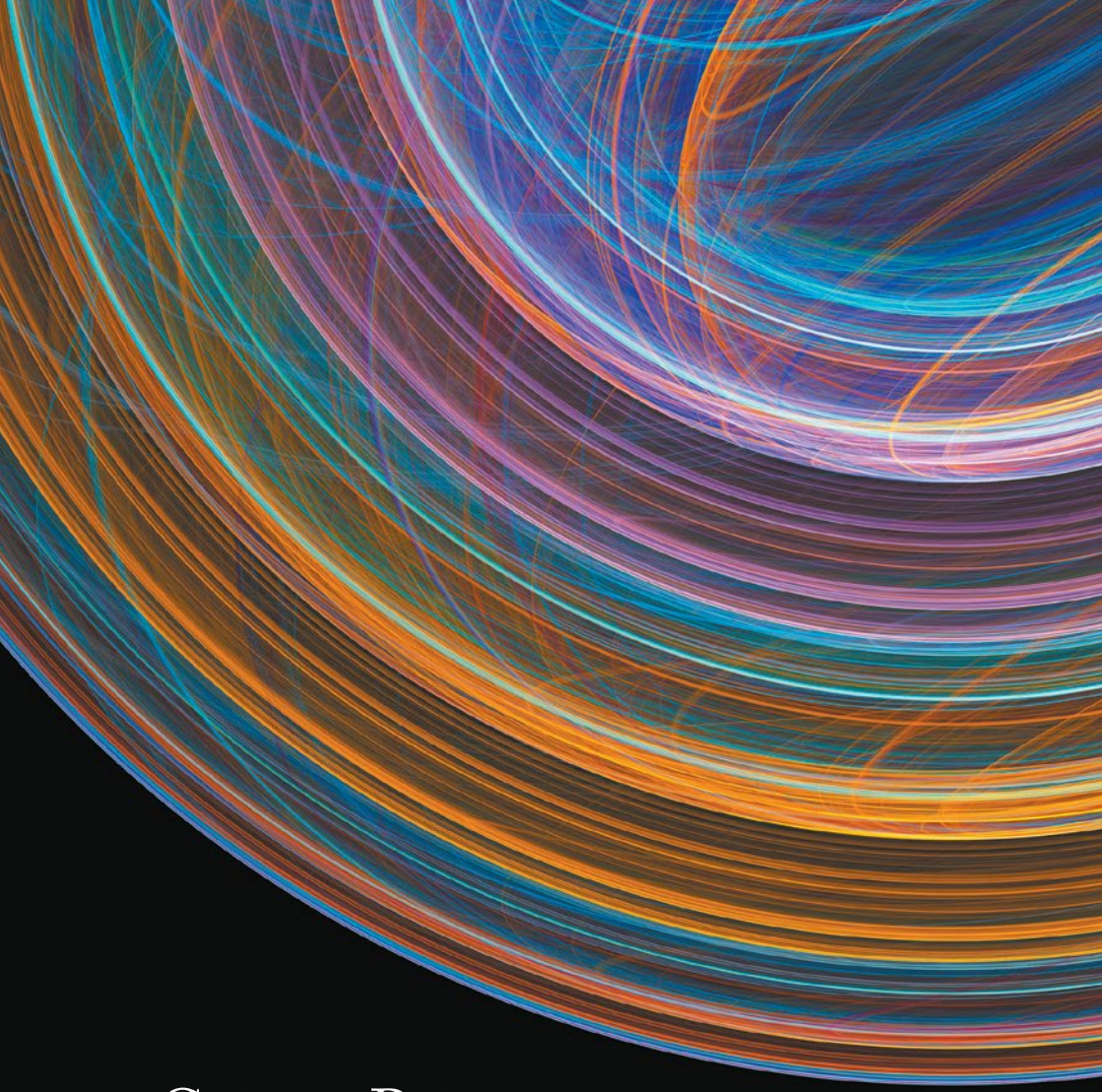

# Crime, Prisons *and* Viscous Culture

## *Adventures in Criminalized Identities*

Finola Farrant

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## Adventures in Criminalized Identities

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*For Steve, Dylan and Ethan*

# Preface

Criminology is not a solitary discipline. Indeed, one of the joys of identifying oneself as a criminologist is the hybridized nature of such an identity. Potentially incorporating sociology, law, politics, history, psychology, linguistics, cultural studies and beyond, criminology thrives on engaging with, rubbing up against, absorbing and being transformed by concepts and ideas, ways of knowing and ways of doing, from a multitude of other disciplines. Criminology is a fragmented, distorted, grotesque, fascinating, carnivalesque, cyborgian, monstrous, shapeshifting beast.

The premise of this book is, however, that criminology is at risk of stagnating. Structural explanations of crime, in terms of understanding through the social, economic and political spheres, have too often neglected the individual; while the individualization of crime and criminality continues apace, oblivious, it seems, to the enormous and varied influences that bear upon us. Instead, I argue, in the spirit of Wright Mills (1959/2000), that life is made up of a range of interconnected stories. Some we are told and some we make up. In some we are the star or co-star, in others we are mere bit-players or may not feature at all. Stories tell us about power and control, about what you can and cannot do. But the most exciting stories are those that allow us to move beyond ourselves, where alternative realities, experiences and endings are played out. Here we enter the realms

of creativity, of storytelling and find ways of making sense of things that, on the surface, may seem to make little sense at all.

My own story begins a year after leaving university, when I started work in a high-support, voluntary sector hostel for women who had been in prison, secure units or special hospitals. With no home to go to these women were regarded as difficult to place due to the nature of their offences, which included arson, child abuse and murder. What started at this organization was to become a long-standing interest in the processes of criminalization, in what we mean by 'justice', and the role and purpose of punishment and prisons.

From that first job I went on to work in a variety of other settings with both women and men who had been in prison. Throughout this time, I listened to the stories of those with whom I worked. I heard about lives that were devastated by the violence, abuse and neglect that had been perpetrated against them. I heard about lives blighted by a lack of care from families, and the state—in the form of children's homes, social workers, foster carers, teachers, probation officers and prison officers. And I heard about the experience of prison. Seldom seen as the answer to their offending—let alone their other problems—imprisonment generally heaped more harm, pain and damage on what were already damaged and painful lives. A number of those women and men I worked with, laughed with, shared stories with and sought to help, are now dead. Some overdosed, some were found dead in suspicious circumstances, others would go on to take their own lives, one was shot dead by the police.

Informed by these experiences, and those of over two decades of working, researching and teaching about prisons and prisoners, crime and justice, this book explores the viscous connections between narrative and structure. In addition to these personal insights, substantial in-depth empirical research has been undertaken. Fifteen men, all of whom had served custodial prison sentences, were interviewed using a life story approach. A further source of information has been prisoner autobiographies; these provide an additional dimension to both our understandings of ex-prisoner lives and to our understandings about the types of tales that get told. These interviews and autobiographies are supplemented by an empirical research project, which involved a three-year study with students on the 'Punishment and Prisons' module I teach at the University of Roehampton.

Observational notes based on informal discussions with students and ex-prisoners over a much longer timeframe are also incorporated. This book, therefore, operates at the sticky interface between the fascinating and the fascinated, and contextualizes theoretical debates about crime, justice and punishment, with popular criminal justice discourse and the lived experience of ex-prisoners.

The empirical material on which this book is based shares many of the key ideas and themes that it explores. Such intellectual endeavour means blurring the boundaries between disciplines, theoretical standpoints and empirical approaches. This book seeks to draw people and ideas together, making stories, in all their guises, worthy of analysis. A variety of material artefacts have been stitched together to create something that, I hope, will provide the foundations for a transformation in not only how we think about ex-prisoner others, but also how we think about criminology and ultimately ourselves. Made up of a collection of many different stories, this is, nonetheless, *a* story, and one for which I must take responsibility.

# Acknowledgements

This book is the culmination of many years of working with ex-prisoners, campaigning for prison reform, and researching and teaching criminology. During this time there have been many people who have helped and inspired me along the way, not least the many ex-prisoners, both female and male, I have worked with. They sparked my initial interest in what, even to a relatively naïve 22-year-old, appeared to be a bizarre situation in our prisons. It was these early work experiences that would eventually lead me to the 15 men included in this study, each of whom must be thanked for sharing a story of their lives so freely and with such good grace and humour; without them this book could not have been written. I would also like to thank the students who study criminology at the University of Roehampton, who have shared numerous insights and opinions about 'offenders', punishment, prisons, prisoners and meanings of justice. It has been a real pleasure to work in an institution with such a varied body of learners, many of whom are inspirational in terms of their commitment to exploring and making sense of such problematic ideas.

In the process of completing this book, many others have also helped. Notably: Dylan Brewerton-Harper, Jill Britton, Ben Crewe, Thom Giddens, Aisha Gill, Steve Harper, John Lea, Joe Levenson, Rob Mawby, Fiona Reddick and Hindpal Singh-Bhui. Special thanks go to Yvonne Jewkes who was particularly involved in an earlier version of this work, and to Amanda Holt who has been an invaluable source of advice and support in this later incarnation.

# Contents

# Part I

## Once Upon a Time

# 1

# Introduction

During a midnight screening of Batman movie *The Dark Knight Rises* in 2012, 24-year-old James Holmes entered a multiplex cinema in Colorado, United States of America, opened fire and killed 12 people and wounded over 70 others. Early reports of the incident—one of the bloodiest mass shootings in United States history—suggested that Holmes had dyed red hair, and when arrested by police told them that he was the Joker, fictional super-villain and Batman's nemesis.

A year later, and on another continent, a group of young people in Marseille, France, set up a petition calling for Batman to help tackle crime (http://www.unbatmanpourmarseille.fr/). One of the founding members of the group, Jean-Baptiste Jaussaud, was reported as saying that calling on Batman to help defend the city was no more ridiculous than recent calls for the army to occupy housing estates, or for military drones to be used to control drug dealers. These ideas, he said, were about as credible as 'expecting Batman to swoop down and solve the city's problems in a day' (Willsher 2013). These were sentiments later echoed by playwright and critic Bonnie Greer when she tweeted: 'In the era we live in, you kinda wish that Robin Hood or Zorro or somebody would turn up.'



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Not only have those in contact with the criminal justice system caught the popular imagination; concerns with crime, justice and punishment have long been a staple of popular cultural entertainment. Through these characters and stories the concepts of wrongdoing and justice are played out in computer and video games, films, TV programmes, songs and books—the popular culture—that we consume. From tragedy to comedy, such stories demonstrate the viscous and porous nature of the relationship between popular culture and real-life action. The dividing line between what is 'real' and what is 'fictional' is less clear-cut than may at first be thought. There is permeability, absorption, glueyness and stickiness to our lived experiences and the wider discourses and structures that swirl around us.

Battle arena-based *League of Legends* was the most played PC game worldwide in 2015 (Statistica 2015), while shooter game *Call of Duty* was the bestselling video game all but one year between 2009 and 2015 (Morris 2016). Based on unit sales, fantasy war game franchise *World of Warcraft* holds three of the top ten positions of best-selling PC games of all time. The roll call of the most popular TV programmes of the last few decades[1] includes: *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D*, *Breaking Bad*, *CSI*, *NCIS*, *Dexter*, *Making a Murderer*, *Orange is the New Black*, *The Sopranos*, *True Detective*, *The Walking Dead* and *The Wire*. Films include *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Dark Knight*, *The Godfather* (parts I and II), *Pulp Fiction* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. For the UK specifically, the most popular TV shows include *Game of Thrones*, *Sherlock*, *Luther* and *Doctor Who*. Such lists demonstrate the dominance of the United States in terms of the classification, production and consumption of popular culture. It is also apparent, however, that despite the diversity of genres, ranging from the historical and humorous, to science fiction and fantasy, computer games, TV shows and films share a number of similar themes: crime, corruption, gangsters and outlaws, war, incarceration, policing and detective work. Clearly, explorations of punishment and justice are staple ingredients for a whole variety of popular media.

[1] According to IMDb, the online database of information relating to films, TV programmes and video games. I have deliberately avoided lists such as those by the British Film Industry (BFI), which is selected by critics, programmers and academics; and *Sight and Sound*, which is largely selected by critics.

Popular culture, which may appear mundane, innocuous and everyday, offers provocative and telling cultural and ideological information about society (Nama 2011). Important philosophical questions are explored——not in some remote area of academia—but on the screens in front of our eyes, in the music that we hear, and through the diverse technologies at our fingertips. The viscous connections between popular culture, social, political and economic structures, and the narratives of male ex-prisoners, are, therefore, the focus of analysis. There are a number of reasons for this. Men dominate the criminal justice system, accounting for significantly more arrests and convictions and making up the majority of prisoners across all geographical locations and throughout time.[2] Analysis of masculinities should be an important feature in criminological study. Furthermore, ex-prisoners have experienced the whole of the criminal justice system, including the most severe punishment used in a number of jurisdictions. It is also worth noting that popular culture is saturated with gendered experiences. For example, gender is relevant in thinking about representations in art galleries, gaming, novels, music and film, as well as in the production and consumption of different popular cultural forms. Nonetheless, the power/gender dynamic is problematized in considering men and incarceration, where men dominate amongst those who are punished.

Much ink, or more accurately, much finger tapping has been spent considering the impact of the mass media and crime. Such considerations can broadly be set out under three general themes. Firstly, research that examines the impact of violent mass media consumption, particularly computer games, horror films and some styles of music, on increasing violent behaviour (Villani 2001; Hopf et al. 2008). Secondly, studies which have focused on the influence of the news media in creating moral panics and the associated scapegoating of particular groups or forms of behaviour in society (Cohen 1972; Hall et al. 1978; Young 1971). Finally, research has explored mass media representations of crime and whether this promotes a more punitive penal policy (Mason 2006a, 2006b). These are all fruitful lines of inquiry. This book, however, takes

[2] According to latest figures from the International Centre for Prison studies men account for 93% of the worldwide prison population.

a somewhat different approach to the topic. It explores *both* cultural *and* individual understandings of issues relating to crime, punishment and justice and does this through the intertextual analysis of the narratives of ex-prisoners and the way these are embedded within, and understood through, references to popular culture.

This serves a mimetic function by analysing wider cultural understandings about crime, punishment and justice through these, and other, narratives. In doing so, three particular areas of exploration are developed: criminalized lifestyles, prison experiences and becoming an ex-prisoner. Analysis begins with outlaw and gangster stories and how these connect to, and draw upon, our understanding of criminality and alternative lifestyles. Secondly, comics and the gothic are used to consider the way prisoners are hidden from view and made into ghosts, the grotesque process of monstering, and the bodily transformation that the incarcerated often go through. Finally, mythological archetypes involving metamorphosis and shapeshifting are used to examine what it means to be an ex-prisoner. In doing this, I argue that we need to recognize the viscous nature of all the various systems and structures of power that shape identity and understanding, including the role of popular culture.

## Intertextuality and Intersectionality: Moving Towards a Viscous Understanding of Culture

> Can I do it [the interview] like *Pulp Fiction*? Like jumping backwards and forwards. Or it could be like the *Count of Monte Cristo*. I'm going to tell it like that, so I'm in a cell and my cell-mate dies and I pretend that I'm him and they throw me off into the sea.
>
> (Paul)

This book is based on lived experiences. It is about the trajectories of a group of people caught in a culture that criminalizes certain behaviours and certain sections of the population, and chooses containment as a method of control. It is about the viscous cultural contamination between the stories we are told, the stories we tell and the stories that we listen to.

It is also about resistance and the pressures, difficulties and adventures that exist, for all of us, in trying to achieve livable lives.

The concept of 'viscous culture' is used to explore the sticky connections between the various systems of power exercized through social, political and economic structures, individual identities and wider cultural understandings of criminal justice. Viscous culture recognizes that although such structures constrain they may also offer opportunities. Systems of power that operate around dimensions of class, gender, ethnicity, age and so forth may not be experienced as a solid, unrelenting block. Destinies can be shaped – although strong forces of power are exerted upon us. Crucially, it is frequently in the cultural sphere that new possibilities and different ways of being and understanding are played out. It is important to recognize this aspect of lived experience and how various structures that shape us are permeable, amorphous; they absorb, resist and are open to change. Dominance and power have subversion and challenge written into them. Significantly, it is popular culture that gives us a sense of other possible worlds beyond our own, providing access and insights into the unfamiliar. I argue that analysis of popular culture and individual narratives allows us to move beyond the false binaries of society/individual, subject/object and fact/fiction.[3] In doing this I draw on intertextuality and intersectionality to move towards a viscous understanding of culture.

## Intertextuality

In its most simplistic terms intertextuality refers to the way in which all texts are made out of other texts, and how there is a shaping, or even transformation of meaning, through referencing one text with another. In bringing intertextual analysis and criminology together, a viscous network of cultural phenomena and 'real' life experiences can be explored. It has long been argued that it is impossible to analyse one text without considering its relationship to other texts (Bennett and Woollacott

[3] An example of this is provided by the outpouring of grief that marked the death of singer David Bowie in 2016 and the numerous comments made regarding his impact on issues relating to gender and sexuality. Going a step further, the German government thanked Bowie for having helped bring down the Berlin wall.

1987), thus, this book seeks to (re)connect a range of 'real' life narratives with narratives from popular culture and beyond. The aim of this is to theorize critical criminological concepts in a manner that demonstrates, in a concrete, as well as theoretical way, the mimetic function of *all* texts that contribute to the production, coproduction and reproduction of shifting and contested understandings of crime, punishment and justice.

Initially employed in literary criticism, intertextuality was used to show that the extraction of meaning from a work of literature goes beyond the process of reading or interpretation. Individual works of literature have their foundations in previous works of literature and are built upon traditions, systems and codes that are crucial to the meaning of the work. Drawing on the earlier work of de Saussure and Bakhtin, Kristeva sought to combine the ideas of these theorists and articulated intertextuality as a way of disrupting notions of objectivity and stability in meaning and interpretation. According to Allen (2000), intertextuality highlights that meaning exists between texts as part of a network of textual relations. Unsurprisingly given this, literary and critical theory was at the forefront of the development of poststructuralist theories.[4]

A key aim of this text is to open up the space to consider the experiences of those who have been punished, through the analytical mesh of a popular culture in which we are all caught. Keep in mind too, that whilst intertextuality has attracted a great deal of debate[5] and criticism regarding its value and meaning as theory—within popular culture—facets of intertextuality have been readily adopted in the form of sampling, referencing, remaking, parody and pastiche.

Intertextuality is intrinsically viscous. It has been claimed, for example, that after watching the film *The Godfather*, real-life Mafiosi altered the way they spoke to more closely resemble Vito Corleone, the Don of the family, played by Marlon Brando (Gambetta 2009; Smith 1998). British gangsters, the Kray twins, were also said to be up to something similar in the UK 'as part of the construction of their identity, it also seems fairly evident that Ronnie and Reggie [Kray] were attempting to dress and talk

[4] Although as Allen (2000) points out, there is enough flexibility in the concept of intertextuality for it to be used by both poststructuralists and structuralists alike.

[5] See Orr (2003) for an overview of various debates on intertextuality.

like Capone, muttering just like screen gangsters, driving big American cars and wearing well-made suits with expensive accessories' (Parker 2012: 121). This demonstrates the dialectical spiral between representation and reality, whereby the traits and tropes of fictionalized representations are incorporated into the identities of real-life people (and vice versa). This is a situation that can be found amongst many groups in society, take for example, the use of the term 'Feds' by young people in the UK. Originating in the US to refer to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), it has been picked up in the UK and is used to refer to the police. The influence of imported police TV shows such as *The Wire* as well as hip-hop lyrics may well have been influential in this particular piece of linguistic tourism.

Alongside the demonization and monstering of certain kinds of offenders and offence types within our culture, we also find a very high level of attraction. This book seeks not only to bridge these two apparently oppositional discourses—attraction to and fear of—but to show their intimate, viscous connection. Recognizing on the one hand, that othering is the experience most familiar to those who have been processed through the criminal justice system; and, on the other, the attractions and seductions that exist, not only in the reality of committing (some) crimes, but just as importantly, in the imaginary of a popular culture saturated with such stories and images. In a world of what cultural criminologists Ferrell and Websdale (2009: 5) term 'ceaseless intertextuality', truth and distortion, reality and representation are best conceived as intimately linked rather than contradictory. Using intertextuality as the analytical tool for this bridge building, the symbiotic relationship between the real and the imagined can be opened up. As Paul Walton (1987: i) somewhat loftily stated, the aim is to 'help heal the split between cultures, between the practitioners and the thinkers, between science and art, between the academy and life'.

Intertextuality widens the limits of the word and of representational categories inscribed by language (Kristeva 1967/1980). These interpretations and explanations are dynamic and open, and may be affected by new readings and new contextual information. The notion of intertextuality offers a way of looking at the narratives on which this book is based as they interact with other cultural texts. As with any other analyses, inter-

textual analysis is an interpretive activity, depending on the researcher's personal judgement and experience. Nonetheless, it has been suggested that intertextual analysis offers a way of examining power relations as a locus of contestation and struggle (Fairclough 1992).

Intertextual analysis was undertaken through consideration of the diverse texts or data provided by the interviews with the men who had been in prison, ex-prisoner autobiographies, empirical research with students and informal observations and conversations with other students, prisoners and ex-prisoners. Points of reference to further texts such as songs, books, films and television programmes became the focus of analysis. In addition, concepts that related to storytelling and mythology were detected in this material and many of the archetypes explored specifically relate to this. The aim, therefore, is to bridge the microanalyses of individual texts with important macro phenomena that consider issues such as what is justice (Fairclough 1992).

Scholars interested in semiotics have highlighted how in order to communicate we must use concepts and conventions that already exist. Furthermore, although our intention to communicate and what we intend to communicate are important to us as individuals, meaning cannot be reduced to the speaker's or author's intention. Literary theorist and teacher of Kristeva, Roland Barthes (1974), demonstrated this idea through analysis of a short story by Balzac. In his literary deconstruction of the story, Barthes shows how texts reflect a number of voices well beyond the author, and that identity is produced by language rather than expressed through it. Narratives and their meaning are affected by time, memory, knowledge of other texts, and the life experiences of all those involved in the construction of the text, including the reader. Intertextuality highlights, therefore, not only references to other texts but the symbiotic relationship between the text and lived experience and draws attention to other texts that affect the meaning of the primary text (Kristeva 1967/1980).

Intertextuality has been adopted as a form of method and analysis on the basis that it offers insights regarding interconnectedness, interdependence and relationality: the viscous nature of our lives. I move beyond the literary world, and into an array of cultural forms in an attempt to demonstrate the relationship that wider culture has to understandings of crime,

punishment and justice. Moreover, even in some of the examples already given we can see something more than what is hinted at. It is, for example, Marlon Brando's portrayal of godfather Vito Corleone that influences real Mafiosi. Marlon Brando would also play a significant role in understandings of what it is to be a teenager: a black rebel motorcyclist wild one. The Kray twins, who looked to screen gangsters in the US as role models for their own behavior, have gone on to be fictionalized characters in a number of films, most recently in *Legend*, the 2015 film starring Tom Hardy as both twins. There is a hyper-real, simulacreality element to such processes. There is stickiness between the various roles someone like Marlon Brando has played and who, and what, we think Marlon Brando was. This is a quality shared in more contemporary times by Tom Hardy, who, along with playing the Kray twins, was also in the title role of *Bronson*, about notorious prisoner Charles Bronson[6]; and Stuart Clive Shorter, a homeless ex-prisoner, in *Stuart: A Life Backwards*, based on the biography by Alexander Masters. Hardy has discussed his own misdemeanours and problematic drug and alcohol use. Again, there is viscousness, a blurring between reality and fiction, representation and reality.

There has been very little criminological research that explores narratives from an intertextual perspective. When this does occur it is normally of a historical nature. For example, Leps (1992) analysed intertextual modes of knowledge production by focusing on the development of criminology via the work of early biological positivists Lombroso and Goring, the emergence of a mass media, and in the proliferation of crime fiction during the nineteenth century. She then considered how these three discursive practices shaped the production of knowledge about crime, criminals and crime prevention. Other examples of such analyses have been in relation to media representations of crime. For example, in terms of exploring the crime narratives found in films, documentaries, 'reality' TV, radio and fiction (Carrabine et al. 2009).

Intertextuality, although far from the worst example of opaque academic language, nonetheless has the aroma of intellectual elitism about it. It seems important therefore, to make clear that what led me to intertextuality, and

[6] The prisoner Charles Bronson (born Michael Peterson) changed his name to that of actor Charles Bronson, although he has now changed his name to Charles Salvador.

therefore, onto the concept of viscous culture, was the narrative traces from popular culture found in the life stories of the men who had been in prison, in the ex-prisoner autobiographies, in the survey of students and discussions with students, prisoners and ex-prisoners. For example, in discussing their criminal identities a number of the ex-prisoners made reference to outlaw and gangster mythology and archetypes, to ideas about freedom, honour and justice. In their stories about prison, intertextuality was evident in the men's references to the 'surreal' and 'film-like' quality of their first entry into prison. Prison was described as a hell-like place, their main reference point filmic and televisual depictions involving violence and abuse, the impact of which would go on to be marked on their bodies and psyche. On release from prison, the way the men discussed their identities as ex-prisoners brought to mind the idea of mutation, transformation and shapeshifting, concepts that can be found at the heart of many classical myths, as well as more modern stories and comics, and involves a sequence of struggles as identity changes occur. The narratives of the men came out of a 'pre-existing cultural web of expressive forms' (Porter Abbott 2008: 101). Just as, in a similar way, when exploring understandings of harm, crime prevention, justice and punishment with students, it was evident that their reference points were frequently films, television programmes, comics and song, rather than academic texts or news stories.[7]

## Intersectionality

A relatively recent development in criminological knowledge has involved engagement with the literature on intersectionality. Largely coming out of feminist and postcolonial thinking, intersectionality posits that rather than perceiving hierarchies of discrimination, for example, in terms of class, gender, ethnicity or sexuality, how different forms of oppression interrelate with each other should be the focus of attention. Crenshaw (1989), originally coined the phrase intersectionality for a set of ideas that increasingly recognized the limiting nature of theories and politics that served to marginalize women from ethnic minorities. Instead, we are

[7] Much to the chagrin of most lecturers!

encouraged to account for the multiple elements of identities when considering how the social world is constructed. Intersectionality, therefore, is an analytical tool, or theoretical framework, for considering the ways in which gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and all other forms of identity and distinction produce situations in which people become vulnerable to discrimination. Rather than viewing the exercise of power as operating in distinct and separate ways in relation to gender or ethnicity or class, for instance, it is seen as operating across all of these distinctions in an interactional, rather than additive, form.

Such thinking has provided a useful reconceptualization in terms of the way that we think about identities, hierarchy and discrimination. Intersectional analysis helps avoid essentialism, without ignoring the specificity of the body and recognizes that 'power and resistance rests, at least in part, on identity' (Bosworth and Carrabine 2001: 503). Moreover, it is all too easy to see the relevance of such an approach when considering the operations of the vast majority of criminal justice systems around the world, most of which focus on the poor, the excluded, the neglected and abused (Mathiesen 2006; Reiman and Leighton 2012; Social Exclusion Unit 2002).

Despite a number of important contributions to criminological endeavour, a significant element in regards to identity and the exercise of power is, nonetheless, still missing. Structural explanations about identity such as those that focus on gender, ethnicity or class need to consider the operations of the wider culture within which we live our lives. The production and circulation of knowledge about 'offenders' and imprisonment offers a way into such considerations and show how the construction of what constitutes 'crime' serves to create a set of cultural norms. These are important factors in establishing key beliefs about society and identity. Popular cultural artefacts that explore these ideas deploy a range of devices that open up analytical space not merely to condemn, confine and exclude but to engage critically with important criminological concepts. This contrasts with much of the policy and practice of the criminal justice system that continues to marginalize and malign, and where engagement with ideas for reform and rehabilitation is frequently wrapped up in the language of redemption and religion. This is a situation that can be traced back to the eighteenth century, when the Philadelphia Quakers founded the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries

of Public Prisons (Bosworth 2005). Over 200 years later, Michael Gove, giving his first speech to the Conservative Party conference as Minister for Justice for England and Wales, returned to the past in a speech with gothic echoes when he argued for the need to bring 'reforming zeal into the dark corners of our prison system and bring redemption to those who were lost' (cited in *IBTimes*, 2015).

## Viscous Culture

This book takes an unapologetically eclectic approach to theoretical contributions to understandings relating to society and identity. There are, nonetheless, a number of theoretical threads that run through it, reoccur, go silent, and return. Important theoretical strands are derived from: the work of Wright Mills (1959/2000) on the importance of analysing the dynamics between biography and history, as well as the dialectic between the personal and the public; Kristeva's (1967/1980) work on intertextuality and the blurred lines between the text and the lived experience; Butler's musings on the performativity of identities; and Ricoeur's work combining phenomenological description with textual hermeneutics on how identities are shaped by the stories we tell about ourselves.

Jewkes (2011) suggests that 'crime films' incorporate a range of genres including the Western, the pirate movie and gangster films, due to the shared references to 'good' and 'bad' guys, outlaws and heroes. This eclectic approach to popular culture was evident in the life stories and autobiographies of the ex-prisoners and in the questionnaires and discussions with students. In some instances, the connection between secondary text (a popular cultural artefact) and the primary text (their narrative) was explicitly stated.[8] For example, references were made by the men who were interviewed, and the students who took part in the survey, to multiple cultural influences from across film, television, music and books: to Robin Hood, outlaw motorbike gangs, *Sons of Anarchy*, *Bugsy Malone*, *Pulp Fiction*, Jim Morrison and The Doors, Waylon Jennings of outlaw

[8] As is evident from Paul's quote in this chapter.

country music fame, The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, 'Gangsta rap' and the work of writers such as Dostoyevsky, Dumas and Solzhenitsyn.

Bringing these ideas together we almost reach the point of liquidization. Bauman put forward his ideas of a liquid modernity in a range of texts including *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Love* (2003), *Liquid Life* (2005), *Liquid Fear* (2006), and *Liquid Times* (2007). According to Bauman, liquid modernity is ambiguous and fluid and focuses upon the individual. Feelings of uncertainty coexist with the freedom to switch identities as we want, move around and transform ourselves. For Bauman, this fluidity has become an end in itself and the most prized characteristic of existence. He argues that individualization has led to the idea that we are able to make our own choices and have control over our own fates; however, the identities that are created come from a pre-ordained model about what we should be and are shaped by consumer culture. Thus, for example, Frank Sinatra's 'My Way' is one of the top five funeral songs in the UK. This is a song that celebrates individualism and the ability to do things as you choose—to do it *my way*, even in death—and even if many other people are doing exactly the same thing.[9] There is much to recommend Bauman's thinking on liquid modernity, and uncertainty, fragmentation and ambiguity are themes that are intrinsic to this book also. He offers, however, a highly pessimistic view of society and the individual's place within it.

Goffman (1959/1990, 1961, 1963/1990, 1968/1986) has made a significant contribution to understanding everyday social interactions, the social construction of the self, dramaturgy and performance and the framing of experience. Moreover, he studied the social life of 'total' institutions and the stigmatized identities of those whom were contained within them. Goffman focuses our attention on the rituals involved in everyday interactions. He argues that on the micro-level, these rituals are the glue maintaining societal cohesion. Language is the jam of social interaction: it is sticky and lingers on the surface (Wetherell 2012). Clearly, there is something about the very consistency of our understanding and our

[9] Based on findings from the Cooperative Funeral Care survey of over 30,000 funeral homes. It is worth keeping in mind that the deceased may not have chosen the song and the choice, rather ironically, may have been made by a family member. http://www.co-operativefuneralcare.co.uk/funeral-music-chart/2014/

experiences of identities, interaction and our role within culture that is important to consider.

Drawing on this variety of work, I use the term viscous culture to refer to the sticky but flexible consistency of the relationship between the individual, social, political and economic structures, and wider culture. This is not about adding on an extra layer of meaning, being reductive, or trying to locate a causal relationship between lived experience and social structure, but about recognizing that meaning is more likely to be realized by taking into account all aspects of influence on our lives. Viscosity has a liquid, fluid, melting and melding element that also involves resistance, stress and pressure. There is a thickness to viscous consistency that makes it neither solid, nor wholly liquid. Viscousness implies a level of contamination, and it may be something that is difficult to remove or throw off (if throwing off is what is desired). The interaction between the individual and systems of power leads to contamination and change. Bauman's concept of liquid identities implies a level of fluidity and freedom that may not be experienced; and everyday interactions may not be the glue or jam of social cohesion for which Goffman hoped. Thinking about relational power in this way, we can see some of the difficulties and troubles that different groups in society come up against. It is evident that the stress and pressure that people are put under as powerful forces are exerted upon them can contort experience; however, it is also evident that resistance can be made, or power absorbed and its energy remade into something else.

Viscous culture means recognizing that the wider culture we inhabit, that which is commonly termed 'popular', shapes understandings and experiences in ways as meaningful, and sometimes even more so, as those structures that we traditionally would expect to do so. Alternative realities, alternative ways of being, possibilities and potential are shaped in a viscous culture. There is stickiness to what we must pass through and make sense of, how we understand ourselves and others. The people we are, the cultures we inhabit, are made up of many constituent parts. Upbringing, education, class position, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, geography all have their role to play in contributing to how we see the world and how the world sees us. Viscous culture recognizes a further, popular, dimension that helps us negotiate and understand situations that may be unknown to us.

## Some Potential Thrills, Spills and Bellyaches

There is a risk that in writing about the lives of ex-prisoners and in reading about their experiences, their stories become 'consumed', just another media representation of lives of which we have little knowledge, but for which we have a great appetite. Making explicit the links with wider popular culture, where the thrills, spills and bellyaches associated with these ideas are played out in full, may compound this situation. It may also add to the general belief that those who are imprisoned are intrinsically different from the rest of society.[10] How is such a dilemma to be resolved? Throughout my time as a practitioner, as a campaigner for prison reform, and now as an academic and researcher, I have discussed some of the life stories of those women and men I have met both inside and outside prison. The responses to this have been diverse. Ranging from disgust, fascination, frustration, shock and excitement. I have been asked if I had simply chosen to tell the stories of those who were 'most fascinating' and told that I had too much sympathy, and sounded like an 'apologist' for behaviours that needed to be condemned.[11] During a live radio broadcast I was once asked if it was not really the case that the best way to prevent male prisoners from reoffending was to make them wear pink boiler suits and work in chain gangs.

Let me deal with these issues from the outset. I would contend that all our life stories are 'fascinating'. The rise of reality TV shows and docudramas, the way social media is used—as well as academic research—consistently demonstrates this to be the case. Whether that is hearing about the lives of clergymen's wives (Finch 1980); NHS chief executives (Learmonth 2004); flight attendants (Hochschild 2003); students (Brooks and Everett 2009); prisoners (Crewe and Bennett 2012); or watching people competitively bake, sing, or seek a partner. Nonetheless, within much popular culture it is stories of crime and punishment and issues of justice that are centre stage. In hearing from those who have been in prison a light is cast into what is generally a hidden world. In

[10] As Liazos (1972) argued, there is a danger within academia of othering through focusing on the 'deviant'.

[11] I have discussed this in Farrant (2014). This issue has also been explored by Liazos (1972).

fact, such stories illuminate several hidden worlds. In the process of committing crime certain behaviours are hidden from view. Prisoners are themselves ghosted from society, while ex-prisoners frequently have to hide part of their life experience in order to be accepted back into society; what Goffman (1963/1991) refers to as 'passing', learning the art of impression management.

A more tricky issue is how others will perceive these stories and how they will be interpreted. This appears to be an issue that Katz (1988: vii) grapples with, when at the start of *Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil*, he states 'it is likely that some readers will feel personally victimized by my effort to convey the offender's experience'. In contrast to Katz's belief, that if readers reach the end of his book they 'will emerge from the various offenders' worlds at least as often in disgust as with acceptance' (vii), I hope that this text offers a counterbalance to the view of offenders and prisoners as 'monstrous' and 'evil', a species separate and different from others. In an attempt to achieve this, links between individual biography and wider cultural understandings about punishment are made. By drawing analysis through a popular culture many of us are familiar with, we must confront our own intrigue and enthralment with those who have been criminalized. The aim is to connect personal troubles with public issues, to reinterpret stories in the hope that a more mindful and compassionate understanding of the criminalized 'other' can be realized; and to remind us that those who commit the most harm in society seldom bother the handcuffs of a police officer let alone the gates of a prison.

The elaboration of hegemonic truths about those who are punished and the practices of justice are related to the wider exercise of power in society. Such 'truths' are also shaped by a popular cultural discourse that presents a complex picture about offenders and prisons, simultaneously constructing a sense of fear and foreboding, but also fascination with those who are criminalized, punished and then released back into society. Whilst not wishing to downplay the harm caused by those who have been punished—and many would regard that some of the offences committed by the men included here are indefensible—the location of analysis is based on recognizing that conceptions of crime, punishment and justice are determined by power relations which have, in this instance, been crystallized in the institution of the prison. This book therefore seeks

to challenge the context and consequences of state-sanctioned 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980: 133), where inequality is pervasive and social justice seldom realized.

## Themes, Theories and Trajectories

When asked to tell the stories of their lives most of the men told it as a chronological tale, with a clear, beginning, middle and end. The structure of this book therefore references this element of the empirical research on which it is based. It also follows the traditions of storytelling in terms of the narrative arc that can be found within much popular culture, and in the autobiographies of the ex-prisoners who generally recounted their lives from childhood, through imprisonment and on to life outside. Archetypes are used to explore some of these ideas, allowing for a more fundamental understanding of experiences that have been hidden. Archetypes can be simultaneously challenging and reassuring, and conscious and submerged meanings are brought to the fore. Prison, for example, is uncannily familiar because our culture is imbued with representations of it.

The book it is divided into five parts. Below, I briefly sketch out some of the themes explored in each section.

## Part One

When we consider the impact of events in terms of victimization, the construction of certain behaviours into criminalized acts, or thorny philosophical issues relating to punishment and identities, there is little doubt that the various topics relating to criminal justice require serious attention. In contrast, popular culture tends to be associated with playfulness, fun, entertainment and frivolity. Yet, popular culture has embraced themes related to crime, punishment and justice and, at times, has explored them in complex and nuanced ways.

Following this introductory chapter, I consider the importance of telling stories and connect the traditions of early mythology with contemporary popular culture. Myth is the most common form of early narrative

and the founding myths were told by people to explain themselves and to explain others. By engaging with mythology and storytelling, new insights for criminological analyses are offered. Chapter 3 provides a brief outline of the men on whom much of this book is based.

## Part Two

Chapter 4 starts our journey into the fantastical. I entwine empirical research, knowledge and understanding about the criminal justice system with various popular cultural representations. The use of gangster and outlaw archetypes provide a framework for understanding a diverse range of behaviours and experiences and amplify issues regarding offending, power and freedom.

Popular cultural tropes and archetypes are used in Chap. 5 to consider lone avengers and gangsters. Adopting intertextual analysis, the blurring of lines between outlaw mythology and the lived experiences of some self-defined outlaws and gangsters is explored. The cultural iconography of such archetypes has meaning at the intersection of economics, politics and culture and analyses of these narratives offer a deeper understanding of the culture that produces and sustains such mythologies. Mainstream notions of law and justice, power, authority and freedom are reworked in these narratives and challenge us to think about why these mythologies are so attractive; not only to ex-prisoners, but to all of us who are tempted by outlaws and gangsters, even if at the distance of a mediated popular culture.

## Part Three

Continuing our journey, we enter the prison. Chapter 6 engages with the 'gothic' and 'comics' and focuses on media and popular culture depictions of incarceration and how these construct a prisoner 'other' through a process of monstering those who are imprisoned.

These ideas are taken forward in Chap. 7, which explores the prison as a cultural space and considers this in terms of ideas around ghosts, the monsters that are created in such a place and the bodily transformations

that some men undergo. There is significant popular cultural ambivalence about incarceration as a solution to societal problems and confusion about what is meant by justice sits at the heart of this institution.

## Part Four

The final substantive section focuses on what happens post-imprisonment. Popular cultural representations of 'offenders' and prisoners and what constitutes our sense of justice are highly contradictory. Similarly, the empirical data on which this book draws was itself ambivalent and conflicting. It is far from uncommon to hear students pronounce that prison is too easy (the holiday camp argument) *and* that reoffending rates are high because reintegration is made too difficult for ex-prisoners. The men's stories were also challenging and multifaceted. In Chap. 8 the conflicts, complexities and uncertainties that exist in society about crime and justice are considered through ideas relating to shapeshifting identities.

Critical criminological concepts around desistance, guilt, remorse, truth, punishment and justice are explored in Chap. 9. Drawing upon and developing ideas from the previous chapters, archetypes relating to shapeshifting and metamorphosis are used to open up alternative ways of thinking about identities.

## Part Five

The final chapter makes the argument that one of the most significant and potentially illuminating areas of criminological inquiry is at the intersection of crime and culture. Engagement with popular culture can contribute to the possibility of a reawakened criminological imagination. By connecting the experiences of those who have been through the criminal justice system and those who are engaged in studying it, with wider cultural narratives about justice, criminology is itself transformed. No longer at the sidelines of commenting on human affairs, criminology is at its very centre. In the process of coming undone, criminology becomes transdisciplinary.

## Some Caveats

> I would wish to enter a plea for a greater willingness in criminology to explore beyond its rigid terms of reference, to open itself to the adventure of other insights.
>
> (Young 1996: 14)

A core argument of this book is that stories demonstrate the inseparability of culture from experience. We need to expand our critical horizons beyond the notion of focusing on what are often perceived as intrinsic criminological questions—such as: why do people commit crime? Or, how do we get people to stop committing crime?—as this has limited value for critical theorizing. Alternative ways of thinking about crime and justice can be found in popular culture, and in the narratives of those caught up in the criminal justice system, if we only open ourselves up to listen and engage with them more fully. In order to achieve this, a variety of sources have been used in this book: computer games, films, literature, biographies and autobiographies, TV shows, comics, music and academic texts, as well as empirical research with ex-prisoners and students. The sheer diversity of source materials presents a number of problems that I need to mention.

This book takes a wide reading of popular culture, it is not focused upon one form or another, nor does it view one form as holding more value than another. For example, the interview texts are considered as much as a performance as is a television programme. I use the term text in a broad sense, where everything is encoded with meaning and must be 'read', that is, deciphered, interpreted and reinterpreted. So, analysis is somewhat broad, which I accept for some will mean a loss of specificity and focus, but will for others, hopefully, lead to wider, fuller, and more interesting connections being made about what we mean by justice—in all its guises.

Although the net of analysis is wide, it is not, however, all encompassing. The focus of this book is the criminal justice system in England and Wales. Popular cultural artefacts are drawn from a relatively narrow stream. I have written about Western popular culture and in

particular the popular culture of the USA and the UK; great swathes of global culture are untouched by this analysis. There are four specific reasons for this. Firstly, and most importantly, it was this popular culture that the various narratives used in this book drew upon. Secondly, I have written about what I know; thirdly, to incorporate information from beyond this would have made a potentially unmanageable, and definitely much bigger book. Finally, different cultures produce different understandings; however, these two cultures have some shared beliefs and ideas, and the popular culture of each is shaped by the other (or perhaps more accurately, the contemporary popular culture of the UK is influenced by the USA). Drawing on the popular culture of these societies makes sense in the context of the empirical work on which this book is based, which involved ex-prisoners and students based in the UK who, as mentioned, largely referenced the popular culture from these two countries.

Despite covering a broad body of work, this book is grounded in the experiences of the men who had been in prison, and each of the archetypes examined developed out of their interviews. The approach employs an eclectic synthesis of analysis, criticism and theory in order to yield information, insights and connections between texts, ideas and cultural artefacts. The analysis interweaves empirical research data and popular cultural representations in order to gain a better understanding of those whose lived experiences are so often hidden from view. The mission is to steer discussion away from theoretical dead ends or obvious conclusions (prison works/crime is committed by the economically disadvantaged) and instead, to challenge conventional and preconceived notions about crime and punishment and to consider how all of us can lead more ethical lives.

So, let me take you on a journey: we will travel far and wide, cover familiar and not so familiar ground; bump into old favourites like Robin Hood along the way, delve into the murky realms of the prison and imagine what it would be like to shapeshift. This may feel like a fantastical journey, and indeed sometimes it is, but do not forget that it derives from the stories of those who have most to tell us about the operation of punishment and the concept of justice.

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# 2

# Word Up! Mythology through to Popular Culture

## Introduction

Philosophers and theorists have long grappled with those intrinsic concerns relevant to all human beings: meaning and understanding. Postmodern societies are so complex, according to Frederic Jameson (1995), that they can only be understood indirectly. The use of allegorical interpretants, involving various media phenomenon, offers, he argues, a simpler, if indirect way of trying to reach understanding. For Derrida (1997), language involves infinite play, constant movement and endless slipping and sliding, so that although meaning may be sought, it is never established. Instability, complexity and ambiguity are inherent in our everyday lives. Butler (2004: 120) argues that norms 'are *reproduced*, they are invoked and cited by bodily practices that also have the capacity to alter norms in the course of their citation'. It is, therefore, important to explore those moments of citation that might be disrupted, to undo, in order to make life more livable. Taking these ideas on board, it becomes clear that intertextual analyses of popular cultural artefacts, the narratives of those who have been in prison and the views of students, need not be a reductive exercise, nor offer tenuous conclusions; instead they encourage us to draw



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deeper connections about meaning and understanding, recognizing the viscous connections between lived experiences and represented lives.

Comics, plays, games, films, novels, TV shows and music offer powerful resources for meaning in narrative and the creative imagination of society and express a myriad of assumptions, political perspectives and imaginings of identities. Ancient stories, ideas and concepts have also influenced contemporary popular culture. These are the cultural ciphers for popular discourses. Without doubt, wider culture—both ancient and contemporary—has engaged in meaningful and accessible ways with issues intimately associated with criminology and has shaped understandings about crime, punishment and justice.

Throughout this book, popular, folkloric and mythological archetypes are used as a dynamic and rich body of materials through which questions about the construction of 'crime' and 'offenders', and meanings of justice and punishment, can be explored. These archetypes help to express, through compelling narratives and powerful visual imagery, multiple meanings relating to a range of cultural ideas and beliefs. Occupying the imaginative realms and representational schemes, such archetypes open up reality yet frequently contain a fantastical element. This chapter explores issues around story, narrative and discourse, mythology and storytelling, autobiography, news media, and popular culture and criminology.

## Story, Narrative and Narrative Discourse

Frequently used interchangeably, there are subtle differences in meaning between story, narrative, and narrative discourse. What we call a story is really something that is constructed through language. Story has a temporal dimension and involves entities engaged in a sequence of events and should not be confused with narrative discourse, which is the telling or presenting of a story (Porter Abbott 2008; Sarbin 1986). The story is the event; the narrative discourse is how the story is conveyed. The important point to make here is that we never see the story directly, but pick it up through narrative. Stories, in all their variety of forms, are always mediated.

For Chatman (1990), narrative is unique amongst text-types because of its doubly temporal logic. Story goes in one direction, starting at the beginning, moving through the middle and arriving at the end. There

is an internal movement through time. Narrative discourse, when the representation of an event or series of events is rendered in a particular form, does not, however, have to follow this order. Although narrative discourse entails movement through time, this is external: for example, the duration of telling a story, reading a novel, or watching a film or playing a game. This separation of story and narrative was first made by the Russian Formalists who distinguished between the *fibula*—the order of events as they take place in the world and are referred to as the narrative discourse; and *sjužet*—the order and manner in which events are presented in the narrative discourse.

The seeking of wholeness or coherence within much empirical research, and some popular culture, can be seen as the result of an interpretative analysis that reifies the concept of a meaningful, cohesive self-identity that involves little contradiction or fragmentation. Such an approach has a long pedigree. Over 1600 years ago, in interpreting scripture, Saint Augustine wrote that meanings found in one part of a text must be congruous with meanings found in other parts, creating a sense of cohesion in a story. Such a rule has exerted a significant influence over narrative analysis, operating to suppress the idea of multiple interpretations, and laying the foundations for the belief that coherency should be sought.

Literary analysts have reflected on the ways in which discourse reorganizes stories to give them a certain inflection and intention in order to have an impact upon those who consume them. For example, a life story interview may take several hours to conduct (the narrative discourse), but it will have taken many years to be experienced. The *fibula–sjužet* distinction leads to a further consideration; as viewers, readers or listeners all we have to work with are the presentation of events in the vehicle of narrative discourse. Songs, books, films—texts—produce thoughts and evoke feelings and emotions. According to Porter Abbott (2008) this is because in almost every narrative of interest a conflict of power is at stake.

## Counter-Narrative Research and Criminology

Engaging with narratives has been a key feature of many academic disciplines. Narratives allow us into individuals' lived experiences, their problems, actions and hopes. Narrative helps to construct identity in a

particular cultural context and 'to raise the question of the nature of narrative is', according to White (1980: 5), 'to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself.'

The use of narrative research within criminology has had a distinguished genealogy.[1] The life story approach was an important component of early Chicago School research. In *The Jack Roller* (Shaw 1930/1966), we hear Stanley's story of grinding poverty, homelessness, offending and institutionalization. So iconic is this particular story that it has been revisited on a number of further occasions, including Stanley's seventieth birthday (Snodgrass 1982) and again, in a special edition of *Theoretical Criminology* in 2007 (vol. 11, no. 4), one hundred years after his birth. It is also a familiar cultural tale, where social deprivation and criminality have become intrinsically linked.

Other examples of life story studies within criminology can be found in the work of Carlen (1985), Crewe (2005, 2006, 2009), Crewe and Bennett (2012), Maruna (1997, 2001) and Parker (1962, 1969, 1970, 1973, 1991, 1995). Despite this longstanding pedigree, the relationship between criminology and narrative approaches has become somewhat shaky. This has culminated in a number of scholars arguing that criminology has virtually abandoned narrative research and that the voices of those who have been imprisoned are increasingly quiet (Crewe 2009; Liebling 2004; Maruna 1997; Maruna and Matravers 2007; Wacquant 2002). This has a number of consequences. Firstly, it has occurred at a time when mass imprisonment has become a common feature across much of the Western world. Secondly, with fewer accounts of prison life, and a punitive turn both politically and in the media, wider societal understandings about prisons and prisoners have become distorted, and a monstrous caricature of those who get punished has been constructed. Finally, this potentially hampers the opportunity for theory development, as those who have most to tell us about the processes of punishment are marginalized. A further issue of interest is that, despite the initial use of life story approaches within criminology, 'the curious eclipse' (Wacquant 2002) of in-depth qualitative criminological research has occurred simultaneously to the concepts of narrative, counter-narratives and life stories

[1] I consider some of these issues in Farrant (2014).

becoming more visible in numerous other disciplines (for example in law: Amsterdam and Bruner 2000; psychology: Erickson 1982, McAdams 1985, 1993; management studies: Learmonth 2004; and sociology: Plummer 1995).

When criminological research has been based on narratives it has often been concerned with narrative coherence and continuity, of a life moving towards desistance (Maruna 1997, 2001). Some people, however, may narrate their experiences of punishment in a less organized fashion. They may also not see themselves as 'making good' in terms of acceptance of punishment and recognition of harm done. They may not conceptualize their ex-prisoner identity in terms of personal agency nor re-author their story as a life-narrative of desistance. Rather, personal struggles may be reframed as political ones, for example, in terms of righting wrongs, challenging state power and inverting societal expectations—or vice versa in an age of individualism.

This conceptual shift in terms of narrative analysis moves discussion about the punished away from individualistic ideals such as personal agency, or criminal justice ideals about desistance, towards discourses that are significantly more wide-ranging. Incorporating popular culture into narrative investigations about crime, justice and punishment allows us to go beyond the structural and the psychological in terms of wholly legal, social, political, economic or personal explanations. Those who have been in contact with the criminal justice system have absorbed and passed through a net of discourses pertinent to their experiences. They are mediated and contaminated by other texts, many of which are from popular culture, about what their lives are supposed to mean.

## Mythology and Storytelling

If story is a chronological sequence of events involving entities, and narrative discourse is the telling, or presenting of the story, then it soon became clear that the men's stories reached a point in their telling where their identities as ex-prisoners were complex, contradictory and challenging—a situation mirrored in many of the autobiographies of ex-prisoners. Rather than achieving an integrated sense of self, identity construction

is a far more complicated process. It involves multiple discourses that go beyond those that we most frequently relate to identity—such as class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or any other system of categorization that we think may be relevant. Important as these are, they fail to account for the cultural context of identity formation. Culture is a complex weave of numerous and conflicting stories that play a powerful role in questions of identities, values, and the understanding of life (Porter Abbott 2008). Identity is neither singular nor integrated but involves drawing out the nuances of various narratives' meanings in a specific cultural context. Individual stories are influenced by the culture in which they are told. For Chivite de Leon (2010: ix), identity work involves negotiation with an array of 'intertextual polyphonies' that include longstanding cultural stories and mythologies, music, books, films, television programmes, computer games, comics—in fact the whole gamut of culture. Identity and meaning cannot help but refer to its own 'interdiscursive nature … whereby the word and its meaning prove necessarily mediated by *other* voices' (ibid.). Identity construction is, as gender theorist Butler (1999) has noted, performative, ongoing and may remain unfinished.

In the African-American oral tradition belief is rooted in the power of the Word and the African concept of *Nommo*, the Word, is regarded as the force of life itself. *Mythos*, in Greek, means story and the founding myths were told by people to explain themselves and to explain others. Aristotle was the first to develop a philosophical reading of storytelling, defining it as the dramatic imitating and plotting of human action, the art of which gives us a meaningful and shareable society.

Aristotle believed that myths offer the freedom to consider all kinds of essentially unpleasant events and that harm is diminished through narration. By hearing some of the unpalatable stories presented in this book we are forced to confront the 'criminal', 'prisoner' and 'ex-prisoner' 'other', and must explain our own feelings of fear, excitement, disgust, desire, pity, interest and vitriol. In hearing these stories, we should also reflect on what demands for harsher penalties, restrictions on liberty, disenfranchisement and the denial of full human rights does—to those whom we focus these labels upon, and to a society that believes pain is the equivalent of justice.

Myth and mythology have power in society. Myths can function as the 'validation and maintenance of an established order' (Campbell 1991: 621).[2] They can define heroes and villains; and, according to White (2011: 65), 'are typically enacted by members of subordinated groups as a counter-hegemonic act of subversion and resistance.' In conjuring up certain archetypes, myths say something about who we are and what we want by imposing structure and order (Warner 1994). Mythology helps us make sense of the world, as these stories and legends are interwoven into social systems and can reveal their inner workings. For Warner (2003), they encourage us to engage with questions about transgression, order, politics and human relationships, and inspire and influence us more than we give them credit. Myths tell us about the reality of power and about our understandings of 'truth'. As Segal (1987: 136) asserts, 'myth is both true and indispensable. Only when taken literally is myth false.' In helping us understand the world, mythology can reveal the operation of power in terms of what constitutes 'truth' at any one temporal and spatial moment. Using creative inventiveness to inquire into everyday realities, myths are stories about 'the ultimate possible destiny of this moment in which we find ourselves now' (Warner 2003: vi).

In Greek mythology, the goddess Dike is the embodiment of justice. Dike, as her more contemporary personification 'Lady Justice', adorns many courthouses, including standing atop the Central Criminal Court of England and Wales, the Old Bailey, where in contrast to most iconography of the figure she is not blindfolded. The daughter of Zeus and Themis, Dike was the enemy of falsehood and protector of the wise administration of justice. As owner of the scales of justice she was responsible for keeping this symbol of equality in balance. According to mythology, when the only creatures on Earth were the gods and animals, each lived freely and without interference; however, not long after humans arrived there was an outbreak of fighting. Dike was unable to bear the unhappiness people caused and urged them to live in peace. The people

[2] There are different interpretations of the term 'myth'. I draw particularly on the work of Marina Warner in thinking about myths and mythology and the power and insight that they offer. However, Barthes (1957/1972: 11) also provides a potent view when he talks of myths as 'ideological abuse' and argues that modern culture creates a set of myths that hide reality under the supposed naturalness or common-sense views about a particular way of doing things.

of Earth did not listen. Greed and selfishness continued, and despite Dike arguing that humans should behave more fairly and kindly to one another, her protestations continued to go unheeded. Finally, Dike gave up and retired to live among the more harmonious stars (Burke 1996). Perceiving the root of harm in society as being based on greed or selfishness has significant currency in both theoretical and popular understandings of crime. For example, peace-making criminologists such as Pepinsky and Jesilow (1992), argue that we should seek to be less selfish and more responsive to others. This relates to the interaction in which an individual's personal agenda constantly shifts to accommodate other people's feelings and needs. Recognizing the impact our behaviour might have on others is regarded as the way to reduce harm in society rather than through punishment.

Marina Warner (1994) argues that myths serve a mimetic function, and that it is in the power of myths and mythology that the story of identity and belonging can be found. Mimesis is the imaginative reinterpretation that captures the essence of lives. It involves both the 'free-play of fiction and a responsibility to real life' (Kearney 2002: 133). This implies not only that all texts are related to each other but that each text will lie somewhere between convention and invention (Carrabine 2012). Storytelling involves more than a simple mirroring of reality, it requires the art of imagination, and it is in the art of the imagination that cultural understandings are formed.

Stories are inextricably bound up with culture and potentially exciting new insights are offered by engaging with mythology and popular concepts about crime and punishment. Storytelling has the power to not only upset existing discourses about crime, punishment and justice, but can also help in the development of new theories. It is through storytelling that a shared sense of understanding is created and a livable life achieved. Engaging with the counter-narratives of ex-prisoners and relevant popular cultural and mythological artefacts offers new ways of knowing and understanding. Life, as the early Greek philosophers recognized, is only understood when it is told in stories, and a recounted life prises open understandings that would ordinarily be inaccessible. It is through our exposure to new stories that possibilities for social justice are opened up. Stories make possible the ethical sharing of a common world, where

individual troubles come to be understood as social concerns (Wright Mills 1959/2000). Moreover, we are, as Butler (2004) argues, called into ourselves, not simply by impersonal forces of ideology or discourse, but by those closest to us—those who have the most power to make us feel loved or unlovable.

So it is that stories alter our lives as we move between narrative and action. We can hitch a ride with a story as it transports us to other times and places, we can experience things we may never actually experience in our own lives, and, at the end of the story, we may well be transformed as new meanings and understandings emerge. Stories stick to us, shape and change us. Hegemonic norms are created through citation and, therefore, alternative stories, citations and iterations can bring different norms into being. Storytelling, in all its forms does not involve inert transmission but is a kind of re-creation that employs imagery and creativity to evoke an intellectual understanding of ourselves, and of the world.

## (Auto)Biography

> When the prisoners began to speak, they possessed an individual theory of prisons, the penal system and justice. It is this form of discourse which ultimately matters, a discourse against power, the counter-discourse of prisoners and those we call delinquents – and not a theory *about* delinquents.
>
> (Foucault 1977/1991: 209)

Prisoner autobiographies have provided insightful accounts into prison culture and the 'interior mental universe of the incarcerated' (Crewe and Bennett 2012: ix). They are also, according to Presdee (2004), 'superior' in both their explanations and descriptions of crime and transgression than rational 'scientific' knowledge. Such autobiographies are, nevertheless, frequently treated with hostility and distrust (Nellis 2012); and criminal justice practice and criminological research has largely failed to engage in any meaningful way with such works—although there have been a few notable exceptions. During the early period of his work on

desistance, Maruna (1997) analysed 20 published autobiographies written by 'reintegrated ex-convicts' and identified what he termed prototypical reform stories. Another example of this type of analysis can be found in Morgan's (1999) work on prisoner autobiographies, which segments these texts into those by 'straights' and those by 'cons'. Straights were those, generally middle-class prisoners, who found themselves in the alien environment of the prison but refused to accept a criminal identity. Cons, on the other hand, had a long-term history of imprisonment, and a criminal identity and lifestyle.

Writing about the experience of using prisoner biography and autobiography in teaching criminology, Dearey et al. (2011: 86), state that the aim of this approach was to 'redress a continuing resistance to life history approaches in criminology, despite the discipline being formally devoted to the understanding of the meaning and experience of imprisonment in all its forms and consequences'. Nellis (2012) has considered autobiographical writing by British prisoners in terms of the therapeutic, redemptive and reformist purposes that such writing can serve. As both Nellis and Dearey et al. note, autobiographies are often about the exceptional rather than the mundane.[3] They are, by their nature, individualized, and consideration about how a personal story connects to wider society may, or may not, be given. Nevertheless, prisoner autobiographies frequently provide evocative accounts of the lived experiences of those who have been criminalized. They may also be one of the ways in which wider society gains insight into the lives of those who have been punished. The full list of the autobiographies analysed for this book is provided in Appendix A.

## News Media and Prison

Consideration of the news media may seem at odds with thinking about popular culture as these different discourses are frequently presented as oppositional—we have what are often believed to be fictional accounts on the one hand, and 'fact' on the other. But both are, of course, cultural

[3] It is worth noting, as Nellis (2012) does, that the autobiographies of women seldom attract significant attention.

constructions. Crime, punishment and justice are constructed in particular ways by both the news media and popular culture. Lots of events, including extraordinarily violent and harmful behaviours, are barely covered in a news media that is supposed to present 'reality'. Furthermore, the borders between the 'real' and the representational are porous. Increasing use of docudramas, reconstructions, and fictionalized accounts, as well as verbatim theatre, biography and autobiography, let alone reality television, blur such distinctions even further.[4] It is useful to consider, even if only briefly, the news texts that permeate our culture. Particular focus is given to news media about prison and prisoners in the UK.

In his study of media representations of the British penal estate, Mason (2006a) analysed one-month's media output in Britain. This included 19 national newspapers, television news bulletins, drama, documentary and film. From this, Mason identified a number of salient features in regards to the narrow construction of prisons and prisoners. Media coverage was not only beset with misrepresentation and distortion, but also silence. Prisoners were portrayed as an uncontrollable danger. Violent offences and offenders were the main focus of news coverage, while stories about poor security, early release and escape, added to the notion of dangerousness and fear.

Reflecting the changing nature of news consumption, Tabbert (2012) focused on eight online versions of newspapers over a three-month period (four tabloids, three broadsheets and one regional paper) as part of a study on the linguistic construction of offenders. She found that offenders were not separated from their crimes but reduced to their criminal-offending role and placed outside society. Not only the criminal act, but the entire identity of the person was constructed as being distant from mainstream society.

Populist narratives routinely focus on the alleged failure of prison regimes to be suitably punitive (Kearon 2012). Liberal sentiments, the protection of prisoners' rights at the expense of victims' rights, poor security, and access to drugs are all features of this particular discourse. Mayr and Machin (2012), in their study of the language of crime and deviance

[4] Such considerations bring to mind the literature of Jonas Jonasson, the Swedish author of *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared* and *The Girl Who Saved the King of Sweden*, tales whereby the absurdity of 'real-life' events is made all the more apparent by their close proximity to the fantastical and outlandish.

in the mass media, identified prison as a soft option, and prisoners as a danger to a fearful public as two dominant media discourses about prisons. Furthermore, the content of media stories about prison tends to focus on the extraordinary, such as riots and escapes, while overcrowding and high levels of self-harm and suicide are largely hidden and unproblematized (Bennett 2006).

Jewkes (2007, 2011) explored the ways in which prisoners are constructed by the popular press. Her analysis considered the role of 'newsworthiness', the focus on celebrity prisoners, and representations of sexual violence in prison films. Jewkes concluded that stories about prison are frequently sensationalist and clichéd, with stereotypical ideas about prisons and prisoners. Much newspaper coverage appears, she argued, to be 'predicated on the belief that large segments of the media audience regard prisoners as society's detritus' (2007: 449). Prisons are presented as institutions for paedophiles, rapists and murderers and prisoners as a monstrous 'other'. This can be seen as in marked contrast to popular cultural depictions where some of those who have been incarcerated are presented as dashing, quick-witted, honourable and even worthy of our sympathy.[5]

Rather than pain, punishment and deprivation, domestic prisons in the news media are portrayed as somewhat easygoing places, where three meals a day and access to amenities and leisure activities are presented as common features. These are pampered, well-fed prisoners and popular news media stories routinely embrace the idea that prisons in England and Wales are like holiday camps. After becoming Minister for Justice for England and Wales in 2012, Chris Grayling gave his first newspaper interview to the *Daily Mail* and said that: 'Life will be made harder for criminals in and out of prison to rebuild shattered public confidence in the justice system.' Prisons would no longer be places that prisoners 'enjoy'. Changes to the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme[6] in

[5] Prisoners have been presented sympathetically across popular culture. For example, by outlaw country musicians and gangsta rap artists (considered in Chap. 4), in the literature of James Baldwin, Stephen King, Iceberg Slim and Jean Genet, in numerous computer games, and in characters on TV shows such as Jax Teller in *Sons of Anarchy* and Lincoln Burrows in *Prison Break*.

[6] The stated aim of incentives and earned privileges (IEP) schemes in prison are to encourage good behaviour and challenge misbehaviour. Schemes generally have three levels with the basic level the most austere.

2013, were reported in the media as marking the end of holiday camp prisons. *The Sun* newspaper headline was 'We'll axe holiday camp perks in jail so lazy lags must work for privileges'. For the *Express* it was 'Time to get tough on holiday camp prisons', and in a more critical report in *The Independent*, the announcement was referred to as 'A party political broadcast by the Tories: Prison's like a holiday camp'.

A further element relevant to the news media and prison is less about discourse and more about a lack of focus on imprisonment. As many scholars have highlighted, reporting on prisons is negligible and therefore knowledge about imprisonment is scant (Bennett 2006; Carrabine 2012; Fiddler 2007; Jewkes 2007, 2011; Mason 2006a). Although news media representations of prison and prisoners are misrepresentative and distorted, there are also significant silences, with little coverage, and some of the most important voices not heard at all.[7] Silence, absence and cliché about prisons proliferate. Discourse and silence are not, as Foucault (1990) has pointed out, each other's opposites. Without prisoners' stories being told we are unable to develop empathy or understanding; an untold life story is one we cannot relate to, reflect upon or share—prisoners become dehumanized—the 'other' (Kearney 2002). As author Philip Pullman has put it, without stories, we are not human beings at all. Similarly, Butler (2004: 4) states 'I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live', although it may equally be the case that the terms of recognition make life unlivable.

## Popular Culture and Criminology

Studies, particularly of the news media, have tended to paint a rather bleak picture in terms of the role the media plays in demonizing those defined as 'offenders', prisoners and ex-prisoners (Cohen 1972; Jewkes 2011; Mason 2006a, 2006b). 'Folk devils', 'monsters' and 'gangsters' have been constructed. And herein lies the clue. Whereas, devils and monsters are clearly demarcated identities that generally have negative

[7] Within criminological work many voices are also rarely heard, such as those of women, children, disabled and older people.

connotations, gangster is not. For some, the assignation of 'gangster' is seen in a positive light. Gangsters may be portrayed rather negatively in the news media but in popular culture they have appeal. Take, for just one example, what is probably the most well-known gangster story, *The Godfather*. This started out as a successful book and was number-one on the *New York Times* Best Seller List for several months. On being made into a film, *The Godfather* was the highest grossing movie for 1972 and is now regarded as one of the greatest films ever made.[8] As Parker (2012) argues, we need to consider why, in nearly a millennium of popular culture, there has been a fascination with those who reject the mainstream and challenge power. Such portrayals of crime, punishment and justice are both universal and central and 'it is the pleasures and dangers posed by transgression and 'Otherness' that make such narratives so seductive' (Carrabine et al. 2009: 416).

Warner (2003: xi) argues that mythologies' association with the fantastical meant that for a long time intellectual consideration of mythology was not perceived as a 'proper' pursuit. Serious adults would grow out of these childish trifles. Such concerns were familiar to the study of popular culture, which has traditionally been regarded as both unworthy of academic study and proof of a decline in academic rigour. With a focus on the cultural context within which 'crime' and crime prevention takes place, cultural criminology has done much to challenge some of these views. The complex and mediated dynamics that construct criminal justice meanings have been inflected with some of the core concepts and practices associated with cultural and media analyses (see for example Ferrell and Websdale 1999; Ferrell 1999). In addition to developments in cultural criminology, there is a slowly emerging field that specifically considers popular culture. This work, however, tends to foreground a particular cultural artefact or format in order to undertake analysis. This potentially limits appeal and somewhat restricts wider interpretation and theorizing. Broad analysis—so often frowned upon in the academy—is a necessary requirement in the context of this particular offering, which, through intertextual analysis of individual narratives, seeks to challenge the claim that 'there seems to be a

[8] *The Godfather* is rated joint first by IMDb users alongside *The Shawshank Redemption*. *Citizen Kane* is rated as the greatest film ever made by the American Film Institute.

dearth of imagination and creativity in criminology' (Frauley 2010; xi). In doing so, the viscous connection between popular culture and individual identities in our media-saturated societies is recognized. In a similar vein, Phillips (2010: 28) has suggested that 'there is increasingly little separation between the fictional and nonfictional – television, film characters, and narratives are used as exemplars of behaviour and potentially influence policy'. A contention supported by the case of the 'Weatherfield One', a plotline in long running British soap opera *Coronation Street*. This saw the conviction and imprisonment of fictional character Deirdre Rachid attracting front-page newspaper coverage and comments from the then Prime Minister Tony Blair and Home Secretary Jack Straw. More recently, a domestic abuse story line on radio soap opera *The Archers* attracted a great deal of media attention in regards to coercive control and saw a significant increase in both calls and donations to charities dealing with domestic abuse. Then justice minister, Michael Gove, commented that the plight of one of the characters not only shone a light on the position of women in prison but also reinforced the case for prison reform. Such examples strengthen the argument put forward by Clear (1998), that representations of crime and justice are as important for the formulation of crime policy as actual crime and actual punishment.

Culture is constructed and simultaneously constructs us. The points of interaction between text, consumer and producer shape and affect each other. When you play a computer game, read a book, hear a song, watch a TV show, your knowledge of other texts affects how you understand the primary text. The consumer is active in constructing meaning, making sense, and creating action. We are not passive recipients of knowledge. It is possible to identify an intertextual loop, or what Ricoeur (1991) referred to as the circle of mimesis, between individual understandings of self, wider understandings of crime and punishment, and their representation in popular culture.

Popular cultural depictions of crime and punishment allow us to explore in a more nuanced, heightened and flexible manner some of the issues raised by the enactment of crime, punishment and justice. Whereas, news media representations rarely move beyond the simplistic

and narrow—where people are bad, evil and monstrous; popular culture frequently offers insights into the complex, contradictory and conflicted experiences of those involved in the criminal justice system, whether as police officers, suspects, victims, defendants or lawyers. Moreover, many cultural depictions play with real-life experiences and offer representations that are more complex and less condemnatory towards people who have been criminalized in real life. Country musician Johnny Cash performed and recorded a number of albums in prisons (San Quentin and Folsom) which were not only best-sellers but allowed him to demonstrate his sympathy with those who had been incarcerated. More recently, renowned drug smuggler and ex-prisoner Howard Marks, wrote a best-selling book which went on to be made into the film *Mr Nice* and worked with musicians including Super Furry Animals. Films, such as *Catch Me If You Can*, based on American fraudster Frank Abagnale, or *Mesrine*, about Jacques Mesrine the French bank robber, murderer and kidnapper, highlight this viscous aspect of culture, traversing a furrow between lived experience and representation.

By the time he was 21 years old, Abagnale (played in the film by Leonardo DiCaprio), had committed a range of frauds amounting to millions of dollars in numerous jurisdictions. He impersonated an airline pilot, an attorney and a doctor, and escaped from police custody twice before eventually being sent to prison for 12 years. He was released early, however, in order to work for the federal authorities on fraud and scam investigations—a role he continues to this day.

Mesrine—played by Vincent Cassel—required a two-part film to cover his life story, although this had a less happy ending. Mesrine repeatedly escaped from prison, tried to orchestrate a mass breakout from a Canadian prison, and made international headlines when his exploits included trying to kidnap a judge who had previously sentenced him. Cultivating the mythology of Robin Hood, he claimed that his criminal activity was politically motivated. Rarely pictured without a female companion, he epitomized the glamour and risk-taking of the outlaw existence. As with so many gangster and prison escape films, the sympathies of the audience are with Mesrine. In the film, Mesrine's death at the hands of the French police is experienced as an injustice. This is a particular irony given the lack of justice given to many of those who die at the hands of the police.

Statistics from the charity INQUEST show that there have been well over 1000 deaths in police custody in England and Wales, yet no police officer has been successfully prosecuted since 1969. In the USA, the FBI maintains a national database of fatal shootings by officers but does not require police departments to keep it updated. Between 2005–2014, 47 police officers were charged with unlawful shootings while on duty, very few of whom were successfully prosecuted. During the same timeframe 2600 'justifiable homicides' were reported to the FBI (Stinson 2015). Sympathy with a representation on film does not necessarily translate into action.

The complex range of reactions to those caught up in the criminal justice system, from horror to awe, through entertainment and education, requires consideration. It is useful to examine some of the most common experiences and representations of the criminal justice system in order to expose the tensions that underlie the construction of understandings about crime, justice and punishment. This will help us to recognize that the boundaries between 'fact' and 'fiction' are both porous and sticky (see for example not only *Mesrine* and *Catch Me If You Can* but also *Monster*, *Bronson*, *Legend*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Orange is the New Black* and so on).

## Conclusion

Bennett and Woollacott (1987) hinted at the idea of viscous culture when they argued that popular culture is a critical site for struggles between dominant and subordinate groups which connect with, and relate to, the audiences' experiences. They argued that rather than simply reflecting dominant discourses popular culture makes concessions to the opposing, or different values and ideologies of subordinate groups. Moral and philosophical dimensions are rarely clear-cut and in a sophisticated and increasingly fragmented popular culture, truly complex ideas are played out in a way that criminal justice policy and political statement rarely reflect. Cultural matters are political matters and reflect economic positions, social conditions and lived experiences. Culture can also be contradictory, offering hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourse, high and low art.[9]

[9] Although beyond the orbit of this book, it is worth keeping in mind that the production of popular culture is itself affected by systems of power and control.

Intertextual analysis involving multiple and diverse forms of texts reminds us that what we take for granted may not actually be true, and what was once unimaginable may in fact be realized. Engagement with popular culture offers a chink in the armour of a dominant punitive discourse whereby prisoners are seen as monsters and ex-prisoners may never feel quite free (Goffman 1963/1990). Although popular cultural depictions may be romanticized and even at times ridiculous, they provide opportunities for us to reflect, to think, to reimagine and redo.

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# 3

# Introducing the Men

Below, I provide a brief outline of each of the men whose narratives feature significantly in this book. Their individual stories provided inspiration for the idea that popular culture is an important discourse in our lives, shaping understanding of ourselves, as well as how others see us. In the complex process of authoring and re-authoring their lives some of the men requested that their nicknames or actual names were used.[1]

**ABDI** was 33 years old and came to Britain from Somalia aged one. He had a long history of homelessness and substance misuse. His father was violent towards him in his childhood and he spent time in foster care. Despite being in contact with social services, he was homeless from an early age and had never had stable housing.

Abdi comes across as rather shy and nervous. He was attending a drug service as part of a community sentence and hoped to go into residential rehabilitation for alcohol use. The first illicit substance he used was crack-cocaine. Abdi had been in prison three times, all short sentences for shoplifting offences. Having lived for a long time on the streets he said, 'in prison, it was for me a little bit… at least I was getting a shower, warm

[1] See Farrant (2014) for a full discussion on issues relating to methodology including consent and anonymity.



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bed, watching TV, in a way it wasn't that bad.' He continued, 'but when you've got a place to live, you're sitting there [in your cell] thinking why did I do this to myself?'

**BOBBY (FROSTY)** had been out of prison for three weeks and was living in a hostel. He was clearly concerned with his appearance and had a very deep but not unpleasant voice and was personable and chatty. He had a short beard and talked about being 'a big man now'. (Bobby, like many of the other men, took up gym during his imprisonment). In addition to the physical, bodily changes he went through in prison, Bobby said he was 29 years old. It later came out that he was in fact 28. Turning 30 was seen as a significant event, a point when he must have his life in some kind of order for that milestone age.

He was keen to state that his (and his brothers') involvement in crime was not to do with their family upbringing or social deprivation, although he briefly mentions that his dad had been in trouble in his youth. Bobby had never worked, and earned a living prior to imprisonment by dealing cannabis, although he had never been charged with this. His prison sentence was for Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) with intent, for which he received a six-year sentence. Bobby's family call him Frosty and when asked why, says it is because he is cold hearted.

**BUTCH** was a 52-year-old ex-biker. Brought up in Hampshire he had spent much of his life homeless and with an extensive drug problem. His mother died before he was a teenager and his father had raised him alone. Butch talked eloquently about his first heroin use and the effect it had on him. Now, with a largely respectable demeanour, the inky traces of his previous life were, nonetheless, still evident. He had two tattoos on his inner lip: FTW (fuck the world) and Outlaw. Butch (his nickname comes from a cartoon dog) shows me a photo album of his early life, usually on a motorbike with long, red, curly hair.

He had been in prison three times, but saw turning 40 as a key moment in his life. Butch does not take drugs or drink, he is a vegetarian, and credits his turn away from crime to taking a more spiritual approach to life, which for him has involved learning to meditate.

**CHARLIE** came across as a caring, thoughtful individual. Small, he discussed how his size led to bullying as a child. He also talked about having dyslexia, although this was not identified until well into adulthood.

Throughout Charlie's life his father had been a problem drinker. Charlie is highly creative and has performed at the Edinburgh Festival and other spaces including universities and prisons. He was planning a film related to the story of his imprisonment.

In telling his story, Charlie adopts, as a number of the other men do also, a range of accents, as he takes on the parts of those involved in his story. He worked part-time for a prison-based voluntary sector organization, matching mentors with prisoners. He has been in prison once, having received a 16-month sentence for rioting during an anti-British National Party (BNP) demonstration, a demonstration I too had attended.

**COLIN** had been in prison so many times that he has simply lost count. Of slight build, he had the appearance of a heavy smoker. Dressed casually, he looked like a man, who even at 63 years of age, should not be messed with.

Colin had a long history of institutionalization, including care homes and borstal. He relates his own violent conduct back to the violent and abusive upbringing he had experienced in care homes as a child. He had served 15 years of a life sentence for murder.

**CRAIG** was 27 years old. He regaled me with stories of childhood abuse for having ginger hair. Out of prison 17 months, this was the longest period of time he had been out since he was 14 years old. Craig had committed an array of offences and classed himself as a 'habitual offender—for bloody donkey's years'.

Craig had been in adult prisons, young offender institutions, a secure training centre and local authority secure children's homes. He had also spent time in children's homes whilst growing up. His longest sentence was for nearly five years, which he received at the age of 19. He referred to this sentence as 'deserved'. He was working in a retail electrical shop and was living back at home with his family where he slept in the kitchen. He predicted a return to prison could be imminent.

**DANNY** was 35 years old and lived with his wife and daughter. Known by his mates as the 'good-looking one', he is a tattooed ex-hippie. Danny is an accomplished storyteller, adopting voices for the tales he tells. Much of his story was told almost as a play, with him taking on the various characters, including that of his younger self, for which he adopted a high pitched voice.

Danny had been in prison once, for offences relating to supply of Class A drugs and fraud, he received a three-year sentence aged 20. He had been out of prison for 14 years.

**HECTOR** had a quiet voice, was 28 years old and lived in an ex-prisoner hostel. He was clearly well regarded in the hostel and seen as a success. Hector came across as level headed and appeared to be holding on to a level of motivation to stay away from crime. This was despite numerous knock-backs in regards to employment and training.

Hector's early life was beset by bereavement, poor attendance at school, problems at home, crime and substance misuse. He had been adopted at a young age, although his adoptive mum died. The woman his dad then married also died whilst Hector was still young. During his time at the hostel he decided to try and locate his biological mother and father. He had been in prison four times including young offender institutions. His longest prison sentence was for importation of Class A drugs for which he received an eight-year sentence.

**JASON** was 28 years old, well built, and dressed in gym gear, he clearly worked out. He talked with emotion about various aspects of his life, including racism and the difficulties he faced being out of prison. He had been in prison twice, both as an adult. The most recent occasion was for a number of offences including robbery and possession of a knife and an imitation firearm, for which he received a six-year sentence.

Jason's mother had died when he was young. He had been adopted and had contact with a social worker whilst growing up. He had no contact with his dad. Unemployed, Jason had been out of prison for two years but considered life on the outside hard.

**MOSES** was 24 years old and had lived in Eritrea until he was eight. He returned to Eritrea for two years at the age of 16. His voice lilts, although you would never guess that English is not his first language. He had a calm and measured presence, despite experiencing problems both in relation to his housing and employment. Prior to conviction, Moses had not had any contact with the police despite a 'few madnesses' whilst growing up. Moses pleaded guilty to an offence of Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) and received a two-year sentence, although this was reduced to 18 months on appeal; he had been out of prison for just over a year.

Moses saw prison as 'a tough place where you had to make sure no one took you for a mug'. He talked about corruption within one prison, how his cellmate had two mobile telephones, open use of drugs, and a failure by prison officers to intervene during fights. He described the prison officers in this particular prison as 'just as bad as some of the prisoners'. Moses was applying for social care work, which he had experience of prior to imprisonment. He also hoped to do a social work degree but had been rejected for both work and courses due to his criminal record.

**NATHANIEL (LOOPIE)** was 28 years old. In his late teens he had been a member of a south London gang. He had been in prison once but his story was a litany of violence: violence to him from his step-father, violence as part of the gang, and then the offence for which he was imprisoned, Actual Bodily Harm (ABH).

Having lived in some precarious situations he was now living in an ex-prisoner's hostel, which he said was the best place he had ever lived. Charming, Nathaniel found picking up work as a chef relatively easy although he struggled to keep jobs for a significant period of time. I ask him why his nickname is Loopie and he tells me that this is what he was known as in the gang as he was always the first one into any situation: a bit mad.

**NICO** had just completed a PhD and was in a complex position as an ex-prisoner in his chosen field of study. Potentially, he could gain some element of credibility because of this in his professional life; however, he recognized that not everyone would take a non-judgemental view of his past. He also had two young children who knew nothing about his imprisonment.

Nico discussed the shift in his life, which now had all the trappings of a middle-class existence. He was concerned that those he had met more recently, through university, where he lives, and his children's school, would find out that he had been sent to prison for drug offences during his twenties. Nico came from a Greek Cypriot background and was just about to turn 42.

**PAUL** was tall and wiry, with dark hair and striking blue eyes. He lived with his girlfriend and numerous cats and was studying for a Masters Degree in Criminal Justice. Initially charged with attempted murder,

Paul was sentenced to four and a half years for Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) with intent.

Paul served over four years in a combination of local authority secure children's homes and young offender institutions. Previous to his offence he had no formal contact with the police, although for some time leading up to the offence, Paul had known he would do something violent and this was partly to differentiate himself and bring an end to the monotony and boredom of his life.

**PHIL** was well educated and was employed in a high status, professional position in a large organization. He looked ill, was very thin, and had some breathing problems. At 62, Phil has something of the old-school offender about him, and his stories are evocative of life growing up in the 1960s, of LSD, sexual freedom and 'sticking it to the man'. He loved music, particularly the blues, and had an impressive knowledge of music from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. His story was beautifully crafted as a coherent, chronological narrative, the telling of which allows him to demonstrate a remarkable range of accents and an irrepressible sense of humour.

Phil has been in prison twice and has an interesting take on his experiences. The first sentence for fraud 'did what it says on the tin', curtailing what had been, until then, a lifestyle wholly reliant on crime. However, several years later, finding himself back in prison, Phil argued that on receiving this sentence 'I knew exactly what to expect, I knew exactly what was coming, so there was no fear at all, just simply resignation'.

**RICHARD** had been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and lived in a hostel for people with high levels of comorbidity, including severe and enduring mental illness, personality disorder and poly-drug use, and a history of serious offending, who represented a risk to themselves or the public. He provided me with details of videos he had put on YouTube and talked about how Brixton prison officers were after him. Soon, he settled into his story and came across as cogent, clever and thoughtful, which was a little at odds with his somewhat dishevelled appearance. Richard described his father as having a significant problem with alcohol, as being abusive and violent both to him and his mother. Brought up by his grandmother, Richard's wider family is involved in crime, a cousin has been convicted of murder and he refers to police concerns about his own criminal networks.

Richard's description of his first use of heroin is incredible. He describes it as 'euphoric', like a dream. It is in the chasing of that dream he says, that his criminality would increase. He had served two prison sentences for intent to supply and possession of a range of drugs. Both sentences were for six years. In the course of the interview he referred to being known to FTAC, which I look up after the interview. This is the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, a joint police and mental health initiative, which assesses the risk to prominent people from obsessive individuals.

In addition to these 15 ex-prisoner narratives, 11 prisoner autobiographies were used as resources for insight and analysis regarding both the ex-prisoner experience and as popular cultural artefacts (see Appendix A).

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# Part II

## Criminalized Lifestyles

# 4

# Outlaws and Gangsters

## Introduction

Outlaw mythology shimmers with abstractions such as freedom, opportunity, honour, individualism and justice. It is an extremely powerful set of ideas that have evolved over several centuries and inspired a vast array of popular cultural artefacts that testify to the tenacious exploits of outlaws and gangsters. Ranked as one of Britain's most successful exports, the aim of the *Grand Theft Auto* game series, is to rise through the ranks of the criminal underworld, something achieved by a heady mix of killings, street fighting and high speed racing. Video game *The Sting*! focuses on an ex-prisoner who must start afresh to build up his criminal reputation and contacts in order to reassert his status as a successful burglar.[1] Such renditions of outlaw living have a long history. Early bandit song and poetry have, for example, been co-opted and utilized by later generations of artists who have drawn on outlaw mythologies. Across a range of musical genres such artists include Adam Ant, Eminem, Jim Morrison,

[1] The name of the computer game *The Sting!* is shared with the 1973 movie about two con artists played by Paul Newman and Robert Redford. This film saw the two actors reuniting after starring in the 1969 Wild West film about two outlaws *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.



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Joan Jett, Johnny Cash, Ice-T, Richard Thompson, Tupac Shakur and Woody Guthrie.[2] There are also numerous gangster movies, such as *The Godfather* trilogy, *Goodfellas, City of God, Pulp Fiction, Scarface, The Departed* and *Outlaw*. Throughout this book the terms outlaw and gangster are used interchangeably. O'Kane (1994) suggests that there are numerous similarities between the two and some groupings, such as outlaw motorcycle gangs, overlap the divide. The main difference between outlaws and gangsters is, according to O'Kane (1994), that the former are rural and the latter urban. Although spatial territory is important in outlaw and gangster narratives, as discussed below, such a simple divide is problematic as urban representations of gangsters often draw upon or invert the rural space of the outlaw—the two are intertextual, iterative and referential: there is viscosity between them.

Taking an intertextual approach to popular outlaw and gangster mythology transcends traditional questions of influence and originality and instead recognizes, and indeed celebrates, the viscous threads between time, space, culture and identities. This analysis demonstrates how various popular cultural, fictional, or mythic figures help us to understand the viscous connections between aspects of human identities and conduct and their cultural context. Rather than providing a unitary understanding of experience and knowledge, such analyses offer nuanced and complex insights based on the interpretation of multiple textual surfaces. Images and representations of outlaws and gangsters produce and reproduce the pleasures, thrills and fears derived from what has been a longstanding fascination with these figures. Outlaws and gangsters are not simply 'offenders' or 'criminals', they are more than this. It is their entrepreneurialism, code of honour, and need to challenge and avenge injustice that is presented as the motivation for lawbreaking. As ex-armed robber Noel 'Razor' Smith wrote in his autobiography *A Few Kind Words and a Loaded Gun* (2005), the desire for glamour, respect, money and notoriety came with the realization that the only way to achieve these was through crime.

[2] Outlaws and gangsters transcend geography, age and ethnicity and even, at times, gender. However, the dominant representation of outlaw and gangster figures is masculine.

A recurring theme in some of the stories that the ex-prisoners told was the idea that in their everyday lives they had operated outside of the law; some referred to themselves as outlaws, others discussed their gangster existence. Colin talked about himself as 'an outcast, an outlaw'. Butch had 'outlaw' tattooed onto his inner lip. Bobby (Frosty) said that his life had been lived outside of mainstream society. Paul discussed his offence as part of a reaction to the feeling of frustration regarding the normality and boredom in his life as a teenager, and the need to be something different. Phil committed fraud against banks and shared the proceeds equally with those involved. Nathaniel (Loopie) was a 'ghetto supastar'[3] who demanded and received respect in his neighbourhood. In *I am not a Gangster* (2014), armed robber and 'criminal businessman' Bobby Cummines discusses how he hated being referred to as a gangster, preferring to see himself as a someone involved in the business of crime. Whereas for Nathaniel, respectability was achieved through the gang, for Cummines the gangster lifestyle was a challenge to his concept of what respectability entailed. These differences in perception highlight the slippery nature of class, age, gender and ethnicity and what respectability means in different cultural contexts.[4] Nonetheless, many of the traits of the gangster life were still evident in Cummines story—sharp clothes, being part of a tight-knit group of armed bandits, the desire for freedom, and to live a 'high life for dazzling short periods' rather than 'to endure a life of drudgery' (46).

Studies on outlaws and gangsters have gone in three main directions. First, many of these have focused on the life and exploits of particular individuals or gangs, such as The Krays, Al Capone, Jesse James or the Kelly Gang. The second direction has been shaped by geographical location or region, such as the American West, Chicago, Glasgow or the East End of London. Finally, the representation of the outlaw or gangster figure in popular culture has been explored, such as in analysis of mafia movies (LeJeune 2007). Rather than taking an individualized, location-, or media studies-based approach, this analysis plaits these various strands together. Instead of being dismissive of the men's narrative constructions

[3] Taken from the 1998 studio album by Pras.

[4] See Skeggs' (1997) analysis of class, gender and respectability.

as outlaws and gangsters, what they actually tell us about crime, punishment and justice is explored. These are figures who transgress spatial, sexual, class, status and bodily boundaries, trespass on private ground, invert the social hierarchy, and as such, provide insight into the cultures that spawned them.

This chapter considers a number of themes related to outlaw and gangster living. This includes the psychic and spatial terrain they traverse, what the role of the outlaw and gangster tells us about gender and racialized performances, and how these figures expose social, economic and personal injustice. Outlaws and gangsters inhabit the boundaries of society, theirs is a liminal world, confusing and anomalous, a construct in which social values and realities are mirrored and redefined. Using outlaw and gangster archetypes, some of these issues are explored in more detail in Chap. 5. This begins with the Lone Ranger, the masked avenger of American culture who fights injustice. In general, however, gangster mythology involves groups who gather in gangs or clearly defined subcultures and so three specific gang-types are considered. Firstly, the most well-known outlaw gang of Robin Hood; secondly, The Wild One; and finally, the more racialized concept of the Ghetto Supastar.

## Psychic Terrain: Dangerous Desires

Historically, the outlaw is someone who has been cast out of society because they have committed a crime, is a threat to those in power, or both. The outlaw is stripped of legal and political rights and is forced into a state of nature: 'through sovereign enactment of a ban, the outlaw or werewolf and the zone of lawlessness are created' (Spencer 2009: 222). This reference to the werewolf[5] is used to define the status of the outlaw, the condemned man who is now dehumanized, made into a monstrous animal. Once the outlaw has been made a monster he can be hunted by anyone (Gerstein 1974).

[5] The concept of the werewolf is explored throughout this book, as this archetype is relevant in relation to outlaws, gothic monsters and shapeshifting. The werewolf archetype is explored in detail in Chap. 9.

An outlaw is not controlled by societal norms and values but operates outside them; they are literally outside of the law and as such are not afforded the same protection as a citizen. A number of these ideas continue to resonate, as evidenced by debates that prisoners have forfeited their rights as citizens by breaking the law. A situation embodied by the ongoing denial of prisoners' right to vote in England and Wales, across vast swathes of the USA, and in countries such as India and Russia. This long history of casting out, exiling, making monsters out of those who were regarded as having transgressed laws, or challenged power, would eventually develop into systems of punishment where some people are defined as criminal, removed from society and incarcerated.

Until the thirteenth century, in England an outlaw could be killed with impunity. After that, although an outlaw still suffered legal and financial deprivations, anyone who killed them was guilty of homicide. Nonetheless, the killings of more contemporary 'outlaws' such as Osama bin Laden, the head of al-Qaeda, by US Navy Seals in 2011, and of Jacques Mesrine, the notorious criminal, shot by a special police unit in France in 1979, indicate that outlaws can be killed as long as it is by operatives of the state. It is important to note that it is not only those identified as being involved in crime that face such deadly outcomes. In 2005, John Charles de Menezes, a Brazilian national living in London was shot dead by police. Rather than admit that the shooting was a mistake, various smears against de Menezes were put into the public realm implying that, even if he was not a terrorist suspect (which was why he had been chased by the police), then he must at least be guilty of acting suspiciously, which would then, supposedly, make the shooting more justifiable.[6] The consistent failure to prosecute any police officer for a death in custody could also well lead to the suspicion that the police can act with relative impunity in modern-day Britain. This brings to mind Agamben's (2005) notion of a bare life, a naked physical being without political, legal, or social status. Agamben (1998: 104) makes the direct link between 'the bandit and the outlaw, the wolf' and uses the image

[6] This process of 'othering' is also highly pertinent to the situation of the Black Lives Matter campaign in the USA, which argues that black people's lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise.

of the werewolf to consider conditions of confinement. When trapped and caged, although he may perhaps be kept alive, no efforts need be expended on ensuring his wellbeing. The outlaw becomes non-human, an animal, and merits little consideration (Dolovich 2011).

Popular representations of outlaws and gangsters are, however, markedly different from this, as were the stories the men told about their outlaw identities. Agamben's notion of bare lives has explanatory power, but the dramatic nature of the insights it offers is perhaps too seductive. Instead his work suggests an empty monochromatic existence characterized by misery, a lack of self-determination and irrelevance (Bhui 2013). In Agamben's analysis, lives become simplified and dulled, and the complexity of human existence, its vividness and vibrancy are lost.[7]

In his interpretation of bandit literature, historian Eric Hobsbawm gave outlaws a social protest function (1969/2000). The behaviour of these bandits, he argued, can be regarded as a form of protest or an expression of injustice. He posited that 'outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals… are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported' (1969/2000: 17). Such a viewpoint stimulated significant debate, mostly concerned with the extent to which Hobsbawm's representation of bandits was romanticized. For Blok (1972: 496), these outlaws were largely mythical creatures: 'rather than actual champions of the poor and the weak, bandits quite often terrorised' the very ranks of which they were a part, he argued. The use of bandit song and story in the original publication of *Bandits* was also said to reflect ideals and aspirations rather than social reality. Another historian, E.P. Thompson, manages to side-step some of these critiques in his work on radical movements and the working class in eighteenth-century England. In contrast to Hobsbawm, Thompson blurred the distinction between acceptable, 'nice' crime and unacceptable and 'nasty' crime, arguing that it was difficult to delineate the boundaries between the two because ambiguity was central to the very concept of social crime (cited in Lea 1999: 310).

[7] In support of this, Willis (1978: 1) argues that 'oppressed, subordinate or minority groups can have a hand in the construction of their own vibrant cultures and are not merely dupes'.

In the 2000 edition of *Bandits* Hobsbawm accepts many of the critiques that had been levelled against him, partly, he said, on the basis that some of the bandits he had assigned 'good bandit' or heroic criminal status to, did not stand up to significant scrutiny, and partly on the basis that poems and ballads could be 'slippery' and 'contaminated' (Hobsbawm 1969/2000: xi). Rather than defending his engagement with the cultural production of the bandit evident in the earlier edition, this was now seen as problematic. In fact, Hobsbawm's comments illustrate the gluey and viscous aspects of culture—the fact that it does contaminate us. This is what makes analyses at the axis of the cultural and the individual so important.

In further criticism of Hobsbawm's work, Slatta (2004: 34) suggested that 'much bandit mythology emanates from literate, urban, middle-class writers with no first-hand experience of bandit-folk ties, real or imagined'. He concluded that 'popular culture reveals little of the social reality of bandit behavior'. Such a dismissive perspective of outlaw popular culture and mythology is myopic, misplaced and mistaken. Warner (1994: xi), for example, refers to how, when she undertook research this 'always led me to myth' and how myths are intrinsic to our social systems. Analysis of mythology and popular culture can reveal social reality because the mythology of the outlaw *is* important. Hobsbawm should not be chastised because he romanticized the outlaw: the outlaw is an intrinsically romantic archetype. In fiction and in popular tradition, outlaw and gangster mythology is romanticized moral territory. As film director Brian De Palma has said, 'we like stories about outlaws who live outside the social order. We imbue them with all kinds of romantic legends. That's our particular mythology' (cited in Bailey and Hale 1998: 1).

Outlaws and gangsters transcend boundaries and extend beyond a single form. These figures live complex lives crossing both physical and mental borders. The ongoing popularity of these legends is, according to Seal (2011), because outlaws and gangsters stand as expressions of people's own conflicts and desires. They provide a set of boundaries or signposts that allow us to negotiate situations that are outside of everyday experience. Outlaws and gangsters have influenced social, political, economic and cultural outcomes. Indeed, as we have seen in the case of the killing of Osama bin Laden, parallels between outlaw history and contemporary global conflicts can be drawn. The outlaw is inside society

as much as he is cast out of it. We can neither live with them, nor without them, because as Seal (2011: 183) argues 'their existence, real or mythic, is a living metaphor of the problem of power and age-old questions of equitable access to the means of subsistence'. Outlaws, he continues, are a 'projection of ourselves beyond the pale, beyond the further outposts of law, order and authority'.

Outlaws and gangsters are part of a broader counterculture, whose existence problematizes power and authority by helping to denaturalize dominant forms of economy and organization (see Parker 2012 for an engaging and informative analysis of economic and business outlaws). The outlaw not only inhabits the borders, he represents the space at the border from which analysis of societal power and control can be made. In outlaw and gangster mythology, therefore, we find a counterculture in regards to ideas about authority and the legitimacy of the law. These are rebels who enlighten our understanding of not only important historical issues, but also critical contemporary ones. Outlaws and gangsters inhabit the psychological territory of the margins and reveal deeply conflicting approaches to power and order (Seal 2011).

## Ladies Love an Outlaw[8]

Outlaws can defy the law, right the wrongs of a corrupt system, fleece the rich and powerful, and be rewarded with sexual attention and fun for their actions. Although outlaws and gangsters commit crimes, many of the popular representations of them focus more on their personalities and adventures. In outlaw mythology the seriousness of the harm they cause is frequently laced with humour (Cavender 2004; Hallsworth 2005). This popular culture representation was echoed in the men's narratives. Many of the stories were told for laughs. Anecdotes became miniature performances and a vast array of voices and accents were adopted for the various roles required. Stories were rarely told without humour and even recollections of the most vicious of offences could elicit laughter.

[8] This section is inspired by one of the men referencing the Waylon Jennings song 'Ladies Love an Outlaw' and the focus is therefore on outlaw country music.

Frequently, the men themselves were the butt of the joke. Comedy, parody, transgression and farce run through the outlaw tradition just as much as violence does. For example, a humorous popular cultural representation of outlaw living was provided in Mel Brooks' film *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*, a title which itself conjures up images of pantomime dames and cross-dressing, 'merry, but straight' men (Hahn and Knight 2008: 29).

It is also worth noting that although not a major element in their analyses of outlaws, both Parker (2012) and Seal (2011) recognize that masculinities are an important facet in this mythology. In writing about the Mafia, Parker (2012) discusses the strong sense of tribalism that can be found in not only the 'real' Mafia, but also frequently amongst the male viewers of such films who 'wanted to be part of the gang' (107). The world of the outlaw and gangster is profoundly masculine, and an array of prized masculinist concepts, such as aggression, violence, sexual freedom and autonomy can be found in these narratives.

This identity also has sexual benefits. The outlaw and gangster is often a successful 'ladies' man'. That their criminal identity was attractive to women was mentioned by a large number of the men who made the link between their newfound enamour and the cultural script that proclaimed this aspect of outlaw and gangster identities. They discussed how, when some women found out how they made their money, all of a sudden there was interest in them that they felt had not been evident before. Through their outlaw and gangster identities the men became more attractive and had the freedom to do what they wanted. Colin, who identified as an outcast and outlaw, and had been married three times, said that prior to his life sentence he had never had any problems getting a partner. Hector said 'and then the girls started to see me, and, once girls start seeing you it's like, this is a good thing!' Jason discussed how when his offending started to escalate so did his involvement with 'girls'. Nico talked about how sleeping around was an integral part of his identity growing up. But more than this, he wanted to ensure that he remained emotionally free of involvement so that he could pursue his other interests. He rather sheepishly said 'I wanted to be the best shag that they'd had, so they'd fall in love with me, and then I could fuck them off I guess, in a sense'. One of the chapters in Cummines' autobiography is called 'Women, Women and more Women'. In his autobiography, Mark Johnson discusses numerous sexual exploits as does the

(then married) Noel 'Razor' Smith. Sex is also highlighted in Mark Leech's autobiography, although as a gay man this offers something of an unusual take on the sexualization of the outlaw figure.

In the 1970s, outlaw country music became increasingly popular. At the forefront of this cultural phenomenon was Waylon Jennings, who recorded the song 'Ladies Love Outlaws' in 1972. In 1976, a compilation album, *Wanted! The Outlaws*, was released. The cover was a sepia-toned 'Wanted' poster with burnt edges, and offered a reward for the artists whose songs were included on the disc. With these, and other musical releases, including those from Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson and Willie Nelson, outlaw country music became a recognized sub-genre of country music.

Although deeply invested in country music, outlaw country also drew on the counterculture of the late 1960s and early 1970s. A new generation of songwriters from Texas wrote about more troubled personalities and focused on the darker side of life (Neal 2013). With an edgier, more aggressive musical sound, outlaw music offered an image that many music fans found appealing. At the same time, established country singers began to question and challenge the excessive musical control asserted over them by producers in Nashville.

With an anti-establishment and rebellious image, outlaw country transmitted images of the Wild West, of Texas cowboys (before Texas cowboys became presidential material), independence and freedom. Such imagery was underscored when in 1977 Jennings was arrested for cocaine possession. He then went on to release what appeared to be the death knell of outlaw country 'Don't You Think This Outlaw Bit's Done Got Out of Hand?' That was until the 1980s, when outlaw country super-group The Highwaymen was formed, with Jennings, Kristofferson, Cash and Nelson.

It is not only within outlaw country music that the allure of this figure can be found. In *The Beggars Opera* (Gay 1728 cited in Duncan 1996) the outlaws' lives are presented as the ones to be envied rather than avoided, and it is the chief protagonist, the criminal-hero Macheath who 'enjoys all the captivation of command, and the devotions of the most beautiful girl' (Dickens 1967/1970 cited in Duncan 1996: 62). In numerous other renditions of outlaws and gangsters their success with women is a core thematic thread. From overweight, middle-aged, violent, fictional lothario Tony Soprano, the mob boss in TV show *The Sopranos*, who not only spent much of the programme having multiple sexual relationships,

but was also once voted the sexiest man on TV; to Jacques Mesrine whose real life exploits were recorded in both an autobiography and films, all of which showed him as a charismatic figure, rarely without an attractive female partner. In an article on 'Why women can't resist bad boys' in the notoriously conservative *Telegraph* newspaper, journalist Kent (2013) wrote: 'one thing that bad boys are not is boring. We are enraptured by their spontaneity, by the excitement and anticipation of being with them.' The line between attracted to, but poor treatment from, is however, often a thin one. Women are frequently sidelined, seen only as sexual material or mistreated. Although the outlaw maybe a successful ladies man, his main priority and focus is his all-male gang, indeed women are likely to be treated rather poorly, even if they may benefit from some of the spoils of the lifestyle.

It seems that a glamorized image of the outlaw can be traced back to as early as the thirteenth century (Phillips 2008). Alongside the concept of the sexually attractive yet frequently disdainful of the female, are intense same-sex bonds. There is strong personal loyalty and companionship in outlaw and gangster narratives that often have the quality of *communitas*. With few exceptions, outlaws and gangsters represent hetero-masculinity in its rawest form. The most important emotional bonds for the outlaw are homosocial. For example, biker gang member Butch said 'there was a lot of brotherly love and that, so I think we were saying we wanted something different. What we were being presented with was hypocritical rubbish and we were never going to attain it so we had to seek something else otherwise we can't justify our existence as human beings.' This raises the issue of not only tight emotional bonds—love—but the importance of adopting an alternative lifestyle away from the hypocrisy of mainstream society, and it is only through this that life becomes what Butler (2004) has termed 'livable'.

## Spatial Terrain: The Wild West and the 'Hood

That studies of outlaws and gangsters have proliferated in the USA is perhaps unsurprising given that much of this mythology has been shaped by intrinsic North American ideals. Moreover, the American West, cowboys and frontiers, form an important backdrop to the development of wider

understandings of outlaw mythology. One of the most abiding aspects of outlaw living is access to the vast expanse of space that is represented in the American West, and although the Wild West outlaw archetype has somewhat faded, its legacy of freedom and honour continues to cast a long shadow that goes well beyond the geographical borders of the USA.

The formation of gangs, or posses, summons up notions of lawlessness and frontier justice, which are standard fare in the Wild West. Comparisons between the Wild West and the 'hood can also be made in terms of considering outlaw and gangster spatial territories. Lena (2012) argues that the emergence of hip-hop as an art form is intimately tied to urban space and that the dominant metaphor in hip-hop is of the ghetto or 'hood which is presented as an exotic, unnatural, hyper-real place. These inner-city communities are also defined as the origin of social dysfunction and are seen as a potential threat to civil order. Growing out of the African oral tradition of storytelling (Wright 2012), rap, in particular, is somewhat fixated with place and locality and with geographical boundaries that demarcate turf and territory. Through social mechanisms and discursive overlays, many of the themes, images and postures of rap such as the pimp, hustler, gambler and gangster, draw upon the imagery of the Wild West (Forman 2012). The 'hood also inverts Wild West imagery. The 'hood is urban not rural and space is restricted not expansive, although in both places issues of justice, freedom, and economic survival are fought out. The 'hood operates as a contemporary urban frontier; it is the frontline, the ghetto, a space that has been connected in popular culture with lawlessness, violence and aggression. Moreover, both the Wild West and the 'hood are masculinized and racialized spaces.

Outlaws and gangsters claim their own territory and freedom is a core feature of their identity.[9] A number of the ex-prisoners discussed this element of their existence. Phil happily gave up a stable and respectable career to pursue his criminal life as it gave him the time and money to do those things he most enjoyed: taking drugs and gambling. Freedom was also evident in Bobby's narrative; he did not rely on the state for benefits or the police for justice. Butch, who had been a biker, loved the freedom

[9] Gender may again be important here as women have traditionally been less mobile due to institutional, social, economic and cultural constraints.

associated with that identity, of living fast, being free to roam the roads. If trouble came to pass, which it frequently does for outlaws, then you could simply move on. For example, Hector, who was involved with drug networks, had briefly moved from London to Birmingham; Nico left England and went to Cyprus; Colin moved between various towns and cities in the south of England; Butch and Craig would each travel to the west when attention from the police got too much; while those who lived in London generally moved from one area to another (Nathaniel, Bobby, Abdi, Richard and Jason).

It was Danny and Phil, two self-identified hippies (though separated by 30 years), who travelled most extensively. Danny would go to India, Egypt and Israel. In the early 1970s, Phil and his friends, tempted by the tales about some of the substances that could be sampled abroad and concerned that the next time they got caught they were looking at 'porridge',[10] decided to take the classic hippy trail, travelling through Europe overland to Afghanistan, on to India, then down to Sri Lanka before heading off to find some form of work in Australia.

A number of the men evoked the Wild West. Phil referred to Afghanistan 'as the Wild West with turbans'. Butch conjured up an image of Wild West living when the outlaw motorcycle gang he was involved with all lived together. Following the death of the mother of gang member, Hairy Mary,[11] the gang moved into her bungalow en masse. Soon the electrics were turned off, then the gas, so the gang started burning things on an open fire, baking potatoes and warming tins of beans. A huge bill built up with the local dairy and one morning the milkman knocked on the front door asking to speak to Hairy Mary's mum:

> The guy that answered the door, his nickname was Slug-Death, he says: 'I dunno, I'm just on my way to work, I'll just go and see.' So he goes in the lounge, shouts out for him 'Mary are you in? There's a bloke at the door for you', then he goes into the bedroom that he shares with his girlfriend, where his Triumph 650 was parked, starts the bike up, and rides it down the hallway, past the milkman, down the path, and off to work.

[10] Slang for a prison sentence.

[11] The use of nicknames by 'motor-bike boys' is discussed by Willis (1978).

Such an image clearly evokes much of the mythology of the Wild West: living hand-to-mouth, cooking on an open fire, a man riding off, if not quite into the sunset on a horse, then into the morning on a motorbike, leaving a 'citizen', a representative of mainstream society, agog.

Since its inception in the mid-1970s hip-hop's capacity to circumvent the constraints and limiting social conditions of young black people has been examined and celebrated. In his compelling analysis of rap and location, Forman (2012) argues that hip-hop introduced new forms of expression that were contextually linked to a city comprised of an amalgamation of neighbourhoods with their own social norms and cultural nuances. Just as with the Wild West the 'hood is bestowed with outlaw value. These territories are understood as sites of popular cultural significance that goes well beyond the physical geographies of their frontiers. Describing the early stages in the development of rap within hip-hop culture, DJ Grandmaster Flash discussed the spatial distribution of sound crews in New York saying 'we all had our territories and we all had to respect each other' (cited in Forman 2012: 249). This reference to respect is primarily related to the geographies that were mapped out by the sound crews. It was the established domains, circumscribed by authority and dominance, that should be respected, and not, necessarily, the music itself.

Emphasizing the powerful connections to place anchors rap acts to their immediate environments and sets them apart from other 'hoods and artists. Intrinsic to hip-hop's cultural forms of rap, break-dancing and graffiti are the element of competition and the fierce defence of local ties. The geographically specific gang, crew or posse has been reified. On the one hand this has led to a sense of shared community, recognition of racial oppression and the formation of loose musical collectives and super-groups such as Black Hippy, D12 and Def Squad. On the other hand, however, this has led to one of the most divisive factors in US hip-hop—the development of the East Coast-West Coast divide.

The East Coast–West Coast feud would eventually culminate in the murders of two of the best-known rappers of the time, Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G., also known as Biggie Smalls. The dispute originated in a record label disagreement between Tupac, on Death Row records and The Notorious B.I.G., on Bad Boy records. Initially the two were involved in vitriolic raps against each other. Such verbal attacks are a

relatively standard form within rap and offer the opportunity to boast and brag and demonstrate exemplary rhyming skills. However, the dispute moved well beyond that point when first Tupac was shot and killed in Las Vegas in 1996; and then, a year later, Biggie was shot dead in Los Angeles.

## The Product

The lives and deaths of Shakur and Smalls blur the line between the metaphorical and the 'real' and offer insight into viscous culture. Since his death, five albums have been released under Tupac's name and his voice has also been used to narrate an Oscar-nominated documentary *Tupac: Resurrection*.[12] Munby (2011: 177) convincingly concludes that 'both Tupac and Biggie Smalls collapsed the distinction between signifier and signified, between mask and self, between performance and so-called reality'. There is no keeping these bad boys down and their life-after-death reincarnations are reminiscent of cartoon-like violence where no one ever seems to stay dead for long. Moreover, rather than marking the end of gangsta rap, the deaths 'constituted an entrepreneurial opportunity' (ibid.). Sean Combs (a.k.a. Puff Daddy/P. Diddy), who had worked with The Notorious B.I.G. at Bad Boy records, put out a tribute to him, 'I'll Be Missing You', which also featured Biggie's estranged wife Faith Evans. With its heavy sample of The Police's song 'Every Breath You Take' another important aspect of rap, the mimetic function of sampling, and the viscous connections between artistic forms are highlighted.

Hip-hop, once a marginal youth subculture, has evolved into a global, multi-billion dollar industry. Moving from the 'street to the marketplace' (Perry 2012: 295), it is the most visible and widely disseminated cipher of black popular imagery internationally. The influence of hip-hop has been significant in American culture and well beyond. In 1999, *Time* magazine, for example, featured the headline 'Hip-hop Nation: After 20 years-how it's changed America'. Understanding space and place is an intrinsic element in what has become one of America's most successful

[12] It is worth noting that Tupac had no agency in these decisions. The potential for consumption and appropriation, as well as exploitation of such figures is significant.

popular cultural exports. Traditionally, hip-hop articulated a 'black', largely masculine, urban discourse of marginality; but it has since transcended geographical, social and cultural boundaries to become a worldwide phenomenon (Kitwana 2012).

Part of the ongoing debate within hip-hop regards the co-option of what was once a radical art form into what has become a significant cultural component of mainstream capitalist industry (Tate 2012). This has led to the suggestion that rather than challenging the high rates of incarceration of black people in America (as well as elsewhere), rap has instead romanticized the prison experience. Gangsta rap in particular has been criticized for becoming more about escapism and voyeurism, violent masculinity, consumption, status, and misogyny, to the point that it is now far adrift from its revolutionary political roots (ibid.).

Early hip-hop was significant in exposing the prison-industrial complex. Boyd and Nuruddin (2012) argue that the culture of hip-hop emanates from the penitentiary style because jail is the reality for a lot of young black men and has played a role in shaping ghetto communities. Hip-hop was a discourse replete with references to excessive policing and brutality and the symbiotic relationship between the ghetto and the prison well before sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2001) made such a link.

Ex-N.W.A. rapper Ice Cube's 1990 track 'The Product', for example, refers to the life of a young black man, the product of his environment, who has few prospects beyond a life of crime and the inevitable prison sentence. 'The Product' samples seven other songs by artists including Kool and the Gang, Sly and the Family Stone, James Brown, LL Cool J, and Ice Cube himself. The 'Train Sequence (This is a journey into sound)', was also used, a sample which Public Enemy, Bomb the Bass, and Eric B. and Rakim, amongst others, have utilized. Hip-hop techniques such as sampling and the appropriation of other texts, reconfiguring them to meet hip-hop sensibilities, is a critical facet to the art form of rap. It also demonstrates how hip-hop culture has inverted strategies of expropriation and theft that have long dogged the contribution to American popular culture by black people. As a technique, it undermines the notion of corporate ownership of music (although it does bring an array of legal ramifications). It also makes explicit the idea of a viscous, sticky and glutinous culture.

The various cultural expressions that circulate in hip-hop are infused with a rich, intertextual aesthetic. This involves a set of practices that include pastiche, parody, montage, irony, and self-referencing that blur the distinction between low and high art, fact and fiction. The need for authenticity is said to be a key aspect in hip-hop sensibility (Munby 2011; White 2011) and yet identity is not authentic but performative. Many rappers understand this aspect of their art and take on roles such as gang member, revolutionary, pimp, drug dealer, black separatist, reformed criminal and successful businessman. Hip-hop can, therefore, be regarded as a set of practices that construct a decentred and fragmented image (or text). The performativity in hip-hop is intrinsic to the creativity of its production. Take for example, Jay Z's involvement with Roc-A-Fella records (referencing one of America's richest and most powerful families—the Rockefellers). Or, Eminem sliding knowingly between various identities, as made apparent on his first three nationally released albums. *The Slim Shady LP* (1999) gave us the ultraviolent, conflicted persona; *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000) his 'real' identity, a regular guy; and *The Eminem Show* (2002) the self-assured rap star. Or dead prez, the politically aware hip-hop duo whose name references both money (the images of dead American presidents appear on American banknotes), whilst also hinting at the more revolutionary content of their music. Such subversive ideas, innovative touches and creativity of the ghetto supastar aesthetic can, however, get overlooked in the ongoing debates about the supposedly inherent dangers associated with rap music (White 2011).

## Conclusion

Territory, possession and identities play an important role in outlaw and gangster narratives. The geographical spaces and psychic terrains that emerge are simultaneously real, imaginary, symbolic and mythical.[13]

[13] I base much of this analysis on outlaw spaces in the United States. Similar analyses could be made of Australia. It is worth noting the colonial aspect of both these countries in relation to Britain, and their role in the history of penal transportation.

Freedom, boundaries, power and ownership are an audible presence in the textures of the Wild West and in the beat of the urban 'hood.

Popular culture swarms with images of outlaws and gangsters and it is because they break the law, defy convention, and act in often highly selfish ways that they are so compelling. But there is more. An outlaw or gangster identity is not this alone; outlaws and gangsters problematize power and authority (Parker 2012; Seal 1996, 2011). They reflect a deep suspicion of those in power and represent different ways of living which offer radical alternatives to the norm. The legitimacy of the laws of the state and the concept of 'justice'—as something that is delivered by the state—are questioned and explored. Outlaw and gangster tales destabilize the exercise of power and the production of hegemonic knowledge. They rework notions of justice and provide a powerful counterpoint to both the rule of law and the power of the state. If we dig deep into this mythic terrain there is much to learn, as the lines between hero and villain, right and wrong, justice and injustice, become part of a viscous mesh. Moreover, pre-existing stories and myths about outlaw and gangster living shape what outlaws and gangsters do.

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# 5

# Lone Ranger, Robin Hood, the Wild One and Ghetto Supastar

## Introduction

In this chapter the viscous connections between outlaw mythology and lived experiences are explored. I start by considering some of the salient features of an individual outlaw, the Lone Ranger, before moving on to explore the more dominant feature of outlaw mythology—that of the gang. I examine four specific narratives. Bobby lived his life outside of the law and would not seek support or protection from the state no matter what situation he, or his family, found themselves in. Phil, talked about having a 'dual identity', and straddled the emerging hippy counterculture of the 1960s and a working-class snooker hall gang. With the hippies he took drugs and listened to music, but this group were ambivalent about the need for 'bread [money]'. Phil said 'never mind all that shit. Yeah I need bread because that's what I gamble with, that's what I need to enjoy myself!' He referred to his criminal behaviour as socialism in action.

The other narratives explored are those of Butch and Nathaniel, who were members of more formal gangs. Butch was a member of a biker gang in the 1970s, whilst Nathaniel was a member of a south London gang in the 2000s. A number of the men talked about their involve-



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ment in gangs or groups in a generally positive light. Nathaniel was more circumspect, even though he recognized the status that came from being 'a face'. Initial involvement in the gang, he said, was largely due to survival. Homeless at the age of 17, Nathaniel had started to do robberies as part of a gang. In contrast, Butch mainly recalled good memories of wild times with his biker gang. It was in the disintegration of that grouping that Butch's life became more difficult, particularly as his drug use spiralled out of control, becoming less about fun times with mates and more about blocking out the reality of his life.

## Lone Ranger

The Lone Ranger is the masked, fictionalized, solitary figure of American culture who fights injustice. First appearing in 1933 on a radio show in the USA, he proved to have popular appeal and the Lone Ranger would go on to become a television series that ran from 1949 to 1957. The show was watched around the globe, with repeats televised until 2010 (Witschi 2011). A Lone Ranger film, starring Johnny Depp and Armie Hammer, was released in 2013—80 years after the Lone Ranger first rode into popular culture.

The figure of the Lone Ranger displays a darkness that makes him what Hemmer (2007) refers to as a 'Good Badman'. Part of this identity is due to the outlaw mask that the Lone Ranger wears, which sets him apart from traditional, more virtuous cowboys, none of whom managed to achieve his popular appeal. Consistently wearing the same mask implies a level of reliability, as well as of course, obscuring identity. The mask has been an important feature in thinking about identities, and a 'mask' operated in a metaphorical sense in a number of the men's stories both in and out of prison. For example, there were frequent references to putting on a 'front' or a mask in the men's narratives. This is also a common theme in a number of studies on prisons (Jewkes 2012), and reminiscent of Goffman's (1961) dramaturgical perspective where the 'face' is a mask that changes depending on the audience and the type of social interaction in which people find themselves.

In his analysis of the Lone Ranger, Cawelti (1999) argues that the use of disguises, which tended to be of much older men, his movement in and out of society and his choice of companions, means that the Lone Ranger can be read as dramatizing the conflict between the simultaneous adolescent desire to join the adult world on the one hand, and fear of the adult world on the other. This idea is particularly interesting given that references to age, time passing, and the need to 'grow up' were prevalent in the ex-prisoner narratives. 'I'm too old for this now' is a statement often made, even by relatively young people, who have been in prison. Moreover, maturation and desistance from crime has been an active field of investigation within criminology (see for example Laub and Sampson 2001; Maruna 1997). The transition from young offenders institution to adult prison is also a cause for concern, a time for reflection, or a moment to be avoided. Some of the men discussed how being held in institutions for children was more permissible, and could be seen as a consequence of naughty, childish behaviour. Adult prison on the other hand, was seen as both less defensible and an experience that was more difficult to shake off.[1]

Discussing the lengthy prison sentence that he had received, Bobby said 'my thinking was that I'd do any sentence as long as I got out before I was 30'. He referred to being a 'big man now' who needed to pull his life together and to stop being involved in 'boyish silliness'. He discussed how turning 30 years of age would require him to find new ways of spending his time, getting a job and becoming an adult. Although he frequently referred to himself as nearly 30, when asked his age it turned out that he was 28 years old. Thirty was some way off, and yet it provided a clear, identifiable mark for when he would have to join the adult world.

Cawelti (2004) continues that the Lone Ranger's symbolic outlaw garb and choice of company in Tonto, his Native American companion, and Silver his horse, can be interpreted as a self-elected separation from the wider community rather than integration into it. Bobby referred extensively to his closest male friend, Byron, who was affectionately termed 'Landlord' as he had consistently provided somewhere for Bobby to stay

[1] This is to some extent recognized in England and Wales by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974) whereby if the sentence was received prior to being 18 years of age then the period of time before it is spent is half of that for an adult.

from his late teens onwards, and to Laiya his dog. He described her as 'slim, she was beautiful… she was a big girl… she wasn't one of those slow dumb dogs'.

The companionship provided by 'the great horse Silver' (Cawelti 2004: 1) is synonymous with Bobby's depiction of Laiya. He spoke about her in ways similar to how you may refer to a sexual partner—he was 'devoted' to her, used to share his bed with her, and she acted as his protector. Dogs such as Laiya, who was a Mastiff Cross, may fit the stereotype of being a status dog (Harding 2012), and was indeed used in this manner, but the relationship between her and Bobby was complex. Just as the relationship between the Lone Ranger and Silver cannot be easily reduced to simplistic ideas about ownership and human domination over animals, nor could Bobby's and Laiya's.

A common theme in outlaw narratives, which is particularly strong in the Lone Ranger's story, is of someone 'good' fighting those who are 'bad'. Bobby did not have a long list of previous convictions. Nonetheless, he lived his life as an outlaw. Bobby never worked and seldom claimed benefits. Instead he operated as a cannabis dealer, not only to get money, but also to maintain his own use of the substance. When his two-year old niece was attacked by a dog and injured so badly that she was hospitalized, the requirement for justice involved utter retribution. The attack on the dog owner was vicious. Bobby discussed how he got himself into a 'mad state'. The victim was severely beaten, but Bobby said that he still did not feel 'satisfied'. Retributive justice required a further step to be taken and Laiya was set upon the man. Despite the ferocity of the attack, that it was in daylight and in full view of other people who lived on the estate, Bobby did not expect police involvement. Instead he thought life would continue as normal, beyond the gaze of the authorities.

There followed a lengthy period of time where there were problems between Bobby's family, particularly Bobby and his two younger brothers (one of whom was the father of the injured child), and the family of the young man who had been attacked by Bobby. For several months, Bobby was backwards and forwards between where he was living independently, and the estate where his wider family lived. Fights, threats and various infractions continued throughout this time. Bobby bought a stab-proof vest from a friend who had broken into some nearby army barracks

and gave it to his youngest brother. This was to prove fortuitous. A few months later his brother was stabbed, but as he was wearing the vest he did not get badly injured. Despite the escalation in violence Bobby did not seek police involvement. It was, he said:

> How we live… I chose to live a certain life, for me to turn round now and call the police because my life might be under threat… it would be bad wouldn't it? I've been breaking the law my whole life when I see fit, so for me to turn round and try to use them to my advantage it's a bit bad innit?

Bobby did not wish to be 'hypocritical', having 'chosen to live outside the law, it wouldn't seem fit to sit inside the law'. He had spent his whole life 'running from the police' and was not going to start involving them in his life now.

Bobby did not expect anyone else to ring the police either, he was adamant 'no, no, you don't'.[2] When, eight months later, in the early hours of the morning, the police bashed down Bobby's door, arrested him, took his dog and her 12, just born puppies away, Bobby remained convinced that it was for his drug dealing rather than the attack. 'The kid, he's a burglar by nature, that's what he does, so therefore he's the same as me, it didn't even enter my head that he would phone the police, it's just one of those things he's not going to do.' This was not to be the case. Charged with Section 18 Wounding with Intent, and with the dog he doted on and all her puppies destroyed, Bobby went to court. The trial took place at the Old Bailey, the only reference Bobby had to this was seeing the court on television, and being aware that this was the court that dealt with the most serious cases. As he recounted the story of his trial he discussed the slow realization about what was going to happen to him.

Bobby admitted to the offence but was pleading not guilty on the charge of Section 18 Wounding with Intent, as he claimed the dog had not been used as a weapon. By the point of the trial the victim was himself in prison and would require being brought to the court. This gave

[2] A sentiment echoed in Cummines' autobiography, where he discusses how if people had a problem they would not go to the 'Old Bill' as they would not want to be known as grasses or police informants.

Bobby some hope, as the idea that someone of a similar outlaw background would grass remained incomprehensible to him.

> I was thinking it's all going to crash because he's not going to come from prison, he's going to refuse to give his evidence in court… He'd never be able to go back to the area and try and live a criminal life after you've done something like that, it wouldn't be allowed. So I thought he's never going to do it.

Things did not, however, go to plan. The victim arrived in court ready to give evidence, at which point, and on the advice of his solicitors, Bobby changed his plea to guilty. At sentencing, he was given a six-year custodial sentence and arrived in Belmarsh high security prison that night.

Bobby's story encapsulates many of the ideas of outlaw living and operating within a code of conduct outside of the dominant culture. It also highlights that some people will not always abide by those rules. Historically, the term outlaw referred to the formal procedure of declaring someone as beyond the sphere of legal protection, and this is precisely Bobby's perception of his life. As a man who operated outside of the criminal law, he could not, he thought, expect the law to protect his family. His need to seek retributive, vigilante justice for the attack on his niece was the culmination of a life led as an outlaw. His story also reminds us that some outlaws are not exiled from society—they consciously abandon it.

## Robin Hood

A couple of years ago I took a telephone call from a media company asking me if I would do some radio interviews to discuss a recent survey which revealed that over 50% of people thought that some forms of theft were acceptable. The survey also found that one in four people said that it was 'understandable' if someone who was poor stole from someone who was rich. This was interpreted as a quarter of people being supportive of, what the company referred to as 'Robin Hood' crimes. The outlaw

mythology of Robin Hood, of someone who steals from the rich and gives to the poor, continues to exercise a very powerful appeal.[3]

In his autobiography, armed robber and local fixer, Bobby Cummines (2014: 74–5) discusses how after one job, 'I felt like a Robin Hood character, having restored law and order, although my methods were definitely outside the law.' Bank robber Noel 'Razor' Smith also draws on Robin Hood mythology in his autobiography and discusses how much he had loved TV programmes such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* as a child. After years of conducting bank robberies, Smith started to query whether he really was committing the 'right kind of crime… I was almost a Robin Hood figure, for fuck's sake! Or was I?' (2005: 3) he rhetorically asks.

Initially transmitted through ballad and recited tales, the story of Robin Hood has been romanticized, glamorized and popularized through plays, in dance, computer games, novels, operas, comics, television, song and film. It is difficult to think of a form of culture untouched by the Robin Hood story. Gray (1984 cited in Knight 1999), argues, however, that the original material in which the story of Robin Hood can be found—there are three surviving early plays from the fifteenth century—uses a language which is 'too formulaic' and has a texture that is 'disturbingly thin'. That these plays are 'sub-literary material like modern comic strips[4] or adventure yarns' is the rather sneery conclusion (Gray 1984 cited in Knight 1999: 4). Similarly, Bessinger (1974 cited in Knight 1999), in analysis of the ballad 'The Gest of Robin Hood' refers to it as 'enjoyable… good things still gratify' (39) despite it not offering 'significant challenge' or more than 'one stage of perception'. Such criticisms remind us of one of the most important facts about the medieval Robin Hood: that this was popular literature. Popular because it was much liked, reached a relatively wide audience, and in the sense that it attracted those familiar critiques of popular culture—as lacking intellectual weight and failing to have sufficient analytical depth. Nonetheless, the popularity of this folklore was such that in 1510 King Henry VIII and some of his nobles dressed 'like outlawes or Robyn Hodes men' as part of a number of Robin-related activities (Dobson and Taylor

[3] An example of the ongoing and economically relevant allure and power of Robin Hood can be found in the Robin Hood Tax group. Set up following the banking crisis the group campaigns for a tax on financial transactions to raise funds to protect and develop public services.

[4] Comics are used for analysis in Part 3.

1969 cited in Knight 1999: 8). In 1795, Joseph Ritson put a comprehensive anthology of virtually all the major works in the Robin Hood canon together, a process that popularized and legitimized the story of Robin Hood and made him something of an ideological hero.

The appeal of the Robin Hood legend for well over five centuries is, by any standard, one of the most extraordinary phenomena in social as well as literary history, as is the continuing hold he has over popular affections. Robin Hood and his gang are mentioned by literary heavyweights including Chaucer, Shakespeare, Keats, Tennyson and Walter Scott. The poet Keats gave Robin Hood a political dimension with his poem firmly on the side of freedom and against tyranny (Barnard 1989 cited in Knight 1999). In *Ivanhoe* Walter Scott defines outlaw freedom as freedom from work, involving the overturning of the economic order.

The most recent vehicles for diffusion of the Robin Hood story have come from film and television. Even here there is a long tradition of telling this most famous of outlaw tales. There were at least five British and American screen Robin Hoods before World War I. And the productions keep on coming. In 2010 Ridley Scott directed Russell Crowe in the lead role, whilst in 2015 four Hollywood studios announced plans for major Robin Hood films.[5] The continued popularity of Robin Hood suggests a universality of meaning, and many of the themes found in this tale have deep roots in culture. The recent proliferation in plans for Robin Hood tales potentially informs us about post-crash hypercapitalism, global inequalities and the mass shift to neo-liberalism. Robin Hood reflects a global fascination with the figure of the outlaw,[6] the man who exists beyond human society and has adventures that appear almost impossible, although nonetheless desirable. Robin Hood represents economic and social freedom writ large, shot through with a strong ethical commitment to economic equality.

The sheer volume of this output is testament to the exhilaration of the story, the exciting and dramatic adventures, and the knockabout comedy between the various characters. All of which have a role to play in maintaining

[5] Warner Bros, Sony, Disney and Lionsgate.

[6] Examples of this global reach can be found at the World Wide Robin Hood Society's 'Many Faces of Robin Hood', and in the Robin Hood Army, based in India and Pakistan who redistribute food to the homeless.

the ongoing attraction of this particular outlaw legend. Robin Hood has also contributed to the development of the mythology of the noble outlaw. The myth goes far beyond the pages of a book or the screen of a film and takes on its own cultural life. There is a strong thread of idealism in the stories and they offer a sense of an alternative outlaw realm. The appeal is to a gothic past of strength, nobility and liberty.[7] Despite conflicting with hypercapitalism, Robin Hood embodies the ideals that mainstream society itself professes to hold. Wrestling with injustice, acting in a principled manner, camaraderie, and offering alternative ways of living that allow for greater freedom are core themes in outlawry and exile. Similar to the arguments made by Hobsbawm about bandits, Bessinger purports that Robin Hood stories 'exemplify the class-conscious, antiecclesiastical social protest of the[ir] age' (Bessinger 1974, cited in Knight 1999: 45).

Phil recognized that he had a somewhat unusual affiliation with both the hippy subculture, which involved drug taking and music loving,[8] and the more working-class subculture of the snooker hall, with an interest in drinking and gambling. Whilst on the surface these two groups were different, they did share some similar traits. In both subcultures it was not too difficult, Phil said, to come across people who 'are a bit shady or who are not averse to seeing a nice little earner'.

After school, Phil had been employed in a number of respectable jobs, firstly as a civil servant and then with an oil company. He was, however, scathing about the experience of working. The path to promotion seemed far too protracted and was based more on time served than ability. Moreover, Phil was increasingly finding that work was inconvenient because it curtailed the time he could devote to taking drugs (LSD and cannabis), going to the betting shop and playing snooker. This left Phil with a conundrum, 'I don't want to work: but I want money.' The lure of an alternative criminal existence, which involved less effort, provided more autonomy and greater financial reward, was not ignored for too long.

Phil could pinpoint the exact time that crystallized for him the fundamental moment when he rejected being an 'office drone' and decided

[7] There is a viscous connection between many of the themes, ideas and concepts within this book. The gothic is one such concept and is explored in more detail in the next section.

[8] See Willis (1978) for discussion on the hippy scene, music listening and drug taking.

to become a financial outlaw. One day, he was asked to take a package to another part of the building he worked in:

> The oil company was housed in this huge building in the centre of town. My manager said to me 'can you take this envelope to such and such office up on whatever floor'. So I wandered off looking for this room. I found the corridor it was in and I walked past all of these office doors eventually finding the office door with the right number on it and went in and actually found that I was in this huge room and all the doors that I had passed also led into this enormous room, with rows of these clerk-type people pecking away on their comptometers [mechanical calculators] and it scared the shit out of me. I thought no, no this is a nightmare.

Where Robin Hood and his merry men preferred the freedom of the forest to the tyranny of a law in whose making they had no share, Phil preferred the freedom provided by a criminal existence to the tyranny of an unfulfilling and time-consuming job and the dystopian future, which was set out before him in the form of never ending corridors and rows of cyborgian automatons. The decision was made. A friend would give Phil his chequebook and card, wait a few hours and then report that they had been stolen. During this time, Phil went around as many banks as he could, cashing cheques. Having made the decision to give up his job Phil used his final day at work to commence his new life and entered a bank for the first time with the intention of executing a crime. Within two hours he had 'earned' the equivalent of six months' wages. Phil returned to the office for his leaving drinks and party just as his friend was reporting that his chequebook and card appeared to be missing.

> So that was me—my life of crime officially had begun, and that was the *modus operandi*. I would agree with people to 'lose' their chequebook to me… then we would split the money, you see I always was a socialist… although it would seem that I was most at risk, and I had done all the work, as far as I was concerned, that was a doddle and their part of it was more difficult because they would be grilled by police officers who quite possibly didn't believe them, so it was vital that they held their ground.

One of the identifying factors of Robin Hood as a hero-outlaw has been the division of spoils into equal parts. Moreover, who will, and will not, be victimized is laid out. It is the rich and powerful, corrupt and hypocritical

who will be targeted and not the poor and needy. The officials Robin Hood confronts are those who are perennially disliked, serving a fantasy-fulfilling function. For Phil, the banking industry was the focus of attention.

And so life continued for Phil for the next few years. There were a number of scrapes with the law but nothing too serious in terms of sentencing. Discussing this time, he said:

> I saw myself as Robin Hood, I was taking from the rich, meaning the banks, and giving to the poor. So yes, I've never been a sort of, what can I say? You know when you have a group of people when they go out for a meal and likely as not there's someone there who says 'I didn't have any poppadums'. Oh fuck off, I've never been that sort, it's always been easy-come easy-go, I've always been like that, and obviously in those days it was both, it was easy-come and pretty much easy-go, and then I'd have to go out and get some more.

Phil explicitly links his choice of criminal career with that of the most notorious hero-outlaw. The mythology of Robin Hood allowed Phil to argue that the fraud was political: socialism in action. This connects with a number of facets of outlaw mythology, such as the outlaw as a rebellious, but principled individual (Seal 2011); Parker's (2012) work on business outlaws; and Hobsbawm's (1969/2000) earlier studies on how outlaws are well-defined figures who inhabit the cultural space between criminality and 'primitive rebellion' or pre-political/political protest. Having worked in the belly of the beast, Phil chose to pursue an alternative path, one, that at least for the short term, appeared to allow him greater freedom. But the very existence of the outlaw requires a strong state response. Within the inception of outlaw living lies its destruction. Robin Hood attracted the ire of those in power and so, ultimately, would Phil.

## The Wild One

Seal (2011) suggests that since the 1950s the formation of outlaw motorcycle gangs has provided an example of the persistence of the needs, wants and fantasies that underlie outlawry. He finds it somewhat surprising, therefore, that there has been little research in this area. What limited knowledge exists

about outlaw motorcycle gangs tends to come from journalists (Thompson 2012) and autobiographies by members or former members of motorcycle clubs (Campbell 2013). The paucity of scholarly research 'on these secret and dangerous motorcycle clubs' is also cause for concern for Barker and Human (2009: 174). They undertook a newspaper search of biker criminality and found that members of the big four outlaw motorcycle gangs (Hells Angels, the Outlaws, the Bandidos and the Pagans), also known as the one-percenters (1%ers), were 'involved in a wide range of criminal activities with the most common being ongoing enterprises/organized crime such as drugs and weapons trafficking' (ibid.). Europol, the European Union's law enforcement agency, has been active in trying to deal with over 700 outlaw motorcycle gangs said to be operating across Europe. Europol argue that there has been an expansion in such gangs due to 'the desire to increase their role in particular criminal markets by opening chapters in strategic locations, for instance along the trafficking routes for drugs, weapons and human beings' (Europol 2012).

Most people's understanding of outlaw motorcycle gangs comes from what has been a long-term attraction with biker gangs in popular culture. This started with iconic film *The Wild One* (1953), which starred Marlon Brando as the leader of the Black Rebels Motorcycle Club.[9] *The Wild One* had many of the ingredients of outlaw and gangster living: boisterous lifestyles, troublemaking, womanizing, inter-gang rivalry and freedom of movement. The film was banned for 14 years in the UK, consolidating its outlaw status through the perception that its contents were unacceptable to the mainstream. Nonetheless, Brando's image as the leader of an outlaw motorcycle gang was potent—in terms of the clothing he wore, the violent reactions he exhibited, his sex appeal and brooding presence. This was also an image that became emblematic and was stuck to Brando himself. If Robin Hood is the historical and political outlaw, then Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* epitomizes the emergence of teenage angst and rebellion. The film has a viscous quality, operating as a mimetic, performative loop between the street and popular culture, by both representing and informing emergent teenagers about how to act and dress, and suggesting to society about how to respond to this new group.

[9] Later referenced by American rock band Black Rebel Motorcycle Club.

A more recent depiction of outlaw motorcycle clubs has been provided by American television drama series *Sons of Anarchy*. The Sons of Anarchy have various clashes and dealings with other gangs and law enforcement agencies as they go about their business, which largely consists of gun running. Starting in 2008, the show proved popular and seven series were produced. A review of the show in the *Guardian* newspaper referred to *Sons of Anarchy* as 'Hamlet on Harleys' (Daoust 2011), a reference clearly recognizing the intertextuality between the series and Shakespeare. Confirming this, its creator, Kurt Sutter, has stated that there is a Shakespearean element to the series and there are some clear references to this, including plots about usurped leaders, revenge of the father, jealousy, tragedy and power struggles. Moreover, the appetite for tales of outlaw motorcycle gangs does not appear to be abating and Tom Hardy has been reported as being attached to a film about an outlaw biker gang.

Butch was a member of Bad Company, a motorcycle gang in the 1970s. Although he would come to see involvement in the group as problematic on some level, he talked about the gang with great affection and had numerous anecdotes to tell about fast living.[10] It had taken Butch a while before he found the right gang. In his early teens he had been a skinhead, but after getting beaten up by a greaser Butch adopted a new look, that of long hair and leather jacket and started hanging out with the bikers.

Following this aesthetic change, Butch would go on to form an outlaw motorcycle gang with a group of friends and acquaintances and to adopt his outlaw mission statement, which he connected to Jim Morrison, lead singer of The Doors: 'live fast, die young and leave a good looking corpse.'[11] Butch explicitly linked the creation of the gang with outlaw mythology particularly from the United States, where biker gangs are more longstanding: 'it was all cowboys and civil war and stuff that fitted with our lifestyles, desperados on the run you know. Loveable rogues.' The gang was named after English rock band Bad Company who also had a song of the same name, which the gang took to be 'sort of our theme'. Butch still remembered some of the lyrics, quoting 'behind a gun I'll

[10] See Willis (1978) for discussion on masculinity and biker gangs.

[11] A quote from 1949 movie *Knock On Any Door* but often misattributed, as Jay Z does in 'Allure', to actor James Dean.

make my final stand, that's why they call me, bad company, I can't deny, bad company, till the day I die'. Most of the gang members had 'Bad Company' tattooed onto their upper arms.

Biker gangs are frequently formed along militaristic lines, with clear hierarchies and codes of behaviour so that individuals understand their role, identity and place (Dulaney 2005). Bad Company had a president, a lieutenant, and a sergeant-at-arms, who looked after the 'weaponry'. In addition, calling their motorcycle gang Bad Company alludes not only to the idea that they were 'bad company'—men of ill-repute—but also to a military unit of soldiers, such as company A or company B. In this instance, 'Bad Company' signified an organized unit of misfits and outcasts. Biker gangs tend to take a name that reflects their outlaw personae and separation from the conventional society of 'citizens'. Along with Bad Company, Butch made mention of Satan Slayers, The Chosen Few, Hells Angels, and the Desperados.

Joining the motorcycle gang gave Butch an identity that mainstream society had failed to provide. He saw his membership in the gang as a reaction to a society that had rejected him. Butch argued that in mainstream society judgements were constantly being made based largely on consumerism and what it was to be the 'ideal man': what cigarettes you smoked, what clothing you wore, what car you drove, what haircut you had, what you looked like, and what type of women you could attract. If you failed to meet these performative and consumerist strictures you were told you were 'rubbish'. Butch and his friends decided that as they were never going to meet the demands made of them by mainstream society then they would 'be the best kind of rubbish you've ever seen. So the 'Bad Company thing was saying that if we don't fit in over there, well we'll fit in over here, which is as far from that as you can get'.

The most well-known and notorious of the outlaw motorcycle gangs or one-percenters are the Hells Angels. Butch spoke with admiration of the way that the Hells Angels conducted themselves. He discussed how he was particularly enamoured with certain aspects of their subculture, such as snapping a citizen's mind, showing class, and having a code to live by. He said that these aspects of the outlaw motorbike existence were because they did not have any respect for 'citizens', members of straight society who were regarded as living a sham. It was, therefore, a conscious

attitude to try to shock or 'snap' their minds and to mess with people's heads. So, along with wearing a particular form of clothing 'the stinkiest leather jacket, the jeans that had never been washed, could stand up on their own and go for a walk, and the long hair', Butch also developed his own way of showing class and snapping citizens' minds.

> I developed a party piece of eating beer glasses. I remember being in this pub where I used to do it virtually every night at a certain stage of drunkenness, when I'd bite off a big piece of glass, start chewing and swallow it. Then maybe two other bits, it got to the point that when I went into the pub the landlord said 'right that's 50 pence for every beer glass you eat tonight', and I'd say 'I'll have a couple of quid's worth then!'

The outlaw status that shocked 'straight' society was all part of the gang's appeal and is reminiscent of Cohen's (1955/1971) ideas about reactive subcultures that were generated as a reaction to the dominant culture.

Most of Butch's time was spent with the gang, who all lived, partied and took drugs together.[12] The gang committed an extensive number and range of crimes, including raiding garages, commercial burglary, theft, violence, drug dealing and armed robbery. Membership of the gang was, however, more than crime related. In contrast to Nathaniel, where most activities to do with the gang required some legal transgression, Butch had a large number of anecdotes about the biker gang that were about a more general outlaw lifestyle and being part of a wider counterculture that rejected dominant ideas about work, law and justice. Referred to by Willis (1978: 18) as 'rumbustious extroversion' these were 'mechanised marauders of the highways' (Seal 2011: 139), making their own rules, often living outside the laws of the state, leading a lifestyle that flouted moral as well as legal codes.

Butch's narrative consciously referenced outlaw and gangster mythology and appealed to this idea of notoriety. The behaviour of the gang itself has viscousness as it comes to be mythologized. The myth becomes reality and reality becomes mythology. The popularity of representations of outlaws and gangsters are fed back and replayed by those who

[12] This contrasted with other biker gangs (such as the Hells Angels) who, I was told, were anti-drug taking.

wish to make their own legends. Butch discussed the gang as being 'a bit like a den of thieves'. Furthermore, and in classic outlaw tradition, tales were told for humour, to make people laugh; these were 'scrapes with the law', examples of daring-do and beating authority rather than simple criminality.

Butch discussed how he and the gang had broken into the grounds of a social club, drove a car to the edge of the six-foot fence and then passed barrels of beer up and over the fence and into the back of a car. They got three barrels when suddenly a shout went up, 'Oi, what you doing?' The gang managed to escape, went home and had a party:

> The party! The bath was full of beer. We just poured it in the bath and used saucepans to drink with. And then a week later there was this thing in the local newspaper, *The Echo*. You know, brave manager foils raiders kind of thing, 20-armed men managed to escape with eight barrels of beer despite his efforts to fight them off. Real urban legend this stuff.

There were, however, also moments of extreme despair and isolation. Ultimately Butch would go on to transform his life, metamorphosing[13] from an outlaw Jim Morrison-type figure, to a peaceful hippy 'something like, you know Neil from *The Young Ones*'.[14] Nonetheless, when I met Butch he arrived on a motorbike. He had pictures of his younger self, clad in leathers, with the gang and their motorbikes. The viscous connection with outlaw imagery clearly remained strong.

## Ghetto Supastar

There has been no paucity of writing, scholarly or otherwise, on the ways in which black popular culture—the blaxploitation movies of the 1960s and 1970s, the urban film melodramas of the 1990s, the literature of Iceberg Slim, hip-hop and in particular gangsta rap, have focused on and been permeated by the ghetto, criminality, misogyny

[13] I return to Butch's story in Part 4 to discuss his metamorphosis in greater detail.

[14] *The Young Ones* the classic British sitcom centred around four archetypal characters. Neil the hippy; Rick the anarchist student; Vyvyan the violent punk; and Mike the wide-boy.

and poverty (White 2011). This perspective, although pervasive, fails to fully account for the appeal of the outsider and for the romantic reimaginings and contemporary retellings of outlaw and gangster living. In contrast to these arguments, for example, the ghetto supastar archetype can be perceived as transcending racial coding and holding up a mirror to mainstream society. Such representations also inform us about the operations of power.

As Dyson and Hurt (2012) argue, violent masculinity is at the core of American identity. There is a preoccupation with outlaws, rebels and social outcasts that are part of the collective imagination of that and many other nations. The gangsta character in hip-hop can be seen as a rearticulation of long-standing and popular figures. There are gluey parallels between the way early Hollywood gangster films and hip-hop gangstas have been conceived, perceived and received. Indeed, hip-hop makes frequent references to mob movies, and the 'hood, ghetto and gangster of the national imagination, have been shaped by Hollywood. For Dimitriadis (2012), hip-hop samples a dissonant past of rugged individualism, rampant materialism, strength through force, male domination, and a rejection of the legal structures that fail to protect. Part of the cultural currency of the gangsta comes from the universally extractable code of the Wild West outlaw narrative. The violent outlaw, living outside of mainstream cultural constraints, solving problems through violence and domination, is a character with deep roots in Western folklore.

Dimitriadis (2001) provides an example of how popular culture can be used to inform us about mainstream culture through analysis of gun ownership within the USA. Heroes in American culture, Dimitriadis says, tend to be men with guns. Defending honour, family and territory are potent symbols of a virtuous and redemptive manhood and the right to own a gun is a symbol of freedom in the USA that is protected by the constitution. According to Dimitriadis (2001: 29), it is not surprising that the gun-toting gangster 'has had such limitless appeal for so many young males, both black and white. The "gangsta" is a romantic figure, a ready-made tool for teen rebellion.' Violence, hypermasculinity and gunplay are central to notions of American democracy and cultural self-expression. In recent times, the closest that the USA has got to implementing new gun controls came after the shooting of 20 school children

and six teaching staff at Sandy Hook elementary school in Connecticut in 2012. Despite presidential support for gun reform,[15] significant legislative changes have not been forthcoming. This is a situation that is unlikely to change, even after the setting up of crowd-sourced site Mass Shooting Tracker which, using a definition of mass shooting as four or more people shot in one incident, found that such incidents occur on virtually a daily basis in the USA.

Kicked out of home at the age of 17, Nathaniel found himself gravitating towards a gang that operated in one of the deprived inner-city areas of London. Through the gang he was offered somewhere to stay but on failing to pay rent one week was threatened with a gun. Despite this incident—or maybe because of it—Nathaniel's involvement with the gang increased and revolved around street and shop robberies[16] and a lot of fighting over territory, particularly in central London, where gangs would congregate to fight:

> Like, there would be other gangs of boys that would come from Tottenham [an area in North London], they would come down and we would be on our side, they would be on their side, and the Chinese boys would be there and we'd just beef it up with the Chinese boys, and if it wasn't that, then it might be serious between, like, one of the Peckham [an area in South London] boys, and one of the Tottenham boys, and we'd watch. And then us and the Peckham boys, it would be like that, it wouldn't be, like, altogether everyone rocking each other, it would be organized in a way, not one on one, but one on one gang.

This description sits well with Ilhan's (2013: 5) work on 'street social capital in the liquid city', which, he argues, allowed street networks to maintain a relatively constant cultural terrain despite being subject to the whims and vicissitudes of their housing situation, 'the decisions of their families and the tragedy of their circumstances.' Changes to welfare entitlements to young people could also be added to such a list. Such young people, Ilhan continues, 'have become equipped to exploit illicit

[15] In 2016, an emotional President Obama cried during a gun control speech.

[16] See Hallsworth (2005) for a discussion on street robbery of this type.

opportunities for amusement, economic gain and a subculturally specific sense of personal achievement as they traverse a liquid city' (ibid.).

Nathaniel described how he was the one who would start trouble, which was how he had earned his nickname Loopie. This was not, he said, because he was more violent that the rest of the gang but because he wanted to be the one in control of the various situations the gang found themselves in, and he achieved this by being the first to get involved.

> I was the pacesetter, do you know what a pacesetter is? Someone who starts the trouble, so I'd be the first one to jump a till, I go in and do, just to make sure no one's getting killed. Getting what we're coming for, then it's alright, do you know what I mean? I used to be like that, that's why everyone used to look up to me and why a favour to them was like nothing because I've done most I could do in the 'hood. Like, I've got 'hood status, 'hood credit, you know.

As the person who started trouble he would set the parameters (pace) of what then went on. Due to his various skills in violent infractions and in robberies, Nathaniel said he was well respected and that people 'used to look up to me'.

He went on:

> It's like being a ghetto supastar… If I go to Vauxhall or Brixton [areas in South London] everyone knows who I am, or knows a member of my family, like I'm famous you know.

Nathaniel talked about how being in the gang and moving up its hierarchy meant that he got material rewards 'free weed, free stuff, and people being interested. Like coming round and saying they've got this or that for me, or can you get rid of this or that, like a laptop, and I'd be able to get rid of it and get some money from them for doing that. Little odd jobs and stuff like that.' Such activities gave him elevated status 'it made me feel like a bit of a king. A king cos you've got status,' he said.

That gang involvement brings status has been explored in criminological literature as well as in popular culture (Cohen 1955; Ilhan 2013; Miller 1958). There has also been a cultural shift that increasingly equates social status with consumerism. The proto-revolutionary outlaw of the

1960s counterculture has, according to Neal (2012), been sidelined and in its place is the motivation to make money—by any means necessary.

Nathaniel was somewhat ambivalent about being in the gang, despite the status he garnered as a key player. Nathaniel's personal ambivalence is also mirrored in the complex responses to wider references to outlaw and gangster figures. Some will find outlaws heroic and admirable, whilst others will view them as villainous and repulsive (Seal 2011; Hallsworth 2005).

## Conclusion

In undertaking intertextual analysis, we can see how there is a viscous intersection between the stories of some of those who commit crime and outlaw and gangster 'textual surfaces' (Kristeva 1967/1980: 65). Popular culture has a long-standing fascination with outlaw and gangster mythology and these figures have become a popular cultural commodity. However, the popular idea of outlaws and gangsters is predicated on a fundamental estrangement from most people's everyday experience. Spatial mobility and economic self-reliance are dreamt of but seldom realized, being a wage 'slave' or 'office drone' are far more likely experiences (Parker 2012). So stories of exotic travels, humorous scrapes with the law, of tight friendships, of subverting the 'rat-race' and resisting authority, offer a glimpse into an alternative existence. In the representational and interpretive space of the outlaw we can see social, political and cultural aspects of human conduct played out. For some, the performativity of the outlaw existence offers a more vivid way of living, greater freedom, and more fun than a conventional existence can provide. As outlaws and gangsters, they appear freer than the normal citizen, although it is a freedom that is unlikely to last.

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# Part III

## Prison Experiences

# 6

# Comics and the Gothic

## Introduction

This chapter contextualizes the experience of incarceration through an exploration of issues around hybridity, horror and hell. Speaking to men who had been in prison, to the students I have taught, and in reading the autobiographies of ex-prisoners, particular elements of the experience came to the fore. Prison was hell-like, counterproductive, operated at the level of the absurd, was perceived as both easy *and* difficult,[1] and had an ongoing impact on identity. It was said that the emotional impact of imprisonment was difficult to describe, an experience that went almost beyond the confines of language.[2] Such discussions led me to consider two particular con-

[1] Although none of the men I interviewed said prison was easy, some prisoners and ex-prisoners contribute to the idea that prison is. A number of students discussed how friends who had been to prison described it in this way. Jimmy Boyle (1977) offers an interesting, performative take on this. Describing how on release from prison he started to give a completely fictitious account of the experience, becoming boastful, even though he had found it terrifying.

[2] Initially, many of the men only briefly touched on their time in prison, skirting over this period of their lives to some extent—a time best forgotten. Charlie, however, continues to explore the impact of incarceration and has created a one-man play using puppets, masks, physical theatre and dance to shine a light on his experience of prison. As part of his documentary, *Stories of Healing*, he also shared some of the abuse he experienced during his prison experience.



F. Farrant, *Crime, Prisons and Viscous Culture*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-49010-0_6

cepts. That of comics—a format that transcends form and moves beyond the word and into the visual; and the gothic—with its emphasis on the returning past,[3] a dual interest in transgression and decay, and a commitment to exploring the aesthetics of fear (Spooner and McEvoy 2007).

Although gothic is a genre and comics are an art form, it is possible to detect some shared concerns between the two. Just as the gothic adopts and assimilates different textual and thematic materials, so to do comics. In this textual and contextual space gothic and comics share a generic hybridity. For example, Smith (2007) considers the thematic, structural and historic conventions and tropes of the gothic and how these have been appropriated in comics, alongside the impact comics have had on the gothic. Comics and the gothic are also used to signify violence, fantasy and the uncanny (Smith 2007). They emphasize juxtaposition, excess and bricolage. Both are embedded within our popular culture and have a long heritage of being so. Furthermore, the various phenomena found in comics and gothic tales often derive from mythological and folkloric stories.

There is promiscuity between gothic and comics; and contemporary gothic, now largely transplanted to Hollywood, can be found in the guise of comic book characters. Some of the largest grossing and most popular films, such as those that form the Marvel Cinematic Universe, *Spider-Man* and *Batman* series, traverse the line between comic book creation and gothic sentiment. Equally, the most revered comic book writer of modern times, Alan Moore, can with ease be set within the gothic tradition (Green 2013). Creations like *Watchmen*,[4] with its backdrop of nuclear war, *From Hell* about Victorian serial killer Jack the Ripper, and a revamped *Swamp Thing*, which depicted 'the threat of an imminent and manifold environmental apocalypse', not only engage with gothic ideas but frequently use intertextual flourishes that reference the gothic (Gray 2013: 43).

The 'gothic' and 'comics' are used as critical and theoretical tools to explore depictions of incarceration, and how these construct a prisoner 'other' through the process of hiding and making monsters of those who

[3] For an example of this in popular culture see French TV series *The Returned*.

[4] *Watchmen* was listed as one of *Time* magazine's 100 best novels published in the English language since 1923.

have been imprisoned. Drawing on and developing some of these concepts and ideas, the next chapter considers ghosts and spectres, the making of monsters, and the Hulk. A viscous hybridity can be found at the intersection between the gothic and comics; as well as at the heart of some well-known, and much loved, gothic and comic stories. Stan Lee (2008: 7), for example, one of the creators of *The Incredible Hulk*, states that the Hulk was his 'personal homage to Frankenstein'. The influence of Frankenstein on Hulk is, however, only part of the story. Incorporating elements of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in terms of transformation from normal to monstrous (and back again), the Hulk is a hybrid of monstrosity and shapeshifting.[5] The comic book character of Hulk is, therefore, a combination of key gothic iconography.

This chapter commences with analysis of the gothic nature of criminology as a discipline. Gothic generates a sense of the sublime by exciting ideas of danger, terror, pain and horror. It is concerned with subjection and victimization and has the ability to inspire fear through the use of sublime effects in architecture and the manipulation of the psychological (Groom 2012). Johnson (2012: 168) argues that 'prisons explicitly deal in fear' and highlights the irony of prison security—given that 'no one feels secure in prison'. Such concerns, as well as spectralization, repression, the uncanny, misunderstandings, possession, excess, monstrousness and hybridity, lend a certain gothic logic to its use in criminological studies. Having explored elements of the gothic, this chapter goes on to consider comics. According to Giddens (2012: 85), comics exist at the borders, they are between the 'textual and the visual, and between the rational and the aesthetic', they have an essential 'in-betweenness'. Two particular aspects of comics are considered. Firstly, the impact of the Comics Code in constructing understandings of crime, justice and punishment; and secondly, the representation of black characters in comics. These connections are then fed back through the work of people like MF Doom and Rammellzee, which returns us to hip-hop, masks, fantasy and performance, cyborgs and hybrids. We are deep in the realms of viscous culture. Analysis of the thick and sticky connections between comics and

[5] Shapeshifting is considered in more detail in Part 4, which draws on the shapeshifting of werewolves and tricksters and ideas around metamorphosis to analyse life after release from prison.

gothic tradition operates as a viscous network through which an array of criminological concepts is explored, and as we shall see, a space where monstrous transformations occur.

## The Gothic

Of all the academic disciplines, criminology must surely be the most gothic. With its focus on the distressing, dangerous, disturbing, and on death, criminology is infused with a gothic sensibility. Fascination with crime and punishment, and explorations of these topics in popular culture and public policy, points, claim Picart and Greek (2007), towards the emergence of a 'gothic criminology' concerned with vengeance, domination and power. Gothic values of passion, vice and excess emerged on the basis of their difference to the Enlightenment values of reason, virtue and restraint. Such values can be found in the work of classical thinkers like Beccaria and Bentham. Informed by Enlightenment principles, these were writers who believed that human rationality and improvements in social control would lead to a reduction in crime. Lombroso, generally regarded as the founder of criminology, challenged such views and developed the idea of atavism—criminals were primitive throwbacks—not fully evolved human beings. In Lombrosian theory, criminality reverses the evolutionary process, as criminals are born as almost a separate species or regress to a bestial state. Lombroso's criminals are gothic creations referring back, as the gothic so often does, to the past (Rafter and Ystehede 2010). The very birth of criminology bears a gothic mark.

The gothic scent that pervades Lombroso's work was well established by the time of his writing. The eighteenth-century fascination with a violent but chivalrous past, of magical beings and malevolent aristocrats, is bound up with the shift from feudalism to capitalism. During this time the meaning of government, property and society were undergoing huge transformations, and in 1848 the economic realities that haunt capitalist societies were laid bare with the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*. The opening lines of the manifesto state: 'A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre' (Marx and Engels 1848/1998:

1). In the same year that saw the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*, revolution engulfed much of Europe. Thousands of people were killed or exiled. Over 50 countries were affected, making this the most widespread revolutionary activity that has ever occurred in Europe. It has been argued, therefore, that many of the anxieties and fears found within the gothic are inextricably tied up with social class (Botting 2005; Punter 2012). Moreover, feminist analyses have highlighted that gothic figures such as monsters, vampires, ghosts, werewolves, sexual deviants and criminals, represent anxieties that go beyond class, and include concerns with gender, ethnicity and sexuality—a facet that makes gothic particularly pertinent to criminological study given how the operations of the criminal justice system are infected with such issues.[6]

Gothic was—and remains—popular culture. Given the richness of the material on which gothic literature was based, it did not take long for these ideas to rapidly move on to provide 'horrid thrills' in poetry, theatre, film, television, computer games, comics, music and clothing (Spooner 2007: 195). Ann Radcliffe, author of gothic masterpiece *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), was the highest-paid author of her day and led what would become a stampede for gothic fiction. By the end of the eighteenth century, a third of all novels sold could be defined as gothic. Radcliffe had been influenced by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which is regarded as the first gothic novel. The castle appears in Moore's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, where it had been 'empty since the 18th century, when it was plagued by apparitions' (cited in Ricca 2013: 159), and provided Moore with intertextual inspiration for the one-off Superman story 'For the Man Who Has Everything', a work that 'draws on a set of narrative resources proffered by the Gothic in order to provide an uncanny adaptation of Superman' (Ricca 2013: 160).

The historical development of gothic is one where, over time, the villain moved centre stage; no longer simply a one-dimensional character, a more complex hero-villain emerges. Ambivalence is also a significant

[6] There are numerous excellent texts that explore class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and the criminal justice system. See for example, Rusche and Kirchheimer (1969) *Punishment and Social Structure* for historical analysis on economic relations or Reiman and Leighton (2012) *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*; Messerschmidt (1993) *Masculinities and Crime*; Bowling and Phillips (2002) *Racism, Crime and Justice*; Smart (1999) *Law, Crime and Sexuality*.

feature of the gothic, and although an idealized image of the past is summonsed up, it is a past full of violence, and a distinct break in the supposed progress of history is provided as borders are crossed and categories disrupted. This view is reminiscent of Foucault's argument that punishment is a political tactic and that contemporary societies deploy disciplinary power to render the human body obedient and useful. Shifts in punishment inform us about shifts in arrangements of power and not, necessarily, about a shift towards a more civilized society (1977/1991).

Gothic itself has a viscous quality. Texts are frequently presented as 'translations' of originals and there is cross-contamination between reality and fantasy. Classic gothic novel *The Monk: A Romance* by Matthew Lewis, published in 1796, begins with an 'Advertisement' setting out its 'plagiarisms'. This straightforward acknowledgement of the various influences on his work did not prevent Lewis from being criticized for a lack of originality. Such a declaration should be seen as a way of announcing that the text was, as many cultural artefacts are, a pastiche based on a collection of pre-existing texts. Initially published anonymously, Lewis would come to be recognized not only as the creator of this gothic masterpiece, but would also be conflated with the book's villain Monk Ambrosio—leading to him being referred to as Monk Lewis. This is a similar semantic situation to how 'Frankenstein' now more frequently refers to the monster created by Frankenstein, than to the scientist himself.[7] Such conflation of deed with identity is an experience with which many prisoners and ex-prisoners will be familiar. A number of themes in *The Monk* are also relevant to criminological study. For example, the book contests a Lombrosian system of justice that relies upon notions of fixed identity; and one of the key subliminal messages of the novel is that identity is performative, something that changes with the words that constitute it (Punter 2012). This, arguably, also reflects the changing nature of the criminological discipline, from the fixed realism of positivism and its certainties, through constructionism and anti-positivism and on to a more recent epistemological pluralism. These are features that are also directly relevant in comics, where identities may shift and change and a variety of roles are played out.

[7] A point pedantically made by Alan Partridge in *I'm Alan Partridge* episode four.

Gothic is associated with 'otherness' and offers us a glimpse into the dark and the grotesque. Involving the process of casting out and vilification, othering has been used across a range of theoretical perspectives including feminism (Kristeva 1991) and postcolonialism (Hall 2007) to highlight exclusion, alienation, marginalization and the operation of power. Going beyond stereotyping and scapegoating, othering is a process that creates distinctions and classifications based on inferiority and superiority. It denies the 'other' the defining characteristics of the 'same', such as dignity, reason, compassion, heroism, and ultimately, entitlements to human rights (Seidman 2013). Thinking about the 'other' is, for Butler (2004), the 'point of departure for thinking politically about subordination and exclusion'. The process of identifying someone as an 'offender' and sending them to prison creates the 'other' who is different from those who have not been categorized in such a manner. Identifying the 'other' performs the role of enabling us to identify ourselves in opposition to. It is through examination of the 'other', however, that we come to realize that we are all humans seeking lives that are livable.

## The Nightmare: Transgression and Marginality

Botting (2005) discusses how gothic 'transgressions' and 'excesses' redrew the limits of taste and acceptability, leading to fantasies about those others who occupy the social, political and cultural margins. Gothic tales tend to involve fragmented narratives that relate to mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits. By engaging with the gothic we must consider emotion over rationality and recognize the viscosity between life and fiction, fantasy and reality. Such a framework connects with the narratives of ex-prisoners. The men's stories inform us about the operations of power and about how societal fear has been fostered, not on the basis of harms caused—states and corporations cause significantly greater harm in society—but around individualized, pathologized and psychologized conceptions of harm. Moreover, these concepts are fetishized, providing the opportunity for both philosophical musings and popular entertainment. This resonates with my experience of teaching. When final-year undergraduate students were surveyed about where

they got information from about crime, punishment and justice, the vast majority answered 'the media'. Students may also be drawn to studying criminology through their media consumption—the so-called CSI effect[8]—and tend to be most interested in the extremities of the discipline such as serial killers, the death penalty and prisons.

The true horror about what prisons are like is rarely shown to the public. Instead we 'must turn to the autobiographical writings of prison inmates or correctional officers to get a more emotional sense of prison as the potential hell it can be' (Picart and Greek 2007: 30). Some of the men directly referred to prison as a nightmarish experience akin to hell, and the various deprivations experienced were set within this context. Lack of contact with loved ones was 'hell' according to Nico, Craig, Danny, Jason and Moses. The fabric of the prisons they were held in described as 'awful', 'appalling' and 'degrading' by Bobby, Butch and Nathaniel. While Abdi, Charlie, Colin, Hector, Paul, Phil and Richard referred to their treatment by other prisoners, prison staff, psychologists and parole boards as 'unfair', 'inhumane', 'violent' and 'horrific'. Such ideas are also picked up in popular culture, 'this is my hell, bitch, I make the rules' as a prison officer in TV series *Sons of Anarchy* states. Prisoner autobiographies also invoke prison as hell. Chapter titles in *McVicar by Himself* (1974/2002) include: 'Getting to the Hell-Hole', 'The Hell-Hole' and 'The Hell-Hole Cools Down'. John Hoskin (1998) has a chapter entitled 'Goodbye to Hell'; and Noel 'Razor' Smith (2005) a chapter called 'A Small Corner of Hell'.

When he was Prison Service Director General, Martin Narey caused controversy when he described some prisons as 'hell holes' where prisoners were treated like a 'sub-species'. In the landmark report following the riots and disturbances in prisons in England in 1990, most notably at Strangeways prison in Manchester, Lord Woolf suggested that a contributory cause of the riot had been 'the dehumanizing effects of the insanitary and unsatisfactory conditions within the prison' (Woolf and Tumim 1991, para 3.54).

Brooks (1999: 418) argues that the gothic is countercultural, typified by disillusion, nihilism, irony and a sense of self as 'negated or endlessly manipulated by economic and social forces beyond the[ir] control'. Such

[8] This relates to the idea that fictional TV programmes such as CSI influence public perception.

features were found across the ex-prisoner narratives. As discussed in the previous section, some of the men who identified as outlaws were disillusioned with what mainstream society had to offer them and sought out a countercultural existence. A number of ex-prisoner autobiographies offer similar views. Cummines (2014) talked about how the average person was exploited by those at the top and was a slave to industry. For Smith (2005: 45), law-abiding citizens were 'mugs and targets, too stupid, weak and cowardly to break out of the mould that society has set them'. Paul, who had been sent to prison as a child, offers an interesting insight into some of these ideas. He explicitly discussed nihilism and how life could be regarded as without value, purpose or meaning. For some time leading up to his offence Paul had known he would do something violent and that this was partly to bring an end to the tedium of his life and to set him apart from others.

Initially charged with attempted murder, Paul was sentenced to four and a half years for Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) with intent. GBH is dealt with under Section 18 Offences Against the Person Act (1861) — itself something of a gothic piece of legislation. Encompassing many dark and nasty human activities it is a hodgepodge of existing offences and statutory sections stuck together into a fragmented, hybridized whole.[9] Paul reported that his first thought after committing the offence was 'my life will be different now'. Rather than be manipulated by forces beyond his control, Paul sought to take control. This however, could only ever be a moment in time. He did not wait for the police to locate him but voluntarily handed himself in following the attack. In prison, control is pervasive and Paul's tale is a nightmare vignette.

Paul showed me the diary he had used to record his time in prison. He said:

> We used to get these diaries every year from the chapel, so I kind of would cross off each day, and then I'd have how many days I'd served and how many days I'd got left, going down to my parole day. I mean I'm ok at maths but it was just something I'd do, I've got the weeks as well at the top.

[9] I would like to thank Thom Giddens for this insight.

> Oh, and there's my one millionth minute, 4.50 p.m. 27 May 2001, and then I've written 'tell a lie' because I'm slightly out, and reworked it, and put the hour down to the next day because I'd marked my first day as day one but it's day zero. That was after 99 weeks. People were saying to me not to do it as it [the prison sentence] will take you even longer, and they were probably quite right. It probably did take longer because of it… I couldn't help myself: I did it automatically.

Paul's story has a gothic textuality. He describes a nightmare experience counting every minute for 99 weeks, and then, ironically, getting it wrong. He becomes an automaton, a cyborg—doing things 'automatically'. The excesses and marginality associated with the liminal gothic figure that transgresses the bounds of reality and possibility is realized. Gothic particularly flourishes during times of change; when fear and paranoia are our touchstones then the gothic is unlikely to be far away.

On transferring to his fourth prison Paul experienced extreme bullying on the wing where he was housed. He talked about how the bullies were given a 'free rein', got enhanced status,[10] and dealt with anyone who 'got out of line'. It was during this part of his sentence that Paul experienced a breakdown. In the period preceding this Paul stayed in his cell for six weeks and refused to go out on association. For three weeks he did not shower and slowly sank into depression. He also started to experience intense paranoia, believing that prison officials were going to section him.[11] 'For a while,' he said, 'I had a concern that they [the prison authorities] had a remote-controlled car to creep up outside the door and then somehow fix a listening device on it so they could hear behind the door.' He also became paranoid about the prison officers and what was being said to them about him. This culminated in an incident during a cell inspection.

Paul explained that he kept his cell 'immaculate' and never had any problems during inspections. On this particular day he cleaned his cell

[10] The Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme was introduced in 1995 with the expectation that prisoners would earn additional privileges—enhanced status—through demonstrating responsible behaviour and participation in work or other constructive activity.

[11] Under section 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983 you can be held and treated without your consent.

and waited about two hours for a prison officer to come round. However, just before the officer entered his cell:

> I just happened to have a shit because I'd been waiting so long and he came in and he starts shouting at me because there are poo stains in my toilet, but I had to go do a shit and that kind of threw me cos he was one of my preferred guards.

A few days afterwards Paul broke down. He discussed how he spent a great deal of time crying and thinking how he still had so much of his prison sentence to go and 'no guarantee that this madness is not going to happen again'.

The impact of incarceration is clearly set out by Paul as he outlines his descent into paranoia. We also face his indignity. Not only does he have to use an in-cell toilet but can be humiliated about using it just before a long-awaited inspection happens. This is an intense and dark narrative. Grotesque and sublime, an officious prison officer is conjured up to demonstrate 'the loss of human identity and the alienation of self from both itself and the social bearings in which a sense of reality is secured' (Botting 2005: 102). The gothic motif signifies a lack of reason, morality and beauty and the barbarity of the prison system is clearly set out. Paul's story is also inscribed with other gothic signifiers—terror and amusement. In his marginalized experience of exposed bodily functions, Paul transgresses comedy and tragedy. This is a tale heavy with emotion,[12] and by exploring the narratives of those who have been through the criminal justice system we are very clearly in the domain of lived experiences. These are not just texts to be understood, or, in keeping with the gothic, misunderstood. These are skeletons that we should be encouraging to leap out from the cupboard so that a better understanding of the criminal justice system can be reached.

Although prisoners can assert some form of resistance, Paul's gothic nightmare is about loss of power, mind and body, rather than an assertion of resistance and control. It also brings to mind Žižek's (1997) declaration that as soon as we come into too close proximity with the law it turns

[12] The connection between emotion and the gothic is semantically interesting given the links between Goth and Emo youth subcultures.

into an obscene and abhorrent monstrosity. Or, as Kearney (2003: 96) suggests, it is in contact with the law that 'the human subject finds itself obliterated in a sort of Kafkaesque confusion of sublime proportions'. Such stories tell us about the observed laws of prison through trauma, fear, shame, and terror. Power and violence are put on display, even if cut through with a semblance of ironic humour.

## Comics

The ability of comics to create a series of visual effects including prose allows this format to conflate image with text in ways that neither cinema nor literature can easily achieve. Narrative prose, alongside graphics, interior monologues and spoken dialogue, create multifaceted meaning for consumers of comics. Furthermore, comics themselves have somewhat mutable, hybridized features; neither the written word nor the picture, they are a combination of both and must convey their message across pictures and words as interest 'shifts back and forth, according to the demands of the action or the needs of characterization and atmosphere' (Horn 1976: 9). Comics are hybrids that blur the distinction between literature and the visual arts (Varnum and Gibbons 2001).[13]

Comics have historically been overlooked artefacts not only in sociology and criminology, but also in popular culture.[14] Comics were traditionally printed on cheap paper—much like broadside ballads had been—and have, according to Wright (2008), been perceived as entertainment for children and the less well educated. Yet, crime, justice and the fight between good and evil, are intrinsic storylines in many comics and, although small, there is an emerging field of critical analysis of comics within criminology and law (see for example Giddens 2012, 2015; Phillips and Strobl 2006, 2013; Reyns and Henson 2010). These analyses tend to be about the various ways in which themes of crime and justice

[13] For further discussion on debates regarding words/images in comics see: Giddens (2012), Groensteen (2009) and Miodrag (2013).

[14] Although, as Varnum and Gibbons (2001) note, this is geographically determined. In Japan, parts of Europe and Canada comics have been treated as serious cultural products.

are played out within the superhero genre, particularly in *Batman* and *Superman*, or how cultural concerns are explored within them. In their study on comic book constructions of crime and justice, Phillips and Strobl (2013) consider a range of cultural issues through comic book representations of gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity; as well as criminological topics such as terrorism, evil-doing, imprisonment and the death penalty. Giddens (2015) draws together an eclectic collection of papers that use comics as a critical tool for interdisciplinary legal studies to argue that comics offer an important resource for making sense of the contemporary place and role of law.

Popular media, such as comics, and the many films that draw on their creations, reflect and inform collective sentiments of justice. In their study of vigilantism and deathworthiness, Phillips and Strobl (2015) argue that comics are not only a resource in terms of offering insight into how crime and justice are portrayed in popular culture; they also inform us about the society from which they emerge. Comics, they continue, can help mediate sociocultural anxieties in their readership (and audience) around criminal and moral dilemmas. Furthermore, and like some other popular media, such as computer games, certain genres of music, and so-called 'video nasties', comics have aroused the indignation of various authority figures, and in the post-war period in the USA, reading comics was specifically linked to rising concerns about youth offending (Nyberg 1998).

## The Comics Code Authority

The introduction of the Comics Code Authority in 1954 should be seen as a cultural symbol of 1950s American society, where concerns over violence and the mass media, emerging teenagers and external threats, were wrapped up in calls for increased censorship and restrictions on political dissent. The introduction of the Comics Code Authority is evidence of broader concerns in American society that were encapsulated by McCarthyism. The anti-communist campaign spearheaded by Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy led to people losing their jobs, being sent to prison, and a pervasive sense of distrust across the US,

particularly in the creative industries,[15] due to often unfounded allegations being made of so-called un-American activities and the frequently unfair investigations that followed.

Amongst other requirements, the Code set out how crime was to be dealt with in comics. Part A Section 1–12 of the Code included requirements that 'crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals'. If crime was to be depicted 'it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity'. Representatives of law and order, such as 'policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority'; while 'criminals shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates a desire for emulation'. Finally, 'in every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his [sic] misdeeds.' Although now all but abandoned, the Comics Code stamped a particular approach on representations about crime and justice that continues to this day.

One particular outcome of the Code was that the superhero comic became the dominant genre, and the image of a crime-fighting superhero and their villainous nemesis is now a mainstream part of popular culture. Muir (2008) outlines the changing faces of superheroes on film and television in America. Starting from 1938 he explains that during the following decade some of the most famous superheroes were born, generally on the comic book page, before leaping on to the silver screen, as 'movie audiences hungered to see good triumph over villainy' (9). In the 1960s, Batman reigned supreme, although this particular television rendition of Batman is often regarded as somewhat detrimental to the way superheroes and comic books should be perceived. Less like the comic book Batman, the 1960s television version was self-parodying, colourful and simplistic; nonetheless, this remains one of the most influential superhero TV series to date and ran for 120 episodes until 1968. The last few decades have witnessed a transformation in the superhero genre. From 1960s camp capers to bulked up and gritty superhero, the transformations of Batman embody the various political, cultural and economic

[15] Possibly telling us something about how power seeks to limit and control imaginative space.

shifts in society. When the Comics Code was enforced, a family-friendly character, supported by sidekick Robin, and somewhat played for laughs, was realized on the TV. As the Comics Code lost influence, and societies on both sides of the Atlantic took a neo-liberal turn, the Dark Knight appeared in a more adult-oriented form.

Treading a thin line between heroism and vigilantism Frank Miller's 1986 comic book mini-series *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* recast Batman as an authoritarian, moralizing character, operating in a corrupt and dystopian Gotham. Offering a 'scathing critique' of the media in contemporary society (Phillips and Strobl 2013: 35), this Batman reflected the paradigmatic shift towards neo-liberalism as reductions in government spending saw the withdrawal of the state and the increasing role of the private sector in both the UK and USA. Augmented by Alan Moore, it was this version of Batman that would become a massive financial success. Alongside Batman, numerous other characters from comics have been reimagined and now represent a multi-million-dollar industry, or in some cases—a billion-dollar industry.[16]

The 1980s saw more sophisticated works being developed outside of the Comics Code that moved the medium on from a largely simplistic format generally focused on children. *Watchmen* referenced the Cold War and the widespread fear of nuclear war that was prevalent at the time; *The Dark Knight Returns* sees Batman come out of retirement and ushered in the modern age of comics, when characters became more complex and storylines darker; and *Maus*, based on the experiences of author Art Spiegelman's holocaust-survivor father, won a Pulitzer prize.

Superhero comics have moved off the page and onto the screen, into the position vacated by the Western in the mid part of the twentieth century. Indeed, there has been a proliferation of superheroes in recent years, including animated series such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Power Rangers*, and *Masters of the Universe*; and TV series *The Incredible Hulk*, *Gotham*, *Jessica Jones* and *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D*. Despite their diversity, all operate as metaphors for various cultural concerns regarding justice, security and punishment.

[16] *The Avengers*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Iron Man 3* grossed over a billion dollars each and are in the top 20 highest grossing films ever.

Part of the legacy of the Comics Code has been the dominance of superhero-based stories that contribute towards the retributive discourse that can be found in mainstream understandings of justice. Phillips and Strobl (2013: 7) conducted focus groups with comic book fans and participant statements included 'all justice is based somewhat on revenge' and that 'it feels good to punish'. Comics' sanctions against an easily identifiable evil tend to be both violent and extra-legal, implying that resolution can be achieved with relative ease if the enemy is neutralized and the formal processes and procedures of the criminal justice system sidestepped. Complete incapacitation is the ultimate outcome—an outcome realized in those jurisdictions with the death penalty and also through the use of increasingly longer prison sentences.[17]

## The Problematic of the 'Black' Character

An ongoing criticism of comics has been the lack of ethnic diversity and that representations of non-white 'others' have been stereotypical and problematic,[18] privileging certain ethnic identities over others (Howard and Jackson 2013; Phillips and Strobl 2013). Crime fighting is often presented as the preserve of the white male. In contrast, the black male in popular culture is rarely heroic; instead, he is criminalized and seen as a symbol of fear. Even those fictional characters who are 'good' and positive tend to be reformed offenders who have turned their lives around. Such stereotypical images have a cumulative effect that, according to Russell-Brown (1998), leads to the creation of the 'criminalblackman', whereby blackness and maleness become intrinsically linked to criminality. A situation no doubt compounded by the operations of the criminal justice systems in both the USA and UK, whereby disproportionate numbers of black people are locked up.

[17] People in England and Wales are more likely to be sent to prison and for longer periods of time than in the past. Since 1993 the number of people serving life or indeterminate sentences has virtually doubled (Ministry of Justice 2013).

[18] This is not only the case in relation to ethnicity, as female characters in comics are frequently stereotyped and sexualized.

In his lively, imaginative and wide-ranging analysis of black superheroes and the fantastical visions of identity that they provide, Nama (2011) argues that racialized notions of hypermasculinity are a significant feature of the black superheroes that do exist. In the late 1960s and early 1970s several black superheroes emerged onto the comic book scene. In 1966, Black Panther, the first black superhero in a mainstream American comic appeared in *Fantastic Four*, and the first African-American superhero title was introduced by Marvel in 1972. *Luke Cage: Hero for Hire* was an innocent man imprisoned for a drug-related crime he had not committed. Cage agrees to take part in a chemical experiment in order to gain early parole but when the experiment goes wrong he escapes prison through his now superhuman strength.

It is possible to see a viscous, intertextual loop between blaxploitation films and comic book superheroes. The 1970s was a period in American history that was trying to come to terms with the long history of exploitation of black people and the impact of the civil rights movement. Slowly the voices of black America, in the form of writers and artists, business people and politicians, began to be heard. Nama (2011) offers an interesting insight into blaxploitation films, which, he argues, can be viewed as black superhero cinema. Using one of the classic blaxploitation movies, *Super Fly*, as a case-study, he shows how the film was 'saturated with superhero signifiers' (37). This is evidenced by the film's title, the colourful and flamboyant attire of the main character, Youngblood Priest, and his distinctive transportation (a customized Cadillac). In contrast to those who see blaxploitation movies as stereotyping the 'black' experience, the characters in these films are recast as heroic figures. They are beyond human, possess extraordinary talents, are hip and streetwise and fight an unjust system. Rather than take a simplistic approach to black comic book superheroes or their blaxploitation counterparts, Nama encourages us to see these characters as a powerful source of racial meaning. Such characters offer a discourse that expresses a whole range of racial assumptions, reimaginings of identity and political perspectives. They also represent racialized notions about crime, equality, punishment and justice.

Nathaniel, AKA Loopie, who was the pacesetter for the gang and would receive 'hood credit for what he did used the language of a superhero to describe his gang activities:

> I felt invincible between the age of 16 and 18. I felt like I was untouchable in the manor, like no one could talk to me. If you were from another end [area] and you talked to me I'd, like, get 15 guys to go to your mum's house and beat you up, or just kidnap you, take you off the streets and take you far away, and then we'd write your mum a letter saying we have your son… We'd beat the shit out of him until he gave us some p [money] and then we let him go.

The gangster identity in Nathaniel's narrative takes on aspects of a superhero figure. He is 'invincible', 'untouchable', he is a 'pacesetter', whose speed and fearlessness earns him status and respect within the gang.

Issues regarding identities, fantasy and performativity can be found in the work of hip-hop artists such as MF Doom or the late graffiti, hip-hop and performance artist, Rammellzee. MF Doom is a masked super-villain rapper, whose name and mask reference the Marvel comic villain Dr. Doom, who is also depicted rapping on the cover of the 1999 album *Operation: Doomsday*. Rammellzee's work has been described as a combination of the hip-hop group the Sugarhill Gang by way of science fiction writer, Philip K. Dick (Kennedy 2010). He performed as different characters in a variety of masks and costumes and sought to revise racial identity through the tropes of fantasy and science fiction. Rammellzee's artwork and graffiti was based on his theory of Gothic Futurism, which sought to deconstruct the English language and described a symbolic warfare between letters and their standardizations through the rules of the alphabet.

The theory of Gothic Futurism, with its battle for freedom from an imposed structure, can be seen as a force for liberation for all those who feel their lives have been negatively affected by the powerful and restrictive systems that shape them. These ideas are reminiscent of the academic work of Haraway (1991), who alongside seeing cyborgs as a metaphor for increasing dependence on technology, saw the hybrid (organic and biomechatronic) status of the cyborg as destabilizing binary oppositions such as female/male, black/white human/machine and animal/human that are seen as the basis for repression, exploitation and subordination. This is an analysis that can equally be applied to those binaries of victim/offender, non-offender/offender, punished/unpunished—categories that tend to disintegrate following even the most cursory of inspections.

## Conclusion

Analysis of the different narratives on which this book is based—those of the men who had been prison, autobiographies written by ex-prisoners and student surveys, led me to using comics and the gothic as analytical tools for considering punishment and prison. The heightened emotions that they portray, and the hybridity that they represent, have been used to contextualize the experience of incarceration. There is viscosity at the junction of gothic and comics, including pastiche and reflexivity, criminality and the unspeakable, indeterminacy and paranoia; both also demonstrate the play of systems of power on the individual. Marginal voices, untold stories and difficulty in understanding situations that are not our own lend themselves to such treatment. For example, similar to the experience of prison, gothic texts are misunderstood and fragmented. Moreover, incarceration is itself gothic as is made apparent in the dystopian, cyborgian tale about counting every minute served in prison for nearly two years. Similarly, we can see the changing nature of comics from the 1950s and 1960s to those produced in the 1980s onwards as representative of the economic, social, political and cultural upheavals many societies went through in the wake of the neo-liberal turn.

Criminology is itself imbued with gothic tradition. It is a grotesque, stitched together monster of a discipline, known for shifting shape, whose focus is perceived to be on the dark and dangerous. Concerned with human stories, it should also be a discipline that has humour and compassion, and should strive towards understanding and responsiveness.

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# 7

# Ghosts, Monsters and Hulk

## Introduction

This chapter begins with discussion on the prison as a haunting, hell-like space where those who have been judged monstrous and no longer fit to live amongst us are exiled and made into ghosts. How the hell-like prison contributes to the construction of the prisoner as a monster is explored, along with an examination of multiple news media references to this idea. Moors murderer, Ian Brady, is regularly described as a monster; as were Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, the two eleven-year-olds convicted of the murder of James Bulger in 1993. Wakefield prison has been described as 'Monster Mansion' by *The Mirror*, *The Sun* and the *Guardian* newspapers. Examples of monstering can also be found in popular culture. A play about Venables and Thompson was called *Monsters*. The film *Monster* depicted the life of American Aileen Wuornos, who was convicted and executed for several murders; whilst *We Are Monster* is a film based on the real-life murder of Zahid Mubarek by his racist cellmate Robert Stewart in Feltham Young Offenders Institution. In his autobiography, ex-prisoner Jimmy


F. Farrant, *Crime, Prisons and Viscous Culture*,
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Boyle (1984: 4), states that the 'authorities would publicly portray us as monsters and animals'; although it is worth keeping in mind that prisoners may also use this term. For example, in his autobiography, John McVicar (1974/2002) refers to prisoners convicted of sex offences against children as monsters.

The impact of the hell-like prison on behaviour is explored through the bodily changes that a number of the male ex-prisoners reported going through. The internalization of normative codes regarding masculinity, such as physical size, strength and violence, should be regarded as a consequence of imprisonment according to Evans and Wallace (2008) who explored hegemonic masculinity and prisoner narratives. The changing shape of the male prisoner body has also been considered by Jewkes (2005) who discusses how bodybuilding is a common response to incarceration. The impact of imprisonment on the body, and the importance of the gym, has been reinforced by two recent experiences I have had. Firstly, an ex-prisoner who comes in to talk to students on my module 'Punishment and Prisons' discussed how in contrast to his somewhat 'weedy' body on entry to prison he went on to become 'hench' whilst serving his sentence. On the second occasion, prior to the start of a focus group with serving prisoners, one of the participants said that he was getting 'well fed up' with the lack of access to the gym as it was the gym that kept him both 'sane' and 'in shape'. Such responses to imprisonment are examined through the archetype of the Hulk.

## Ghosts

Prisons are haunted, haunting places where spectres loom large. Tales are told of infamous ex-prisoners; bars and netting obscure sight, fogging the view; deaths occur and blood is spilled. Moreover, with high levels of mental health and substance misuse problems, and experiences of violence and neglect, prisoners themselves must live with the demons of their own past, along with those of others.[1]

[1] In England and Wales 62% of men in prison have a personality disorder; 15% report symptoms indicative of psychosis; 10% have had a previous psychiatric admission. Rates of self-harm increased

In eighteenth-century gothic the emphasis was on expelling and objectifying threatening figures of evil—casting them out, hiding them away.[2] The process of imprisoning someone operates as the modern-day equivalent. Imprisonment is confinement, it evokes being trapped: it is horror (Picart and Greek 2007). Experiences of tyranny, barbarity, ruin and fear, of feeling at the disposal of institutional power can all be found in the stories the men told and in the autobiographies of ex-prisoners. Mark Johnson (2008: 109) discussed how prison made him 'an expert in brutality'. Cummines' (2014: 155) language is particularly gothic—pain and misery seep through every brick in the court cells and prison is a 'frightening, frightening place, where it was easy to lose all hope for the future'. McVicar (1974/2002: 116) adds a futuristic dystopian aspect describing it as a place where prisoners are 'farmed by other men'.

An example of an intertextual loop or triple mimesis can be found in the gothicization of prison imagery, in the dungeons and jails that are frequently evoked in gothic literature, and in the Victorian era where judicial buildings were deliberately designed as gothic palaces. The Age of Enlightenment, from which the gothic emerged, also gave birth to the model of modern-day punishment: the prison. In the gothic, medieval-like ruins and decaying buildings were perceived in a new and favourable light (Punter 2001). This architecture was both sombre and picturesque and would go on to provide, through various Victorian building projects, sublime additions to the geographical and cultural landscape. One of the men interviewed, Hector, invokes the gothic dungeon with his description of a young offenders institutions that he had been in: 'Portland was a dungeon it's all the way in Dorset. Its like one way in, one way out, there's no escape… You see seagulls, and you go up, up, up. And the prison is ancient.' In his autobiography, Mark Johnson (2008: 94) describes the same prison: 'it looms ahead, grey mist hanging… Massive, imposing, grey-white walls.'

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by 37% in male prisons between 2008 and 2013. Nearly a third of men report needing help with a drug problem and have experienced emotional, sexual, or physical abuse as a child. Well over a third report having an alcohol problem. A quarter were in care as a child. Nearly 70% were unemployed prior to imprisonment and 15% homeless (Prison Reform Trust, 2014).

[2] Such ideas can also be found in ancient myths.

Judicial gothic can be seen in the architecture of both prisons and courts and such buildings were used to signal power, authority and religious allegiance to Christianity. Gothic buildings often shared similar features, designers and architects. In 1840, Charles Barry, for example, was joint architect for the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament, the seat of government in the UK, and at the same time worked on the façade of Pentonville prison in London.

Whether Victorian gothic, or more contemporary bland and functional prison buildings, each denotes culturally specific notions of justice and punishment. In the 1970s, Foucault (1977/1991) raised the issue of a carceral system where factories, schools, barracks, prisons and hospitals all resembled each other. But this issue goes much further back than he implied. Through the nineteenth-century commitment to the gothic, schools, churches, seats of government and jailhouses all shared a similar aesthetic. In this architectural period buildings were the physical expression of Christian judgement and emerging capitalist power, and sought to instil awe in the new urban working class. Law courts during this period expressed, according to Mulcahy (2011: 112), 'the new ideals of the market place.' Foucault's analysis of modern architecture as being symbolic of the culture from which it comes can equally be applied to the past.

Jewkes and Moran (2014: 8) ponder whether the nondescript external appearance of new prisons can 'be regarded as a visual metaphor for the loss of public empathy for the excluded offender? Do we turn a blind eye to the plight of those confined if we cast an invisible cloak over them'? they ask. But do not be fooled. Even contemporary prisons, with their bland and mundane exteriors, the gothic façade eroded away, are hell-like. Behind both gothic palace and nondescript front lurks pain, isolation and terror. The gothic lingers, even if we now seek to hide not only those contained within prisons, but the prison building itself.

The architectural dullness of the contemporary prison in no way mitigates the horror of what they contain.[3] Inside you will find, according to Jimmy Boyle (1984: 3), 'the living dead.' Indeed, the very banality of the architecture can add to the horror of the mechanical, dehumanization process of imprisonment. Prison is a location that has been constructed

[3] For an evocative exploration of the aesthetics of the death penalty see Manderson (2000).

in the imagination through an accumulation of popular cultural artefacts including computer games, song, literature and film. It is a space in which the fears and desires of culture can be played out, the bland walls offering a blank canvas on which any range of projections can be put.

The architecture of Victorian prisons is normally presented as spectacle for reforming the human soul. Utilizing aspects of Moretti's (1983) compelling analysis of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* an alternative reading can, however, be made. Moretti argued that *Dracula* could be read as a metaphor for capital. The bloodsucking, predatory, monstrous actions of Dracula, compelled to make ever more victims in order to survive, is a symbol for the capitalist who is compelled to accumulate. Blood-lust and money-lust become synonymous.

For Moretti (1983: 94), the 'great ideological lie of Victorian capitalism' is that economic power can be used to 'purify' capital for moral good. This, he argues, is 'a capitalism which is ashamed of itself and which hides factories and stations beneath cumbrous gothic superstructures'. Applying this analysis to the mass building of prisons in the Victorian era, we can see that instead of operating as an architectural signal for celebrating reform and reformation of the soul, this was an attempt to hide the monstrous purpose of punishment under a sublime gothic carapace. The prison is not so much an institution for discipline as one that, through the destruction of any secure sense of time and place, dismantles personal identity (Gallo and Ruggiero 1991).

Richard lived in a hostel for people with high levels of comorbidity, a history of serious offending, and who represented a risk to themselves or the public. Discussing his first prison sentence, Richard talked about the devastation he had seen prison create:

> The thing is that you have to remain upbeat, if you start to let the situation get you down you'll succumb to various different components of being dehumanized because that's what it is, if you succumb to that sort of pressure it literally will dehumanize you, it will break you.

He continued:

> I've seen a lot of people in fairly short periods of time, prison has broken them, they've become institutionalized, withdrawn, isolated, the very fabric

> of what they were before they went to prison, they're a shadow of themselves, they don't even interact with their family or their friends… So the trick is not to let them break you, have some discipline, some structure in your life, something constructive that you will get out.

During Richard's second prison sentence however, he had a mental breakdown and was sectioned under the Mental Health Act (1983). He served the remainder of his sentence in secure hospital and has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and says that he hears voices '24/7'.

Richard talked about the 'long apprenticeship' he had served before he got to a certain level in drug dealing. During this time, he was concerned about being 'grassed up' by people who would end up in witness protection as Bloggs. Again the gothic is incited. Not only is Richard fearful, he is fearful of the unknown, of spectres and ghosts, of people who are not there, who have disappeared. Despite working with ex-prisoners, for various prison campaign organizations and undertaking research in prisons over a period of two decades, I had never heard of Bloggs and asked Richard what it meant. He said:

> Bloggs is, like, the government-run witness protection that's in prison. Parkhurst is one of the few prisons that has these programmes, the reason they are called Bloggs is because no one is supposed to be able to identify their names. So they are all called Bloggs One or whatever. They are literally doing a sentence away from the general population of the prison because if they came out and it transpires what they've done they'd get killed.

For Richard, Bloggs was of concern for two reasons. Firstly, if caught, criminal contacts could decide to go into witness protection rather than face a lengthy prison sentence, which meant that he risked prosecution and a prison sentence himself. Equally, Richard argued, if someone did grass, witness protection or not, they or their families risked violent retribution; on this basis he did not think that this was an option for him if he got caught. In Richard's narrative Bloggs is an absent presence, a liminal being that inhabits and gives shape to many of the figurations of horror that characterize the gothic.

On trying to find out more about Bloggs, I came across only a small number of references. In 1999, the *Observer* newspaper ran an article by journalist Tony Thompson about the Protected Witness Unit at Parkhurst prison, which stated that the unit did not officially exist. In 2000, Thompson published the book *Bloggs 19: The Story of the Essex Range Rover Triple Murders*, based on interviews with Darren Nicholls, a supergrass who had turned Queen's evidence. Nearly a decade later, ex-prison governor turned Professor of Criminology, David Wilson, makes another mention, claiming that he came up with the idea of using the term Bloggs to refer to those prisoners in the Protected Witness Unit at Woodhill Prison (Wilson 2008). The idea that such units did not exist loses even more credence given that Prison Service Order 1801, setting out how requests from the police to produce prisoners should be dealt with, also refers to these units, and details the separate arrangements required for the production of prisoners held in Protected Witness Units at Full Sutton, Hull and Parkhurst prisons.[4]

Bloggs is reminiscent of other gothic practices such as ghosting and the use of extraordinary rendition. During the so-called war on terror suspected terrorists were seized and secretly flown across national borders to be interrogated by foreign governments that use torture. In the decade following the attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, nearly 150 people were illegally transported around the globe with about 54 governments complicit in this practice (Singh 2013). Ghosting refers to the shuttling of prisoners identified as troublesome between different prisons in an attempt to reduce their influence—a practice that garnered national attention when it was alleged that prisoners were ghosted between two London prisons prior to visits from the prisons inspectorate[5] in order to increase the likelihood of more positive reports. Mark Leech, who served nearly two decades in 62 different prisons, also mentions this practice, referring to a ghost train that moved around the country dispensing its travellers into solitary confinement on each arrival.

[4] I have since been informed that the unit at Parkhurst prison is now shut.

[5] Inspector is etymologically derived from the same origin as 'spectre' (apparition, image, appearance, from Latin *specere*, to look/see). I'd like to thank Thom Giddens for suggesting that a prison inspector is, therefore, a ghost hunter!

## Monsters

> Once it is understood that criminals are a 'different breed' altogether, the almost cavalier attitude as to the fate of the people thereby banished from society becomes not merely defensible but perfectly appropriate, and the mechanisms of exclusion and control are revealed as obviously necessary. How else are we to deal with these dangerous monsters? (Dolovich 2011: 288)

Judicial gothic provides the necessary environment for the emergence of identifiable monsters. Dolovich (2011) argues that the shift to individualistic discourses within criminal justice constructs a normative framing, which sees all those who are caught up in the system as dangerous, 'nonhuman' and in need of exclusion. Moreover, the belief that some people are inherently evil remains a persistent one (Drake 2012).

An important part of the gothic tale is the monster, and human-type monsters have an uncanny quality. In Freudian theory the uncanny involves the dialectic between what is known and what is unknown. In defining the uncanny Freud (1955/2001: 219) suggested that 'it is undoubtedly related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror… things which lie within the field of what is frightening'. According to Beal (cited in Picart and Greek 2007: 12), 'we humans respond to the monster as a personification of the *unheimlich* [the uncanny], of otherness within sameness, and our responses range from demonization to deification.' At the brink between the known and the unknown, otherness and sameness, we find prisoners. In the imagination of the sublime, mediated by the known and unknown, fears proliferate and the spectre of the prisoner-monster is fashioned from the grotesque and abject.

Prisoners occupy the space of a number of familiar monster-types. As we have seen, the werewolf is an outlaw, and as is discussed in the following section, the werewolf is also a tortured being, a shapeshifter, never allowed to stop moving between different states that are far from his own choosing. The werewolf is, therefore, a leitmotif throughout this book. Those who have had contact with the criminal justice system can also be seen in those classic gothic monsters personified by Dracula and Frankenstein's monster—bloodsuckers of society, hideous monstrosities, barely human.

The story of the birthing of some of the most iconic gothic monsters is as gothic as the texts that were created. On a fateful night in 1816, at the Villa Diodati near Lake Geneva in Switzerland, are 18-year-old Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin and poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, who would marry later that year, along with Mary's sister, Claire Claremont, poet Lord Byron and his physician, John Polidori. They read a collection of gothic tales to each other. A decision was taken to write their own ghost stories and the rest, as they say, is history.

One of the outcomes of this night was Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), regarded as the first vampire novel in the English language. It was inspired by the folklores and myths that had captured the imagination of the people of the Balkan regions of Eastern Europe. Polidori's version of the vampiric myth would go on to have a significant influence on much future vampire literature and has a viscous quality to it, as it shared some Byronic literary tendencies whilst also using Byron as a template for the vampyre.

Also conjured up that night in Italy was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, one of the greatest gothic tales of identity and abandonment. This is the story of a painfully human creature turned into a monster, an inhuman 'other', who does not even possess a name. Using different first-person narrators, and presented as a collection of various stories and letters, *Frankenstein* the novel, appears as fragmented, disjointed and amalgamated from various bits and pieces as the monster himself. This is a complex, multi-dimensional story, which refuses to provide easy answers; the monster is simultaneously villain, hero and victim.

Frankenstein is, nonetheless, clearly a tale of horror. Indeed, as Mary Shelley wrote in the Introduction of the 1831 edition of the book, her declared intention was to 'awaken thrilling horror'. Frankenstein's monster is made of bits and pieces of dead bodies and the finished creature is a monstrosity, blurring the boundary between the living and the dead. He is liminal, on the threshold between two opposing conceptual categories: death/life, sympathy/abhorrence. Indeed, one of the debates that has clung to the book since its publication is the appropriate apportionment of sympathy and blame between the man and the monster. Mary Shelley's monster shifts the concept of monstrosity from those cast out or rendered 'other', onto the repressive and oppressive systems of normalization and injustice that have created it.

The story of *Frankenstein* has moved beyond the borders of gothic literature and become part of popular culture, a shift that occurred almost as soon as the book had been published. By 1826, for example, it had been staged 15 times and would go on to be a staple of cinema—the first film adaptation coming in 1910—and television and video games would follow. Possibly one of the most influential productions was the James Whale-directed 1931 movie starring Boris Karloff, who would come to be physically associated with the monster and go on to play this role in a number of other films. Based on an earlier play of the book rather than the book itself, in this version the monster is given the brain of a murderer. Whereas Shelley depicted the monster as something of a tragic hero, many of the representations since have presented him in far more simplistic and violent terms.

The etymology of monster, Latin *monstrum*, is 'that which reveals' and 'that which warns'. Monsters signify something other than themselves; they are 'always a displacement' (Cohen 1996: 4). A number of the men felt that their status as ex-prisoners made them seem monstrous to wider society. Colin felt this particularly acutely because of his ongoing status as a life-sentenced prisoner. Nonetheless, he wanted his story to be heard, hopeful that it would provide insight into a system that had, in his words, created him.

Colin could not recall the number of prison sentences he had received. He was matter of fact, almost deadpan when asked what he did when he found out that his third wife had started a relationship with his son from a previous marriage, replying: 'I murdered her'. In common with a large number of other prisoners, Colin had extensive experience of childhood institutionalization and brutality, and he related his own offending back to his violent and abusive upbringing.

Cohen's (1996) seven theses about culture and the monsters that it creates are used as a framework for analysis of Colin's narrative. The first thesis is that the monster's body is a cultural body and, therefore, we can examine the monsters that are made and the cultural circumstances that bring them into being. Analysis of monsters is important because they represent uncertainty. The monster is 'an abjecting epistemological device basic to the mechanics of deviance construction and identity formation' (ibid.: ix). The monster is also a cultural problem; they unsettle us as clear answers are not provided. Every monster is also a double narrative. One narrative describes how the monster came to be, whilst the other details what cultural use the monster serves. Colin sets out in detail how he came to be:

> As a kid I spent long periods of time in children's homes and on reflection my life since then has been shaped by those early experiences. In the brutality, violence and abuse I experienced at the hands of the state in the guise of social workers and teachers. They taught me that violence provided answers, it sent a message out: violence is the solution. It was this lesson that led me to borstal and here staff confirmed the role of violence in my life. This would go on to be a downward spiral in my life as I went on to repeat that violence.

Colin sets out that he is a product of an unjust system. This is reminiscent of the title of Mark Leech's (1992) autobiography, *A Product of the System*, and of the Ice Cube song discussed in Chap. 4, 'The Product'.

The second thesis is that the monster always escapes. Although the monster may be banished, it will reappear; the monster is never defeated— 'the monster's body is both corporal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift' (Cohen 1996: 5). This concept of shifting shape is explored in the following section. The third thesis is that monsters refuse easy categorization, they are not part of the order of things and by resisting attempts to classify and categorize them they become dangerous. Monsters are also indicative of crisis and have the power to evade and undermine, demanding a radical reconsideration of boundary and normality and the expected order of things gets upset as the monster resists integration. Through this the monster offers new methods of perceiving the world. Colin discussed how all his life he fought the various institutions and systems he came up against. He was highly politicized and saw the work of social workers, prison reformers and others as 'do-gooding'. Whilst offenders and prisoners were 'assessed, classified, categorized, and pigeon-holed' by such people, they failed to recognize that it was the system itself that was at fault. A system he (correctly) claims is focused most upon the working class. He said:

> The state, you know, the probation officers, social workers, and psychologists, they've got no interest in us. They're not interested in the prisoner, or the politics of imprisonment, and even less about what happens to us after release.

Colin therefore links the wider systems of power and control, including so-called soft power, with the tentacles of the state. He argued that despite protestations from various professional groups that they are interested in promoting equality, and motivated by meeting needs and compassion for others, by engaging with systems of power and control rather

than challenging them such work serves little purpose beyond oiling the very system itself. In doing this, Colin refuses to take on the dominant individualized discourse relating to offenders as deficient human beings, and instead embeds his actions in dysfunctional systems of power.

A further thesis is that the monster dwells at the gates of difference—the 'other'. Monsters are created through a process of fragmentation and then assembled into a hybridized being. 'By revealing that difference is arbitrary and potentially free-floating, mutable rather than essential, the monster threatens to destroy not just individual members of a society, but the very cultural apparatus through which individuality is constituted and allowed' (Cohen 1996: 12).

The hybrid, nearly human nature of the monster connects to Freud's notion of the uncanny. Moreover, the idea of individual destruction links to Colin's story and his early life as being one of violence and brutality. Colin argued that his parents had tried to do their best for him but had been let down by society. Both his parents had served during World War II but would still go on to experience poverty and homelessness. This was not the freedom, he said, for which they had fought.

The fifth and sixth theses are that the monster polices the borders of the possible and that fear of the monster is really desire. In this reading, the monster is a warning against curiosity and explanation. To step outside of state-sanctioned behaviour risks being excessively controlled and becoming monstrous. There is also a sexuality to the monster that is similar to the outlaw, 'the monster is transgressive, too sexual, perversely erotic, a lawbreaker; and so the monster and all that it embodies must be exiled or destroyed' (Cohen 1996: 17). In linking the monster with the forbidden the monster becomes all the more appealing, he attracts as well as repels. At the same time that we loathe and distrust the monster, we envy its freedom and even, perhaps, its despair can appear sublime—issues that link to the outlaw identity also.

The monster operates to demarcate the bonds that hold culture together, calling 'horrid attention to the borders that cannot – must not – be crossed' (ibid.: 13). This highlights the viscous network of gangsters and outlaws, monsters and shapeshifters. Cohen goes on to suggest that it may have been the case that medieval merchants deliberately placed sea monsters on their maps to discourage further exploration and by doing so demarcated and

protected their trade routes, allowing the establishment of new economic power bases and monopolies. Monsters often serve the purposes of their creators. Applying this to the prison context, it is all too easy to see how prison and prisoners are used as a way of delineating power in society. They simultaneously call attention to the borders that cannot be crossed, while drawing attention away from the horrors committed elsewhere.

The final thesis is that the monster stands at the threshold of becoming. Monsters 'can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return' (Cohen 1996: 21). They ask us how we perceive the world and why we have created them. Lombroso created the atavistic criminal monster who demanded new and more drastic forms of social control. The monsters created through the process of imprisonment are a sharp reminder of the operations of power. Portraying certain sections of society and certain behaviours as monstrous provides simplistic answers to what are in fact complex issues of power and control. But despite what the powerful might hope, the boundaries are fluid and flexible rather than fixed and firm. Neither *Frankenstein* nor *The Vampyre*, for example, offer any sense of resolution at the end the text. Similarly, men who bear the mark of imprisonment, and who have been made into monsters, must nonetheless, return to society.

## Hulk

Stallybrass and White (1986: cited in Hurley 2007:9) argue that the monstrous body is 'multiple, bulging, over- or under-sized, protuberant and incomplete… always in process, it is always *becoming*, it is a mobile and hybrid creature, disproportionate, exorbitant, outgrowing all limits, obscenely decentered and off-balance'. This is a metamorphic body, grotesque, uncanny, fluid and variable. The grotesque body is also carnivalesque (Hurley 2007). Indeed, there is something funny, off-balanced and carnivalesque that in the process of controlling people, of locking them up and taking away their liberty, these bodies are put into places of violence; and one of the responses to this situation is to work upon the body and to make it bigger—an irony not lost on the men who had been in prison.

Butler (2004: 15) suggests that psychoanalytical theories aid understandings of how fantasy has been construed as part of human relationality as we come to understand that 'fantasy is essential to an experience of one's own body'. Such responses to imprisonment are examined through the archetype of the Hulk. This archetype also allows analysis to take into account family background and the role of anger and anger management—important aspects in many male prisoners' experiences.

Bodily (re)constructions are well known in mainstream discourses about male prisoners. The large, pumped-up body, is not only represented in numerous prison dramas but is commodified on American websites such as 'Prison Workout Routine – Get Ripped Like a Convict' which includes 'badass exercises' to 'become the ultimate convict'; and 'Prison Body Fitness', which is, according to the website, 'the brain child of a highly motivated and extremely resourceful X-Con Group Trainer who is currently serving time in a remote federal facility.' This is a man who pushes 'the boundaries of human potential with his customized Maximum Intensity Training Program'.

The physical changes that occur within the hell-like prison are well recorded. In his autobiography, John Hoskin (1998: 102), describes entering the gym at Coldingley prison for the first time and states that it was full of men 'who would have made the Incredible Hulk look small'. Erwin James (2003) said that he needed to appear tough and be able to handle himself, a key measure of which was how much someone could bench press. Boyle (1977: 92) became 'super fit' in prison. Cummines (2014: 44–5) came out of prison 'fighting fit and totally brutalised… a superthug'. The process and meaning of increasing body mass, the masculinization of the body, can be contextualized in the environment of the prison, where fear and violence are common features. The link between masculinities and increasing body size has been explored in academic literature (Evans and Wallace 2008) and in depictions of prisoners such as in films like *Bronson* or TV series *Oz*. It has also been suggested that individual forms of resistance can be seen in relation to attempts to control and manipulate the physical body (Crewe 2009; Jewkes 2005).

Just as with Lombroso's concept of atavistic criminal throwbacks, there is a gothic element in the creation of many superheroes: infected by a spider's bite (Peter Parker/Spider-Man); fuelled by the desire to avenge the murder of his parents (Bruce Wayne/Batman); born just before their

home planet is destroyed (Clarke Kent/Superman); or exposed to gamma rays during a test bomb detonation (Bruce Banner/Hulk). The shift from human to superhuman is often the consequence of a dark or violent experience.

According to Pitkethley (2013: 27) 'monstrous superheroes such as the Hulk demonstrate the incorporation of an *otherness* associated with the grotesque'. Created by Marvel Comics' Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the *Incredible Hulk* first appeared in 1962 and originally featured a grey Hulk, although by the second issue he had become the recognizable green. In the comic's creation of Hulk, we meet quiet, reticent scientist Dr Bruce Banner, who was trying to protect a young man from a test bomb explosion when he himself was exposed—an incident that would go on to have devastating side effects. Inciting the werewolf, Muir (2008: 328) points out that 'like a movie werewolf, Bruce Banner was normal by day, but became a powerful, uncontrollable, heavily muscled monster by moonlight'. According to co-creator Kirby, it was a mother trying to get her baby out from the running board of a car that inspired this new character: 'it suddenly came to me that in desperation we can all do that – we can knock down walls, we can go berserk' (cited in Muir 2008: 328). The Hulk is a metaphor for the monster within all human beings.

Hulk was a member of the original line up for the 'Avengers'—a gathering of mighty heroes needed when the Earth is under a super threat too powerful for any one superhero. Nonetheless, he 'never truly fitted in with the rest of the team… before too long the Hulk was constantly arguing with the other heroes, and they began to regret including him' (DeFalco and Manning 2008: 33). Following Hulk quitting the Avengers, a new replacement is found, a patriotic superhero, super athlete and brilliant strategist—the antithesis of Hulk—Captain America. Despite this setback, by the 1970s Hulk was a well-established member of the Marvel universe.

The Hulk has achieved fame as a comic book creation, TV series, and cinematic star. Unlike the comic book Hulk, who is affected by terrible gamma rays when a new and deadly H-bomb is detonated by the military, in the 1978 TV series Banner conducts a scientific test on himself, the result of which is involuntary shapeshifting into the Hulk. This is an interesting change—from the exercise of military power in the creation of the monster in the 1960s to the individualized, self-created, self-infected Hulk of the 1980s. A shift reflected in the criminal justice system—from

the more welfarist approach of the 1960s, to the rise of managerialism and individualization in more contemporary times (Cavadino et al. 2013). As both the US and UK saw the increasing reification of the free market, the rolling back of the welfare state, a focus on the individual, and the rise of rational choice theories, this was a Hulk for the times. Where once the Hulk was the victim of other people's involvement in his life, now he is the cause of this monstrous change.

The Hulk is a highly complex comic book character, more of an antihero than superhero. Where most comic book heroes fight villains, the situation for Hulk is more complicated. According to Lee (2012: 138), 'the psychological trauma buried in his lost childhood has resulted in a repressive personality in adulthood… his past is revealed by his transformations into the Hulk.' For DeFalco and Manning (2008: 138) he is 'both the bully in the schoolyard and the victim cowering on the ground. He is us'. Like so many prisoners, Bruce Banner is trapped by his personal demons: the 'normal' side of the Hulk had a dysfunctional upbringing, with an abusive father, culminating in the murder of Bruce's mother. Following the conviction of his father, who is confined in a mental institution, Bruce must go to live with an Aunt. Bewilderment and introspection are key parts of his adolescence. Anger is also an important feature of the Hulk: 'don't make me angry, you wouldn't like me when I'm angry' was a frequent refrain in the TV series.

Such stories of family dysfunction, abandonment, violence and anger were prevalent in the men's narratives, in the ex-prisoner autobiographies and in criminological understandings of 'offenders'. Only Phil did not refer to violence in his life story; violence was a feature in all the other men's lives. Abdi had experienced violence at the hands of his father, Bobby had been involved in a violent offence and recounted getting into fights throughout his life, Butch had been beaten as a teenager and would be involved in violence most of his adult life, Charlie was convicted of a violent offence—although no one had been hurt and he had been hit himself, Colin's life was replete with violence, Craig's family life had been violent and, as with Danny, violence was a feature of their lives post-imprisonment, Hector had been involved in violence including a knife fight, Jason, Moses, Nathaniel and Paul had been convicted of violent offences. Nico's childhood and early adult life had involved an array

of violent incidents, and Richard's upbringing and association with drugs had been violent.

Through the body of the Hulk fantasies of aggression and inversion are allowed safe expression. The dense symbolism reminds us how permeable the monstrous body can be, and how difficult to dissect. Hector's adopted mother and then stepmother both died when he was young. When he was in prison, particularly young offender institutions, things would very easily kick off, he said, as everyone wanted to show that they could stand up for themselves. Hector discussed one incident where he had a fight with another prisoner that led to a violent intervention from staff.

> I had a fight with one guy in Feltham, a lifer. I was on the phone talking to my sister and he's telling me to hurry up, and then he came up and punched me. I just saw red, tried to bite him,[6] he's hiding behind the officers, and I was, like, mad, then one of my friends said 'mind his head' cos I was like that, off, and I'm licking [hitting] my head off the concrete so the officers are, like, 'ok mate, try and be calm…' [One of the officer's] was very good, but that day he flipped me out. The way he got me, the way he flipped me, was like I was doing a somersault and then he hit my head on the pool table, because one minute I'm there and the next minute I'm spinning. You know when they hold you for the pressure points, he was holding me and telling me to calm down and breathe in and out slowly. He asked if I was alright to stand up and then he patted me on the back and took me to the [punishment] block.

Hector's story continues and links directly with the narrative of the Hulk as someone who is now both angrier and bigger. He said:

> When I came out I was just mad. Prison just made me want to do more crime, it was like I was more rebelling, I'd done prison now and it's nothing. I came out and I was… bigger.

Within four months of release from prison Hector was back inside. As with the Hulk, we can gaze deeply into the impact of family trauma, anger and the physical transformation that many prisoners undergo.

[6] This offers a vampiric element to the story.

Anger management is an explicit metaphor in the Hulk, with the suggestion that uncontrolled rage can turn people into monsters. Violence remains one of the areas of complication for those committed to penal reform, who tend to argue for reducing the use of imprisonment for *non-violent offences*—indicating that prison is, therefore, appropriate for those who have been identified as violent.[7] Fiske (1989) suggests that representations of violence are popular because they are relevant to people living in societies where power and resources are inequitably distributed. Such arguments resonate with those made by a number of criminologists. Aspects of both popular cultural studies, and criminological studies, regard violence as a concrete representation of conflict within society, of domination and subordination. For example, peace-making criminologists argue that the discipline has been complicit in the 'war on crime' paradigm that perpetuates violence and inequalities (Pepinsky 1995). Moreover, elements of the criminal justice system itself can be regarded as fostering violence. Discussing his prison sentence, Charlie said 'they were sending me into prison for violence. That's what they said, I was a violent man; well they've sent me in somewhere that is violent. Man, I survived in some ways *by* violence, the thing they were sending me to prison for'.

The Hulk conveys 'a gargantuan creature, a being of awesome strength coupled with a dull and sluggish thinking process' (Lee cited in Rosenberg and Coogan 2013: 6). This is no Superman, no Captain America, morally superior and mentally sharp. Instead 'the Hulk is a superhero without a mission' who 'seems absolutely antisocial' and whose 'adventures do not typically arise from his attempt to fight crime or improve the world' (Coogan 2013: 7). Or as Busiek (2013) claims, the Hulk is child-like, taking great pleasure in imagining power and destruction because he is so powerless himself.

Lee outlines why the Hulk is not a typical hero. He discusses how the monstrous acts and lashing out that are features of Hulk's behaviour are down to panic and confusion and a response to a society that, though complicit in his creation, not only fails to understand him, but also mistreats him. His statement offers not only a way of perceiving the Hulk but, potentially, some prisoners. Lee (2012: 92) said:

[7] For example, the Howard League for Penal Reform (2011: 11) stated that: 'Custody should be reserved for serious and violent individuals who pose a threat to the public.'

The Hulk represents the incoherent protests of the so-called 99 percent. In our bleakest era of authoritarian indifference to human suffering, the duality of the anti-heroic character of the Hulk is able to expose the dystopian/apocalyptic dangers, both ethical and moral, that are posed by the unchecked growth of capitalism.

## Conclusion

The prison experience involves making ghosts of those defined as offenders and hiding them from view. The idea of barbaric individuals—monstrous offenders—retains contemporary currency when considering the way that prisoners are perceived. To render the monstrous beings created inside prison as authentic and believable characters an appropriate setting is required—the alienating space that they inhabit corresponds with the characters they must become. The gothic discourses of fear and horror are perpetuated, the remedy of which is frequently presented as increased state control through hiding people away and the use of ever harsher penalties. As Dolovich (2011: 289) notes, in order to justify exclusion from society it is essential to 'foreclose the uncomfortable possibility that any factors besides the personal choice of the offender might have contributed to the commission of a crime – at least any factors originating in society more generally'.

Popular gothic and comic representations of that which causes us to be scared and frightened can help us move beyond the desire to hide, purge, reject and exile and can instead invest both them, and us, with a sublime energy. Although monsters and antiheroes are rarely what they seem they provide insights into what haunts our culture. Constructed by contemporary discourses about crime and justice, they are fragmented, plural, performative and anxious subjects. Prisoners have an uncanny quality—so very like us and yet so very different. Most will also return to society.[8]

[8] Just over 50 prisoners in England and Wales are on whole-life tariffs and approximately 50,000 prisoners in the US have been sentenced to life without parole.

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# Part IV

## Becoming an Ex-Prisoner

# 8

# Shapeshifting Identities

## Introduction

Between fantasy and reality, the surreal and real, liberty and confinement, in the liminal spaces in society that a person who has experienced incarceration inhabits, in these grey areas of uncertainty, tumultuousness and possibilities, in society's shadows, we find the shapeshifters. This is their complex terrain. Whilst some will come out of the shadows, others will be tentative and shy, some will transform into a completely different being in order to achieve a livable life, and some would prefer not to be here at all. Shapeshifters, like those who have been imprisoned, move between worlds, identities, values and styles, constituting and confounding the limits of the known.

The idea that identity can undergo a range of changes through shapeshifting has been central to numerous classical, mythological and popular cultural stories, and runs counter to notions of the unified self. According to *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, shapeshifting is the preferred term to describe 'those who change shape (and for the act of thus changing shape) *repeatedly* and *reversibly*' (Clute and Grant 1997: 858). The process is



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transformative, but transformations for the shapeshifter may be ongoing and involve moving constantly backwards and forwards.

The popular cultural and mythological concept of shapeshifting is used in this chapter to consider what it means to be an ex-prisoner, and societal responses to this status. I draw on and develop some of the concepts threaded throughout this book in relation to corporal hybridity and fluidity, the capacity for (re)invention, and the duality of anxiety and desire. Prisoner others maybe monstrous enough by themselves, however; when they return to society they cause considerable concern and continue to experience the consequences of their punishment. The ex-prisoner identity is one that makes a productive and fulfilling life more difficult to lead, a situation borne out in the high reoffending rates amongst ex-prisoners (Ministry of Justice 2015).[1] The complex and contradictory aspects of popular cultural representations of offenders and prisoners discussed in the previous chapters, as well as the apparent confusion that exists regarding what constitutes justice, provides the catalyst for this final area of analysis. Moreover, the very narratives on which much of this book is based, those of men who had been in prison, the students who have been taught, and the writings of, and conversations with, other ex-prisoners, were frequently ambivalent, ambiguous, conflicting and contradictory. As Raggatt (2006: 17) argues, theoretical frameworks and methods of study are required that recognize the multiplicity, conflict and contradiction in the structure of the self. Life stories can be used without the assumption of a definitive or singular story line or even selfhood. This analysis, therefore, focuses in more detail on the issue of identities, and the notion of shapeshifting is used to examine some of the complexities and uncertainties of the ex-prisoner identity.

[1] I make the connection between these two on the basis that access to things like accommodation and employment can reduce reoffending, yet ex-prisoners often face discrimination in these areas (Brunton-Smith and Hopkins 2013). These issues were discussed by a number of the men and are explored in this chapter.

## Theorizing Identities

Thinking about identity can be traced back to those fundamental philosophical questions, such as who am I? and how do others perceive me? (Wiesing 2014). Issues of identity have become central, both theoretically and substantively, to a range of academic studies including the social sciences, history, business and management, political science and beyond. In teaching criminology, for example, getting students to think about their own subjective identities is a core part of learning, as well as an attempt to militate against a tendency amongst some students to 'other' those who have been criminalized.

Academic adventures in identities have provided lively illustrations of the many varying categories of identity that we can belong to, such as class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality, by way of location, politics, belief system and occupation. Academic studies have also offered insights into resistance to having various parts of our identities categorized, and, although it is not always explicit, explorations of identities are infused with issues of power—not least because it may be powerful others who categorize us in particular ways.

There are numerous perspectives on identity including psychoanalytical (Freud 1955; Lacan 1991), symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934/1972; Goffman 1959/1990), narrative (Ricoeur 1991), Foucauldian (1990) and Bauman's work on liquid identities (2000, 2009). These perspectives are not necessarily neat, stand-alone categories of understandings, but have commonalities, as well as some marked differences between them. Narrative theory has been a thick strand of analysis throughout this book and I return to this at the end of this chapter in considering the complex and contradictory narratives on which this book is based. Below, I briefly discuss the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and Lacan, Foucault's work on identity and Bauman's conception of liquid identities. With an interest in the theatricality of identity, both Goffman and Butler speak to the performativity involved in the narration of the men's life stories. For example, a number of the men provided multi-tonal performances through the adoption of a vast range of accents, speaking in high pitched voices, quietly or loudly, talking directly into the recorder, or at times, asking to speak 'off the record'. I, therefore, consider aspects of the work of both these theorists in terms of identities.

The main tenets of psychoanalytical theories focus on how the psyche shapes responses to everyday events and how identifications with particular social forces are formed at the level of psyche. Life experiences can be internalized and emerge in the form of fantasies, repressed feelings or desires (Freud et al. 1966). Frosh (2010) suggests that the psychoanalytic concept of the dynamic unconscious, and the tension between understanding identity as fixed or fluid, make psychoanalysis an important site for exploring notions of identity. He argues that identities are constructed through processes of identification and recognition, and are significant because of the emotional investments made in them. Because these processes and the investment are largely unconscious, they are often experienced as if they 'were "given" rather than chosen' (ibid.: 29).

There are many elements to psychoanalysis and one of the most influential contributions has been made by Lacan (1953/1977). Interested in developing psychoanalytical theory through the use of linguistics, Lacan helped bring about the linguistic turn in contemporary psychoanalytical theory, a shift that involved moving away from biology, and instead asserted the importance of language, which was regarded as dominant in both clinical practice and theory-making. Concerns have, however, been raised regarding potential limitations of the linguistic turn in psychoanalysis on the basis that this fails to account for what lies outside of language, how complexities of the lived experience can be captured, and the place of bodily experiences within a linguistic framework (Frie 1999). Butler (2004) has also highlighted that writing cannot quite deliver or convey what it seeks to communicate, and how language cannot directly represent. These are important points to consider in the context of thinking about the men's narratives. How to discuss experiences alien to others was something the men grappled with and led many of them to make connections with other, more familiar discourses, which tended to coalesce around popular cultural representations or well-known mythologies. This was not a simple process of linking representation with experience but a discursive response to discussing experiences that have not been, or do not appear to be, easily captured in language. It was in the creative redescription of the experience of prison that shared understanding, if not quite reached, came a little closer. As Jameson (1995) suggested, the use of allegorical interpretants drawn from various media

allow for a better understanding of, in this instance, the experience of imprisonment.

Frosh and Baraister (2008) outline a number of criticisms of psychoanalytical theory, including: the focus on the individual and a failure to locate or deal with the macro context of experience; that analysis is historically and spatially located in a particular system of twentieth-century/Western thought; and, that psychoanalysis is a discourse of power—or 'regime of truth' to use Foucault's (1977/1991) term. Nonetheless, psychoanalytic approaches exert an important influence upon mainstream understandings of identity, and some, such as Butler, have used psychoanalysis in developing radical explorations of identities.

Foucault (1990) argued that identities are not fixed or 'natural' but are a product of forms of subjectivity and power relations. Identity is realized through a complex mesh of various discourses, each of which offers different ways of understanding behaviour; it is through these often contradictory discourses that intelligibility can be achieved. People are formed within, and come to identify with, dominant discourses that make certain subject positions and self-understandings available. In Foucauldian thought there are three focal points of study, these are: *knowledge*, the rules of discursive practices that determine what counts as true or false; *power*, the rationalities and techniques by which one governs the conduct of others; and *ethics*, the practices of self through which an individual constitutes itself as a subject (Chinn 2010). For Foucault, the human subject is constructed through powerful discursive practices of time and culture. Behaviour is determined by dominant discourses, power/knowledge regimes, and subject positions; thus, the focus is on the relationship between power, knowledge and subjectivity. Such arguments have attracted significant criticism. Wetherell (2010: 17), for example, notes that analysis of people's actual talk and interaction revealed 'dynamic, highly reflexive, intersubjective, mobile and active discursive work… It is not so much that the ensemble of discourses and the play of differences create subject positions and identity slots. Rather, people do this for themselves and for each other.'

In his later works in particular, Foucault regards power as productive; present at all levels, it generates fragmented and conflicting discourses which undermine, as well as reinforce, the power of any single dominant

discourse. As Chinn (2010: 109) notes, in Foucauldian analysis, relations of power are closely connected with all types of social relationships, 'top-down, bottom-up, horizontally, diagonally, and so on.' She goes on to say that 'power relations are produced and perpetuated, as well as resisted and changed'—all of which is highly relevant to viscous culture, where the sticky connections between individual experiences and the exercise of power are experienced in multiple ways, across multiple dimensions and lead to multiple outcomes.

Bauman relates the rise of interest in identities with globalization. The processes of identity formation are, he argues, tied to consumerism and a self-narration that is increasingly individualized and instrumental. He argues that 'the quandary tormenting men and women at the turn of the century is not so much how to obtain the identities of their choice and how to have them recognized by people around, but *which* identity to choose.'[2] This is a 'nerve-wracking' existence full of 'worry' and 'suspicion' whereby people must keep alert and vigilant so that a different choice can be made if the previously chosen identity is 'withdrawn from the market', 'stripped of its seductive powers' or 'torn apart or melted' (2009: 7). For Bauman (ibid.: 11), the 'identitification wars are neither contrary to nor stand in the way of the globalizing tendency: they are a legitimate offspring and natural companion of globalization and, far from arresting it, lubricate its wheels'.

Drawing heavily on the 'The Culture of Narcissism' (Lasch 1979), Bauman (2009) allies himself with the argument that apparently harmless pursuits—such as self-improvement, jogging, healthy eating and getting in touch with one's feelings—have been wrapped in a rhetoric of awareness and authenticity, when they in fact signify a retreat from politics. In this analysis of society and the individual, it is the narcissistic individual who has retreated from politics, although a more convincing argument would be that through a process of individualization, politics has retreated from the individual.

In amongst all this pessimistic reading of identities Bauman (2009: 11) does offer some interesting insights. For example, identification is per-

[2] A similar point is made by TV presenter and historian Dominic Sandbrook in discussing societal shifts in the 1980s.

ceived as a process that is 'never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended'. Particularly pertinent to analysis of ex-prisoners is his argument that ambiguity and unpredictability, and 'the discovery that things do not keep their shape' (ibid.: 2), leads to anxiety and fear.

## Theatricality, Performance and Performativity

Storey (2014) considers the theatricality of everyday life and uses Butler's (1993/2011, 1999) concept of performativity to extend Goffman's work on performance. This is an attractive combination in the context of an analytical exploration of ex-prisoner identities. Goffman (1968/1986) has been highly influential in sociological and criminological study and has argued that prisons are an example of a 'total institution'—the very fabric of which can be seen to limit and constrain interaction with the wider world. He was also instrumental in considering how those defined as 'deviant' negotiated the various social structures in which they found themselves when he considered the management of stigma and concluded that some, such as those who have been criminalized, have to find ways of managing a 'spoiled identity'. Butler draws upon a range of theoretical standpoints, including poststructuralist theorists, such as Kristeva, Foucault and Derrida, psychoanalytical approaches from Freud and Lacan, and feminist theories associated with, among others, De Beauvoir and Irigaray. From this rich and diverse tapestry, a somewhat dense perspective of performativity is sewn.

Goffman's (1959/1990) dramaturgical approach explored the various techniques used in managing the self and the performances that must be given to achieve a favourable impression. Through interactions with others, situations are defined and impressions given and understood. Goffman proposed a dramaturgical self where people are performers on a stage, and direct and indirect forms of communication are utilized in the process of self-presentation. Using the analogy of the theatre with all its various component parts, such as front and back stage, scene setting, masks, roles and scripts, he argued that the self is a product of performances and that the self or selves produced are a collaborative venture. Goffman's theorizing of a drama-

turgical self promotes a self-conscious tactical presentation of socially favourable fronts or 'selves' while retaining an element of a backstage 'true' self. This highlights one of the criticisms of Goffman's work, that the performance on the front-stage is less authentic and 'real' than the identity at the back-stage (Storey 2014).

In contrast to Goffman's theory, where a performed identity is put on display behind which a 'true' or 'real' identity sits, Butler's work points to a very different understanding of identity. There are several points of connection between Butler's work and the concept of viscous culture; drawing on a range of influences, she offers a hybridized perspective on identity. I look specifically at three areas of her work. Firstly, the value Butler offers those whose work is at the margins of their disciplines or even outside its bounds. This is difficult territory to inhabit. Butler, however, encourages us to journey into these spaces, revealing that getting close to ideas and concepts normally outside of disciplinary parameters can be invigorating, and that there are shared concerns that cross disciplinary boundaries. A transdisciplinary approach encourages us to transgress. Secondly, Butler's work on the body is considered, as this offers a theoretical grounding in thinking about unstable, decentred identities. Finally, the cultural construction of identity is used to demonstrate the performativity of identity and how we need to think about how all aspects of identity are made in culture. As Storey (2014: 107) states, 'the everyday is not a stage on which a natural self freely performs in a play of multiple identities; it is a series of theatrical scripts that, through iteration and citation, produce performatively the drama of who we are and where we belong.' For Butler, identity is an unstable discursive effect and, in contrast to Goffman's dramaturgical concept of a social self, there is no stepping offstage to reflect.

For Frosh (2010: 190), one of the key values of Butler's work is that it provokes and questions, troubles and disrupts. Rather than providing simple interpretations, we are offered a methodology of 'undoing'. This was the very process that I had gone through in the course of meeting the men and analysing their stories. As simple answers and clear connections with the existing criminological canon slipped away, I was left troubled and for a while undone. Moreover, Frosh suggests that Butler 'expresses a willingness to engage politically with oppression and violence with whatever tools

it takes, including the tools provided by the concept of identity' (40). The idea that we should use what comes to hand[3] in order to make critical political points is a compelling one, and contrasts with Bauman's (2009) view that the turn to identity is a turn away from politics. By using the tools at hand—popular cultural connections with individual narratives—we are reminded of the politics of oppression that has been the experience of many of those who have been incarcerated, and also of the many and varied ways in which this is responded to.

Butler (1997) provides a political account of subjectivity, which challenges mainstream political thought and its emphasis on identity politics, suggesting it should instead focus on the subjective performances of power. Drawing on her principle critical theoretical engagements—Foucault, psychoanalysis and feminism—Butler begins with Foucault's premise that subjection is the constitution and that power constitutes subjects. Conditions of power are maintained through constant reiteration. Power is, therefore, both oppressive and productive in subjectivity, and not fully determined; in order to theorize power one needs to theorize the subject.

Utilizing Derrida's notion of iteration, Butler (1990, 1993/2011) argues that in the same way that the sign in language is iterable and recited in ways not controlled by the author, so too is the material sign of the body. Through constant performative acts, the body is not fully controlled by the embodied individual—a concept that evokes the idea of shapeshifting identities. For Butler, identity is the site of turbulence and ambivalence. There is, however, the possibility of a radically conditional form of agency, which holds unpredictable outcomes through constant performativity and coming into being. Seeing identity politics as both divisive and destructive, Butler argues that traditionally established aspects of identity, such as gender, were not an identity but an embodied act in must the same way in which performative language is a speech act. According to Chinn (2010: 110), this means that 'gender is not naturally or inevitably attached to specific anatomically shaped bodies; indeed "bodies" themselves are made comprehensible by the discursive formations that co-construct "sex" and "gender"'.

[3] Like a creative bricoleur—as discussed in the following chapter.

The core of Butler's argument is that gender is not the expression of biological sex, it is performatively constructed in culture, and what is constructed in culture also constructs biology. Performative language does not describe; it brings into being. Naming does not reveal but produces. Each time there is a pronouncement, we are citing previous pronouncements and this gives authority and validity. Such thinking has clear connections with Kristeva's (1967/1980) work on intertextuality. Butler (1993/2011: 171) states, for example, 'where there is an "I" who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that "I".' The announcement of the ex-prisoner is the moment of constitution and in that constitution the ex-prisoner must face the weight and authority of previous pronouncements about ex-prisoners. Given that mainstream discourses about this experience tend to be simplistic, negativistic and distorted, the narratives of those who have been through imprisonment, as well as popular cultural discourses, potentially offer a counterweight to such iterations and allow the space for alternative performances.

## Conflicting Stories/Contradictory Personae

Contradiction is a core feature in shapeshifting mythology. Shapeshifters can assume an array of contradictory personae in the course of a single narrative. They can move from one identity to the other with a skill that says more about ever-changing identities, evolving forms and mutability, than it does about a fixed, unique identity—or indeed about deception and lies (Ellis 1993). The exploration of contradiction through the concept of mythological stories is useful given Carlen's (2002) argument that if criminology is to flourish then it should recognize, and indeed cherish, the contradictory nature of human experience; and Lea's (1999) statement that that it is a necessity to explore the contradictory elements in criminal behaviour and how they interact. This is particularly the case for those who have been officially identified as law-breakers, as this is an identity that almost automatically leads to concerns being raised about the veracity of the stories they tell (Nellis 2012), as if contradictory phenomena and performativity were not at the heart of life experience.

Many life story researchers in psychology have tended to see identity as an individual achievement (Erickson 1982; McAdams 1985, 1993). In these understandings, identity is regarded as an integrative function and therefore the life story or narrative identity serves to make a meaningful, cohesive sense of self. It is through the telling of stories, these writers argue, that scattered and often confusing experiences are provided a sense of coherence. For others, however, life stories are an expression of different, multiple and potentially conflicting aspects of the self (Gergen and Gergen 1983; Gergen 1991; Raggatt 2006). These differing ontological positions offer, on the one hand, the idea that a core, integrated sense of self is feasible and indeed desirable in terms of psychological well-being, and that this can be achieved through narration and story-telling. On the other hand, although individuals may derive a sense of purpose and feelings of happiness by integrating the past, present and future, it may be the case that a single or definitive life story will not be produced. Indeed the imposition of a model of a coherent life demeans the complex ways in which lives are crafted and lived (Butler 2004).

It was this latter view of complexity, fragmentation and confliction that most accurately described the men's narratives. The stories they told did not provide clear or concise 'data' or answers, as, say, quantitative research suggests and even some qualitative research implies. For example, it was apparent that even basic information on which some statistical understanding could be based would be highly problematic. Some of the men could not remember the age they had first gone to prison, how many times they had been in prison, or what offences for which they had been sentenced. In addition, all the men talked about their initial involvement in crime in relation to the first time they had contact with the criminal justice system, as opposed to the first time they had offended. Such findings exemplify not only how statistical conclusions are themselves socially constructed but also support the idea that deviance is not inherent in any act. Instead the focus is on the linguistic tendency of powerful groups and agents to negatively label others as 'deviant' (Becker 1963; Goffman 1963/1990). The self-identity and behaviour of individuals is influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them ('offender') as well as the wider discourses available to them.

Although Raggatt (2006) and McAdams' (1993) ideas about life stories come from opposing ontological positions, both McAdams' conceptual framework and Raggatt's theoretical and methodological assumptions, have something to offer in terms of analysing narratives. Both also lend themselves to intertextual analysis. McAdams' concept of imagoes, for example, where people adopt opposing types from popular culture, echoes intertextual analysis regarding the presence of texts in other texts[4] and the mimetic function of storytelling as imaginative redescription. It also reminds us that, as many great myths recall, the self is never secure in itself (Kearney 2003).

Mythology had shaped the men's existence in terms of popular cultural references to outlaws and gangsters, and in terms of their prison experiences, where dominant discourses about hell-like prisons and ghostly and monstrous prisoners significantly impacted on them, affecting their mental and emotional wellbeing, their friendships both inside and outside prisons, and their physicality. In thinking about their lives post-imprisonment a number of tropes—all related to mutable identities—emerged. Stories of shapeshifting have been evident throughout human history and transcend national borders and narrative type. Frogs have been kissed and turned into princes, blood has been sucked and vampires created, and scientific experimentation has birthed monstrous hybrid species. Drawing on ideas relating to shapeshifting allows us to explore the deeper and unstable, oppositional and ambiguous elements in the men's stories. These are experiences that demonstrate that multiplicity, conflict and contradiction are intrinsic to the ex-prisoner identity.[5] Such experiences should not be ignored, nor viewed as an example of the lack of faith that we should have in the 'truthfulness' of such stories. Tales of shapeshifting and metamorphosis reveal powerful metaphors regarding difference, exclusion, control, the body, pain, multiple identities, outsiders and heroes.

Most of the men's narratives exhibited elements of complexity, inconsistency and contradiction, and this was also evident in many of the ex-prisoner autobiographies. Writing in his autobiography, *Wasted* (2008), Mark Johnson discusses how although he had made the decision not to

[4] This also supports the concept of viscous culture.

[5] They are also likely to be features of most of our identities.

live like a 'bandit' there were 'a lot of gangsters in the West End and I'm proud to feel I'm like them' (239). One of the men interviewed, Craig, discussed how he had a particularly high sense of morality and that there were clear boundaries that he would not overstep. Nonetheless, for over a decade following his fourteenth birthday Craig had not been out of prison for more than a year. A five-year prison sentence, was, he said, 'deserved' for an offence he did not wish to discuss.

Jason talked about various aspects of his life, including racism and the difficulties he faced growing up—particularly regarding his mother's death when he was young, his adoption, and that he had no contact with his dad. His story about the offence for which he had received his most recent prison sentence shifted throughout its telling in regards to whether a firearm had been real or not. As the firearm had never been found—having been thrown into a river during a police pursuit—he and his co-defendants could only be charged with possession of an imitation firearm, 'it's not like they could prove it was real' he said. Jason had been out of prison for two years and spoke emotionally about what life was like on release. With no family, few friends, unemployed and living in a hostel for ex-prisoners he considered life on the outside difficult and talked about 'surviving at the moment, but only just'.

One of the most compelling examples of contradiction came from Nathaniel (Loopie), the ghetto supastar.[6] For Nathaniel, as for a number of the other men, there was ambivalence about the street status attained because of their criminality and involvement with gangs, and the desire to be free of the requirements and expectations of such a reputation. He simultaneously liked the idea of being a ghetto supastar but equally appreciated the anonymity of living in a location where he had no status. In Nathaniel's case, there was also significant dissonance between the offence for which he had been imprisoned and his own upbringing.

Nathaniel's story was one of neglect, abandonment and violence at the hands of his parents.[7] He held his stepfather in particular to account in regards to the deeply negative impact that such regular violence had on him. He also felt let down by his biological father, who had left the

[6] As discussed in part two.

[7] I discuss elements of Nathaniel's story in Farrant (2014).

family, moved to another country and started another family. Nathaniel discussed being subjected to 'beats constantly; like, through the whole of my life'. At 17 years of age he was told to leave the familial home, and this would mark the turning point for his descent into crime (see McAdams 1993, McAdams and Bowman 2001 for further discussion on analysing turning points in narratives). Although actively involved in gang culture Nathaniel had only been in prison once, for a non-gang related offence.

Nathaniel spoke about how on release from prison, and following time in therapy, he felt able to confront the adults who had let him down. He said 'I told my [step] dad I'd never put my hand on my kids the way that you did to me'. Yet Nathaniel's offence was Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) against his two-year-old daughter. Despite saying that he was upset, embarrassed and ashamed about his offence, he did not connect his behaviour with that of his stepfather's. Indeed, he said, he would 'never' put his hand on his children in the way that was done to him.

What is to be made of such statements? Any understandings of the human experience are likely to be beset with complexities and contradictions, as complexity and contradiction are intrinsic to human existence (Gergen and Gergen 1983; Gergen 1991; Raggatt 2006). An individual can feel pride in the street status of their gang membership *and* revel in the calm provided by being unknown, feel shame for hurting a child *and* anger at being hurt whilst a child themselves. Contradictions are as fruitful sites of analysis and exploration as commonalities and themes have traditionally been. Moreover, it is in the telling of these stories that far more complex, sticky and viscous experiences emerge and the inadequacy of the oppositional binaries of victim/offender, truth/lie, good/bad, fact/fiction recognized.

## Conclusion

By adopting shapeshifting mythology, the contradictions, multiple identities and problems experienced by those who have been incarcerated can be explored. Rather than viewing these narratives as lacking authenticity, what the prism of shapeshifting does is clarify that, at any one time, we can all have multiple identities, some of which appear directly oppositional to the other. The concept of shapeshifting allows us to consider how a num-

ber of the men discussed feeling constantly judged because of their status as an ex-prisoner. No matter how long they had been out of prison they believed that they were unable to wholly escape this identity and must adapt and amend their demeanour because of it. As Butler argues, agency does not consist of denying the condition of the constitution of identity but recognizes that 'paradox is the condition of its possibility' (2004: 3). For the shapeshifter there are many masks to be worn, many stories to be explored. Ultimately, as with all identities, there is also a dimension that we can never know. Moreover, there may be advantages to remaining less intelligible. If the options available are loathsome, or if you have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that a person's sense of survival may depend upon escaping the clutches of those norms by which recognition is conferred (Butler 2004: 3).

A concept like shapeshifting does not provide neat categories. Some of the men moved between defiance, regret, guilt, bravado, resistance and shame—feeling at some points that they had 'made good', then at others that they were pulling the wool over people's eyes. These were flailing, fragmented, disjointed, conflicted and unravelling selves. Their very existences were thick with viscous connections to multiple discourses and systems of power. Moreover, shapeshifting appeared to be something of an ongoing feature in many of the men's lives. The stories that follow demonstrate how some of the men dealt with their lives following imprisonment, and how their experiences are symbiotic with popular cultural and mythological concepts grounded in ideas about destiny and origin, and about what you can and cannot achieve.

By using mythological concepts we can start to decode the ex-prisoner experience in new ways. We can journey into places and concerns with identity, transgressing disciplinary borders in order to consider how iteration and citation produce identities about who we are and where we might belong.

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# 9

# Metamorphosis, Trickster and Werewolf

## Introduction

By exploring the shapeshifting of the trickster and werewolf, and the transformation involved in metamorphosis, we can begin to understand the ways in which ex-prisoners struggle, but also find ways, to manage their identity. In order to do this, firstly I explore the concept of metamorphosis. In terms of the ex-prisoner identity this involves personal transformation and the subversion of the monstrous ex-prisoner identity. Through almost superhuman powers the criminal identity becomes but a skeletal story, a shadow plot and in its place emerges the transformed ex-prisoner, the man who has made good, learned from his mistakes and turned his life around.

The second analysis adopts the archetype of the trickster to explore ideas around resistance towards the offender identity. The trickster is a complex mythological character who serves many purposes and has many facets. Trickster mythology was utilized in the film *The Mask* (1994), which was based on a comic book series. One day, loveable loser Stanley, played by Jim Carrey, finds a mask, which is a representation of



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well-known trickster Loki, the Norse god of mischief.[1] When Stanley becomes 'The Mask' he gains magical powers and is able to exact revenge on those who have ridiculed him and win the affections of a woman. In this analysis I look at the trickster in regards to the various roles and tricks that ex-prisoners have to play when they are seeking to be accepted back into society.

Shapeshifting can be experienced as a curse and beyond someone's control. This is found in the mythology of the werewolf. The pull and influence of early experiences, and the status of being an ex-prisoner, can result in a werewolf-like existence, involving shifting back and forth between identities. The persecution and dehumanization of the werewolf/ex-prisoner is a real concern for those who have been incarcerated, who often prefer, or are forced, to hide elements of their past, because, as ex-prisoner Noel 'Razor' Smith has stated, such an identity means that you are 'marked for life' (2005: 15).

## Metamorphosis

The theme of complete personal transformation has a long mythological and popular cultural pedigree and can be detected not only in Ovid's eighth-century narrative poem *Metamorphoses* but also in the plays of Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*), in numerous comics and various other forms of popular culture. Arguably, these are the most powerful of the shapeshifting stories, as metamorphosis requires a belief in the individual's own powers of transformation. A metamorphosed identity has literally shifted shape.

Early legends and stories of shapeshifting and transformation challenged Christian notions of divinity and salvation. For example, early convert to Christianity, Tertullian argued it was 'nonsense' to believe that the soul might change and become something completely different (cited in Sconduto 2008: 15). A similar conclusion reached by Saint Ambrose, bishop of Milan, who said that belief in metamorphosis was 'disgusting' as it denied the power of God (ibid.: 17). By the fifth century, Saint

[1] Loki is also a fictional character in the Marvel comic universe.

Augustine conjured up a subtler theory to the problem of metamorphosis. Although it may involve 'demonic trickery' the Bible itself had its own account of metamorphosis in Nebuchadnezzar, who was transformed by God into a wild animal for seven years because he failed to acknowledge God's authority. Potentially, therefore, God had a role in bringing about metamorphosis.

Some of these ideas of transformation can be directly related to the desistance literature. Maruna (2001), who used a narrative analytic framework in his seminal study on desistance, concluded that a successful move away from crime required a shift to a coherent, pro-social identity. He also highlighted the importance of the individual's role and personal agency in desistance; the shift to a pro-social, non-offending identity, required the reconceptualization of the self. This is achieved through reconstructing one's internalized life narrative. A positive conceptualization of the self is developed as past events are reinterpreted to suit future aspirations. Maruna (2001) found that many of his study's desisters assumed generative roles, whereby they used their past experiences to help others. Furthermore, participants attributed self-change to personal agency and expressed how much more meaningful their 'new' lives now were.

Desistance is bound up in a process by which an identified ex-offender comes to see themselves as an essentially 'good' person who had previously acted in a bad way. These individuals perceive their previous lives as a necessary requirement for their newfound callings, and utilize the past as a means of reconceptualizing their identities, and a basis for making a contribution to society. Crucially, generative roles such as the 'wounded healer' or 'professional ex' were part of a reformed script allowing prisoners to give something back. Here, they can explain their past while also rationalizing their decision to go straight. Importantly, making good involved a redemptive narrative, a moral heroism enabling them to overcome the negative perception of their criminal pursuits. This allowed new meanings to be given to what were now considered to be shame and guilt filled pasts (Maruna 2001).

The concepts of transformation, redemption, reformation and rehabilitation have significant political, social and cultural currency. Moreover, we demand that ex-prisoners realize such changes. Bauman

(2007) suggests that flexibility and adaptability, alongside the willingness to change and to abandon loyalties and communities, is a key feature of liquid times. In fact, this could be viewed as one of the great prison myths—that it is through incarceration that such magical transformations can be achieved.

Warner (2002: 26–27) has suggested that it was from the late eighteenth century onwards, during 'the era of secularization, scientific inquiry, epistemological adventures in the pursuit of clear Reason' that tales of metamorphosis really proliferated. Simultaneous to people falling under the spell of mythological metamorphoses, the rise of the prison as a form of punishment was occurring in western penal systems. These two events can be seen as inextricably linked: prisons were increasingly required to demonstrate power and instil awe in the emergent capitalist system and, therefore, the mythological transformation from a 'bad' person to one who has made 'good' is the idealized criminal justice narrative. These iterations of reform of the soul suggested that it was the system that had brought about this metamorphosis. Such narratives operate as a mirror reflecting back to society an ideal image of itself—that it is through the systems and institutions of the state that the creation of a productive citizen can be achieved.

Butch's life was crime filled. He had been involved in a vast array of criminal behaviour including theft, burglary, violence and armed robbery as part of a biker gang, but as the biker existence fell away he was left with a severe drug problem. Butch had used drugs from his teenage years and by his thirties was injecting heroin. His description of his first use of the drug is reminiscent of Richard's.[2] Butch said:

> Wow. I had one line and the colours, sensations, yes, nirvana, I'd found it, the Holy Grail. I'd found it and I wanted more, more, more. It was powerful, blew my socks off and I was like yes, where have you been all my life darling, come to me.

However, he went on to say that:

[2] As discussed in Chap. 7.

> It's never been the same since, you might come close and you might get different things, but that's the insidiousness of it, because it gives you this glimpse of heaven and you never go there again.

Arriving in prison just before his fortieth birthday, Butch went through an eight-day methadone reduction programme whilst also attending education. Instead of experiencing the normal pain of withdrawal, this time he experienced it 'like the monkey came off my back'. His story continued:

> I was 39, right, coming up to my 40th birthday which for many people is a pivotal point in life, it's a reflective point, it's a taking stock point, and life begins at, and all that sort of stuff.[3] And it was for me, sat in my little cell, my mind had its own kind of detox and from being in a habit, a pattern of constantly scheming and being creative, and how to add a little bit of powder into my reality, that was suddenly removed.

Butch discussed that although there is an assumption that there are more drugs in prison than there are on the outside, the reality is that in order to access them, you need resources or something to trade. It was at this point that Butch realized that no matter how hard he thought about it there was simply nothing he had to trade. He had 'burnt all those bridges' and so it was that he thought he needed to find something new and different. He continued:

> And, in a solitary space, where there's not a lot happening, you automatically gravitate towards reflection and coming back to some of the traumatic and fateful incidents of your life, and the philosophy behind my mission statement, which was the Jim Morrison [lead singer of The Doors] thing 'live life fast, die young and leave a good looking corpse'. That had been my espoused philosophy up until that point, I had decided, looking back, that I didn't like the world, that I didn't like the materialistic, consumerist, boring, hypocritical world that I found myself in. So I'd do my best to create another one. But you can't do that absolutely,[4] so the only alternative was to get out i.e. exit. Exit this life you know altogether, if it's that bad, top yourself. But that's a bit

[3] A similar argument was made by Bobby in Chap. 5.

[4] Such a comment recognizes the viscous nature of experience.

> of a coward's thing, suicide, possibly. The machismo says live your life hard and fast and go out in a blaze of glory, so that had been the philosophy.

Sat in his prison cell, Butch said it dawned on him that exiting this life was what he had been trying to do: 'I'd been doing my best… drinking petrol, eating glass, getting into fights, getting shot at, getting stabbed, bike accidents, drug overdoses, I was doing everything I could for death to take me, but it didn't seem to want me. Seemed to keep throwing me back into the ring.'

Corporeal reality of his aging body was also hitting. 'The corpse', he said, 'wasn't getting any prettier.' Without anything to trade to access drugs, back in prison and approaching 40 years of age, was the required mix from which Butch was to rethink his mission statement.

Free from drugs and undertaking education, Butch started to feel better about himself, new possible pathways started to seem like they were opening up to him: 'I didn't need brown, powder [heroin], to feel ok when I got up in the morning' he said. Moreover, previous experiences of what life had been like were all too familiar to him, of doing low-paid, menial work, requiring brute strength, brawn but little brain. He also reflected on his friendship group and how, if he returned to his home town, the old ways and the old crowd, then he would probably succeed on the mission statement.

Alongside this, Butch was to experience something of a spiritual awakening. He discussed how during this particular prison sentence, and nearing a landmark age, an early school lesson returned to him. Life, he had been told, was like a three-legged stool with each of the legs representing the mind, the body and the spirit. He decided that this was a useful model for considering his life and that he could see that without balance across all three aspects then things could become unstable. In prison at 39 years of age he felt that his stool was 'in the gutter… kicked into touch'. Butch considered his mind and decided that this seemed to be fine; he could articulate himself clearly and follow conversations and was not 'thick'. In terms of his body, he had never had any serious illnesses or major operations, was fairly fit and had done a lot of physical work so he did not think the problem was with the body. He concluded that the problem must lie with the spirit and 'decided to investigate this concept called spirit, to find out what it was, and fix mine'. Bobby Cummines,

who has a similar story of redemption and would go on to head up charity Unlock, discusses in his autobiography how he eventually saw the 'light' and would dramatically turn his life around. Moreover, like Butch, it was reading in prison that was the catalyst for change. Butch started going to the prison library and although there was very little available about personal development and religion he would randomly select a title and read it. At the same time he went to the chapel. As with many of the men's stories, humour—particularly gallows humour—was a feature of Butch's narrative:

> I gave my first confession in 25 years to the vicar. It was like 'you never?' 'I did!' 'Right, three million Hail Mary's, two million Our Father's and don't come back here again!'

Butch also went to a couple of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and spoke to someone from the Salvation Army. Through his extensive and diverse reading, including books on Islam, yoga, faith healing, colour therapy and how to give up smoking, Butch came across one term that 'kept leaping out of the pages at me and that was meditation'. He continued:

> There would be something about meditation in each of the books and I sort of thought there's something about this meditation lark that I need to find out about. Now as I say, I'd made this decision and there was all this other stuff going on, but the decision was that when I came out the front door [of the prison] I'd get a travel warrant so I could go anywhere I liked, and London seemed to be the logical place in terms of finding out about meditation and in terms of the high support needs I would have being homeless, unemployed, witless [laughs], skint, no friends.

Butch's plans for his new, reformed identity link to Bauman's (2000) idea that it is the struggle which is important in the search for a feeling of transcendence and by making new identities we can remodel our own histories.

A number of people tried to dissuade Butch from moving to London, especially given that the city would provide him with easy access to the drugs he had only recently stopped using; and, indeed, all was not plain

sailing. Following what would be his final release from prison, Butch discussed how he had located a crack house near to the hostel (or as he referred to it, 'hostile') for the homeless that he ended up living in. However, despite this blip, Butch said that coming out of prison and starting a new life in London was the beginning of his new identity.

He explained:

> There's a scientific, academic explanation behind some of this as well; there's a sort of road to Damascus thing, a sort of redemption aspect. You know, the cell didn't fill with white light, there wasn't an angel that said change your ways, but I do refer to it as a spiritual experience.

This metamorphosis was, however, not a religious one. Despite using a range of religious symbolism, Butch was at pains to make clear that his new identity was not the result of a religious conversion:

> I'd been taught a lot of religion and it sucked. And all I could see, and I'm not saying Christianity is horrible, but my experience at that time was to be forced every Sunday to go to this draughty building, with boring grey people, saying all these stupid words, 'oh please forgive me and I won't be doing it again.' And they'd go home and do it all over again, and that's just crap, it's not for me.

Butch's metamorphosis involved what ex-prisoner John McVicar refers to as putting yourself under a microscope and doing a stock take of the self in order to 'change what is problematic' (1974/2002: 19).[5] Through this redemptive process, Butch shifted his identity from the rock 'n' roll iconography of the 'mythic hero' Jim Morrison (Hopkins and Sugerman 1982), with whom he had been so enamoured and whose outlaw identity Butch had sought to share. Morrison, who died aged 27, has been mythologized in numerous books and film, and been described as 'shamanic' (Davis 2006: ix), 'a god' (Hopkins and Sugerman 1982: vii), and 'Adonis' and 'Dionysian' (Jones 1990: 9). A non-conformist who encouraged rebellion and sexual liberation, he was 'an acid evangelist on

[5] Mark Johnson (2007: 117) discusses a similar situation when he says 'it was time for me to decide that I don't want to live like a bandit'.

a suicide mission to deprogram his generation from what he saw as a prisonlike conformity to social and sexual norms' (Davis 2006: ix). This was the type of outlaw mythology around which Butch had built his life. Now, reaching middle age, and long past the point that Morrison had died, Butch switched allegiances to a wholly different popular cultural character:

> You know Neil from *The Young Ones*—'my body is a temple and I do not abuse it or the world in which it lives'—you know without being too prattish…

The transformation was, therefore, complete. Butch had clearly done a great deal of thinking around his identity and who he was. Having lived all his younger life and much of his middle age in the thrall of the outlaw identity, as a biker, a drug taker and offender, in later middle age he had metamorphosed into another archetype—the hippy, the vegetarian, the peace-maker. In the language of desistance, Butch's redemptive script had been accomplished. In terms of metamorphosis we can see how Butch himself identifies the process he has gone through. The outlaw mythology, as embodied by Jim Morrison, was replaced with that of a pacifist, a gentle, quiet person: a character from a comedy programme.

Not all the men, however, sought transformation, some felt that they did not need to reform or change. Others argued that despite their best efforts it remained almost impossible to remove the negative stigma attached to their identity as an ex-prisoner.

## Trickster

In almost every culture a trickster can be found. They can be cunning and foolish, destroyers and creators, heroes and villains. The trickster is a composite of opposites, and like many of those whom society labels as in some way problematic, tricksters are notorious boundary breakers. Telling and listening to trickster stories and myths can be regarded as a safe, even cathartic, outlet for criticizing cultural norms. These tales are subversive, whilst also reminding us of the consequences of breaking societal rules.

Analysis of the trickster mythology itself has an interesting story. One of the classic texts, Paul Radin's 1957 book *The Trickster: A Study in Native American Mythology*, was in reality, a collaborative effort between cultural anthropologist Radin, Karl Kerényi, who studied Greek mythology, and Carl Jung, the analytical psychologist who provided psychological interpretations of trickster myths. Jung concluded that the trickster equates with the collective shadow, the dark part of society's psyche that consists of feelings of guilt and fear. In Jung's view of mythology, the imaginaries of such tales serve a positive, life-affirming end. It is through mythological stories that we recognize and integrate ourselves. The true subjects of mythology in Jungian analysis are, therefore, the archetypes themselves: myths do not symbolize but are symbolized (Segal 1987). In thinking about viscous culture, the relationship between the archetype and lived experience is not simplistic, causal or representative but recognizes the complex, sticky nexus of relationships between the symbolic and symbolized.

Hynes (1993) argues that tricksters are resistant to capture and difficult to draw boundaries around due to their status as notorious border breakers. Based on a diverse selection of trickster stories, he nonetheless sets out a typology of characteristics common across all trickster archetypes. Using Hynes' (1993) heuristic guide to mapping the characteristics of tricksters, I explore Moses' story about life following release from prison.

Moses had been found guilty of ABH and received a two-year prison sentence, reduced to 18 months on appeal. This was his first offence. He saw the incident as one of self-defence, as the victim had been beating up one of his friends and was about to punch Moses when he hit first. On release from prison, Moses had been keen to pursue a career in social work and had applied to a number of universities to progress this aim. After declaring his conviction, he was told he would be unable to do the course due to the placements in which he could be involved. This was despite the fact that, prior to his sentence, Moses had worked with a number of vulnerable groups in the community, and immediately before being sent to prison was working with young people involved in gangs. He said:

> You come out [of prison] and you realize that a lot of doors are shut to you and it's difficult to open them, and that's what frustrates people, and I

> think that's what drives people to reoffend… it's a kick in the teeth but you got to go on, you can either breakdown or you can just keep on trying.

Moses had decided to keep on trying. But he felt that at times he had to deceive the system just to be given a chance.

For Lévi-Strauss (1978), the trickster epitomizes binary oppositions, although, as Hynes argues, this does not fully capture the essence of the trickster, who is more complex than binary distinctions imply. One of the strands in Hynes' typology is that tricksters have fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personalities. A key component of this ambiguity is that the trickster appears on the edge, or even just beyond existing borders. Hynes himself connects this with outlawry: 'the trickster is cast as an "out" person, and his activities are often outlawish, outlandish, outrageous, out-of-bounds, and out-of-order' (1993: 34). Many ex-prisoners fall within the scope of this characteristic, having been exiled from society during imprisonment. They may also remain at the boundaries of acceptable society—or just beyond—even on release. Moses sat at the boundary between acceptable society and ex-prisoner; refused full entry back into society he nonetheless resisted his status as an ex-prisoner.

Other elements of the trickster identified by Hynes include being a deceiver and trick-player: the trickster causes disruptions and improprieties. They may experience misfortunes and therefore lie, cheat and deceive, although such deceptions may not be deliberate. The trickster is also a situation-inverter; they can turn a bad situation into a good one, and vice versa. Developing the idea from Lévi-Strauss, Hynes argues that the trickster is a sacred and lewd bricoleur, meaning that they are a tinker or fixer who transforms anything that comes to hand to make a creative solution. Finally, the trickster acts as a messenger, bringing gifts that are essential to human culture and understanding. All these aspects can be found in Moses' story.

Moses had been out of prison for a year and was living in shared accommodation with a number of other young men, a situation that he did not like. He discussed the impact that his conviction had on him and the ongoing consequences of this particularly in relation to work, study and accommodation. Moses said he had been aware that although prison was a 'shithole' it would be coming out of prison that would be the hardest part, and this proved to be the case. Initially, Moses had disclosed his

conviction on job application forms, however, he never got invited to interview. He therefore stopped doing this and decided that he would disclose at the end of the process instead. He was then successful in two job interviews. Each job offer was, however, withdrawn once he told them about his conviction. Moses therefore sought advice about how to disclose his conviction to potential employers. He was advised that this should be explained at the point of interview in order to outline the circumstances himself, face-to-face, or to write a letter about his situation that could be given to potential employers. Moses decided to write a letter.

In discussing his life post-imprisonment Moses explained that he felt very upset about the offence and the situation in which he now found himself. However, as with the trickster, Moses felt that he was the victim of a misfortune, a situation that required him to lie and deceive if he was ever to be given a chance in mainstream society.

> What I had done was wrong in the eyes of the law… but deep down I thought what I did was right, I was protecting myself, I was merely protecting myself. Yes I can say I regretted it, but deep down I knew that what I did was genuine, it wasn't because I wanted to hurt the person you know, in any way do anything bad to the person, it was basically just an act of self-defence, but in the eyes of the law…

Moses wanted to put the offence and its consequences behind him, 'to delete it.' He did not want to have to keep talking about what had happened and explain it in order to gain employment. He said that although he recognized that it was 'taboo' having been charged and convicted of a violent offence, he could live with what had happened and not be too hard on himself. Having to explain himself to others, however, caused him concern as their interpretation 'might magnify it ten times worse and that's the problem'. Moses was aware of the process of monstering those who have been in prison and what he was up against in trying to explain his particular situation. This is similar to what John McVicar (1974/2002: 23) says in his autobiography when he discusses how, having made the decision to turn his life around, 'it was no good just proclaiming it, I had to demonstrate it to the people who would decide my fate.'

Moses continued:

> Yeah it's like I said to you that deep down I thought that what I did, I felt I did the right thing for myself, do you understand? It's because I'm going to protect myself. However, to the public because they think I've committed such a horrific offence I have to come across as if I regret it wholeheartedly and that I have so much remorse and that I won't do it again, and it was completely out of character etc. etc. and I even added [in the letter] that it was probably due to the fact that I was drinking and that I'd actually stopped drinking to negate that problem.

Moses goes into detail and seeks to clarify understanding in terms of his own belief regarding the situation that had resulted in his imprisonment—that he had been doing the right thing in trying to protect himself and his friend from harm; nonetheless, he cannot be honest about this with others. Moses' story demonstrates many of the features of the mythical trickster archetype. He has an ambiguous and anomalous personality. Through his ex-prisoner status Moses had been forced to live his life on the margins, in an ex-offender hostel, unemployed and struggling to find work. However, he retains his desire to find employment, to study and to find somewhere more appropriate to live. He is in the paradoxical, farcical situation, well known in criminal justice policy, practice and research circles, of desperately wanting to work or study, yet being denied opportunities to do so. He therefore has to lie about his status as an ex-prisoner or about the situation of the offence to try and move forward. The idea of being trapped is one of the most important elements in trickster narratives, and in order to survive Moses must become a bricoleur, finding creative solutions to the situation

> That letter [for prospective employers], maybe you could say I'm trying to trick the system, but then the system don't give you a chance anyway so you need to get as much advantage as you can, are you with me? The more I say it was self-defence… the more they think he hasn't learnt from his mistake sort of thing. So I'm telling you, if it happened again, I'd do it again I just hope the situation would be different, because I'm not going to let somebody run up to me and hit me for no reason…

He continued:

> I have to show them that I think I was wrong and I won't do it again and show remorse even though like I say deep down I don't regret it, I don't regret what I did to him. I regret the injuries that he sustained and the situation in general, but if you was to say, you know some people say I can't live with myself, I can't believe I did this, I can't believe I did that, well I'm at peace with myself to tell you the truth, I just think I was unlucky.

Moses concluded that the only viable option open to him was to 'trick the system' if he was to be given a 'fair' chance. If he was to state what he really thought—that the offence was an act of self-defence, and that if he was in the same situation he would do the same thing again—would not fit with the dominant narrative of transformation and reformation that is demanded from those we punish. Moses' story adds disorder to what is supposed to be an ordered process of guilt and punishment. It turns understandings of these ideas on their head. This troubling, troubled experience is not permitted in a criminal justice system based on the idea of simple, clearly delineated guilt and innocence.

In terms of situation inversion, Moses was in a relatively good situation prior to his conviction; he was in work, in a relationship and had housing. Excluding the relationship, all else was lost to him when he went to prison. Following incarceration, Moses was in a relatively poor situation. However, he continued to try and make the best of things, to apply for work and courses and to seek better accommodation. This he did even if it required that other element of the trickster, the bricoleur, where a creative solution is sought. Moreover, although Moses makes no suggestion that his story is a message to others, or that his story tells us something essential about human culture, these aspects of the trickster mythology can nonetheless be detected.

As someone of Eritrean heritage, Moses' experience may well be about how the criminal justice system discriminates against ethnic minority young men. In England and Wales, 26% of the prison population is from a minority ethnic group, with black Britons, who make up less than 3% of the general population, comprising 10% of the prison population (Ministry of Justice 2015). According to the Sentencing Project more than 60% of people in prison in the USA are from ethnic minorities, with black men having a one in three chance of imprisonment in their lifetime. Moses' story is also about the enactment of state power through

the processes of punishment, about the devastating consequences of such power, and how meanings of 'justice' are not fixed but fluid. In addition, and echoing Hector's claim that prison made him want to do more crime, Moses stated that a less safe society could be created when someone feels that justice has not been served, 'there's a part of you that thinks if you are going to be in prison you might as well have done something big'.

At the core of the trickster mythology is the dynamic between restraint and breakthrough, and Moses sits on this boundary. He is, as tricksters are, a creator and a destroyer. He functions according to the trickster principle that proves the absurdity of mainstream criminal justice thinking by focusing attention precisely on its operations. Trickster narratives help us understand the concepts of stability and change, and challenge the social order by introducing to it imbalance and destabilization (Bassil-Morozow 2012). As with many mythological tricksters, Moses' story stands between order and doubt and encourages us to think independently and to challenge mainstream thinking. His trickster story introduces a sense of uncertainty about how we see the world and provides a fertile source for reflection and critical reflexivity. The trickster has been involved in the 'making, shaking and remaking of the social order' as a promoter of progress, and yet the trickster is often a metaphor—as in Moses' case—for 'repressed potentiality' (Bassil-Morozow 2012: 7–8).

## Werewolf

Among the best known of mythological shapeshifters are werewolves[6]: a trope of horror because the shift is not voluntary but seen as a curse and a bondage. The lack of control over their ex-prisoner identities was critical for all of the men interviewed and is a significant feature in many ex-prisoner autobiographies. The students also recognized that this identity made life difficult for those who had been in prison. Although some

[6] Other mythological shapeshifters include the Chinese fox women, and, in Islamic folklore, the jinn. Vampires are some of the most famous shapeshifters. The vampire myth is especially interesting in terms of viscous culture, given that the ability to shapeshift into bat form seems to have fed back from fiction into reality after the vampire bat was so named in the eighteenth century (Clute and Grant 1997).

of the men acknowledged that there was often much to gain in having an outlaw identity, in terms of status, sexual attractiveness and economic freedom, having then been 'monstered' by the process of going to prison, this rarely translated onto their ex-prisoner selves. Moreover, whereas voluntary shapeshifting offers broad vistas of wish-fulfilment, the bondage of being given an identity that one has little power over can be horrifying. This form of recognition does not, according to Butler (2004: 2), lead to a viable life.

From ancient times, through the Middle Ages and up to contemporary culture, tales of shapeshifting from man into beast have been portrayed. Werewolf mythology is also long-standing and geographically diverse. Reference to a werewolf was made in the poem *Epic of Gilgamesh* from Mesopotamia, thought to have been written in 2111–2004 BCE. Werewolves can also be found in Greek and Roman mythology—with the Roman term for werewolf literally meaning 'turn-skin'. Two particular strands are evident in lycanthropy folklore: on the one hand, tales that depict the werewolf as 'a savage beast that lurks in the dark and preys on the helpless', and on the other, those where the 'creature' is presented 'sympathetically as a victim and a hero' (Sconduto 2008: 1).

This latter incarnation of the werewolf has a longer history than may be first thought, having emerged towards the end of the twelfth century when Gerald of Wales, the archdeacon of Brecon, wrote about werewolves as historical account, as opposed to legend, and introduced talking werewolves who had intelligence and humanity. Nevertheless, with the outward appearance of a wolf and no ability to remove this, the werewolf must live as an exile. These werewolves were seen as victims of a curse and there is dissonance between the exterior perception and interior reality (Sconduto 2008). This more sympathetic portrayal of the werewolf continued throughout the twelfth century. In French romance poem *Guillaume de Palerne*, for example, the werewolf is presented less as savage beast than chivalrous hero. The motifs in these stories are of the werewolf as victim and hero, discovery and recovery of identity, as well as violence.

The mythology of the werewolf is an enduring one, veering between the antiquarian cannibalistic baying beast, that can be found in gothic literature and twentieth-century horror films, to the more heroic form that can be found in the Harry Potter books and films in the character of Professor Remus Lupin, one of the teachers at Hogwarts. In contemporary tales, the werewolf

may even be the object of desire—more hero than villain. This has led to some scholars arguing that contemporary werewolves are more at peace with their dual identities, less likely to be full of rage and fear and the desire for revenge (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver 2012). But this is only one interpretation, Du Coudray (2006: 44), for example, discusses how the werewolf has been constructed as an alien 'other', the 'negative of normalized social identity'.

Although Nico would not deny that he had done wrong, the ongoing nature of a condition that had been imposed him upon well over a decade before meant that he was continuously shifting between identities and was concerned about discovery. Shapeshifting was woven in and out of Nico's story. Talking about his childhood, he discussed how his Greek Cypriot parents had tried to bring him and his brothers up in a 'particular way, with particular values, that are sort of Greek culture'. This, he referred to as being quite medieval, and that there had been a 'culture clash' between his parents, who were 'strict' and 'traditional', and the parents of his English friends. Home life and street life were delineated and many of the demands of home were set against the life he wanted to live whilst growing up.

This duality was also evident in Nico's early working life. He asserted that, like his parents, he had a very strong work ethic, which meant that from the age of 11, he was not only doing a paper round like many other children, but in addition, worked as a cleaner. Later he became a successful electrician, and although crime had been a feature of his early life, it was during this time that more endemic offending took place. Nico reflected on his own struggles with why crime became part of his life story, especially because as an electrician, and running his own company, he was making plenty of money. In fact, by 18 years of age, Nico had bought his own flat. Alongside being a successful businessman, Nico was, nonetheless, already involved in a multitude of offences including credit card fraud, fighting, football hooliganism and car crimes. This did not mean that he would provide a poor service to his customers. On the contrary, he asserted that he would 'never stitch anyone up' through the company, and that most of his work was through recommendation and repeat custom. He took pride in his work and wanted to do a good job for those who paid him, although tax fraud was also a strand in his criminality. This work ethic continued post imprisonment to the point of going to university to do a degree, then a Master's programme, before successfully completing a PhD.

Werewolves can be read as a dichotomy of the human-monster, 'civilized-primitive, rational-instinctual, public-private and masculine-feminine. In this sense, the werewolf has modelled the dualistic subjectivity that emerged through the Enlightenment in graphic, exaggerated – or monstrous – terms' (Du Coudray 2006: 3). Nico's identity was torn between his working-class, second-generation immigrant, offending roots and the middle-class, high educational achievement and stable family man that he had become. Managing this was particularly difficult, as Nico was concerned that neighbours and friends of his family would find out about his past. If werewolves go to extraordinary lengths to hide 'their lycanthrope identities and protect the humans around them' (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver 2012: 13) then this was something at which Nico was skilled. Despite all that he had achieved, Nico had not been able to pursue his chosen career as a psychologist. This was because of his criminal conviction of intent to supply Class A drugs, for which he had received a three-year prison sentence. Due to this, he had been forced to transfer his attention to criminology, where his offending past offers something of interest.

> I've spoken to a lot of other offenders about this and the fucking stigma's there whether you like it or not and you can't get away from it. Now if I was an electrician it wouldn't really matter would it? It gives you a bit of kudos.

He immediately recognized that this was not, however, the full story: 'although saying that, a few people in this environment [academic criminology] think it's impressive you know.' Nico referred to occasionally using the ex-offender label as a 'commodity', nonetheless, he argued that the negatives outweighed the positives. The stickiness of this identity was also evident in that although 'on some days it's a bit of kudos to be an ex-offender, on other days you want to keep it away with a barge pole'. Nico felt that he was living in two separate worlds and shifted between each. Increasingly, in his professional life, he is carving out a career that draws upon his ex-prisoner identity; in his home life, no one other than some of his immediate family know about his past. He said:

> I don't want to imagine what it will be like, but I'm aware that at some point these two separate worlds, the not knowing world and the knowing world, somehow, someone's going to find out.

On discussing the idea of shapeshifting identities with Nico he immediately understood what it meant in regards to his own identity. The duality he discussed mapped onto werewolf tales of both beast and man.

Fear of being identified as an ex-prisoner and the consequences of this was a common element in many of the men's stories. Furthermore, many ex-prisoners do feel ashamed about their past and what they have done (James 2005; Smith 2005, 2010). A sense of shame is also a feature in werewolf mythologies. One element in werewolf literature is that the werewolf cannot recover his human form if his clothing is lost. In twelfth-century poem 'Bisclavret' the werewolf—a nobleman—reveals to his wife not only that he is a werewolf but also where he leaves his clothes at the point of transformation. She arranges for his clothes to be stolen and thus her husband is doomed. When, after many adventures, the king demands that his clothes are brought back to Bisclavret, he will not shift shape in front of others but must be taken to the king's chambers and left alone.

> My lord, you are not doing the right thing!
> For nothing in the world will he
> Put his clothes back on in front of you
> And transform his bestial appearance in front of you.
> You do not understand how important this is:
> He is very ashamed about it!
> (Marie de France, 'Bisclavret', c. twelfth century, cited in Sconduto 2008: 52)

The werewolf is a complex, even riddling concept and can mean having multiple selves and multiple existences, often coexisting at the same time. This comes through strongly in Nico's story, where he explicitly states that he feels that he is living in two separate worlds. As Warner (2002) suggests, such stories, at the same time as expressing fear and the loss of self, entertain the possibility of metamorphosis. The werewolf archetype itself offers possibilities for identity transformation.

## Conclusion

The men's counter-narratives involved unstable selves, which led, perhaps predictably, to myth. In order to explore the ex-prisoner experience, analysis moved into areas far beyond conventional considerations of what it

is to be an ex-prisoner. These stories inform and reveal the social systems and cultural norms within which individuals are criminalized, punished and released back into society. By exploring deeper and further into the concept of mutable identities, the conflicts and uncertainties of the ex-prisoner identity have been analysed, and in doing so, these fantastical experiences have been rendered that little bit more comprehensible. The concept of mutable identities, where the self is never stable, has been central to many mythological stories and provides insight into the complexities of ex-prisoners' identities. In this newly imagined, intertextual, viscous world, the impact of imprisonment on ex-prisoner identities has been explored through the free-play of mythic narratives.

The path to this new world has not been a particularly easy one, it has come out of a place of confusion and concern regarding the often complex and contradictory stories of the ex-prisoners, in many of the autobiographies written by those who have been in prison, and in the responses to the operations of the criminal justice system that I came across while teaching students. However, by embracing these contradictions and complexities, new lines of inquiry, of seeing the world and making sense of it, have been opened up.

Rather than thinking about shapeshifting and transformation as something that others should do, we are offered the chance to view the world in new ways and to transform our own thinking about ex-prisoners. It is us who are forced to think differently about the operations of power, to cross boundaries and consider what viscous, multiple and transformed identities mean, encouraging us 'to think differently and provok[ing] us to rethink our assumptions' (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver 2012: 185).

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# Part V

## Conclusion

# 10

# Towards a Viscous Understanding of Culture

## Introduction

A group of men, huddled around a small TV screen, are absorbed by what they are viewing. On the screen is footage of a man—Rodney King—being viciously beaten by several police officers, as he lies prostrate on the ground. The men who are watching the television screen are members of rap group N.W.A., and Los Angeles is about to erupt as four police officers who were involved in the incident are acquitted of using excessive force.

This clip, from film *Straight Outta Compton*[1] (2015) about the emergence of rap artists N.W.A., shows members of the group watching the footage in a music studio. When asked to go back to work they argue that watching this news story *is* their work. The scene is knowingly iterative: reaffirming and restating N.W.A.'s role in providing social and political commentary regarding police discrimination of young black men, as had been set out in their 1988 song 'Fuck Tha Police'.

[1] The film title is taken from N.W.A.'s debut studio album, which referenced the spatial territory that N.W.A. inhabited, Compton, L.A., California.



F. Farrant, *Crime, Prisons and Viscous Culture*,
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The film *Straight Outta Compton*, was produced by N.W.A. members Dr. Dre and Ice Cube, and Tomisha Woods-Wright, wife of the late Eazy-E—this was never going to be a production that presented anything other than a story approved by those on whom it was based.[2] During filming, a gang-related drive-by shooting took place. Suge Knight, co-founder of Death Row Records with Dr. Dre, was involved in a hit-and-run incident after visiting the set of the movie. Film footage shows Knight running over two men; Terry Carter, co-founder with Ice Cube of Heavyweight Records, died in the incident. Knight is, at time of writing, in prison awaiting trial for murder. In the film, Ice Cube, played by his son O'Shea Jackson Jr., states that 'our art is a reflection of our reality'. Such viscous interconnections between sons playing fathers, multi-layered, intertextual representations between 'real' and reel-life experiences, and the life and death impact of behaviour recognizes that the relationship between lived experiences and art is far more complex than this.

In this final chapter I return to a number of themes that have both run through and shaped this book. Key points are drawn out in regards to how we can ethically situate ourselves, and others, in a viscous culture imbued with issues of power. The figure of the werewolf returns for a final time, and discussion on the art of (un)doing criminology provides the closing curtain.

This book is premised on the assumption that although there is always a dimension in our relations with others that cannot be narrated and cannot be known, it is nevertheless the case that understanding and knowledge of the human experience can be increased through engagement with storytelling in all its forms. This potentially challenges mainstream criminal justice thinking in terms of how crime is defined, who is criminalized, the impact of incarceration, and what it means to be labelled an 'ex-prisoner'. This book itself personifies some of the features and ideas that it contains; it is outlaw criminology, operating at the borders like a trickster, shifting shape and embodying the intertextual analysis from which it draws. It has a viscous texture shaped by my own experiences as someone who has worked with ex-prisoners, taught criminology students

[2] For example, the film does not deal with a range of issues, including the groups misogynistic themes and Dr. Dre's violence against women.

and campaigned for penal reform. This book is also concerned with the false binaries between 'good' and 'bad', 'high' and 'low', the 'real' and the 'fictional'. It has sought to illuminate the shadows of various hidden experiences, of committing crime, of being incarcerated and ex-prisoner identities.

It is worth keeping in mind that the archetypes explored in this book are profoundly male.[3] Their sexual confidence, amorphous features, ability to shift shape, transform, and to move through space and time informs us about the operations of masculinities. These are men who can travel relatively unencumbered if required, they can try to rewrite the history of the monster because the male monster, is still, nevertheless, more acceptable than the female.

## Situating (Our)Selves in Viscous Culture

The figure of the offender, prisoner and ex-prisoner helps to define 'our' identity and the cultural norms, or taken-for-granted views that exist about harm and justice. It is, according to Kearney (2003), through examination of the 'monster' that we come to realize that all humans contain a monstrous element. The uncanny human monster is at the edge of the known and the unknown, otherness and sameness. Such monsters do not reside only in myths, but are a central part of our culture and offer understandings about ourselves and about justice. For example, in the novel *The Last Werewolf*, author Glen Duncan sets out an exchange between the werewolf narrator and another character that covers this very territory:

> In ages past the beast in man was hidden in the dark, disavowed. The transparency of modern history makes that impossible: We've seen ourselves in the concentration camps, the gulags, the jungles, the killing fields, we've read ourselves in the annals of True Crime. Technology turned up the lights and now there's no getting away from the fact: The beast is redundant. It's been us all along. (cited in McMahon-Coleman and Weaver 2012: 7)

[3] Although this was not the case for all the men, some of whom rejected masculine performativity.

It is in the creation of this uncanny 'other' that it has been possible to construct a criminal justice system that has little interest in the devastating harms committed by the powerful. This is a 'justice' system that reinforces structural inequality and puts at its heart an institution whose core aim is to cause pain through the processes of punishment. Recognizing the viscous connections between the monster and ourselves may go some way in challenging the treatment we currently mete out to those who are the focus of the criminal justice system. Moreover, in engaging with the diversity of criminologically related stories that popular culture provides, new understandings may be forthcoming. For example, a president of one of the most powerful countries in the world—the USA—stated that it was novels that taught him the 'the most important' things about how to be a citizen. This was because such fictions made him more aware and 'comfortable with the notion that the world is complicated and full of greys' and 'that it's possible to connect with some[one] else even though they're very different from you'.[4]

Popular cultural characters can be angst-ridden and plagued by personal demons. They may be murderers presented as multidimensional heroes, with weaknesses and vulnerabilities. They may even be based on lived experiences and yet, without the prism of popular culture to colour them, such people are all too frequently painted only in black and white. Increasingly for ex-prisoners, the image that can be seen, the voice that can be heard, is that which fits the criminal justice fantasy of individuality and transformation. Levels of ambiguity and complexity, the figures still sticky with their criminal justice experiences, are largely the preserve of popular cultural space.

We are made within a matrix of power relations and through constant interactions and citations with each other and the cultural artefacts with which we are surrounded. There are viscous connections between fictional representations of crime and justice and 'real' events. Tabloid newspapers frame themselves as supportive of victims, and as crusaders for harsher punishments, in order to protect the public. But their discourses promote fear and contort justice so that the focus of the system is on the poor, marginalized and deprived whilst the harms caused by the

[4] Barak Obama in an interview with the *New York Review of Books* in 2015.

powerful are sidelined. Crime and punishment are seen through the lens of individual pathology or through the social, political and economic context within which punishment is enacted. In contrast, understanding is opened up through analysis at the intersection of the 'real' and unreal, and fantasy shines a scorching searchlight through which lived experiences can be better understood. The twin shadows of power and control fall across much popular cultural work, and through these shadows we may experience clarity on how the various intersections of power operate as a viscous mesh on all our lives.

How culture is constructed and how that culture constructs us is worthy of consideration. We should also analyse the points of interaction between text, consumer and producer and how each shapes and affects the other. Contemporary popular culture cannot be defined by a single medium, which means that, as in the case of this study, considerations of popular culture can traverse and interconnect with multiple other forms. As Hall (1992: 32) has stated, popular culture 'commodified and stereotyped as it is… is an arena that is *profoundly* mythic… it is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented'. Moreover, characters from popular culture, folklore and mythology can be found in some of the most unlikely of places. Baldick (1987: 121), for example, argues that 'throughout Marx's writings… some of the most gruesomely archaic echoes of fairy-tales, legend, myth, and folklore crop up… ghosts, vampires, ghouls, werewolves, alchemists, and reanimated corpses continue to haunt the bourgeois world'.

In situating ourselves within popular culture we can fantasize about not only what we want to be, but also what we want society to be like, and vice versa. At the core of this is the question posed by Butler (2004), how do we achieve a livable life—and grant the same to others? In her analysis of gender, Butler suggested that it is important to see ourselves as part of a community, to be engaged in thinking about how we should treat others, consider how lives should be lived, and the ways in which a more bearable, livable life can be achieved. These are important ethical and philosophical questions and ones that, as Butler recognizes, are posed by people in every walk of life. Rather than seeing consideration of identity as an example of the individualization and self-absorption of a

liquid society, as Bauman does, Butler argues that the struggle for rights is not just a fight for individual freedoms but for the possibility to be conceived of as a person, and of perceiving ourselves as being part of a community, family or some other supportive network.

Storey (1998: 107) states that 'human subjects only become recognizable as human subjects through conformity with recognizable standards of cultural indelibility'. This point is echoed by Butler (2004) when she says that a livable life requires a degree of stability. A life for which no categories of recognition exist, or where such categories create significant constraint, are not acceptable options. This concept of unlivable constraint was evident across the ex-prisoners' narratives, and, given this, it was perhaps unsurprising that returning to prison was a feature of a number of the men's lives. We are called into ourselves not simply by impersonal forces of ideology or discourse but by those closest to us—those who have the most power to make us feel loved or unlovable (Chinn 2010). In this reading of identity we all have a role to play in constraining and liberating both ourselves and others.

## Power, Identity and the Popular

Viscous culture is glutinous with issues of power. People have to make meaningful lives in the face of forces over which they may have very little control. Viscous traces from popular culture and beyond can be found in all our lives, for the ex-prisoner the trace is simply that much more marked, as some of their experiences defy easy narration.[5] In her analysis on the concept of a livable life, Butler (2004: 2) explains that 'certain humans are recognized as less than human' and that this 'form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life'. High levels of suicide and self-harm, mental health and substance misuse problems all highlight the fragility, and at times lack of viability, of the lives of those we punish.[6] In the process of monstering

[5] Other experiences face the same issue, for example, grief in western societies is something that language largely fails adequately to capture.

[6] Although rates of suicide and self-harm are culturally specific, concern about suicide in prisons is such that the World Health Organization has considered the issue (WHO 2007). Moreover, as I

those who have been in prison, viability is also brought into question in relation to the problems that are faced in terms of employment, housing, relationships, travel, and in some jurisdictions, access to the democratic process. Furthermore, it is a reminder that in discussing outlaws, gangsters, ghosts, monsters, Hulk, metamorphosis, tricksters and werewolves, fantasy, myth and stories, we are nevertheless, talking about embodied beings, who, like the rest of us, are seeking to achieve a livable life.

By focusing on ex-prisoners it is possible to see the vulnerability and precariousness of certain categories of identification. It is also important to recognize the political context within which such identities are brought into being. The world of popular culture allows us to speculate on possible conjunctions between identities, social structures and political quandaries. Butler's later work forms part of a trajectory that uses identity as a tool to engage politically with issues relating to oppression, loss and violence: oppression, violence and loss are experiences well known to ex-prisoners. Similarly, Frosh and Baraister (2009: 168) suggest that consideration of identities is politically focused because of 'the work involved in constructing and reconstructing identities in the face of forces that upend them, that write certain people out of existence, or subjugate particular voices to such a degree that they become silenced'.

Just as it is important to think of identities as political[7] there is also a need to take seriously Storey's (1998) invocation to think culture politically. This point was made many years earlier by Bennett (1986) in regards to popular culture, identity and politics. Theoretical developments in the study of popular culture, he argued, had been accompanied by a sureness of political purpose, and popular culture had become a site of positive political engagement in regards to concerns of identity. Bauman (2009) makes the important point that not only is our individuality socially produced, but that society is also shaped by the ways in which individualization is framed and responded to. We can learn as much about resistance

mentioned at the outset, many of the men and women ex-prisoners I have worked with are now dead.

[7] The importance of thinking about identities politically should not to be confused with identity politics. As Butler (1997) amongst numerous others has highlighted, social categories of identity fail to identify accurately.

to, and persistence of, dominant ideology from studying the popular and everyday, because power and resistance are exercised through these dimensions (Fiske 1989). If we desire social change, engagement with popular culture is a potential way to realize it; we should not underestimate the amount of social change—both good and bad—that is achieved through this sphere.

All of the men interviewed had been in prison and all had broken the law. However, a number of them continued to believe that the law operated in ways that were grotesque and gothic. Danny, for example, had been 'serving' drugs to consumers who actively sought out his wares at the parties and raves he attended. Charlie had thrown a brick after being hit and punched during an anti-fascist demonstration. The brick had not hit anyone or damaged property but his actions were, nonetheless, featured on a TV programme dealing with unresolved crimes and he was subsequently arrested and sent to prison. Moses had been protecting himself and a friend from being punched and said that he would do the same again if required, rather than risk being assaulted himself. Many of the men discussed the abuse, neglect and poverty that had marked their early life experiences. They felt let down by their families and the state in all its guises.[8] Simultaneously, the more harmful and serious types of injury to person and property committed by the powerful, in the form of wealthy groups, organizations, governments and states, are rarely targeted by crime control agencies, counted as part of crime data collection, nor regularly reported on by the news media (Barak 2015).

A fantasy-reality has been created whereby certain harms that, although real, have been continually reproduced and exaggerated whilst other greater harms—such as financial destruction, environmental degradation, genocide—go largely ignored and unpunished. It is, as we have seen, the enactment of punishment that creates the monster: without punishment there is no monster. By constructing the study of crime in such a manner the cultural discourses relevant to criminology—particularly in regards to justice and harm prevention—have distorted understanding.

Popular culture is integral to viscous culture and through various narratives, connects us to others in numerous ways. Politicians are asked

[8] For example, social workers, foster carers, care workers, probation officers and so on.

about, and understood through, their engagement with popular culture. Thus, representatives of state are asked about their favourite football teams, superheroes, musicians and books. There are also porous boundaries between the political and the popular, with movement between one side and the other.[9]

Just as empirical evidence, such as interviews, will always be full of gaps, contradictions and inadequacies, so too are other 'data-sets' or texts on which we base our knowledge. Popular culture may romanticize, mass media may distort, academic writing may be inaccessible,[10] and individual experience is partial. We are reliant on fragments of knowledge and information to try and make sense of the world, our place within it, and those with whom we share it. Misrepresentation, misinformation, fragmentation, complex authorship and questionable authenticity are all aspects of our culture, from the gothic through to hip-hop. Using popular culture as a cipher for the exploration of meaning and a deeper understanding of those defined as 'offenders'—who themselves are the focus of so much popular culture—makes sense in this viscous understanding of the world. Taking a wide lexicon of imagery and a multitude of narratives about the criminal justice system has the power to upset existing regimes of truth and to offer new knowledge: there are, as Foucault (cited in Kearney 2002: 119) asserted, 'monsters on the prowl whose form changes with the history of knowledge.'

Viscous culture talks of the sticky interconnections, the web, that multiple narratives which may relate to class, ethnicity, gender, geography and sexuality, bring into being. It is also mindful to explore those moments of citation that might be disrupted and undone, for example in challenging normative conceptions of what it means to be an ex-prisoner.

In her formulation of a sociology of personal life, Smart (2007: 20) argues that elements of Bauman's vision of society—that people are increasingly narcissistic and that the rise of concerns about identity marked the end of concerns with community—are 'apocalyptic' and

[9] Numerous politicians have moved into television in particular. Whilst others have pursued political careers having been actors, writers etc.

[10] Inaccessible in multiple meanings of the word; for example, academic work may be written in an obscure, difficult and exclusionary fashion, and also due to publishing restrictions that prevent open access to academic work.

'largely devoid of empirical support'. In contrast, this study has been grounded in empirical data, in the stories of ex-prisoners who had been interviewed, in the autobiographies of ex-prisoners, in a three-year survey of students, and in the informal discussions and conversations that I have had over the last 20 years with a variety of prisoners, ex-prisoners, criminal justice practitioners and criminologists. Based on this, I have argued that we are caught in a nexus of powerful structures and that the various discourses that circulate are gluey, gloopy and sticky: they are viscous, rarely all-consuming nor irrelevant.

Hegemonic discourses require non-hegemonic or counter discourses. To be dominant and powerful requires something over which to be dominant and powerful. In the very exercise of power is the existence of resistance. So, at the very point that we name some in society as monsters, evil, cast them out and are fearful when they return, numerous counter-narratives are created; and in many societies, these alternative stories are most likely to be found in the popular culture that we consume.

## The Art of (Un)Doing Criminology

Criminology is a rapidly growing discipline in the UK and the number of students studying it has increased exponentially. Rooted in nineteenth-century positivism, the very foundations of the discipline have been challenged and a broader framework for understanding crime, justice and punishment has been built. The rise of criminology has been based on its engagement with a number of other disciplines, and this is where it flourishes. Throughout this book I have argued that engagement with popular culture provides a sense of imaginative possibilities and a means of rehearsing and challenging the constraints of our everyday lives. Analysis of the narratives of those who have been on the receiving end of the operation of extreme state power offers ways for considering the viscous connections between all our lives. Through the use of the concept of viscous culture I have suggested that meaning is frequently intertextual—we exist in the cultural space between and within constantly circulating texts. Criminology itself has a hybridized, cyborgian identity and is at its best, I would argue, when this is brought into play. For example, in the 1970s feminism had a

revitalizing effect on criminology; Maruna's work on desistance cuts across psychology and criminology and has attracted academic and policy-oriented attention; while cultural criminologist Jeff Ferrell's ethnographical research pushes the margins of how, why, where and for whom we do criminology.[11]

Gregoriou (2012: 3) poses the question: 'to what extent are narratives surrounding real crime constructing possible worlds that are in fact far from the real one?' In the process of undoing criminology such a statement is worth unpicking. This could imply that the focus on certain types of crimes and certain types of offenders constructs a world that neglects the behaviours of those in power. It could also imply that such narratives sensationalize behaviours that should attract censure. It could equally be valid to ask to what extent fictional narratives construct the real world of crime? Rather than assuming that popular cultural discourses tell us little about criminological phenomena, we can instead see that the various cultural artefacts that construct crime, offenders and justice are complimentary to critical analysis and intersect with societal understandings of criminal justice in highly complex and non-reductive ways. One does not necessarily or simplistically lead to the other. We all move between the realms of the representational and the 'real'.

Consider, for example, two particular TV shows. The first, *Law and Order*, was the longest running prime-time legal drama in America. The series had two elements. Firstly, the criminal investigation followed by the apprehension of a suspect. The second part then focused on the prosecution. Although fictional, the programme's plots were often 'ripped from the headlines' and were based on real cases in order to provide TV entertainment (Brisman 2010/11: 1044). The other is British TV programme *Crimewatch*. This factual programme reconstructs unsolved crimes in an attempt to gain intelligence from the public that will help solve the case. Notoriously, in 1999, one of the show's presenters, Jill Dando, was shot dead outside her home in London. Dando's murder would later be reconstructed on *Crimewatch*.[12] A suspect was apprehended (although

[11] In another example of viscous culture, Ferrell was referred to as 'something of a U.S. urban Robin Hood' in a media article about his research on dumpster diving (Wiley 2011).

[12] For further discussion on *Crimewatch* see Jewkes (2011).

not down to the reconstruction on the programme), convicted of murder and sent to prison. After serving seven years he was, however, acquitted and released. A more recent example of the swirling, viscous narratives between fact and fiction is provided by *Making a Murderer*, the 2015 documentary about Steven Avery, who had served 18 years in prison for a crime he did not commit. Within a couple of years of his exoneration Avery was found guilty of murder and sent to prison for life. *Making a Murderer* portioned the case into a TV 'series', and there has been significant debate about whether or not the documentary reflected reality. In such instances, and so many others, to what extent narratives surrounding 'real' crime are constructing possible worlds that are in fact far from the real one is a moot question indeed.[13]

Failing to engage with multiple narrative-types potentially leads to what Fiske (1989) has referred to as the poverty of the individual text. One possible way to deal with this is to artfully portray the experiences of those most affected by the criminal justice system through consideration of an array of textual formats. It is important to cast the net wide in developing new avenues of inquiry. We need a criminology that is alert to life, to lives that have been lived, to all those lives that are ambivalent, relentless and unpredictable. Theory-making and knowledge creation should be imbued with the messiness of life, recognizing that 'a science can be shaped by the artistic sensibilities and cultural traditions of the period in which it develops' (Rafter and Ystehede 2010: 266). The world depends upon the imagination. Moreover, stories are transformative, we ourselves may change in the process of hearing, listening to, telling, reading or watching a story.

The sheer range and diversity of discourses that have something to say about crime, punishment and justice inform us about the social, political and economic context within which we live. Such discourses shine a light on the operations of power in society and on the cultural context within which 'justice' is enacted. Individual stories tell us far more than stories of individual lives. As novelist Amos Oz has said, readers should

[13] I am also reminded here of the case of Christopher Jefferies, wrongly identified as a suspect in a murder case, he was vilified in the mass media in Britain. Jefferies became involved in Hacked Off, a campaign group for an accountable press, set up following the phone hacking scandal in the UK. A fictionalized drama of his case, *The Lost Honour of Christopher Jefferies*, was broadcast in 2014.

not ask if the novel they are reading is autobiographical of the author, but rather whether it is autobiographical of themselves. My own thinking has, for example, been transformed in the process of hearing and writing about ex-prisoners. Initially, I had expected to hear about spoiled identities, experiences of trauma and neglect, and lives keen to achieve desistance. But this was only part of the story. What I learned and what has transformed my thinking was that the men drew upon wider cultural references to make sense of their lives. Similarly, students understand the study of criminology through popular culture. Rather than think that this over simplifies understanding, or is an example of dumbed-down lazy learning, engagement with popular culture can deepen knowledge. Thinking about culture as a viscous network of relationships has been transformative in terms of making sense of how we can all achieve livable lives. Moreover, as I have written elsewhere (Farrant 2014), consideration of the role we play in constraining and liberating others and ourselves has informed my approach to empirical criminological study.

Stories help us to create and interpret; they can also change our social, cultural, political and personal lives. The power of narrative is both in helping to reveal the world and also in helping us to revise it. As Kearney (2002: 156) says:

> Storytelling invites us to become not just agents of our own lives, but narrators and readers as well. It shows us that the untold life is not worth living. There will always be someone there to say, 'tell me a story', and someone there to respond. Were this not so, we would no longer be fully human.

It is through engaging with these stories that greater understanding of the operations of the criminal justice system can be achieved. We need a rigorous, ethical and poetic approach to criminology, which accepts responsibility for knowledge creation and understanding and seeks to challenge the status quo. Popular culture is stories and this is why it is of direct relevance to the criminological project, which is itself saturated with dramatic human experiences. For even the densest of quantitative data is trying to tell a story, even if it has not worked out the art of how to do so.

Although set within a criminological framework and exploring core criminological concepts, I have embraced the poetic practices of a narrative

imagination, utilized insights provided by intertextuality, and contextualized this in relation to the wider cultural resonances of popular culture within which all identities are performative. This has highlighted, in a concrete sense, some of the ideas from within the research, such as that there is a viscous relationship between powerful social, economic and political structures, the individual and popular culture. This breaching of conventional criminological norms, of undoing criminology, demonstrates that other disciplines have much to offer criminology and that criminology has much to offer them. In making these disciplinary borders more porous, even leaky, allowing contamination, new understandings seep out beyond criminology and are reciprocated by those disciplines that have the same, or similar, concerns about justice at their heart.

The viscous mesh of relationships between the men's counter-narratives and other stories meant that instead of suppressing the intertextuality of their tales of outlaw existences, feeling that they had to trick the system, or that they were constantly shifting between a range of sometimes quite monstrous selves, it was the very viscous intertextuality of their experiences that became the focus of analysis. In doing this I hope to have shown a willingness to 'explore beyond [criminology's] rigid terms of reference'; to be open 'to the adventure of other insights' (Young 1996: 14); even to be more 'rock 'n' roll' (Daly 2011). Breaching these borders highlights the transdisciplinary potential of a criminology undone.

And so, we reach the end of the story. The archetypes, characters and concepts that have been considered, such as outlaws, monsters and shape-shifters, are all boundary creatures that destabilize society, signify and demonstrate otherness. The experiences of ex-prisoners operate as signs for the societies for which we are responsible and also of the other possible worlds that we could create. 'Difference', as Haraway (1991: 109) notes, 'is political, that is, about power, accountability, and hope. Experience, like difference, is about contradictory and necessary connection.' What human relations can we imagine? What possibilities lie beyond the monster? What hopes and opportunities are offered by recognizing the viscosity of experience? What learning can there be from hearing stories from those who have been abused, neglected, ignored and caged?[14] What might we become as we shift and move and blur into the future? Can we transform,

[14] Not that we should forget that many lives and the stories that they could tell are cut short.

not only our selves, but also the environment we inhabit, the society from which we were begat and the future for which we would hope? Let us all become outlaws, monsters and shapeshifters standing at the edge, inverting power, challenging systems of domination and forces of control.

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# Appendix A: List of Prisoner Autobiographies

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# Appendix B: List of Popular Culture References

**A Midsummer Night's Dream**
One of Shakespeare's most popular plays. Written in the 1590s, it has inspired poetry, ballet, music and comics and been adapted for TV and film.

**Adam Ant**
British singer and member of post-punk band Adam and the Ants (1980–83) whose image is part pirate and highwayman.

**The Adventures of Robin Hood**
British TV series broadcast between 1955 and 1959.

**Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.**
American TV series starting in 2013 based on Marvel Comics S.H.I.E.L.D. (Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement, and Logistics Division) a spy and peacekeeping agency. Part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, a number of spin-off series have also been created.

**Alan Partridge**
Fictional comic creation by British actor Steve Coogan, has appeared in several TV series and in film.



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DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-49010-0

**Allure**
Song on Jay Z's *The Black Album*.

**The Archers**
Longest running radio soap opera in the world. Set in a fictionalized rural village in England it often portrays events taking place on the day of broadcast.

**The Avengers**
2012 Marvel Cinematic Universe superhero film involving several characters including Iron Man, Captain America, Hulk, Loki and various S.H.I.E.L.D, agents.

**Avengers: Age of Ultron**
2015 Marvel Cinematic Universe superhero film and sequel to *The Avengers*.

**Bad Company**
English rock group active on and off since 1973.

**Batman (TV series)**
Focusing on the various crime fighting adventures of DC Comics character Batman and his sidekick Robin. The show ran for 120 episodes between 1966 and 1968.

**Batman: The Dark Knight Returns**
A four-part DC Comics book written by Frank Miller in 1986. Bruce Wayne (Batman) is 55 years old when he returns to fight crime in Gotham city.

**Batman: The Dark Knight Trilogy**
*Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) all directed by Christopher Nolan.

**The Beggar's Opera**
Ballad opera written in 1728 by John Gay and adapted in 1928 by Elisabeth Hauptmann, Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill as *The Threepenny Opera*.

**Bisclavret**
One of twelve *lais*—short narrative poems in octosyllabic couplets—thought to have been written in the twelfth century by Marie de France.

**Black Hippy**
American hip-hop super-group formed in 2009 and involving West Coast rappers Ab-Soul, Jay Rock, Kendrick Lamar and Schoolboy Q.

**Black Panther**
First black superhero in a mainstream comic, appearing in 1966 in the *Fantastic Four*. Part of the Marvel Universe, his debut film is planned for 2018.

**Black Rebel Motorcycle Club**
American rock band formed in 1998.

**Bloggs 19: The Story of the Essex Range Rover Triple Murders**
Book by Tony Thompson published in 2000 about gangland murders in Essex, England. Based on interviews with a supergrass who turned Queen's evidence.

**Bob Dylan**
American singer-songwriter who has been recording music for over five decades. Part of the 1960s counterculture, he was seen as a political artist and is one of the best-selling artists of all time.

**Breaking Bad**
2008–13 American TV drama about terminally ill chemistry teacher turned drug producer Walter White, and Jesse Pinkman his ex-student, is the most critically acclaimed TV shows of all time.

**Brian de Palma**
American film director.

**Bronson**
2008 film about English life-sentenced prisoner Charles Bronson. Played in the film by actor Tom Hardy.

**Bugsy Malone**
1976 British musical film based on real-life American gangsters Al Capone and Bugs Moran featuring only child actors.

**Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid**
1969 American western loosely based on the lives of two Wild West outlaws, starred Paul Newman and Robert Redford.

**Call of Duty**
Highly successful first-person shooter video game franchise.

**Captain America**
Marvel Comics superhero first appeared 1941 and has featured across a range of popular culture.

**The Castle of Otranto**
Horace Walpole's 1764 book is generally regarded as the first gothic novel. Drawing on Shakespeare's work, the novel was made into a surrealist film in 1979.

**Catch Me If You Can**
2002 biographical film about con artist Frank Abagnale.

**Charles Dickens**
English author (1812–1870).

**Citizen Kane**
1941 American film regarded as one of the greatest movies ever made.

**City of God**
2002 Brazilian film based on an earlier novel, the plot is based to some extent on real events and is about the growth of organized crime and corruption in Rio de Janeiro.

**Coronation Street**
First shown in 1960 it is the world's longest-running soap opera. Set in fictional town in north of England, it is one of the most watched programmes on British TV.

**The Count of Monte Cristo**
French novel written by Alexandre Dumas published in 1844.

**Crimewatch**
British reconstruction TV programme focused on unsolved crime, first broadcast in 1984.

**CSI**
Crime Scene Investigation media franchise about forensic scientists and behavioural psychology. Several spin-off series (Miami, NY, Cyber), comics and novels. Started in 2000 and concluded in 2015.

**David Bowie**
British singer and cultural icon and one of the world's best-selling music artists (1947–2016).

**Dead Man Walking**
1995 American film about a prisoner on death row, adapted from a non-fiction book.

**dead prez**
American hip-hop duo formed in 1996.

**Def Squad**
Rap super-group officially formed in 1998, remade 'Rapper's Delight' by Sugarhill Gang.

**The Departed**
2006 American crime film directed by Martin Scorsese.

**Dexter**
2006–13 American TV series based on a book about a forensic technician.

**D12**
The Dirty Dozen—formed in 1996 involved six of the members developing alter-egos to make up the dirty dozen. Eminem developed the character Slim Shady.

**Doctor Doom**
Marvel Comics super-villain and arch-enemy of the Fantastic Four has also appeared in TV and games.

**Dr. Dre**
Original member of N.W.A. and successful record producer—co-owner of Death Row Records. Ranked as one of the best paid musicians worldwide.

**Doctor Who**
British science fiction TV programme starting in 1963. Numerous spin-offs and links to popular culture.

**Don't You Think This Outlaw Bit's Done Got Out of Hand?**
1978 song by Waylon Jennings.

**The Doors**
Highly successful and controversial American band (1965–73, plus reunions) took their name from Aldous Huxley's book *The Doors of Perception*. Lead singer Jim Morrison.

**Dostoyevsky**
Russian novelist (1821–1881) who experienced imprisonment and exile.

**Dracula**
1897 gothic vampire novel by Irish author Bram Stoker whose rendition would be hugely influential in the development of vampire literature and form the template across numerous popular cultural forms, particularly in film and TV.

**Dumas**
French author (1802–1870) many of his books have been adapted for film and TV.

**Eminem**
American rapper and one of the bestselling artists of all time.

**The Eminem Show**
2002 record by American rapper Eminem.

**Epic of Gilgamesh**
Poem from ancient Mesopotamia, written around 2111–2004 BCE.

**Fantastic Four**
Superhero team from Marvel Comics, first appearing in 1969. Four films have been released.

**For the Man Who Has Everything**
1985 Superman comic by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. Story formed part of animated series 'Justice League United'.

**Frankenstein**
Gothic novel written by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley about scientist Victor Frankenstein, who creates a grotesque monster. Published in 1818, the story has gone on to be reinterpreted in numerous ways and across multiple formats.

**Frankenstein (film)**
1931 American film based on a play of the book by Mary Shelley.

**Frank Sinatra 'My Way'**
French song adapted and popularized by Frank Sinatra.

**From Hell**
1989–96 comic written by Alan Moore explores the identity and motivation of infamous London serial killer Jack the Ripper.

**Fuck Tha Police**
1988 song by N.W.A.

**Game of Thrones**
American fantasy drama starting in 2011, adapted from a series of books.

**The Gest of Robin Hood**
One of the oldest surviving tales of Robin Hood, thought to have been printed around 1500.

**Ghetto Supastar**
1998 debut album from Pras, former member of hip-hop group The Fugees.

**The Girl Who Saved the King of Sweden**
2012 novel by Jonas Jonasson.

**The Godfather**
Film trilogy based on a bestselling novel about a mafia gangster family in New York. The first film was released in 1972 and The Godfather Part II in 1974 and the third instalment in 1990.

**The Good, the Bad and the Ugly**
1966 western about three gunslingers looking for buried gold.

**Goodfellas**
1990 American mafia movie.

**Gotham**
2014 American TV series based on DC Comics characters from the *Batman* franchise.

**Grand Theft Auto**
Video game series started in 1997 and one of Britain's most successful exports.

**Grandmaster Flash**
Early American hip-hop DJ.

**Guillaume de Palerne**
French romance poem written in the twelfth century.

**Harry Potter**
Fantasy novel series written by British author J.K. Rowling, some of the fastest-selling books in history. Have been made into highly successful films as well as games and stage productions.

**The Highwaymen**
1985–95 outlaw country super-group consisting of Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Kris Kristofferson and Willie Nelson.

**Howard Marks**
Welsh former drug smuggler turned author.

**Hulk**
Marvel Comics superhero first appeared in 1962 and has gone on to feature across multiple popular cultural formats.

**The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared**
2009 novel by Jonas Jonasson was made into a film in 2013.

**Ice Cube**
Original member of N.W.A., actor and record producer.

**Ice-T**
Rapper and reality TV star, part of the gangsta rap scene.

**Iceberg Slim**
American author (1918–1992) his novels have been made into films.

**I'll Be Missing You**
1997 song released by Puff Daddy after the death of The Notorious B.I.G. and featuring Faith Evans the wife of The Notorious B.I.G., sampled The Police's 1983 song 'Every Breath You Take'.

**The Incredible Hulk (TV series)**
1978–82 American series based on Marvel Comics character of Hulk.

**Iron Man 3**
2013 Marvel Cinematic Universe superhero film.

**Ivanhoe**
1820 historical novel by Sir Walter Scott.

**Jax Teller**
Lead character in TV series *Sons of Anarchy*.

**James Baldwin**
American novelist (1924–1987).

**James Dean**
American actor and cultural icon (1931–1955).

**Jay Z**
One of the most financially successful American rappers.

**Jean Genet**
French author who served time in prison (1910–1986).

**Jessica Jones**
2015 American TV series based on Marvel Comics character.

**Jim Morrison**
Iconic figure in rock music as lead singer of The Doors (1943–1971).

**Joan Jett**
American singer and guitarist founding member of all female rock band the Runaways before forming Joan Jet and the Blackhearts. A film about the Runaways was released in 2010.

**Johnny Cash**
American country rock singer (1932–2003), one of the best-selling artists of all time who performed in prisons and was part of the outlaw country music scene.

**Jonas Jonasson**
Swedish author of novels *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared* and *The Girl Who Saved the King of Sweden*.

**Knock on Any Door**
1949 American courtroom film based on novel of the same name.

**Kris Kristofferson**
American country singer and part of the outlaw country genre.

**Ladies Love Outlaws**
1972 album and song by outlaw country musician Waylon Jennings.

**The Last Werewolf**
2011 novel by British author Glen Duncan.

**Law and Order Franchise**
American franchise dealing with the criminal justice system, includes TV drama, film and video games. Running between 1990 and 2010, *Law and Order* was the longest-running prime-time legal drama in America.

**The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen**
Comic series co-created by Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill in 1999. Various literary characters are assembled to protect the British Empire. Film loosely based on the comics was released in 2003 and a further film is planned.

**League of Legends**
The most played PC game worldwide in 2015.

**Legend**
2015 British film about the Kray twins adapted from a book about their lives and starring Tom Hardy.

**Leonardo DiCaprio**
American actor who played Frank Abagnale in *Catch Me If You Can*.

**Lincoln Burrows**
Character in American TV series *Prison Break* who is imprisoned for a crime he did not commit.

**The Lost Honour of Christopher Jefferies**
2014 British drama.

**Luke Cage**
First black superhero to appear in his own comic series, Marvel Comics' *Luke Cage: Hero for Hire*. Has made the transition to screen appearing in TV series *Jessica Jones* and has been included in the *New Avengers*, as well as having his own TV series. Part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

**Luther**
British TV crime drama starting in 2010.

**Making a Murderer**
2015 documentary filmed over 10 years following the case of Steven Avery. Avery was exonerated in 2003 having spent 18 years in prison for attempted murder and sexual assault. Two years after his release he was arrested for murder and in 2007 was convicted alongside his nephew Brandon Dassey. The 10 episodes of the documentary follow their arrest, court cases and convictions.

**Marlon Brando**
American actor and cultural icon (1924–2004).

**The Marshall Mathers LP**
2000 record by American rapper Eminem.

**Marvel Cinematic Universe**
Media franchise and fictional universe focused on various Marvel Comics superheroes. Includes films, comics and TV series. Releases include the *Iron Man* film series, Marvel's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and *Daredevil*.

**The Mask**
Comic book based 1994 superhero comedy film.

**Masters of the Universe**
Media franchise generally targeted at the children's market started in 1982.

**Maus**
Graphic novel serialized between 1980 and 1991.

**Mesrine**
French criminal Jacques Mesrine (1936–1979) has inspired three films, including two that were made as companion pieces in 2008. Mesrine also wrote an autobiography while he was in prison.

**Metamorphoses**
Fifteen-book narrative poem, written in Latin by Ovid in the first century CE.

**MF Doom**
Hip-hop artist who wears a mask similar to that of Marvel Comics fictional character Doctor Doom.

**Mr Nice**
1997 autobiography by drug smuggler Howard Marks turned into a film in 2010.

**The Monk**
English gothic novel by Matthew Lewis (1775–1818), published in 1796. The story has been adapted for opera, film and theatre and inspired Batman comic *Batman: Gothic*.

**Monster**
2003 American film based on the life and execution of Aileen Wuornos.

**Monsters**
2009 play about the murder of two-year-old James Bulger by Robert Thompson and Jon Venables.

**The Mysteries of Udolpho**
Gothic romance novel by Ann Radcliffe published in 1794.

**NCIS**
American police drama about Naval Criminal Investigative Service. Starting in 2003, it is one of the longest-running TV series. Two spin-off series (Los Angeles and New Orleans) have been produced.

**N.W.A.**
American hip-hop group (Niggaz Wit Attitudes), associated with gangsta rap. Members included Arabian Prince, Dr. Dre, Eazy-E, Ice Cube, MC Ren and DJ Yella. Active 1986–91.

**Notorious B.I.G. (Biggie Smalls)**
American rapper (1972–1997) murdered during the East Coast–West Coast hip-hop rivalry.

**Orange is the New Black**
Prison-set American comedy drama based on the book by Piper Kerman about her real-life experiences of being sent to prison. Started 2013.

**Outlaw**
2007 British vigilante film.

**Operation: Doomsday**
1999 album by rapper MF Doom.

**Oz**
American TV prison drama 1997–2003.

**Philip K. Dick**
Science fiction writer (1928–1982), many of his books have been made into films.

**Philip Pullman**
British author generally writing in the fantasy genre.

**Prison Break**
2005–09 American TV series. A further series was broadcast in 2016. There is also a video game based on the TV show.

**The Product**
Ice Cube song on 1990 EP *Kill at Will*.

**Pulp Fiction**
1994 film written and directed by Quentin Tarantino.

**Rammellzee**
American performance and hip-hop artist (1960–2010). Frequently performed in masks and costumes.

**Robin Hood**
Popular heroic English outlaw figure who continues to be widely represented in popular culture.

**Robin Hood: Men in Tights**
1993 French-American film parody of the Robin Hood story.

**The Rolling Stones**
British rock band active since 1962.

**Power Rangers**
American superhero franchise starting in 1993, largely focused on the children's audience.

**Professor Remus Lupin**
Werewolf teacher in the 'Harry Potter' books.

**The Returned**
French supernatural TV series originally broadcast in 2012. Based on an earlier French film.

**Richard Thompson**
British singer-songwriter.

**Scarface**
1983 crime film was a remake of a 1932 film of the same name.

**The Shawshank Redemption**
1994 prison film based on Stephen King's short story 'Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption'. Joint top-rated movie on IMDb.

**Sherlock**
Reboot of the Sherlock Holmes stories, starting in 2010. Set in the present day, it has become one of the UK's most watched dramas and a highly successful export.

**The Slim Shady LP**
1999 record by American rapper Eminem.

**Solzhenitsyn**
Russian novelist (1918–2008) who experienced imprisonment and exile.

**Sons of Anarchy**
2008–14 American TV series about an outlaw motorcycle gang.

**The Sopranos**
1999–2007 American TV series about the mafia. Largely focusing on head of the family, Tony Soprano, and the demands he faces through work and his home life. Regarded as one of the best TV shows of all time.

**Spider-Man**
Marvel Comics fictional superhero co-created by Stan Lee (and Steve Ditko) first appearing in 1962 has gone on to feature in animated series, films and books.

**Stephen King**
American author, many of whose books have been made into films.

**The Sting**
In 1973 film starring Robert Redford and Paul Newman based on a book written about two real-life con artists.

**The Sting!**
Video game about Matt Tucker, a famous burglar who must seek a return to his former notoriety following release from prison.

**Straight Outta Compton**
Debut album by American rap group N.W.A., released in 1988. The album included song 'Fuck Tha Police'. The title was also used for the 2015 film about the group.

**Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde**
Written by Scottish author Robert Louis Stephenson in 1886. Within a year of publication, the story was adapted for the stage and there have been numerous reformulations of it ever since.

**Stuart: A Life Backwards**
Autobiographical book written by British author Alexander Masters was made into a TV drama in 2007. It is about the life of a homeless ex-prisoner Stuart Shorter and starred Tom Hardy.

**The Sugarhill Gang**
American hip-hop group active since 1973, named after the Sugar Hill district in Harlem. Their 1979 song 'Rapper's Delight' was one of the first ever mainstream hip-hop hits.

**Suge Knight**
American record producer and co-founder with Dr. Dre and The D.O.C. of Death Row Records. Involved in an array of criminal activities and has spent time in prison.

**Super Fly**
1972 blaxploitation film.

**Super Furry Animals**
Welsh band active since 1993.

**Superman**
DC Comics superhero and American cultural icon, created 1938. Has been featured across numerous formats in popular culture.

**Swamp Thing**
DC comics character. A human-vegetable matter hybrid who fights to protect the environment, has inspired film, TV series and video games. First appeared in 1971 and revamped by Alan Moore in the 1980s.

**Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**
American comic book characters starting in 1984, have gone onto be part of a wider franchise.

**The Tempest**
Shakespeare play written in the 1610s, draws on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Has inspired music, film, art, poetry and ballet.

**Tom Hardy**
British actor who has played a number of real-life characters.

**True Detective**
American crime drama premiering in 2014.

**Tupac: Resurrection**
2003 documentary about Tupac Shakur and narrated by the rapper, who had been dead since 1996.

**Tupac Shakur**
American rapper and actor (1971–1996) embroiled in the East Coast–West Coast hip-hop rivalry, which eventually cost him his life. Had spent time in prison.

**The Vampyre**
1819 book written by Lord Byron's physician John Polidori.

**Vincent Cassel**
French actor who played Jacques Mesrine.

**The Walking Dead**
Franchise about the survivors of a zombie apocalypse. Originally a comic it is available on various formats including TV, video games and novels.

**Wanted! The Outlaws**
1976 album of outlaw country music songs and the first country music album to sell a million copies.

**Warcraft**
Franchise of video games, novels and film developed around five main multi-player role-playing fantasy war games. *World of Warcraft* is one of the world's best-selling PC games.

**Watchmen**
1986–87 DC Comics series written by Alan Moore.

**Waylon Jennings**
American outlaw country artist 1937–2002.

**We Are Monster**
2014 film about the racist murder in 2000 of Zahid Mubarek in Feltham Young Offenders Institution.

**The Wild One**
1953 American film about two rival motorcycle gangs. Made leader of the Black Rebels Motorcycle Club, Marlon Brando a cultural icon. The film was banned for 14 years in the UK.

**Willie Nelson**
American country music singer associated with outlaw country music.

**The Wire**
2002–08 American crime drama based in Baltimore and about the city's relationship with law and order. Now regarded as one of the greatest TV shows of all time.

**Woody Guthrie**
Influential American singer (1912–1967) of traditional and political songs.

**The Young Ones**
Anarchic British TV series 1982–84, based around four archetypal student characters, hippie Neil, wide boy Mike, violent punk Vyvyan and anarchist Rick

**Zorro**
Fictional masked outlaw created in 1919 has appeared in video games, books, comics, TV shows, films and on stage.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by "n" denote notes.



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