

**EMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL: THE POETICS OF  
IDENTIFICATION IN PSYCHOPATH FICTION**

**Abby Alicea BENTHAM**

School of Arts & Media

University of Salford, Salford, UK

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, April 2014

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For Dan, who made this possible, and Theia,  
whose light banishes the darkness contained within these pages.

## **Acknowledgements**

A thesis can be a fraught, lonely and weighty undertaking. This one, however, was made joyous and stimulating by the generous and unstinting support of my supervisor, Dr. Glyn White, and numerous other friends and academics at the University of Salford who offered advice and insight along the way. My thanks go to all of you.

I must almost thank my Mum for freeing me to work by taking care of my young daughter; she is truly the best Nana in the world. My greatest debt is to Dan, who has supported my decision to throw in an established career in advertising to walk the long and winding path to academia, and to Theia, the most glorious girl who ever drew breath. Thank you for your patience.

## **Declaration**

The material on cognitive dissonance, *jouissance* and moral masochism that appears on pages 244-246 of Chapter Four has appeared in slightly different form in a conference paper that I gave at the '10<sup>th</sup> Global Conference: Monsters and the Monstrous' at Mansfield College, University of Oxford in September 2012. A version of my paper also appeared in *Monstrous Manifestations*, an e-book of the conference proceedings, which is available from the Interdisciplinary Press: <<https://www.interdisciplinarypress.net/online-store/ebooks/gender-sexuality/monstrous-manifestations>>

*'When I would come back from these excursions, I was often plunged into a kind of wonder at my vicarious depravity.'*

Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

## Abstract

As Philip L. Simpson notes, humankind has an ‘ongoing...fascination with tales of gruesome murders and evil villains’ (15). Popular culture abounds with depictions of the mad and the bad; and perhaps no single disorder holds as much morbid appeal as psychopathy, the baffling condition which combines what Hervey M. Cleckley terms a ‘mask of sanity’, with a seeming lack of the qualities usually deemed to constitute humanity.

My thesis focuses on how authors have sought to explain, interpret and understand the psychopathic individual, and explores how literary techniques have manipulated readers’ responses to the moral questions posed by psychopathic characters. Between the mid-nineteenth century and the present day, authors have increasingly used empathetic narrative techniques to encourage readers to identify with and accept the villains whose stories they so voraciously consume. I track the transitions in narrative style, structure and form which take us from depictions of the psychopath as fiendish ‘other’, for example Rigaud in Charles Dickens’s *Little Dorrit*, to modern portrayals of the psychopathic murderer as hero, as seen in Jeff Lindsay’s series of *Dexter* novels.

I consider what the reader gains from reading such material and how we as readers negotiate the paradox of empathising with characters who are themselves incapable of empathy. I also explore whether cultural fascination with the psychopath is based on a desire to understand the workings of the psychopathic mind, a perverse delight in our fear of the aberrant ‘other’, or whether it reveals something altogether darker and more disturbing about ourselves.

## Introduction

Psychopaths: callous, unemotional predators devoid of the usual markers of humanity. Monstrous others, stalking the mean streets of our teeming cities; ready to pounce on the unsuspecting or socially marginal. So goes the popular cultural conception of psychopathy, but how does the reality of the condition compare to the myth? Conservative estimates suggest that approximately 1% of the population is psychopathic, which in a city of around 8 million inhabitants, such as London or New York, equates to around 80,000 psychopaths.<sup>1</sup> Of this 1%, some will be criminals;<sup>2</sup> some will be killers. But the majority will not offend and many of these will hold respectable, high ranking professional positions as surgeons, CEOs, lawyers, politicians and police officers.<sup>3</sup> Despite the relatively low levels of violent offending amongst psychopaths, they appear in a disproportionately high number of popular cultural treatments including literature, film, television and music, and the term psychopath has become a part of the popular lexicon. Indeed, characters bearing the signs of psychopathy have had narrative presence for as long as narratives have existed and can arguably be found in works from Ancient Greece, the Bible, Chaucer, Shakespeare and Marlowe.<sup>4</sup> There is no specific, recognised canon of psychopath fiction and it does not exist as a formal, established genre. However, the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Hare suggests that the figure in New York could be as high as 100,000 (*Without Conscience* 2). We can surmise that this may be due to the city's concentration of the high-powered, high-risk roles, in sectors such as finance, to which the psychopath is attracted.

<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that 15%-20% of the prison population is psychopathic. See Robert D. Hare, 'Psychopaths and Their Nature: Implications for the Mental Health and Criminal Justice Systems,' in Millon, 188-212.

<sup>3</sup> See Paul Babiak, 'When Psychopaths Go to Work,' *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 44.2 (1995):171-188; and Paul Babiak and Robert D. Hare, *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work* (New York: Harper/Collins, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Greek military statesman Alcibades is generally considered to have been a 'real life' psychopath, whilst the vignette by Theophrastus on 'The Unscrupulous Man' offers a fictional account; in the New Testament, St. Paul warns of people with psychopathic tendencies, see 1 Timothy 4:2, NIV, and Titus 1:15-16, NIV; The Pardoner in *The Canterbury Tales*, Iago in *Othello* and Richard III (although only in his Shakespearean incarnation, as historians now agree that he did not show psychopathic characteristics in life), and Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* can all be construed as psychopathic.

psychopathic figure is so ubiquitous in narrative that it seems appropriate to use the term ‘psychopath fiction’ to loosely and economically refer to the myriad representations of psychopathy in literature.

Interest in psychopathic characters has not diminished with the passage of time; rather, as psychopathy has gained popular currency it has become increasingly central to the cultural imaginary. Significantly, literary representations of the psychopath have not only proliferated, they have also become more sympathetic; and this thesis will chart the development of the psychopathic figure across the last 150 years or so. My interest lies in the transition from depictions of the psychopath as fiendish ‘other’, for example Dickens’s Rigaud, to modern portrayals of the psychopathic murderer as hero, as portrayed in Jeff Lindsay’s series of *Dexter* novels. Such a startling transformation demands critical scrutiny; this thesis will investigate how reader engagement with the psychopathic figure is manipulated by authors bent on provoking an empathetic response to characters who were traditionally portrayed as monstrous. Narrative poetics, which we can define as the linguistic techniques of prose and poetry, can push the reader into positions of identification with literary figures who both attract and repulse, and my study will consider the modes of reception inherent to such texts. These ‘poetics of identification’ will be explored in detail as I demonstrate how literary technique shapes aesthetic response and enables readers to negotiate moral ambiguity in their acceptance of the psychopathic character.

Although, as noted above, representations of psychopathy can be found in texts some 2000 years old, the condition itself was not formalised in medical science until well into the twentieth century. Etymologically the word ‘psychopath’ derives from Greek, where ‘psykhe’ means ‘mind’ and ‘pathos’ refers to suffering; in its earliest uses the term ‘psychopath’ was used to refer to any kind of psychological disorder. Chapter One of this

study will chart the scientific evolution of the term from its first recorded use to its current tightly defined clinical status. Today, psychopathy is recognised as a specific personality disorder, distinct from the antisocial personality disorder with which it is often confused. Diagnosis of the disorder is typically made via the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised, or PCL-R, a clinical rating scale which measures socially deviant behaviours and specific personality traits to produce a detailed picture of the psychopathic individual. One of the key measurements made by the PCL-R relates to the subject's ability to feel empathy for others, and the psychopath can be typified as callous-unemotional and lacking in affect. Given the increasingly sympathetic treatment of the figure in literature and the empathetic narrative techniques employed by writers in the modernist period and beyond, the focus on empathy is very interesting. Chapter One therefore explores the appeal of representations of the psychopath in fiction and offers an exposition of the modes of literary reception. I also consider the implications of fictional representations of the psychopath, and examine their impact on the reader, literary technique and narrative. I rely on the PCL-R definition of psychopathy as it offers a tighter and more nuanced delineation of psychopathic traits than other clinical rating methods, particularly with regards to its emphasis on empathy. This thesis is concerned with literary constructions rather than clinical case studies, however, as Liam Clarke notes,

whilst fiction is (in itself) not real, it informs us about reality, especially its 'incomplete status' and it can do this since it doesn't carry the promised expectations of psychology research with its hypotheses and anticipated outcomes. Neither does fiction seek to inform didactically... Instead it constantly demands a collusion from readers in respect of its meanings, construing itself in ways that complicate this requirement endlessly. (186)

This sense of collusion can be troubling to the reader of psychopath fiction, as it often carries with it a sense of moral ambivalence. However, examples studied in this thesis offer the reader a number of means of repudiating the more troubling aspects of her or his engagement with transgressive material, such as cognitive dissonance or Thomas Leitch's techniques of disavowal.

Cognitive dissonance was the subject of a 1957 study by social psychologist Leon Festinger. It describes the state of tension which arises when a person holds clashing cognitions or 'knowledges'; what Festinger describes as 'things a person knows about himself, about his behaviour, and about his surroundings' (9). Cognitions are dissonant if 'for one reason or another, they do not fit together...[or are] inconsistent or contradictory' (12-13). The reader of psychopath fiction, for example, may find it difficult to reconcile their support for a fictional killer with their understanding that multiple murder can never be justified in real life. The disharmony of dissonance is uncomfortable and the subject feels under pressure to reduce it via psychic manoeuvring. Festinger notes that 'in order to eliminate a dissonance completely, some cognitive element must be changed...But even if it is impossible to eliminate a dissonance, it is possible to reduce the total magnitude of dissonance by adding new cognitive elements' (21). The reader of psychopath fiction may therefore seek to reduce dissonance by emphasizing certain elements, or adding new ones, which are consonant with the idea being explored. This study will focus on the ways in which narrative poetics aim to reduce dissonance and facilitate the acceptance of troubling material and characters.

Similar manoeuvres take place during audience identification with challenging characters on screen and some of these techniques of disavowal are also applicable to literature. In his 2001 article, 'Nobody Here But Us Killers: The Disavowal of Violence in Recent American Films', Leitch discusses the ways in which American films provide

audiences with an array of tools they can use to reduce the ambivalence created by the passive acceptance and enjoyment of screen violence.<sup>5</sup> The stylisation of violence, such as that seen in the films of Sam Peckinpah or Quentin Tarantino, for instance, can highlight the dissonance created by violent spectacle and our consumption of it as entertainment; however for Leitch this is not a single process. He draws a distinction between those instances which make ‘the audience more acutely and uncomfortably aware of their own ambivalence toward the violence they are watching’ (ibid. 5), and those that ‘anaesthetize the audience’s awareness of their own disavowal rather than sharpening it’ (ibid.). I will address such techniques in my discussion of the representations of psychopathy dealt with in this thesis, highlighting instances where readers are forced to address their moral complicity, such as in Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (1991), and those where the reader is encouraged to gloss over the more disturbing aspects of the narrative, as with Lindsay’s *Dexter* series (2004-2013). Leitch draws attention to the way that intertextuality can reattribute the sociopathology being explored from the character expressing it to the sources which are being referenced. Comedy, Leitch explains, is another important tool of disavowal and my study will show how this has become a vital element of psychopath fiction, both in terms of disavowing moral connivance and for engendering empathy for psychopathic characters.

It should be noted that, in addition to psychopathy being a relatively newly-defined condition, empathy itself is also a modern term. As Breda Gray points out, it was ‘translated in the early twentieth century from the term *Einfühlung* which dates from 1897....So the term empathy did not exist until the nineteenth century and it is seen as signalling aspects of the modern self’ (209-210). In fact, the earliest recorded use of the

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of how Leitch’s techniques are utilised in the award-winning Showtime television series, *Dexter*, please see David Schmid’s article ‘The Devil You Know: *Dexter* and the “Goodness” of American Serial Killing’, in Howard, 132-142.

clinical category of psychopathy (see section 1.2) and the designation of empathy are relatively coterminous.<sup>6</sup> In recognition of the significance of these late-nineteenth century developments, I plot the beginning of the psychopathic character's literary trajectory in the same approximate period. Texts are selected both for their use of the psychopathic character and for the quality of their psychological rendering and empathetic techniques; however, my selection is necessarily selective rather than exhaustive, and constraints of space and time have forced me to include only the most singular texts. Filmic and televisual texts are sadly beyond the scope of this project.

The narrative modes for representing consciousness in fiction are detailed in Chapter Two, where I consider the impact of narrative situation and focalization on what Dorrit Cohn has termed psycho-narration (see pages 59-60 for exposition of this term which, it should be noted, describes narrative techniques for rendering consciousness and is not specifically related to psychopathy). Textual analysis of three key novels then follows. My starting point, in section 2.1, is Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1857), which contains an extraordinarily detailed and lifelike psychopathic character named Rigaud. The novel is notable as much for its polyphonic techniques as for its author's obvious fascination with his psychopathic character, and we see the attraction of repulsion which so colours psychopath fiction played out in his handling of Rigaud. Yet despite Dickens's flirtations with his psychopath, this realist novel follows a standard pattern of crime and retribution. Rigaud is depicted as a monstrous other who must ultimately pay for his crimes. This theme is modified slightly in the second text I consider in this section, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866). Despite the narrative trajectory promised by

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<sup>6</sup> Emil Kraepelin referred to 'psychopathic states' for the first time in the fifth edition of his seminal work, *Psychiatrie: Ein Lehrbuch* which was published in 1896, although it was not until 1904 that he identified what is today referred to as the antisocial personality (see Millon 9-10). One could argue that the emergence of the term 'empathy' was a prerequisite for the acknowledgment of the absence of empathy in the psychopathic subject, in a similar way to how the emergence of the term 'homosexual' in the late-nineteenth century predated the notion of heterosexuality (see Sedgwick 2) and led to the creation of 'a binarized identity that was full of implications' (ibid.).

the novel's title, Dostoevsky shows an almost perverse interest in human wickedness and suffering. His novel of consciousness is significant both for its extraordinary rendering of aberrant psychology and for its manipulation of the reader; and, although its protagonist is not, in fact, a psychopath, *Crime and Punishment*'s narrative style would have a lasting influence on subsequent psychopath fiction.<sup>7</sup> The final analysis in Chapter Two covers William Faulkner's literary experiments in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), in which he attempts to approximate human perception from a number of different perspectives. His poetics offer new ways of accessing consciousness, and his introduction of black humour and a veneer of normality to his psychopath was to impact heavily on those novelists who came after him.

In fact, after Faulkner there followed a veritable explosion of psychopath narratives and in Chapter Three of the thesis I examine the social and cultural drivers for the sudden proliferation of fictional psychopaths in the twentieth century. This chapter tracks the psychopath through hardboiled, pulp and noir fiction, and considers the significance of the serial killer subgenre. The international relocation from Europe to America in this period is also significant, as it follows the academic and psychoanalytic developments in the field. The period saw a concentration of psychopathic figures in the crime fiction genre, and I discuss how innovations in publishing impacted on the development and expansion of this kind of fiction. I map the development of the psychopathic figure onto the key events of this tumultuous century, and show how the psychopath was progressively depicted as an empathetic and likeable character whose transgressive behaviour could be seen as a rational response to an increasingly hostile modernity. The chapter offers detailed analysis

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<sup>7</sup> Unlike the other texts studied in this thesis, *Crime and Punishment* does not contain a psychopathic character. It is included here due to its early rendering of psychological disturbance and the way that Dostoevsky's poetics push the reader into a position of empathy and collusion with the killer; the interest therefore resides in the narratological technique, rather than psychological accuracy. A true depiction of psychopathy can be found in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), where the senior Karamazov appears to be a prototypical psychopath. For Cleckley's discussion of this character, see *The Mask of Sanity*, page 194.

of a number of key texts from the period, with a particular focus on the works of Jim Thompson and Patricia Highsmith whose witty, personable psychopaths created a new template for psychopath fiction. Conversely, this period also produced texts which sought to demystify and understand the psychopath; particularly those ‘real life’ psychopaths whose hideous crimes had captured and appalled the public imagination. The sensational Leopold and Loeb trial of 1924 is depicted in Meyer Levin’s *Compulsion* (1956) and I assess its impact on Truman Capote’s genre-changing ‘non-fiction novel’ *In Cold Blood* (1966), which deals with the 1959 Clutter murders. Capote’s unflinching portrayal of the killers Perry Smith and Dick Hickock paved the way for the serial killer subgenre which would follow.

Chapter Four of the thesis examines the genesis of the serial killer subgenre and its impact on fictional representations of psychopathy. I focus on the impact of Thomas Harris and his paradigm-changing creation of Hannibal Lecter, who came to define psychopathy in popular consciousness. Lecter achieved a mainstreaming of psychopathic deviancy which led to a massive shift towards the normalisation of psychopathy in pop culture. However, the key thrust of Chapter Four is the extraordinary impact of Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (1991). His highly controversial postmodern novel challenged conceptions of decency via its explicit scenes of extreme violence and pornography, yet still managed to create an amusing and engaging psychopathic character that became a cultural icon. The acceptable public face of his psychopath contrasts with the banality of random violence in a narrative which critiques the market-driven, neoliberal late-1980s culture which valorises psychopathic traits and devalues the human. *American Psycho* is the single most impactful novel in the history of psychopath fiction to date and perhaps the only one to force the reader to truly confront his or her engagement with violence as entertainment. The binary oppositions of good and evil, sanity and madness are

relentlessly attacked until subject positions become meaningless. Ellis wrests the psychopath away from pulp fiction and back into high literature.

Ellis's depiction of modernity and his 'boy-next-door'-cum-'fucking evil psychopath' (19) leads us to the end point of the literary trajectory of the fictional psychopath: the heroic serial killer, Dexter Morgan. I examine Jeff Lindsay's series of *Dexter* novels and ask whether it represents a dramatic negotiation of the rhetoric of evil or a rational response to bewildering modernity. Lindsay's postmodern gathering of psychopath fiction influences enables him to create one of popular culture's most innovative and accessible anti-heroes; a serial killer who only kills other killers. However, my research has revealed that as the series progresses, the focus on Dexter's psychopathy retreats and the novels move towards a police procedural format where the emphasis is on detection rather than the vigilantism of the earliest novels. In this way Lindsay's books tap into the zeitgeist and answer a cultural need to push back against the pressures of modern life via a transgressive figure that both challenges and supports the status quo. The moral ambivalence which has followed the psychopath's literary trajectory from monster to hero is slowly replaced with a flaccid conformity. The Conclusion of this thesis addresses what this conformity represents, then considers the likely future developments of the psychopathic figure in literature, its continued cultural prominence and its potential relocation to other media.

### The Question of Gender

In the interests of brevity, throughout the thesis I use the male pronoun when referring to the psychopath. Psychopathy affects more males than females and the disorder is more pronounced in men, particularly with regards to physical violence. With the exception of

characters such as Rhoda, the girl psychopath in William March's *The Bad Seed* (1954) and the mysterious, letter-writing killer in Edward Lee and Elizabeth Steffen's *Portrait of the Psychopath as a Young Woman* (1998), the literary psychopath is almost exclusively male. This mirrors the profile of the typical serial killer (the most common figuration of the psychopath in fiction), who Peter Vronsky argues 'usually turn out to be white males' (8) and also points to the gender issues which necessarily attend this kind of literature. Kevin D. Haggerty suggests that '[f]rom a feminist perspective it could be argued that serial killing is not so much a radical departure from normal codes of civilized behaviour as it is an intensification of hegemonic masculine ideals' (332) and this is certainly in evidence throughout the corpus of psychopath fiction.

It is impossible to study texts such as Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* or Jim Thompson's pulp classics without confronting the issue of gender. The works of both authors contain multiple instances of disturbing and graphic violence against women: a stratified response to the texts therefore seems inevitable. Surely no woman could enjoy reading *American Psycho*'s extended scenes of phallogentric pornography, torture and murder, or engage with Thompson's assorted shrews, gold-diggers, and double-crossing bed-hoppers? Yet both authors, each now enjoying cult status, have cross-gender appeal – so how can we account for this? As befits these authors, there is no one clear answer to this question, but rather an assortment of responses which mingle and interlink to create a dialogic view of gender, literature and the act of reading that communicates much about readers and the relationship of literature to society.

Although Ellis and Thompson will bear the weight of my scrutiny in this section, the issue of gender, representation and reception is applicable to most of the authors analysed in this study, and particularly to those writing in the twentieth century. With the exception of Patricia Highsmith, all of the authors are male and the majority of them,

Highsmith included, write masculinist fantasies from a male perspective, for an implied male readership. The treatment of women in the texts is broadly analogous with the condition of women at the time of the novels' writing, with the pulp fiction and noir texts of the early- to mid-twentieth century having a particularly narrow and unsympathetic approach to the portrayal of women. Although pulp fiction, with its sexy, salacious covers and textual focus on violence, hard drinking men and femme fatales was aimed mainly at male readers, contemporary statistics reveal the broader genre of crime fiction to be female-oriented. 80% of all fiction is reportedly bought by women (Groskop) with some commentators claiming that '[w]omen account for almost 60% of the [crime fiction] genre's market, with females aged over 55 the most avid readers' (Hill). I suspect that the women Hill references are reading about Jane Tennison (in the novels of Lynda La Plante) or Kay Scarpetta (a Patricia Cornwell heroine) rather than Patrick Bateman, but the fact remains that the crime genre, for all its gore and sensationalism, does appeal to women. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the allure that contemporary crime fiction holds for some female readers may lie in a fascination with extreme psychology and a desire to understand the drivers to abhorrent acts, or the culture of fear into which females are inculcated from a young age (Cooke). It is difficult to align *American Psycho* with the more formulaic novels of Cornwell and her ilk, as Ellis's novel not only confounds generic classification but also refuses to adhere to literary conventions with regards to plot, identification and resistance, narrative closure, and so on. The issue of generic classification is an important one; although most of the novels dealt with by this study can sit under the very broad umbrella of crime fiction, very few of them are defined by it. The texts analysed in this thesis were selected for their treatment of psychopathic or psychologically disordered characters rather than crime, hence the inclusion of non-crime texts such as *Little Dorrit* and *The Sound and the Fury*, and texts in which crime takes a backseat to the development of the psychopathic

protagonist. Statistical data detailing readership demographics is not readily available for the various and distinct genres that the psychopath appears in, but work done on the readership of crime fiction (which often relies on psychopathic characters for its thrills) offers a view of contemporary tastes, particularly in relation to gender, which can be instructive. Nevertheless we must not forget that, in a thesis interrogating poetics, we are concerned with the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’ of fiction’s appeal.

This ‘how’ rests in part in what cultural historian Robin Bernstein, in her essay on ‘Material Culture and the Performance of Race’, has referred to as a ‘processual interaction’ (86) between a ‘scriptive thing’ and the response it provokes in the person interacting with it. A scriptive thing is something which invites a particular action, reaction, or range of physical response. Bernstein explains: ‘That which I call a “scriptive thing,” like a play script, broadly structures a performance whilst simultaneously allowing for resistance and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable’ (69). Further, ‘[t]hings script meaningful bodily movements, and these citational movements think the otherwise unthinkable’ (70). According to Bernstein’s schema, the very act of turning the pages of a novel like *American Psycho* – itself a scriptive thing – interpellates the reader into Bateman’s disturbed and disturbing version of the world. The grasping and turning of the page transforms the reader from a passive consumer of entertainment into a person who actively solicits scenes of hard core pornography, extreme violence, cannibalism and murder. According to Bernstein, ‘by entering the scripted scenario, the individual is interpellated into ideology and thus into subjecthood’ (73). From this we can extrapolate that, for the period of entrancement (see section 1.5), the reader of *American Psycho* temporarily merges with Bateman and his psychology, however disgusting, boring, or difficult that may be. This interpellation seems to account for the curious phenomenon of cross-gender identification in a novel which has

such a troubling relationship to women. That is not to say that women are uniformly enamoured of the text, if at all – and of course men, too, can experience resistance to the novel’s more challenging content. The novel’s early critical reception almost uniformly opposed its violence, vacuity and tedium. Yet this too, is part of the novel’s script. Bernstein argues that ‘an action which appears transgressive actually follows a script’s range of implications’ (75), with resistant response being not only permissible as an appropriate response to disturbing material, but also covertly invited by the text. Novels, or scriptive things, are read and interacted with within what Bernstein refers to as ‘historically located traditions of performance’ (76). Familiarity with these traditions grants performers of the scripts awareness of ‘normative aggregate behavior’ (ibid.) and the subsequent comfort of knowing that their performances fall within the bounds of accepted practice. The appropriate tradition of performance in the late twentieth century would be a disavowal and rejection of the violence that *American Psycho*’s script pushes the reader towards, with the detailed scenes of sexual and physical violence against women producing vehement disapprobation. Yet, significantly, Ellis’s poetics deny the reader the comfort of this reaction as they manipulate reader empathy and identification and push him or her towards engagement with – and, dare I say, *enjoyment of* – the novel’s violence. *American Psycho* frustrates the reader’s expectations of the typical scripts of literature, denying an Iseran closed gestalt,<sup>8</sup> and throwing into disarray his or her understanding and expectations of appropriate response to the novel’s violence and pornography. For Bernstein, ‘[w]hen a thing scripts actions, it manifests the repertoire of its historical

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<sup>8</sup> In his 1972 article, ‘The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach’, Wolfgang Iser contends that meaning is produced from literature when the artistic (i.e. ‘the text created by the author’ 279) and the aesthetic (‘the realization accomplished by the reader’ ibid.) poles of the literary work meet in a ‘convergence of text and reader’ (ibid.). This convergence ‘must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader’ (ibid.) It is this virtuality which renders the text dynamic; a state which induces in the reader a desire to impose the ‘gestalt’, or fixed meaning, which is essential to understanding. However, due to the contingent nature of the intersection between the artistic and aesthetic poles of the work, ‘the “gestalt” is not the true meaning of the text; at best it is a configurative meaning’ (289).

moment' (89) and for *American Psycho* we can take this to include post-feminism, Reaganite politics, runaway capitalism, the breakdown of community, the celebrification of the serial killer, and the slasher films the novel pays homage to. Each of these things, and more, are present in the text but they create such a polyphony of conflicting ideologies that Ellis's novel ultimately elects not to consistently 'interpellate us into ideology and subjecthood'; instead it confounds and confuses us, in a postmodern challenge to traditional reader/text ontological boundaries.

As I noted above, those authors writing in the pulp, noir and hardboiled traditions in the mid-twentieth century betray the restrictive and unsympathetic treatment of women prevalent at that time. Authors such as Jim Thompson have long been accused of misogyny, and the hardboiled 'dames' of Hammett and McCoy can be hard to stomach for the modern female reader. Despite this, such novels do have cross-gender appeal, with men and women alike empathising with and accepting chauvinistic anti-heroes such as Lou Ford and Ralph Cotter. Although both Thompson and McCoy are skilled writers who have created compelling and convincing characters, their poetics lack Ellis's virtuosity and it seems that cross-gender identification here depends, at least in part, on a process that Judith Fetterley has called 'immascultation'. Fetterley argues that '[w]omen are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny' (*The Resisting Reader* xx). Having been schooled in a male-dominated literary canon and having lived in patriarchal society, the average female reader is well prepared to function in this often unconscious fashion and Fetterley's schema still has resonance some 35 years after it was first published. The lack of active, undomesticated female focalizing characters in mid-twentieth century pulp fiction forces the female reader into close relationships with masculine protagonists, as that is the only way to achieve narrative satisfaction. The non-

feminist reader 'accepts as normal' the misogyny of the texts and, by attributing the misogyny to the era and genre the text originates from, can escape psychic injury or slight (men, of course, are privileged in the texts and so these negotiations do not apply to the male reader).

Having explored how poetics and immasculation make possible cross-gender identification, one could be forgiven for assuming that the gender of the reader loses all significance during the reading process. However, gender remains

a significant determinant of the interaction between text and reader  
... gender-related differences are multifaceted and overdetermined. They are a function of the social, cultural, and political structures that form the context of reading and writing, and they interact with other differences, in particular, those grounded on class, race, and sexual orientation. (Flynn xxviii)

An Iseran aesthetic response (see Section 1.3) is evinced when the reader draws on his or her social, cultural and individual background in order to make sense of a text.

Subjecthood is composed of social and cultural influences and their impact on the individual self, and it is inevitable that such influences are themselves contingent and gender-determined. These influences are not restricted to essentialisms such as masculine aggression, but extend also to our relationship to emotion and its expression. In Western society, masculine performances centre on stoicism whilst women are entitled to emotional display. So, when this study addresses emotions such as empathy, it is addressing it as something gendered and socially constructed. Anthropologist Catherine Lutz has noted that 'any discourse on emotion is also at least implicitly, a discourse on gender' (qtd. in Abigail Locke 192). Even when a reading position is ostensibly neutered, the reader

inevitably processes the emotional material in gendered terms. This is not to say that he or she is always aware of his or her own gender, but rather that emotion and non-emotion are figured as female and male characteristics.

For writers like Thompson and McCoy there is a difficulty with emotion in that it doesn't fit with the 'tough guy' paradigm of hardboiled and noir fiction. But if emotion cannot be expressed, what happens to the cathected energy? And if feminine-coded sentiment is expressed by men, what is the consequence of this cultural transgression? In much of the psychopath fiction from the middle of the twentieth century, the expression of emotion is emasculating and it is this rather than his aberrant psychology which sees the transgressing male lose his foothold in the dominant social order. This was a particularly strong concern of Thompson's, whose novels teem with male characters who are unable to articulate their emotions or even to properly feel. Denied an outlet, signification breaks down for these characters and they descend into madness, a kind of psychic gelding. Those characters who do vent their emotions are similarly emasculated: Brownie in *The Nothing Man* (1954) spends a great deal of time talking about his feelings, but he was castrated in the war and is therefore not fully masculine according to Thompson's schema. In *Savage Night* (1953) Little Bigger's punishment is both a psychic and physical castration, his mental collapse accompanied by his dismemberment by a crazed female he has wronged. *A Hell of a Woman's* (1954) male protagonist Dolly Dillon also suffers a breakdown and is castrated by a lover, a similar fate to that which befalls McCoy's Ralph Cotter. Cotter is symbolically neutered by two separate women after a repressed oedipal memory and acute castration fear resurfaces. He loses his mind and is shot to death by a spurned and furious 'dame'.

Highsmith's Ripley thwarts the masculine paradigm in that he openly expresses emotion. In his bouts of self-pity and frustration he often weeps, but rather than Highsmith

figuring this as a masculine failing, Ripley's emotionality is actually one of the things which helps to secure an empathetic response from the reader. This 'feminine' trait is not Ripley's downfall, as it is for his literary contemporaries. One reason for this may be that Ripley is written by a woman, who was subject to the social, cultural and political forces that are specific to female experience and which denote emotionality as an acceptable, even desirable, trait. However, Highsmith did not conform to the dominant gender ideologies of her time. Her sexual orientation placed her outside of hegemony and she has been described as 'markedly masculine in appearance, and something of a man-hater, a kind of female chauvinist' (James 181). Her stark prose and dark subject matter have also been described as masculine. Furthermore, Highsmith is now widely believed to have been on the autistic spectrum with a high-functioning form of Asperger's Syndrome (ibid. 182). According to the National Autistic Society, a common characteristic of Asperger's is difficulty with 'social imagination', which means that sufferers find it difficult to empathise with others. Asperger's Syndrome affects more men than women and is on a similar spectrum to psychopathy, which complicates this line of enquiry even further with regards to issues such as empathy, emotion and socialisation. Highsmith's mysteriousness and refusal (or inability) to conform are part of her appeal and it is neither possible nor desirable to unravel her psychology here. Broadly speaking, the issues that arise with the gendering of characters and readers fall into certain roles because of the cultural constructions of things like emotions. Highsmith does not correspond to these essentialist notions of what is right and/or acceptable; rather she acts as an interesting counterpoint that highlights the arbitrary nature of the issues at play.

The arbitrariness of gender roles and a sense of constructedness are also present in *American Psycho*. The novel has been roundly criticised by feminists the world over for its extreme and prolonged scenes of violence against women, yet rather than being a manual

for the torture of women, as has been suggested by one feminist group (see page 205), the novel is actually a response to the culture that the author sees around him. The narrative is not misogynistic; it is about ideas of victimhood and victimhood's opposite – the person who can't be got at or feel emotion, and who is invulnerable in some way – in other words, the psychopath. Like Thompson and McCoy's characters, when Bateman becomes emotional and despairing he becomes delusional. As his mania heightens he hallucinates about ambulant rubbish bins and pieces of breakfast cereal being interviewed on television. Yet whilst characters in the works of Thompson and his contemporaries are locked into gender-based essentialisms, in *American Psycho* the situation is much more fluid. Ellis suggests that gender doesn't or shouldn't matter, but it does. In fact, it affects our very means of engaging with literature and the levels of immersion we are able to reach. When David Bleitch conducted his empirical research into the 'comparative literary response patterns of men and women', he found that 'women...automatically blended in with [the narrator]...and/or they automatically blended in with the author [...] The men, however, draw boundaries much more decisively' (264-265). Bleitch found the women to have greater empathetic capabilities than the men, and a greater willingness to capitulate to the diegesis. Men in the study were far more reticent, and less prepared to surrender themselves to the narrative world. To me, this suggests that a reader's potential level of immersion in the text is gender-determined and I suggest that this ultimately impacts on the extent to which the two sexes can, or will, empathise with literary characters and situations. As with the acceptability of masculine emotional response, this could be attributed to social factors. One can surmise that a woman who has been socially conditioned to think of others and put other people first may find it easier to surrender her self and merge with the other of the text during the period of entrancement, than a male whom society has dictated should be self-possessed and single-minded. More empirical

research would be needed before such a claim could be definitively stated (and there is sadly no space for that here), but it certainly offers food for thought.

What is clear is that gender is neither a barrier nor a driver to reader identification with literary psychopaths and in light of this the issue of gender will not be a primary focus in this study. Although a text's violence may be skewed more towards one gender or social group than others, the reader's reception of this violence is shaped by a number of competing factors including, as we have seen, socialisation, immasculation and narrative poetics. Furthermore, readerly acceptance (or rejection) of literary violence is not necessarily determined by the imposition of morality on the text; this thesis will demonstrate how it is possible to engage with *and enjoy* material to which one is diametrically opposed. As Bleitch's study has shown, empathetic response to texts can be tempered by gender but this difference relates only to the *depth* of the reader's immersion in the diegesis. The feminist impulse which says 'No!' to violence against women is an ideological response that makes political decisions about content, rather than a readerly decision to engage with poetics. Since it is apparent that female readers for such texts exist, my study of the poetics of these narratives is both timely and necessary. Emotion, gender and empathy are important and interlinked, but they are also contingent and subject to manipulation. Ultimately, it is the novel's poetics which determine the reader's response to a text. One can only be interpellated into a text's ideology so far, as there is always a little of oneself colouring the reading experience.

## Chapter One

### Depicting the Psychopathic Individual

#### 1.1 Literature and Psychopathy

In this chapter I shall explore the particular fascination with psychopathy that is manifest in so many literary, filmic and televisual texts. By examining the literary techniques that allow the reader to access the psychopathic subject, I will also investigate the psychological factors that come into play through audience engagement and identification with the fictional psychopath. Although, ultimately, the cultural meanings of psychopathy put into circulation by literature will be more important to this thesis than strict clinical definitions of the disorder, a solid understanding of psychopathy is a necessary basis for this study.

There is a strong tradition of fictional characters being explored in psychoanalytical literature, be that Freud discussing Sophocles and Shakespeare, Lacan debating Poe with Derrida, or Laing analysing Dostoevsky. The benefits to the clinician seem clear enough – accurate literary portraits of medical conditions allow the reader a closer and more detailed view than may be gained from individual patients in the ‘real’ world, and such ‘case studies’ may be disseminated to a wider audience. But what does the lay reader get out of their literary engagement with the darker recesses of the human mind, and why the enduring cultural interest in the figure of the psychopath? A glimpse into the unknown certainly has a strong appeal, but one can assume that the average reader of such literature does not seek out the fine points of psychological realism for their diagnostic efficacy. The enigmatic psychopath can present a fascinating stream of salacious material to a literature

fascinated with monsters, villains and criminality, yet it can be difficult to imagine how readerly access to such a character can be fulfilling or enjoyable. This chapter will therefore endeavour to uncover the appeal that the psychopath has for the reader, whilst exploring the techniques that writers use to ensure that readers are immersed in and engaged with their texts. However, before we can explore how one engages with the psychopath in literature, it is first necessary to explore the disorder itself.

As Philip L. Simpson notes, in his book *Psycho Paths: Tracking the Serial Killer Through Contemporary American Film and Fiction*, humankind has an ‘ongoing...fascination with tales of gruesome murders and evil villains’ (15). Popular culture abounds with depictions of the mad and the bad; and aberrant psychology has proved a fertile source of such material to the novelist and the reader alike. Perhaps no single disorder holds as much morbid cultural appeal as psychopathy; the baffling condition which combines what Hervey M. Cleckley terms a ‘mask of sanity’ with a seeming lack of the qualities usually deemed to constitute humanity. Over the course of the last century or so, the figure of the psychopath has become increasingly prevalent in fictional depictions, and, as medical understanding of the psychopath has developed, so too has his portrayal in literature, television and other popular cultural forms. This is not to suggest that the literary and medical conceptions are intrinsically linked; rather we see literature, fuelled by its own interest in the subject of human psychology, exploring psychopathy and other abnormal mental states, fed by the scientific understanding of psychopathology. As this deepens and is more widely disseminated, literary and cultural representations of aberrant psychology become more detailed, accurate and realistic. As I hope to show in this study, late nineteenth century representations by authors such as Dostoevsky, who scorned psychology, are not entirely clinically accurate; yet the mid-twentieth century, when understanding of psychopathy became more defined and

widespread, saw its increasingly realistic portrayal in literature, film and television multiply.<sup>9</sup> This suggests a sequential link between scientific understanding of psychopathy, the seeping of this awareness into the wider populace, and its portrayal in literature and other popular cultural forms.

However, not all of the authors I will explore in this study comply with this model. Dickens wrote knowledgeably about a variety of conditions even as they were being discovered and debated by the medical community. B.C. Douglas tells us that the veracity of Dickens's characterisations was such that he 'was well known in his own lifetime for true-to-life descriptions of characters with illnesses that were even cited in medical journals as case reports' (64). Furthermore, '[s]ome clinical entities were anticipated before they were identified as such by physicians' (ibid.). One of Dickens's most memorable creations, the psychopathic Rigaud of *Little Dorrit* (who I will examine in section 2.1), appeared almost thirty years before the first recorded use of the term 'psychopath', yet is clinically accurate and complete. However, Dickens was unique in that he entertained a keen interest in mental health issues and had access to asylums and contemporary medical literature via his work on asylum reform. Furthermore, it is known that he based Rigaud on the notorious Pierre François Lacenaire, a nineteenth century murderer whom today we can recognise as a 'real life' psychopath.

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<sup>9</sup> The more widespread understanding of psychopathology in the twentieth century generally improved the accuracy of representations of psychopathy. In some respects such representations could be deemed more realistic than earlier portrayals, which may be less complete or clinically suspect. However, it does not necessarily follow that the most accurate portrayals offer the greatest satisfaction to the reader. Rather, satisfaction is derived from the quality of the writing and the level of engagement it invites in the narrative world. It is interesting to note that, today, the term 'psychopath' has become such an integral part of the popular lexicon that it functions as a kind of shorthand for all the social and cultural implications of psychopathy. A less nuanced depiction of psychopathy may pass as accurate and complete due to the subconscious work done by the reader of the text.

## 1.2 The Historical Background of Psychopathy and its Nomenclature

Popular culture's interest in psychopathy is mirrored by that of the international medical community: despite being the 'first personality disorder to be recognized in psychiatry' (Millon vii), the condition continues to be widely debated and regularly reclassified. The earliest recorded use of the term 'psychopath' was in an 1884 Russian murder trial, when psychiatrist I. M. Balinsky used it in his defence of accused child-killer, Mlle. Semenova. Balinsky typified the psychopath as a person 'whose every moral faculty appears to be of the normal equilibrium...But of all moral notions he is entirely devoid...Besides his own person and his own interests nothing is sacred to the psychopath' (*New York Times*, February 14<sup>th</sup> 1885 np; original story taken from the *Pall Mall Gazette*). The term came to be used as a somewhat obtuse label for any type of psychopathology that did not fit the existing categories of mental disorder, although it was later narrowed as the understanding of psychopathic typologies grew. In 1930, the psychologist G.E. Partridge proposed that the term 'psychopath' be dropped in favour of 'sociopathic personality', which he felt better reflected the social ramifications of the disorder. However, Partridge's contribution had the effect of muddying an already problematic nomenclature, and, as David T. Lykken has pointed out, '[f]or the next 50 years or so, dangerous or persistent lawbreakers were labelled variously as psychopaths or sociopaths with negligible diagnostic consistency or clarity' (3).

Perhaps the most influential figure in the development of the clinical understanding of psychopathy was Hervey M. Cleckley, whose 1941 *The Mask of Sanity* (revised and reissued multiple times over the subsequent four decades, until Cleckley's death in 1984) became 'the foundation for modern research on the topic' (Patrick xv). Cleckley offered, for the first time, a clear and nuanced picture of the disorder, including a detailed understanding of the psychopathic personality and the challenges it poses to society.

Cleckley viewed psychopathy as a combination of personality traits and socially deviant behaviours, whilst also considering the impact of psychological, biological and genetic factors on the inner workings of the psychopathic mind. Significantly, Cleckley noted that '[d]espite the plain etymological inference of a *sick mind* or of *mental sickness*, this term is ordinarily used to indicate those who are considered free from psychosis and even from psychoneurosis' (7, original emphasis). The debate as to whether the psychopath is 'mad or bad' continues to rage, and the argument is largely related to the legal conception of 'insanity'. Insanity denotes whether a person can be held responsible in law for their actions and experts are split as to the culpability of the psychopath. The aberrant acts of the psychopath do not derive from unconquerable urges or a break with reality, but rather 'from a cold, calculating rationality combined with a chilling inability to treat others as thinking, feeling human beings' (Hare, *Without Conscience* 5). Such control and rationality suggests culpability, yet how culpable can a person be when their behaviour is dictated by a biological disorder? What is clear is that psychopathy is largely untreatable; there is no cure or therapy that has been shown to be effective and, whilst patients present as 'sane', clinical tests reveal their brains to work very differently to those of the broader population.

Despite the inroads made by Cleckley, the term psychopath continued to be used interchangeably with 'sociopath' until the publication of the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)* in 1980. In an attempt to end the subjective and inconsistent diagnostic practices previously in use, psychopathy was renamed 'antisocial personality disorder' and 'diagnostic criteria that were relatively objective and noninferential' (Lykken 3) were introduced. Focus shifted away from personality traits and onto social deviance, as this was easier to categorise and therefore helped to remove the reliance that earlier diagnostic

criteria had on the subjective impressions of clinicians and the self-reporting of patients. However, the system is not universally popular and Robert Hare has described it as ‘a diagnostic category with good reliability but dubious validity, a category that [lacks] congruence with other, well-established conceptions of psychopathy’ (‘Psychopathy and Antisocial’ 39). In 1991, Hare published his own clinical rating scale for psychopathy, the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R). The system was adopted worldwide (although it is typically used in conjunction with *DSM* in America and a combination of *DSM* and the World Health Organisation’s *ICD Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders* in Europe) and, as Patrick has noted, its publication ‘has led to a surge of interest and activity’ (xiv) in the field. The PCL-R combines a rating scale with an in-depth interview and case-history information to provide a nuanced view of the patient and their actual and potential offending behaviour. Significantly, the PCL-R appears to reveal the shortcomings of the *DSM*’s tendency to view psychopathy and antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) as one and the same, with Hare claiming that it proves that ‘[m]ost psychopaths...meet the criteria for ASPD, *but most individuals with ASPD are not psychopaths*’ (‘Psychopathy and Antisocial’ 40, original emphasis). In the interests of clarity, then, this study will exclusively use the term psychopathy when referring to the disorder, rather than following current naming trends.

My key area of interest in this study relates to empathetic response, particularly the dissonance created by reader engagement with characters who are themselves incapable of empathy. As lack of empathy is a defining feature of psychopathy, I shall therefore largely limit my analysis to characters who exhibit psychopathic traits. In order to distinguish psychopathy from other personality disorders, I will refer to the PCL-R clinical rating system rather than DSM-IV. In clinical practice, the PCL-R is administered in two parts, a semi-structured interview and a review of the subject’s case files and personal history. The

clinician rates the subject against a list of twenty psychopathic characteristics (summarised below) which cover emotional and interpersonal traits and socially deviant behaviours; a score between 0 (non-psychopathic) and 40 (prototypical psychopath) is then produced. I should of course point out that I am neither a trained psychologist nor an expert in psycho-diagnosis in forensic settings, and I have received no formal training in administering this test. However, as I noted in the Introduction, I am examining literary constructions rather than writing clinical case studies and my ‘diagnosis’ of characters is necessarily limited. When assessing a fictional character’s propensity towards psychopathy it is not possible to conduct an interview and there are no clinical case notes to consult. However, this does not devalue the exercise; full clinical diagnosis of fictional constructs is neither necessary nor instructive. It is enough that the basic character traits are identified and that one can distinguish the psychopaths, who are incapable of the empathy this study is concerned with, from the non-psychopaths who may be displaying other signs of mental aberrance. My evaluation of the characters analysed in this study is based on the summarised PCL-R checklist provided by Hare in his book, *Without Conscience* (1993), which I have reproduced below.

According to Hare, prototypical psychopaths exhibit the following traits:

**Emotional/Interpersonal**

- glib and superficial
- egocentric and grandiose
- lack of remorse or guilt
- lack of empathy
- deceitful and manipulative

**Social Deviance**

- impulsive
- poor behaviour controls
- need for excitement
- lack of responsibility
- early behaviour problems

- shallow emotions

- adult antisocial behaviour

(Hare, *Without Conscience* 34)

On the emotional and interpersonal side of the scale, psychopaths could be described as lacking humanity in that they appear to be devoid of empathy, self-awareness and guilt. Indeed, forensic psychiatrist J. Reid Meloy has suggested that the psychopath is in fact a predator; a human functioning from the 'reptilian brain'. According to Paul MacLean's theory of the triune brain, the reptilian brain, which is composed of the upper brain stem and cerebellum, is primarily concerned with physical survival. Significantly, it also plays a crucial role in establishing social dominance. Some clinicians believe that, in the psychopathic subject, this primitive brain takes precedence over the higher functioning neocortex, which gives us reason, and the limbic system, which is responsible for emotion. Reptiles lack a limbic system and, like the psychopath, have no capacity for emotion or empathy. In their essay, 'The Internal World of Psychopaths', Meloy and Carl B. Gacono explain how their study revealed

psychopaths...[to have] little interest in others as whole objects...People were part-objects...defined by the psychopaths' present desires...Our psychopaths were pathologically narcissistic, grandiose, and self-focused individuals...who unconsciously identified with predatory objects...Their relationships were defined by dominance, not affection. (104)

When considered in relation to literary studies, this lack of empathy becomes extremely interesting. As Suzanne Keen points out, '[t]here is no question...that readers feel empathy with (and sympathy for) fictional characters and other aspects of fictional worlds' (vii), yet it is difficult to see how one can empathise and identify with a character who is himself

incapable of empathy. If empathy and identification are both a goal and reward of reading literature, then we are left with a striking ambivalence which needs to be explored.

### 1.3 Reading, Immersion and Identification

The cultural fascination with aberrant figures is perhaps easier to understand than the personal one; whether it is based in a desire to understand the workings of the psychopathic mind, a perverse delight in our fear of the aberrant other, or, as Simpson suggests, the provision of a figure of darkness that we can unite against (7), it seems clear that the collective cultural imaginary revels in depictions of humanity that are recognisable yet distorted. In his article, 'Cozying Up to the Psychopath that Lurks Deep Within', Bruce Weber quotes the forensic psychiatrist Ronald Markman, who has suggested that our identification with filmic psychopaths is based on our awareness that they are lacking a superego, or conscience. Markman explains that the conscience typically develops between the ages of two and seven, so identification with the psychopath is based on our recognition that '*We were born that way, without any superego...We're all psychopaths under the skin*' (np, my emphasis). With literature, as opposed to film, however, the process of engagement is perhaps a little more complicated. Film is by nature spectatorial but, as readers, we may be called upon to think someone else's thoughts and feel their emotions; this sees us engaging with, and trying to understand, others – an act the psychopath is incapable of. In order to explore this phenomenon fully, we must first examine how literary identification, immersion and engagement are achieved. This is complicated by the relative neglect of these issues in twentieth century literary study, as although these matters are addressed to some degree by reader response theories and

psychoanalysis (which I will discuss shortly), the mechanics of empathetic engagement with fictional constructs are less well-defined.

The scholarly pursuit of a pseudo-scientific objectivity in criticism saw many schools of thought attempt to eradicate discussion of emotional responses to literature, as Marie-Laure Ryan notes:

[e]motional participation in the fate of imaginary characters was accepted as a natural response to literature until textualist approaches overtook realist paradigms and dissolved the human essence of characters into actantial roles or aggregates of textually specified features...In the heyday of structuralism and deconstruction, it became heretical even to mention the phenomenon of emotional response. (148)

Despite such efforts to the contrary, the reality of literature's powerful effect on the reader endured; one of the key pleasures of literature remains its ability to move us, immerse us in an alternative reality, or cause us to empathise or identify with another. This is no cheap trick; the Oxford English Dictionary defines empathy as '[t]he power of projecting one's personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation'. In creating an empathetic connection between the reader and the characters, the novelist is able to imbue the text with a rich and complex heteroglossia.

Some of the pleasures of literature depend on the fact that 'in reading we think the thoughts of another person' (Iser, *Act of Reading* 126) and it follows that our proximity to the consciousness of another should also bring us into close emotional contact with them. Interestingly, identification does not depend on us reading about characters that are exactly like us; scant details of disposition, location and narrative situation are often sufficient to forge a connection or initiate engagement. Ryan explains this phenomenon via the

psychological concept of ‘mental simulation’, which she describes as ‘a form of counterfactual reasoning by which the subject places himself in another person’s mind’ (111). One of the key benefits of this process for the novelist is that it encourages the reader to understand and engage with characters they might normally find abhorrent. Creating this experience is a challenge no less for the writer than for the reader, whom Virginia Woolf defied to ‘welcome representation of unfamiliar, disconcerting, and even frightening thoughts and feelings’ (qtd. in Keen 59).

For Keen, the risk-free opportunity to engage with transgressive figures is one of the key advantages of fiction. She explains:

Novels can provide safe spaces within which to see through the eyes of the psychopath, to occupy the subject position of the oppressive racist, to share the brutalizing past of the condemned outcast...Such serious literary experimentation with inhabiting the perspective of stigmatized or repulsive others may play on readers’ appetites for vicious imagery or play with taboos, but it has not been generally understood as a corrupting aspect of narrative. (131)

However, as Keen points out, ‘character identification is not a narrative technique (it occurs in the reader, not in the text), but a consequence of reading that may be precipitated by the use of particular techniques of characterization’ (93). This standpoint invokes the reader-response criticism of Wolfgang Iser, who held that meaning existed not in the text itself, but in a dialectic relationship between the reader, the text and their cultural context. In his theory of aesthetic response, he argues that the reader is not the passive consumer of meaning, but its active producer. Guided by the author, the reader is free to construct his or her own, historically contingent interpretation of the text, drawing on his or her cultural,

social and personal background and beliefs. Iser explains: ‘It is called aesthetic response because, although it is brought about by the text, it brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader, in order to make him adjust and even differentiate his own focus’ (*Act of Reading* x). Significantly, Iser saw the reader engaged not just in making meaning from what was present in the text, but also from what was absent. By necessity, no story can ever be told in its entirety so it is littered with blanks and negations which the reader must negotiate as s/he works through the text. As connections are made between the elements, subject positions are revealed and subtle meanings made clear; ‘[n]egation and blanks as basic constituents of communication are thus enabling structures that demand a process of determining which only the reader can implement. This gives rise to the subjective hue of the text’s meaning’ (Iser, *How to do Theory* 68). For Iser, this reveals the duality of ‘the literary work with its two poles: the artistic and the aesthetic. The artistic refers to the text created by an author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader, the interaction of which unfolds the work’s potential’ (ibid.).

The novelistic techniques employed by the author manipulate and guide the reader through the lacunae and towards the relevant positions of identification and empathy. Narrative situation, which the *Dictionary of Narratology* describes as the ‘mediating process through which the narrated is presented’ (Prince 64), is a key tool in engendering empathy, as it determines narrative perspective and focalization. Of the many techniques for representing consciousness in fiction, it is widely accepted that the internal perspectives (such as the direct discourse of first person narration, free indirect discourse, and shifting authorial narration that omnisciently reveals the inner lives of a number of characters) are the most successful at achieving character identification and reader empathy. Despite this, ‘[f]or immersion to retain its intensity, it needs a contrast of narrative modes, a constantly renegotiated distance from the narrative scene’ (Ryan 137).

A varied mode of representation, such as a third person narration detailing a character's thoughts, feelings and experiences, therefore tends to be most successful at maintaining immediacy and interest. David Lodge explains: '[t]he discourse is...both objective and subjective, simultaneously...One might say that the diction is mostly subjective, belonging to [the character's] consciousness, and the syntax is objective' (33).

However, narrative situation and its perspectival subtypes don't always engender identification and empathy in the reader, even when internal perspectives are given. Joyce Carol Oates's *Zombie* (1995), for instance, is a richly nuanced text which offers the scholar of poetics an excellent case study for the discussion of narrative situation, reading position, and their impact on the reader. It will form an integral part of the discussion that follows in sections 1.3 to 1.8. *Zombie* is a first person account of a serial killer's 'projects', yet we remain at a remove from the text – and especially from the aberrant psychopath, Quentin P.<sup>10</sup> Such narrative distance, despite the use of what are usually identificatory techniques, suggests that there is more at play and that a complex hierarchy of reading positions, differentiated by the psychological distance between the reader and the text, exists. These range from an outside viewing position to oneness with the character(s), and can broadly be categorised as spectatorship, imaginative involvement and entrancement. These reading positions and their effects are explored in detail in sections 1.4 to 1.7 which follow.

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<sup>10</sup> Quentin's name nods to the other famous Quentin in American literature, Quentin Compson, whose mental collapse is detailed in Section 2.3 of this thesis. The name carries with it heteroglot meanings, creating in the dialogic, which colour our reception of the text. See pages 80 and 67 respectively for discussion of these phenomena.

## 1.4 Spectatorship

Spectatorship can be construed as the basic mode of reception for literary, theatrical or televisual/filmic texts. It situates the reader or viewer outside of the narrative, as an observer who does not interact with the diegesis. Spectatorship is therefore a distanced mode of reception which does not demand a response or engagement from the reader, although s/he may like or dislike particular characters, or feel excited, moved or repulsed by the text. The main motivation in engaging with texts that place us in a spectatorial position seems to be the satisfaction of curiosity; we want to know what happens, so we keep on reading or watching or viewing. Novels which place the reader in the position of observer or spectator are generally written in the third person, and the technique can be found in works ranging from Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838) to J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (comprising seven novels, published between 1997 and 2007).

Mary Astor's *The Incredible Charlie Carewe* (1960), which was hailed by Cleckley as 'the most realistic and successful of all portrayals of the psychopath' (195), is a good example of standard spectatorship in psychopath fiction. It uses a heterodiegetic narrator which keeps the reader at a distance from the text and, although the reader does respond to the various characters, s/he does not engage with them on an empathetic level. The text's poetics quickly reveal the dual poles of attraction and repulsion at work in the psychopathic figure. Charlie is highly intelligent, handsome, rich and charismatic. He is also glib and superficial, callous, impulsive, unemotional and lacking in affect. The novel opens with a hungover Charlie waking up in a car he has stolen and crashed when drunk; his insouciance and good humour, even when blaming the incident on the innocent owner of the car, brings the reader on-side as s/he anticipates a text rich in excitement and amusement. When the focus shifts to the young Charlie, we are struck by his innocence; the incidents which worry his father and older sister, such as trying to place play money on

the collection plate at church instead of a real five dollar bill, appear to be childish pranks more indicative of immaturity than malevolence or criminal intent. The reader's complacency is shattered, however, when the text confronts him or her with a shocking glimpse of Charlie's fledgling psychopathy. At a lavish Carewe family party, Charlie slips away down the beach with another boy and his sister, sensing trouble, follows shortly afterwards:

They rounded the sentinel rocks, plashing through a strip of wave that seemed to slide ahead of them, reaching to point to the scene on the edge of Berry Pie. Fifteen feet away, Virginia and Jeff froze, unable to move or make a sound. Charlie was on top of Roger, holding his ears in his hands, rhythmically banging the now unconscious boy's head on the side of a rock. There was absolutely no savagery in the action, no passion or hatred, no viciousness. He looked up briefly as he saw Virginia and Jeff and called out a smiling 'Hi!' and then went back to his task. Firmly, purposefully, as though he were occupied in cracking a coconut. In the seconds before movement came back to the paralyzed observers another wave whispered up to the two boys and receded with pink in its foam. (27-28)

Here, the text's poetics demonstrate the gulf which exists between 'normal' subjectivity and the aberrant psychopath, with the 'strip of wave' marking the distance and 'point[ing] to the scene'. The reader, like Virginia and Jeff, looks on in horror at the unexpected and horrifying tableau. The psychopath's terrifying lack of passion or aggression suggests that the attack is motiveless; a crime motivated by a blinding rage and momentary loss of control would be easier for the reader to understand, but Charlie's lack of affect reveals his lack of humanity as it is commonly understood. The spectatorship mode places the reader

in a peripheral position; to some extent this lessens the impact of the violent spectacle – a narrative technique which facilitates the reader’s ongoing engagement with the text and allows the temporary suspension of moral judgement on the character (he is, after all, just twelve years old in this scene<sup>11</sup>). Yet the technique also heightens the horror, by setting Charlie literally and figuratively apart from both the reader and Virginia and Jeff, who function as examples of normal subjectivity in the narrative. For all its seeming simplicity, then, spectatorship can assist in the creation of a nuanced understanding of scene and character which shapes the reader’s response to the text as completely as the more involving modes of reception. Spectatorship’s distancing effect, created by heterodiegetic narration, typically precludes the reader from empathetic engagement with characters and can sometimes be seen as a ‘safe’ means of engaging with the fictional psychopath. The first person form which came to dominate psychopath fiction from the middle of the twentieth century onwards places the reader in direct proximity of the psychopathic consciousness and, whilst this has great dramatic potential, it suggests a state of ‘oneness’ with the psychopath which can be troubling to the reader. Aligning the reader with the psychopath, via the text’s poetics, inculcates him or her into the character’s ideology and this invokes feelings of complicity which can be distinctly uncomfortable.

However, first person narration does not guarantee an empathetic response and spectatorship does not always emanate from third person heterodiegetic narration, as Joyce

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<sup>11</sup> Later, when Jeff and Virginia discuss the incident, Jeff remarks that upon witnessing the scene he had not instantly considered Charlie a monster, but rather: ‘I felt pretty much the same as if I’d seen a four-year-old child with a knife in his hand, poking somebody’s eye out...what I mean is that Charlie didn’t even seem to *be* guilty – it was like maybe we were the guilty ones, but of just what, I don’t know’ (32). His unwillingness to categorise Charlie as evil at this point mirrors the reader’s own reticence and ambivalence. It also suggests the ‘mad or bad’ debate surrounding psychopathy, which I discuss on page 30 of this thesis.

Carol Oates's *Zombie* shows. The poetics of *Zombie* subvert the usual rules in that, despite using a typically identificatory first person technique and an intimate narrative form, the reader remains in a spectatorial position. The novella combines these involving techniques with a raft of other literary devices to create a distancing effect that denies an empathetic or identificatory response to the focalizing character. The text constantly challenges and frustrates readers' expectations. The version of first person narration introduced by the journal form feels and functions like third person narration, as it is a slightly more distanced narrative mode than the 'I' verbal form, where the 'I' relays the story personally to the reader. With the journal form, the reader is naturally placed on the outside of the narrative, surreptitiously looking in and although s/he has access to privileged information, it is not as a confidante of the focalizing character. So, despite the privileged access to the psychopathic figure that *Zombie*'s poetics grant to the reader, his or her understanding of the character remains shallow and limited. This reinforces the perception that when dealing with the psychology of a psychopath, the normal rules do not apply. *Zombie* demonstrates that it is not the mere presence of the psychopath which makes the text so compelling and unusual, but the way in which that presence is mediated. The homodiegetic first person narratorial form puts the psychopath in control, both of the material and of the reader.

As noted above, Oates uses a confessional journal form to tell her story from the perspective of the psychopathic Quentin P, a sex-obsessed serial killer (loosely based on Jeffrey Dahmer) intent on lobotomising his victims to create a 'zombie' who will satisfy his every need. Despite the access that the reader gets to Quentin's thoughts, his condition is such that he is unable to confront his own feelings, even in his private diary. The result is that the reader remains at an emotional and mental distance from him; there is no recognition of human traits and frailties shared by all. We react to Quentin's plans and actions with horror, and the passages detailing the torture, rape and eventual murder of his

victims are uncomfortable to read. What is interesting about Oates's technique is the fact that, having been granted unprecedented access to Quentin's thoughts and emotions via his diary, the reader expects to gain some insight into the psychopathic mind but finds instead that there is nothing that the average person can associate or identify with. Despite the unpleasure the reader experiences as s/he is faced with the shocking details of Quentin's crimes, s/he reads on in the hope of uncovering some kind of motive for his actions or some sense of his humanity, however warped. Yet what we get is nothing: Quentin does not seem to be motivated by hatred, rage or psychotic delusions; we cannot label him as evil or explain away his actions biologically. There's simply nothing there and this absence is demonstrated in the text by the unfinished sentences and thoughts that are alluded to but not revealed. The result of this technique is a compelling text which simultaneously draws readers in and pushes them away; cleverly playing with the conventions of narrative situation and our expectations as readers. Such stylistic devices allow Oates to constantly reinforce and increase the distance between Quentin and the reader, emphasizing the gulf between the psychopathic subject and the 'normal' individual. Our spectatorship is made all the more apparent as Oates ensures that readers are constantly aware that they are regarding an 'other', rather than a character in whom they can catch glimpses of themselves and of humanity at large.

### 1.5 Immersion

Immersion describes the process by which a reader gets absorbed in a book; it relies on the text offering a believable and engaging textual world 'to which the reader, spectator, or user can relate, and it must populate this space with individuated objects' (Ryan 15). The fictional reality that the author presents must be detailed enough to captivate the reader

both imaginatively and emotionally; a degree of mimetic skill is therefore required. Ryan distinguishes four degrees of immersion (98-99);<sup>12</sup> however, just two of these – imaginative involvement and entrancement – seem relevant to this discussion of the techniques relating to empathy and identification.

### Imaginative Involvement

Imaginative involvement describes the immersive state the reader reaches when s/he engages with the text but is also aware of stylistic and aesthetic qualities of the narrative techniques at play. *Zombie* creates just such an effect on the reader, as the confessional journal form draws one's attention to the actual writing of the narrative, an effect compounded by Quentin's curious illustrations, syntax and punctuation. The juxtaposition of the visual elements and the semantic content of the text combine to make the reader more aware of the literary medium, the diary form and the unconventional outlook of the fictional author. Similarly, the reader of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, remains cognitively split between immersion in the narrative world and aesthetic awareness of the author's poetics, in an attitude of what Ryan has termed 'epistemological awareness' (98). This bifurcated reading position does not detract from enjoyment of the text, but rather adds a complexity and richness which can enhance satisfaction.

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<sup>12</sup> The two modes I have omitted are 'concentration' and 'addiction'. Ryan defines concentration as the 'type of attention devoted to difficult, non-immersive works...[where] the textual world – if the text projects any – offers so much resistance that the reader remains highly vulnerable to the distracting stimuli of external reality' (98). Addiction 'covers two cases: (a) The attitude of the reader who seeks escape from reality but cannot find a home in the textual world because she traverses it too fast and too compulsively to enjoy the landscape. (b) The loss of the capacity to distinguish textual worlds, especially those of fiction, from the actual world' (98-99).

## Entrancement

Entrancement describes an even deeper level of immersion, whereby the reader is so deeply immersed in the diegesis that s/he loses all sense of the literary experience and begins to feel that s/he is actually living the action as it unfolds. Iser has argued that, in order to reach this level of entrancement, the reader must surrender him- or herself to the text and allow his or her own reality to temporarily retreat in favour of identification with the fictional reality, so that both 'selves' co-exist:

To imagine what has been stimulated by aesthetic semblance entails placing our thoughts and feelings at the disposal of an unreality, bestowing on it a semblance of reality in proportion to a reducing of our own reality. For the duration of the performance we are both ourselves and someone else.

(*Prospecting* 244)

Despite the depth of the reader's immersive encounter with the fictional world, however, s/he remains aware that the experience is not rooted in reality. Readers of works as disparate as Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* and Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* often experience a level of entrancement which can effect physical symptoms of engagement, such as tears at moments of high emotional drama or a pounding heart and shortness of breath as narrative tension mounts. The depth of the immersive experience is fixed, however, by the reader's awareness that they are participating in a fiction, as Victor Nell points out:

...totally committed attention may heighten the reality of the cathected object so as to transfigure both the object and the observer...the reader feels that he or she has been transported to another place, which, though real, is

known to be false, since there is still an observing ego, distinct from the participating ego. (215)

The 'split subject' of the reader does not lose sight of his or her own self during the period of entrancement, but at some level remains aware of the process of reading itself. In identifying that the ego is at the centre of this process, Nell invokes Freud's influential essay on the psychology of literary creation, 'The Relation of the Poet to Daydreaming' (1908), in which Freud argues that 'His Majesty, the Ego, [is] the hero of all daydreams and novels' (qtd. in Nell 207). The role of ego identification is central to reader enjoyment of, and emotional and psychic participation in, literary and visual texts and therefore to the process of identification itself. This phenomenon will be explored more thoroughly in section 1.8; first, however, I must address the issue of emotional participation which is so central to this study.

### 1.6 Empathy

Immersive texts lead to an empathetic engagement between the reader and the characters of a text. This kind of emotional immersion occurs when readers become so engrossed in a narrative that they feel as though they understand fictional characters on an intimate, emotive level. In such circumstances, the depth of understanding readers gain of the feelings, thoughts and motives of the characters leads them to unconsciously project themselves into the narrative where they find themselves feeling the emotions of the characters as they occur in the fictive world (although these emotions are of course supplied or projected by the reader, rather than the text).

Empathy should be distinguished from sympathy, which is where readers feel *for* characters, rather than *with* them. In Oates's *Zombie*, for instance, we feel sympathy for Quentin's unsuspecting victim, Squirrel, as the killer prepares to abduct him, but we do not empathise with him as we have not reached the necessary immersive depth. By contrast, when reading Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, we experience Raskolnikov's terror and suffering as he tries to come to terms with his actions and evade capture for his crimes. The reason for this, I suggest in section 2.2, is the fact that Dostoevsky takes the reader deep into Raskolnikov's mind and explores the interplay between his conscious and unconscious drives. We therefore experience not just his aberrance but also his humanity, via projected emotions of anguish, rage, guilt, jealousy and fear which we feel vicariously.

### 1.7 Identification

Identification is an effect of imaginative involvement or entrancement which can perhaps best be described as the process by which immersion and empathy combine to such an extent that the reader mentally begins to merge temporarily with a fictional character. Jonathan Cohen, in his study of viewer engagement with screen media characters, describes identification as

an imaginative experience in which a person surrenders consciousness of his or her own identity and experiences the world through someone else's point of view. Identification leads to the (temporary) adoption of an external point of view and to viewing the world through an alternative social reality. The varying intensity of identification reflects the extent to which one exchanges his or her own perspective for that of another and is able to forget him- or herself. (248)

A similar process also occurs during engagement with literary characters. However, what Cohen does not mention is that identification – this swapping of our own beliefs for those of a fictional other – is not a willed conscious act, but seems to occur independently. Furthermore, this shift in point of view tends not just to be confined to those moments when we are actively engaged in the reading process but lingers, affecting our thought processes in between reading sessions and remaining, however briefly, once we have finished the book. This effect may be as innocuous as being more aware of etiquette after reading a comedy of manners such as Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778) or, in the case of psychopath fiction, it can be altogether more disturbing.

When reading *American Psycho*, for instance, we can find ourselves involuntarily thinking Bateman's thoughts about vagrants as we go about our daily life, even though they may be diametrically opposed to our own, more humanitarian beliefs. We become inured to the violence of the novel, even experiencing a 'blood-lust'<sup>13</sup> during reading as we race through long and tedious expositions of the musical achievements of Huey Lewis and the News to reach the next brutal slaying. The effect seems to be caused, at least in part, by the level of contact we have with Bateman's psyche. We are exposed to the minutiae of his inner and outer life, everything from his taste in music to the shower gel he prefers and his exact routine in the gym. The triggers for his outbursts are everyday occurrences, such as his jealousy over the superior business cards of his peers or his rage at being unable to get on the Stairmaster when the gym is busy. These glimpses of normality allow us to recognise Bateman as a human being we can identify with; we empathise with his disgust at the selfishness and gross materialism of late twentieth century American society, whilst at the same time participating in that society via the text. Despite this, the reader is not moved to express this disgust via the kinds of murderous and sadistic acts that Bateman

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<sup>13</sup> For more on this phenomenon see pages 50-51 of this thesis.

engages in; there remains an awareness of the separation between the character and ourselves. As William Flesch explains, in his discussion of the ‘biological components of fiction’, our identification is rooted in vicarious enjoyment of the text rather than a belief that we are the character:

When we try to see through their [characters’] eyes it becomes vivid that their eyes are not ours, and we are brought to an intense awareness of the difference between us – the very opposite of identification...If I can identify with what I see, then my vicarious experience comes first, and identification is based on it. Such identification has nothing to do with some illusion that I *am* the character I care about. (15-16)

Although Flesch is correct to distinguish between the character and the reader in this way, he falls short of explaining what *does* occur during the identificatory process; that is, the fact that his ‘vicarious experience’ is based on a complex psychological process concerned with the fulfilment of his forbidden wishes. This is clearly an important distinction and one I will be examining in greater detail as this study progresses. Psychological energy spent repressing these wishes is given respite when they are explored in this way; although the wishes are not literally fulfilled, experiencing them vicariously via the text leads to a satisfying release of tension without any of the risk typically associated with the taboo.

### 1.8 Conscious Motivations vs. Repressed Desires

As noted previously (section 1.3), identification is not a narrative technique but a phenomenon that occurs in the reader, having been triggered by textual effects. It arises at the juncture between the conscious act of reading and the imagining of the narrative in the

reader's head. The tension this creates seems to be particularly acute when we are dealing with texts which explore aberrant psychology, as the engagement with the reader's sense of right and wrong raises awareness of the interplay between the ego, the id and the superego. Freud explores this notion in his essay 'Psychopathic Characters on the Stage' (1905-1906), in which he theorises the appeal of drama. He identifies the pleasure of drama as essentially narcissistic, in that the hero (or anti-hero, as is usually the case with psychopath fiction) gives the viewer or reader someone to identify with. Via this figure, the viewer can imagine her- or himself centre stage and at the heart of the action, in a safe, risk-free environment. S/he can experience the suffering that the drama is concerned with, whilst at the same time being spared the anguish such suffering would entail in real life. So far, so in tune with Flesch's argument of vicarious enjoyment. However, I would argue that the situation is slightly different with fiction (and particularly with texts exploring aberrant figures such as the psychopath), in that the experience *can* entail suffering.<sup>14</sup> Reading novels like *Zombie* and *American Psycho* can be an acutely uncomfortable and disturbing experience, due to the extreme subject matter the texts are concerned with. Yet at the same time these texts are compelling; the reader, driven by the desire to satisfy his or her curiosity about what will happen next in the narrative, reads on despite the discomfort. The gratification the reader derives from the experience may originate from his or her appreciation of the narrative technique, or the author's satiric swipe at contemporary society, and it could equally arise from the satisfaction of the 'blood-lust' that often develops during engagement with this kind of material. The question of 'blood-lust' is interesting in that it's based on the pursuit of a particular kind of vicarious sadistic pleasure, specifically the enjoyment of outrageous and unsavoury events that most readers

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<sup>14</sup> Suffering is, of course, possible with drama, even with the potential for catharsis. However, I contend that it is more pronounced during engagement with fiction due to the nature of the act of reading. As I noted in my discussion of Bernstein's theory of material culture (see page 18), the very act of turning the page interpellates the reader into the text's ideology. Reading position and narrative technique can also heighten the effect, as they create a closer mode of reception.

would rightly balk from engagement with in real life. The process sees the reader identifying with key passages and aspects of plot and participating in them without risk, culpability or even acknowledgement of the process at play. As Elizabeth Dalton explains, in her discussion of the unconscious in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*:

The paradox of these books is that they present forbidden fantasies rather openly, and yet because the material is contained within ritualized literary-cultural conventions, and manipulated in a superficial and mechanical way, without much relation to reality or any sense of the ambiguity of lived experience, the nature of the fantasy is concealed from the naive reader...One is permitted to enjoy in fantasy the gratification of forbidden wishes while paying little or nothing in conflict and guilt. (30)

Dalton's theory certainly seems applicable to psychopath fiction, where the reader engages with characters and events which s/he would find reprehensible in real life. The 'conflict and guilt' felt by the reader of psychopath fiction may increase commensurate with the salaciousness and extremity of the material, but dissonance is mediated by a combination of the text's poetics and the prevalence and relative acceptability of psychopath narratives in society – Dalton's 'ritualized literary-cultural conventions' – which highlight the fictionality of the challenging material.

Freud suggests that dramas depart from the psychological and become psychopathological when 'the suffering in which we are to share and from which we are to derive pleasure is no longer a conflict between two almost equally conscious motivations, but one between conscious and repressed ones' ('Psychopathic Characters' 147). The viewer or reader's satisfaction in watching such a struggle, Freud argues, derives from the fact that, like the character, the spectator is neurotic. The release or recognition of the

repressed desire creates pleasure in the neurotic which is not felt by the non-neurotic subject. Freud gives as his example Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and bases the repressed desire in the Oedipus complex which he argues is common to all people and therefore recognisable as a point of identification, allowing the audience to muse that 'we are victims of the same conflict as he' (ibid.). I believe we can extrapolate from this to include (with regards to the literary psychopath narratives this thesis explores) the fleeting and repressed 'psychopathic' desires that each person has, such as the wish to kill those who harm or annoy them, or the desire to please oneself regardless of the impact those actions may have on others. For Freud, the pleasure of psychopathological (by which he means any kind of mental disturbance, rather than the tightly defined psychopathy that this study is concerned with) texts lies in this struggle with the repressed; if there is no struggle then an empathetic reaction to the text is impossible.

This sense of struggle also goes some way towards explaining why readers push through the unpleasure of reading graphic scenes of anal rape in *Zombie*, or misogynistic brutality in *American Psycho*. Reader resistance to such scenes strains the empathetic response the texts have previously engendered, yet the reader carries on. This partial or limited suspension of moral sanction is disturbing, so what is the meaning of it? Is this a twentieth century phenomenon born of an age which saw the certainties of the past give way to the unimaginable horrors of two World Wars and a desensitized, brutalized modernity? Or is there something more instinctive and primal at play? The attraction of reading such material is based on the reader's contact with matters which are usually taboo or prohibited. Freud touches on this, although he does not elaborate, when he notes that 'there are many things that could afford no enjoyment in reality, but can do so in the play of fantasy, and many excitations that are in themselves painful, but can give pleasure to the writer's audience' ('Creative Writer and Daydreaming' 26). The pleasure derived from

unsavoury material seems to spring from the reader's latent sadism and masochism, which Freud refers to as 'two excellent examples of a mixture of the two classes of instinct, of Eros and aggressiveness' ('Anxiety' 138). In his lecture, 'Anxiety and Instinctual Life', Freud argues that every impulse consists of a combination of these instincts and that any imbalance in the interplay between the two can lead to psychic tension and discomfort. The readers of *Zombie* or *American Psycho* indulge their masochistic urges by reading through the unpleasure of the most brutal scenes, sating their appetite for tragedy whilst at the same time vicariously inflicting suffering on the victims of the texts by their complicity in the acts committed. For Freud, sadism – and its aggressive outlets – functions primarily as a defence against self-injury by directing pain outwards. However, 'aggressiveness may not be able to find satisfaction in the external world because it comes up against real obstacles. If this happens it will perhaps retreat and increase the amount of self-destructiveness holding sway in the interior' ('Anxiety' 138). Such obstacles may be real or imagined and, for the average law-abiding, morally upstanding citizen, will relate to a wider culture of self- and societal censorship. Literature, therefore, offers a socially and morally acceptable outlet for the sadistic, aggressive drives which the subject cannot otherwise exercise or even acknowledge. Literary technique can help the reader to overcome their natural repulsion towards other people's fantasies whilst indulging their own forbidden pleasure in acts that they consciously find abhorrent. These drives can remain repressed, whilst being exercised in a controlled fashion that offers no danger to the reader or to others. The release or recognition of the repressed desire creates pleasure in the neurotic reader (and, of course, we are all neurotic to some degree or another), as Freud explains: 'the real enjoyment of a literary work derives from the relaxation of tensions in our minds. Maybe this effect is due in no small measure to the fact that the writer enables

us, from now on, to enjoy our own fantasies without shame or self-reproach' ('Creative Writer and Daydreaming' 33).

However, it is hard to imagine the average reader fantasising about such abhorrent acts as we find in novels like *American Psycho* or *Zombie*; the levels of twisted, sadistic violence and depravity seem too pronounced for a 'normal', non-psychopathic subject to engage in, even at the level of fantasy. Something more is at play. When confronted with such texts, the spectrum of narrative identification runs from the aggressor to the victim and the reader must find his or her own position on that spectrum as he or she negotiates the material. Literary technique may push us towards identification with the psychopath, even whilst we feel sympathy for the victim of their crimes. Yet, as the narratives typically deny us as much access to the psyches of the victims as to the psychopaths, our feelings of sympathy cannot develop as fully as our empathy for, or identification with, the psychopathic figure who is perpetrating the crimes. The reader therefore feels helpless unpleasure when reading of the victim's suffering. Projective identification, where the reader subconsciously projects his or her own unpleasant, repressed drives or desires onto another, can help us to cope with these feelings and may add further explanation for reader engagement with the fictional psychopath. This ego defence mechanism, posited by Melanie Klein in 1946, involves a complex process of projection and introjection, where the projected 'bad' elements of the self are then reincorporated when the subject identifies with the object s/he has imaginatively modified. Klein argued that projection 'originates from the deflection of the death instinct outwards...[helping] the ego to overcome anxiety by ridding it of danger and badness' (181) and it is the active element of the process which is important. As Charles Rycroft explains, projective identification 'creates the illusion of control over the object and enables the subject to deny his powerlessness over it and to gain vicarious satisfaction from its activities' (68-69). This process allows the reader of

psychopath fiction to simultaneously disavow his or her unacknowledged instinctual aggression and exercise it by proxy; and this seems to go some way towards explaining the complex psychic manoeuvres taking place during engagement with the literary psychopath.

When considered in this light, reader fascination with, and vicarious enjoyment of, psychopath narratives become easier to understand. Through them, the reader is able to explore his or her repressed desires and obtain the release that the (subconscious) recognition of these desires brings. As Glyn White notes, such texts present the reader with an escape from the restrictions of society ‘through which the reader may avoid responsibility for the wish fulfilment obtained’ (7); crucially ‘the literary work, like a dream, represents the fulfilment of...forbidden wishes, but in a way that disguises their true nature so that both the repressing tendency and the wish are satisfied’ (Dalton 10). The reader of texts such as *American Psycho*, then, is able to satisfy his or her basest, most unspeakable desires in a safe and guilt-free manner (the possibility of counter or resistant reading is also scripted in) that affords release without the risk of harm to self or others and, perhaps most importantly, without the reader having to confront or acknowledge the desires themselves. The novel’s interest, then, goes beyond what Femi Oyeboode describes as ‘the intrinsic fascination that we all have for how the mind works, either in health or illness’ (142) and is engaged instead with the satisfaction of deep-seated, forbidden desires and the pleasure which accompanies the release or recognition of the repressed – evidence, perhaps, of Markman’s suggestion that there’s a little bit of the psychopath in each of us.

## Chapter Two

### Narrative Modes for Representing Consciousness in Fiction

In the introduction to her seminal work, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, Dorrit Cohn talks of ‘the paradox that narrative fiction attains its greatest “air of reality” in the representation of a lone figure thinking thoughts she will never communicate to anyone’ (7). She cites Käte Hamburger’s theory that the successful representation of a character’s interiority is what differentiates fiction from reality and facilitates the construction of a fictional reality. For Hamburger, the ‘semblance of life is produced only by the person as a living, thinking, feeling, and speaking subject...it is language alone which is capable of producing the semblance of life’ (*The Logic of Literature* 59). She explores how it is the verbs of ‘inner action, such as to think, to reflect, to believe, to intend, to feel, to hope, and so forth’ (82) which create these effects (often via the narrated monologue), but that the ‘real life’ individual can never use these verbs authoritatively about another; we can only truly ‘know’ our own consciousness. Ultimately, she concludes, ‘*Epic fiction is the sole epistemological instance where the I-originary (or subjectivity) of a third-person qua third-person can be portrayed*’ (83, Hamburger’s emphasis). This preoccupation with mimesis of human experience has been present in the novel since its rise in the eighteenth century, when a mood of social and psychological questioning, coupled with the growth of the reading public, precipitated demand for an ever-widening choice of narratives. Readers voraciously consumed fledgling depictions of consciousness and world views other than their own, and revelled in the opportunity to relate to an ever-widening selection of literary characters.

The modern novel first appeared during the Age of Sensibility (c.1701-1789), which straddled the Augustan ‘Age of Reason’ (c.1660-1740) and the Romantic period (c.1785-1832). The emphasis of the Sensibility novel was typically on the particular, rather than universals and generalities, and a preoccupation with the experience of the individual was manifested in a proliferation of eponymous heroes and heroines (e.g. *Robinson Crusoe*, *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, etc). The focus on the individual led to an increasing concern with representing consciousness in fiction. This can be seen in novels such as Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), often credited with being the first English novel, which provided ‘for the first time in the history of fiction...a hero whose day-to-day mental and moral life is fully shared by the reader’ (Watt 76). Building on Defoe’s successes, Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) added greater psychological depth to its characters, by creating fuller, more complex and more realistic characterisations than had previously been seen.

These early works often relied on first person techniques such as the memoir or journal (*Crusoe*) or the epistolary form (*Pamela*) which offered readers an insight into the minds of the characters without the need for authorial intervention. Readers receive the material ‘first-hand’ without the involvement of an authorial, or third person, narrator, making things more immediate. However, these techniques are not without their difficulties. As Anna Barbauld notes in her essay ‘Three Ways of Telling a Story’<sup>15</sup> (1804), since ‘what the hero cannot say, the author cannot tell’ (259), the memoir is limited to what the protagonist chooses to share with the reader; furthermore, the vibrancy and accuracy of recollections may be hampered by the time that has elapsed between their occurrence and retelling. Barbauld conceded that third person narration has advantages over first person narratives in that:

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<sup>15</sup> The ‘Three Ways’ that Barbauld identifies are the memoir, omniscient narration and the epistolary form.

The author relates himself the whole of the adventure...he can reveal the secret springs of actions, and let us into events in his own time and manner. He can be concise, or diffuse, according as the different parts of his story require it. He can indulge...in digressions, and thus deliver sentiments and display knowledge which would not properly belong to any of the characters. (258)

The omniscience of the third-person narrator, as Barbauld shows, allows him or her to shape and control the flow of information according to his own narrative agenda, thereby heightening tension for dramatic effect. The narrator's access to the thoughts and motivations of diverse characters is also an advantage, although Barbauld warns that, as 'his narration will not be lively, except he frequently drops himself and runs into dialogue' (ibid.), narrative interest is best maintained by the use of differentiated modes of discourse.

Indeed Barbauld saw that the realist writer faced problems with each of the existing narrative techniques and that new methods, combining the best elements of both first- and third person narration, were needed. This was achieved in the nineteenth century via combinations of what Wallace Martin has termed Barbauld's 'conceptual distinctions' between '*grammatical person or voice*', '*kinds of discourse*' and '*access to consciousness*' (131, original emphasis). The new methods of narration which developed led to increased interest in the question of point of view, and a number of competing terms came into usage. However, for Gérard Genette, writing in the early 1980s, terms such as 'narrative perspective', 'point of view', 'vision' and 'field' lacked precision. He felt that:

most of the theoretical works on this subject...suffer from a regrettable confusion between...*mood* and *voice*, a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and

the very different question *who is the narrator?* – or, more simply, the question *who sees?* And the question *who speaks?* (186)

Genette's solution to the problem was to introduce his own, more specific term: *focalization*. Focalization determines the way that a story gets told, with the focalizer the person perceiving the events being relayed. This simple semantic shift marked a dramatic departure from earlier narratological theories and, as Jonathan Culler has noted in his introduction to *Narrative Discourse*, Genette's '[i]nsistence on the difference between narration and focalization is a major revision of the theory of point of view' (10). In Genette's schema, the focalizer, who is often the narrator (although this is not always the case), can be a character from within the diegesis (homodiegetic narration) or be external to it (heterodiegetic narration). This was an important development and, as H. Porter Abbott observes,

Genette argued with much justice that the distinction between homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators is more adequate than that between first- and third-person narrators for specifying whether a narrator is inside or outside of the world of the story. (68)

Such distinctions are of great use to the literary critic, particularly one who is engaged in an historical survey of narratological techniques for mimesis of inner life. Narrative trends have changed over time as writers continue to experiment. Generally speaking, however, nineteenth century realism tended to favour heterodiegetic narration, whilst the modernist preoccupation with representing consciousness in fiction saw a proliferation of homodiegetic stream-of-consciousness techniques.

Central to all these techniques for the literary representation of consciousness is Cohn's formulation of the three modes of psycho-narration. Psycho-narration, says Cohn,

‘identifies both the subject-matter and the activity it denotes (*Transparent Minds* 11). She defines the three techniques for presenting consciousness in third person narratives as: ‘1. psycho-narration: the narrator’s discourse about a character’s consciousness [e.g. ‘Little Dorrit had sometimes thought, and now thought again as she retraced her steps up the staircase, that he had made his way too easily into her father’s house’ Dickens, *Little Dorrit* 427]; 2. quoted monologue: a character’s mental discourse [e.g. ‘Yesterday was one day, she thought, but I didn’t eat then. I haven’t eaten since.....and that night was the dance, and I didn’t eat any supper’ Faulkner, *Sanctuary* 88; original ellipsis]; 3. narrated monologue: a character’s mental discourse in the guise of the narrator’s discourse’ [‘He thought of fastening his door, but he could not raise his arm...and besides it would be no use! Fear crept like ice round his heart, tortured his nerves, numbed his spirit...’ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* 110; my emphasis, original ellipses]’ (ibid. 14). Cohn’s third person techniques can be equally applied to the study of narrative techniques for presenting consciousness in first person narratives, although the terms are slightly modified: ‘psycho-narration becomes self-narration...and monologues can now be either self-quoted, or self-narrated’ (ibid.).

Of course, not all novels seek to represent the consciousness of their characters; the nineteenth century third person novel typically shunned psycho-narration. But, in the absence of an exposition of inner life, how is the reader to engage with or understand figures in the text? The answer lies within the texts themselves, where ‘character portrayal is far more “contextual” than “intrinsic” (*Transparent Minds* 22). We can reach these ‘contextual’ truths by examining the broader narrative techniques employed in a novel. As Martin notes, American critics such as Cohn, Paul Hernadi and Roy Pascal placed great emphasis on the language of narrative and on how representations of speech and thought impact on narrative action and interaction between characters. Although the work of these

theorists is very different, collectively it led ultimately to an understanding that narration consists of three types of discourse: (1) ‘mimetic and diegetic, showing and telling’ and (2) ‘the relationships between characters, as well as [3] their relationship to the narrator. Each one can provide a perspective on the action just as the narrator does’ (Martin 143).

Narration can therefore be achieved either directly, via a character’s mind, or indirectly, by their reactions to the people around them and events as they unfold. None of the characters in a text exists in isolation. Mieke Bal argues that, in order to gain full understanding the careful reader must analyse both the subject and the object of focalization, as well as the relationship between them. For Bal, ‘a character-bound focalizer [sic]...brings about *bias* and *limitation*’ (105, original emphasis), and shifts from one focalizer to another can reveal a variety of different versions of the same event. These levels of interaction add deeper shades of meaning to the narrative, and are particularly important to the work of the Russian theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin.

In his influential work *The Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin explores the idea of ‘contextual character portrayal’ when he separates novelistic prose into three distinct groupings:

- I. The direct word, aimed directly at its object; the expression of the speaker’s ultimate semantic authority
- II. The objectivised word (the word of a represented character)
- III. The word oriented toward another person’s word (the double-voiced word)

(Unpaginated schematic, appears on the reverse of a photograph of Dostoevsky in between pages 164 and 165)

The original schematic contains detailed subcategories for groups II and III, but, following Simon Dentith's lead and in the interests of brevity, I have reproduced a simplified version here. Bakhtin's schema begins to introduce his notion of consciousness as subjective and multiple. As Dentith notes, Bakhtin insisted that 'consciousness can only realize itself, however provisionally, in dialogue with the other...truth only emerges in contact with, or anticipation of, another's truth' (44). In many ways this interaction mirrors the inter-relations between characters and truth that Cohn explores, although with an important distinction. For Bakhtin, truths are revealed when the different voices in the novel (each of which carries its own world view, temporally and socially created) collide to create new meanings. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan explains:

the act of narration does not represent the world directly. Rather, it represents modes of representation, possibilities of doubt and credence, in the worlds the characters inhabit. These may be filtered through a variety of narrators and points of view or through other forms of what Bakhtin calls "polyphony" and "heteroglossia". (*A Glance Beyond Doubt* 20)

In essence then, Cohn's psycho-narration deals with the internal dialogue of characters, whilst Bakhtin's polyphony and heteroglossia focus more on external dialogues and the way that they interact with and affect one another. Polyphony and heteroglossia can also have internal implications; as I shall show during my analysis of *Crime and Punishment* and Raskolnikov's fevered machinations (see page 102), external dialogues can affect interior dialogues, which in turn are manifested externally. Broadly speaking, though, Cohn is indispensable when dealing with modernist and postmodernist literature, whilst Bakhtin is particularly useful for dealing with nineteenth century texts where interiority is rare. His theories highlight the subtleties and richness of narrative discourse and help us to understand its myriad effects. Although he is probably best known for his work on

Dostoevsky, Bakhtin also wrote on Dickens's *Little Dorrit*. His essay 'Discourse in the novel', which appeared in his collection of essays *The Dialogic Imagination*, gives a detailed account of Dickens's use of heteroglossia. The methods that Bakhtin discusses in his essay have proved to be excellent tools for exploring how narrative techniques help us to accept and identify with aberrant figures. The next section of this study will therefore examine how Bakhtin's methods grant us a greater insight into the psychopathic villain at the heart of Dickens's eleventh novel, *Little Dorrit*.

### 2.1 Realist Representations: Charles Dickens and *Little Dorrit*

*Little Dorrit*'s villain is a psychopathic murderer and master-manipulator named Rigaud. Despite being a key figure in the narrative, he occupies a relatively marginal position in the text and the reader has little access to his psyche. Indeed, his isolation in the text mirrors his isolation from humanity and society. Much of the reader's knowledge of Rigaud is gleaned from the opinions of others; even his crimes occur beyond the diegesis as what J.C. Reid calls the 'picaresque elements of violence and exciting action' (25). Despite this, Rigaud's influence weighs heavily on the narrative: his acquittal for the brutal murder of his wife is a hot topic of conversation; he travels around Europe (without any obvious means of support) and provides a 'bridge' between many of the key characters and events; Cavalletto lives in constant fear of him, etc. The implication is that, even though Rigaud exists on the fringes of society, he can re-emerge at any time to wreak havoc.

Yet Rigaud is, in a way, one of the most enviable characters in the novel. He is mostly to be found singing and whistling, happy in his undertakings; quite at odds with the misery that attends the other characters. As Clennam trudges with heavier and heavier steps towards the Marshalsea, Rigaud seemingly floats through the narrative. He is not

bound by the figural prisons that entrap the other characters. Class, money and national boundaries do not hold him; he is of ‘no country’ and therefore not subject to any one set of societal rules. Whilst Amy Dorrit humbly submits to the status quo and Clennam fights against society, Rigaud, self-serving and vile though he is, is free. Interestingly for the narratologist, this freedom also exists on a metalevel whereby Rigaud is less subject to the constraints of plot than the other characters. He has far greater autonomy than everyone else and seems merely to please himself, regardless of narrative feasibility. His freedom from authorial powers reveal him to be a menacing and Gothic figure, whom even Dickens himself cannot contain. Like the monster in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Maturin’s Melmoth and Stoker’s Dracula, Rigaud cannot be second-guessed; his illimitability adds to the horror.

The narrative freedoms that Rigaud enjoys are interesting when considered in comparison to Clennam’s constrained, somewhat uptight, existence. As we shall see later on in this chapter, much has been made of the ‘doubling’ in *Little Dorrit*, with critics such as Elaine Showalter and Brian Rosenberg suggesting that Rigaud functions as Clennam’s ‘dark twin’. J. Hillis Miller talks of the ‘relationship between the imagining mind and its objects’ (ix), and how characters are projections of the author himself: ‘each imaginary man or woman is...a figure in the writer’s own private world of perception or memory, longing or fear...a novel is indeed the world refashioned into conformity with the inner structure of the writer’s spirit’ (ibid. x). It is possible to extrapolate from this that both characters are projections of Dickens himself. Clennam, perhaps the most sympathetic and rounded character in the text, is, as Reid notes, ‘a more complex character than Dickens usually drew, in that he is seen from the inside, if to a limited extent’ (39). Clennam has a strong moral code and a kind heart; he adheres to the rules of society, however limiting and uncomfortable that may be for him, and he is similarly constrained by the plot.

Conversely Rigaud, as Clennam's opposite, exists on the outside of decent society and narrative plot alike. If Clennam is a version of Dickens, Rigaud is Dickens 'othered'.<sup>16</sup>

Reid calls Rigaud 'the stock foreign villain of melodrama' (17) and, as M.H. Abrams notes, melodramatic characters are typically 'flat types...the villain a monster of malignity...[whose credibility] is sacrificed for violent effect' (110, Abrams's emphasis). Despite this, the characterisation of Rigaud is actually based on fact. In his introduction to the Oxford World Classics edition of *Little Dorrit*, Harvey Sucksmith tells us that Dickens modelled Rigaud on Pierre-François Lacenaire, a double murderer who was guillotined in 1836. Lacenaire, who began his criminal career at a very young age and claimed to have always known he was destined for the guillotine, courted the attention of the press and the public who were thrilled by his ghastly exploits. Like Rigaud, he was 'work-shy with genteel pretensions and took to a life of theft, extortion, forgery and murder for gain. He dressed well, affecting an elegant air and scrupulous politeness, and admired the Romantic theatre whose over-acting he imitated' (Sucksmith, 'Introduction' viii). Lacenaire was also an aspiring writer. His self-reflexive writings were devoured by a public eager to know more about a man who believed that 'murder ought to be defended and judged wholly on the basis of aesthetic, rather than legal or moral, criteria' (Black 113).<sup>17</sup> Indeed, commentators such as David Evans and Kate Griffiths have noted how his 'poems, memoirs and letters...written during his incarceration, depict a fascinating monster who

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<sup>16</sup> One is reminded here of the focus on 'man's dual nature' (48) in Robert Louis Stevenson's short story *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). The radical splitting of the selves in *Little Dorrit* retrospectively bears much resemblance to Stevenson's later tale and this highlights both the potency and the universality of the theme. Like Dickens, Stevenson (via his character, Jekyll) demonstrates a marked attraction to the dark side of human nature: '...when I looked upon that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome' (51).

<sup>17</sup> This focus on the aesthetics of murder would later be found in the works of Thomas Harris and Jeff Lindsay. Harris's Lecter delights in matching the aesthetic of his victims' murders to their 'crimes' as he perceives them. Lindsay's Dexter takes an almost painterly interest in crime scene aesthetics, particularly those of his brother, Brian, in the first novel.

takes a perverse pleasure in his criminal activity, imprisonment and impending execution’ (22).

Lacenaire appears to have exhibited many of the key traits of psychopathy, including egocentrism and grandiosity, lack of remorse or guilt, lack of empathy, deceitful and manipulative behaviour, early behavioural problems and criminal versatility. His detached attitude towards his crimes, coupled with his charm and flamboyant appearances in court, captivated his contemporaries. A lengthy article on Lacenaire, published in Dickens’s journal *All the Year Round* in 1861, describes how he ‘made some people shudder, attracted others, and found enthusiastic admirers...For more than two months, Paris would listen to and talk of nothing else than the adventures of Lacenaire’ (‘Lacenaire’ 417). That journals were still writing about his ‘adventures’, rather than brutal murders, some twenty-five years after his death shows not just Lacenaire’s lasting impact on popular culture, but also how he was romanticised and rendered attractive to generations of readers.

In his article ‘The Melodramatic Villain in *Little Dorrit*’, Sucksmith describes how both Lacenaire and Dickens’s depiction of Rigaud were heavily influenced by French Romantic theatre. Sucksmith considers Rigaud to be ‘powerfully realistic and, at the same time paradoxically enough, artificial...his falseness is dramatically presented’ (‘Melodramatic’ 82). As we saw in section 1.2, the true psychopath is eccentric and grandiose, lacks empathy and has shallow emotions. Personality often becomes performative, with psychopaths adopting the traits that will appeal to those they are attempting to manipulate. For Sucksmith, Dickens’s recognition of ‘the phenomenon of life attempting to imitate drama makes Rigaud a triumphant assertion of the true and vital hollowness that lies at the core of the psychopathic criminal’s theatrical yet authentic performance’ (ibid.). As noted above, Lacenaire similarly drew freely from Romantic

theatre in terms of his personal affectations. At his trial, he insisted on portraying himself as an artist – both as a poet and as a killer. In this he may have been influenced by Thomas de Quincey's 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' (1827) which was published shortly before Lacenaire's trial. However, the phenomenon of life-imitating-art-imitating-life was nothing new. As Black has noted:

Where authors like De Quincey, Stendhal, and Balzac based their criminal literature on actual murders, real-life murderers like Pierre-François Lacenaire and Jean-Baptiste Toppman were inspired by their readings of popular romantic fiction, and they in turn provided fresh models for more of the same. (11)

The similarities between the real life exploits of Lacenaire and the fictional Rigaud would not have been lost on the reading public of the 1860s. The intertextuality of Lacenaire/Rigaud and life/art invokes the Bakhtinian concept of the dialogic, where references of this kind cause the author and the reader to engage in a dialogue with the context in which they first encountered the thing being referred to (in this case, the story of Lacenaire). The dialogic represents a convergence of 'voices' and perspectives which engage and interact with each other to create new meanings. For Sue Vice, dialogism 'refers to the ceaselessly shifting power relations between words, their sensitivity to each other, and the relativizing force of their historically motivated clashes and temporary resolutions' (5). By drawing on popular culture and invoking Lacenaire, then, the characterisation of Rigaud inscribes upon the villain certain value judgements and shades of meaning. This enables the reader to connect with him on a deeper level, as they bring to the text their own understanding of his personality and the acts he may be capable of.

Cultural fascination with the grotesque and barbaric was quite common in the nineteenth century (and indeed today), as evidenced by the continuing popularity of ‘real crime’ narratives such as the Newgate Calendars. These were originally monthly bulletins detailing executions at the Newgate Prison in London, although by 1773 they had been gathered together and published in a bound edition entitled *The Newgate Calendar: The Malefactor’s Bloody Register*. Positioned as a chronicle of crime and retribution, it gave detailed accounts of London’s most shocking crimes and the subsequent capture and punishment of the perpetrators. Public hangings continued in England until the Capital Punishment Amendment Act of 1868 recommended that executions only be carried out within the confines of prison. Prior to that executions had provided a popular day out, attracting vast audiences of men, women and children. As Keith Hollingsworth shows, cultural fascination with crime, criminals and public executions was pervasive and drew admirers from all social strata:

The spectators were people of all conditions. Besides the simple curiosity-seekers and the roisterers, there were a few men of leisure...vulgarians of the middle class and large numbers of commonplace city dwellers whose bleak lives demanded excitement. The street children were there of themselves, and others were brought by their elders for a fright or a treat.

(4)

Dickens, who attended a number of executions in a journalistic capacity, was a vocal opponent of capital punishment. He viewed it as a vehicle of social injustice, with grave effects on what Hollingsworth has called ‘the psychology of crime’ (223).

However, we know from John Forster, Dickens’s friend and biographer that, even as a boy, Dickens had ‘a profound attraction of repulsion’ (18) to the ‘prodigies of

wickedness' (ibid.) that abounded in St Giles, his favourite place in London. Indeed, Albert Borowitz claims that Dickens 'felt a strange empathy for criminals whose impulses seemed to raise an echo from some of the darker recesses of his own personality' (11), whilst Edmund Wilson asserts that Dickens 'identified himself readily with the thief and even more readily with the murderer' (15). This is interesting when we consider the incredible popularity of the cheap, crime-obsessed penny broadsides in the mid-nineteenth century and also of Dickens's own narratives of villainy; clearly he wasn't the only person to feel this attraction to the darker side of human nature. Juliet John tells us that '[i]n the 1830s and 1840s, the most notorious breed of romantic criminal was to be found in so-called 'Newgate' fiction and melodrama' (122). The 'Newgate novels', typified by their salacious content and fascination with odd personalities, valorised the criminals at the centre of their narratives and rendered them attractive to readers. This caused great concern to the establishment, particularly when a number of criminals claimed to have been inspired by the books. Perhaps most notable of these was François Benjamin Courvoisier, valet and murderer of Lord William Russell, who claimed to have based his crime on that depicted in Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*. Courvoisier's trial in 1840 caused great excitement and his execution was watched by some 40,000 people, including Dickens and Thackeray. Ainsworth received a great deal of criticism for the alleged pernicious effect of his book and, although he continued to write Newgate novels after the trial, his reputation never really recovered. When *Oliver Twist* first appeared, in 1837-1839, Dickens himself was also categorised as a Newgate novelist – a label he hotly resisted. As John has noted, critics, including Thackeray, were so vociferous about Dickens's portrayal of the charismatic Artful Dodger that the 1841 edition of *Oliver Twist* carried a new preface in which Dickens 'vigorously defend[ed] the novel against charges of immorality' (ibid. 124).

Whether we accept Dickens's protestations or not, his extensive body of work does show a marked interest in crime and punishment. Borowitz has claimed that Dickens was a 'firm believer in the principle of the existence of Evil...[with a] hatred of the criminal soul' (11). Yet for Hollingsworth, rather than *hating* the 'criminal soul', Dickens identified with it on a personal level and it is this which explains his interest in crime and criminality:

Dickens [was] interested in the criminal as representative of black evil erupting from the depths of a human nature which is shared by all...[he] worked from springs of intuition which made [him] sometimes aware of the shocking affinity with enemy. (224-225)

Certainly this sense of innate evil is present in *Little Dorrit*. Murderous villains such as Rigaud have no hope of reformation; as Kreutz notes, 'they prove in their erring to be merely inhuman' (331). Reid expands on this notion when he cites Lionel Trilling's evaluation of Rigaud as 'the embodiment of evil...[a character whose very] presence is to deprive us of the comfortable, philanthropic thought that people are nothing but instruments of injustice' (*Dickens* 37). Our lack of access to Rigaud's psyche means that we never understand the motivation for his recidivism or whether he has been shaped by circumstance.

The modern reader can recognise in Rigaud the symptoms of psychopathy (he scores highly on the PCL-R) and therefore place a medical and psychological gloss on his actions; we know it's just the way he's built. For the nineteenth century reader, however, Rigaud's behaviour was difficult to comprehend. In her study of American murder narratives, Karen Halttunen has noted that nineteenth century Enlightenment faith in the supremacy of rational thought did away with earlier Christian beliefs in the sinfulness and depravity of human nature, and recast the murderer as a 'moral alien' whose

actions were beyond human understanding. Attempts to understand such (fictional) individuals via ‘comfortable philanthropic thought’ were angrily rejected in some quarters, as shown by this contemporary review of *Little Dorrit* in the *Manchester Times*:

In the career of this slimy fiend there is no maudlin compromise, no sickly sympathy with vice. It is too much the custom to endow the modern villain of romance with a halo of compassion; sentimental tears are shed over his failings, and the general reader can hardly repress a feeling of indignation that the laws of society should interfere with the pleasure and aspirations of such a pathetic hero; but in the picture of Blandois all such dangerous cant is happily avoided. (20<sup>th</sup> June 1857, issue 796)

This anonymous reviewer sees *Little Dorrit* as a morality tale which will encourage readers to emulate the actions of the saintly Amy and develop ‘a more earnest loathing of sin when they see it personified in the naked deformity’ (ibid.) of Blandois/Rigaud. However, despite the strength of the reviewer’s antipathy for Rigaud, it is interesting to note that s/he also identifies him as one of ‘Mr. Dickens’s most finished and successful portraitures’ (ibid.). Clearly, for this reviewer at least, the much-vaunted cultural fascination with narratives of villainy is not necessarily diminished by a lack of empathy for the malefactor.

What is also significant about the review from the *Manchester Times* is the journalist’s use of the name ‘Blandois’ when referring to Rigaud. It shows that this particular reader has been duped by, or has accepted, Rigaud’s alter-ego to the extent that s/he no longer refers to him by his real name. In the course of the narrative Rigaud adopts no fewer than three aliases: Rigaud, Lagnier and Blandois. All three names are his own

and his separate use of them is not accompanied by a splintering of identity, rather, as Rosenberg suggests:

Rigaud's incarnations as Lagnier and Blandois act as disguises rather than as alternate selves and suggest no split in his character. He remains always in control of his various identities and aware of their essential singularity, referring to himself openly, in the end, as "Rigaud Lagnier Blandois". (90)

Throughout the novel, everybody who comes into contact with Rigaud attempts to understand him. They sense that something is wrong; that his outward appearance does not accord with their intuitive grasp of his character, yet these feelings are so fleeting that no one is able to definitively decide whether to trust his appearance or their instincts.

Interestingly, Dickens plays along with Rigaud's deceptions, referring to him as Rigaud, Lagnier or Blandois at various points in the narrative. Clearly, he does not need to do so. Yet this technique creates a powerful effect, placing the reader in the position of the characters and forcing him or her to repeatedly go through the process of trying to understand who, and what, Rigaud is.

Rigaud's multiple identities, and the simultaneous feelings of repulsion and attraction that he inspires in writer and reader alike, echo the multiplicity of dualities, confusions and contradictions that run throughout the novel. Characters are literally doubled (such as Flintwich and his twin) or have figurative doubles within the text (such as Clennam/Rigaud). Furthermore the novel abounds with a polyphony of different voices. The idea of polyphony is most closely associated with Bakhtin's work on Dostoevsky, whom he credits with creating the polyphonic novel; however the term can equally be applied to the works of Dickens. Bakhtin describes the polyphonic novel as a 'plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses' (*Poetics* 4). The polyphonic novel

gives its narrator and characters equal narratorial authority; as Vice points out, '[t]he narrator does not speak over the characters' heads, giving the reader privileged moral or physical information; the characters narrate themselves, and the narrator never knows more than they do' (6). This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated via Dickens's decision to collude with Rigaud over the use of his various aliases. He places the narrator and the reader on equal footing with the characters; we must wait for events to unfold before we can grasp the truth.

For Bakhtin, 'what matters [about polyphony] is the *dialogical angle* at which these styles and dialects are juxtaposed or counterposed in the work' (*Poetics* 150, Dostoevsky's emphasis); it is the meanings that are created when the voices intersect that are important. Such fluidity also relates to Bakhtin's understanding of the self as unfinalizable. He believed that individuals could never be truly understood, known and revealed to the world and that they existed not in isolation but were affected and influenced by others. As Jeremy Hawthorn notes, the voice of each of these individuals is deemed by Bakhtin to relate not just to language but to 'matters relating to ideology and power in society...[referring] the listener not just to an originating person, but to a network of beliefs and power relationships' (153).

This idea of a multiplicity of characters, only partially known, whose lives are intertwined is particularly useful for a reading of *Little Dorrit*. As readers, we never truly 'know' any of the characters; we are only shown elements of personality and given hints of motivation. The lack of access we have to the characters' psyches underscores Bakhtin's conception of the unfinalizable self and what Rosenberg has called the novel's 'fascination with the elusiveness of character' (45). Elaine Showalter suggests that Dickens attempts to 'penetrate the secrecy of personality' (31) through his technique of doubling. She sees Rigaud as Clennam's Jungian shadow, 'an archetypal aspect of the psyche...which

represents spontaneity, creativity, and strong emotions, but also lust, criminality and violence' (ibid.). What we see of Clennam is the Persona, or mask, he presents to the world. The Persona is the result of 'a compromise between himself and society' (Fordham 47) and a device for shielding the Ego. Rigaud, then, is the dark and uncivilised aspect of Clennam's personality which he wishes to keep from others (and, perhaps, himself). Frieda Fordham describes the shadow as 'all those uncivilized desires and emotions that are incompatible with social standards and our ideal personality, all that we are ashamed of, all that we do not want to know about ourselves' (50). Perhaps most significantly for this discussion of the repressed Clennam, cowed by the strictures of society, and the overbearing, irrepressible Rigaud, Fordham adds that '[i]t follows that the narrower and more restrictive the society in which we live the larger will be our shadow' (ibid.). This intertwining of individuals, ideologies and power creates true polyphony in the novel and helps the reader to better understand the motivations of Rigaud and the psyche of Clennam. Yet despite the richness that this doubling brings to the text, Rigaud, like the unconscious, remains essentially unknowable.

The reader's first meeting with Rigaud, in the prison at Marseilles, sets up the contrasts and contradictions. He is described in an animalistic and derogatory fashion as having 'the expression of a wild beast...his eyes, too close together, were not so nobly set in his head as those of the king of beasts are in his' (3) – a description at odds with Rigaud's courtly bearing and the deference with which he is treated by his cellmate Cavalletto and the jailer. We hear that a 'prison taint was on everything...the imprisoned men, were all deteriorated by confinement' (2). Rigaud is further described as having 'eyes like pointed weapons with...no depth or change...a hook nose...thin lips...[and a] thick moustache' (3). When he laughs his face does not take on a softer, more kindly aspect,

rather ‘[h]is moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache, in a very sinister and cruel manner’ (5).

The focus on Rigaud’s scratched, dirty hands, ghostly white skin and the emphasis placed on his eyes, nose, moustache and mouth are characteristics of carnivalesque and grotesque realism. In *Rabelais and his World*, Bakhtin explains how grotesque realism focuses largely on those areas of the body which swallow the world or can be swallowed by it, usually the bowels and the genitals:

They can detach themselves from the body and lead an independent life....(the nose can also in a way detach itself from the body). Next...is the mouth, through which enters the world to be swallowed up...All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines [sic] between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome. (317)

The eyes are also significant, as they are almost unique in the body as a site through which the world can both enter and be entered. Rigaud’s cold, dead eyes, cruel mouth and mobile moustache reveal a great deal about his character. Bakhtin writes that the ‘essential principal of grotesque realism is degradation’ (*Rabelais* 19) and in Rigaud’s case we can perhaps take this to represent the degradation of his morality and soul. However, as Dentith notes:

this degradation is not merely a negative process...The degradation enacted in carnival and carnivalized writing – the incessant reminders that we are all creatures of flesh and thus of food and faeces also – this degradation is simultaneously an affirmation...linked to regeneration and renewal. (67)

This seems particularly apt for Rigaud; much of the novel sees him engaged in acts of regeneration and renewal. Our first encounter with him in prison finds him on the brink of release; following his pardon he is spirited away from Marseilles to start a new life abroad; as the narrative unfolds he adopts three different identities (Rigaud, Lagnier and Blandois); he metamorphoses from a degraded prisoner to a courtly gentleman who moves freely in Society; he shows criminal versatility as he goes from murder to extortion, and so on. Rigaud's transformations exemplify Bakhtin's description of the grotesque as 'the inner movement of being itself...the passing of one form into another in the ever incompleting character of being' (*Rabelais* 32). However, Dentith has noted that by the time of the publication of *Gulliver's Travels* in 1726 (some 129 years before the first part of *Little Dorrit* appeared), the regenerative aspect of carnivalesque had largely disappeared from literature, leaving behind only the negative elements of the grotesque.

The changes to the carnival-grotesque are interesting when considered in relation to literary texts, as they reveal how social, cultural and political developments have affected representations of selfhood and community. From the Middle Ages until the Renaissance, the tradition focused predominantly on a collective cultural experience. As Dentith points out, in Renaissance literature the carnivalesque 'perception of life, and its artistic expression in the grotesque, is not private, has not settled upon the individual body of the bourgeois subject – that is a development of the seventeenth century and later' (80). This move from the collective to the personal shifted the emphasis of the grotesque to an 'expression of subjective, individualistic world outlook very different from the carnival folk concept of previous ages' (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 36). In part, this can be attributed to an earlier state intervention in carnival which sought to control its potentially subversive political qualities by turning it into a licensed calendrical ritual. As Stallybrass and White suggest, the 'licensed release' of carnival is 'simply a form of social control of the low by

the high [that] therefore serves the interests of that very official culture which it apparently opposes' (13).

The narrowing of festive life saw festivities shift into the private sphere, where they were increasingly celebrated within individual homes. This brought a shift in emphasis which Bakhtin felt represented

a reaction against the elements of classicism which characterized the self-importance of the Enlightenment. It was a reaction against the cold rationalism against official, formalistic, and logical authoritarianism...an individual carnival, marked by a vivid sense of isolation. (*Rabelais* 37)

Perhaps most significantly, it was also marked by a move from joyous laughter to 'cold humor, irony and sarcasm' (ibid. 38). This is apparent in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, a satire on the human race accused of being one of the most obscene and misanthropic texts ever written. For Bakhtin, Swift's use of the carnival-grotesque tries to break away from convention to offer a new perspective of the world, although, as Dentith notes, without the regenerative laughter it is 'an almost purely negative affair' (81). This harsh, individualistic version of the grotesque continued into the following centuries where Bakhtin believes it 'influenced the entire realistic literature' (*Rabelais* 52) and '[r]ealism of grand style' (ibid.) of authors such as Dickens. Rigaud stands as the archetypal post-Renaissance grotesque. From his self-serving scheming and lack of empathy to his physical appearance, all that is positive about the grotesque has been suppressed. Via Rigaud, the traditional carnivalesque focus on regeneration and renewal remains, albeit in a newly cynical, negative way; his transformations are used purely to further his villainous agenda.

Without regenerative laughter, the grotesque realism in *Little Dorrit* is similarly restricted to the negative and its use in the Marseilles descriptions of Rigaud allows the reader to gain some insight into his character. Yet, just as we feel we have the measure of him, Dickens introduces a number of contradictions which prevent us from getting close to complete understanding. Prior to Rigaud's trial, he describes to Cavalletto the state of his marriage and the circumstances of his wife's death. We hear that his wife was a young widow who had 'a reputation for beauty, and (which is often another thing) was beautiful' (8). Rigaud himself is described by the narrator as having 'a certain air of being a handsome man – which he was not; and a certain air of being a well-bred man – which he was not' (9). Rigaud refutes allegations of domestic violence, despite being seen striking his wife, saying 'I have a light hand; and if I have been seen apparently to correct Madame Rigaud in that manner, I have done it almost playfully' (ibid.). Even Rigaud's denial is not clear-cut; to hit someone 'almost playfully' is not the same as hitting them playfully. Such claims and counterclaims show that reality is not singular and absolute but plural and subjective; we cannot believe the evidence of our eyes or our ears and we cannot truly 'know' Rigaud. His version of events is allowed to blur the picture and our lack of access to his psyche, coupled with the novel's polyphony (which means Dickens never privileges us with information not available to the other characters), constantly keeps us guessing.

The polyphony is underscored by the scene in the Break of Day, where a weary Rigaud arrives to find himself described as 'the devil...let loose', 'a bad subject', and 'a wicked wretch' (106) as his crime and acquittal are discussed. One man, 'the tall Swiss belonging to the church' (ibid.), suggests that all humans are good: 'It may have been his unfortunate destiny. He may have been the child of circumstances. It is always possible that he had, and has, good in him if one did but know how to find it out' (ibid.). This is hotly refuted by the landlady who asserts that some people 'have no good in them'. Her

description of such people, limited though it is, is well suited to the antisocial psychopath. The term itself was not to appear until the 1880s, but it is clear that Dickens understood the personality type and the characteristics of the condition. During her diatribe the landlady finds that she cannot recall Rigaud's name, referring to him instead as 'this man – whatever they call him, I forget his name' (107). This highlights the fact that Rigaud's identity is so amorphous, slippery and mutable that names have no meaning; it is his true nature, and how that is revealed through his behaviour, that really matters.

Rigaud's overbearing and patronising behaviour soon empties the bar, until only he and the landlady remain. He asks her why she feels such antipathy towards Rigaud. As she considers her answer, the landlady becomes aware of the contradictions in Rigaud's appearance:

The landlady, who had at one moment been thinking within herself that this was a handsome man, at another moment that this was an ill-looking man, observed the nose coming down and the moustache going up, and strongly inclined to the latter decision. Rigaud was a criminal, she said, who had killed his wife. (107)

The use of indirect discourse here is significant. The landlady does not know that the man she is speaking to is Rigaud, yet her instincts tell her that there is something strange, dark and unkind about the stranger before her. By omitting the speech marks around her answer Dickens connects her judgement on Rigaud with her judgement on the stranger, with ominous effect. We feel that the depths of Rigaud's depravity are written on his face, revealing the darkness of his soul. It is a Gothic moment that fills us with dread.

By contrast Rigaud's discourse is direct and, perhaps most significantly, spoken out loud, even when he is alone. Having been shown to his bedchamber by the landlady's

husband, Rigaud draws out his money: ““One must eat,” he muttered to himself, “but by Heaven I must eat at the cost of some other man tomorrow!”” (109). Even when alone, Rigaud jealously guards his inner self from sight and, as the author, Dickens colludes in this act by denying the reader access to Rigaud’s psyche. We know what Rigaud is thinking because his thoughts are vocalised, yet by voicing them, rather than allowing us to ‘hear’ Rigaud’s internal monologue, Dickens ensures that the reader is kept on the outside, in an unprivileged and spectatorial position.

Of course, Rigaud’s is not the only voice in the novel. As Dentith points out, ‘novelistic prose has built into it more than one consciousness’ (196). Bakhtin explores this notion in his discussion of ‘heteroglossia’ which, in Russian, literally means ‘different speechness’. It refers to the existence of, and dialogic interaction between, different types of speech, including (but not limited to) dialects, genres and registers, socially and historically formed. Heteroglossia can occur within the speech of the characters, the speech of narrators or even the speech of the author, but ultimately it is ‘another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way’ (‘Discourse in the novel’ 324).

For Bakhtin, each heteroglot language carries a particular standpoint, characterised by its own meaning and values, and world view. He argues that one of the simplest forms of heteroglossia is ‘incorporated genres’, which typically ‘preserve within the novel their own structural integrity and independence, as well as their linguistic and stylistic peculiarities’ (ibid. 215). This is significant when we consider Rigaud’s characterisation as a melodramatic villain. Dickens invests greatly in Rigaud’s melodramatic persona, from his manner of speaking to his style of dress, even his physical movements. An interesting example of this comes in the *Break of Day*, when Rigaud becomes intrigued as to the identity of the person sharing his bedchamber. At this point, Rigaud himself has not been

named and is variously referred to as ‘the guest’, ‘the traveller’, and so on. This polyphonic play adds not just to the mystery surrounding Rigaud’s identity but also to the tension of the scene, as he creeps across the room to catch a glimpse of the sleeper:

The waking traveller, therefore, stole a little nearer, and yet a little nearer, and a little nearer, to the sleeping traveller’s bed, until he stood close beside it. Even then he could not see his face, for he had drawn the sheet over it.

The regular breathing still continuing, he put his smooth white hand (such a treacherous hand it looked, as it went creeping from him!) to the sheet, and gently lifted it away.

“Death of my soul!” he whispered, falling back, “here’s Cavaletto!” (109)

Rigaud’s exaggerated tiptoe across the room would not be out of place in a pantomime (a form from which melodrama derived, according to Peter Brooks on page 62 of *The Melodramatic Imagination*). Every part of this passage impresses upon us Rigaud’s dastardly nature, from his ‘treacherous’ ghostly hand, to his reaction on discovering the sleeper’s identity. The hand seems to work independently of Rigaud, bringing to mind the detachable body parts of the grotesque. As it goes ‘creeping from him’ there seems to be no limit to the amount of mischief or evil it could commit and this adds to our impression of Rigaud as diabolical and ‘othered’. His actions and exclamation on uncovering Cavaletto are equally melodramatic, tying him tightly to the genre that defines him by his immorality and villainy.

John makes the point that, as a genre, melodrama creates simple, ‘flat’ surfaces that hint at the depths below. It avoids interiority on the assumption that surfaces have a broader meaning, that their outward simplicity signals the complexity beneath. She goes on to argue that, in *Little Dorrit*, Dickens is exploring the possibility that this is not the

case, with ‘the Gothic villain Rigaud Blandois and his prose environment [foregrounding] Dickens’s exploration of a world devoid of interiority’ (112). This is interesting on a number of levels. The first is her reference to Rigaud’s ‘prose environment’, by which she presumably means both the way he is spoken of (i.e. narrated), and the way in which he speaks, within the context of the novel. Now, whilst I would agree that Rigaud seems to lack psychological depth, I do not agree that his prose environment lacks complexity. Heteroglossia is, by its very nature, complex, representing as it does the dialogic clashes and conflicts between diverse languages within a single utterance or passage. As Bakhtin notes,

[s]uch speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. (‘Discourse in the novel’ 324, original emphasis)

John’s assertion is also interesting when we consider it in relation to Rigaud himself. She explains how his lack of interiority is a consequence of his melodramatic posturing and his ‘constant externalization of passion’ (*Dickens’s Villains* 113), arguing that ‘if innerness is constantly made visible, then arguably there is nothing left inside’ (ibid.). This is a compelling argument and one which lays bare Dickens’s vision of identity. Yet it could equally be argued that Rigaud’s hollowness relates to his psychopathy – that is, a biological disorder over which he has no control – rather than manifesting as a side-effect of the conscious performativity of his identity. Hare describes psychopaths as suffering from

a kind of emotional poverty that limits the range and depth of their feelings. While at times they appear cold and unemotional, they are prone to dramatic, shallow, and short-lived displays of feeling. Careful observers are left with the impression that they are play-acting and that *little is going on below the surface*. (*Without Conscience* 52, my emphasis)

We have already accepted that, in Rigaud, Dickens has drawn a very accurate portrait of a psychopath who conforms closely to the clinical criteria laid out by Hare. It therefore follows that, for Rigaud the psychopathic villain, it is not that the melodramatic ‘externalization of passion’ has made passion meaningless, as John suggests, but rather that this passion never existed in the first place. Rigaud jealously guards his psyche from the prying eyes of other characters (an act in which Dickens polyphonically colludes), because his inner self is not recognisable as human. Were this to be revealed to his peers, his progress through the narrative would be hampered.

However, Rigaud’s polished veneer does not fool everyone. Some, such as Gowan, reveal Rigaud’s true character unwittingly and in jest, without realising what they’ve done; whilst others, such as Amy Dorrit, Gowan’s mother and Lion, Gowan’s dog, understand it on an instinctual level. This is made clear in a key scene in Chapter Six of Book Two, when Rigaud poses for a portrait by Gowan in the presence of the Dorrit sisters. Gowan asks Rigaud (or Blandois as he appears in this sequence) to hold his pose:

“Don’t stir, then,” said Gowan, coolly, as the sisters approached the easel.  
“Let the ladies at least see the original of the daub, that they may know what it’s meant for. There he stands, you see. A bravo waiting for his prey, a distinguished noble waiting to save his country, the common enemy

waiting to do somebody a bad turn, an angelic messenger waiting to do somebody a good turn – whatever you think he looks most like!” (412)

It is significant here that Gowan asks that the ladies see the ‘original...that they may know what it’s meant for’ and then lists a number of possibilities. The inference is that a glance at Rigaud is insufficient to understand him. His surface appearance is merely that, a surface, on which can be written any number of definitions of his character, according to the taste and disposition of the observer. Each positive possible persona is superseded by a negative one, until eventually Gowan settles on ‘a murderer after the fact’ (ibid.). His decision is prompted by Rigaud’s ghostly white hands which seem to show the marks of ‘some scuffle with another murderer, or with a victim’ (413).

Of course, Gowan does not really believe that his friend is a murderer; this is merely light-hearted banter. Amy Dorrit, however, senses the darkness at the core of Rigaud when their eyes meet as she stands by the easel and she trembles with fear. Lion, whose head Amy is caressing, also meets Rigaud’s gaze and growls menacingly. Supposing Amy to be afraid of the dog, Gowan reassures her ‘He won’t hurt you, Miss Dorrit’ (ibid.), a statement which could as equally refer to Rigaud as to the animal. When Gowan realises that Lion is not growling at Amy he is incensed and instantly blames Rigaud for provoking him. As Lion tries to leap at Rigaud, Gowan restrains him, shouting “Get out of his sight, Blandois! What devil have you conjured into the dog?” (ibid.). Again, the language that Gowan uses here is noteworthy. By suggesting in his anger that Rigaud has ‘conjured’ a ‘devil’ into the dog he grants him diabolical powers that are far closer to Rigaud’s malevolent true nature than Gowan could imagine. When Rigaud has left the room and Lion has been subdued, Gowan turns to his frightened wife and asks her to remember the dog’s usually placid manner:

“Come, come, Minnie! You know he is always good humoured and tractable. Blandois must have irritated him – made faces at him. The dog has his likings and dislikings, and Blandois is no great favourite of his; but I’m sure you’ll give him a character, Minnie, for never having been like this before.” (414)

When the dog first became aggressive as it stood by the easel with Amy Dorrit, Gowan, ‘putting in the markings of the hand’ (413) was focused on his canvas. With his back to the dog and his attention away from Rigaud it is easy for him to imagine that the latter was engaged in mischief. Yet we know from Amy Dorrit that Rigaud’s eyes were locked to hers and not in contact with the dog: “they had looked at each other all the time” (ibid.). The dog then, sensing Rigaud’s malevolence at the same time as Amy, acts instinctively when he growls in warning before attempting his attack. Significantly, H.K. Browne’s illustration of the scene is captioned ‘Instinct stronger than training’, providing further proof that, far from being a dumb animal, the dog understands far more than his master.

Unfortunately for Lion, however, a strong instinct is not enough to save him from his new-found nemesis. Later that evening, when the Dorrit sisters are leaving the opera, they meet Rigaud on the quay. As he hands them into their boat he nonchalantly tells them that the dog is dead, a fact which Amy finds hard to accept: ““Dead?” echoed Little Dorrit. “That noble dog?” “Faith, dear ladies!” said Blandois, smiling and shrugging his shoulders, “somebody has poisoned that noble dog. He is as dead as the Doges!”” (420). The use of the word ‘noble’ is ironic here. The last time it was used in the presence of these characters was when Rigaud was posing for Gowan who suggested, amongst other things, that he may be ‘a distinguished noble waiting to save his country’ (412). The reader, having followed Rigaud since his release from the prison in Marseilles, knows that he is not of noble birth and that he merely plays at being a gentleman. Furthermore, as the

scene in Gowan's studio developed it became clear to Amy and Lion that Rigaud was not of noble character, if we take noble to mean a person of illustrious or distinguished character. That this term should be conferred on a dumb animal, then, demonstrates the dog to have been of exalted and discerning nature. In turn, the base and brutish qualities typically associated with animals transfer onto Rigaud as the man who callously took the life of the 'noble dog'.

Rigaud's killing of the dog is also interesting from a clinical perspective. His casual, even triumphant account of the dog's demise indicates his lack of empathy, lack of remorse or guilt, and poor behavioural controls; all key indicators of psychopathy on the PCL-R. Profound cruelty to animals is a well-documented childhood precursor to psychopathy, which appears on the MacDonald triad. In his 1963 article 'The Threat to Kill', which appeared in *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, J.M. MacDonald identified a set of three behavioural characteristics which when exhibited in childhood can indicate a propensity to severe personality disorder. MacDonald's study was on a small scale and its validity has since been questioned, but his findings have been corroborated by many later studies, including the research of Hare who notes that '[e]arly cruelty to animals is usually a sign of serious emotional or behavioural problems' (*Without Conscience* 66). Indeed, many of the most notorious killers of recent history, such as serial killers Jeffrey Dahmer and Henry Lee Lucas (on whom the 1986 film *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* was based), had well-documented histories of precocious sadism and animal abuse. Perhaps most significantly for this discussion of Rigaud's attitude to killing Lion, Hare also points out that '[a]dult psychopaths usually describe their childhood cruelty to animals as ordinary events, matter-of-fact, even enjoyable' (ibid.). Rigaud's smiling, shoulder-shrugging, insouciant account of the dog's death stands in sharp contrast to the horror with which Amy Dorrit reacts to the news.

In these small ways Rigaud's true character is continuously revealed, despite his efforts to conceal it. Throughout the novel people are puzzled as to whether he is 'an ill-looking man or a good-looking man' as their instincts fight with their eyes in their evaluation of his character. Amy and Mrs. General, however, are not so easily fooled. They see him as 'an odious creature of the reptile kind' (426) and are brought together by their shared experience of him. Rigaud is aware of their feelings towards him and dislikes them in turn, betraying his antipathy by minute mannerisms, imperceptible to the casual observer but noticeable enough to inform Amy and Mrs. General that he retains the upper hand:

A mere trick of his evil eyes, a mere turn of his smooth white hand, a mere hair's-breadth addition to the fall of his nose and the rise of his moustache in the most frequent movement of his face, conveyed to both of them equally a swagger personal to themselves. It was if he has said, "I have a secret power in this quarter. I know what I know." (ibid.)

Rigaud's hostility towards the women is most keenly felt when he arrives at the Dorrit home in Venice, to pay his respects to Mr. Dorrit before leaving the city. Mrs. General, who is visiting for the same purpose, is sitting with Amy. With the paranoid and bullying attitude common to the psychopath, Rigaud intrudes on their conversation and offers to escort Mrs. General home. Mrs. General declines his offer but he remains at their table and attempts to engage them in conversation. However, Rigaud's attempts at playing the role of the polite and amiable Society gentleman fall flat; the women are not taken in by his performance. As Hare tells us, psychopaths are typically very good at presenting themselves as charming and charismatic, although to some people 'they seem too slick and smooth, too obviously insincere and superficial. Astute observers often get the impression that psychopaths are play-acting, mechanically "reading their lines"' (*Without Conscience*

35). Mrs. Gowan and Amy are certainly astute observers; they hear the subtext beneath his honeyed words and are fully aware that his aim is to prevent them from talking about him: ‘He sat entertaining them with his finest compliments, and his choicest conversation; but, he conveyed to them all the time, “No, no, no, dear ladies. Behold me here expressly to prevent it!’ (427).

This sentence is very interesting in its construction, combining the heteroglot utterances of Rigaud, the narrator and, in a refracted way, the author himself. It is a classic example of a hybrid construction:

an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two “languages”, two semantic and axiological belief systems. (Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the novel’ 304)

The main clause of the sentence, which is in the narrator’s speech, tells us what Rigaud *does*, in that he sits and speaks to the women. However, it also tells us what Rigaud *thinks* he is doing, via the descriptions of his ‘fine compliments’ and ‘choice conversation’. These descriptions give us Rigaud’s inflated sense of himself as infallibly charming whilst, via their irony, also conveying to us the discomfort of the women as they receive Rigaud’s unwelcome attention. The subordinate clause of the sentence is Rigaud’s direct internal discourse, which reveals that his intentions (which are to control the ladies and prevent them from speaking about him) speak louder than his actual words (which aim to flatter and entertain them).

For Bakhtin, this particular type of heteroglossia sees the author demonstrate his own presence and point of view via his effect on both the narrator of the story and the

story itself. In other words, the author's point of view is separate from and different to the point of view of the narrator, whose narration he controls:

Behind the narrator's story we read a second story, the author's story; he is the one who tells us how the narrator tells stories, and also tells us about the narrator himself. We acutely sense two levels at each moment in the story; one, the level of the narrator, a belief system filled with his objects and expressions, and the other, the level of the author, who speaks (albeit in a refracted way) by means of this story and through this story. The narrator himself, with *his* own discourse, enters into the authorial belief system along with what is being told. ('Discourse in the novel' 314, original emphasis)

In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens presents as an impish, mischievous author who identifies with, and in some ways admires, the psychopathic Rigaud. He manipulates his narrator, and thus his readers, in the same way that Rigaud manipulates the people around him. The narrator's ironic description of Rigaud's charming conversation in the hybrid construction above betrays the frustration he feels at the psychopath's manipulative behaviour – behaviour in which Dickens appears to revel. While the 'good' characters in the novel, such as Amy, Clennam and the residents of Bleeding Heart Yard, are imprisoned by Society, Rigaud floats in and out of the narrative, causing trouble, unconstrained by finance, bureaucracy or reputation. And Dickens is similarly mischievous, entering and exiting the narrative as he pleases, here confusing the reader, there confounding the narrator. His narrative technique mirrors Rigaud's character and his ambivalence towards his villain colours our own perception of him.

It is not until the dramatic denouement of the novel that Rigaud's full identity is revealed. Rigaud, who is blackmailing Mrs. Clennam with the threat of revealing Arthur's true parentage, arrives at the Clennam house to make his final demands. The house is dark and ominous, full of portent of impending doom. As he enters Mrs. Clennam's room, the window stands uncharacteristically open, symbolising the fact that the outside world (in the shape of Rigaud, Pancks and Cavalletto) has been let in and that the secrets of the house will soon be opened up for all to see. The death-laden imagery that describes the scene adds to our sense of foreboding, from the 'deadened fire' to the 'pall' on the bed, the 'black bier-like sofa' and the bolster 'like the head'sman's block' (637). The use of the word 'bier' is particularly chilling, as it refers to the movable stand on which a corpse is placed before burial. A burial, but not of the Christian kind, certainly awaits Rigaud; he is shortly to be crushed to death when the house collapses.

In his parting shot, Pancks addresses the villain, saying 'to his ill-looking face, that in my opinion the world would be no worse for his slipping out of it altogether' (638). Although at this stage in the narrative Rigaud cannot imagine how soon Pancks's observation will be proved to be correct, his fate has been inextricably bound up with the house of Clennam since day one. As Dickens himself remarked in an 1857 article in *Household Words*:

when Rigaud first enters it...he is beset by a mysterious fear and shuddering...the rotten and crazy state of the house is laboriously kept before the reader, wherever the house is shown...the way to demolition of the man and the house together is paved all through the book with a painful minuteness and reiterated care of preparation. (qtd. in Collins, *Dickens and Crime* 291)

Showalter has called the Clennam home ‘the house of shadows’ (28); how appropriate, then, that the man she has identified as Arthur Clennam’s Jungian shadow should be killed by its collapse.

As noted above, Fordham has written of how a restrictive society leads to the formation of a large and powerful shadow. In many ways the Clennam house acts as a microcosm of Victorian society. It is where the young Arthur was brought up ‘in fear and trembling, and in a life of practical contrition’ (*Little Dorrit* 649) at Mrs. Clennam’s ‘restraining and correcting hand’ (ibid. 659), and where Mrs. Clennam herself has lived an austere life of self-abnegation and psychosomatic paralysis. It therefore seems apt that it is within the house that we see Rigaud at his most fully-fleshed. Fordham warns that:

the danger of repressing the shadow is that in the unconscious it seems to acquire strength and grow in vigour, so that when the moment comes...when it must appear, it is more dangerous and more likely to overwhelm the rest of the personality (51).

During his confrontation with Mrs. Clennam, the bullying Rigaud appears at the height of his powers, ‘always threatening her...coarse, insolent, rapacious, cruel and powerful’ (644). He had not counted on the strength of Mrs. Clennam’s character, however. When she rises to her feet for the first time in decades, ‘Rigaud fell back and dropped his voice. It was...almost as if a dead woman had risen’ (654). Dickens’s references to the ‘ghostly figure’ (ibid.) and resurrection of Mrs. Clennam foreshadow Rigaud’s imminent death and the return of righteousness to the house of Clennam. Rigaud settles into the window seat in ‘the old Marseilles-Jail attitude’ (656); a pose redolent with meaning as we shall shortly see. As he awaits Mrs. Clennam’s return he congratulates himself on the success of his plan so far. His words, however, are chillingly prophetic:

“Rigaud Lagnier Blandois, my amiable subject, you will get your money. You will enrich yourself. You have lived a gentleman; you will die a gentleman....”

In the hour of his triumph, his moustache went up and his nose came down, as he ogled a great beam over his head with particular satisfaction. (656)

Rigaud Lagnier Blandois is at last revealed as a unified identity; his pretences have been dropped and his dark intentions and malevolent nature finally laid bare. Yet as Mrs. Clennam rushes to the Marshalsea to confess to Amy and plead with her to protect Arthur from the truth, the balance of power shifts. As the secrets are revealed, darkness is banished and with it goes Rigaud’s hold over the Clennams. As J. Hillis Miller has argued,

[if the Devil] exists embodied in a single person, as in Blandois in this novel, that person will be powerless against the good, an impotent posturing pasteboard figure who is destroyed in the end by his own selfishness, as Blandois is crushed in the collapse of the Clennam house. (240)

In the moment before the house crashes down, Amy and Mrs. Clennam see Rigaud framed in the window, still oblivious to his fate: ‘In one swift instant, the old house was before them, with the man lying smoking in the window’ (662). As the old house looms large in front of them, the secrets and lies and culture of repression that have sustained the house of Clennam are brought into stark relief. Rigaud’s position in the window, in the house of shadows, reminds us of our first encounter with him in the dank, dark Marseilles prison. In the Marseilles window, Rigaud ‘loll[ed], half sitting, half lying’ (2), his semi-upright position signifying that he had not been beaten by the prison system. Now, though, he is prostrate, on his back, framed at the centre of the implosion of the Clennam house. In ‘the hour of his triumph’ Rigaud has swapped places with Mrs. Clennam, occupying the self-

imposed prison which has held her for decades. For Rigaud, however, there can be no escape. Significantly, at this point in the narrative Dickens has chosen to strip him of his name, referring to him simply as ‘the man’. Impotent at last, he has become Hillis Miller’s ‘posturing pasteboard figure’. The house breaks into fifty pieces, until only its chimney stacks remain standing, ‘like a tower in a whirlwind’ (662). This great phallic symbol represents the symbolic restoration of power and virility to Arthur Clennam’s father, as the repressive house of shadows is dashed to the ground and he is freed from the emasculating revenge of his wronged wife. Arthur’s father is long dead, so the endurance of his phallic triumph is short; it remains just long enough to free the house of Clennam from Rigaud’s power. To drive home the point, the tower too then falls and ‘hailed itself down upon the heap of ruin, as if every tumbling fragment were intent on burying the crushed wretch deeper’ (662). Again, Rigaud is not referred to by name. The OED gives a number of interesting definitions for the word ‘wretch’, including ‘a banished person; an exile’ and a ‘vile, sorry, or despicable person; one of opprobrious or reprehensible character; a mean or contemptible creature’. With each narrative turn Rigaud becomes less and less important and recognisable, until he ceases even to be described as human. Following the collapse of the house, parties of diggers work for two days and nights to recover Rigaud’s body:

it was night for the second time when they found the dirty heap of rubbish that had been the foreigner, before his head had been shivered to atoms, like so much glass, by the great beam that lay upon him, crushing him. (662)

Stripped of all his identities and a gentleman no more, Rigaud’s final incarnation is as a worthless and unwanted ‘dirty heap of rubbish’. The shadow has been vanquished. The repressive house of Clennam that Rigaud had sought to destroy but which ultimately destroyed him has gone too, making way for a new order. The extreme ‘othering’ of Rigaud’s demise, which sees Dickens not just killing him but reducing him to nameless

matter,<sup>18</sup> shows the author asserting his control over, and contempt for, his representative of evil. For all its allure and attractions, evil cannot be seen to triumph. Dickens demands vengeance; Rigaud must be crushed.

## **2.2 Dialogism and Disorder: Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment***

Like Dickens, Dostoevsky shows a profound interest in both crime and criminals; each of his four great novels contains scenes of murder. However, whereas Dickens is seen as a 'didactic [and] moralizing' (Eagleton *English Novel* 155) force, Dostoevsky's depictions of crime seem to have gained him a far darker reputation. As Victor Terras observes, as early as 1864 Dostoevsky's interest in the macabre was felt by contemporary critics to reveal 'an unhealthy...curiosity about the darker recesses of the human psyche...a perverse attraction to the diseased states of the human mind...[and] sadistic pleasure in observing human suffering' (ix). It seems that this fascination was fed, at least in part, by Dostoevsky's own experiences of mental and physical torment. In 1849 his involvement with the Petrashevsky Circle, a radical group of liberal intellectuals, led to him being condemned to death for conspiring to set up a printing press. Although his sentence was commuted to exile and hard labour, the pardon arrived literally at the last moment as Dostoevsky and his comrades faced the firing squad; the trauma of the experience caused one of the men to go mad. Dostoevsky's subsequent imprisonment in Siberia, served in squalid, cramped conditions alongside murderers and other hardened criminals who

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<sup>18</sup> The reduction of the diabolic to inorganic matter also appears in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* which, as noted previously, is of great relevance to a number of the texts and themes explored in this study. Towards the end of the narrative, Dr. Jekyll 'thought of Hyde, for all his energy of life, as of something not only hellish but inorganic. This was the shocking thing; that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices; that the amorphous dust gesticulated and sinned; that what was dead, and had no shape, should usurp the offices of life' (61). The exaggerated, pathological destruction of the dark self speaks to the intensity of the dissonance created by the author's (and by extension the reader's) interest in, and acceptance of, this figure.

resented his links to the gentility they despised, was a period of severe hardship and degradation. This was a formative time for Dostoevsky, as Janko Lavrin notes:

It is beyond doubt that the criminals he became familiar with must have revolutionised Dostoevsky's former ideas of good and evil. The germs of a brooding 'transvaluer' are to be sought in some of his experiences in the *katorga* (penal settlement) where he could watch human nature divested of all its masks and disguises. The enigma of man and of the irrational human self appeared, under those conditions, in so many new aspects that on leaving this 'house of the dead', Dostoevsky was a different human being from the one who had entered it four years earlier. (10-11)

The experience sparked Dostoevsky's interest in the instability of the self and brought a conversion to the Orthodox Christianity that was to inform his later literary works. His stoic acceptance of his punishment as a means of atoning for his crime reveals his belief in the doctrine of salvation through suffering so central to Russian Orthodoxy, a theme which would be explored in *Crime and Punishment* (1866). Dostoevsky's 'curiosity about the darker recesses of the human psyche' led him to intellectualise aberrant psychology; he confronts the reader with the appeal of certain psychopathic traits, and also with the complexities of portraying mental disarray in literature.

Dostoevsky's novel demonstrates a marked interest in aberrant psychology and the extremes of human consciousness, yet he grappled with the difficulty of creating an engaging and appealing character who is divorced from society and does not care about anyone else. In so doing he gave us Raskolnikov and Svidrigaylov. Unlike Dickens, however, Dostoevsky does not present the reader with a straightforward portrayal of a psychopath. He did not understand psychopathology in the way that Dickens did and,

what's more, he did not care to; he was contemptuous of psychology. Bakhtin declares that Dostoevsky saw in psychology 'a degrading *reification* of a person's soul, a discounting of its freedom and its unfinalizability' (*Poetics* 61). Furthermore, as Terras has shown, there is a 'pattern of deprecation of psychology in Dostoevsky's later works. Psychological motivation, psychological subtlety, and psychological complexity tend to be associated with weakness, lack of faith, and negativism' (49). *Crime and Punishment* abounds with dismissive and disdainful references to 'nonsensical nervous trouble' (113) and 'damned psychology' (428), yet despite this there is a great focus on madness and mental disturbance in the novel. Some seven major characters (Marmeladov, Raskolnikov, Svidrigaylov, Katerina Ivanovna, Sonya, the painter Mikolka, and Raskolnikov's mother, Pulkeria Alexandrovna) are either suspected of or shown to be suffering from rational distortions, mental illness or mania at various points in the narrative. Dostoevsky was not interested in the ordinary or the mundane; rather he wished to reveal individual responses to the moments of greatest stress. Lavrin explains:

he was preoccupied with the three main paths, leading one to the greatest tension of consciousness: the mystical experience, the crime, and the suffering...His explorations of the diseased mental states were not of a clinical kind. They were only a short-cut to that 'inmost essence' of man and life which average healthy conditions could not provide. (42)

Dostoevsky's Christian beliefs in humility, forgiveness and the potential to reform were to shape his artistic vision, and led him to interpret mental illness as spiritual illness. His abiding 'curiosity about the darker recesses of the human psyche' was tempered by his belief that the malefactor must be redeemable; for this reason a clinically true depiction of psychopathy would not work within his literary framework. The psychopath's malevolence is hardwired; the condition is untreatable and he is therefore incapable of reform. Yet the

fact remains that the psychopathic mind has a great deal to offer a connoisseur of the aberrant and unusual. How, then, can it be explored within the confines of Dostoevsky's literary schema? Dostoevsky's solution to this problem was a complex splitting of the subject into several different characters: Raskolnikov becomes a schizoid personality.

In *Major Theories of Personality Disorder*, Mark F. Lenzenweger and John F. Clarkin explain how the 'normal personality is characterised...by an integrated concept of the self and an integrated concept of significant others' (121). This structural unity constitutes the individual's ego identity, underpins healthy self-esteem and permits the enjoyment of everyday life in the society of others. By contrast, in the 'antisocial personality', or psychopath (the most severe of the personality disorders), identity is entirely diffused and there is 'a total incapacity for any non-exploitative investment in significant others' (ibid. 140). Lenzenweger and Clarkin cite W. Fairbairn's description of the schizoid personality 'as the prototype for all personality disorders' (ibid. 138), so its morphology here is significant both to my study of the psychopath and to Dostoevsky's creative treatment of it. The psychiatrist R.D. Laing says of the schizoid personality:

in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself...he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways...as two or more selves, and so on. (*Divided Self* 17)

This concept of the individual split into 'two or more selves' is very interesting when considered in relation to *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov experiences a dramatic disruption of his relation with himself which leads to the separation of his ego, superego and id. These aspects of his personality are embodied in the narrative in the characters of Svidrigaylov and Razumikhin, with Svidrigaylov representing Raskolnikov's id, or

unconscious, and Razumikhin his superego. Raskolnikov himself represents the ego, or conscious mind. Significantly, the etymology of the characters' names support this analysis. As Terras notes, the Russian word *raskol'nik* means 'schismatic' (70, note 10) – highly appropriate for a character with such pronounced identity diffusion that his 'good' and 'bad' selves have been entirely separated. Svidrigaylov 'has a foreigning' (ibid.) which reflects his 'othering' function; whilst Razumikhin, as the conscience or 'good self' of the superego, has as its root the Russian word *razum* meaning '(good) sense' (ibid.).

However, far from offering Raskolnikov freedom, the separation of his disparate 'selves' increases his mental torment and distances him even further from his contemporaries. Lenzenweger and Clarkin state that 'extreme splitting leads to a fragmentation of affective experience, which "empties out" interpersonal experience' (138). The more detached Raskolnikov becomes from the various aspects of his personality, the more 'apathetic, listless, distant, and asocial' (ibid. 375) he is. The 'true self' becomes disembodied and dissociated; Raskolnikov killed Alëna Ivanovna by repeatedly striking her with an axe 'hardly conscious of what he was doing, and almost mechanically' (73). When he fled from the scene it was as though he 'no longer knew quite what he was doing, and the farther he went the worse his condition became' (ibid. 83). In the days following the murder, Raskolnikov's mental torment tells on his body and he succumbs to a fever. As he struggles to come to terms with his crime and deal with his crushing paranoia, he withdraws completely from the world, shunning those closest to him. The commission of the crime had depended on a split between Raskolnikov's 'true' and 'false' selves; however, the tension between the two leads to a further division. This is a typical complication of the schizoid personality, as Laing observes:

the true and false selves lose their relatedness...but also they both in turn break into sub-systems within themselves. Thus, in the relationship that the

self has with itself, one finds the inner self splits to have a sado-masochistic relationship with itself. (*Divided Self* 83)

This seems a good description of the tortured relationship that Raskolnikov develops with Razumikhin. Razumikhin is a symbol of social and psychological normativity and the representative of Raskolnikov's superego. Despite the time that has elapsed since the two were together at university, from the moment of their first reunion Razumikhin goes to extraordinary lengths to help his friend. Yet Raskolnikov is at best dismissive and at worst contemptuous of Razumikhin, as though he cannot bear to be faced with this side of himself which he has since disavowed.

The disintegration of Raskolnikov's unified self and the brutal murder of the Ivanovna sisters stem from Raskolnikov's desire to prove himself a 'superman' to whom the normal rules of society do not apply. Suffering an existential crisis, a response to the pressures of modernity, Raskolnikov wishes to test whether he is a great man like Napoleon<sup>19</sup> and the other 'men of genius [who] had not heeded the isolated misdeed but marched straight over it without reflection' (472). This championing of psychopathic traits runs throughout the novel and the 'terrible fascination' (ibid.) that Napoleon holds for Raskolnikov mirrors the reader's own interest in the psychopathic figure. However, Raskolnikov's experiment comes with great psychic risks, as Laing explains:

[i]n phantasy, the self can be anyone, anywhere, do anything, have everything. It is thus omnipotent and completely free – but only in phantasy. Once commit itself [sic] to any real project and it suffers agonies of humiliation – not necessarily for any failure, but simply because it has to

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<sup>19</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte is widely believed to have been a psychopath, his lack of affect and shallow emotions no doubt assisting him in his campaigns. For more on Napoleon see Alan Schom's study, *Napoleon Bonaparte: A Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998).

subject itself to necessity and contingency...The more this phantastic omnipotence and freedom are indulged, the more weak, helpless, and fettered it becomes in actuality. (*Divided Self* 84)

When Raskolnikov tests his theory, then, he becomes not a Napoleonic ‘world-shaper’ but tormented and constrained, a prisoner of the situation he has created. The irony is that Raskolnikov was led to his heinous act by his empathy for the indiscriminate suffering he saw around him. Unable to accept that a just and compassionate God would allow such misery, Raskolnikov turns to nihilism, the rejection of all religious or moral principles. Without the centring of religion there are no absolutes; no divine decrees. Man is free to become a libertine, like Svidrigaylov, following his appetites without recourse to moral, religious or legal strictures. Raskolnikov comes to believe that not all men are created equal; there are those who must abide by society’s rules and those who are above them, to whom all is permissible. To him, Alëna Ivanovna is a ‘foul, noxious louse...no good to anybody, who sucked the life-blood of the poor, so vile that killing her ought to bring absolution for forty sins’ (498); he tells himself that despatching her would be a service to humanity rather than a crime. He originally expounded his idea in a journal article some months earlier and although the ‘superman’ concept is not in itself original, as Razumikhin points out, what Raskolnikov does bring to the debate is the idea of ‘bloodshed *as a matter of conscience*’ (253, original emphasis). Raskolnikov’s article posits the overstepping of ethical and social interdictions as a moral duty for qualifying persons, and this complicates the reader’s relationship with the crime. Reception of the murders is no longer a case of simple acceptance or disapprobation; one must also negotiate one’s understanding of Raskolnikov’s social philosophy.

Significantly, Raskolnikov has no overwhelming urge to murder the moneylender. He spends a great deal of time rationalising the act and is ultimately convinced of its worth

by a series of mundane coincidences. The galvanising factor is a chance encounter in the Haymarket, when he overhears some market traders speaking to Lizaveta and learns that Alëna Ivanovna will be home alone the following evening. It reminds Raskolnikov of an earlier occasion, when after his first visit to the moneylender he stopped off at a tavern and overheard another student telling a young officer how he could kill the old woman without compunction. Fate and circumstance seem to be conspiring against Raskolnikov, propelling him towards the commission of the crime, and '[t]his casual public-house conversation had an extraordinary influence on the subsequent development of the matter, as if there were indeed something fateful and fore-ordained about it' (63). This sense of Raskolnikov's helplessness and of the terrible inevitability of events helps to lessen his culpability; viewed as a victim of circumstance, rather than the evil perpetrator of a senseless crime, it is easier for the reader to negotiate his or her empathetic acceptance of the character. Raskolnikov's distaste for the act of murder further strengthens the reader's support for him. When he finally goes through with it, it is a triumph of reason over instinct and one only achieved, as we have seen, by the complex splitting of key components of his psyche. Yet in so doing 'Raskolnikov has murdered his own better, i.e. meeker, self, as symbolised by his wicked destruction of the harmless Lizaveta' (Conradi 53) which brings, ultimately, his mental disintegration. Dostoevsky was fascinated by the indistinct nature of human consciousness – what Bakhtin terms unfinalizability – and, as Philip Rahv has noted, he was 'the first novelist to have fully accepted and dramatized the principle of uncertainty or indeterminacy in the presentation of character' (21). Dostoevsky's focus on interiority allows him to create an extraordinarily intense and penetrating version of realism which highlights the dialogic nature of human consciousness and interaction.

Dostoevsky's revolutionary literary techniques allowed him to create a psychological verisimilitude the likes of which had never been seen before. Indeed, Bakhtin contends that 'the thinking human consciousness and the dialogic sphere in which this consciousness exists...becomes the object of authentic artistic visualization for the first time in Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel' (*Poetics* 271). In contrast to *Little Dorrit's* Rigaud, to whose psyche we are denied access, we spend much of *Crime and Punishment* inside Raskolnikov's mind. Dostoevsky's notebooks show that he originally conceived of the novel as a first person psychological account of a crime. However, initial drafts revealed the technique to be limiting and, ironically, distancing,<sup>20</sup> in that Raskolnikov was only able to relay events after the fact. The lack of suspense and immediacy that this engendered saw the plan abandoned in favour of third person narration. The benefits of this are patent: the reader occupies a privileged position inside Raskolnikov's head and from that vantage point experiences the pressures, terrors and fevered machinations that occupy him throughout the narrative. Indeed, the novel produces such a profound effect on the reader that early editions carried health warnings and, in a letter to John Addington Symonds, Robert Louis Stevenson remarked: 'Henry James could not finish it: all I can say is, it nearly finished me. It was like having an illness' (qtd. in Lord 3). Stevenson is not alone in his reaction to the novel. The extraordinary intensity of Dostoevsky's narrative style and the barrage of 'voices' dialogically heaping pressure on Raskolnikov (and, through him, on the reader) produce an effect similar to the 'brain fever' to which Raskolnikov succumbs in the aftermath of the murders. The reader's unique understanding of the pressures Raskolnikov is placed under helps him or her to empathise with the murderer in a way they might not in a less intense and involving text. As Gary Rosenshield has said:

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<sup>20</sup> This is an issue which would later affect William Faulkner. See pages 138-139 for my discussion of the limitations of Faulkner's experimental poetics in *The Sound and the Fury*.

[b]y presenting most of the action from the experiencing Raskol'nikov's [sic] point of view, Dostoevskij [sic] induces us to commiserate with the murderer's anxiety and suffering while appreciating their role in the resolution of the plot....Focusing on the experiencing self...makes the presentation of the murder more vivid and powerful. (406)

Even as we condemn Raskolnikov's warped theories and the evil acts they lead to, we celebrate his humanity. The narrative abounds with examples of his compassion and empathy; as noted previously, even his crime is based on his inability to accept the suffering he sees around him. He gives his last few copecks to Katerina Ivanovna to feed the starving Marmeladov children (24) and tries to save a drunken young woman, who appears to have been attacked, from being further abused by a predatory older man (46). Such altruistic acts stand out in stark relief in a novel concerned with human suffering, poverty and social injustice, and Raskolnikov's instinctive desire to help the needy encourages an empathetic response in the reader. Ironically, though, the act of empathy which paves the way for his crime also implicates the reader, in that it leads to our narrative acceptance of his act of murder. As Raskolnikov leaves the wretched Marmeladovs his last few coppers, there follows a section of quoted monologue in which he details his outrage at the speed and ease with which Marmeladov and Katerina Ivanovna have grown used to accepting the money provided by Sonya's prostitution:

'Men are scoundrels; they can get used to anything!'

He pondered.

'Well, and if I am wrong,' he burst out suddenly, 'if men are not really scoundrels, men in general, the whole human race, I mean, – then all

the rest is just prejudice, imaginary fears, and there are no real barriers, and that is as it should be!’ (25)

Fatefully for the Ivanovna sisters, the ‘barriers’ he imaginatively tears down include those interdicting acts such as murder. When Raskolnikov breaks this taboo, via the murders and his nihilistic philosophy, he enters a world without moral guidelines or guardians and it is a world in which he has the power to do entirely as he wishes. The only thing that could stand in his way is his own conscience.

The idea of conscience, lacking in the true psychopath, is noteworthy and one I shall come back to throughout this study. For most of the novel, Raskolnikov scornfully rejects the idea that he has done anything wrong in murdering the old woman and therefore disavows all feelings of remorse or guilt. His attitude is troubling to the reader whose empathy has been won by descriptions of his crushing poverty and suffering; Raskolnikov’s strange lack of remorse is repellent and alienating and the reader is forced to condemn him once more when he boasts

I longed to kill without casuistry, to kill for my own benefit, and for that alone! I would not lie about it even to myself! I did not commit murder to help my mother – that’s rubbish! I did not commit murder in order to use the profit and power I gained to make myself a benefactor to humanity. Rubbish! I simply murdered; I murdered for myself, for myself alone, and whether I became a benefactor to anybody else, or, like a spider, spent the rest of my life catching everybody in my web and sucking the life-blood out of them, should have been a matter of complete indifference to me at that moment! (401-402)

Despite his protestations, however, Raskolnikov clearly does feel guilt; its effects manifest in his fevers and hallucinations, depressions, apathy and erratic behaviour. His guilt is repressed; a risky tactic, as we know from Freud that there is always a danger that the repressed will return. Albert J. Guerard suggests that, at 'a wavering line between conscious and unconscious understanding we see...actual persons and happenings interiorized and thus [becoming] psychic events' (178-179). This appears to happen in Part III of the novel, when a mysterious stranger accuses Raskolnikov in the street: 'the man raised his head and looked at him with sombre ominous eyes. "Murderer!" he said suddenly, in a low but clear and distinct voice' (261). At this stage in the narrative the stranger appears to be a hallucination; Raskolnikov's conscience transformed into a detached entity. According to psychotherapists Anthony Bateman and Jeremy Holmes, the hallucination of a persecuting figure is common to the schizophrenic subject in a paranoid state, where 'elements of the fragmented self [are] projected into the outside world, [and] then take on elements of the projected self' (219). This defence mechanism sees the subject project an unsettling part of himself which then 'confronts him in a frightening way, but perhaps less terrifyingly than if the hatred [or, in this case, guilt] had remained entirely inside him' (ibid.).

The man appears a second time, in a horrific nightmare in which he leads the unwitting Raskolnikov back to the moneylender's flat. The stranger disappears from sight as the two men mount the stairs and Raskolnikov enters the flat alone. Moving aside a cloak, Raskolnikov reveals the old woman huddled in a chair, with her face hidden. He strikes her repeatedly with the axe but she does not react until Raskolnikov crouches down and looks into her face. The old woman erupts into noiseless laughter and, seized by madness, Raskolnikov strikes her again and again. Laughter and whispering seem to be coming from every part of the flat, amplifying with every strike of the axe. Raskolnikov

‘tried to flee, but the entrance was full of people, all the doors stood open, and the landing and the stairs below were one mass of people, a sea of heads, all looking at him, and all silent, waiting, without a sound’ (267). This classic stress dream, where Raskolnikov finds himself unable to move or cry out, reveals the depth of the psychic trauma occasioned by his guilt. That the stranger led him to confront the scene, and thus his own guilt, is of course significant. Although we later learn that the mysterious stranger is a real person and a witness for Porfiry Petrovich, the investigating magistrate, the dream sequence described above clearly demonstrates the extent to which he has been interiorised by Raskolnikov, to become one of Guerard’s ‘psychic events’. As I noted in my discussion of *Little Dorrit*, this is a clear demonstration of how polyphony and heteroglossia can also have internal implications; with external dialogues affecting interior dialogues, which in turn are manifested externally.

In Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, remorse is a natural response to a transgressive act that one regrets. Guilt, however, is a psychic manifestation of the realisation that an act has caused an irreparable rift between the subject and the maternal or paternal other. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov’s guilt has two sources: the sublimated incestuous desire he feels for his sister and mother and the killing of the Ivanovna sisters. Both have led to an ‘irreparable rift’ between Raskolnikov and his mother, with his unresolved oedipal conflict adding a further insult to, and rift between, Raskolnikov and his late father. For Lacan, desire, when it concerns a loved one, is enacted to the extent that it accomplishes a desire for death. This is not a physical death, but what Lacan calls the ‘second death’. In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan arrived at this formulation in his discussion of Sophocles’ *Antigone* (442 BC), where he recognises that Antigone would only have felt guilty if she had failed to give her brother a proper burial. Guilt is therefore figured as the renunciation of desire, which is always desire for the other

of the unconscious oedipal fantasy. In following his desire to the limit, Raskolnikov brought himself to his second death; his desire to be a superman led him to attack the patrilineality of the symbolic order, dislocating himself from the Symbolic Father. In psychoanalysis, then, guilt appears as a signpost to the subject's desire in relation to the desire of the other.

In his essay, 'Dostoevsky and Parricide', Freud discusses the difficult relationship that Dostoevsky had with his own father as a boy. Freud argues that Dostoevsky's oedipal desire to murder his father came horribly true when the father was actually murdered by his own serfs, leaving the boy crippled with guilt and craving punishment. Freud concluded that the experience turned Dostoevsky into a masochist; as Lavrin has noted, '[h]e enjoyed piling upon himself voluntary suffering, misfortunes, and humiliations. In fact, these gave him a moral relief, and even stimulated his creative power' (40). This desire to kill the parent and the attainment of 'moral relief' via self-torture seems highly relevant to Raskolnikov. He is forced to act when his mother writes to him explaining Dunya's intention to sacrifice herself in a loveless marriage to Luzhin<sup>21</sup> so that Raskolnikov may return to university. However, the murder of his family is too hideous a notion for his ego to deal with, so his attack on patriarchy is transferred to Alëna and Lizaveta. As we have seen, Razumikhin stands in the novel for Raskolnikov's superego; he continues to look after Raskolnikov's mother and sister when Raskolnikov sends them away. Despite his complex psychological transferences and splitting mechanisms, Raskolnikov is tortured by what he has done and is ultimately driven to confess. He experiences his loss of unity as the death of himself and, as Laing observes, considers

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<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that Luzhin is figured as the most unappealing character in the novel. His narcissism, avariciousness and avowed desire to take a wife over whom he can 'exercise absolute and unlimited dominion' (295) is repellent to the reader, who comes to view him as even worse than the murderers Raskolnikov and Svidrigaylov. This empathetic quirk is in keeping with the ambiguity that runs throughout the novel.

himself the victim of the crime, rather than an executioner (*Self and Others* 66). When he finally confesses, it is not with a sense of remorse at the killing of the old woman (he constantly forgets about Lizaveta), but in an attempt to restore his psychic health and rejoin humanity.

Raskolnikov's attitude towards Lizaveta is curious, in that her death has no reality for him. He suppresses his memory of killing her (as evidenced by the dream described above) and focuses only on the murder of the old woman. There are a number of possible reasons for this. Guerard suggests that:

[t]he classic explanation would be, of course, that only the pawnbroker's murder was "intended" or "wished". A psychoanalytic rendering might argue that the mother-component was so strong and hateful, at the critical moment, that the sister-component scarcely seemed to exist. (181)

One can also surmise that Raskolnikov perceived Lizaveta, as an educationally-subnormal peasant, to be even less of a person than the 'louse' of an old woman and therefore beneath the notice of a 'superman' like him. Yet another, and perhaps more compelling, explanation is that during the murder Lizaveta acts as a substitute for Raskolnikov's beloved sister, Dunya. The psychic pain brought by Dunya's figurative death is too much for Raskolnikov to bear, so he represses the memory in a classic psychological defence mechanism. This is not a conscious action, as Bateman and Holmes explain:

defences...are psychological configurations operating outside the realm of consciousness which minimise conflict, reduce tension, maintain intrapsychic equilibrium, regulate self-esteem and play a central role in dealing with anxiety whether it arises from internal or external sources...Repression ensures that wishes which are incompatible with

reality, superego demands, or other impulses, remain unconscious or disguised. (74)

Dostoevsky also supplies the reader with a defence mechanism which helps to reduce the dissonance created by their complicity with the murderer. The sustained narrative focus on Raskolnikov's philosophy, rather than his victims (Raskolnikov insists 'I killed not a human being but a principle!' (264)), spares the reader from some of the horror of the act. This shielding, or repression, of the abjection of murder makes it easier for the reader to maintain their empathetic connection with Raskolnikov and to focus on the philosophical and moral issues being explored. As Raskolnikov discovers to his cost, however, repression is not absolute. The anxiety that accompanies the repressed thought or memory remains, intensified by the ever-present fear that the repressed will eventually return to consciousness. Following the murder, Raskolnikov develops an intimate but sexless relationship with the selfless Sonya, a young girl forced into prostitution to feed and clothe the starving wife and children of her alcoholic father, Marmeladov. Although the memory of Lizaveta has largely been repressed, Raskolnikov increasingly identifies her with Sonya until the two women have been almost entirely elided in Raskolnikov's conscious mind. Prior to his dream about ineffectively attacking the old woman again, Raskolnikov ruminates on his attitude to Lizaveta:

Poor Lizaveta! Why had she to turn up?...It is strange though; I wonder why I hardly ever think of her, as though I had not killed her...Lizaveta! Sonya! Poor, meek, gentle creatures, with meek eyes!...Why do they not weep? Why do they not groan?...They give up everything...they look at you meekly and gently...Sonya, Sonya, gentle Sonya!... (265, original ellipsis)

Even when consciously addressing his feelings about Lizaveta's murder, Raskolnikov almost instantly replaces her in his sympathies and lamentations with Sonya and the doubling of the characters becomes more pronounced as the narrative progresses.

The theme of the double was a major one for Dostoevsky for the duration of his creative life, and through it he explored the instability and unfinalizability of the self. Significantly for my study of *Crime and Punishment*, the figure of the double was also used to explore concepts of morality. As Dmitri Chizhevsky has noted,

[t]he appearance of the double raises a question about the concreteness of man's real existence as an ethical individual. The problem of "stability", of the ontological "fixity" of an ethical being is the real problem of the nineteenth century. (122).

This sense of 'fixity' was a key concern for Dostoevsky; in *Crime and Punishment*, characters are not only doubled repeatedly but are also provided with parallels within the text. Everybody seems linked in one way or another, often by family connections: Porfiry is related to both Razumikhin and Luzhin; Luzhin was introduced to Dunya by the Svidrigaylovs, of whom he is a distant relative; there are two Mikolkas, symbolically linked; Katerina Ivanovna shares her surname with the murdered moneylender and her sister, etc. The links between the characters add to the feeling of claustrophobia within the narrative. According to Robert Lord, Dostoevsky's fascination with the double grew from a stylistic requirement for a narrative device that would accommodate the dialogism inherent in his work. Lord argues that this

inner dialogue was to become incarnate and to produce its own human forms. The projection or shadow became a stylistic necessity as soon as

Dostoevsky discovered the need for the interplay and counterpoint of  
'voices' which could not otherwise have been achieved. (218)

The introduction of the double to the text allows Dostoevsky to explore the outer limits of human consciousness and identity. It is a narrative technique that allows Dostoevsky to explore Raskolnikov's psychic agony when caught in a polyphonic maelstrom of conflicting voices, opinions and pressures from the people around him. More significantly, it offers shape and structure to the whole novel, drawing the reader closer to the characters and the torments they suffer. Perhaps the most widely discussed of the doubles in *Crime and Punishment* is Svidrigaylov. Described in the novel as 'a very unpleasant character, extraordinarily corrupt and depraved, undoubtedly cunning, deceitful, and perhaps malicious' (444), Svidrigaylov is nonetheless one of the narrative's most fascinating and appealing characters. He represents the darkest elements of human consciousness and the reader's attraction to him may be based on his or her recognition of the opposing good and bad selves inherent to humankind. The ambiguity Svidrigaylov embodies is written on his face:

It was a rather strange face, almost like a mask: red and white, with a very light-coloured beard and still quite abundant fair hair. The eyes seemed somehow too blue, and their gaze too massive and unmoving. There was something terribly unpleasant in the handsome face, so extraordinarily young for its years. (449)

This face, which is handsome but terrible, attractive yet terrifying, is full of contrasts and contradictions, much like the reader's response to the character. Svidrigaylov shrugs off criticism of his ungentlemanly conduct towards Dunya by claiming that his very humanity should exculpate him from his most atrocious actions. When he says 'I, too, am a man, *et nihil humanum*' (269) he references the Roman playwright Terence who, in his comedy

*Heauton Timorumenos* (163 BC), writes ‘Homo sum et nihil humanum’: I am a man and reckon nothing human alien to me. This reference to humanity draws the reader into the frame; we too are human and therefore prey to the same passions and urges that trouble Svidrigaylov and Raskolnikov. So, when Svidrigaylov asks ‘am I a monster or am I myself a victim’ (269), the reader is surreptitiously prompted to ask this question not only of Raskolnikov but also of his- or herself. Empathetic support of Raskolnikov and enjoyment of the monstrous Svidrigaylov could be construed as morally suspect; however, one could argue that the reader is also the ‘victim’ of the poetics which have manipulated him or her into a position of empathy and identification at odds with his or her typical moral standpoints.

Svidrigaylov’s claim to be ‘merely human’ implicates the reader, yet Dostoevsky’s poetics shield the reader from the consequences of this assertion. As we have seen, when the commission of Raskolnikov’s murderous plan causes the disintegration of his unified self, Svidrigaylov comes to stand for his splintered id or unconscious. This separation allows the reader some cognitive distance from the cruelty and depravity that Svidrigaylov represents. The reader’s fascination with Svidrigaylov brings with it a subconscious recognition of his or her own aggressive drives; the dispersion of these elements into separate characters allows the reader to externalise those personal traits which cause moral discomfort and disavow the relation of these characteristics to his or her ‘better’ self. In clinical terms, Svidrigaylov has a malignant narcissistic personality; a severely disordered psyche which is just one step away from full-blown psychopathy. Lenzenweger and Clarkin tell us that the malignant narcissist finds the expression of aggression both acceptable and pleasurable, and has zero impulse control. The main personality traits are ‘grandiosity combined with ruthlessness, sadism, or hatred...[and] a total absence or deterioration of superego functioning’ (140) – mainstays of psychopath fiction all. Unlike

the psychopath, however, the malignant narcissist shows ‘some capacity for commitment to others and for experiencing authentic feelings of guilt’ (141). These traits offer great dramatic potential and the tension between the character’s tendency towards evil and his ability to form attachments and feel remorse is particularly interesting. Like *Little Dorrit*’s Rigaud, Svidrigaylov can be menacing and charming in equal measure; a fascinating and heady mix for the reader.

Svidrigaylov’s influence hangs heavily over the text from the beginning and, although we enjoy his characterisation, it is with increasing dread that we anticipate his appearance in the narrative proper. His cruel cat and mouse game with Raskolnikov does not disappoint. Raskolnikov is both repelled by Svidrigaylov and fascinated by him. Aware of his reputation as a conscienceless seducer and possible murderer, he is unable to deny the similarities between them and, as his mania develops, Raskolnikov finds himself increasingly drawn to him. As Conradi points out, during Svidrigaylov’s ‘nightmare appearance at Raskolnikov’s bedside in Part IV, he ingratiatingly insists on his kinship with Raskolnikov...[although] Raskolnikov experiences his sense of connection as a menace’ (59). As Raskolnikov’s psychic disintegration develops, however, he feels increasingly dissociated from society until the only people he feels a connection to are the disenfranchised prostitute Sonya and Svidrigaylov. Indeed, having initially been a source of anxiety for Raskolnikov, Svidrigaylov comes to represent refuge and understanding.

Following his final harrowing interview with Porfiry, which culminates in a promise to arrest him within a couple of days, Raskolnikov finds himself instinctively hurrying to find Svidrigaylov: ‘What he hoped for from him he did not know himself. But some power over him lay hidden in the man’ (443). The reader is similarly drawn to Svidrigaylov, as evidenced by the way that s/he eagerly anticipates his fullest appearance in the text. One can rationalise that this is based in the hope that his presence will explain

the dread fascination that mental and moral aberrance hold for the reader; however, it could equally be based in a vicarious, carnivalesque enjoyment of the extreme.

Svidrigaylov is widely accepted as the embodiment of Raskolnikov's man without conscience to whom all is permissible, and in this we can read a subtle valorisation of psychopathic traits. Although tormented by 'an infinite moral weariness' (ibid.), Raskolnikov is not yet ready to renounce his ideal and hopes that Svidrigaylov will offer him 'something *new*' (ibid., original emphasis). Contrary to Raskolnikov's expectations, however, his meeting with Svidrigaylov is not satisfactory; the superman Raskolnikov has built up in his mind seems changed, unsettled, and is unable to supply him with the answers he seeks. Svidrigaylov, drunk on a glass and a half of champagne, tells Raskolnikov that he is drinking 'to help me pull myself together, because I am getting ready to go somewhere, and you find me in a peculiar mood' (450). It seems that, even at this stage, Svidrigaylov is contemplating suicide: he tells Raskolnikov that without the distraction of debauchery 'one might have to shoot oneself without more ado' (451), and makes repeated references to Schiller. Friedrich Schiller was an eighteenth century philosopher, playwright, poet and historian who wrote extensively on the question of human freedom. In his discussion of the sublime, or incomparable greatness, he explored the notion of sacrificing oneself, contrary to one's instincts, for conceptual ideals. Svidrigaylov admits to Raskolnikov that he is afraid of death and doesn't like to hear it spoken of, yet we sense that his final show of 'superman' strength will see him surmount his fears in the ultimate triumph of philosophy over humanity.

As the novel approaches its denouement, both men contemplate death. Svidrigaylov, having risen at 5am, shoots himself dead at a watch-tower after cryptically telling the watchman that he is going to America. At just the same time, Raskolnikov stands on a riverbank, considering suicide. The use of thresholds is notable here: both

events take place at dawn, the threshold between night and day; the two men are at the threshold of life and death; Raskolnikov stands on the threshold of solid ground and the water which threatened to engulf Svidrigaylov in one of his nightmares; indeed, even Svidrigaylov's puzzling reference to America concerns a threshold, in that America in the 1860s was still a frontier land, characterised by rugged individuality, where people were creating their own territories and shaping the psychic identity of their nation. Bakhtin demonstrates that 'the threshold and its substitutes' are important motifs for Dostoevsky, marking 'the fundamental "points" of action in the novel' (*Poetics* 170). For Bakhtin, the threshold is where 'radical change, [and] an unexpected turn of fate takes place' (ibid. 169); when the motif relates to a person it denotes somebody 'on the threshold of a final decision, at a moment of *crisis*, at an unfinalizable – and *unpredeterminable* – turning point for his soul' (ibid. 61, original emphasis).

The unfinalizability explored by the novel extends also to the reader, via Dostoevsky's narrative technique. There is no position of omniscient, easy comfort from where everything can be known; rather 'Dostoevsky's novels are designed in such a way as repeatedly to challenge the reader's (and the character's) easy identification of signifier with signified, sign with meaning, verisimilitude with reality' (Jones 15). Although there is a heterodiegetic narrator who offers commentary on the proceedings, in the Dostoevskian polyphonic novel the narrator's voice has the same weight as those of the characters; he does not have special privileges which he can share with the reader. Bakhtin views this strategy as essential to Dostoevsky's view of the world as unfinalizable: 'if any essential surplus of meaning were available to the author, it would transform the great dialogue of the novel into a finalized and objectivised dialogue, or into a dialogue rhetorically performed' (*Poetics* 73). The reader, too, is on an equal footing with the narrator and the characters, able only to wait and see how events unfold.

Terras calls the narrator ‘selectively omniscient’ (64) and suggests that he dips in and out of the narrative in a quite unpredictable manner: ‘Occasionally the narrator’s observations stand apart from the drama...[other times] the narrator makes his presence felt by referring to the text itself...Sometimes that narrator will let his own emotions come to the fore’ (ibid.). The result can be quite dizzying. The reader is sometimes led to a particular conclusion (as with Terras’s example of the narrator describing Lizaveta as ‘unfortunate’ during the murder (*Reading Dostoevsky* 64)); at other times the reader is confronted with the incongruity of the narrator’s feelings, such as the sympathetic treatment Raskolnikov receives despite being an arrogant, self-centred, cold-blooded murderer. Our attitude to Raskolnikov and Svidrigaylov shifts from revulsion to attraction and back again, over and over throughout the narrative. Ultimately our ambivalence becomes a kind of doubling or dialogism which shows the effect of the narrative’s many voices on our understanding of events and characters alike. Even this draws us empathetically closer to the characters, as Conradi has noted: ‘[i]n identifying with Raskolnikov and simultaneously being repelled by him, the reader has set up within him a tortured doubleness comparable to that by which Raskolnikov feels eaten alive’ (42). There is no familiar territory in *Crime and Punishment*; as soon as the reader begins to feel comfortable Dostoevsky introduces another voice or viewpoint to alter his or her perception. Jones explains:

Changes in narrative point-of-view serve not principally to light up the subject from different angles, but more often to subvert the integrity of the reader’s perception of the imaginative world, particularly to subvert the refuge of the familiar, to lure readers into thinking they know ‘where they stand’ in relation to characters, setting and plot, only radically to undermine their suppositions. (14)

For Bakhtin, the dialogism of narrative and consciousness in *Crime and Punishment* is nowhere more apparent than in Raskolnikov's first monologue at the beginning of the novel. The monologue occurs before Raskolnikov has decided to go through with the murder of Alëna Ivanovna and after he has received the letter from his mother detailing the circumstances of Dunya's engagement. As Raskolnikov considers his position and the tone of his mother's letter, he enters into a dialogic inner debate with each of the figures that will be central to the ensuing narrative: Dunya, his mother, Luzhin, Svidrigaylov, Marmeladov and Sonya. Bakhtin describes this kind of dialogized interior monologue as *microdialogue*; 'all words in it are double-voiced, and in each of them a conflict of voices takes place...Dialogue has penetrated inside every word, provoking in it a battle and the interruption of one voice by another' (*Poetics* 75). As Raskolnikov mulls over the proposed marriage and considers its implications, his mind turns to the events of recent days – conversations he has had, things he has read. Through these, the voices of the people concerned are able to dialogically enter the debate in a polyphony of distinctly individual, authentic 'voices'. It is a powerful technique that helps the reader to better understand and empathise with Raskolnikov, as we realise that his decisions are not his alone but based on a cacophony of viewpoints and influences that constantly assail him. Indeed, this sense of Raskolnikov being bombarded by a bewildering variety of disparate perspectives that shape his response to the world around him is central to the novel. As Bakhtin has shown, '[i]n the subsequent course of the novel, nothing incorporated into its contents – people, ideas, things – remains external to Raskolnikov's consciousness; everything is projected against him and dialogically reflected in him' (*ibid.*).

These influences become so central to Raskolnikov's experience of the world, so embedded within him, that they also manifest as what Bakhtin has termed a *hidden dialogicality* (*ibid.* 197). This is where even Raskolnikov's private and innermost thoughts

are influenced by the perceived or anticipated responses of others; the words of the other are uttered neither out loud nor in Raskolnikov's internal monologue, yet their influence is still felt in a profound and affecting manner. As Bakhtin puts it, 'it is a conversation of the most intense kind, for each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker' (ibid.). It is a testament to the effectiveness of the technique that the reader is able to accept this not just unquestioningly, but with recognition too. This sense that every word uttered influences and is influenced by every word uttered by others mirrors everyday human experience; we are each of us, even the psychopath, a mass of dialogized influences. It is a Lockean refusal of *a priori* knowledge that makes us all the sum of our experiences; a process which is, by nature, unfinalizable and ongoing. Dostoevsky recognised that a 'very intensive kind of realism can be obtained...by concentrating on man's inner world' (Lavrin 29) and that the polyphonic novel was the best means of approaching this; however he also showed that consciousness is ultimately unknowable and indefinable. Bakhtin sums it up: 'It is impossible to master the inner man, to see and understand him by making him into an object of indifferent neutral analysis; it is also impossible to master him by merging with him, by empathising with him' (*Poetics* 251).

With regards to the development of narrative techniques for representing aberrant psychology in fiction, then, *Crime and Punishment* is a landmark text. Dostoevsky is the first novelist to juxtapose a profound interest in the psychic state of deviant figures and a highly developed dialogic technique. Although the focalizing character is not psychopathic, the novel nevertheless represents a key point in the trajectory of the fictional psychopath. Dostoevsky's poetics ensure that the reader is drawn into complicity, via narration, with a psychologically disordered criminal; the resultant solipsistic introspection is of great interest to the scholar of empathy. Furthermore, the novel's extensive passages

of interiority demonstrate a deepening interest in the representation of consciousness, a concern which would occupy a central position in the narrative concerns of the twentieth century. The tensions between Dostoevsky's subject matter and his poetics reveal that further development of the technique was possible; yet in highlighting the difficulties inherent to the task, Dostoevsky also highlights the opportunities – opportunities which would later be capitalised on by twentieth century novelists such as William Faulkner and Bret Easton Ellis.

### **2.3 The Impact of Modernism: William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury***

William Faulkner's experimental novel, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), is a landmark text of high modernism which also marks a significant development in the representation of aberrant psychology in fiction. Faulkner wrote at a time of great advancements in the understanding of human consciousness and sensory perception; as the field of psychoanalysis expanded and grew in stature, artists of every discipline questioned the sense and logic of the world and explored conceptions of reality as multifaceted and subjective. Faulkner himself was fascinated with the representation of consciousness, having avidly studied great nineteenth century novelists such as Dostoevsky, Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert, and modernists including Herman Melville, Marcel Proust, Henry James, Joseph Conrad and James Joyce. He took narrative devices from each of them, combining and developing them to create a style of his own that best approximated his understanding of human perception. As Arthur F. Kinney notes:

we can trace many of [Faulkner's] strategies and techniques in the works of others: the autonomy of the novel in James, the use of images in Flaubert, the panoramic view of society in Balzac, the idea of the doppelganger and

the use of the family in Dostoyevsky [sic] and, most importantly, the development of consciousness in Melville, Conrad, Joyce, and Proust. (41)

The lengthy passages of introspection characteristic of James and Dostoevsky were of great interest to Faulkner, as was the later stream of consciousness technique that they foreshadowed. The term 'stream of consciousness' was first used by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) as a means of describing the unbroken flow of sense perceptions in the conscious mind, and now refers to the narrative method for rendering perceptual, imaginative, emotional and cognitive activity. The earliest known example of stream of consciousness is Edouard Dujardin's short novel *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1888), a dechronologised story which relies on free association and attempts to depict the events of the story only as they impact on the protagonist's consciousness. Although not wholly successful in *Les Lauriers*, Dujardin's pioneering technique was highly inspirational to later novelists and was cited by Joyce as a major influence on his own work. Indeed, stream of consciousness was to become one of the key devices of the modernist movement (and beyond), developed and refined by writers such as Dorothy Richardson (*Pilgrimage*, published in twelve volumes 1915-1938), Joyce (*Ulysses*, 1922), Virginia Woolf (*To the Lighthouse*, 1927) and, of course, Faulkner himself. Abrams explains that, since the 1920s, stream of consciousness has described

a special mode of narration that undertakes to reproduce, without a narrator's intervention, the full spectrum and continuous flow of a character's mental process, in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings and random associations. (202)

*The Sound and the Fury* exemplifies these qualities as it tells the story of the Compson family via four monologues: interior monologues from each of the three Compson brothers, plus a more traditional authorial narration which Faulkner referred to as his own monologue. The brothers' monologues represent a big departure from the narrative styles I have examined so far in this thesis; gone are the external view of *Little Dorrit* and the shifting first- and third person narration and free indirect discourse of *Crime and Punishment*. With no mediating narrator to show us the way, we must feel our way through the jumbled discourse of each of the brothers, a mélange of competing, often fleeting memories from the recent and distant past with the potential for confusing us as we struggle to ascertain where we are in time. The process is complicated by the aberrant mental states of each of the brothers: the first, Benjy, is a 33-year-old, non-verbal 'idiot' who has mentally never progressed beyond the age of three; the second, Quentin, is suicidal, obsessed with his sister and consumed by fantasies of incest and murder, and his monologue is possibly relayed to us post-mortem; the third monologist, Jason, is a psychopath who, despite his veneer of normality, is in psychological disarray as his elaborate web of lies threatens to collapse and reveal the truth of his situation. Although only one of the brothers is psychopathic and therefore an obvious candidate for analysis in this thesis, each of the monologues is worthy of inclusion due to their differing treatment of mental aberrance. Faulkner's experimental poetics are noteworthy for their manipulation of the reader and the text, and his techniques would have far-reaching implications for the representation of both the psychopathic subject and of psychic disorder more generally.

Each of the monologues recounts the events of a different day: Benjy's day is April 7<sup>th</sup> 1928; Quentin's is June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1910; Jason's is April 6<sup>th</sup> 1928; and the fourth monologue (sometimes referred to as Dilsey's monologue although she is not the speaker) narrates the

events of April 8<sup>th</sup> 1928. Although each of the monologues deals with unique material pertaining to their particular days of locution, the discourse of the brothers in particular also has a lot of material in common (predominantly the loss of their sister, Caddy). This offers the reader multiple perspectives on the same events, none of which are definitively truthful. Such varied angles of vision express the modernist conception of reality as manifold and enigmatic. Even with the addition of the fourth, authorial monologue we are not given an absolute truth, as absolute truth does not exist. Faulkner's poetics provide what Michael Millgate has called 'Faulkner's impassioned metaphor for the modern crisis of meaning' (328); the polyphonic nature of the novel underscoring the essential unfinalizability of reality. Furthermore, by placing us, without mediation, inside the mind of the disordered subject, Faulkner also creates an important milestone in the representation of aberrant psychology in fiction.

The first monologue of the novel is the most fragmented, disordered and alienating of the entire text. Benjy suffers from an unnamed neurological condition which carries some of the markers of autism, including an inability to communicate verbally and interact socially, obsessive attachment to objects, rigid adherence to established routines, repetitive behaviour, and an inability to understand the chronological movement of time.

Abstractions are beyond Benjy and he is unable to make causal links between events. The famous opening sentence of the novel, 'Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting' (3), illustrates his inability to conceptualise and the reader is made acutely aware of the perceptual challenges that lie ahead. Benjy reacts on a purely sensory level and is unable to discriminate between memories from the distant past and contemporary events. Time for him is a single instant; thought transferences, indicated in the text by the use of italics, break with temporal causality. Each dechronologised remembrance is lived anew in the now, and reported without commentary or subjective

opinion, forcing the reader to focus on the resonance of each episode in order to piece together its meaning within the wider context of the narrative. The weirdly intimate experience of viewing the world through Benjy's eyes is bewildering enough to contemporary readers; in 1929, when no fictional antecedent for such a character existed, the experience must have been truly extraordinary.

Faulkner's technique is as extraordinary as the experience itself. He shapes the 'associative, illogical, [and] spontaneous' (Cohn 12) interior monologue with its 'staccato rhythms, ellipses, [and] profuse imagery' (ibid.) into a believable mindscape that allows a non-verbal man to figuratively narrate his story. In 1929, the interior monologue was still in its infancy and very much an experimental form. The most celebrated and successful precursor to *The Sound and the Fury* was Joyce's *Ulysses*, but that was not an interior monologue in its purest form, as the novel also included significant sections of third person narration. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner perfected what Cohn has termed the 'autonomous interior monologue' (17, Cohn's emphasis) whereby the narrative is delivered to the reader directly from the subject's mind, without authorial incursion or mediation, and in chronological order (i.e. from the beginning of the narrated day, to the end). Each of the brothers uses a slightly different monologic form which subtly reveals his personality and mental state. The reader takes meaning not just from the content of the monologues, but also from the fact and method of their reproduction. This is significant, as it helps to overcome some of the problems inherent to the technique, such as how a non-verbal man like Benjy has the language to monologise, or whether any of the monologists is addressing an actual listener. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the moment of locution generally remains ambiguous and the reader cannot be certain whether events are reported as they happen, or are remembered at a later time. Dorrit Cohn suggests that the monologues in *The Sound and the Fury* are focused exclusively on the past and can

therefore be categorised as memory monologues. For Cohn, this infers that each of the monologues represents the mind's replay of events at the end of the recounted day, before sleep in the case of Benjy and Jason and before suicide for Quentin (Sartre suggests that Quentin's monologue could actually be relayed post-mortem, but this need not affect our characterisation of his discourse as memory monologue). The memory monologue, a variant of the autonomous monologue, combines an autobiographical form with mnemonic achronology to create 'the illusion of the "uninterrupted unrolling" of a thought process' (Cohn 185). Cohn explains:

In contrast to other autonomous monologues, in memory monologues the present moment of locution is a moment emptied of all contemporary, simultaneous experience: the monologist exists merely as a disembodied medium, a pure memory without clear location in time and space. The monologic presentation itself is reduced to zero here, to a kind of vanishing point of the mnemonic process. (247)

By removing the reader's awareness of the act of locution, Faulkner frees him or her to focus exclusively on the remembered events and experience them as the character does. The remembering mind does not announce its recollections to the self with an 'I remember when...' Rather, addressing no-one, it 'replays' aural and visual scenes so that they appear to the self in exactly the same way that they did at their moment of origin. The effect of this technical device on the reader is not without its problems. With time, via remembrance, so radically dechronologised, the reader often feels adrift, unsure as to their temporal position and unclear about what is being relayed. This is particularly acute in the Benjy section as he relays events in an even, reportorial fashion and focuses on sensory perception.

The key to understanding events in Benjy's monologue and the wider novel is to examine the triggers to memory, then extrapolate the causal links between the events being relayed. For instance, a memory from the day of Damuddy's funeral, where the children are trying to glimpse the wake, gives way to a much later recollection of Caddy's wedding. TP, who is looking after Benjy, has stolen some champagne, which he calls 'sasprilluh' (24), from the cellar, and they are both drunk. Benjy is unable to make a link between the 'soda' he is drinking and his altered physical state and he has no conception of inebriation. Things happen *to* Benjy; he has no understanding of his own agency and this is reflected in his monologue. This passage is worth quoting at length:

"Hush up." T.P. said, trying not to laugh. "Lawd, they'll all hear us. Get up." T.P. said. "Get up, Benjy, quick." He was thrashing about and laughing and I tried to get up. The cellar steps ran up the hill in the moonlight and T.P. fell up the hill, into the moonlight, and I ran against the fence and T.P. ran behind me saying "Hush up hush up." Then he fell into the flowers, laughing, and I ran into the box. But when I tried to climb onto it it jumped away and hit me on the back of the head and my throat made a sound. It made the sound again and I stopped trying to get up, and it made the sound again and I began to cry. But my throat kept on making the sound while T.P. was pulling me. It kept on making it and I couldn't tell if I was crying or not, and T.P. fell down on top of me, laughing, and it kept on making the sound and Quentin kicked T.P. and Caddy put her arms around me, and her shining veil, and I couldn't smell trees anymore and I began to cry. (26)

Unable to conceptualise his drunkenness or contextualise the incident, Benjy can offer no indications as to what is taking place. The reader must supply meaning for him- or herself.

It is only when we reach the reference to Caddy's 'shining veil' that we can piece together the clues to arrive at an understanding of time and place: the unusual activity at the house, Benjy banished so as not to disrupt proceedings, the stocks of champagne in the cellar.

Significantly, the scene of Benjy's and T.P.'s drunkenness is interspersed with memories from the day of Damuddy's funeral. Although the initial thought transference is marked by italics, subsequent time slippages are not. The passage goes directly from a drunken T.P. asking Benjy to "Git on the box and see is they started" (25) to Caddy saying "They haven't started because the band hasn't come yet" (ibid.). Here, Faulkner's poetics deftly and subtly render both the movement of memory from prompt to linked episode and the dramatic and emotional resonance the two events have for the character. Benjy's mind flits between the occasions, merging them into a single achronologous locus of significance and hurt. The fact that the temporal shifts are not marked by italics as elsewhere in the narrative demonstrates how these events are synonymous for Benjy; the conflation of funeral and wedding linking the literal death of Damuddy with the figurative death of Caddy and Benjy's relationship, and of her place in the Compson family home. The end of the passage is deceptively simple; Benjy's recollection that 'I couldn't smell trees anymore and I began to cry' simplistically yet powerfully drawing together the two scenes. The scent of trees that characterised the Caddy of Benjy's childhood evokes the innocence of a fearless little girl with muddy drawers disappearing up a tree so as to peer through a window and ascertain what is occurring in the parlour; the muddy drawers themselves act as an ominous prefiguration of the loss of Caddy's innocence and her self-harming forays into promiscuity, which she neither enjoyed nor understood ('When they touched me I died' (94)). That Caddy is gone, lost to Benjy forever, and his subconscious realisation of this is what causes him to cry.

The seeming simplicity of Benjy's perceptual awareness of events belies the complexity of Faulkner's narrative poetics. Faulkner's demand that the reader take an active role in creating meaning from the text forces us to draw on what Kinney has termed our 'constitutive consciousness'. Constitutive consciousness is the locus of the reader's ability to select which evidence s/he will both take and reject from the text and the means by which those elements will be combined; it is 'the integrated sum of our awareness of the structure of the work and the perceptions of all the characters whose thoughts are explicitly or implicitly provided for us' (Kinney 101) The combination of the multiple perspectives offered by the text produce, in the constitutive consciousness, a Bakhtinian polyphony which mirrors the modernist conception of reality. Furthermore, the simultaneous collapse of temporal causation and conflation of events reveals the dialogism of the work, exemplifying the 'ceaselessly shifting power relations between words, their sensitivity to each other, and the relativizing force of their historically motivated clashes and temporary resolutions' (Vice 5) which typifies the Bakhtinian dialogic. Benjy's stunted intelligence does not limit our understanding of events as we are able to pull together disparate references and allusions, to become active producers of meaning. We become, in a sense, an extension of Benjy's psyche, performing for him the tasks of which he is incapable. The resulting intensity and sense of depth relates to both the characters and the narrative technique. François Pitavy explains:

By amplifying all the vague, fleeting, latent, or forgotten thoughts of a character without being restrained by the latter's limited intelligence or consciousness, [Faulkner] gives the reader the impression that he participates in that character's life. He retains the emotional force of a subjective account while giving it the fullness and fluency of an objective one. Since a voice thus modulated seems at once external and internal to the

character, both emanating from him and enveloping him, a three-dimensional effect not unlike that of stereophonic sound is produced. (qtd. in Kinney 101-102)

Faulkner's portrayal of Benjy's consciousness reflects the modernist preoccupation with accurately representing the thinking, feeling human subject. His exploration of mental impairment was bold and original, yet for all its revelations about sensory and temporal perception it actually reveals Benjy's objective, reportorial view of reality. Ultimately, it is the monologues of Benjy's brothers, Quentin and Jason, which are of the greatest interest to this study of the fictional representation of mental disorder. They are significant as they juxtapose a seemingly 'normal' psychology with Quentin's mental breakdown and preparations for suicide, and Jason's thinly veiled psychopathy. Noel Polk argues that:

Faulkner uses the mechanics of the English language – grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling – as a direct correlative to the states of each of the narrators' minds. The mechanical conventions of writing, then, sometimes work *against the words themselves*, so that they reveal things other than what the characters are saying; they work, in fact, to reveal things that the narrators are incapable of saying, or are specifically trying to keep from saying, things that have caused them pain or shame. (143)

The monologue of Harvard student Quentin is articulate and coherent. It initially reads like a straightforward autobiographical monologue, moving chronologically through time, and based more in the world of concepts than in the sensory world of Benjy. Yet, like Benjy, Quentin is caught in the past, forever scarred by the loss of Caddy and doomed like his brother to 'wander among memories and events which occurred over a period of as many as thirty years' (Ruppersburg 21). Quentin's experience and understanding of the

world is deeper than Benjy's and his monologue is more complex; as Cohn notes the 'relationship between the account of the last day and the memories of earlier days is far more varied, and the text cannot be reduced to a consistent pattern' (251). His incursions into the past present not as fleeting memories of moments relived, but as psychic bombardments of painful events that he is trying to stifle and ignore. The first instance of this, in paragraph five, shows how Quentin's musings on the weather and a half-remembered line from the John Keble hymn, *Holy Matrimony*, cause a barrage of thoughts related to Caddy's wedding, Quentin's torment over her loss of virginity, his obsession with incest and his ambivalent feelings about his place at Harvard:

Thinking it would be nice for them down at New London if the weather held up like this. Why shouldn't it? The month of brides, the voice that breathed *She ran right out of the mirror, out of the banked scent. Roses. Roses. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of. Roses. Not virgins like dogwood, milkweed. I said I have committed incest, Father I said. Roses. Cunning and serene. If you attend Harvard one year, but don't see the boat-race, there should be a refund. Let Jason have it. Give Jason a year at Harvard. (49)*

As Polk demonstrates, italics function differently for Quentin than they do for Benjy, representing his complete submersion in memory and 'farthest remove from language' (155). His 'remove from language' signals a loss of control, as indicated by the freefall of thoughts and images that invade his monologue. The irregular spacing between 'breathed' and 'She' signals typographically the depth of his submersion in memory and the abruptness of his break from reality. The distinction between the self-consciously 'written' style of Quentin's monologue and freer, less formal manner of remembered speech in his discourse initially represents the opposition between his public and private selves; the

image of himself which he projects to the outside world and his truer, more natural self. Quentin's monologue progresses in an orderly and straightforward fashion as he goes through his preparations for suicide, but rather than being reassuring or indicative of a sound mind, this order is synonymous with stasis and death; he functions as an automaton, performing his final tasks with a detached efficiency. However, as his narrative progresses, Quentin's incursions into the past become more frequent and, as the events they replay become increasingly fraught, his mental degeneration is reflected in what Polk refers to as the 'mechanical representation of his syntax, grammar, and punctuation' (150). The formal, controlled method of narration gives way to a less cohesive discourse:

One can trace Quentin's psychic disintegration, his movements into and out of lucidity, in the degree of normality of his language's representation, from the intricately structured sentences of some passages, to the almost complete disintegration of traditional language representation in others, especially in two scenes close to the end of his section that abandon punctuation and paragraph indentation, and in the penultimate paragraph of his section in which he finally yields up the capital "I," the orthographical symbol of the fragile ego he has managed to cling to, to the lower case "i," which represents graphemically his disintegrated self. (ibid.)

Such typographical signalling of Quentin's mental state does much to relay the physical effects that his remembrances have on him. The lack of punctuation evokes the increased heart rate and quickening breath that accompany the heightening of emotion, whilst the rejection of paragraph indentation suggests a contradictory flattening of emotion and a diminished sense of self, with the to-ing and fro-ing of his remembered exchanges becoming a single source of torment rather than a representation of opposition.

Quentin's further mental disintegration is starkly rendered in the passages depicting his challenges to Caddy over her sexual awakening, his imagined fight with Dalton Ames and his actual brawl with Gerald Bland. Following closely behind the highly-charged and symbolic incident with the Italian girl, whom Quentin calls 'sister', these passages reveal his subconscious feelings towards the girl who functions as a substitute for Caddy; an innocent, prepubescent Caddy whom Quentin can both protect and possess. As Mrs Bland and her party chat, Quentin drifts in and out of a reverie about Caddy's sexual exploits and his own imagined confession of incest. The thought transferences are marked by italics, and the irregular spacing and the lack of punctuation and capitalisation create a reading pace that mimics how these thoughts bombard Quentin's consciousness then eventually take over. As Quentin becomes more deeply immersed in his memories, the italics stop and the cadence alters, taking us from a barrage of invading, competing memories to events relived. The pace slows somewhat when the dialogue begins, giving the reader a sense of the weight the words carry for Quentin. Turn-taking is indicated by line breaks without indentation; there is no 'she said' or 'I said' to identify the speakers which suggests a merging, in Quentin's mind, of himself and Caddy, and a loss of personal identity and status during the exchange with Dalton Ames. The blending of Quentin with Caddy signifies Quentin's over-identification with his sister; his obsession with incest representing a way of merging with or becoming her.

Faulkner's poetics subtly render Quentin's struggle with his wavering sense of self, as we see Quentin's grasp of language break down as his identity disintegrates. This loss of control over language can be interpreted as the result of Quentin's increasing retreat from the symbolic order and his foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father.<sup>22</sup> For Lacan, the

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<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that *The Sound and the Fury* predates the major theories of Lacan, who was in fact still training when the novel was published. Faulkner's instinctive linking of language, signification and

Name-of-the-Father, or Symbolic Father, is the fundamental signifier from which all other signification proceeds. It bestows identity, naming and positioning the subject within the symbolic order, and also represents the oedipal prohibition of incest and the child's renunciation of the phallus (*The Psychoses* 96). Without the interdictions of the Name-of-the-Father, Quentin is adrift in the world and rapidly losing all sense of self. In 'On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis', Lacan noted that:

It is the lack of the Name-of-the-Father in that place which, by the hole that it opens up in the signified, sets off a cascade of reworkings of the signifier from which the growing disaster of the imaginary proceeds, until the level is reached at which the signifier and signified stabilize in a delusional metaphor. (*Écrits* 481)

Quentin's 'delusional metaphor' manifests as his obsession with Caddy and their imagined incest. The eruption of the pure materiality of his real self creates a tension between his latent (potential) homosexuality and the social conventions of his time, and this tension attacks the linguistic structures that support his position in the symbolic order. As Quentin walks away after the fight with Bland, he is aware of his diminishing grip on himself: 'As I descended the light dwindled slowly, yet at the same time without altering its quality, as if I and not light were changing, decreasing' (107).

The merging of Quentin and Caddy intensifies Quentin's impulses towards death, and as his sense of self wanes so does his grip on language. Millgate suggests that the following passage provides the key not just to this section, but to the book itself:

...I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long  
corridor of gray halflight where all stable things had become shadowy

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identity seems to be based on the author's keen understanding of psychology and human nature, and it underscores the verity of Lacan's later theory.

paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible  
form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves  
with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking I was  
I was not who was not was not who. (107-108)

As Millgate notes, 'we realize that Quentin himself is at this moment not merely midway between sanity and madness but precisely poised between waking and sleeping, between life and death' (298). The repetition of in-between states, be they Quentin's degree of wakefulness, the quality of the light, etc., reinforces our sense of Quentin as a person drifting in and out of the symbolic order;<sup>23</sup> the defining events of his life losing all signification. This slippage forces Quentin to question his entire existence and the language he uses to do this is revealing. Polk argues that Quentin's references to shadows echo those that Macbeth makes in the speech the title of the novel is drawn from, whilst the line 'I was I was not who was not was not who' alludes to Hamlet's existential musings (*Reading Faulkner* 138). Such rich yet subtle heteroglossia reminds the reader that both Macbeth and Hamlet suffered mental distress and struggles with personal identity, and s/he becomes starkly aware of Quentin's use of the past tense: he has already decided to end his life. Again, Faulkner's poetics deftly deliver complex, layered meaning via a few simply wrought words. Quentin's use of 'I was' rather than 'I am' or 'I will be' anticipates his suicide; it also acknowledges the death of the personality he has been projecting. The shadowy reference to Macbeth's speech following the death of his wife signifies Quentin's multiple loss of Caddy not just as a sexual object, or the centre of his family, but the locus of his projected heteronormativity. The figurative death of Caddy leads directly to Quentin's literal death of self, both psychically and corporeally, at his own hand. As soon as Quentin has conceptualised this loss or death of personal identity it

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<sup>23</sup> It is also suggestive of the work that Bakhtin did on the use of thresholds in Dostoevsky, which I discuss on page 115.

becomes true and that self is gone; forgotten. His question 'who was not' asks who is the person, who has ceased to exist; who, exactly, has died? His personal identity fully dispersed, Quentin then loses touch even with the essence of the lost self; his 'was not who' asking not *who* that person was, but *what* that person was. By asking what the lost self represented or did, the emphasis moves to the materiality or essence of the person, rather than the name or defining characteristics of the person performing that identity. The absence of punctuation in the sentence creates a plurality of possible meanings whilst simultaneously removing any chance of ascertaining what the sentence actually signifies. Without punctuation the reader does not know how the words should be grouped and it is the positioning of the words which reveals their meaning. My reading of the sentence groups the words thus: 'I was / I was not / who was not / was not who' but they could equally be read as 'I was... I was... not. Who was not? Was. Not. Who' and this configuration gives an entirely different shade of meaning. With the second configuration and the addition of punctuation, we see Quentin tentatively seeking the words to describe his essence, before coming up short. This causes him to question his identity and his inability to do so forces him to consider the signification of each of the terms. In just eleven words Faulkner confounds the reader and elegantly portrays the total collapse of signification in Quentin's mind. We are left fumbling for meaning not just in those eleven words but also in our own understanding of what is meant by existence, consciousness, agency, time and identity.

After the complexities of Benjy's and Quentin's monologues, the monologue of Jason comes as something of a relief to the beleaguered reader. As Cohn notes, his section has:

a simpler structure, and one even hesitates to classify it as a memory monologue at all. Since it works its way relentlessly through the events of

April 6, with very few halts and detours, it comes closer to a simple autobiographical monologue. (253-254)

There are some elements of memory monologue in Jason's section, although it lacks the achronicity of the genre. Of course, typological classification of Jason's monologue is not necessary; what is important is how Faulkner's poetics function and what they reveal to us about Jason's mental condition. For all the seeming normality of Jason's monologue, it actually reveals his psychopathy; his 'mask of sanity' slipping occasionally to reveal the novel's most aberrant psychology. The simplicity of his monologue belies the complexity of his psychological profile. Cohn contends that:

Jason is not the type of character who can take full advantage of the genre in which he speaks. Only a character heavily burdened with his entire past can be expected to dechronologize a discourse dealing with a specific past experience; the full deployment of the monologic genre's mnemonic variant thus depends on a mind that creates (and is created by) a "swarming and vigorous disorder of memory." (255)

Jason is not burdened with the past because he is a psychopath; his shallow affect and lack of remorse or guilt mean he cares little about events in the past, especially those of his own making.

Jason carries most of the markers of psychopathy, such as his grandiose estimation of self, pathological lying, and cunning and manipulative behaviour. He lives parasitically, stealing the cheques that Caddy sends for Miss Quentin's upkeep whilst pretending to destroy them and bear the burden of providing for the household on his own meagre wages. He views his cruel and sadistic treatment of Caddy as righteous punishment for her behaviour years before, when the revelation that her baby was conceived before wedlock –

and therefore not her husband's – lost him his promised career in banking: 'And so I counted the money again that night and put it away, and I didn't feel so bad. I says I reckon that'll show you. I reckon you'll know now that you can't beat me out of a job and get away with it' (129). Throughout his monologue, Jason fails to accept responsibility for his own actions, preferring instead to blame everybody else – Caddy, Miss Quentin, his mother and father, Quentin, Benjy, Dilsey and her family, Earl, and even the man at the telegraph office – for his hardships and misfortunes. What he fails to recognise throughout is that he is the architect of his own misery; he subconsciously creates discomfort for himself in order to validate his reassuring sense of victimhood. Painting himself as a victim in this way divests him of responsibility and gives him a sense of power; it transforms him from a talentless small-town bully into a wronged, outraged and decent man, nobly fighting back against intolerable odds. His needless pursuit of Miss Quentin and her beau from the fairground serves this purpose and Jason revels in the hardships he endures as he crosses ploughed fields on foot 'with every step like somebody was walking along behind me, hitting me on the head with a club' (150), or is besmirched or injured by nature:

I had gotten beggar lice and twigs and stuff all over me, inside my clothes and shoes and all, and then I happened to look around and I had my hand right on a bunch of poison oak. The only thing I couldn't understand was why it was just poison oak and not a snake or something. So I didn't even bother to move it. (150-151)

Jason's monologue is suffused with a dark humour that not only brings a welcome levity to a challenging text, but also helps shape our attitude towards him. We often find ourselves laughing at him, as with the wryly stated delusion of persecution quoted above; we are also made constantly aware that Jason's humour, such as his reference to the

castrated Benjy as the ‘Great American Gelding’ (164), is rooted in his unwavering cruelty. Jason’s sense of self is in many ways more warped than those of his brothers; as Millgate observes, ‘[h]e is in fact far less aware of what is actually real than his brother Quentin’ (336). Deeply paranoid and disturbed, Jason stands in stark contrast to the controlled and ordered manner of Quentin’s mental collapse. There is an elegance to Quentin’s breakdown; he remains a gentleman throughout. Jason’s discourse reveals his warped humanity; his base, unpleasant nature. Despite his delusions of grandeur, we find him to be talentless with an inherent nastiness born not of experience but present since childhood.

Regardless of the reader’s personal feelings towards Jason, his monologue is as close as the novel brings us to socially functional masculinity. That this ‘normality’ happens to be the subjectivity of a psychopath is as interesting as it is disquieting. His monologue is accessible in a way that those of his brothers are not, and this can be seen as a portent of the future of psychopath narratives. Faulkner showed the potential of the literary psychopath; his successors, and particularly the pulp writers of the 1950s and 1960s, made the psychopath’s cold logic, lack of empathy and chilling veneer of normality a cornerstone of their work. Furthermore, Faulkner’s influence does not appear to have diminished with time; his influence can be felt on authors of the 1990s, such as Bret Easton Ellis, and his treatment of the functional psychopath also anticipates Jeff Lindsay’s Dexter. In terms of narrative techniques for representing aberrant psychology in fiction, then, *The Sound and the Fury* is a landmark text. Faulkner’s poetics offer new ways of accessing consciousness, creating the illusion of the ‘uninterrupted unrolling of a thought process’ (Cohn 185) which places us in direct proximity of the transgressive mind. Yet despite granting us access to the minds of the brothers, Faulkner’s technique does not push us towards them emotionally or empathetically; though immersive, their monologues feel

cold and distanced. One could view this as evidence of Faulkner's modernist view of mankind as alienated and isolated, with each individual adrift in a bewildering world able only to make superficial and fleeting connections (as we do, with the text). And it can also be read as an evolutionary step yet to be taken in the fictional trajectory of the psychopath. Faulkner's experiments with form represent a great developmental leap with regards to engendering reader empathy for aberrant subjects, via immersive narrative techniques. They also show that there is work yet to be done. Of the novel's four monologues, it is Faulkner's fourth, authorial monologue which allows for the greatest empathy. Benjy's section is certainly emotive, but our sentiments are only roused when Benjy's actions and emotional responses are relayed to us by other characters. It is when he is *narrated* that we feel, and even then we are feeling *for* Benjy rather than *with* him; our sympathy invoked via an external view, albeit a homodiegetic one. Similarly, it is the fourth, authorial monologue with its omniscient narration that allows the greatest warmth, in relation to the characters.

As readers we find ourselves alienated by Benjy's bewildering monologue, exasperated by Quentin's estranged, overwrought and melodramatic monologue, and repulsed by Jason's cold and unfeeling one. Dilsey's, although not Dilsey's, allows us to view the Compson household through her eyes and experiences. Dilsey is revealed as a kind, loyal and stoic woman. We feel kindly towards her and, because we like and respect her, we mirror her feelings of warmth and protection towards Benjy and feel sorrow and compassion for Caddy at the enforced loss of her baby. Yet contrary to the central conceit of this thesis, our empathy is achieved not via modernist proximity to consciousness, but by the good old nineteenth century omniscient narrator feeding us privileged information. Interior monologues based on sensory perception and the naturalistic unrolling of thought are the closest we will get, via literature, to someone else's consciousness, but the effect is

paradoxically alienating. The monologues are so highly personal – the shifting, fleeting thoughts and associations of an individual’s inner discourse, rather than a monologue addressed to a particular reader or listener – that we by definition remain on the outside, looking in. As readers, we are constantly seeking meaning and any kind of marker which can pin us to an event or time. We barely get an opportunity to empathise, as we are too cognitively engaged, too challenged, to emote. For all of the stylistic innovations and immersive techniques of *The Sound and the Fury*, the text is so challenging to read that the reader remains distanced and unable to engage empathetically with the first three monologists. The empathetic contrast between the first three monologues and the fourth suggests that as readers we need to be led and narrated to in order to feel empathy, even when dealing with the interior monologues of first person narratives. The challenge of creating this effect was picked up on and developed by those novelists of consciousness who followed Faulkner, although it is interesting to note that Faulkner’s insights were pursued most avidly not in high literature but in the pulp fiction genre. Pulp married a populist form with an abiding interest in aberrant psychology and although Faulkner himself experimented with pulp via his 1931 novel *Sanctuary*, it was not until writers such as Horace McCoy and Jim Thompson seized the mantle that the techniques truly came to fruition.

## Chapter Three

### Twentieth Century Psychos: An Explosion of Treatments.

*The Sound and the Fury* notwithstanding, literary representations of psychopaths are most commonly found in crime fiction. The genre of crime fiction is arguably as old as the novel itself, with Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) providing one of the earliest examples. *Moll Flanders* poses as a conversion narrative, written in the first person, and gives salacious details of the titular heroine's criminal activities. Rather like the pulp writers this chapter will be largely concerned with, Defoe was not concerned with producing great works of art; his writing was a saleable commodity, using a colloquial style and showing a cheerful fascination with the lowest aspects of human life. As I observed in my discussion of *Little Dorrit*, this fascination can also be found in the Newgate novels and sensation novels of the nineteenth century; links can likewise be drawn between crime fiction and the Gothic tradition (Horsley 4; Simpson 26). However, it was not until the development of detective narratives that crime fiction really began to emerge as a distinct genre in a form we can still recognise today.

From its inception in the 1840s, when Edgar Allan Poe established the conventions, to the 'Golden Age' of the 1920s and -30s, the detective-based offshoot of the genre enjoyed huge success, with figures such as Poe's Dupin, Arthur Conan Doyle's Holmes and Agatha Christie's Poirot proving particularly successful. Golden Age detective fiction insulated the reader from the uncertainty of a rapidly changing world by offering neat resolutions to crimes. Its villains were typically scheming individuals intent on serving their own interests, and they were no match for the ratiocinative detectives tasked with solving the crimes and restoring order. This was uniquely reassuring to readers; the kind of

crimes they read about were unlikely ever to impact on their own lives, and the pleasure of the text lay more in joining in with the process of deduction and detection than the vicarious fulfilment of hidden wishes. A notable exception to this trend was R. Austin Freeman's collection of short stories, *The Singing Bone* (1912), the birthplace of the 'inverted' detective story. The inverted story begins with a depiction of the crime, a major departure from the standard structure which typically did not reveal the identity of the criminal until the denouement of the tale. This foregrounded the criminal mind in a move which Horsley has declared to be 'one of the major sources of generic change during the course of the twentieth century' (36), an innovation which paved the way for other narratives told from the perspective of the villain.

As interest in villains grew, so did the villain's increasingly graphic and fulsome representation and the twentieth century is a rich repository of psychopath fiction. This can be linked, in part, to social and cultural events, and in part to the fact that medical understanding of psychopathy was becoming progressively sophisticated. The seeping of this awareness into popular culture led to an increase in the number of fictional depictions of psychopathy and a concomitant improvement in the quality of representations. The period also saw significant developments in literary technique, with modernism and postmodernism having a particularly pronounced effect on the representation of consciousness. This chapter will chart the psychopath's progress through the crime fiction of the early- to mid-twentieth century, exploring the social, cultural and historical events which were impactful. I will consider narrative poetics in the context of time and genre, and examine how the cumulative influences of the twentieth century led to the emergence of the 'non-fiction' novel, a form which would prove instrumental in the rise of the serial killer subgenre which was to be so prominent in the latter part of the century.

### 3.1 The Thirties: Gangsters, Poverty and the Paperback Revolution

The move away from law and into criminality became increasingly prevalent during the inter-war years, and examples of this trend can be found in both high and low culture. Pulp magazines relied heavily on criminal and semi-criminal protagonists (Horsley 79) and, whilst not commonly known for the quality of their content, they did enjoy high sales as audiences lapped up the adrenaline-fuelled detective and adventure stories that populated their cheaply-produced pages. The most influential pulp title, *Black Mask*, which was established in 1920 and reached its sales peak in the early 1930s, carried stories by such genre-defining luminaries as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler; at the other end of the literary scale, respected authors such as William Faulkner and Graham Greene were producing novels which married a commercial form with masterly, often experimental writing. The fact that the period saw a commingling of lowly genre fiction with writers now recognised as canonical speaks not only to the financial merits of publishing this kind of material, or to the fascination that the criminal protagonist held for the period's authors, but also to a deep need to write truthfully about the dark side of the real world.

Faulkner's bleak yet compelling novel *Sanctuary* (1931) gave readers a shocking glimpse of human evil bolstered by humanising details from the villain's medical and ancestral history. Faulkner's malefactor is a terrifying rapist, kidnapper and murderer named Popeye, whose inhumane and brutal actions are as incomprehensible to the reader as they are to the characters in the book. As with *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner uses a multi-perspectival narrative technique, but he never grants us an internal perspective of Popeye. He remains at a distance from the reader; the narrative contains no self-quoted monologue, and his thoughts are not narrated by an external source.<sup>24</sup> Instead, our view of him must come via the other characters and the heterodiegetic narrator. Although we can

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<sup>24</sup> This is reminiscent of Dickens's treatment of Rigaud, in *Little Dorrit*.

clearly see his impact on the world and on the people around him, we are never given access to his motivation. In many ways, this is the most disturbing element of a bleak, unrelenting novel which highlights the callousness and alienation inherent to the modern condition but offers no answers or resolution. It is not until the end of the novel that we are offered some sociological and hereditary basis for Popeye's behaviour. We learn that Popeye's mother brought him up alone, having been deserted by her husband three weeks after her shotgun marriage and left with the syphilis that would ravage her and her unborn child. Popeye was born stunted, sickly and presumed blind. Popeye's shaky genetic heritage is also apparent in the delusional pyromaniac grandmother who cares for him whilst his mother works, but who is ultimately killed by a devastating fire she has set in the family home. Popeye is unharmed but, callously, the narrator of the story tells us that he 'might well have been dead' (308); bald until the age of five, he was wizened and frail, prone to convulsions and already attending an institution. Perhaps most tellingly, the young Popeye showed precocious sadism, having mutilated and killed two lovebirds, and later a half-grown kitten, with a pair of scissors; acts which led to him being placed in a juvenile detention centre. Although it could be argued that Popeye's upbringing and the ravages of syphilis account for his behaviour (the disease, in its advanced stages, can cause mental degeneration and personality change), there are enough clues in the narrative to lead us to deduce that he is in fact exhibiting the symptoms of an acute personality disorder (although Cleckley discounts psychopathy, see *Mask of Sanity* page 194). However, far from explaining or excusing Popeye's behaviour, this detail actually serves to complicate it. Popeye's aberrant psychology acts as a symbol of extreme alienation in the modern world and is also highly representative of the increased focus that Faulkner places on subjectivity. *Sanctuary* represents Faulkner's attempt to write a more saleable, less experimental multi-perspectival novel than the earlier *The Sound and the Fury* and,

although notable on many levels, it is not a landmark text in terms of the trajectory of the fictional psychopath. We do not empathise with Popeye; despite the mitigating circumstances of his birth and upbringing, he remains unknowable, alien and ‘other’.

Arguably the first crime novel to humanise its villain was W.R. Burnett’s *Little Caesar* (1929). It represents a turning point in depictions of the fictional villain in that it was one of the first texts to deliver its narrative from the point of view of the villain. As Burnett himself noted, *Little Caesar* showed

the world seen through the eyes of a gangster. It’s commonplace now, but it had never been done before then. You had crime stories but always seen through the eyes of society. The criminal was just some son-of-a-bitch who’d killed somebody and then you go get ‘em. I treated them as human beings. (qtd. in Horsley 121-122)

Burnett was significant in that his novel (and its 1931 film adaptation) offered a somewhat sympathetic view of the criminal protagonist, as a tragic figure failing in his pursuit of the (alternative) American Dream. Although he is satirised by the text and in some ways depicted as a comic figure, Rico is also figured as vulnerable, flawed and ultimately very human; a portrayal quite at odds with earlier representations of the criminal ‘other’. He is, in fact, ‘other than other’ – not quite like us, but not so different either. Burnett’s satire humanises Rico, allowing readers to empathise with the villain in a way that hadn’t been seen before; his novel therefore marks a significant point in the trajectory of the fictional psychopath. His novel taps into the growing cultural fascination with gangsterism in the 1920s and 1930s, sparked by the notoriety of ‘real life’ mob bosses such as Al Capone. Capone captured the public imagination due to his two-sided reputation as a fearless and ruthless mob boss, and a (somewhat) philanthropic patrician known for his generosity

towards the poor (Bergreen 400). Although the figure of the gangster can stand as an unsympathetic symbol of rampant capitalism and individualism, it also offers a tantalising glimpse into a life of excitement and excess steered by an untrammelled id. The fact that the 1920s and 1930s gangster was often an underprivileged and uneducated immigrant, who had risen above the position accorded him by American society, added to his allure. He stood in opposition to the social structures and institutions – themselves often considered corrupt – that controlled and restricted ordinary people, and offered an alternative view of modernity. As Robert Warshow notes, in his seminal essay ‘The Gangster as Tragic Hero’, the gangster ‘is what we want to be and what we are afraid we might become’ (86). As the gangster story typically charts the protagonist’s rise and fall, it offers the reader a chance to flirt with transgression before order is restored.

The trend for exploring the darker side of human experience via bleak, alienating and increasingly violent texts is perhaps best understood in relation to its social and political context. The early twentieth century was tumultuous and aggressive; against a backdrop of global Depression, gangsterism, and rapid urbanisation, the comforting narrative devices of earlier genres appeared increasingly irrelevant in a world where vicissitude seemed to be the only certainty. As man’s capacity for violence and brutality was revealed via the horrors of war and want, narratives depicting base nature and mean streets became more widespread. Graham Greene’s *This Gun for Hire* (1936) brings together many of these themes in a text which highlights the alienation and isolation of the modern condition. Told via a predominantly third person heterodiegetic narration, it is the story of Raven, a psychopathic, hare-lipped assassin hired to kill the Czechoslovakian Minister of War and thereby drag Europe into armed conflict. There is little in Raven’s behaviour for the reader to empathise with; he is cold, cruel and remorseless, and from the very outset we are told that ‘[m]urder didn’t mean much to Raven. It was just a new job’

(1). His behaviour should repulse the reader, yet it is strangely compelling. We do not empathise with him; his characterisation is too distancing, his portrayal too unpleasant. But we do feel a pull towards him, based on our feeling that the society which has shaped this monster deserves to have him in its midst.

Double-crossed by his employer, Raven finds himself turned from hunter to hunted; as he crosses the country in pursuit of the man who betrayed him, the reader marvels at his resourcefulness and strength. Significantly, it is during his kidnap and intended murder of the proto-feminist heroine, Anne, that the reader begins to warm to Raven. Greene gradually introduces humanising details, such as Raven's sudden tears when Anne shows him a modicum of compassion, to highlight the impact that Raven's upbringing has had on him. His harshness contrasts strongly with Anne's warmth and we cannot help but feel for him when we learn that '[h]e was used to fear. It had lived inside him for twenty years. It was normality he couldn't cope with' (49). Our connection with Raven is gradual and grudging; Greene sets him up as an archetypal villain but then slowly shows the man within. It is not until we are a third of the way into the novel that we are given an explanation for Raven's demeanour and behaviour. Born in poverty and an outcast from the start, we learn, Raven is the product of his environment and his physical deformity; society has left him cold and emotionless, twisted by cruelty and fear:

He had been made by hatred; it had constructed him into this thin smoky murderous figure in the rain, hunted and ugly. His mother had borne him when his father was in gaol, and six years later when his father was hanged for another crime, she had cut her own throat with a kitchen knife; afterwards there had been the home. He had never felt the least tenderness for anyone; he was made in this image and he had his own odd pride in the result; he didn't want to be unmade. (76-77)

Greene's attack on modern society draws readers in, forcing them to acknowledge their own alienation and dispelling any cosy notions of community and inherent human goodness. Even the kindly socialist Minister whose murder is to bring about war is described negatively as 'a grubby old man without friends, who was said to love humanity' (1). An air of distrust surrounds the Minister's socialist values; he is only 'said' to love humanity. There is an unspoken suggestion here that such a thing is impossible and pointless; even an alleged philanthropist is friendless and unloved in cruel and heartless modernity.

In fact, suspicion and paranoia were a feature of the time. In *This Gun for Hire* boundaries are blurred; hero and villain are hard to tell apart and most of the protagonists become outcasts at some point in the narrative. This sense of moral turpitude and a rapidly shifting teleology highlights many of the fears and concerns of the period. It was not only the novel's backdrop of a Europe teetering on the brink of war that resonated with 1930s readers, but also mistrust of the Establishment. Even though Raven has kidnapped Anne at gunpoint and threatened to kill her, she facilitates his escape as she makes her own and, once free, does not report him to the authorities:

she had evaded Raven, leaving him there in the bathroom of the little empty house, and Raven's affairs no longer concerned her. She wouldn't give him away; she was not yet on the side of the big organised battalions; but she wouldn't help him either. (62)

Greene also addresses contemporary fears about corruption; business, crime and politics are intertwined in the text. The revelation that the Minister was assassinated to bring about a war that would financially benefit Midland Steel may seem sensational, but the storyline speaks to growing concern (undiminished today) about the links between big business,

government and wrongdoing. The owner of Midland Steel, Sir Marcus, is portrayed as a joyless psychopath whose ‘most vivid emotion was venom’ (130), and his lack of affect allows him to kill with impunity: ‘[t]he deaths he had ordered were no more real to him than the deaths he read about in the newspapers’ (202). His unsympathetic portrayal in the novel stands in stark contrast to the more nuanced character of Raven, and Sir Marcus functions simultaneously as a critique of capitalism, a critique of Britain’s class system, and a critique of a narcissistic and alienating modernity.

Brian Diemert argues that Graham Greene’s interest in the thriller or detective novel stems from a desire to subvert traditional structures of authority in a genre which he considered to be ‘propaganda for the ruling classes’ (95). He views Greene as part of a challenge to Golden Age detective fiction which was taking place on both sides of the Atlantic, via a reworking of the thriller by Greene and his contemporaries in Britain, and by the emergence of hardboiled fiction in America. However, it is my view that such developments were not spearheaded entirely by politicised authors; there were also market forces at play. It was at around this time that publishing underwent a period of great change, via the introduction of the paperback format. The mass-market paperback was pioneered in Germany by Albatross Books in 1932, from whom Penguin Books in England took much of their inspiration. Although the Albatross project was curtailed by the declaration of war, Penguin’s 1935 UK launch revolutionised the industry, mass-producing lightweight and inexpensive books which could be easily picked up at railway stations and other locations of convenience not previously associated with the sale of books. Its success was replicated in America by the iconic Pocket Book imprint, which first left the presses in 1939. Pocket Book initially produced a limited number of respected classics, before establishing itself as the home of hardboiled and noir fiction. Popular taste of the time was still for the detective-based fictions of Agatha Christie, although their depictions of the

upper classes and country houses were unrepresentative of the readers who consumed them. Although these tales offered a welcome diversion from the difficulties of the day, which included mass unemployment, the crushing poverty of the Great Depression and the rise of the political far right, there was a growing desire amongst the reading public for tales which better reflected contemporary experience and offered more recognisable settings. Paperbacks filled this void by bringing their tales back down to street level and providing what O'Brien has termed 'a microcosm of American fantasies about the real world' (2); a 'vision of the lurid underside of life' (ibid. 11).

The result was a new kind of genre fiction which coupled the investigative angle of traditional detective fiction with hard-edged 'crook-as-investigator protagonists'<sup>25</sup> (Horsley 76) to create 'tough guy' or hardboiled fiction. Following the lead of pre-paperback, genre-defining writers such as Dashiell Hammett, whom in his essay 'The Simple Art of Murder' (1950) Raymond Chandler credits with rescuing crime fiction by bringing it back to the real world, hardboiled and noir fiction were increasingly used as a means of critiquing an unforgiving and harsh society and contemporary discourses of criminology, psychology and so on. The pat endings supplied by Christie were replaced by ambiguity and indeterminacy; tacit acknowledgement that real life teems with threats that cannot be easily neutralised. Although essentially moral figures, private investigators like Hammett's Sam Spade and Chandler's Marlowe operate on the edge of legality, occupying a grey space between failing structures of bourgeois society, and 'the disruptive forces threatening the social order' (Diemert 94).

The cultural paranoia explored by authors like Greene did not diminish; rather it grew more pronounced as the century progressed, reaching fever pitch in the 1940s and

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<sup>25</sup> In the new millennium Jeff Lindsay would take this to extremes in his series of *Dexter* novels, where the focalizing character is a serial killing blood spatter expert for the Miami Dade Police Department. See section 4.2.

1950s. With many of the old certainties gone, the world was increasingly figured as a chaotic place of great danger. The atrocities of World War Two ratcheted up the fear, previously unimagined horrors having laid bare man's dark potential; whilst fascism, rampant McCarthyism, and Cold war paranoia laid waste to earlier notions of selfhood and one's place within a unified society. The anxiety which characterises the period pervades its cultural output and, as Woody Haut has observed, '[p]aranoia is essential to pulp culture writing and an agent capable of energizing and corrupting both narrative and nation' (*Pulp* 14).

### 3.2 The Forties: Freud, Nihilism and Horace McCoy

Horace McCoy's *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (1948) embodies all of the tropes described above. Often described as the most nihilistic of the hardboiled writers, McCoy's novels are bleak, relentless and intelligent, showing a broad understanding of psychoanalytical theory, sociological polemic and policing and forensic science techniques. Largely ignored as a 'serious' writer in his native America, McCoy was revered by French intellectuals who ranked him alongside Faulkner and Hemingway. As Paul Duncan notes, McCoy's fiction is populated by unsympathetic characters who 'are drawn into, and then consumed by, the abyss' (80). There are no 'good guys' in *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*; everybody the reader encounters is corrupt, dissolute and unpleasant. The homodiegetic narrator and focalizing character is Ralph Cotter, a murderous, misogynistic, misanthropic, escaped convict and armed robber, who also happens to be a Phi Beta Kappa scholar and self-proclaimed psychopath. Phi Beta Kappa is America's most prestigious academic honour society, governed by the motto 'Love of learning is the guide of life'. With the grandiosity so typical of the psychopath, Ralph wastes no opportunity to showcase his superior

intellect and connoisseurship; he looks down on his accomplices as ‘fools, mere passers of food’ (67). He makes frequent references to the period’s valorisation of the gangster, but dismisses Alvin Karpis, Pretty Boy Floyd and John Dillinger as ‘bums’ who ‘got to the top’ despite a complete absence of talent and intelligence. Ralph debunks the deterministic and environmental theories of crime so often cited in defence of the Depression-era gangster; he chose a life of crime, his ‘love of learning’ guiding his decision-making and ensuring him a high degree of success in his criminal endeavours:

I’m sure my career doesn’t reflect too much credit on the school. It does prove one thing, though – it proves that I came into crime through choice and not through environment. I didn’t grow up in the slums with a drunk for a father and a whore for a mother and come into crime that way. I hate society too, but I don’t hate it because it mistreated me and warped my soul. Every other criminal I know – who’s engaged in violent crime – is a two-bit coward who blames his career on society. I need no apologist or crusader to finally hold my lifeless body up to the world and shout for them to come and observe what they have wrought. (235)

To prove his point, Ralph intends to spend his ill-gotten gains on a gold Cartier identity bracelet inscribed with the words: ‘Use me not as a preachment in your literature or your movies. This I have wrought, I and I alone’ (236). Such an overt attack on the sometimes facile causality theories of contemporary society is typical of McCoy, who seems at pains to distance himself from his populist genre and mark himself out as a learned writer of distinction.

McCoy’s erudition is apparent throughout *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* and the novel has a heavy focus on myth and psychoanalysis. Its ambitious, overtly stated Freudian

subtext was certainly topical; in the 1930s and -40s, American psychiatry was revolutionised by Freudian psychoanalysis and McCoy, writing in 1948, seems to have been in its thrall. The novel makes multiple references to neuroses, complexes and psychoanalysis; Ralph's obsession with the heiress Margaret is based on her role as a catalyst for the return of the repressed: 'It was that girl, that goddamned girl with the white face and the black hair who had broken into my sanctuary again and uncovered more of the fetishes' (311). The repressed in Ralph's case is the oedipal scenario played out with his grandmother (who at that time he thought was his mother) when he was aged six, which resulted in him murdering her in order to avoid the threatened castration by his grandfather: '*Your grandfather shall punish you for this...he will do to you what he did to the ram*' (337, original emphasis). Fragmented memories of the incident escape from his subconscious with increasing regularity as we near the end of the novel and Ralph's mental disintegration. Despite his frequent proclamations that 'Oedipus is dead, and the sepulchre is sealed. The road back to the womb is closed forever' (289), the novel ends with Ralph's death and his return to the figurative womb. Shot three times by Holiday, Ralph reports that

I could see nothing and could feel nothing, but I had a vestige of awareness left that made me know that I was pulling my knees up and pushing my chin down to meet them, and that at last I was safe and secure in the blackness of the womb from which I had never emerged. (346)

This ending opens up several very interesting avenues of enquiry. The first relates to McCoy's extreme nihilism; as Ralph's mental collapse accelerates he begins to feel physically diminished. He does not feel Holiday's bullets as he has 'nothing left with which to feel' (345); his very reality is under threat. Forced to confront the materiality of his existence, he experiences a traumatic eruption of the real into the symbolic order. For

Lacan, the real is the state of nature which the pre-oedipal human subject inhabits prior to his or her entrance into language. It is a state in which there is nothing but need and the search for satisfaction. Lacan tells us that the real is ‘the impossible’ (*Fundamental Concepts* 167), since it is outside of language and can therefore not be expressed, imagined or integrated into the symbolic order. It includes hallucinations and symbolic dreams, like the ‘dream phantasy’ (*Kiss Tomorrow* 336) that Ralph experiences as he confronts the repressed memories of his oedipal experience in boyhood. Significantly, Freud posited that an unresolved Oedipus complex could result in a child becoming aggressive, over-ambitious and vain. Having failed to identify with the correct parent, the child also fails to internalise morality and may find him- or herself unable to comply with societal rules. Such hubris and deviance are indicative of the psychopathic personality and, as we have seen, the psychopath lacks a superego, functioning instead on pure id. The neo-natal infant, too, is without a superego as it does not develop until the child is between the ages of two and seven. During the mirror stage, when the child begins to recognise itself as distinct from the world and separate to its mother, the sense of lack causes the child significant anxiety. Its response is to desire reunion with the mother/other, to make the other a part of itself as it was during the neo-natal months spent in the Lacanian real. Of course, this desire can never be satisfied and the child is instead confronted with a permanent symbol of its loss and lack. Yet, by a complex manoeuvre – be it actual or hallucinated – Ralph appears to achieve this reunion by returning to the womb.

As Holiday confronts Ralph over his murder of her brother, he loses sense of who she is: ‘She was Tisiphone. Tisiphone, Alecto...and where was the third? Wasn’t there a third?’ (345). Ralph’s tortured subconscious and much vaunted intellect combine Holiday’s actions with her symbolic role to figure her as the Furies, netherworld goddesses who avenged crimes against the natural order. The Furies hunt down and drive mad those

who kill blood relatives and in this respect Ralph has sinned more than once, having murdered not only Holiday's brother but also his own grandmother and possibly his younger brother too. As she exacts her revenge, Holiday morphs into Tisiphone, or Vengeance, who in Greek mythology punished crimes of murder and hatred, and Alecto, or Anger, 'the unceasing pursuer' (337) who punished moral crimes, and crimes of ambition and lust. That Ralph is unable to remember the third Fate, Megaera, or Jealousy, could indicate that at this point in the narrative she is in fact the most significant of the three. She is representative of the all-consuming jealousy that Holiday has been feeling about Ralph's relationship with Margaret (whose name bears an interesting similarity to Megaera), which has prompted her to turn against him. More importantly, Megaera also embodies Ralph's subconscious feelings towards Holiday at this moment of emasculation; Holiday's drawn gun is a phallic symbol of the potency that Ralph no longer has. Her bullets penetrate Ralph three times and he can only submit to their power.

The mythic significance of this episode also echoes Sophocles's tale, *Oedipus Rex*, where Oedipus was tortured by the Furies for trying to change his fate. When Ralph rejects Margaret, having hallucinated then collapsed at the golf course, his fate is sealed. Following his collapse, Ralph apologises for screaming, explaining 'It's not very manly to scream' (338). His collapse was in fact silent but it indicates his loss of control and agency; to underscore this point Margaret takes his gun from him: "...you won't be needing this any more", she said. She flung something from her, and in a moment I heard a splash in the lake. It was my automatic. No, I wouldn't be needing that any more...' (338). Margaret, who has functioned as his Grandmother's double and thereby facilitated the return of the repressed, is also figured as Alecto at this point. In rejecting Margaret Ralph rejects his fated oedipal union with his grandmother, thereby invoking the wrath of the Furies who punish his insubordination by sending him insane. Ralph's psychic

disintegration almost complete, he begins to desire reunion with the mother/grandmother; to subsume the other in a return to the neo-natal months spent in the real. However, Ralph seems to manage to go even beyond the neo-natal and achieve what Gregory Zilboorg has termed the 'normal person[']s] ever unconscious trend to return to the quietistic, prenatal state, a wish to return to intra-uterine existence' (349). Having penetrated deeper than the 'zero state at the heart of the hardboiled novel' (O'Brien 80), McCoy's hero becomes not dead but unborn; his guilt and significance wiped from the face of the earth, the narrative simply ends. This oedipal wish never to have left the womb and therefore never to have existed reflects the increasingly nihilistic zeitgeist, and the cultural anxieties expressed in McCoy's text prefigure the tropes explored by Patricia Highsmith and Jim Thompson in the 1950s.

### 3.3 The Fifties: Cold War Paranoia and the Unstable Self

A major strand of 1950s crime fiction is noir, an often bleak and cynical genre closely related to the hardboiled fiction with which it shares many concerns. Duncan describes noir as a genre which gives the reader 'ample opportunity...to gaze into the minds of bad, dark people on the edge of society' (7); little wonder, then, that it should prove to be a fertile source of psychopath fictions. Of course, no discussion of 1950s noir fiction is complete without substantial attention being paid to Jim Thompson and Patricia Highsmith. Although ostensibly very different writers, with divergent narrative styles, both were prolific authors (writing 29 and 22 novels respectively) whose works charted the darkest recesses of the human mind, dealing with themes of guilt, culpability and the dissolution of the self. Their novels are steeped in the Cold War paranoia of the time; moody and at times bleakly humorous, they demonstrate that nothing is as it seems and

appearances can be deceptive. From Thompson's folksy Lou Ford in *The Killer Inside Me*, to Tom Ripley, Highsmith's master of deception, the reader is constantly made aware of the performativity of identity and the fragility of the self. Although largely unappreciated in their native U.S. during their lifetimes, due to their lowly status as writers of crime fiction, both demonstrate masterly control of their subject matter, their poetics deftly manipulating readers to positions of identification quite at odds with the conservative values of their day. More recently, their psychological intensity has led to comparisons of each with Dostoevsky and both writers have been accorded canonical status within the noir genre. Now, Thompson and Highsmith are seen as writers who raise questions about identity and challenge standard conceptions of good and evil. Significantly for this study, they do so through representations of charming yet ruthless psychopaths.

### 3.3.1 Jim Thompson

Jim Thompson's novels teem with psychopaths and serial killers who move freely in society, their aberrance hidden behind a veneer of normality. Thompson's oeuvre focuses on the *ordinariness* of the psychopath; the arbitrariness of identity and, notably, the disparity between the inner self and the self projected, are themes which run throughout his work. Although his career as an author was long and prolific, with works being produced from the early 1940s until well into the 1970s, Thompson's finest work appeared in the 1950s, a decade which Haut has described as 'an era of psychotic behaviour and suicidal impulse, of shadows, square jaws and dangerous women' (*Pulp* 12). The tensions and uncertainties of the period colour his work; nothing is as it seems, no one can be trusted, and there seems to be no limit to man's cruelty and depravity. His characters are typically shallow, opportunistic and cruel; a scathing indictment of what Thompson saw as the

modern condition. His novels often end with scenes of apocalyptic violence and mental collapse, events painted as inevitable in a society where ‘people [are] pushed and twisted to such extremes that dissolution is all that awaits them’ (Haut, *Pulp* 21). Of course, many of the writers of the period shared these same concerns and in many ways Thompson’s work is simply an expression of zeitgeist. Where he differs from his contemporaries, however, is the sheer power and diversity of his narrative style. He marries the tough-talking, wise-cracking style of hardboiled writers like Hammett and Chandler with the psychological intensity of Faulkner and Dostoevsky; his writing is also experimental and surreal, with incursions into what Anthony Boucher has referred to as ‘sheer Guignol horror’ (qtd. in Stanfield 154). Yet for all of his experimentation, Thompson also achieves a verisimilitude with regards to characterisation that allows the reader to recognise and identify with human traits common to all.

Thompson’s most famous creation, Deputy Sheriff Lou Ford in the 1952 classic *The Killer Inside Me*, is a prime example of Cleckley’s ‘mask of sanity’. Lou hides his psychopathy in plain sight; posing as a simple, ingratiating, tender-hearted ‘rube’, he is able to maim and kill as the mood strikes him without raising suspicion. The dual aspect of Lou’s personality underscores the essential ‘unknowability’ of human nature, even though the reader is treated to privileged information regarding Lou’s emotions, thought processes and motivations. By having Lou narrate his tale himself, Thompson gives the reader unprecedented access to the psychopathic consciousness and in so doing has created what Stanley Kubrick called ‘probably the most chilling and believable first person story of a criminally warped mind I have ever encountered’ (*Killer Inside Me*, 2006 edition, cover matter).

Thompson was an erudite man fascinated by, though dismissive of, psychoanalytical theories and his knowledge of mental conditions adds veracity to the

novel. Lou lives in the house once occupied by his physician father, whose untouched office still contains

endless files of psychiatric literature, the bulky volumes of morbid psychology...Krafft-Ebing, Jung, Freud, Bleuler, Adolf Meyer, Kretschmer, Kraepelin...All the answers were here, out in the open where you could look at them. And no one was terrified or horrified. I came out of the place I was hiding in – that I always had to hide in – and began to breathe. (22)

This seemingly innocuous paragraph sets the tone for the narrative which will follow. The multitude of names, a veritable roll-call of psychological luminaries who all wrote extensively on psychopathy, suggests the plurality of meaning inherent to modern life and anticipates the variety of explanations that Lou will offer for his behaviour as the novel progresses. His reference to ‘morbid psychology’ suggests that, for Lou, the theories contained in the volumes threaten to take all the joy out of his psychopathy. He revels in his condition; his poor behavioural controls and lack of remorse and affect allowing him to mischievously amuse himself with no thought for how his behaviour may impact on himself or others. The connotations of death that the word ‘morbid’ carries could further imply the death of the relevance or accuracy of such theories to Lou’s condition, thereby acting as a clue to the reader of the misinformation tactics that he will employ later on in the narrative. Lou hints at this when he teasingly says that all ‘the answers’ are there, but the question, of course, is which answer is the right one? The careful reader must further decide whose questions Lou is offering to answer – are they the reader’s questions? Or are they questions being asked by Lou and other characters within the diegesis? Do they relate to Lou in particular, or psychopathy and mental aberrance in general? There’s a metatextual quality to this passage which aligns the reader’s reading of the novel and his or

her implicit search for meaning and understanding of the enigmatic psychopath, with the scientific drive to elucidate the condition. Significantly for this study of the poetics of identification, the passage also begins Lou's subtle manipulation of the reader's sympathies. We learn that with everything 'out in the open', there's no need for Lou to hide his true personality. Within the safe confines of his father's office he can drop his mask and be himself, and it is liberating for Lou to be in an environment where this true self is 'normal' and accepted, without a censorious society judging his choices. Lou's revelation that in the office he can come 'out of the place I was hiding in – that I always had to hide in – and [begin] to breathe' positions Lou as a childlike innocent, a victim we should pity and make allowances for.

Thompson's poetics manipulate the reader as a psychopath plays with his prey. Lou ingratiates himself to us via his seemingly frank account of the murders and investigation; his early positioning of himself as a man fighting valiantly to control what he calls '*the sickness*' encourages a sympathetic response from the reader and helps us to accept him. Lou's manipulation of the reader is so subtle that it is hard to recognise all of the ways in which he works to control our response to the text. I have noted above how, via reference to '*the sickness*', he linguistically controls the reader's emotions; what is less obvious is the fact that it is also done graphemically. By always writing '*the sickness*' in italics, Lou is able to stress both its potency and its otherness, positioning his condition as less a part of him and more as something which is happening *to* him and which he struggles daily to suppress. This reinforces, on a subconscious level, the reader's conscious understanding of Lou as a man battling against the odds and trying to do the right thing, simultaneously eliciting a sympathetic response and reducing Lou's level of culpability.

The archetypal unreliable narrator, Lou offers psychological explanations for '*the sickness*' (8) then contradicts himself by offering other suggestions which cancel out his

earlier claims. Such manipulation is typical of the ‘real life’ psychopath, who will tell his audience whatever it wants to hear in order to invoke the desired response. As a writer of crime fiction, Thompson was no doubt aware that one of key attractions for readers of lurid material is the desire to understand the ‘why and how’ of aberrant behaviour. Lou responds to this by offering justifications to satisfy all camps: the psychoanalytical – it’s a result of the trauma he suffered after being sexually abused by his masochistic housekeeper, Helene, during childhood, plus guilt at his adopted brother taking the blame for a crime that Lou committed, both of which can be attributed to his father, thereby invoking an oedipal conflict; hereditary – his father had ‘*the sickness*’, as evidenced by the photograph of Helene, her body criss-crossed with scars inflicted by Dr. Ford; the biological – Lou diagnoses himself as suffering from an acute case of schizophrenia; the societal – nobody stopped him, despite all of the clues that he offered to the detectives and citizens involved in and affected by the investigation into the murders; the absence of theory – Lou finally hints that he may in fact be perfectly sane and free from disorder, his acts of murder emanating from an inherent evil rather than any causal theory. Each of these theories has their appeal for different audiences: if trauma is the cause, then Lou can be cured by therapy; if ‘*the sickness*’ is hereditary or biological, then no one is to blame; if society is at fault then we are all culpable but lessons can be learned for the future. The suggestion of evil, of course, is much more disquieting as it not only threatens the security of all society; it also poses uncomfortable questions about human nature. The refusal of narrative closure alerts the reader to the fact that Lou is toying with him or her and, as Leonard Cassuto has noted, forces us to view everything he says with suspicion (132).

Such mischievous narrative play suffuses the entire novel, which is presented as Lou’s written testimony. By suggesting and then contradicting the causality theories, Lou brings the reader’s attention to the fictionality of his narrative and this extends not just to

the content of his testimony but also to the way in which it is delivered. Throughout the novel, Lou addresses the reader directly, drawing him or her into the narrative. When speaking of his discussions with County Attorney Howard Hendricks, Lou says ‘I wish you could have seen him sweat’ (90). On the surface, his remark seems fairly innocuous; friendly, humorous and naturalistic. Yet it is also quite controlling. It makes the reader complicit, dragging her or him to Lou’s side and forcing a moment of self-reflection as we realise that we are enjoying the image of Hendricks squirming uncomfortably. Furthermore, the narrative is suffused with a dark humour which not only adds levity to an otherwise unsettling read but has the added effect of making Lou seem likeable and roguish, rather than disturbed and dangerous. Even when he has painstakingly described the way in which he has beaten his girlfriend, Amy Stanton, to death, Lou’s description of his exasperation at watching her suffer because the bum he is to frame for the murder is late can still raise a smile from the reader: ‘Hell, she hadn’t had a real breath now in almost thirty minutes, and it was hard as hell on her. I knew how hard it was and I held my own breath for a while because we’d always done things together’ (166). We smile because his comments are ludicrous; this psychopath’s idea of compassion being a moment’s synchronised breath-holding in honour of the closeness he and his girlfriend had once shared.

Lou’s narrative handling of Amy’s murder is one of the most interesting aspects of the novel. He controls it as he controls the reader; teasingly revealing snippets of information about the murder before pulling back. Comments such as ‘I guess I’m not ready to tell about it yet. It’s too soon, and it’s not necessary yet’ (153) add to our impression of Lou as a victim of his condition, suffering from the ‘loss’ of his girlfriend. It also reveals his lack of affect and highlights the extreme narcissism at the heart of psychopathy. Lou uses the time in between his brushes with full disclosure to blame others

for his crimes: ‘It was no use. I’d done everything I could. I’d dropped it in their plates and rubbed their noses in it. And it was no use. They wouldn’t see it. No one would stop me’ (161). In a Ripley-esque psychic manoeuvre (more of Ripley later), Lou also reveals that as he feels no guilt at Amy’s death, he is therefore not guilty of her murder. Lou attempts to disguise obfuscations by positioning his reticence as a desire to attain full disclosure: ‘I guess there’s another thing or two I need to tell you first, and – but I *will* tell you about it. I want to tell you, and I will. Exactly how it happened. I won’t leave you to figure things out for yourself’ (161). Even as he is withholding information and confusing the reader with misinformation and red herrings, Lou is manipulating the reader’s sympathies. His repeated direct addresses to the reader heighten the reader’s level of imaginative involvement with the text, as he suggests that his delays are for the reader’s benefit. Ultimately, though, he is toying with us; the reasons and theories he gives for his behaviour are untrue – the whole thing is just a fiction. Lou makes this explicit when he draws attention to the fact that we are *reading* his *written* testimony, rather than viewing events from a privileged omniscient position, as with a traditional heterodiegetic narrative. This metafictional strategy heightens readerly engagement with the character and with the act of reading itself, as we become increasingly aware of the stylistic techniques at work in the narrative.<sup>26</sup> Lou even discusses writing style, talking disparagingly of what we might term the poetics of mental/narrative breakdown (favoured, as we have seen, by Faulkner and McCoy), and claiming that his narrative regressions and delays are borne of a desire to tell the full story, however lengthy and laborious a task that might be:

In a lot of books I read, the writer seems to go haywire every time he reaches a high point. He’ll start leaving out punctuation and running his words together and babble about stars flashing and sinking into a deep

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<sup>26</sup> This anticipates Ellis’s postmodern manipulation of narrative, which I will explore in Chapter Four.

dreamless sea. And you can't figure out whether the hero's laying his girl or a cornerstone. I guess that kind of crap is supposed to be pretty deep stuff – a lot of the book reviewers eat it up, I notice. But the way I see it is, the writer is just too goddam lazy to do his job. And I'm not lazy, whatever else I am. I'll tell you everything. (161)

Thompson himself made great use of the techniques that Lou derides; his 1953 novel, *Savage Night* contains just such a passage when Little Bigger, the consumptive hit man, begins his mental collapse towards death. 1954's *A Hell of a Woman* is also experimental, carrying a significant section of interlarded narration at the end of the novel which demonstrates the bifurcated consciousness of the schizophrenic protagonist, Dolly Dillon. Lou's objection appears to be less about stylistics and more about his desire to control readers by influencing both their response to the text and their relationship to him as the narrator.

Despite his protestations, Lou does shape his poetics to his mental state. Towards the end of the novel, the narrative voice shifts from the first person to the third, to the second, and then back to the first again, charting as it does Lou's shifting psychological condition. When the whole of Chapter 25 is delivered in the second person, a form rarely employed in literature, it appears to give a sense of Lou's detachment from reality. It is as though he is outside himself; removed from the story and from social significance, his actions must be performed by someone else. For Mark Seltzer, this represents:

the paroxysms of self-location in the killer's accelerating and explosive violence. The final act of murder and self-murder takes the form of a final identification, of a final literalization: this time a terminal collapse of

“private” interior and “public” cliché, private body and public collapse.

(168)

This is a compelling argument, but not one I feel able to agree with. For me, the shift in narrative voice is not evidence of the controlling Lou’s psychic dissolution but rather a devious and deliberate stylistic attempt to manipulate the reader into a position of identification and empathy with the killer. The constant references to ‘you’, ‘you’ve’ and ‘your’ put the reader into the narrative frame, in place of Lou. The reader becomes the psychopathic killer, pacing his home, throwing nitric acid on the volumes of psychology, and preparing the house so that it will ignite when the police fire their guns. Even with the return of the first person voice in the final chapter of the novel, Lou continues to drag the reader into collusion with him. As the house explodes, taking Lou and Joyce with it, Lou muses existentially on the meaning of life and the existence of the afterlife:

...And they all lived happily ever after, I guess, and I guess – that’s – all.

Yeah, I reckon that’s all unless our kind gets another chance in the Next Place. Our kind. Us people.

All of us that started the game with a crooked cue, that wanted so much and got so little, that meant so good and did so bad. All us folks. Me and Joyce Lakeland, and Johnnie Pappas and Bob Maples and big ol’ Elmer Conway and little ol’ Amy Stanton. All of us.

All of us. (220)

The first reference to ‘our kind’ seems to refer to psychopaths, a category the reader probably would not put him- or herself into. Yet Lou’s subsequent references to ‘Our kind. Us people’ make it clear that he *is* including the reader at this point. Indeed, he goes on to

include each of his victims, people who represent all shades of moral and legal guilt and innocence. In so doing, Lou simultaneously paints himself as a blameless victim, and the reader as a guilty procurer and consumer of evil acts. The final reiteration of 'All of us', standing apart from the rest of the text, suggests the futility of an existence where each person is doomed to a life and death of meaningless oblivion, the good alongside the bad, with nothing to differentiate them. It is a fittingly bleak end to a novel which ultimately underscores the contemporary fear that the age can offer 'no salvation, no point' (O'Brien 149).

This sense of the era's hopelessness pervades much of Thompson's work and his novels are populated by desperate, emasculated men and fearsome, vicious women. As we have seen, Lou Ford is keen to depict himself as the hapless victim of a childhood sex assault by Helene, his father's housekeeper. Lou claims that his experience with Helene has tainted his relationship with all women and that when he kills Joyce and Amy it is really Helene that he's attacking. Whether this is true for Lou or simply another manipulative use of pop psychology is a moot point. What is clear is that masculinity in the era was embattled and the fears surrounding the loss of agency and masculine potency were reflected in the literature of the day. In *Savage Night*, for instance, the tough-guy hit man, who talks like a character from a Hammett or Chandler novel, is actually a five-foot-tall consumptive who doesn't know how old he is. The point about his age is significant as we don't know whether he has yet passed the threshold to adulthood. As a gangster/hit man, Little Bigger defines himself in the context of a dominant masculinity yet he retains an immaturity which is characterised by his sexual inadequacy (intercourse makes him vomit) and his restless inability to settle down in a normative relationship with Ruthie. He looks young enough to pass for a college student, yet is desperate to prove himself as a man who should be feared, admired and respected. Significantly, the person he wishes to

impress with his masculine performance is known only as 'The Man', the simplicity of his nomenclature and use of capital letters underscoring the notion of violence and aggression as symbols of virility. For all his efforts, Little Bigger finds himself diminishing, getting smaller and smaller as the narrative unfolds. The surreal climax of the novel sees Little Bigger locked away in a remote cabin in the wilds of Canada with the disabled and downtrodden Ruthie, who he suspects is working for The Man: 'And I seemed to be shrinking more and more, getting weaker and littler while she got stronger and bigger' (145). The narrative descends into the kind of chaos so derided by Lou Ford, with howling goats that do and do not exist, and lapses between rationality and insanity indicated by the use of italics. The novel's nightmarish ending sees Little Bigger hacked to death by Ruthie who has been growing increasingly strong and mobile. The symbolism here needs little unpacking: the man diminishes as the woman grows stronger, then loses parts of himself, bit by bit, until there is nothing left for him to do but crawl off and die. As descriptions of mid-twentieth century masculine angst go, this really could not be clearer. Interestingly, Little Bigger's death, in a dark recess in the basement of the cabin, has echoes of the death of Ralph in *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* and seems to suggest a return to the pre-lingual, pre-natal state represented by the womb. One can also read it as solace found in oblivion; a common trope in the nihilistic 1950s. There's a sense that if you strip away everything that makes a man – his reasoning, sanity, agency, social standing, etc. – until all that is left is a twitching, bloody stump, then he will surely wither and die. In *Little Bigger*, Thompson seems to be offering a metaphor for the modern condition where values such as compassion and fraternity are no longer prevalent or valued and masculinity has lost its mythic status and phallic power.

Indeed, the loss of phallic power is a recurrent theme for Thompson. *A Hell of a Woman* ends with a castration, told two ways in a lurid and terrifying interlarded narration.

One version of events has Fred Jones (a pseudonym, representative of everyman, for Frank Dillon, the novel's protagonist) drugged by Helene<sup>27</sup> who then saws off his penis as punishment for disappointing her; the other version sees Fred get high on marijuana, cocaine and heroin before sawing his own penis off with broken glass because '*she was...entitled to it. and anyway I wasn't going to need it any longer*' (185, original emphasis). Both of the narratives end with Helene laughing and screaming at Fred, who throws himself out of the window, presumably to his death. The message is clear: whether women are to blame for castrating men, or men are responsible for their own lack of potency, the current situation is intolerable. This theme is made even more overt in Thompson's 1954 novel, *The Nothing Man*, a story told by Clinton 'Brownie' Brown, whose penis was blown off in the war. Like Lou Ford, Brownie is an unreliable narrator who draws our attention to the materiality of the novel as a literary artefact: 'Take me, which you are doomed to do for some two hundred pages. Take me' (39). The title of the novel and the nature of Clinton's injury make the central concern of the novel crystal clear. The loss of his penis – literally his manhood – physically figures Brownie's mental and emotional loss of agency, aggression, power and virility. Brownie's impotence is so pronounced that not even the murder of three women can reinscribe his masculinity; his soft and harmless persona means that even in the face of compelling evidence, nobody will believe that he could have committed the crimes. In this novel, Thompson captures the crushing ennui of the post-war period; life is empty, banal and meaningless, with

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<sup>27</sup> Lou's Ford's childhood housekeeper in *The Killer Inside Me* was also called Helene. Lou's sexual experience with her precluded him from successfully resolving his Oedipus complex, thereby denying him access to healthy adult subjectivity and masculine identity. Thompson's reuse of her name here reveals her as emblematic of invidious, castrating womanhood. Both books also have characters named Joyce; one is a slovenly wife and the other a prostitute. In each case, Joyce is a woman the protagonist is trying to escape, but who ultimately proves instrumental in his downfall. For Thompson, Joyce is representative of the power and resilience of woman; she is the root of all man's dissatisfaction and trouble. Lou Ford also reappears: in *Wild Town* (1957), in which Joyce also features as a scheming, murderous gold-digger; and under the thinly-veiled pseudonym Tom Lord in *The Transgressors* (1961). Nick Corey in *Pop. 1280* (1964) is also unmistakably modelled on Ford. Thompson's re-use of the enigmatic Ford seems to indicate his admiration for the charismatic psychopath. This does little to counteract accusations of Thompson's misogyny.

characters '[l]iving not as men but human gadflies' (214). There's a sense of quiet desperation, borne of living in an alienating culture which places little value on human life and where even the newspapers, surely a reflection of society itself, are 'puerile...façades for emptiness' (200). Like so many of Thompson's creations, Brownie feels himself split between his public and private selves, although 'the real me – the me-in-charge-of-me' (34) is never seen. The unstable self, vacillating between various performances of personal identity, mirrors the conflicts of the 1950s, a decade which has variously been described as a time of 'vapid celebration of the established order and a fearful atmosphere of repression' (Mellen 186) and 'an era of affluence and complacency' (Cohan ix). For Cassuto, 'Thompson's stories of people unglued registered the fears and concerns boiling beneath the prosperity of post-war America' (130), yet the lasting popularity of the novels suggests that the truths they contain are transcendent, rather than time-bound.

### 3.3.2 Patricia Highsmith

The universals one can identify in Thompson can also be found in the work of Patricia Highsmith. Like Thompson, Highsmith was fascinated with masculine performance, the mutability of identity and the tensions between repression and desire, and her tales reflect contemporary cultural anxieties. The acceptable social faces of her psychopaths allow them to wreak havoc with impunity and they are at once compelling and utterly terrifying.

#### *Strangers on a Train*

Highsmith's debut novel, *Strangers on a Train*, published in 1950, charts the slow moral and mental disintegration of two strangers who, following a chance meeting on a train,

become embroiled in a life of murder, paranoia and crumbling selfhood. Dissolute socialite Charles Bruno, a prototypical psychopath, has an unresolved Oedipus complex and wishes to dispose of his father. Sober architect Guy Haines is heartbroken and angry, having been betrayed by his wife. When Bruno suggests to Guy that they commit murder for each other – ‘I kill your wife and you kill my father! We meet on the train, see, and nobody knows we know each other. Perfect alibis!’ (30) – Guy is sickened and appalled. Bruno, however, is thrilled by his idea and, having successfully murdered Guy’s wife, Miriam, begins to pressure Guy into killing his father. Tormented by guilt and fear over Miriam’s death, Guy eventually gives in and shoots the old man, at great psychic cost to himself.

*Strangers on a Train* has none of the charm or humour of the later Ripley series; rather it is a tense, unsettling meditation on the nature of evil and the essential instability of self. Highsmith’s terse prose and ‘karate-chop syntax’ (Winterson np) keep the reader on edge, and, as none of the characters are particularly pleasant or appealing, sympathy for them is in short supply. Guy, although initially portrayed as a moral and hardworking figure, proves also to be a judgemental, cold and somewhat haughty man. Bruno, by contrast, is dangerous and criminally-minded but also passionate, vibrant and spontaneous. The forces of attraction and repulsion work on the reader as surely as they work on the characters themselves, leaving him or her in a kind of empathetic limbo. Yet Highsmith does manage to draw readers in, making them complicit not only as consumers of literary transgression but also as human beings prone to the same biological drives and mental weaknesses as the characters in the book. When, prior to the murders, Guy tells Bruno that he is not the type of person who could ever kill, Bruno exclaims:

That’s exactly where you’re wrong! Any kind of person can murder. Purely circumstances and not a thing to do with temperament! People get so far –

and it takes just the least little thing to push them over the brink. Anybody.  
Even your grandmother. I know. (26)

The reference to ‘*your* grandmother’ reminds the reader that, although the situation in the novel is fictional, the characters are speaking of human universals which apply to the reader too. When Guy disapprovingly tells Bruno that he reads too many detective stories, he references contemporary debates about the causes of crime. As we shall see later on in this chapter, during my discussion of Meyer Levin’s 1956 documentary novel, *Compulsion*, detective fiction was often considered a corrupting influence. Guy’s reference to it here sees Highsmith poking fun at or perhaps challenging her readers, and it again forces us to consider our own position in relation to the novel and the issues it raises with regards to reception.

Relationships between the characters in the novel are fraught; Bruno is friendless, except for his mother, and although Guy is loved by the kind and selfless Anne, his guilt forces them apart. Bruno, inexorably drawn to Guy by a sublimated homosexuality, both repulses and attracts Guy who feels an affinity and oneness with the man he vehemently rejects. As the narrative unfolds, Guy increasingly feels that Bruno represents a secret side of himself; that they are two separate parts of the same personality, the light and the dark, the ego and the id. As they talk on the train, Guy views Bruno as the very essence of evil: ‘All he despised, Guy thought, Bruno represented. All the things he would not want to be, Bruno was, or would become’ (30). Yet, by the time Guy has decided to commit the murder, he has accepted their kinship and acknowledged his love for Bruno: ‘He was like

Bruno. Hadn't he sensed it time and time again, and like a coward never admitted it? Hadn't he known Bruno was like himself? ...He loved Bruno' (134, my ellipsis).<sup>28</sup>

Significantly, following the murders the two characters begin to merge. Guy finds himself hardening, gradually able to accept his new self. His growing aberrance is written on his body and he seems split, like Jekyll and Hyde. The face that looks back at him from the mirror is unrecognisable as his own; his eyes have become Bruno's eyes. Guy's awareness of this doubling announces itself to his conscious mind via a recurrent nightmare in which a mysterious figure 'in a great cape like a bat's wing sprang suddenly into the room' (164).<sup>29</sup> On asking 'Who are you?' Guy sees that the figure is Bruno and tries to fight him with all his might. Unaffected by Guy's attempts to strangle him, Bruno finally answers 'You' (ibid.). The bedroom, as a private space or inner sanctum, signifies Guy's consciousness. The symbolic 'other', as represented by a vampiric Bruno who threatens to consume Guy, did not have to force entry; a way in was left open to him. The dream reveals how Guy has subconsciously allowed Bruno, and the evil that he represents, to enter into his life and into his mind; he did not guard against him and the little resistance that he did put up was futile. Although figured by Guy's subconscious as indomitable, in the aftermath of the murders the real Bruno becomes increasingly paranoid and fearful; drunk and obsessive, his self-assured swagger is a thing of the past. Abject, he begins to decay; his moral rot figuring externally in his bloated face and 'corpse-like body' (196). Bruno spends more and more time with Guy, fascinated by his life and relationships, and

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<sup>28</sup> Guy seems to have engaged in a process of projective identification, where undesirable elements of the self are projected onto the other, who the subject then identifies with. Whilst this manoeuvre aims to prevent psychic injury it can actually increase anxiety, as Klein explains: 'By introjecting and reintrojecting the forcefully entered object, the subject's feelings of inner persecution are strongly reinforced; all the more since the reintrojected object is felt to contain the dangerous aspects of the self' (186).

<sup>29</sup> There are obvious parallels here with the scene in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* where the Count enters the bedroom of Mina Harker and attacks her as she sleeps (282). Intertextual references of this kind create dialogic associations in the reader which colour their reading of the present text; here, Bruno is imbued with the strength and diabolic menace of Count Dracula, whilst Guy is temporarily feminised as he merges, dialogically, with Mina. The horror associated with Stoker's creation (and its subsequent revisions in popular culture) colours this scene and adds to our sense of dread and foreboding.

Guy tolerates Bruno's visits because the *jouissance* they cause – 'some torture that perversely eased' (ibid. 197) – feels like a fitting penance for the crime he has committed. When Guy disposes of his gun by throwing it off his boat, he is also letting go of the last vestiges of his old self and giving himself over entirely to a life of lies and dishonesty:

He held the gun in both hands over the water, his elbow on the bowsprit.  
How intelligent a jewel, he thought, and how innocent it looked now.  
Himself – He let it drop. The gun turned once head-over, in perfect balance,  
with its familiar look of willingness, and disappeared. (200)

The gun, bought for its beauty many years before, represents his earlier, innocent and unsullied self. The capitalisation of 'He' demonstrates the split between his two selves: 'Himself', who he must let go, and 'He' who is now in charge. Of course, a capitalised 'He' is most commonly associated with references to God; its use here underscores how all-powerful this new self is. Guy has always held that everything is doubled, both within and without the person. He has previously maintained to Bruno that each person has a *doppelgänger*, 'a person exactly the opposite of you, like the unseen part of you, somewhere in the world, and he waits in ambush' (228). In folklore, *doppelgängers* are mortal enemies and Guy and Bruno, in allowing their selves to merge, have wrought their own destruction and left themselves no place in the world.

This sense of the tortured, paranoid individual adrift in a callous, bewildering world, harnesses the air of suspicion that pervaded Cold War America and coloured its cultural products. Masculine crisis suffuses the works of both Highsmith and Thompson; a reflection of the disruption to traditional gender roles in society wrought by such seismic events as the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War, both of which forced more women into work and altered family dynamics. The impact of the war can

also be felt in contemporary attitudes to mental health (specifically trauma), and musings on the nature of good and evil. In accepting ‘the full complement of evil in himself’ (220), Guy is forced to also acknowledge ‘a natural compulsion to express it’ (ibid.) and even the possibility that he may have

enjoyed his crime in some way, derived some primal satisfaction from it – how else could one really explain in mankind the continued toleration of wars, the perennial enthusiasm for wars when they came, if not for some primal pleasure in killing?’ (ibid.)

For Bruno and Guy, murder becomes a source of phallic power that reinscribes their masculinity. Bruno, in particular, feels that killing Miriam has made him a man. He is thrilled to see coverage of the murder in all of the newspapers, and when, prior to the murder, he realizes that killing her will benefit not just Guy but also any other ‘nice guy’ who might meet her in the future, he swells at the thought of his own importance: ‘His energies that had been dissipated, spread like a flooded river over land as flat and boring as the Llano Estacado he was crossing now, seemed gathered in a whole vortex whose point strove towards Metcalf like the aggressive thrust of the train’ (60). The barely sublimated sexual imagery of the ‘aggressive thrust’ of the train, and the ‘vortex’ of Bruno’s ‘energies’ demonstrates the extent to which Bruno’s intended obliteration of Miriam for the benefit of his fellow men functions not just as an attack on this particular woman, but on the whole of womankind.

In *Strangers on a Train* Highsmith uses a conventional heterodiegetic narrator and extensive free indirect discourse which brings the reader closer to the characters. She explores the darkness at the core of humankind with an intensity and depth quite uncommon at the time, particularly within the crime fiction genre. We do not see

conventional justice in the novel; no criminal investigation, righteous arrest or legal penalty. Instead, her characters' punishment comes from within, via their slow, psychic disintegration as guilt (in the case of Guy) and fear eat away at them. They embody Guy's theory that '[e]very man is his own law court and punishes himself enough' (229), positing the idea that natural law has greater validity than state administered justice, and suggesting that instinct reigns supreme over reason. We do not empathise with Bruno's murderous, monstrous ennuï, but we are fascinated by it and its enervating effect on Guy. Both Guy and Bruno, though surrounded by people, are isolated and alone in the novel – Highsmith's way of highlighting, perhaps, an alienating modernity in which no one can be said to really know or trust another person. Guy's journey from upstanding citizen, avowedly incapable of killing, to cold-blooded murderer demonstrates how an individual cannot know what he is capable of until extreme circumstances push him to act. And this is why *Strangers on a Train* represents an important point in the trajectory of the fictional psychopath; it posits evil as normal, natural and inherent to us all.

### *The Talented Mr Ripley*

This notion of the ordinariness of the psychopath gains fullest expression in Highsmith's most famous novel, *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1955). Tom Ripley is the archetypal psychopath: a grandiose, manipulative, compulsive liar; he is criminally versatile, highly intelligent, callous and unempathetic, with a lack of affect. Despite this, he has also been described as 'perversely entertaining', 'a wickedly attractive figure', and 'the most charismatic psychopath in modern literature' (Dirida np). Ripley is perhaps also one of the most famous psychopaths in modern literature and his enduring popularity is due in no small part to the way in which Highsmith's poetics guide the reader to a position of

identification. The story is told via Highsmith's usual heterodiegetic omniscient narration, brought to life by extensive use of free indirect discourse. As noted during my discussion of *Strangers on a Train*, Highsmith's prose is stark and intense, with an austerity quite at odds with the lurid, sensationalistic writing often associated with crime fiction. This simplicity extends also to Tom himself, lending him an authenticity which makes him seem knowable in a way that perhaps Lou Ford and Popeye are not.

The plainness of Highsmith's poetics belies the complexity of their effect on the reader. Omniscient narration is usually associated with truth and impartiality, and the unwary reader could be forgiven for assuming that everything they read of Tom's early life is the absolute truth. However, the narrative is most definitely slanted in Tom's favour, with the free indirect discourse presenting his thoughts and feelings to us in a subtle, almost surreptitious way. This technique insidiously brings the reader closer to Tom, both stylistically and emotionally, with a restraint that makes it difficult for the reader to realise that s/he is being manipulated towards Tom's point of view. And this is part of Highsmith's genius; in telling her story of a controlling yet charming psychopath, she deftly controls her readers and leads them towards a position of identification without them ever realising that they are not in control of their responses to the text. Her poetics mimic exactly the psychic manoeuvres of the psychopath. So, when we learn that Tom's murders are not motivated by madness or greed and that he is driven to right what he considers to be wrongs visited on him by fate and circumstance, we may not question the logic. Tom did not want to murder; events forced his hand. And although he is never given to self-pity, Tom feels that he is the victim in the narrative; a position that readers are happy to accept because they too are victims, though in this case of Highsmith's insidious prose. We learn that Tom was orphaned at an early age and brought up by a resentful, uncaring and unsympathetic aunt and, when told that Tom's early life was difficult and devoid of

love, the reader cannot help but feel for him and the perceived hardships and injustices that he suffered. However, a closer and more critical look at the narrative could reveal his tribulations to simply be the ‘me, me, me’ bleatings of a hard-done-to psychopath. Aunt Dottie wiping his juvenile nose is seen by Tom, and thus by us, not as solicitous care but as evidence of her hatred for him whenever he had a cold. Likewise, ‘piddling cheques for the strange sums of six dollars and forty-eight cents and twelve dollars and ninety-five’ (33) sent to the adult Tom are perceived as money ‘tossed...to him, like a crumb’ (ibid.), rather than amounts scraped together by a caring and penurious old woman acting far beyond her duty to an orphaned nephew. The litany of injustices continues: as a young man, he attempted to escape that life by hard work and employment, but it didn’t work out and he was fired from his first job after just two weeks:

he remembered how horribly unjust he had thought it. He remembered deciding then that the world was full of Simon Legrees, and that you had to be an animal, as tough as the gorillas who worked with him at the warehouse, or starve. He remembered that right after that, he had stolen a loaf of bread from a delicatessen counter and had taken it home and devoured it, feeling that the world owed a loaf of bread to him, and more.  
(36)

Here, Highsmith subtly manipulates the reader to a position of identification by marrying her unemotional prose with loaded cultural references. Simon Legree, for instance, is a vicious slave trader from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s ground-breaking anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). His inclusion here allows the reader to overlook the fact that Tom turned his back on honest labour after a failed first attempt only two weeks in duration, and encourages us to focus instead on the cruelty and greed with which Legree’s name is synonymous. The fact that Tom then stole bread and ‘devoured it’ positions him

as a starving and destitute wretch who asks little of the world, rather than a piqued thief with a sense of entitlement. Indeed, the simplicity of Tom's needs will be one way in which Highsmith endears him to us as the novel progresses. His aim is not to amass wealth and live the life of an international playboy. He simply wants to belong and to have a defined place in the world, rather than being a perpetual outsider: 'He only wanted a home, a base somewhere, after years of not having any. And Rome was chic' (115). Highsmith tugs at our heartstrings and makes us think of our own insecurities, but her prose is never mawkish; a throwaway reference to Rome's chicness is all it takes to lift the mood and raise a wry smile. Even as we recognise Ripley's weaknesses and foibles we accept him; they serve only to make him more human, more acceptable, more like us.

As the narrative progresses, Tom proves himself to be industrious, thorough and earnest – all traits that are highly prized in society and which endear him to the reader. Tom works hard at his deceptions, spending hours practising Dickie's voice and mannerisms; even his painting style. As he considers the story he will tell to the police, following the unplanned murder of Freddie Miles, Tom creates an elaborate scene of drunken disorder in his home, even though he knows that he will have cleaned it up by the time the police arrive: 'the point of the messy house was that the messiness substantiated merely for his own benefit the story that he was going to tell, and that therefore he had to believe himself' (126). Tom also works hard at his self-improvement, spending two hours per day learning Italian and poring over books on history, architecture and art. Having decided on the type of person he wants to become – a sophisticated, serious and privileged young man of leisure – he sets about living that life in earnest. He immerses himself in the culture of Rome and his accomplishments soon outstrip those of Dickie, Marge and Freddie who seem base in comparison. When we read that:

He visited a Byzantine palace, the Palermo library with its paintings and old cracked manuscripts in glass cases, and studied the formation of the harbour, which was carefully diagrammed in his guidebook. He made a sketch of a painting by Guido Reni, for no particular purpose, and memorized a long inscription by Tasso on one of the public buildings. (159)

we cannot help but experience, in a strange, small way, a sense of pride in his achievements. We feel, as Tom feels, that he is now living the life that should have been his, had fate, fortune and accident of birth been kinder to him. Later, Highsmith and Tom voice the sentiments which the reader seems to have felt spontaneously (but which were obviously invoked by Highsmith's poetics) and thereby validate the reader's feelings towards Tom:

Did the world always mete out just deserts [sic]? Had the world meted his out to him?...In the first part of his life fate had been grossly unfair, he thought, but the period with Dickie and afterwards had more than compensated for it. (244)

Of course, there is also something chilling about Tom's lack of guilt and remorse at the murders and deceptions he has committed; the fact that he feels only a sense of entitlement serves to remind the reader that he is not the charming, hardworking young man of his projections, but an emotionless and dangerous psychopath. Yet Highsmith does not allow the reader to dwell on this fact and skips instead to meditations on the death penalty, the shortness of Tom's young life and the fact that he has not yet visited all of the places he wants to see in the world. In so doing, Highsmith deftly manoeuvres the reader from a potentially censorious, anti-empathetic position to one of sympathy with Tom. This is bolstered by the revelation that, whilst mimicking Dickie and his 'mediocre paintings'

(ibid.), Tom has discovered a genuine love of art and a desire to act as a patron to struggling young painters. Tom is thereby transformed once more into a character that the reader can support in good conscience. His is not a capitalist dream. His desire to be a benefactor, selflessly helping others, positions him more as a young man of means on a nineteenth century Grand Tour than an avaricious conman and killer, and stands in positive contrast to the industrialist figure of Dickie's father, Herbert Greenleaf. This enables the reader's identification with Tom and also builds on the theme of Tom's cultural growth, as explored earlier in the novel. However, whilst portraying Tom as an epicure, bon vivant and art aficionado, Highsmith is careful to ensure that the reader recognises that Tom's bourgeois desires and needs, although based on an appreciation of the finer things in life, do not reflect a gross consumerism. His consumption of good food, wine, art and culture is meaningful rather than the empty capitalism that would later be explored in Ellis's *American Psycho*. Tom is an aesthete; his Venetian home with its marble floors and 'furniture that did not resemble furniture at all but an embodiment of cinquecento music played on hautboys, recorders, and violas da gamba' (184) is evidence of that. Dickie's money has allowed him to be the person he always wished he could be. More significantly, his materialism is based on the fact that it functions as evidence of his materiality; something tangible to counteract the intangibility of his sense of self: 'Possessions reminded him that he existed, and made him enjoy his existence. It was as simple as that' (214).

The unstable self is perhaps the most important theme in the novel, which positions personality as performative and mutable, rather than fixed and instinctual. Tom's adoption of Dickie's identity seems to happen spontaneously; it is neither forced nor a difficult task, rather it occurs naturally and organically. From very early on in the narrative, Tom is aware of the similarities between himself and Dickie:

They sat slumped in the carrozza, each with a sandalled foot propped on a knee, and it seemed to Tom that he was looking in a mirror when he looked at Dickie's leg and his propped foot beside him. They were the same height, and very much the same weight, Dickie perhaps a bit heavier, and they wore the same size bathrobe, socks, and probably shirts.

Dickie even said, 'Thank you, Mr Greenleaf,' when Tom paid the carrozza driver. Tom felt a little weird. (58-59)

The reference to a mirror here is interesting as the mirror, in reflecting the self, has the effect of separating the mind from the body. The two become distinct objects, physically separated. Identity, in the projected form of the physical self, is pushed further into the world as a detached entity to be contemplated and deliberated over. Furthermore, Tom's unconscious mirroring of Dickie lends an eeriness to the scene; an uncanny presentiment of what lies ahead. Although at this stage Tom has not consciously considered murder, on noticing the physical similarities between him and Dickie and hearing himself addressed by the Greenleaf name, Tom's interest in becoming Dickie Greenleaf is piqued. It is reminiscent of the scene at the beginning of the novel when Herbert Greenleaf suggests that Tom may be able to persuade Dickie to return from Italy, if he were to travel out there, at Mr Greenleaf's expense. Tom instinctively recognises 'a possibility. Something in him had smelt it out and leapt at it even before his brain' (10). There's a sense here of something quite primeval at work; a response from Tom's reptilian brain which occurs before his neocortex, or 'thinking brain', has chance to engage. Later, in the carrozza, a similar process seems to have taken place, setting in motion a train of events which lead Tom inexorably towards murder and his new life as Dickie Greenleaf. Indeed, Tom's initial appropriation of Dickie's persona seems to occur without Tom's even realising it; with a phrase here and a gesture there, the reader sees Tom gradually and unconsciously

morphing into his friend. As Tom told Dickie in the early days of their relationship, he can ‘impersonate practically anybody’ (51). Tom has a gift for appropriating the mannerisms, gait and bearing of a person which, when garnished with the appropriate clothing and accessories, allows him to offer very convincing performances. The reader first sees this soon after the scene in the carozza when, alone in Dickie’s home, Tom tries on Dickie’s suit and impersonates him in the mirror. Quite literally ‘trying him on for size’, Tom finds him to be a very good fit. When Dickie walks in and suggests that Tom may be ‘queer’ he is actually questioning not just Tom’s sexuality, but his true identity and masculine performance – issues which go right to the heart of 1950s fears of male crisis. The fact that Dickie tells Tom that his assumption is based on ‘the way you *act*’ (70, my emphasis) points again to the performative nature of identity.

When the murder has been committed and Tom is living as Dickie in Rome, the doubling becomes so pronounced that he actually starts to *become* Dickie, with ‘Tom’ being as alien/other to him as anyone else. Rather than being his own true self, ‘Tom’ becomes a persona that he must adopt as circumstances demand. The split between the two characters becomes so defined that he must consciously rehearse the role of Tom, in case Marge should pay him an unexpected visit to enquire about Dickie’s whereabouts: ‘It was a good idea to practice jumping into his own character again, because the time might come when he would need to in a matter of seconds, and it was strangely easy to forget the exact timbre of Tom Ripley’s voice’ (105-106). Tom’s reference to himself in the third person here demonstrates how completely he has separated from the Ripley persona. Tom wears the habits of a person like a costume that he can shrug on and off and the theatricality of this analogy reinforces our sense of the performativity of identity. However, the split between the two ‘selves’ becomes more pronounced as the deception develops, until Tom comes to see the binary personalities as two separate people. It’s no longer Tom Ripley as

himself, plus Tom Ripley *being* Dickie Greenleaf; it's Tom and Dickie as two separate individuals. As with the mirror analogy discussed above, the identities of Tom and Dickie become detachable to the point that they may be picked up and put down at will, before being played out in the host body of Tom Ripley. The pronounced separation of self is made clear when Tom considers opening a bank account with Dickie's money in the name of Tom Ripley. He notes that it would be practical, as '[a]fter all, he had two people to take care of' (117), and the reader is made chillingly aware of Tom's psychic ownership of the two identities. Tellingly, the split between the two personas is so absolute that Tom comes to believe that he is not responsible for Freddie's murder – because Dickie did it. The benefits of such a complex cognitive manoeuvre are clear: freed of responsibility for Freddie's murder, Tom is able to resume 'normal' life, his interest in the case no more than that of any of Dickie and Freddie's other friends. He is not weighed down by fear of apprehension, in fact '[t]he only thing that really interested him was whether the police had found anything that actually incriminated Dickie in the murder of Freddie Miles. And he could hardly say that really interested him personally' (171). However, by this point in the narrative Tom is so divorced from his old identity that he cannot simply stop acting and relax as himself; there's nothing of *him* left. Rather, he must continue to perform, pretending to be the person he used to be. This is made clear when Tom travels to Venice under his own identity and chooses a mid-range hotel: 'It was clean, inexpensive, and convenient to points of interest. It was just the hotel for Tom Ripley' (167). Here, Highsmith's poetics give the reader an outsider's view both of Tom's hotel choice and of Tom himself. With typical stark simplicity Highsmith renders the distance between Tom and his self, as we realise that Tom doesn't just have to imagine how his selection will look to the police, he must also imagine Tom.

In subtly mapping the insubstantiality of Tom's identity and sense of self, Highsmith invokes the reader's own sense of disenfranchisement and bewilderment in a cold and often baffling modernity, and in so doing she again secures our complicity. At odds with the 'tough guy' masculine paradigms so prevalent in the 1950s, Tom cries easily and his emotionality suggests an endearing fragility. This softens us to many of the worst acts in the book, such as Tom's disrespectful dumping of Freddie's body, and allows us to continue to empathise with and accept the psychopath. The scene positions Tom as the victim again, with Freddie as a philistine deserving of his fate:

He dragged the limp body roughly now, scraping the face in the dirt, behind the last tree and behind the little remnant of tomb that was only a four-foot-high, jagged arc of wall, but which was probably a remnant of the tomb of a patrician, Tom thought, and quite enough for this pig. Tom cursed his ugly weight and kicked him suddenly in the chin. He was tired, tired to the point of crying, sick of the sight of Freddie Miles, and the moment when he could turn his back on him for the last time seemed never to come. (130)

The reference to the 'tomb of a patrician', a member of the hereditary aristocracy of ancient Rome and a cultured person of high birth, with sophisticated manners and taste, loads the scene with heteroglot meaning by offering a cultural and historical contrast to Freddie, who was also born to privilege yet remained unrefined and vulgar. The stub of tomb shows how 'low' Freddie is compared to the patricians of ancient Rome; that a stub is adequate for this 'pig' demeans, debases and belittles him. Significantly, though, Highsmith's moves towards empathy are also laced with jolts of ugly realism. The violence of the unexpected kick is in stark contrast to Tom's piteous and pathetic tears, and shows clearly the less winsome side of his personality. Yet even as we recoil from the blow and the man who delivered it, we are drawn back towards him by the very next line.

It places Tom back in his habitual underdog position and allows the reader to support him once more, both from a shared sense of victimhood in a tough world in which it is hard to gain purchase, and from a more elevated position of sympathy. That we can view Tom as a victim even as he is dragging the corpse of a man he has recently murdered says much for the power of Highsmith's poetics; shifting positions of empathy and identification keep the reader sufficiently in flux to disrupt our usual moral responses and enable us to accept this emotionless killer as our (anti)hero.

In positioning Tom as a likeable victim rather than a heartless and dangerous aggressor, Highsmith ensures that the reader empathises with, and thus supports and accepts, him. His voyage to Greece at the end of the novel represents his stepping out from Dickie's shadow to forge his own life in a brave new world and the loyal reader is happy to see this evidence of Tom's personal growth. Even though he fears capture having learned that Dickie's belongings have been discovered in Venice, he does not fear arrest. Significantly, his terror of open water has also vanished. Water has strong associations with death in the novel but Tom no longer fears it. Having finally been able to embrace life, accomplish so much and enjoy it all, Tom's dread of the void or abyss has abated. At the tender age of twenty-five he is able to stare down death, feeling that it is a price worth paying for the experiences his crimes have afforded him. Again, with remarkable sleight of hand, Highsmith coolly manoeuvres the reader into a position of empathy that permits him or her to focus on the triumphs of Tom's personal growth, rather than the fact that he has literally got away with murder. For Horsley, the absence of punishment or consequences is a large part of the appeal of the Ripley novels, which she describes as 'a fantasy of impunity sustained by lack of narrative closure' (132). This lack of closure is also rather unique, in that until this point the psychopaths we have dealt with have all had their comeuppance in one way or another. Indeed, a quick survey of the titles considered in this

thesis shows that from the late-nineteenth century to the mid-1950s, seven of the fictional killers died, two confessed, and a further two were castrated or otherwise emasculated. *The Talented Mr Ripley*, then, marks an interesting new direction in the trajectory of the fictional psychopath and its ‘fantasy of impunity’ would colour the serial killer subgenre which took hold in the latter part of the twentieth century. Intriguingly, the stepping stone between the two would come not from fiction but real life.

### 3.4 Documenting Death: The Birth of the Non-Fiction Novel

With the publication of *In Cold Blood* in 1966, Truman Capote heralded the creation of ‘a serious new art form: the “nonfiction novel”’ (Plimpton np), which he described as ‘a narrative form that employed all the techniques of fictional art but was nevertheless immaculately factual’ (ibid.). Although the truth of Capote’s claim to have created an entirely new genre and the veracity of his ‘facts’ have been challenged repeatedly since the book’s release, it remains a landmark text which has had a significant impact not only on subsequent ‘true crime’ writing, but also on fictional representations of murder and crime.

In November 1959, Perry Smith and Dick Hickock brutally murdered four members of a Kansan family: Herb Clutter, his wife Bonnie, and their teenaged children, Kenyon and Nancy. Perry and Dick targeted the family in the mistaken belief that Herb kept a safe filled with at least \$10,000 dollars; in reality the robbery netted them ‘[b]etween forty and fifty dollars’ (Capote 248), a portable radio and a pair of binoculars. The Clutters were upstanding members of the community; active in their church, hard-working, clean-living and universally liked. The brutality of their deaths was incomprehensible, particularly given the low financial gain the killers had made. The town of Holcomb was rocked by the crime, which came to represent what Capote later described

as a ‘collision between the desperate, ruthless, wandering, savage part of American life, and the other, which is insular and safe’ (Plimpton np) – a theme of great resonance in mid-1960s America. Using a four-part structure to weave together testimony from all of the key players in the narrative with extensive reporting of the criminal proceedings and detailed psychiatric profiles not heard in court, *In Cold Blood* attempts to understand and explain the seemingly inexplicable crime. The result was seismic: it offered readers extraordinary access to the minds of the two murderers via comprehensive psychological analysis, considered the impact of environmental factors on their actions, and, perhaps most startlingly of all, offered a very human, very *sympathetic* view of the man who pulled the trigger on the Clutters. Earlier true crime narratives had reserved their sympathy for the victims of crime, portraying the killers as unrelatable monsters which, according to David Schmid, helped to protect the reader from the uncomfortable notion that the killer they were reading about had anything in common with them (*Natural Born Celebrities* 195). By contrast, *In Cold Blood*, is at pains to humanise the killers; Perry Smith in particular. Although Dick was the driving force behind the robbery, it was Perry who actually committed the murders, cutting the throat of Herb Clutter, then shooting him at point blank range, before executing the rest of the family, one-by-one. Capote is unsparing in his depictions of the crimes and the callous disregard that Perry and Dick had for their victims, yet his narrative also reveals Perry’s humanity. Investigators were puzzled to find that Kenyon, tethered to a pallet in the basement of the Clutter home, had been given a pillow by Perry, to ensure his comfort before he was killed. Herb’s throat was cut whilst Perry was in a fleeting, dissociative state (‘I didn’t realize what I’d done till I heard the sound’ (247))<sup>30</sup> so he shot him dead, an act of brutality becoming a humane killing to spare a man

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<sup>30</sup> One is reminded here of the fugue state that Raskolnikov enters during the murder of Alëna Ivanovna in *Crime and Punishment* which I discussed earlier (see page 98).

undue suffering: ‘The man would have died anyway, I know that, but I couldn’t leave him like he was’ (ibid.).

Indeed, the novel abounds with descriptions of Perry as a lonesome, damaged ‘child-man’ (226), ‘an exiled animal, a creature walking wounded’ (341); the victim of a chaotic and loveless broken home and poor genetic heritage. Capote skilfully renders the paradox of Perry’s warped humanity and our moral equivalency, with the subtlest of details which foreground the process of storytelling whilst simultaneously alerting us to the absence of an identifiable narratorial voice. The first part of the novel consists of alternating sections which shift between the victims and the killers. Following the discovery of the Clutters’ bodies and their removal by a cortege of four ambulances, the scene shifts to a hotel room in Olathe, where

...Perry lay sleeping with a grey portable radio murmuring beside him. Except for taking off his boots, he had not troubled to undress. He had merely fallen face down across the bed, as though sleep were a weapon that had struck him from behind. The boots, black and silver-buckled, were soaking in a washbasin filled with warm, vaguely pink-tinted water. (83-84)

The juxtaposition of the funereal procession of ambulances, watched grimly by affected members of the community, and Perry peacefully sleeping underscores his callousness – he is untroubled, conscienceless and lacking affect. Face-down on a bed, like a felled victim, we are made simultaneously aware of his status as victim in the narrative and reminded of the people he has recently slain in their beds (Bonnie and Nancy in particular). The slight tug towards sympathy that we feel on reading of him being metaphorically ‘struck...from behind’ is sharply arrested by the image of the blood spattered boots soaking in the basin. The domesticity in this simple vignette is at once

banal and disturbing, reminding us again of the terror that the Clutters suffered in the sanctity of their home. The unnamed narrator never passes comment on the story or its players, yet his feelings and intentions become increasingly plain from the way that he manipulates the reader into a position of empathy with Perry and expresses his revulsion for Dick. Dick, described by Special Agent Alvin Dewey of the Kansas Bureau of Investigation as ‘empty and worthless’ (341), is revealed as the true psychopath of the pair. His malevolence is written on his body, in a Lombrosan misshapeness:

It was as though his head had been halved like an apple, then put together a fraction off centre...his eyes not only situated at uneven levels but of uneven size, the left eye being truly serpentine, with a venomous, sickly-blue squint that although it was involuntarily acquired, seemed nevertheless to warn of bitter sediment at the bottom of his nature. (42)

This description crackles with evil, from the ‘venomous squint’ of the left eye (left is the side of the Devil), to the references to apples and snakes which suggest original sin and a role in the fall of the innocent and trusting. Although the text does provide biographical detail and expert psychiatric evaluation of Dick, he is never treated sympathetically; rather his callousness reinforces the reader’s empathy for Perry, particularly when it is revealed that Dick manipulated Perry into committing the murders. Having listened to Perry’s baseless boasts of murder when the two were in prison together before the crime

Dick became convinced that Perry was that rarity, ‘a natural killer’ – absolutely sane, but conscienceless, and capable of dealing, with or without motive, the coldest-blooded deathblows. It was Dick’s theory that such a gift could, under his supervision, be profitably exploited. (66)

To ensure that the reader remains distanced from Dick, Capote grants him less narrative space than Perry. Dr Jones's diagnosis of Dick as suffering with 'a severe character disorder' (295) does temper the reader's view of the righteousness of Dick's hanging (guided by Capote's poetics, of course), but he retains an aura of evil which is absent from Capote's portrayal of Perry.

In fact, Capote's portrayal of Perry is extremely sympathetic. Much has been made of this over the years, with some critics and contemporary observers alleging that the two men were engaged in a homosexual relationship. Whether this is true or not can never actually be proved as both men are now dead, but what seems certain is that Capote felt a kinship with Perry. According to Ralph F. Voss, this affinity was based on a number of parallels that Capote perceived between Perry's life and his own (including abandonment in childhood, outsider status and attachment issues) and a recognition that, were it not for good fortune, his own life may have turned out like Perry's (Voss 16-17). Like Perry, Capote's difference was visible; he was small and flamboyant with an unusually high-pitched voice and these features, combined with his overt sexuality, made him very noticeable. Capote grants a great deal of narrative space to physical descriptions of Perry and whilst this is partly a stylistic device which adds to Capote's gothic handling of the material, it is also a Derridean example of text as psyche, where the 'unconscious is operative in language all the time' (Wright 121). Capote's frequent references to Perry as a 'child-man' whose feet do not touch the floor when seated in an adult chair seem to draw on pathological issues of Capote's own, relating to ideas of childhood and masculine performance; feelings of being stunted in some way, of not having advanced sufficiently or of not being taken seriously. It is possible that Perry evokes in Capote juvenile feelings of never being good enough to gain his mother's love (she rejected him repeatedly throughout his life before her suicide in 1954 (Voss 33)); the author's championing of Perry could

therefore perhaps be viewed as a championing or saving of his own young self. However, Capote's depiction of Perry is consistently ambivalent; his narrative mirroring the attraction of repulsion so common to psychopath fiction. In this way his relationship with Perry mirrors the reader's own. However beguiling the psychopath may be, the reader remains aware that the fascination is based in part on an externalisation or projection of personality traits that s/he finds unacceptable. Capote, like the reader, sees traces of his shadow in the killer; the moment of recognition mirrors that in Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and it is at once terrifying and terrifyingly attractive.

As Capote conducts his painstaking research for the book and strives to divine the reasons behind the Clutter killings, he occupies the same position as the reader of the fictional text. The reader is therefore able to draw parallels between Capote's experience of researching and writing his novel and his or her own experience of reading a novel about psychopaths. The motivations, rewards and ambivalences are the same for both parties; this alignment of reader and author strengthens the reader's acceptance of Capote and his project (which is ostensibly to engender reader empathy for Perry and, to a lesser degree, Dick, whilst raising questions about the righteousness of capital punishment). Whilst analysis of the author is often a fallacy in critical practice, it seems appropriate for *In Cold Blood*. Despite his claims of absence and objectivity, Capote is 'in' the text whether he admits it or not; his presence and opinions are felt via his handling of the material. Capote's omissions and inclusions and chosen areas of focus and emphasis, when combined with his contemporary media presence (and continued cultural interest in him and his work) and the huge pre-publication publicity that he generated for the book, provide the reader with such a strong sense of the author that he becomes, by extension, an additional character in the narrative. The reader's awareness of literary construction does not detract from the text's dramatic effect; rather the reader enters a state of imaginative

involvement (see section 1.5) in which engagement continues alongside an awareness of the stylistic and aesthetic qualities of the narrative technique. In our awareness of medium, we see here both an extension of the literary experiments of Faulkner, McCoy and Thompson and a foreshadowing of Ellis's virtuosic postmodern poetics.

Throughout the novel, Capote intersperses omniscient, heterodiegetic narration with testimony which is allegedly recorded verbatim. Capote's claims of '95 percent...absolute accuracy' (Plimpton np) in his transcriptions from memory (he did not use a notebook or Dictaphone during his interviews, as he believed that they inhibited his subjects) have been broadly challenged, although for my purposes this matters little; what is important is the narrative effect that his poetics achieve. The interweaving of testimony, free indirect discourse and heterodiegetic narration has the effect of making the narrative simultaneously more realistic and more novelistic, as it adds veracity to the subjects' recollections. When Marie, Alvin Dewey's wife, recounts the moment that her husband received a telephone call announcing the capture of the killers, she speaks in detail about the situation, the conversation she had with her husband and their feelings at the news, yet it is an unrelated remark she makes about her son having previously been very ill with encephalitis – '...we thought we might lose him. But I don't want to talk about that' (215) – that makes the scene come to life. Seemingly throwaway remarks by the narrator, such as his description of the sister of Lowell Lee (Perry and Dick's Death Row neighbour) as 'an intelligent but rather plain girl' (313), also add to the effect by giving the impression that the narrator does not flinch from reporting the truth, however unpalatable or unseemly it may be. Capote's poetics make full use of novelistic techniques for scene-setting and mood-building, also; a description of Dick's face as 'puffy, pallid as a funeral lily, gleam[ing] in the weak winter sunshine filtering through the bar-shrouded glass' (334) is loaded with portent and symbolism which could not be conveyed via reportage. The

marrying of the two writing styles allows Capote to deftly manoeuvre the reader to a position of empathy with Perry under the guise of accurately rendering the impressions of the other characters. The following passage is so rich it is worth quoting at length:

After Hickock's dismissal, Nye and Church crossed the corridor, and looking through the one-way observation window set in the door of the interrogation room, watched the questioning of Perry Smith – a scene visible though not audible. Nye, who was seeing Smith for the first time, was fascinated by his feet – by the fact that his legs were so short that his feet, as small as a child's, couldn't quite make the floor. Smith's head – the stiff Indian hair, the Irish-Indian blending of dark skin and pert-impish features – reminded him of the suspect's pretty sister, the nice Mrs Johnson. But this chunky, misshapen child-man was not pretty; the pink end of his tongue darted forth, flickering like the tongue of a lizard. (226)

This scene succinctly renders the ambivalence that Perry provokes in all those who meet him, whilst triggering an emotional response in the reader. That the scene is visible but not audible demonstrates how Perry is a man who is subject to the scrutiny and influence of others, but is often without agency. His tiny feet, unable to touch the floor, emphasize his status as a damaged child in a man's body; with the reference to him as a 'child-man' underscoring his sense of helplessness and lack of import or impact in the world. In referencing his 'Irish-Indian' heritage, the policemen are focusing on Perry's otherness. Both groups endured low social status in America at that time and when the policemen note Perry's 'stiff Indian hair', 'dark skin' and 'impish' (for which we can read devilish, demonic and mischievous) features, there are definite undertones of racism. Yet even as the officers focus on Perry's otherness, Capote's poetics ensure that the reader is aware of the heteroglot meanings their comments create in the dialogic; of the shortcomings,

disadvantages and difficulties that Perry has endured. This prevents the reader from tipping over into feelings of disgust and losing his or her empathetic connection with the killer. Reference to Perry's 'pretty sister, the nice Mrs Johnson' suggests that he too could have turned out well had circumstances and fate been kinder;<sup>31</sup> whilst the use of her title, rather than her Christian name, underscores her respectability. However, the reference to Barbara's niceness and beauty also acts as a counterpoint to Perry's 'misshapen' ugliness, with his lizard tongue betraying him as animalistic and non-human, whilst also referencing his reptilian brain and predatory nature. Capote deliberately tugs the reader towards and away from Perry so that s/he is aware of the conflicted feelings of pity and revulsion that he inspires.

Having successfully manipulated the reader's emotions and established his or her empathetic connection with Perry, Capote secures the reader's complicity by introducing the psychiatric evaluations of Doctors Jones and Satten. Their evidence, disallowed in court due to the narrow definition of legal sanity and culpability of the M'Naghton Rule, proves that Perry, as a paranoid schizophrenic, should not have been held responsible for the murders. Capote's inclusion of the medical reports functions as proof of the righteousness of his sympathetic treatment of the killer and also ratifies the reader's support of Perry. In so doing, he relieves the reader of her or his conflicted support for Perry and validates the humanity of both Perry and his supporters. Capote's forensic use of psychoanalysis and environmental causality theory has allowed him to create a detailed psychological study which raises the status of crime fiction, granting it a level of respectability unknown by writers such as Highsmith and Thompson. However, he was not the first to merge in-depth psychological analysis and true crime: Meyer Levin's 1956 'documentary novel' *Compulsion* had similar aims.

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<sup>31</sup> There are echoes here of the parallels between Capote and Perry, and the impact of fate and fortune upon their lives, which I noted above.

In thinly-fictionalised form, *Compulsion* tells the story of the infamous Leopold and Loeb case of 1924. Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, two wealthy and prodigious university students, were convicted of the abduction and murder of 14-year-old Bobby Franks. The case, which was frequently referred to as the ‘crime of the century’ sent shockwaves through American society as it was a seemingly motiveless crime committed solely to prove a philosophical point. Leopold and Loeb (renamed Judd Steiner and Artie Strauss by Levin) considered themselves to be Nietzschean übermenschen, or supermen, to whom the rules of society did not apply<sup>32</sup> and the crime, according to Levin, ‘was a crime for its own sake... a crime in a vacuum, a crime in a perfectly frozen nothingness, where the atmosphere of motive was totally absent’ (272). Like Capote, Levin blended novelistic technique with documentary fact; however, as John Hollowell has noted, ‘in the Library of Congress system, [*In Cold Blood*] is placed under non fiction, in a category of “social pathology” including murder case histories... *Compulsion*... a remarkably similar book... is placed in the catalogue system under fiction’ (83). The difference is that Levin thinly disguised his events by changing the names of the protagonists and inventing certain scenes for dramatic effect (charges which were also laid against Capote, although he denied them). Such a merging of fact and fiction is endemic within crime fiction and Joseph Grixti, in his discussion of the allure of serial killers such as Jeffrey Dahmer, describes the fictionalizing process as a vital way for readers to cognitively separate the killers from ‘normal’ people like the reader and recontextualise them in an unthreatening way:

Fictionalizing figures like... [Ted] Bundy as inhuman monsters is one way of coming to terms with the dislocations that they generate in order to preserve the preferred contours of our own identity. Popular fiction,

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<sup>32</sup> There are parallels here with Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*.

because of its very generic and formulaic nature, frequently acts as a frame of reassurance which allows us to safely engage in this exploratory process.

(qtd. in Simpson xv)

What is interesting about *Compulsion* and, later, *In Cold Blood*, is that they begin to reverse this process, relocating the criminal from monstrous other to ‘one of us’. There has, of course, been a gradual shift towards this throughout the twentieth century,<sup>33</sup> as evidenced by my discussion of the earlier texts in this chapter; what is notable here is not just the extent of the change but also its application to real persons rather than just fictional constructs. Like Capote, Levin sought to understand the causes of violent crime and assuage the terror felt by society in the face of such senseless brutality. Levin’s narrator, cub reporter Sid Silver, occupies a central position in the narrative and he provides a ‘normal’ counterpoint to the killers. Silver attends the same university as Judd and Artie, is a member of the same fraternity as Artie and is equally prodigious academically. The cultural fear that homicidal compulsion is an inherent part of every human being is explored through the overlapping experiences of Sid and the killers:

I grappled with the image of Judd Steiner, someone like myself, my own age, a prodigy like myself, graduating at eighteen, in the same school, reading the same books, and attracted to the same girl.

If we were in so many ways alike, surely I would come to understand him. And yet he had done that most incomprehensible, most horrible murder. Yes, he had done it. I knew it. (231)

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<sup>33</sup> This trend was rooted in the Enlightenment, as evidenced by Halttunen’s scholarship on Puritan murder narratives which I referenced in section 2.1. From the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, popular responses to murder were shaped by execution sermons. Halttunen observes that this was a ‘formulaic demonstration that all murders were simply natural manifestations of universal depravity, [with a] tendency to express surprise, not that one sinner had committed this crime, but that everyone else in the community had not’ (4). Schmid also discusses Puritan murder narratives; see *Natural Born Celebrities* pp 179-182.

Recognition of shared humanity carries with it a fear of shared guilt and Sid, and the broader society which he represents, looks to science, in the form of psychoanalysis, for reassurance that he will not also be gripped by a murderous and senseless compulsion to kill. The novel offers a deep and incisive Freudian analysis of the crimes and their drivers, which greatly exceeds the scope of the analysis in the original case. As Paula S. Fass has shown,

the new psychology transformed [Leopold and Loeb] from Nietzschean criminals...into vulnerable boys...and linked them to the ordinary boys of America. The change made their crime less distant, but it may well have made it more broadly frightening. (936)

Yet for all their vulnerability and familiarity, the reader does not empathise with Judd and Artie. Levin's poetics keep the reader in an external, spectatorial position, and s/he remains on the outside, looking at them like two courtroom exhibits or laboratory specimens. *Compulsion* is very much a product of its time, addressing 1950s concerns about masculinity, sexuality, delinquency and psychology from within a stifling framework of repression. It was not until the freedoms of the 1960s and Truman Capote's masterful handling of *In Cold Blood* that the fictional trajectory of the psychopath would advance significantly. As Hollowell says:

*In Cold Blood* exemplifies the seemingly random, meaningless crime that became symptomatic of America in the sixties. For implicit in the story of the Kansas killings are larger questions about the social dislocations of the sixties and the failure of conventional morality to explain away the senseless violence we read about daily in the newspaper. (85)

These social fears, and narrative handling of them, would be exemplified in the serial killer subgenre which came to prominence in the latter part of the twentieth century and will be explored in the next chapter. It combined what John Arlott, in his foreword to William Bolitho's classic study of 'real life' crime, *Murder for Profit* (1926), described as 'a sensitive dual accuracy, the accuracy of history and the accuracy of imaginative understanding'<sup>(7)</sup>. We can see these dual accuracies building in *Compulsion* and reaching fruition in *In Cold Blood*, before carrying over into the emergent serial killer subgenre via pulp fiction-inspired psychopathic protagonists who are both psychologically plausible and accurate, and chillingly recognisable.

## Chapter Four

### The Normalisation of Psychopathy? The Serial Killer Subgenre and the Impact of *American Psycho*.

As noted in the previous chapter, the mid-twentieth century saw an explosion of fictional and fact-based (sometimes referred to by the portmanteau ‘factional’) treatments of psychopathy and a number of texts produced during this period proved crucial in the formation of the serial killer subgenre. The popularity of this subgenre has pushed psychopathic characters out from the cultural peripheries and into the centre ground and the development of the figure has led to an extraordinary dialogue between fact and fiction. Literary representations have become psychologically accurate to such a degree that the FBI training academy in Quantico teaches its students using not only case materials on ‘real life’ serial killers such as Ed Gein but also the novels of Thomas Harris (Haut, *Neon* 215). The traditional definition of a serial killer is someone who has killed three or more people over a period of more than a month, with a ‘cooling-off’ period between each murder (the timeframe and cooling-off period are important, as they help to differentiate serial killing from mass murder, which consists of four or more killings in a single incident, and spree killing, which is typically identified as two or more murders without a cooling-off period), although, in 2005, the FBI changed the definition to the ‘unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s), in separate events’ (Morton 9). Special Agent Robert Ressler, who, alongside John Douglas, founded the FBI’s Behavioral Science Unit, claims to have brought the term into common usage in

1976,<sup>34</sup> whilst working on the ‘Son of Sam’ case in New York. Douglas, who was the inspiration for Special Agent Jack Crawford in Harris’s *Red Dragon* (1981) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), pioneered modern criminal profiling techniques. In his 1995 book, *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI’s Serial Crime Unit*, Douglas asserts that modern detection techniques actually have a basis in literature:

though most of the books that dramatize and glorify what we do, such as Tom Harris’s memorable *The Silence of the Lambs*, are somewhat fanciful and prone to dramatic license, our antecedents actually do go back to crime fiction more than crime fact. C. August Dupin, the amateur detective hero of Edgar Allen Poe’s 1841 classic “*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*,” may have been history’s first behavioral profiler. (32)

It seems appropriate that detectives such as Dupin, Holmes and Poirot, who work on ratiocination and an uncanny ability to inhabit the mind of the villain, should have so coloured modern profiling techniques, as it underscores the symbiotic relationship between literature and science, fact and fiction; the one feeding into the other. This dialogism also extends to the reader and his or her relationship to the literary psychopath, as during the period of entrancement (see Chapter 1, section 1.6) one must allow for a temporary merging of consciousness with the psychopathic figure.

As I explained in the previous chapter, popular fascination with the fictional psychopath built steadily during the twentieth century. The impetus for this phenomenon was manifold, resting in a number of cultural spurs including World War Two, the trauma of the Holocaust and the seismic cultural and economic changes which followed in their

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<sup>34</sup> Although the FBI can certainly be credited with the popularisation of the term, it was first brought into use a decade earlier, in John Brophy’s 1966 treatise on serial murder *The Meaning of Murder*. For more detail on the formalisation of the nomenclature of serial murder see Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*, pp 66-101.

wake. Opposition to the dominant culture grew throughout the 1950s and 1960s, influencing the cultural output of the period. Some literature, as we have seen, became more challenging and experimental, whilst movies also became increasingly violent. Robert Bloch's pulp fiction novel *Psycho* (1959) was a great success; Hitchcock's faithful adaptation of the novel, in 1960, secured its position as one of the founding texts of the serial killer subgenre. The impact of the film cannot be underestimated and its enduring success reveals the extent to which audiences have embraced encounters with aberrant psychology. As Cassuto has noted, '*Psycho* long ago left the horror and crime genres behind to become part of the cultural lexicon' (242). This transcendence of niche literary genres speaks also to the trajectory of the literary psychopath, which has seen him move from the margins to centre stage. Although psychopathy is a relatively obscure condition, affecting only 1% of the population, the psychopath has become such a clearly defined and well-explored figure that most people can give a fairly accurate description of the behavioural and emotional manifestations of the disorder. I should note at this point, however, that Norman Bates of *Psycho* is not actually a psychopath. He is psychotic, with a multiple personality disorder composed of at least three facets:

There was *Norman*, the little boy who needed his mother and hated anything or anyone who came between him and her. Then, *Norma*, the mother, who could not be allowed to die. The third aspect might be called *Normal* – the adult Norman Bates, who had to go through the daily routine of living, and conceal the existence of the other personalities from the world. (148)

I won't engage in an in-depth analysis of the text here as, although it is certainly relevant to my discussion of the serial killer subgenre, it deals neither with psychopaths nor any particular advancement of narrative technique. Rather, it sits within the conventions

established by authors such as Jim Thompson, who I explored in the previous chapter: a deranged killer with a benign public façade, black humour, a keen focus on disturbed psychology, plus knowledge of legal process, psychoanalysis, and contemporary cultural concerns about issues such as sissies and Momism. The key points of interest, from the perspective of this study, are the interplay between fact and fiction, and the effect that the novel and subsequent movie adaptation had on the serial killer subgenre as a whole. Hitchcock's film brought the serial killer subgenre to a far broader audience than the novel alone could be expected to reach and it has had greater longevity than Bloch's fairly average book would have done had it stood by itself.

Bates was based on the real life American serial killer, Ed Gein, whose grotesque crimes gripped the horrified public when he was apprehended in 1957. Unable to cope with the death of his mother, Gein admitted to exhuming the bodies of recently deceased middle-aged women then tanning their skins to make grisly home furnishings and souvenirs. As his mania heightened he decided to create a 'woman suit' from the tanned hides of his victims, in order that he may wear it and live as a woman. Gein's crimes were so singular that they have made an indelible impression on the Western psyche and he has subsequently influenced numerous cultural outputs across music, film and literature. His literary incarnations include Jame Gumb in *The Silence of the Lambs*, who wanted 'a vest with tits on it' (146), and *American Psycho*'s trophy-taking Patrick Bateman.

Thanks to the vividness of Thomas Harris's characterisation and the extraordinary resonance of Gein's crimes, Jame Gumb remains one of fiction's most unsettling villains. Harris's reliance on research is legendary, as is his relationship with the FBI. Special Agent Ressler reportedly gave Harris unprecedented access to case files on a number of high-profile killers, including Gein. The material he was able to gather allowed him to create killers and investigators who were both psychologically and factually plausible.

Simpson compares the synergy between fact and fiction and the relationship between Ressler and Harris to ‘the Möbius strip of what Jean-Francois Baudrillard refers to as “simulacra”’ (71), in that FBI ‘fact’, based on nineteenth century fiction, is then used by Harris to create ‘reality’-based novels. A simulacrum is an image or representation of something that ultimately replaces reality, to create what Baudrillard has termed the ‘hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models...It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real’ (1-2). Fiction becomes fact and fact becomes fiction, until the distinction between the two is difficult to see. This focus on psychological and scientific verisimilitude was to have a profound and lasting impact on the depiction of the psychopath in literature and its effect can be felt on creations such as Bateman and Dexter, who I will discuss shortly. Harris has been so influential on the genre that he is broadly agreed to have created the template for contemporary serial killer fiction. From the 1980s to the present day, his creations have gripped readers and, as Simpson states, ‘Harris is perhaps the man most directly responsible for the 1980s and 1990s explosion of interest in serial killers, the current cycle of fictional narratives of serial murder, and the future shape of the mythos itself’ (83). Harris’s novels are police procedurals rather than the homodiegetic psychopath narratives that this thesis is largely interested in; my analysis of his work here is therefore necessarily short and aims to delineate his role in establishing the serial killer subgenre and bringing the psychopathic character into the centre ground. From my point of view, the most interesting thing about *Red Dragon* and *The Silence of the Lambs* is their treatment of the psychopathic psychiatrist and cannibalistic killer, Hannibal Lecter, who has transcended his fictional base to become part of the cultural imaginary. In large part this was due to the massive success of Jonathan Demme’s 1991

film version of *The Silence of the Lambs*; however, I think a great deal of Lecter's power lies in Harris's depiction of him as an epicure, aesthete and man of culture.

Lecter is self-possessed and mysterious, with an almost clairvoyant insightfulness which suggests that, like the mindhunters, he is able to inhabit the psyches of others. His own psyche remains closed, however (at least in the first two novels in the Lecter series), and this enigmatic combination of knowing and inscrutability makes him a figure of fascination, both intra- and extradiegetically. In *Red Dragon*, Will Graham describes Lecter as a breed apart, a 'monster' that cannot be classified: 'They say he's a sociopath because they don't know what else to call him. He has some of the characteristics of what they call a sociopath. He has no remorse or guilt at all... But he doesn't have any of the other marks...' (64). Although the novel begins some three years after Lecter's arrest and incarceration, diegetic media interest in him remains fevered, suggesting that the fictional public, like the novel's real life readership, has a great appetite for stories relating to the Doctor and his crimes. Professional curiosity also endures; medical journals are keen to publish Lecter's articles, psychology students are desperate to include him in their theses and psychiatrists at the secure psychiatric facility where Lecter is held initially see him as 'an opportunity to make a landmark study', before realising that he is 'impenetrable, much too sophisticated for the standard tests' (*Silence* 10). Lecter's intradiegetic allure mirrors the appeal he has for readers, who are similarly eager to understand the impenetrable psychopath. It is significant, too, that in both *Red Dragon* and *The Silence of the Lambs* the FBI approaches Lecter for help in apprehending Francis Dolarhyde and Jame Gumb, as this offers a metanarrative of the dialogic process in which the real life Bureau and the author of the novels are engaged.

Interestingly, given Lecter's extraordinary cultural cachet, he is actually a very minor character in *Red Dragon*. Other than a few letters that he writes, Lecter only

'physically' appears in about twelve pages of the 420 page novel, yet he occupies a principal narrative space. And, although he is more central to *The Silence of the Lambs*, he is neither the most aberrant figure nor the controlling consciousness in either book. Indeed, in both novels Lecter provides a kind of middle-ground between the psychologically scarred investigators and the monstrous killers they pursue. Dolarhyde and Gumb are completely alien and othered; although some sympathy is possible, for instance when we read of Dolarhyde's tortured childhood or Gumb's gender dysphoria, we cannot empathise with these figures. Whilst we may like and admire Graham and Starling and will them to success, we cannot help but notice that they do not have the same prepossessing mental strength as Lecter. Graham's 'pure empathy and projection' (*Dragon* 179) is described by Dr. Bloom as a 'gift'; yet compared to Lecter, who has no empathy, we are forced to question just who has the gift and who has the curse. This subtle championing of psychopathic traits leads us to identify with Lecter in a way that is slightly at odds with the usual positions of empathy in the police procedural novel. As Black has noted in his study of detective fiction:

it has become a convention of the genre to portray the sleuth at odds with the established police force. In fact, the literary figure of the detective typically was and continues to be an extraordinary, marginal figure who frequently bears a closer resemblance to the criminal he pursues than to the police officers with whom he supposedly collaborates. (43)

Although the detective is traditionally the locus of empathy in such novels, in Harris's fiction the reader's identification with the detective simultaneously pushes him or her closer to the psychopath. That Graham and Starling are in thrall to Lecter adds to the destabilising effect; the reverence with which Dolarhyde views Lecter is enough to remind us of the danger that the Doctor represents, but not enough to counter his beguiling

influence. Although effective, this in itself does not constitute any major advancement of the depiction of psychopathy in literature. What Harris did do, however, was achieve bestseller status with serial killer narratives which led to an extraordinary concentration of such fictions during the 1980s and 1990s. By the end of that period, the novels being produced were portraying levels of violence and disaffection that would have been undreamed of earlier on in the century. The number of authors writing about psychopaths, including Dennis Cooper, James Ellroy, Poppy Z. Brite, Joyce Carol Oates and Bret Easton Ellis, reveals that this was not an anomaly but a cultural movement.

#### 4.1 Patrick Bateman, 'The Boy Next Door'

Of the late twentieth century authors listed above, it is Bret Easton Ellis who has had the greatest cultural impact. His *American Psycho* courted controversy before it was even issued and the story of its troubled release is now the stuff of publishing lore. Just months before it was due to be published in 1990, the book was dropped by its original publisher, Simon & Schuster (who forfeited the \$300,000 advance paid to the author), after leaked excerpts from galley proofs printed in *Time* and *Spy* magazines were met with fierce disapprobation. Just two days later, Ellis signed a new contract (and secured a second, undisclosed advance) with Random House, a more prestigious publisher, who released the book under its Vintage imprint the following year. An extraordinary backlash followed, with critics almost uniformly appalled by the novel's extreme violence and alienated by Ellis's narrative style. An enraged National Organization of Women called for Random House and the book to be boycotted, with Tammy Bruce, President of the Los Angeles Chapter, describing *American Psycho* as 'a how-to novel on the torture and dismemberment of women' (*New York Times*, December 6<sup>th</sup> 1990). Roger Rosenblatt of

the *New York Times* descried not just the ‘gratuitous degradation of human life’ but also the novel’s grammar (‘Let’s trust that Vintage will at least clean up the grammar when it publishes the book next month’), and labelled Ellis’s prose ‘childishly gruesome’, ‘pointless’, ‘themeless’, and ‘loathsome’ (16<sup>th</sup> December 1990). Numerous other commentators concurred and even the more accepting reviewers, such as Fay Weldon, who called it a ‘seminal book’ (*Guardian* 25<sup>th</sup> April 1991), advised caution: ‘I don’t want you to actually read [this] book. I did it for you’ (ibid.). Academic attention followed, with Elizabeth Young in particular delivering an excellent and insightful early piece of criticism of what she considered ‘a classic text at the end of the high postmodern period’ (121-122) in her 1992 book, *Shopping in Space: Essays on America’s Blank Fiction*, co-authored with Graham Caveney. In more recent years, critics have increasingly turned to the complexity of Ellis’s poetics, the impact of his unreliable narrator, the novel’s satire, whether Bateman’s violence is ‘real’ or simply the ravings of a madman, and even if Bateman himself actually ‘exists’ or is the alter-ego of one of the other characters. For our purposes, of course, the important issue is the American psycho himself – how he is portrayed, how that portrayal works on the reader’s emotions, and the ultimate effect of this transaction on the development of literary portrayals of psychopathy. The critical accounts I have explored have almost uniformly denied any possibility of reader identification with the titular psychopath, focusing instead on the alienating nature of Ellis’s prose. Condemnatory in their response to the novel’s violence, commentators have largely ascribed it a single, unvarying function and effect which is resolutely negative and distancing. However, I contend that both the violence and Bateman’s aberrance are multi-layered, with an undulant and complex narrative function which resists generic classification. I find that an empathetic response to Bateman is not only possible but encouraged, and that it plays a vital role in our negotiation of the novel’s most troubling

content. Worrying, perhaps, if one accepts C. Namwali Serpell's suggestion that '[t]here is no interpretation of *American Psycho* that is not, in effect, an interpretation of the critic' (66), yet this seems to be the key to understanding the negativity the book has garnered. Critics appear to have been unable to accept or acknowledge identification with Bateman for fear of aligning themselves with the psychopath or his deeds, but, as I shall show shortly, Ellis's poetics ensure that the reader's relationship to his psychopath is strategic and shifting, rather than self-revelatory.

Perhaps the first thing to note about the novel is the way that it has metamorphosed from a niche text to a cultural landmark, propelled by the controversy surrounding its release and by Mary Harron's film adaptation in 2000. *American Psycho*'s popularity has been so enduring that, in 2011, *Publisher's Weekly* ran an interview with Ellis to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the book's release, in which interviewer Annie Coreno referred to Bateman as 'one of the most recognizable characters in fiction' (10). *American Psycho* is the key text responsible for the normalisation of psychopathy which took place in the late twentieth century. Drawing on the ordinary, 'everyday' psychopaths of Thompson and Highsmith, Ellis's antihero certainly *looks* normal – a 26-year-old, tanned and stylish Wall Street financier with model good looks and a finely-honed physique is hardly what one would imagine when conjuring up a mental image of a homicidal psychopath – and in the earliest pages of the novel he seems fairly reasonable too. Bateman is repeatedly referred to as 'the boy next door' (11), harmless and unremarkable: "Patrick is not a cynic, Timothy. He's the boy next door, aren't you honey?" "No I'm not," I whisper to myself. "I'm a fucking evil psychopath" (19). His repeated and increasingly desperate attempts to identify himself as the psycho of the novel's title end in failure, with his admissions unheard, ignored, misheard or disbelieved. Even a ten-minute long confession detailing 'thirty, forty, a hundred murders' (338), left on Harold Carnes's

answerphone, is dismissed as a joke because ‘Bateman’s such an ass-kisser, such a brown-nosing goody-goody’ (372) that he could never be believed capable of such crimes. The reader of the book vacillates between feelings of pity, empathy and revulsion, as Ellis’s poetics manipulate him or her to contradictory emotional responses to the novel’s challenging content.

Written almost exclusively in the first person, *American Psycho* also generally uses the present tense which not only gives it immediacy and makes it seem more real, but also works to draw the reader into the narrative process as Bateman’s confidante. Yet, despite these usually empathetic techniques, the flat and emotionless way in which the narration is delivered is simultaneously alienating. The narrative devices give a sense of the temporality of Bateman’s existence, its focus on surface and the extreme narcissism of not just the narrator but the entire age. In a 1991 interview with Roger Cohen from the *New York Times*, Ellis explained the book’s aesthetic by quoting from the novel: ‘Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in...this was civilization as I saw it, colossal and jagged’ (360). Despite its well-deserved reputation for containing scenes of staggering violence and pornography, the bulk of the book is actually made up of mind-numbing lists of consumer products, detailed descriptions of designer attire and bizarre, in-depth critiques of mainstream pop acts such as Whitney Houston and Huey Lewis and the News. The intentional tedium of these passages was attacked by early critics of the novel such as Naomi Wolf, who declared *American Psycho* to be ‘the single most boring book I have ever had to endure’ (34); however, by focusing on the surface effect of these sections, such commentators fail to acknowledge their strategic narrative function. Great attention is paid in the novel to the aesthetics of boredom, which establish the pervading ennui of the 1980s. The unmodulated narrative voice describes pocket squares and dismemberments with the same detached languor, suggesting a parity of meaninglessness which would be

shocking were it not delivered so drily. In Bateman's milieu, there is no depth or hidden meaning and this very transparency is simultaneously the source of his boredom and the spur for his violence. As Lars Svendsen notes in his book *A Philosophy of Boredom* (2005), '[b]oredom has to do with finitude and nothingness. It is a death within life, a non-life' (40-41); in *American Psycho* this constant association with boredom/death propels Bateman towards expressions of vitality via acts of extreme violence. Using Martin Doehleman's typology, Svendsen delineates four kinds of boredom:

situative boredom, as when one is waiting for someone, is listening to a lecture or taking the train; the boredom of satiety, when one gets too much of the same thing and everything becomes banal; existential boredom where the soul is without content and the world is in neutral; and creative boredom, which is not so much characterized by its content as its result: that one is forced to do something new. (41-42)

Each of these types is at play in *American Psycho* in some way or another, with the situative boredom spilling beyond the narrative to also affect the reader. The monotonous listing of consumer products, clothes and services has a flattening effect which deadens the reader's response to the text and surreptitiously aligns her or him with the novel's jaded and affectless psychopath. Like Bateman, who according to Svendsen is impelled to 'transgress every conceivable and inconceivable limit, in order to create differences and thereby transgress the levelling' (74), the reader is also driven to violate conventions of decency and decorum via an avid consumption of increasingly distasteful material. The violence and pornography in the novel becomes progressively Sadean as the narrative unfolds, its atrocities and perversities accelerating, check-list fashion, until no taboo remains unchallenged.

The soporific effect of the novel's tedium ensures that the first explosion of savagery (which occurs a full 126 pages into the narrative) is doubly impactful and the forceful collision between the two modes establishes the relationship between boredom and viciousness which will punctuate the rest of the novel. Having raced through the seemingly endless and plotless sections detailing products, purchases, reservations and attire, the reader is arrested by the intensity of the violence. As I shall show shortly, instances of brutality in the novel are narrated in close and shocking detail, which Ellis's poetics force the reader to read slowly and carefully. Whereas the scenes of consumerism are alienating, the pornography and violence, although distasteful and often difficult to read, concern people rather than things and are therefore easier to identify with. They are also the most recognisable in terms of novelistic conventions (things are happening) and offer the greatest promise of plot development (actions typically have consequences) to the, at times, bewildered reader. Expressions of violence and pornography are followed by interminable lists of hi-fi equipment or banal conversations about restaurant reservations which allow the reader to 'reset' and recover; the most extreme scenes are ensued by lengthy sections of pseudo-pop journalism. In addition to ensuring that the reader does not become too alienated and unempathetic, these sections also help to pace the novel and create the 'speed differentials' discussed by Marco Abel (144-145) and Serpell (61). Arguing against Abel's claim that '[s]lowness is the novel's dominant mode of speed' (145), Serpell explains how the reader must 'negotiate between the decelerated pace of the violent episodes, a voyeuristically slow reading into which the reader is lured via pornographic segues, and the faster pace warranted by the redundant scenes of consumerism' (161). Serpell goes on to state that the emphasis in the novel is on 'suspense and dread, rather than on shock and disgust' (63); however, it seems to me that a secondary effect of the novel's strategic use of boredom and the Sadean linking of humour

and atrocity is that the most disturbing scenes of the novel actually become the most enjoyable. Rather than fearing what may happen next, the reader races towards the challenging sections, desperate to uncover the latest outrage.

I will return to the linking of violence and humour later, but here I wish to address how the seemingly artless simplicity of the novel's most tedious sections belies the extraordinary complexity of Ellis's poetics. An early chapter entitled 'Morning' comprises six pages of wearisome description of Bateman's apartment and morning routine. He goes into minute detail, even including an ingredient-list of his preferred pre-date hair care products: 'These are formulas that contain D-panthenol, a vitamin B-complex factor; polysorbate 80, a cleansing agent for the scalp; and natural herbs' (25). The situatively boring and seemingly endless listing of products and processes invites speed-reading, the surface-skimming technique aligning the reader with Ellis's aesthetic. Yet close attention to the poetics pays off. As the chapter progresses, the reader becomes increasingly disengaged and the boredom that s/he feels mirrors Bateman's disconnectedness. The subtlety is such that the changes are almost imperceptible, but as the register shifts from catalogue ad copy to infomercial, the pronouns shift from the first person ('I put...I press...I always slather...' (26)) to the second person ('You can...You should...One should...' (ibid.)) causing Bateman's narration to become more distanced and impersonal. This not only reveals Bateman's shaky sense of self, but also hints at the way that Ellis will manipulate our reading position as the narrative progresses – sometimes aligning us empathetically with Bateman and at other times allowing us the relief of a more detached perspective. Simpson, citing Leigh Brock, argues that the novel's exhaustive and exhausting cataloguing of brands and products 'not only illustrates its title character's obsessive nature but also sets up a self-aware distance between the reader and the narrative' (148) and I concur. However, for every instance of distancing there are also

deliberate attempts to draw us closer. Sometimes these are simplistic and occur at unimportant points in the text, such as when Bateman relates what happens at a dinner party in a reportage style, then sneakily addresses the reader: ‘Evelyn laughs good-naturedly and says, “Oh Stash, you *are* a riot,” and then asks worriedly, “Tempura?” Evelyn is an executive at a financial services company, FYI’ (13). Although it is barely discernible, the Y in ‘FYI’ is actually quite powerful, addressing the reader directly and drawing her or him closer to the narrative. At other points, the strategy is more overt:

On my way into the Chinese cleaners I brush past a crying bum, an old man, forty or fifty, fat and grizzled, and just as I’m opening the door I notice, to top it off, that he’s also *blind* and I step on his foot, which is actually a stump, causing him to drop his cup, scattering change all over the sidewalk. Did I do this on purpose? What do you think? Or did I do this accidentally? (79)

On the surface, this appears to be a fairly standard narratorial method for engaging the reader and helping him or her to identify with the character (Bateman, not the bum). By having Bateman address the reader directly, Ellis draws the reader into the text and reminds her or him that s/he is *part of* this: ‘Did I do this...?’ appears to be Bateman’s response to a question from the reader; that he then questions *the reader in response* underlines the fact that reading narrative is a two-way process, or at least a simulacrum of one. This plays an important role in the novel’s insidious play on reader empathy and it also raises important questions about narrative process and the nature of fictionality. By drawing the reader’s attention to the novelistic apparatus, Bateman alerts him or her to the constructedness of the text. This colours the reader’s imaginative involvement with the novel with an ‘epistemological awareness’ (Ryan 98) of the separation between his or her

immersion in the diegesis and his or her attentiveness to the narrative poetics which mediate that engagement.

Indeed, the fictionality of this fiction is constantly underlined, with Ellis employing a number of interesting, multi-functional techniques. His use of movie jargon, such as ‘smash cut’ (10), ‘panning down’ (50), and ‘Scene two’ (227) points to performativity and constructedness, whilst simultaneously adding character detail and a further ‘in’ for the media-savvy late-twentieth century reader. When we read that Bateman walks home, says goodnight to a doorman he doesn’t recognise ‘and then dissolve[s] into [his] living room high above the city’ (23) we learn far more about his insubstantiality and tenuous connection to reality than we could if this had been conveyed via more conventional poetics. As readers we delight in this narrative sleight of hand; the introduction of cinematic terminology draws our awareness to the serial killer movie cycle so prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s and makes us feel that we are part of something much bigger and more culturally impactful. The rich intertextuality of the novel, with its polyphony of people, places and texts from both real life and from fiction, causes us to engage more closely and more meaningfully with the work, with the effect that we empathise not just with the character but with *the text itself*. We become invested in the multi-layered poetics and their beguiling combination of simplicity and complexity, acceptance and revulsion. For this reason, I take issue with Brock’s suggestion that ‘Ellis’s style allows the reader to distance himself from the text, lessening its shock and impact’ (7). Agreeing with Brock, Simpson argues that this ‘distancing strategy may be the method by which [Ellis] thought he could honestly present the gruesome details of a violent killer’s crimes and still keep an audience’ (148), however I contend that it is in fact Ellis’s *drawing-close* of the reader that enables us to push through the unpleasure of the book’s most troubling scenes. By invoking our empathy for Bateman and aligning us mentally and emotionally with the

killer, Ellis ensures that we feel as Bateman feels, whether that emotion is pleasure, disgust or ennui.

The first third of the novel is relatively devoid of violence. There are hints at murders committed – a couple missing from a yacht party, presumed murdered (4); Evelyn's neighbour found decapitated (117) – and expressions of violent impulse that Bateman does not act upon ('the temptation to kill McDermott is replaced by this strange anticipation to have a good time' (50)), but we are spared the detailed descriptions of torture, murder and sexual perversion which pepper the later chapters of the novel. However, this early section plays an important role in conditioning the reader to accept the brutality which will follow, as the following excerpt illustrates:

...I take a quick hot shower and then head to the video store where I return two tapes I rented on Monday, *She-Male Reformatory* and *Body Double*, but I rerent *Body Double* because I want to watch it again tonight even though I know I won't have time to masturbate over the scene where the woman is drilled to death by a power drill since I have a date with Courtney at seven-thirty at Café Luxembourg. (67)

This passage comes at the end of a long, tedious and detailed description of Bateman's gym routine, the precise exercises he performs including the number of sets and repetitions, his cool-down stretches, etc., which we have read quickly and carelessly in order to relieve its tedium. That Bateman has returned the porn film, preferring instead to get his sexual kicks from a death scene in a thriller he has rented 37 times, suggests Geoffrey Gorer's claim that in the twentieth century death became the new pornography (51), a sobering thought for the reader who avidly consumes Ellis's tale of gratuitous sex and death. The image of a man masturbating over a scene of torture and murder is grim

and disturbing, yet Bateman is so blasé, and the poetics are so controlled and controlling, that it is difficult for the reader to react appropriately here. There is no moral guidance in the text – Bateman feels nothing – so it is up to the reader to appraise the content, but our reception of the scene is coloured by its narrative delivery. We may read it with a shocked laugh and a grimace at its randomness and awfulness, but we do not judge and we are not moved to a position of outrage or disgust. Ellis forces us to feel and react as his characters do and not even our lack of affect is shocking, or even noticeable, at this point due to the playfulness of his poetics. His technique is delicate and insidious, but little by little he is chipping away at our usual reactions and preparing us for the explosions of extreme violence and pornography which will follow.

For all its flat, emotionless tone, lack of plot and characterisation, and alienating banality, the first section of the book does work to align us with Bateman. Compared to his friend Tim Price, who dominates the novel's opening, Bateman is a model of decency. He corrects Price's ignorant, anti-Semitic comments (35) and objects to his racist joke (37); during a discussion at Evelyn's dinner party Bateman speaks of the need to 'end apartheid...slow down the nuclear arms race, stop terrorism and world hunger...find a cure for the AIDS epidemic, [and] clean up environmental damage from toxic waste and pollution' (14) – laudable aims, all. Although, as Young points out (97), the points he makes are so at odds with each other ('We have, he says, to slow down the nuclear arms race *and* ensure a strong national defense, prevent the spread of communism *and* prevent US military involvement overseas' (ibid., original emphasis)) that the speech as a whole is rendered absurd, to my mind this does not affect our acceptance of the character. In fact, our acknowledgement of his fallibility actually serves to *heighten* our enjoyment of the text. The conflicting issues that Bateman raises are difficult to reconcile; the reader doesn't have the answers, neither did contemporary governments. Bateman expresses our own

quandaries and the quandaries of his time, and in doing so he becomes everyman. Coming from a label-obsessed yuppie serial killer, Bateman's final flourish is highly ironic and amusing: 'Most importantly we have to promote general social concern and less materialism in young people' (15). Our initial approval of his humanitarian agenda (who could argue with a desire to end famine?) creates feelings of empathy which are not eroded when we recognise his comments as unthought-out, media-gleaned sound bites, as the feelings of benign superiority the realisation generates negate any negativity. Perhaps most importantly, Bateman is entertaining: the text's dark humour is incentive enough for us to keep reading.

In later sections of the novel, humour will play an important role in our acceptance of the most grisly and disturbing scenes. However, our first encounter with the novel's violence is far from funny and represents a severe test to our empathy. When Bateman first approaches Al, a middle-aged homeless man, he speaks gently to him, seemingly showing concern for his plight. His tone initially makes one wonder whether Evelyn is right and 'the boy next door' does indeed have some kindness in him. However, when he launches his attack any empathy we may feel towards Bateman is suspended in appalled disbelief as, even though the tension has been rising for more than two pages and the clues were all there, the attack still comes as a shock. The initial blow is described in the same careful, gentle, almost *loving* tones as Bateman's solicitous words to Al and this adds to the horror we feel at the violence of the attack:

I reach out and touch his face gently once more with compassion and whisper, "Do you know what a fucking loser you are?" He starts nodding helplessly and I pull out a long, thin knife with a serrated edge and, being very careful not to kill him, push maybe half an inch of the blade into his right eye, flicking the handle up, instantly popping the retina. (126)

The violence that Bateman inflicts on the defenceless Al is extremely graphic and difficult to read; but after the torpor of the previous 125 pages the reader pushes through his or her resistance to the content, relieved to finally have reached something approaching action. What is particularly interesting about this scene is the way that Ellis's poetics twist our emotional response to the violence: the disgust we experience as we read is targeted not just at Bateman, but also at the victim and at ourselves. Cassuto argues that 'identification is naturally predicated on sympathy. The opposite of sympathy is disgust: a refusal of identification that involves making someone or something as taboo, polluted, not to be touched' (257). I differ from Cassuto slightly here, as I believe that identification is based on empathy (feeling *with* characters) rather than sympathy (feeling *for* characters); however his wider point is sound. We neither sympathise nor empathise with Bateman's hatred of homeless people, or with his need to commit horrific acts of brutality. We are disgusted by the expression of his murderous urges, particularly given close descriptions of Al's split eyeball pouring out 'like red, veiny egg yolk' (126) and 'oozing over his screaming lips in thick, webby strands' (127). However, any sympathy we may initially feel for Al is soon overridden by feelings of disgust, brought about by descriptions of his 'flabby black thighs, rashed because of his constantly urinating into the pantsuit' (126) and 'the 'stench of shit [which] rises quickly' (ibid.) when Bateman pulls down Al's pants revealing a 'dense matted patch of pubic hair' (ibid.). Al's incontinence recruits our senses, the sight and (described) smell of the urine and faeces repulsing us and identifying him as the 'polluted, not to be touched' person that Cassuto mentions. Classifying him as such temporarily aligns us with Bateman's abhorrent view of the wretched homeless (literal manifestations of *Les Misérables*, which is granted so much narrative space in the novel) who line Manhattan's streets and the realisation of this is disgusting to us too. Bateman humiliates and degrades Al, first by speaking to him in a disrespectful way (Al is

old enough to be Bateman's father) and then by debagging him in the street. By means of a complex psychological process, skilfully manipulated by Ellis, readerly disgust then becomes focused on Al and his victimhood. William Ian Miller explains:

Cruelty generates a double disgust in the impartial spectator, that is, once we recover from the shock it can give. First, the perpetrator is looked on with fear and loathing, with the most intense kind of disgust and horror. Then a second disgust focuses on the degraded victim, whether bloody and disfigured or morally annihilated in the disgrace of having been so abused. (195-196)

Witnessing Al's shame disgusts us; the emotion is generated both by his failure of agency – for his *allowing* this to happen to him – and by our own part in the proceedings. As Cassuto says, a surfeit of disgust prevents the reader from identifying with the victim and results in a kind of 'moral paralysis' (258). Our failure to identify with Al or to supply an appropriate moral response to his disfigurement is also the source of feelings of disgust which, according to Miller, 'involves an admission that we did not escape contamination' (204). We are unable to identify with Al due to the influence of Ellis's poetics and the lack of access that we get to Al's psyche, and in this we mirror Bateman. After the attack Bateman feels 'heady, ravenous, pumped up, as if I'd just worked out and endorphins are flooding my nervous system, or just embraced that first line of cocaine, inhaled the first puff of a fine cigar, sipped that first glass of Cristal' (127); his adrenaline referencing our own 'fight or flight' response to the passage. Looking for somewhere to have a 'celebratory drink' (ibid.), Bateman eschews his usual upper class haunts and decides instead to visit 'somewhere Al would go, the McDonald's in Union Square' (ibid.). He orders a shake and takes it 'to a table up front, where Al would probably sit' (ibid.) but his 'high slowly dissolves, its intensity diminishing' (ibid.). The ebbing of adrenaline and the

‘horribly anticlimactic’ (ibid.) evening mirror our experience. We read the grotesque details of Al’s maiming with horrified fascination, hardly able to believe what we were being exposed to, but afterwards we feel soiled, like we’ve let ourselves down.

The tension between repulsion and attraction is something which the novel raises on numerous occasions, forcing the reader to meditate on what it means to empathise with serial killers and engage with such salacious, challenging material. Significantly, the vehicle most commonly used for this in the narrative is *The Patty Winters Show*, a chat show as heavily invested in trauma as Bateman is. Topics for the shows include ‘Concentration Camp Survivors’ (212) and ‘Teenage Girls Who Trade Sex for Crack’ (173); the mixture of banal daytime TV and trauma served up as entertainment mirrors our own consumption of murder and disfigurement via the novel. Our mixed response to Bateman’s deeds is particularly well illustrated by the following episode:

*The Patty Winters Show* this morning was about Nazis and, inexplicably, I got a real charge out of watching it. Though I wasn’t exactly charmed by their deeds, I didn’t find them unsympathetic either, nor I might add did most of the members of the audience. One of the Nazis, in a rare display of humor, even juggled grapefruits and, delighted, I sat up in bed and clapped. (150)

The juggling display transforms the Nazi into a clown, performing for our amusement – just like fictional killers in popular literature and film. By specifying Nazis rather than neo-Nazis, Ellis conjures a mental picture of men in SS uniforms, which, combined with the juggling, creates an anachronistic and amusing image. There is a carnival atmosphere here, which sets the tone for much of the violence that will follow and seems to be a deliberate attempt by Ellis to ensure that the disgust the reader felt at the attack on Al doesn’t affect her or his reception of future scenes of murder. By destabilising subject positions in this

way Ellis is able to better control our response to the text and ensure that we push through the unpleasure of reading the more horrific details.

A great many of Bateman's attacks are predicated on homophobia; Al was maimed and called a 'faggot' (126) shortly after Bateman was whistled at by a gay man, and a few pages later he 'began to receive fey cat-calls from aging overmuscled beachboys with walruslike mustaches' (134) after watching a Gay Pride Parade 'with a certain traumatized fascination' (ibid.). In both instances, Bateman feels it necessary to reassert his masculinity by carrying out acts of extreme violence. The 'traumatized fascination' felt by Bateman at Pride provides a good parallel for the reader's reception of the novel's escalating violence, as in the following passage, which details a random attack on a gay man and his trophy dog:

I push the serrated blade into its stomach and quickly slice open its hairless belly in a squirt of brown blood, its legs kicking and clawing at me, then blue and red intestines bulge out and I drop the dog onto the sidewalk, the queer just standing there, still gripping the leash, and this has all happened so fast he's in shock and he just stares in horror saying "oh my god oh my god" as the sharpei drags itself around in a circle, its tail wagging, squealing, and it starts licking and sniffing the pile of its own intestines, spilled out in a mound on the sidewalk, some still attached to its stomach, and as it goes into its death throes still attached to its leash I whirl around on its owner and I push him back, hard, with a bloodied glove and start randomly stabbing him in the face and head, finally slashing his throat open in two brief chopping motions; an arc of red-brown blood splatters the white BMW 320i parked at the curb, setting off its car alarm, four fountainlike bursts coming from below his chin. The spraylike sound of the blood. (159)

The shifts in register here are rapid and powerful, yet so subtly rendered as to be barely discernible. The unexpected attack on the dog is shocking to the extreme, its ‘hairless belly’ underlining its innocence and harmlessness. Unlike the attack on Al, the knifing of the dog does not render it abject or disgusting; it cannot be degraded by its victimhood as it shares what Miller describes as ‘the peculiar status we accord to infants and children for whom the demands of dignity are largely suspended’ (196). The pathetic image of the bewildered animal dragging itself round in a circle, still wagging its tail, elicits a great deal of sympathy before the scene descends into gross-out humour as it sniffs and licks its spilled intestines. This helps to offset some of the horror of the scene and also references the rhythms of the splatter movie cycle of the 1980s. In his book, *Laughing Screaming* (1994), William Paul explains that ‘[t]he alliance between the grossest horror and farcical comedy is far from new. The Grand Guignol, for example, generally alternated its buckets-of-blood horror playlets with broad farces’ (67). Switching between the two modes often meant that audiences were uncertain how to react; however, as Eric Bentley points out, the significance of this ‘lies not in the materials themselves but only in interpretation’ (341). Here, the technique provides light relief from the repulsiveness of the scene, before plunging the reader back into outright horror when Bateman attacks the man. It also signals the unstable boundaries of literary and filmic categories and, by extension, of sanity, culture and reality itself. ‘The spraylike sound of the blood’ sounds and looks like a note or stage direction in a film script; indeed, the whole of this scene is very filmic. Its unreality seems to function as evidence of Bateman’s mental collapse and an indication that the killings are not real, but imagined. This collapsing of real and unreal invokes Freud’s view that ‘an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred’ (*Uncanny* 150), further undermining the reader’s equilibrium and thereby aligning her or him more closely with Bateman’s mental state, albeit unwillingly.

The abjection of the scene is alleviated by an absurd shift to D'Agostino's, which he appears in front of 'like in a movie' (ibid.). There he uses an expired coupon to purchase a box of oat-bran cereal and walks jubilantly out of the store stuffing handfuls of cereal into his mouth and whistling 'Hip to be Square' (ibid.), the scene's surreal coda simultaneously confusing and delighting the reader who is trying to make sense of the assault on his or her senses that has just occurred.

Violence and humour are increasingly linked as the narrative progresses, with the carnival atmosphere causing us to race through the tedious scenes of consumerism and banal conversation with an avidity approaching blood-lust. The opportunistic killing of a passing Oriental delivery boy, enacted as revenge for the rumoured purchase of Nell's and The Empire State Building by the Japanese, is emotionless, shocking and distasteful, suspending any empathy the reader may have for Bateman. However, the dumping of the food which leads to the discovery that he has killed 'the wrong kind of Asian' (173) is surprising and absurdly funny. By counteracting our distaste at the killing, Ellis is able to keep the reader engaged and on-side, and ensures that we continue to invest in his killer. Immediately after the murder and Bateman's hilariously inadequate and unexpected mumbled apology ('Uh, sorry' (ibid.)), comes a line describing that morning's *Patty Winters* topic, the casual linkage of the two suggesting that the murder and the show are equally banal.

Interspersed with the violence are scenes depicting Bateman's accelerating mania and whilst these are generally fast-paced and engaging, they also have a role in aligning the reader empathetically with the killer. Whilst doing his Christmas shopping in Bloomingdales, '[s]ome kind of existential chasm (172)' opens before Bateman and it is so profound an experience that not even three Halcion and the purchase of six tubes of Clinique shaving cream can restore his equilibrium. When he muses that his feelings of

emptiness could be related to his poor treatment of Evelyn or ‘have something to do with the tracking device on [his] VCR’ (ibid.), we speculate that these are the ravings of a paranoid madman who believes his home to be bugged and thinks that electronic equipment is interfering with his brainwaves. However, Ellis then confounds the reader by having Bateman add ‘I...remind myself to look through my VCR handbook and deal with the tracking device problem’ (ibid.); the realisation that the issue is one of syntax rather than insanity makes us feel that *we* are the paranoid ones. By extending the uncertainty of the text to the reader, Ellis’s poetics make us merge a little further with his killer. Our realisation that Ellis is playing with us causes us to question everything about the text and, as we share the confusion and suspicion that Bateman feels, we are drawn ever closer to the psychopath.

This subtle merging of Bateman and reader continues as the narrative progresses and, like Bateman, we feel the vicissitudes of mood and perception. The murder of Paul Owen is relayed without emotion, with a detached inevitability. Bateman, who has taken two five milligram Valium tablets, ‘washing them down with a tumblerful of Plax’ (208), is feeling mellow and commits the murder with a kind of apathetic serenity. The murder is brutal and the violence has ratcheted once more, yet we can read it unflinchingly, distanced by Ellis’s poetics. We are not ‘with’ Bateman, but we’re not on Paul’s side either – just passionless observers. It’s like we’ve taken Valium too.

Blood starts to slowly pour out of the sides of his mouth shortly after the first chop, and when I pull the ax out – almost yanking Owen out of his chair by his head – and strike him again in the face, splitting it open, his arms flailing at nothing, blood sprays out in twin brownish geysers, staining my raincoat. This is accompanied by a horrible momentary hissing noise actually coming from the wounds in Paul’s skull, places where bone and

flesh no longer connect, and this is followed by a rude farting noise caused by a section of his brain, which due to pressure forces itself out, pink and glistening, through the wounds in his face. He falls to the floor in agony, his face just gray and bloody, except for one of his eyes, which is blinking uncontrollably; his mouth is a twisted red-pink jumble of teeth and meat and jawbone, his tongue hangs out of an open gash on the side of his cheek, connected only by what looks like a thick purple string. (ibid.)

The graphic detail is made more horrible by a sense of verisimilitude; this is not the bright red blood of horror movies, it is brown, real-looking. The sounds and sights of the killing appear to be told from experience, not fantasy; this all feels horribly *real*. All the more disturbing, then, that we are not more moved, outraged or disgusted by what we are ‘seeing’. The disgust and amusement of earlier sections are missing, casualties of the drip-drip-drip of sensory overload and desensitisation. Like Bateman we are becoming blank and affectless and if we even notice, we don’t really care.

Yet Ellis cannot let us rest. It is not enough that he has morphed us into pseudo Batemans; he must attack us again, our constantly shifting reception of the narrative, so expertly produced by Ellis’s poetics, ensuring that meaning is fluid and the reader is in a constant state of questioning flux. By the time of Bethany’s murder, the murder/violence has lost much of its carnival atmosphere. There are funny moments, but we don’t – can’t – laugh. It’s all too disgusting and distressing and we feel that things have gone too far. Forced to question our enjoyment of the novel, we must acknowledge that it has been sparked not just by Ellis’s virtuosic narrative technique, but also the grisly content. Having pushed us to the brink of acceptance or rejection, Ellis teases us again: ‘with a pair of scissors I start to cut off her dress and when I get to her chest I occasionally stab at her breast, accidentally (not really) slicing off one of her nipples through the bra’ (236). The

addition of ‘accidentally (not really)’ makes us consider who Bateman is addressing that he needs to phrase it this way. It’s playful, boyish, and demonstrates that Bateman is delivering his narrative to someone he trusts and who he needs to keep on-side. He’s keen not to alienate the reader which is ironic given that even as this happens Ellis is pushing us towards a rebuffal of our complicity in the narrative. Throughout the lengthy passage detailing Bethany’s suffering, Bateman refers to her simply as ‘she’ and ‘her’; his choice of language revealing the objectification and depersonalisation at play. During the torture she is reduced to mere body parts in Bateman’s consciousness, temporarily ceasing to be a person. It is not until the end of the paragraph that he uses her name mid-sentence; the fact that this occurs at a moment of humiliation is, of course, significant: ‘She starts screaming again once I’ve ripped her dress off, leaving Bethany in only her bra, its right cup darkened with blood, and her panties, which are soaked with urine, saving them for later’ (ibid.). The image of the urine-soaked underwear is abject and this abjection is grounded in her personhood – recognition of her humanity makes us remember our own. Bethany is humiliated, shamed, and that shames us too. We cannot enjoy this scene on any level. There is a moment of levity, but the scene is so grotesque it fails to lift the mood:

I take advantage of her helpless state and, removing my gloves, force her mouth open and with the scissors cut out her tongue, which I pull easily from her mouth and hold in the palm of my hand, warm and still bleeding, seeming so much smaller than in her mouth, and throw it against the wall, where it sticks for a moment, leaving a stain, before falling to the floor with a tiny wet slap. (236)

There is so much detail here about the tongue – its size, temperature, and resonance – that we feel complicit; we can almost feel it in our own hand, hear the sound it makes as it hits the floor. The reader is left thoroughly alienated and disgusted by this scene, much of which is too horrific to reproduce here. It is significant that Bethany is the most ‘fleshed

out' of the all characters within the novel (and not just of Bateman's victims): we have a greater sense of who she is and have received some biographical details. That she shares a history with Bateman makes her seem more real, as it aligns her with the controlling consciousness of the novel. Perhaps most crucially, she is *nice*. Bethany is not shallow and vacuous; she does not debase herself like the prostitutes, and the fact that she barely even drinks shows her to be decorous. This puts us in the uncomfortable position of having to muse whether she is therefore more 'worthy' than the other victims and thus undeserving of her fate. This notion is pushed to an extreme in the chapter 'Killing a Child at the Zoo', where the murder scene is unbearable and very difficult to read. Child-killing is one of the final taboos, an inexcusable act negating any possibility of identification or empathy with the killer. As usual, it is dispassionately narrated by Bateman, but this time the distance he puts between himself and the emotional and moral impact of his crime is not enough to buffer the reader too. It may enable us to read on but it is not enough for us to be unmoved by the crime. Our only reaction to this crime can be disgust and we note this with relief, as it creates a comfortable distance between ourselves and Bateman, who is revealed as an utter monster. Here, Ellis appears to be testing his readers, forcing us to distinguish between crimes against familiar victims such as prostitutes and bums, who in films and the media are often portrayed as deserving of their fate, and the innocent, against whom violence is never acceptable. This scene challenges the reader to search his or her conscience to determine where his or her moral compass sits, a process which inevitably highlights the anomalies of acceptance thrown up by our enjoyment of the earlier instances of violence in the novel.

These shakily defined boundaries are tested in the chapter 'Girl', where an unnamed woman is tortured with a rat. It is still a grisly, disgusting, abject read but some of the fun, the carnival, is back. It tempers the horror and saves the reader from being

completely alienated – we find that we can still enjoy Bateman’s dark humour, at least until the rat (dis)appears. Ellis assists this reversal in empathetic attachment by subtly referencing Hannibal Lecter, the psychopathic serial killer who until this point has enjoyed the most support and acceptance in popular culture. Like Lecter, Bateman appears as a gourmand and aesthete as he adds dobs of Dijon mustard to a woman’s brain as he cannibalises her in front of another terrified victim:

I’m wearing a Joseph Abboud suit, a tie by Paul Stuart, shoes by J. Crew, a vest by someone Italian and I’m kneeling on the floor beside a corpse, eating the girl’s brain, gobbling it down, spreading Grey Poupon over hunks of the pink, fleshy meat. (315)

It is interesting that the thing which appals the girl – Bateman’s lack of humanity – is the thing that most fascinates us, yet we don’t feel horror. When, later, he muses: ‘I can tell that it’s going to be a characteristically useless, senseless death, but then I’m used to the horror. It seems distilled, even now it fails to upset or bother me’ (316), we realise that this is our experience too yet even this doesn’t disturb us; as the scene descends into a splatter movie, it feels fake, filmic, unthreatening and, crucially, culturally acceptable.

The investment in filmic language and imagery continues in what is perhaps the most revealing and enjoyable chapter of the book. ‘Chase, Manhattan’ starts fairly ‘normally’ with a dinner with friends and a confession of misery that no one acknowledges – ‘Listen, guys, my life is a living hell’ (333) – before morphing into a Hollywood blockbuster. Bateman randomly shoots a busking saxophonist so that ‘a huge crimson ring appears behind his head’ (334) but is seen by police cruising nearby. He hijacks a taxi, shooting the driver, and is pursued by the squad car (335); the obligatory high-octane car chase follows, including a gunfight and, later, an exploding police car. Ellis’s inclusion of

every action movie cliché and convention underscores the fact that the narrative is serving up *entertainment* rather than purporting to represent experience. The willing suspension of disbelief is itself suspended as the metanarrative reminds us about the nature of our engagement with this material. This is Ellis's poetics at their most powerful and overt, the simplicity of construction belying the complexity of their effect. The entire chapter consists of a single sentence, split into paragraphs which stream seamlessly one into the other. The parataxis and lack of full stops creates pace and urgency, causing us to read it breathlessly and raising our heart rate, an effect of narrative which aligns us with Bateman physically as well as mentally.

At the end of the car chase, the narrative switch from first person to third suggests that Bateman's mania is such that he is totally dissociated. This has the added effect of putting the reader in an outside position – we are no longer in Bateman's head, looking through his eyes. We are spectators now and this makes the narrative experience feel constructed and unreal, like we are watching a film:

...racing blindly down Greenwich I lose control entirely, the cab swerves into a Korean deli, next to a karaoke restaurant called Lotus Blossom I've been to with Japanese clients, the cab rolling over fruit stands, smashing through a wall of glass, the body of a cashier thudding across the hood, Patrick tries to put the cab into reverse but nothing happens, he staggers out of the cab, leaning against it, a nerve-wracking silence follows, "nice going, Bateman," he mutters, limping out of the store, the body on the hood groaning in agony, Patrick with no idea where the cop running toward him across the street has come from, he's yelling something into his walkie-talkie, thinking Patrick is stunned, but Patrick surprises him by lunging out

before the cop can get to his gun and he knocks him over onto the sidewalk... (335-336)

The reiteration of Patrick's name (thirteen times in two paragraphs) has a dual function; we get a sense of Bateman trying to reinforce his sense of self, and also become aware of the separation between the character and the narrator, and of ourselves and the character. It seems that this is a daydream or fantasy – at one point we read that 'Patrick keeps thinking there should be music' (336), then

guns flashing like in a movie and this makes Patrick realize he's involved in an actual gunfight of sorts, that he's trying to dodge bullets, that the dream threatens to break, is gone, that he's not aiming carefully, just obliviously returning gunfire...' (ibid.)

As Bateman runs away, looking for a car to steal, he hopes to find 'a black Range Rover with permanent four-wheel drive, an aircraft-grade aluminum body on a boxed steel chassis and a fuel-injected V8 engine' (337), a specification which speaks not just to Bateman's knowledge of *stuff*, but also to action movie conventions. The chapter ends with a rambling telephone confession, inevitably rejected as implausible, and some time-lapse cinematography '...the sun, a planet on fire, gradually rises over Manhattan, another sunrise, and soon the night turns into day so fast it's like some kind of optical illusion...' (339). As well as adding a much-needed dose of excitement to the text, this filmic unreality also assists the reader's empathetic engagement with the psychopath. Our acceptance of the book's most troubling sections suddenly becomes acceptable, as we can conclude that none of it happened anyway. However, whether it did or did not actually occur is irrelevant, as Young notes:

[w]e have still had to read all the detailed descriptions of the killings and the effect on us is exactly the same. Whether Patrick's murders are fantasies or not, within fiction, they are all fictional. Thus we are forced by the author to confront the definition and function of fictionality itself. (116)

Having negotiated some of the most disturbing material in contemporary literature and confronted the limits of readerly endurance, one must also address the allure of such fiction. The fact that it is fiction, and therefore restrained within the protective frame of the novel, is key to our relationship with it. The high stakes of the narrative can be safely enjoyed without danger or risk; the paradigm of fictional and factional crime narrative – i.e. the progression through the crime, apprehension, trial and punishment of the criminal – is disturbed in *American Psycho* and although it can be disconcerting to see this pattern broken, it is also thrilling. Furthermore, the novel speaks to the way in which we live our lives; the dissociation from other human beings, especially in urban environments, can be liberating but it can also leave us vulnerable and unsupported. The reader can identify with Bateman's isolation, the facelessness of city life, the lack of interaction with neighbours and the absence of community. Our worst fears of senseless, random brutality, fed by a popular culture obsessed with serial killers, can be explored during the reading experience, the novel's fictionality cushioning the reader from any ill effects. Yet even this is unsettled by *American Psycho*: its effects seem to linger long after the narrative has ended. Its very open-endedness, its resistance to closure, denies the reader a neat exit from the text.

Ellis offers no explanation for his novel within the text itself, there is no symbolic function to the violence, it simply 'is'. The pornography of death can have no real development, as Gorer notes (52). There remains only a process of degradation and constant one-upmanship; the desensitisation inherent to the medium leading to escalating sensationalism and depersonalisation. Having opened with the Dantean injunction

‘Abandon all hope ye who enter here’ (3), which establishes the diegesis as an inescapable hell, it is appropriate that the final words of the novel, ‘THIS IS NOT AN EXIT’ (384) should invoke Sartre. According to Sartrean existentialism, so infused with alienation and despair, man is entirely autonomous. Although exposed to the objectifying gaze of the other and the essentialisms the other will inevitably impose upon him, he remains isolated and alone. Separated from others, he is subject solely to his own will, independent from culture and law. ‘Existence precedes essence’ (13) therefore a person is free to identify his or her own understanding of existence and define his or her own identity. Yet Bateman, by his own admission, is ‘*simply...not there...*[His]self is fabricated, an aberration. [He is] a noncontingent human being’ (362, original emphasis). His self, like his narrative, defies classification. There are no absolute meanings, nor are there insights to be gleaned or lessons to be learned. When Bateman asks ‘Is evil something you are? Or is it something you do?’ (362), his question resonates both intra- and extradiegetically. We are sullied by our engagement with the book’s excesses, and by the pleasure we have taken in them, and confused by Ellis’s virtuosic handling of our empathetic engagement with the text. As readers, we are used to answers but not only are they are not forthcoming, Bateman teaches us that they are fleeting, contingent and meaningless. The only thing one can be certain of with *American Psycho* is its cultural impact. It is a niche text which became a cult classic; its relentless collapsing of categories between real and unreal, madness and sanity, good and evil, leading ultimately to the creation of the most normalised psychopathic character yet encountered: Dexter, the hero killer.

## 4.2 Jeff Lindsay's *Dexter*: the Psycho as Hero

After the twentieth century's concentrated focus on fascinating, personable psychopaths, the new millennium heralded a further development: the heroic serial killer. Jeff Lindsay's *Dexter* series, which comprises seven novels published between 2004 and 2013 and has sold around 1.7 million copies to date, has introduced one of popular culture's most impactful psychopaths – a serial killing vigilante who cleans up Miami's dark streets and enjoys the reader's full support. Lindsay's crime fiction creation was quickly picked up by US premium cable channel Showtime, with the first season of the series *Dexter* airing in 2006 and a further seven seasons following until the series finale in 2013. Viewing figures were smashed with each successive season and the show has won a raft of awards, including Golden Globes and Emmys. Acceptance of the titular hero has reached such heights that the name 'Dexter' has soared in the baby name charts, enjoying a fourteenfold increase in popularity in England and Wales ([www.names.darkgreener.com](http://www.names.darkgreener.com)) between 2004 and 2012, whilst in the United States it rocketed from the 874<sup>th</sup> most popular boy's name in 2005 to the 384<sup>th</sup> in 2012 ([www.babynamewizard.com](http://www.babynamewizard.com)). That parents are willing to name their offspring after a serial killer speaks volumes to how this figure has been taken to audiences' hearts, but how can we account for this phenomenon?

Lindsay's character, Dexter Morgan, is the embodiment of Kristeva's notion of the 'criminal with good conscience [...] the killer who claims he's a saviour' (4) yet he is neither an abject figure nor a monstrous other. Rather, he is portrayed as an improved version of us; clever, cool and effective, he is the 'us' we wish we could be. As Schmid observes, 'Dexter represents a turning point in the willingness of Americans to embrace the serial killer as one of their own, as the personification of essentially American values' ('Devil You Know' 132-133), a startling development when one contrasts this with the psychopath narratives examined at the beginning of this thesis. The *Dexter* novels are

written in the first person, a narrative strategy placing the reader close to the killer which one can trace back through Bret Easton Ellis, Jim Thompson and Horace McCoy. As Dexter's actions are relayed from his own perspective, they meet no disapprobation in the text and Lindsay's poetics ensure that there is little resistance from the accepting reader. Dexter's commitment to dispatching those paedophiles and killers who prey on the vulnerable and whom the law cannot contain is positioned as a rational response to a cruel and perplexing modernity. Ironically, this vigilante is also a functionary of legitimate law enforcement, via his work as a blood spatter technician for Miami-Dade Police Department. The tension between his opposing roles – heroic avenger on the one hand, psychopathic predator on the other – creates a moral ambivalence which should be difficult for the reader to negotiate, yet Lindsay's poetics ensure that the reader's responses are manipulated in such a way that identification with Dexter is rarely threatened. Indeed, Lindsay's scheme is laid bare in Dexter's very name: deriving from the Latin for right, the name means 'right-handed', 'favourable' or 'auspicious' (Pickering 84). Pertinently, given Dexter's own repeated references to himself as 'Dashing Dexter', 'Dauntless Dexter', and so on, the name is also associated with heraldry. The heraldic escutcheon, or family shield, is typically split into two halves; dexter, to the bearer's right, is the position of honour, and its opposite side, sinister, is to the bearer's left. In Western culture right and left carry associations with good and evil, a division highlighted here by our understanding of the word 'sinister' as being 'suggestive of evil; looking malignant or villainous', 'wicked or criminal' or 'of evil omen' (OED). It is interesting to note that the bearer's right and the viewer's right are transposed; from the viewer's perspective, dexter appears on the left – the side of the devil – so again the reader is faced with a multivalent perspective of right and wrong, good and evil. Dexter's references to himself as 'Dashing Dexter' and 'Dauntless Dexter' evoke images of valiant knights slaying monstrous dragons and create

a slew of dialogic meanings which imbue him with subconscious positive associations. Allusion to the family shield also hints at the police badges carried by the Morgan family: Dexter, as I have noted, works in the forensics department of Miami PD, and his foster sister, Deborah, is a cop. They have both followed in the footsteps of the late Harry Morgan, Deborah's father and Dexter's foster father, who was a highly respected detective. In the first novel, *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* (2004), Dexter notes how he and Deb are 'so very different, and yet still both Harry's kids, the two strange fists of his unique legacy' (225). This legacy is the basis of the reader's acceptance of Dexter's extra-legal 'justice' work; the (mostly) night-time killings which make the character unique and compelling.

Harry took Dexter into his family aged three, after Dexter's mother, who worked for Harry as a police informant, was brutally slain by a drugs gang. Having witnessed his mother's murder, Dexter was left sitting in a pool of her blood in a dark shipping container for two and a half days until he was discovered and rescued by Harry (*Darkly Dreaming* 263). Although Dexter repressed the memory, and has no knowledge of it until it surfaces again in adulthood, the trauma of the event has a profound psychological impact on him. As he grows up, he finds himself unable to feel or express emotion, or interact socially. More significantly, Dexter is increasingly influenced by the internal 'other' that he refers to as his Dark Passenger, a primal force with an insatiable appetite for murder that drives Dexter to 'experiment' on the neighbourhood pets.

Unable to get his son 'straightened out' (*Darkly Dreaming* 40) and terrified of what will happen when he inevitably graduates to killing humans, Harry develops a code for Dexter to live by, which will help him to channel his impulses into only killing those deserving of their fate, and to avoid arrest by being careful and forensically aware. The Code supplies the novels' moral framework and positions Dexter as a force for good,

rather than a figure of evil. Importantly, it also absolves the reader of any guilt s/he may (or should) feel at enjoying representations of violence and engaging with a serial killer, thereby reducing cognitive dissonance. The Code of Harry, which posits Dexter's killings as being for the good of society, is consonant with the ideas being explored; dissonance is reduced when we accept that leaving Code-less killers and predatory paedophiles free to prey on the vulnerable is far worse than condoning their dispatch by Dexter. Reducing dissonance in this way makes Dexter more sympathetic and underscores the righteousness of his rhetoric, thereby validating the reader's decision to accept it. Lindsay's poetics also help to reduce the dissonance created by guiding the reader to the appropriate position of identification and creating a complicity that draws the reader closer to the killer. In *Dearly Devoted Dexter* (2005), the second novel in the series, Dexter muses that

...I could have been much worse. I could have been a vicious raving monster who killed and killed and left towers of rotting flesh in my wake. Instead, here I was on the side of truth, justice, and the American way. Still a monster, of course, but I cleaned up nicely afterward, and I was OUR monster, dressed in red, white, and blue 100 percent synthetic virtue. (4)

In just 67 words, Lindsay manages to draw a contrast between his neat and principled killer and the insatiable 'vicious raving monster[s]' that he preys upon, whilst positioning Dexter as a Superman-inspired avatar of integrity, whose actions uphold the cherished dominant fictions and supporting structures of American society. The reference to the Stars and Stripes infers that accepting Dexter is both patriotic and desirable, whilst describing Dexter as 'OUR monster' simultaneously makes our support of him both personal and communal. Despite this, the ambivalence which colours the reader's engagement with Dexter remains. His boast that he is a monster who cleans up 'nicely afterward' does little to recommend him, and the careful reader is warned to be mindful that the 'virtue' s/he

bases her or his identification on is '100 percent synthetic'. Lindsay's ironic humour ensures that the reader is constantly reminded of the psychic struggle to reconcile the tension between the accepted morality of mainstream society and the morality of Lindsay's novels.

The juxtaposition of Dexter and his victims is Lindsay's chief means of reducing dissonance and ensuring the reader's identification with his vigilante killer. Five of the seven novels contain paedophiles and child killers whose crimes are so heinous and indefensible that it is impossible to be sympathetic towards them. Their child victims are, of course, utterly blameless; unlike with Dexter's victims, there is no grey area or mitigating circumstance where it could be argued that the children brought their fates upon themselves.<sup>35</sup> Lindsay underlines this point by regularly emphasising Dexter's own relationship with children as one of honour and compassion. Although Dexter 'genuinely wouldn't care if every other human in the universe were suddenly to expire' (*Darkly Dreaming* 54), he likes and respects children and abhors those who present a threat to them: 'for some reason I care about kids. And when I find someone who preys on children it is very much as if they have slipped the dark Maître d' twenty dollars to move to the front of the line' (*Dearly Devoted* 10). This characteristic helps to draw a stark distinction between serial killing Dexter and those killers that he kills, a distinction which ensures that the reader's empathetic acceptance of Dexter is not threatened by his crimes.

In *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, Lindsay goes to great lengths to establish the deservedness of Dexter's victims; the novel opens with a 12-page section detailing Dexter's capture and kill of Father Donovan, a paedophile priest responsible for the murder of at least seven orphans. The first page of the novel, however, focuses on Dexter

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<sup>35</sup> There are echoes here of the chapter entitled 'Killing a Child at the Zoo' in Ellis's *American Psycho*, where the reader is forced to confront his or her prejudices against the relative deservedness of various victim groups. I address the issues raised on page 226 of this thesis.

and the 'Need' (1) which drives him to kill. It is described in playful, beguiling language intended to draw the reader in; his or her eagerness to read on mirroring Dexter's eagerness to sate his homicidal hunger:

Oh, the symphonic shriek of the thousand hiding voices, the cry of the Need inside, *the entity*, the silent watcher, the cold quiet thing, the one that laughs, the Moondancer. The me that was not me, the thing that mocked and laughed and came calling with its hunger. With the Need. And the Need was very strong now, very careful cold coiled creeping crackly cocked and ready, very strong, very much ready now – and still it waited and watched, and it made me wait and watch. (ibid.)

The passage draws on popular cultural tropes drawn from horror films and suspense novels<sup>36</sup> to create an interesting combination of familiarity and the alien. The reader feels that s/he knows what is being described, yet what this actually is remains unspecified and mysterious. This creates a textual presence for something which both is and is not; for the shadow self of every person that we both acknowledge and deny. This sets up, on the very first page of the novel, the unsettling and seductive ambivalence upon which the novels are founded. It is significant that at this early stage Dexter does not mention the Code; the hook for the reader at this point is not the resolution of dissonance but the dissonance itself. Whilst stories of transgression have thrilled audiences for as long as there have been narratives, this first page also ensures that the reader knows that this monster is not just an out-of-control maniac, but a careful, diligent creature of reason and restraint. Dexter

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<sup>36</sup> These influences are many and varied and carry with them heteroglot inferences and shades of meaning which impact upon the reader's understanding of the events being relayed. In the passage cited above, one can feel the influence of Edgar Allan Poe's short story, 'The Tell-Tale Heart' (1843). This early psychopath narrative details a well-planned and vicious attack on a defenceless old man. Contemporary readers were expected to be horrified by the grisly tale; modern readers of Dexter, who recognise the intertextual reference, are confronted with the dissonance between that reaction and their own. Poe's killer was ultimately undone by his own guilt, something Dexter is not troubled by. The contrast between the motivations and guilt reactions of the two killers is noteworthy and reveals a great deal about the acceptance and development of psychopathic characters in the last century and a half.

describes how he has ‘been waiting and watching the priest for five weeks now... For three weeks I had known he was it, he was next, we belonged to the Dark Passenger, he and I together’ (ibid.). The reader is reassured that the killing is justified and well-planned and, as the narrative continues and the issue of the Code is raised for the first time (2), we learn that it is not the fulfilment of a sadistic fantasy or sexual perversion but an act of cop-sanctioned retribution.

The first hint of actual violence, when Dexter captures Father Donovan in his noose, is shocking to the uninitiated reader; it is very fast after the long build-up, yet it is also restrained and relatively painless for both the victim and the reader:

*NOW.*

I sat up in his backseat and slipped the noose around his neck. One quick, slippery, pretty twist and the coil of fifty-pound-test fishing line settled tight. He made a small ratchet of panic and that was it. (4)

Due to its homodiegetic narration, delivered from Dexter’s perspective, the novel does not focus on the thoughts, feelings or reactions of Dexter’s victims. We get fleeting, external observations, consonant with the psychopath’s view of events, which serve equally to shield us from the abjection of the assault and to empathetically align us with the perpetrator. However, Lindsay’s poetics ensure that the reader remains aware of the tension between their own moral standpoint and the skewed morality of the book. Dexter’s reference, in this novel, to his prey as ‘victims’ rather than the ‘playmates’ he refers to in later novels makes the narrative darker and more visceral, ratcheting the cognitive dissonance to titillating levels. Yet just as we feel ourselves growing uncomfortable with the scene, Lindsay tweaks us back to a position of complicity and identification with Dexter by ensuring that we realise the magnitude of Donovan’s crimes. As a man of the

cloth he should be an irreproachable paragon of love and morality, yet we learn that he has killed at least seven orphans. When we read that '[t]here were seven of them, seven small bodies, seven extra-dirty orphan children laid out on rubber shower sheets, which are neater and don't leak' (9), we feel empathy for the defenceless young children, living without the protection of loving parents, and horror at the abject 'sight' of their tiny corpses. Significantly, the reference to 'leaks' speaks of Dexter's experience – we know that he has done this before and somehow that is reassuring. The reader's acceptance of this small detail makes her or him complicit in Father Donovan's murder as by condoning – or perhaps even mentally willing – the act as just punishment for Donovan's crimes, s/he figuratively commits it too. The dissonance this creates is dissipated by the addition of an element consonant with our acceptance of Dexter's actions – we learn that not only would Dexter never harm a child, he is also compelled to find and eliminate those who do: 'I could never do this to children...Not like you, Father. Never kids. I have to find people like you' (10). The novel's repeated emphasis on the need to rid the world of those who prey on children satisfies the reader's internal censor and also speaks to Dexter's victimhood; acceptance is bought by shifting the focus from the aggression being meted out to the very human reasons behind it.

Even as the narrative details Dexter's aberrance, the reader is reminded of his mercy. The muscle relaxant he injects into Father Donovan makes the priest easier to dominate but it also fills him with 'quick, clean calm' (11). Furthermore, we appreciate the fact that Dexter's actions are considered and reasoned. He takes his time, respecting the 'meat' – 'I had about eight hours before I had to be gone. I would need them all to do it right' (12) – and this sense of ritual adds a weird civility to proceedings. Lindsay is careful to protect his readers from the abjection of the kill and his poetics shield us from the gore that horror films have taught us to expect; a simple 'I went to work' (12) signals what is

happening whilst preventing the narrative from descending into gratuitous, salacious violence. Most significantly, Dexter's victims usually invite their fate verbally as well as by the heinousness of their crimes. Father Donovan thanks Dexter as he 'works' on him, sanctioning the kill, and the knowledge of his impending fate seems to bring him peace:

'What?' I said. I moved my head a little closer. 'I can't hear you.'

I heard him breathe, a slow and peaceful breath, and then he said it again before his eyes closed.

'You're welcome,' I said, and I went to work. (12)

Although, of course, one must be wary of trusting a first person narrator who also happens to be a serial murderer, the 'peace' that Father Donovan appears to feel suggests that Dexter is releasing him from the irresistible and diabolical forces which have driven his murders. This positions Dexter as a merciful provider of absolution and tranquillity, and there is a gentleness<sup>37</sup> to the scene which undercuts its viscerality. Most significantly for the reader, when Father Donovan effectively sanctions his own murder he also sanctions our support for it, thereby ensuring that dissonance is reduced and our empathetic link with Dexter is maintained. Dissonance does remain, of course, and Dexter confronts it in a direct address to the reader:

Killing makes me feel good. It works the knots out of darling Dexter's dark schemata. It's a sweet release, a necessary letting go of all the little hydraulic valves inside. I enjoy my work; sorry if that bothers you. Oh, very sorry, really. But there it is. And it's not just any killing, of course. It has to be done the right way, at the right time, with the right partner – very complicated, but very necessary. (13)

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<sup>37</sup> Of course, it is doubtful that Father Donovan perceives this gentleness. The reader's impression of Dexter as merciful, righteous and tender is partly to do with the fact that s/he accesses the narrative via Dexter's thought perceptions and partly due to the text's poetics which aim to ensure the reader's complicity and induce an empathetic response to the titular antihero.

This may seem an audacious, even dangerous move in terms of identification, but by addressing the reader directly Lindsay draws him or her into complicity.<sup>38</sup> We are not reading a found document such as one might find in the Gothic, we are being told, personally, by a killer, about his nefarious exploits. *Why* it's necessary remains ambiguous and the reader is left wondering whether it is necessary to relieve the 'Need' or to rid society of evil. This ambiguity runs throughout the novel and it is important; it mirrors our moral quandary as readers and creates the tension that makes the books interesting.

The murder of Jamie Jaworski, a paedophile and thief, highlights this tension. In contrast to the almost-tender Father Donovan murder, the Jaworski kill is graphic and ghastly, with many alienating details. The murder is committed on impulse, with no planning, and Dexter is slow to get Jaworski to admit his guilt. However, when Dexter does finally prompt his victim to speak about his crimes – the sexually sadistic murders of runaway girls – the reader can accept the murder because of his remorselessness. Jaworski's comment – 'Five little beauties. I'm not sorry' (141) – makes it clear that not only does he deserve his fate, but he will continue to kill unless Dexter stops him. Unlike the other novels in the series, *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* does expose the reader to some disturbing acts of Dexter-violence. It is nasty but quick and clean and, as it is relayed from Dexter's point of view, the reader is not exposed to the physical pain that Jaworski must experience:

'No,' we said, and sliced off his left ear. It was closest. The knife was sharp and for a moment he couldn't believe it was happening to him, permanent and forever no left ear. So I dropped the ear on his chest to let him believe.

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<sup>38</sup> There is also an interesting overlap of sex and murder in this quotation, which I will examine in greater detail on page 262-263.

His eyes got huge and he filled his lungs to scream, but I stuffed a wad of plastic wrap in his mouth just before he did. (138)

There's a chilling insouciance to the detail about the left ear being closest which should be alienating, yet the scene lacks some of the impact we might expect. The reason for this resides in the dialogic conflation of this scene and the most (in)famous ear-cutting scene in popular culture, when Michael Madsen, as Mr. Blonde in *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), deprives Marvin Nash, a police officer (played by Kirk Baltz) who he is holding hostage, of his right ear. Once this connection is made Dexter's fictional act becomes more cognitively fictional; the willing suspension of disbelief is temporarily swept away as we link the act we are reading about to a scene from a film. Significantly, much of the power of the ear-cutting scene in *Reservoir Dogs* resides in the dissonance between the visual image and the jaunty, enjoyable soundtrack, a fact which reminds Lindsay's reader of the dissonance created between the abject act described in the text and our consumption of it as entertainment. Despite this, Lindsay takes a real risk in sharing so much graphic detail with the reader and there is an abandon here quite at odds with the measured, controlled kills the narrative has led us to expect. At this point in the novel, Dexter is much closer to his serial killer counterparts than he is to the reader and this has considerable implications for our empathetic response to him. Disturbed by a security guard, Dexter stops and contemplates his victim. The paragraph that follows is pure abjection:

I stared down at the grubby little insect and felt myself fill with loathing. The thing was drooling snot and blood all together, the ugly wet slop burbling across his face. A trickle of awful red came from his mouth. In a quick fit of pique, I slashed across Jaworski's throat. I immediately regretted my rashness. A fountain of horrible blood came out and the sight made it all seem even more regrettable, a messy mistake. Feeling unclean

and unsatisfied, I sprinted for the stairwell. A cold and petulant grumbling from my Dark Passenger followed me. (143)

We are distanced from Dexter here – his actions and his disdain for his victim are too much for the reader to bear. There is no attempt to relieve the dissonance; no poetic sleight of hand to twist us back towards a position of identification. Although Dexter mentions regret, the reader is aware that this refers to Dexter’s impetuosity rather than remorse for his victim; it is the *mess* which Dexter deems to be a problem, not the morality of the act. The reader is forced to confront the ‘reality’ of serial killing and the reality is unpleasant and uncomfortable to read. So why include it? Is it to challenge the reader’s allegiance, to shake him or her out of complacent acceptance of a ‘hero’ killer? Is it to make the reader aware of what he or she is ‘involved in’? Or is it simply to show Dexter as human, fallible and therefore more like us? It is, in fact, all of these things, yet paradoxically this brush with abjection ultimately functions to strengthen our feelings for Dexter. His uncharacteristic loss of control indicates a psychological blip, a return to the trauma of his childhood. The acting out of extreme violence, this time with him in control as the aggressor, reminds the reader that Dexter is, in fact, a victim. This sanctions our acceptance of Dexter, reminding us that he was not born a monster but forged as one, by an unimaginable juvenile trauma.

Acceptance also relies on our continued acknowledgement of the importance of Harry’s Code as the only means of dealing with characters such as Jaworski. The Code operates in the grey areas of the law, ensuring that those killers who evade conventional justice can be dealt with. Lindsay goes to great lengths to highlight the problems with the normative justice system, from the Lombrosan beat cops with low foreheads and even lower intelligence, to the career detectives who prioritise politics over people’s lives – ‘the real threat to society was LaGuerta. She had called off the hounds, closed down the hue

and cry, sent people back to bed in a burning building' (*Darkly Dreaming* 114) – and the corruption which means that those with money and influence can literally get away with murder:

Joe's money would get the charges reduced to hunting out of season, with a sentence of twenty hours' community service. A bitter pill to swallow, perhaps, but that's life in the service of that old whore Miami Justice, and we had certainly expected it. (*Dexter is Delicious* 348)

The reader is left in no doubt that Dexter's brand of justice is vitally necessary and without it society, particularly children, would not be safe. Despite these assurances, a level of dissonance remains constant throughout the novel series.

Although it is uncomfortable to experience cognitive dissonance, Jacovina et al. tell us that it 'is accompanied by a strong state of arousal...[which] within the context of a narrative...may actually be pleasurable' (240). Furthermore, '[w]hen people read for entertainment, higher levels of arousal are related to higher levels of enjoyment' (241). The 'arousal' stimulated by dissonance, and its conflation of pleasure and pain, leads to sensations of *jouissance*. In general usage *jouissance* refers to pleasure, but for Lacan it is a way of referring to anything which is too much for the subject to bear. Suffering is a key component of *jouissance*, emanating from the subject's compulsive drive to go beyond the pleasure principle in search of ever greater levels of enjoyment and, as Dylan Evans observes, '*jouissance* thus nicely expresses the paradoxical satisfaction that the subject derives from his symptom, or, to put it another way, the suffering that he derives from his own satisfaction' (92). The *jouissance* experienced by the reader of psychopath fiction stems from the decision to transgress the societal taboo surrounding murder and enjoy depictions of killers and killings. Cognitive dissonance arises when the reader's acceptance

of Dexter clashes with his or her real-world conviction that murder is wrong but this is mitigated by the introduction of consonant elements such as the Code of Harry or the deservedness of Dexter's victims, which ensure that the reader may continue to enjoy the heightened state of arousal this ambivalence creates whilst protecting against psychic injury.

In his Seminar 17, Lacan also refers to *jouissance* as 'the path toward death [...] a discourse about masochism' (18) – fitting when considered alongside our ambivalent relationship with modernity's favourite fictional serial killer. The dissonance created by the reader's acceptance of Dexter results in what Freud termed 'moral masochism', as the reasoning, law-abiding ego comes under attack from the aggressive and sadistic superego. Significantly, this 'turning back of sadism against the self regularly occurs where a *cultural suppression of the instincts* holds back a large part of the subject's destructive instinctual components from being exercised in life' ('The Economic Problem of Masochism' 170). In denying our own sadistic urges and vicariously enjoying Dexter's instead, we are subconsciously turning these urges against ourselves. Such masochistic behaviour ratchets instinctual tension up to titillating levels so we may embrace the pleasure/pain of the resultant *jouissance*. For the reader or viewer of transgressive texts such as *Dexter*, the masochism lies in the dissonance created by identification with Dexter's Dark Passenger. Although hopefully none of Lindsay's readers wish to slaughter other human beings, the struggle between the light and dark sides of the self is common to all. Vicarious enjoyment of the dark doings of Dexter's unleashed id represents a seemingly risk-free way of exercising one's own Dark Passenger, with the mediating frames of the novel and TV screen allowing the reader to distance his-or herself from the conscious and subconscious drives being explored. Yet the process is not without its hazards. Moral masochism destroys moral consciousness, eroding our sense of right and

wrong and making it easier for us to accept characters like Dexter. The *jouissance* we feel as the process plays out arises from the experience of enduring punishment and pain simultaneously with pleasure. This moral masochism alleviates the guilt we feel at enjoying representations of violence, helping us to disavow our own dark selves and deny our complicity in Dexter's actions. Taking pleasure from transgression in this way also offers reassurance to the beleaguered modern reader or viewer. Like Dexter, we too can feel adrift and alienated in a bewildering, fast-paced and aggressive modernity that at times seems to be spinning out of control. Our consumption of texts such as *Dexter* suggests transgression as a means of reinscribing the dominant social order. The masochistic pleasure we take from engaging with Dexter fetishises our submissive role in society, thereby reinforcing the moral interdictions that suppress our destructive instincts.

However, Jung warns that

[w]e must beware of thinking of good and evil as absolute opposites. The criterion of ethical action can no longer exist in the simple view that good has the force of a categorical imperative, while so-called evil can resolutely be shunned. Recognition of the reality of evil necessarily relativizes the good, and the evil likewise, converting both into halves of a paradoxical whole. ('The Problem of Evil Today' 171)

By drawing attention to the relativity of the binary positions of good and evil, Jung warns of their shifting and contingent nature. This is not to say, of course, that these categories cease to have any resonance or meaning, rather that ethical judgement is based on the specifics of a given situation. This appears to recognise the validity of solutions such as Harry's, yet Jung also warns of the psychic consequences of engaging in such activity:

Moral judgment is always present and carries with it characteristic psychological consequences...moral evaluation is always founded upon the apparent certitudes of a moral code which pretends to know precisely what is good and what evil. But once we know how uncertain the foundation is, ethical decision becomes a subjective, creative act. (ibid.)

The uncertainty of this foundation is explored several times in Lindsay's novels. In the fourth book of the series, *Dexter by Design* (2009), Dexter makes a mistake and kills the wrong man. The reader's empathy for Dexter, which is based upon an understanding of the righteousness of the kills, is severely threatened. The realisation that the killing was gratuitous and unjustified forces the reader to question his or her glib acceptance of Dexter's status as Dark Avenger. When Dexter muses 'I never pretended to have any real humanity, and I certainly didn't tell myself that what I did was all right just because my playmates were cut from the same cloth' (122), the reader is forced to question their own understanding of Dexter's actions. Dissonance has been reduced by attributing the killings to alternative justice and the Code of Harry, but the wrongful killing of Doncevic forces the reader to consider whether he or she does actually think that vigilante slayings are 'all right', really. Ironically, this is the first murder that Dexter has committed for something other than his selfish need to dice and chop: '...I had done this one for *her* [Deb], as much as anything else – the first time I had ever acted out of noble impulses, and it had turned out very badly. My sister made a really poor Dark Passenger' (123). The inference is that Dexter does not consider the other kills to have been 'noble', as we have done. Notably, the key problem here is not with the 'Code killings' but with Dexter's interpretation of nobility. The reader is able to draw a distinction between revenge (Doncevic) and retribution (Father Donovan, Jaworski) which absolves him or her of any moral accountability and reasserts the righteousness of the moral decisions taken.

The uncertainty and mutability of moral evaluation is laid bare in book six of the series, *Double Dexter* (2011) when a member of the public witnesses Dexter dismembering ‘Puffalump’, a paedophile clown. Puffalump preys on young illegal immigrants and has graduated from sexual offences to murder. He was twice arrested and released for lack of evidence, and his subsequent crimes often went unreported due to the unofficial status of his victims’ families. Dexter is therefore addressing a social justice issue as well as a moral and criminal one, and he enjoys the reader’s full support for his actions. However, Bernie Elan, who saw Dexter at work, is not party to the information that the reader has access to and he reads the scene in a totally different way. He sees Dexter as a dangerous predator who must be stopped, thereby transposing Dexter and Puffalump via the apparent moral certitudes of the situation. Elan’s reading of the scene forces the reader – and Dexter – to question the righteousness of Dexter’s actions, especially when in his blog Elan outlines his plan to kill his ex-wife and frame Dexter for her murder. Elan claims that *his* murders are for the good of society:

*I was put here to deal with the rule breakers, the ones who have gone too far and can't come back. You. My very-ex-wife. And who knows who else? There's lots of 'em. I see 'em every day.*

*So in a way I am becoming like you, right? The big difference is, I do it to stop people like you. I do it for Good. (158, original emphasis)*

Here we see Dexter’s, and our, justification for murder being turned on its head by an opposing viewpoint and we are compelled to acknowledge both the fallibility of a Code like Harry’s and the inability of any one person to decide what is right and wrong. In forcing us to recognise the issues with a vigilante justice system, Lindsay reinscribes the hegemonic order. Yet, in order to preserve her or his engagement with a series of novels

that s/he has invested so much time and energy in, the reader is compelled to continue to support Dexter. This is made possible by Lindsay's depiction of Elan, whose name, Dexter notes, references 'zest, zeal, [and] panache' (133), qualities quite at odds with his depressive, narcissistic and aggressive nature. Elan is also characterised as immoral, weak and undisciplined. He does not live by a moral code; his kills are messy, untargeted and unjustified and, perhaps most importantly, he does not recognise his own darkness.

Dexter, by contrast, is fully at ease with his Dark Passenger and his acceptance of its influence gives him a more nuanced view of right and wrong. In Jungian analysis, acknowledgement of one's dark half is vital to psychic health and to 'own one's shadow is to become responsible for it, so that one's morality is less blind and less compulsive, and ethical choices become possible' (Stevens 67). Acknowledgement of the shadow, by both Dexter and the reader, therefore becomes an essential identificatory tool. As Anthony Stevens notes, Jung postulated that each individual consciousness is made up of a Self and a number of 'archetypal components which play specific roles in the psychic development and social adjustment of everyone' (61). These components enter the psyche as complexes during the course of development and although they manifest differently in every individual, they perform a universal function. Each person is composed of the same basic psychic elements, or archetypes, which include the ego, persona, shadow, anima and animus. The archetypes represent the various stages of the life drama played out in the Hero myth of identity formation and, according to Donald Kalsched and Alan Jones, they

lead from an initial stage of unconsciousness before the ego has awakened, through various stages of heroic struggle, to a final state of "wholeness" or integration when life has reached its full potential...Jung called this process "individuation," the process of becoming the true individual that one really is. (1)

This is significant when considered in relation to Dexter and his Dark Passenger. The Passenger is a manifestation of Dexter's shadow which, as we have seen, is composed of the undesirable character traits which must be suppressed in society. Jung described the shadow as 'the "negative" side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the contents of the personal unconscious' ('On the Psychology of the Unconscious' 66). Dexter's shadow is separated entirely from his persona, which is the acceptable mask or façade that he shows to the world. Carefully honed with the help of Harry, Dexter's persona is the jovial, clean-living, crime-fighting self that he portrays in his interactions with the public, his colleagues at Miami PD and his girlfriend Rita; the construction of this persona betrays him as what Cleckley described as 'a subtly constructed reflex machine that can mimic human personality perfectly' (228). The use of Jungian archetypes functions as another identificatory device in Lindsay's poetics as, according to Jung, the archetypes are 'a psychic organ present in all of us' ('Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious', qtd. in Segal 11).

The archetypal hero myth focuses on the trials and tribulations that beset the subject on the path to individuation. Its themes can be found in the stories of figures as disparate as Jesus and Luke Skywalker and this, too, makes it recognisable and accessible to the reader. This intertextuality brings with it dialogic shades of meaning that colour our expectations and reception of Lindsay's narratives, thereby reducing the dissonance we experience when engaging with a character like Dexter. Kalsched and Jones describe the conventions of the myth thus:

The birth of the hero usually occurs in humble surroundings such as a manger or cave, but it is always extraordinary in some way...Frequently, the hero has two fathers – his personal father and a "higher" father...The

hero... inherits a dual nature. He is a human being like everyone else, yet at the same time he feels himself to be an outsider, a stranger to the community. He does not fit in, and discovers within himself something that sets him apart, such as his prophetic powers, healing abilities, or creative powers. These lead him to extraordinary deeds. (3)

Kalsched and Jones, writing in 1986, obviously did not have Dexter in mind when they composed this description; the fact that it fits his story perfectly demonstrates how closely Lindsay's narrative aligns with the myth. The Dexter the reader knows was born when he witnessed his mother's murder, in the humble surroundings of a dockside shipping container. This 'birth in blood' saw him develop a 'dual nature' which his foster father, frequently referred to as 'Saint Harry' throughout the novel series, tried hard to contain. The novels abound with Dexter's descriptions of himself as monstrous and inhuman, and his 'hobby' can certainly be described as 'extraordinary'.

Structurally, the novels generally see Dexter dispatching one or more carefully selected victim of his own choosing (very often a paedophile or child killer, as noted previously), before being pitted against an arch-villain who comes to his attention via his crime scene forensic work. Each story arc therefore offers a representation of the 'universal hero myth', which according to Jung depicts 'a powerful man or god-man who vanquishes evil in the form of dragons, serpents, monsters, demons, and enemies of all kinds, and who liberates his people from destruction and death' ('The Archetype in Dream Symbolism' 95). Dexter's relation to the universal hero myth strengthens the reader's empathetic connection with the killer. The universality of the myth makes it applicable to everybody; Dexter can therefore be understood to be working on behalf of every reader. Furthermore, by likening his killer to the 'god-man' of myth, Lindsay elevates him to suprahuman status. No longer subject to the societal restrictions and prohibitions

governing average citizens, Dexter is raised above ordinary morality. His extra-legal justice work consequently becomes acceptable, even desirable, and the reader's support of it is similarly sanctioned. The arch-villains who oppose Dexter and dominate each of the novels in the series signify 'the regressive forces of the unconscious which threaten to swallow the individuating ego' (Kalsched and Jones 3). Through these battles 'early infantile attachments must die and a more mature and productive life be born in their place' (ibid.). For Dexter, this relates to his juvenile desire to save his mother and avenge her death by vanquishing those 'bad men' who prey on the vulnerable. His particular hatred of paedophiles and child killers addresses this need, as Dexter and his long-lost brother, Brian, were also victims of his mother's killers. Here, Lindsay taps into the revenge narratives so common to American popular culture and further secures the reader's acceptance and empathy.

In *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, Dexter speaks of the ongoing battle between his shadow and persona which can only be quelled, temporarily, by a kill. Following his murder of Jamie Jaworski, Dexter notes how

...some of the tension of the last week was gone, the cold voice of the Dark Passenger was quiet, and I could be me again. Quirky, funny, happy-go-lucky, dead-inside Dexter. No longer Dexter with the knife, Dexter the Avenger. Not until next time. (130)

The 'me' that Dexter refers to here is his individuating ego, which is under threat of being engulfed by his growing shadow. Interestingly, in the later books of the series Dexter suggests that his true self is actually his dark half whilst 'daytime Dexter' is simply the socially acceptable façade, but here he claims that the reverse is true. Regardless of his claims, as the series progresses we find that Dexter does retreat from the Passenger-led darkness of the first novel and moves slowly closer to his persona. He remains a serial

killer, of course, but the body count drops and the books become increasingly less violent and visceral. This process relates to the element of the dragon battle which aims at what Kalsched and Jones term the ‘redemption of the feminine’ (3). In myth, this usually entails the heroic rescue of a beautiful maiden held captive by a terrifying monster, with these figures respectively representative of ‘the inner core of the personality and its surrounding defenses’ (ibid.). Once the captive is liberated the hero is free to marry her and live happily ever after, in peace and harmony. By vanquishing the complexes imprisoning his inner core, Dexter is able to develop psychically, throwing off the worst excesses of his shadow and moving closer to his hero side. Kalsched and Jones explain that this process ‘can guide us through th[o]se major transitional passages in our personal development where a rebirth or reorientation of consciousness is indicated’ (ibid.) and this reorientation proves to be vital to the reader’s ongoing empathetic engagement with Dexter.

In *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, the dragon figure takes the form of Dexter’s brother Brian, a serial killer known as the ‘Tamiami Slasher’,<sup>39</sup> who preys on Miami’s prostitutes. Like Dexter he was ‘born in blood’ in the shipping container their mother died in, but unlike his brother he was raised in the care of the state without the love of Harry or the guidance of Harry’s Code. The novel’s denouement sees Dexter forced to choose between saving his sister, Deborah, or joining his brother in her murder. Deborah, who was working as an undercover vice cop and is consequently dressed in ‘gold lame hot pants and a skimpy silk blouse tied above her navel’ (*Darkly Dreaming* 255), has been captured by Brian and imprisoned in a shipping container at the same spot where Dexter and Brian’s mother was murdered. Lindsay places a heavy emphasis on what Deborah looks like as she is held captive and the highly visual nature of this scene taps into popular cultural treatments of the ‘damsel in distress’ trope; it also references Deborah’s symbolic role as

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<sup>39</sup> The *Dexter* TV series renames Brian the ‘Ice Truck Killer’.

the 'beautiful maiden' of the dragon myth. This offers a degree of subconscious reassurance to the reader as in the archetypal myth the imperilled maiden rarely comes to harm, due to her rescue by the dashing hero. However, this scenario is complicated by the fact that Deborah is dressed as a prostitute. Her 'sex suit' objectifies her and aligns her with Brian's usual choice of victim; these factors combine with Dexter and Brian's murderous proclivities to make Deborah's position so vulnerable that her murder becomes a real possibility. For the reader, consonance and dissonance become engaged in a cognitive tug-of-war which mimics the torment that Dexter will endure as he struggles with his dark urges.

Having been led to the shipping container by clues brought to him in dreams – clues drawn from vestigial memories as the repressed slowly returns, and from Dexter's connection to the collective unconscious – Dexter realises that something momentous awaits him inside: 'there I would find Deb, too, and find either myself or my not-self' (236). Dexter instinctively knows that within the shipping container individuation will be completed and that the process will be painful and messy. He enters the container unable to remember his mother's murder and unaware of Brian's true identity, but once inside the repressed returns and he is flooded with painful memories and bewildering feelings of terror and abandonment. As Brian fills in the gaps in Dexter's memories and explains how the events shaped them both into killers, Dexter feels a kinship for the first time. When Brian offers him a knife and asks him to join him in killing Deborah he occupies the mythological role of the shadowy being who tries to tempt the hero into performing an evil action. As Kalsched and Jones observe, '[s]uch acts result in expulsion from paradisaical condition. The protection of childhood, as well as the contentment with the past or with what has been achieved, are types of paradise that are lost when life calls for a new adaptation' (2). Dexter's happy existence as a Harry-schooled killer acting out murderous

impulses couched in terms of his childhood complexes is threatened, and as the light of consciousness dawns he is psychically wrenched away from Harry and Deb and the only stability he has ever known. The two function for Dexter as representatives of the parental imago and are his substitutes for the moral complex, or superego, which his psychopathy precludes. As Dexter wrestles with the temptation to join with Brian in killing Deborah he sees her morph into his actual mother; her wide, terror-filled eyes becoming the glassy stare of the dead and her rigid, taped body the unmoving, abject corpse. The horror of the image eliminates the fraternal feelings that had reminded him of Harry's Code and prevented the killing, and reawakens the sentiments of anger and abandonment that the 3-year-old Dexter felt when his mother was murdered. This represents the point in myth when

the world falls into opposites, and "good" and "evil" are assigned their place in the world. The Great Good Mother shows her dark aspect, the hateful or Terrible Mother, while the Creative Father now sits opposite the Destructive Father, and brothers kill each other in the name of love, and the world is alternately either an enchanted or persecutory place. (ibid.)

The loving and virtuous figure of 'Mommy'/Deborah becomes 'Wicked Mommy, who wanted to leave us here alone in the awful cold blood' (*Darkly Dreaming* 270) and as Dexter raises his knife to kill her we see the two faces of Harry: the Creative Father who gave new life to an abandoned and emotionally void boy, and the Destructive Father who created a killer. Dexter's psychic struggle is played out in a tense, dramatic scene as he wrestles with the temptation to join Brian in a reproduction of their mother's murder scene; the knife remains poised above Deborah's chest as Mommy/Deborah and the ghostly voice of Harry do battle with the Dark Passenger. When Dexter voices his helplessness whilst 'growing into the handle of the quivering blade' (ibid. 271), Harry

implores him to only kill those who deserve to die, reminding his son ‘*You’re a good kid, Dex*’ (ibid., original italics) and the reader is pushed into a position of empathy with the poor, tormented child at Dexter’s core. Unable to either plunge the knife into his sister or throw it away, Dexter remains frozen but it is clear that he has fought the Passenger and has striven to adhere to the Code of Harry. His choice to save Deb rather than join Brian represents his reorientation of consciousness to the side of light and law and a (semi) renunciation of killing and darkness. This is a significant turning point in the characterisation of Dexter, as in the subsequent novels in the series he becomes progressively less monstrous and more human.

This reorientation can be seen as a result of Dexter’s symbolic violation of the incest taboo. As noted above, the hero who liberates the imperilled maiden does so as he wishes to marry her and live happily ever after, but Deborah is not only Dexter’s foster sister but also representative of his anima/idealised mother. Jung warns that

[s]ince incest must be avoided at all costs, the result is either the death of the son-lover or his self-castration as punishment for the incest he has committed, or else the sacrifice of instinctuality, and especially of sexuality, as a means of preventing or expiating the incestuous longing. (‘Origin of the Hero’ 147-148)

Dexter’s partial rejection of his cherished shadow side corresponds to the ‘sacrifice of instinctuality’ which in the later books of the series sees him moving increasingly away from darkness and towards detection. Although this is never openly acknowledged in the novels, the careful reader will notice a decrease in the frequency and intensity of Dexter’s kills as the series progresses. In the first novel, Dexter has three victims (one murder is told in flashback), in the second he has two, and in each of the four other books he kills

only one person (although book five, 2010's *Dexter is Delicious*, does end with the promise of one further victim). The first three novels establish Dexter's serial killing credentials within the first 36 pages, in book four the reader must go for more than 100 pages before 'witnessing' Dexter at work, and by book five there are almost 180 pages between the opening of the novel and a Dexter murder. Book five is also notable in that it sees Dexter renounce his shadow self, following the birth of his daughter, Lily Anne. In book six there is a return to earlier form, with the first eleven pages dedicated to Dexter's dispatch of a murderous paedophile. By book seven, however, Dexter appears to have largely forgotten about the 'Need' which powered the earliest novels; his killing of a homicidal stalker takes place between pages 180 and 189 and is notable for both its lack of gusto and its limited narrative space. The viscerality of the first novel also wanes in the subsequent books; apart from a graphic section involving a pair of tin snips and a paedophile's fingers in book two (*Dearly Devoted* 23) the reader is largely spared the gore and misery which would logically attend a serial killer's ministrations, with Lindsay preferring to protect the reader's hard-won identification with his character and obscure Dexter's precise actions via euphemisms and literary sleight-of-hand.

Dexter is repositioned from slayer to sleuth as the novels gradually depart from the conventions of psychopath fiction and turn increasingly towards the police procedural format. This move heralds Dexter's psychological development following the individuation process at the close of the first novel and it also significantly reduces the dissonance experienced by the reader during immersion in the text. By shifting the focus away from Dexter's own killings and onto his pursuit of the opposing characters, Lindsay encourages greater acceptance of and identification with his hero. However, the reduction of dissonance also leads to a reduction in the arousal the dissonance creates in the reader, an action which threatens to disrupt the enjoyment the reader gains from the text. The

unsettling moral ambivalence which titillated readers of the earliest books in the series is increasingly supplied in the later novels by Dexter's brother, Brian, and Rita's children, Cody and Astor. Having escaped from the kill scene at the end of the first novel, Brian disappears from the series before mysteriously reappearing in the fifth book, *Dexter is Delicious*. As noted above, in this novel, Dexter decides to hang up his kill kit and renounce his dark ways following the birth of his daughter. Although this development makes Dexter seem more human and theoretically increases his potential as a locus for the reader's empathy and identification, it also makes him more ordinary and less interesting. The reader who has invested in the series on account of its stimulating levels of cognitive dissonance is forced to seek his or her thrills elsewhere. It is significant that Brian meets this need, as he functions as the dark counterpoint to Dexter; a vision of what Dexter might have become without Harry's tutelage:

...Brian had been forged in the selfsame fire that had turned me into Dexter the Dark, and it had also given him an inarguable need to slice and dice. Unfortunately, he had grown to maturity without the restraints of Harry's guiding code, and he was very happy to practice his art on anyone, provided they were youngish and female. He had been working his way through a string of Miami prostitutes when our paths had first crossed. (61-62)

In book one in particular, the juxtaposition of the two brothers helped to validate the reader's acceptance of Dexter by emphasising the righteousness of Dexter's kills. As Schmid has noted, the technique had been previously used to great effect by Thomas Harris in *The Silence of the Lambs* and '[j]ust as Buffalo Bill allows readers to maintain their attachment to Hannibal Lecter in a relatively untroubled form, so the Ice Truck Killer, despite his family resemblance to Dexter, enables us to continue rooting for the "hero" of the series' ('Devil You Know' 140). In the fifth book, however, where Dexter

has reformed, we find that the contrast between the brothers leads us to actually like Brian *more*. He is funny, smooth and sinister and the fact that he is much more dangerous than Dexter has transformed from a shortcoming into a benefit. The reader is willing to overlook his earlier indiscretions because in this book he offers greater promise for salacious, titillating mayhem. Our shifting allegiance reveals our own shadows and the dissonance created by our acknowledgement of this fact, either on a conscious or subconscious basis, adds to our enjoyment of the novel.

Rita's children, Cody and Astor, were beaten and psychologically abused by their biological father in their early years and the experience was so traumatic that it left them with fledgling Dark Passengers, just like Dexter's:

The sharp and shiny tin soul of Dexter the Avenger was forged from a childhood trauma so violent I had blocked it out completely. It had made me what I am, and I am sure I would sniffle and feel unhappy about that if I was able to feel at all. And these two, Cody and Astor, had been scarred the same way, beaten and savaged by a violent drug-addicted father until they, too, were turned forever away from sunlight and lollipops. As my wise foster father had known in raising me, there was no way to take that away, no way to put the serpent back in the egg. (*In the Dark* 23-24)

The serpent/egg imagery couches their aberration in naturalistic terms, making it seem organic and acceptable. Any sympathy or sadness the reader may feel at the thought of these poor, maltreated children is nullified by the comparison with Dexter and his admission that he is unable to 'feel at all' and is therefore unconcerned about his own childhood trauma. In making the children mirror Dexter's experience, Lindsay ensures that the psychic manoeuvres that have allowed the reader to accept Dexter and his Passenger

are also transferred to the children, so the reader's response to Dexter's revelation about their dark proclivities is one of eager anticipation. When Dexter notices Cody's Passenger in book two, he vows to pass on all of Harry's teachings so that Cody may become 'a new Dark Avenger, carrying the Harry Plan forward against a new generation of monsters' (*Dearly Devoted* 296); it is significant that he emphasises the Harry Code here, as this sanctions our acceptance of a child being trained to kill. Although Dexter reneges on his promise following Lily Anne's birth in book five, the children are delighted when they recognise that the uncle they never knew they had has a similar skillset. When Brian takes Cody and Astor out one evening for 'Chinese food' – which Dexter knows they don't like – Dexter is left with 'a very uncomfortable sense that something very wrong [is] going on' (*Dexter is Delicious* 99). For the reader, however, there is no sense of foreboding; s/he anticipates something delectably dark and this provides the frisson of excitement which has been missing since Dexter reformed. Although Dexter is too preoccupied to piece together the clues littering the text, it is clear to the discerning reader that Brian has taken over the children's training. There is a small sense of triumph for the reader who has uncovered a secret to which Dexter remains oblivious and this both strengthens our acceptance of Brian and ensures that we remain engaged with the text.

It is interesting to note that that the reader's level of engagement and empathetic response is conditioned by the degree of salaciousness in the text. The more voluptuous the violence (or the threat/promise of violence) in the novel, the more avidly the narrative is consumed. Furthermore, in a technique borrowed from Ellis, the passages which most inflame the reader's emotions – descriptions of crime scene victims or passages detailing Dexter's stalk, capture and kill of his adversaries – are those which are relayed in the most dispassionate manner. When describing the victims found at crime scenes, Dexter gives graphic details of their injuries:

It looked like she'd had a very hard time of it. Like the previous victim, this one had been hacked, stabbed, bitten, and clawed with an undisciplined but frenzied abandon, a wild impatience that had left very few patches of visible skin unmarked by trauma. (*Dexter's Final Cut* 176)

As I noted in my discussion of the Father Donovan and Jaworski murders, Lindsay uses such sections to manipulate the reader's response to the text; by contrasting Dexter favourably with the arch-villain of each novel's story arc, Lindsay pushes the reader towards identification with his eponymous hero. The abject corpses left by the arch-villains, often attended by clouds of flies, are described in graphic detail with carefully chosen descriptors such as 'undisciplined', 'frenzied' and 'wild' marking a stark contrast between the animalistic perpetrators and ratiocinative Dexter. However, Dexter's tone when he is relaying this information is typically impassive or sardonic. He may show an interest in the aesthetics of the scene – 'The technique was clumsy, inefficient, even brutal, but it spoke of a wild experimental joy in the work that was a pleasure to see' (ibid. 28) – or he may speak flippantly of something which angers him

In one of the pictures, the boy looked like he was in a silver-gray cocoon, with only certain areas exposed. What MacGregor left exposed told me a great deal about him. As I had suspected, he was not the kind of man most parents would wish for a scout master. (*Dearly Devoted* 14-15)

but he never dwells on *feelings*. Dexter repeatedly tells us that he is incapable of empathy and is unable to feel or express love. His relationship with Rita is simply a means of blending in and appearing normal; she is his 'beard', his disguise, and the fact that she brings with her a ready-made family is an added bonus for a man with an avowed distaste for sex. In fact, sex has very little place in the novel series as a whole. On the rare occasions where it does occur, such as in the first novel when Dexter and Rita

unexpectedly consummate their relationship (*Darkly Dreaming* 149), or Dexter's ecstasy-fuelled sex with fellow kidnappee Samantha Aldovar in *Dexter is Delicious* (242), it is alluded to rather than addressed directly. This is significant in a novel series which places such a heavy emphasis on murder, and seems to relate to Leslie Fiedler's assertion that American literature is pathologically obsessed with death but unable to portray sexual passion. Fiedler's ground-breaking overview of American literature, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), situated the best of American fiction in the Gothic form which has at its heart the 'substitution of terror for love as a central theme... The titillation of sex denied, it offers its readers a vicarious participation in a flirtation with death' (134). Fiedler argues that the gothic themes of alienation and terror allow the American author to explore pathological national concerns without offending discerning readers in a literature dominated by sentimentalism.

These themes can be traced throughout the *Dexter* novel series; the baroque kill scenes staged by the Tamiami Slasher in the first novel and Brandon Weiss in the fourth stand as examples of gothic excess, whilst the supernatural elements introduced to the third novel, *Dexter in the Dark*, address the need to situate the worst extremes of behaviour beyond the human. For all the originality of his 'serial killer who only kills other killers', Lindsay's fictions fit neatly within an American canon which Fiedler defines as overwhelmingly 'gothic, non-realistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic – a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation' (29). The overlaying of sex with death can be seen in the curious passage I quoted earlier, in my discussion of the Father Donovan kill: 'Killing makes me feel good... It's a sweet release, a necessary letting go of all the little hydraulic valves inside... it's not just any killing, of course. It has to be done the right way, at the right time, with the right partner (*Darkly Dreaming* 13). All one needs to do to make this passage relatable is substitute the word 'killing' for 'sex'; indeed,

there is a sense that the reader instinctively understands all of Dexter's descriptions of his 'Need' in sexual terms, a phenomenon which arises from our sado-masochistic relationship with the dissonance emanating from our empathetic acceptance of Dexter and his Passenger. It seems that Geoffrey Gorer's 'pornography of death' has come full circle; that, in a popular culture defined by excess, the two are indistinguishable. Despite this, there remains a coyness in the literature (and, perhaps, society as a whole) whereby the prohibitions surrounding sex remain in place, despite its increasingly explicit and widespread depiction in popular culture. For all its ubiquity in music videos, television shows, advertising, etc., sex remains an essentially intimate, quotidian act usually engaged in by two people in a private setting. Conversely, via the film and television industries, violent death has become an exotic spectacle for mass public consumption and a legitimate source of entertainment. In the *Dexter* books, it seems that killing is also an activity in which the whole family can engage: Dexter and Brian have numerous victims across multiple books, Harry and Deb have killed in the line of duty, and even Rita (accidentally, *By Design* 283), Cody (*In the Dark* 370) and Astor (*Double* 327, *Final Cut* 346) have blood on their hands. Yet when sex and death appear together on the same bill it is risky business; as Carol Clover has shown (*Chainsaws* 33-34), for all the advances in sexual equality and gender relations, sex, particularly in horror films, remains punishable by death.

Lindsay's Miami, as relayed to us by Dexter, is an emotionally void wasteland. Love gets scant mention in the novels and those who do open their hearts (or, worse, their legs) are dealt with harshly. Prostitutes are, of course, easy victims, but romantic love often seems riskier than transactional sex – particularly for women. A college student who sleeps with her professor is ritualistically slain (*In the Dark* 103); Camilla Figg falls deeply in love with Dexter and is pounded to death by a cop killer (*Double Dexter* 173); eighteen-

year-old Samantha Aldovar is killed by cannibalistic vampires following her deflowering by Dexter (*Delicious* 339). Even Dexter's wife, Rita, is ultimately slain by a paedophiliac TV star (*Final Cut* 351) who is pursuing a sexual relationship with her underage daughter, and Jackie Forrest, the celebrity that Dexter is about to leave Rita for, is killed by the same man (*ibid.* 310).

Dexter's relationship with Jackie marks a startling change in the cold, emotionless psychopath of the earlier novels. Assigned as a technical adviser to the stars of a TV pilot, Dexter falls in love with the character based on his sister Deborah (who, in her role as Dexter's substitutive 'Mommy', which I discussed during my analysis of the denouement of *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, was previously the locus of Dexter's subconscious, pre-oedipal, incestuous longings). As noted above, in *Dexter's Final Cut* Dexter kills only one person and this brief and perfunctory event does not occur until page 189. Dexter's apathetic approach to killing in this novel appears to be the result of his character's slow reorientation towards detection and away from death, which began following the individuation process at the close of *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*. Dexter's 'Will Graham moments', where he temporarily inhabits the psyche of the killers he hunts in sudden and vivid visions – '*And I see her, see the way she thrashes, moans, twists wildly against the ropes*' (63, original italics) – also become more frequent and pronounced and the Dark Passenger itself is at one point tellingly recast as the 'Dark Detective' (317). In contrast to Dexter's diminished dark desires, there is mention of innumerable instances of sex between Dexter and Jackie (246, 248, 255, 256, 278 and 292), including a very detailed and uncharacteristic paragraph on Dexter's fascination with Jackie's breast and nipple (248). The subconscious process of renunciation which began in book one, when Dexter chose to save Deb rather than join Brian in her killing, reaches its culmination in this seventh (and possibly final) novel. The 'sacrifice of instinctuality' (Jung, Origin of the

Hero 148), which saw Dexter reject his shadow and embrace his hero self, has culminated in his return to (almost) normal emotional functioning. Dexter has fallen in love with Jackie and for the first time appears to have access to virtually the full range of human sentiments. It is ironic that, earlier in the novel, Dexter tells us that ‘Deb knows what I am [a serial killer], and in her limited way she almost approves’ (242), yet when Deb discovers her brother’s infidelity she is unable to forgive him: ‘I don’t think I ever want to talk to you again’ (276). The true crime is one of sex, not murder, and in this we see America’s Fiedleran pathology laid bare.

Increasingly, these national concerns also include a fascination with celebrities who have become an acceptable locus of estranged, unattainable sexuality. Gossip magazines, reality TV shows and tabloid newspapers abound with images of scantily clad stars and editorial detailing their outrageous and decadent lifestyles. The remoteness of these figures, the gulf between the stars and those who avidly consume media dedicated to them, defuses the tension between their overt sexuality and the censorious moral culture that Fiedler identifies. In many ways, it is the *status* of celebrity which is beguiling to the consumer, with the hypersexualised image simply a PR strategy dedicated to securing column inches. In *Dexter’s Final Cut*, Jackie Forrest is a highly successful and publicly adored star of film and TV and Dexter is as seduced by her fame as he is by her appearance and personality. This would have been unthinkable in the earlier novels, as Dexter’s rigid training by Harry emphasised the importance of keeping a low profile to avoid detection, yet less than a third of the way into *Dexter’s Final Cut*, Dexter basks in Jackie’s reflected glory:

Someone in the throng yelled, “Whoo!” and I felt myself smiling with pleasure. I knew it was for Jackie – but I was *with* her, part of her

entourage, and in a moment of truly bizarre insight, I realized I liked it. I enjoyed having idiot smiles following in my wake. (113)

This adulation-by-proxy feeds Dexter's psychopathic grandiosity and narcissism, but more complicated territory is also being negotiated. The conflation of celebrity and serial killing mirrors the phenomenon that Schmid identifies in his book, *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* (2005), which addresses the iconic status accorded to serial killers in contemporary society. Schmid argues that the current fascination with stardom is rooted in the celebrity's equivocal status as somebody who is at once recognisable and utterly alien; a status which equally applies to the enigmatic serial killer. The attraction of repulsion which has always attended the grotesque and the monstrous is intensified in the serial killer, whose carnivalesque contraventions of law and morality allow the ghoulish consumer to vicariously transgress society's boundaries from within the comforting bounds of hegemony. The glamorous celebrity offers a similar means of escape; for every photograph of a red carpet event or sumptuous yacht party there is editorial detailing breakdowns, addictions and other human failings. This allows the reader to vicariously experience A-list life whilst revelling in its attendant miseries; miseries which can make us feel grateful for our own lives. Furthermore, our ambiguous response to the celebrity helps us to mediate our response to those serial killers who have transcended mere notoriety to become famous in their own right:

Our complicated relationship with celebrities, affective as well as intellectual, composed of admiration and resentment, envy and contempt, provides us with a lexicon through which we can manage our appalled and appalling fascination with the serial killer. (Schmid, *Natural Born* 25)

So, when Dexter fantasises about leaving behind his ordinary life to enjoy the reflected glory and material trappings of Jackie's fame it seems plausible to the reader who is

already familiar with the celebrity status of such killers as Ted Bundy and Richard Ramirez. There is an irony, of course, in the fact that a man so dedicated to what Seltzer terms ‘psychasthenic vanishing’ (136) should crave the limelight, but there is symmetry to it too. Serial killers such as Henry Lee Lucas in America or the UK’s self-styled ‘Crossbow Cannibal’, Stephen Griffiths, craved notoriety and revelled in the attention their trials afforded them, and Seltzer attributes the need for self-making and aspirations for celebrity to ‘the conditions of an anonymous mass society’ (135). Of course, the celebrity attached to such killers came after their arrest; in fiction, too, the ‘stardom’ of killers such as Hannibal Lecter was attached to them during their time in prison. Although Dexter is increasingly seduced by the attention paid to Jackie and the other stars of the television pilot, he hopes to remain free to slice and dice:

...Dexter must maintain a low profile or cease to be Dexter. Still, I found that I felt larger, more handsome, certain that great wit fell from my lips every time I parted them to speak. It was invigorating, intoxicating, and I enjoyed it... (*Final Cut* 113)

Yet Dexter in this novel *has* already ‘cease[d] to be Dexter’. His ‘Need’ has all but vanished and he experiences real human emotions; he is no longer a facsimile of one of us, but one of us in actuality. It is fitting, then, that this newly ‘ordinary’ man should finally be forced to pay for his crimes. Part of the reader’s acceptance of Dexter’s killings was bought on the understanding that Dexter was different to us; possessed of a special aptitude that allowed him to do the things that nobody else could. In *Dexter’s Final Cut*, everybody’s favourite psychopath has turned into a man capable of love, a development which hints that he has potential for further emotional growth. He remains callous and self-centred, as one would expect from a psychopath; the overwhelming, life-changing love that he felt for Lily Anne in book five is reduced to ‘a very small twinge’ (290) and he is

happy to leave her and the rest of his family to pursue a life with Jackie. Dexter still professes an urge to purge humanity of its more undesirable members, although the contrast between the driving Need of book one and the background murmur of the slumbering Passenger in book seven is starkly rendered.

The denouement of *Dexter's Final Cut* sees our hero racing to save Astor from the clutches of predatory paedophile, Robert Chase, who has also murdered Jackie Forrest and, earlier, her PA, Kathy. Rita, who reached the house before him, has been attacked by Chase and left bound and gagged, teetering on the brink of death (342). When Dexter arrives to rescue them, he is quickly overpowered by the actor who attempts to kill him before being stabbed to death by Astor. Rather than feeling relief at his lucky escape, Dexter quickly realises that the damning scene could be enough to implicate him in the murders of Jackie and Chase. Rita's testimony is his only chance of proving his innocence, but she dies while he is untying her and cannot be resuscitated. There is an aptness to this, as Dexter himself notes:

...even I had to admit that I deserved it. My entire career had never been more than a prelude to prison. I'd kept ahead of Just Desserts for a very long time by using my wits – but recent events proved those were gone, dried up and blown away like last autumn's leaves. It was all over: inarguably, inescapably over, and as I admitted that to myself, I even felt a little bit of relief. (352)

It is fitting that the novel – and possibly the series – should end on a note of uncertainty. By leaving the situation unresolved, Lindsay leaves the reader in a state of limbo and the novel's ambiguous ending mirrors the moral ambivalence which has characterised the entire series. Dexter may be innocent in this instance but there are 57 slides in his

rosewood box (298), memento mori of the lives he has taken. Dexter's crimes have offered the reader a means to both transgress and reinscribe the moral interdictions that underpin the dominant fictions of society and we need him, in the end, to pay for his crimes. Having flirted with death, order must be restored; just as Dickens crushed Rigaud, so Lindsay must contain his psychopath. When Dexter decides to 'face the music' (352) the reader is a spectator rather than a collaborator, the 'we' of the novels' darkest sections resolutely replaced with the first person singular: 'I took out my phone and I called it in. Then I sat with Astor and waited for the music to start' (352). The reader may have joined Dexter in his 'Dark Dance' (*Dearly Devoted* 114), but in the end s/he is not committed to this allegiance. The fictional trajectory of the psychopath finds its culmination in a figure that has become so naturalised that it has lost many of the characteristics that made it so compelling and engaging. Psychopathic Dexter's psychological and emotional growth may be clinically suspect; it is also literarily unsatisfying. The enigmatic psychopath who looks normal but remains 'other' has been revealed as just another fallible human being and, like us, he must pay for his mistakes.

## Conclusion

As this thesis has shown, narrative poetics determine the reading position from which a text is accessed and guide the reader to a spectrum of responses, ranging from alienation and resistance to empathy and identification. Immersion in the text can be of varying depth; a reader may remain aware of the literary experience, or s/he may temporarily surrender her- or himself to the narrative and temporarily merge with a fictional character. This kind of ‘counterfactual reasoning’ (Ryan 111), what Ryan calls ‘mental simulation’ (ibid.), occurs at the deepest level of empathetic engagement and can lead to a reader thinking and feeling *with* characters as the action unfolds. This is a powerful effect which can occur in any kind of literature, but when the character that the reader identifies with is a morally reprehensible psychopath, its potency is revealed by disconcerting feelings of ambivalence. The cognitive dissonance created when a reader thinks and feels in a way which runs counter to personal and social mores can be difficult to reconcile. Dissonance may however be mitigated by a number of techniques, such as those outlined by Festinger (see page 10) or Leitch (see page 10-11).

The novel offers the reader a safe way to vicariously transgress societal norms and explore alternative versions of consciousness and experience. Ego identification is central to reader enjoyment of, and emotional and psychic participation in, literary texts and therefore to the process of identification itself. Empathetic engagement with characters and situations may represent the subconscious fulfilment of repressed wishes and create a pleasurable release of psychic tension in the neurotic reader (according to Freud, we are all neurotic to some degree or other). Of course, it is important to remember that identification is not a narrative technique but something which occurs in the reader, in response to textual

triggers. The author may attempt to push the reader towards particular responses to a text, but reception can vary with multiple readings, even with the same reader. Resistance can also be scripted into a text's range of implications or it may arise spontaneously in the reader; counter readings are always possible. Furthermore, cognitive responses may be multiple, with empathy and resistance present in the same text and in relation to the same character. The plurality of potential responses mimics the range of possible spontaneous reactions to narrative and recognises also the diversity of human subjectivity.

In the course of this thesis I have explored a variety of fictional representations of the psychopath and analysed the poetics which seek to place readers in positions of empathy or resistance in relation to this divisive and enigmatic figure. Charles Dickens, as we have seen, mainly employed a conventional heterodiegetic narrator although his use of it was far from conformist. His polyphonic technique allowed him to create, in *Little Dorrit*, a complex panoply of voices, each with equal diegetic weight. Dickens was beguiled by his psychopath and, although the ending of the novel betrays ambivalence and guilt, he clearly enjoyed exercising this shadow figure in the narrative. *Little Dorrit's* psychopath, Rigaud, is of vital importance to the story but, as befits such a liminal character, he operates on the margins of the narrative. The text's suspicion of Rigaud keeps the reader at a distance; empathy and acceptance of the psychopath is limited due to the lack of access that the author grants to Rigaud's psyche. Despite Dickens's obvious fascination with Rigaud, ultimately order must be restored and the psychopath is reduced to nameless matter. The interaction between character, narrator and even, at times, author, creates an impressive yet subtle display which mimics the manipulative behaviour of the prototypical psychopath.

In *Crime and Punishment*, Fyodor Dostoevsky also uses a heterodiegetic narrator; however, his novel is more experimental and his poetics have a more pronounced effect on

the reader. His novel was the first to combine a dialogic technique with a pronounced and prolonged interest in psychological disorder and criminality. The level of entrancement is deeper in this novel, as Dostoevsky's narrative technique allows the reader to become more psychologically immersed in the text. Indeed, mental simulation occurs to such an extent that descriptions of Raskolnikov's mental anguish also affect the reader; many readers report feeling changed by their harrowing encounter with the narrative. The reader also experiences greater empathy for and acceptance of the focalising character, as a result of the increased access that the narrative grants to Raskolnikov's consciousness. With greater interiority comes greater proximity to the more challenging aspects of Raskolnikov's philosophy; moral ambivalence consequently becomes more prevalent as the reader struggles to reconcile his or her acceptance of the character with the hostility that Raskolnikov's actions and beliefs inspire.

The interest that Dostoevsky shows in the representation of aberrant psychology in fiction was later capitalised on by William Faulkner. His efforts to accurately represent consciousness led him to become one of the first authors to experiment with an almost exclusively first person format. The result is a novel that is powerful and effective, but difficult to read. The narrative is so complex that it verges on the abstruse, the a-chronicity of memory monologues and the specificity of personal perception rendering it at times unintelligible. Despite the use of a homodiegetic first-person narrator empathy is also strained, proving that narrative situation does not always encourage an empathetic response from the reader. Although the reader encounters the diegesis from a privileged position within the consciousness of the focalizing character, s/he remains largely an outsider, looking in. Faulkner's technique is paradoxically *too* immersive and the varying success of the four monologues reveals that a degree of narration is necessary to lead the reader to a position of empathy and identification, and concomitant mental simulation.

Nonetheless, the narrative figuring of consciousness was to remain a key concern of the modernist period and the innovations Faulkner made in the representation of aberrant psychology were to have a lasting effect. His typographical signalling of mental disorder and dechronologised subjectivity would later be found in the works of authors such as Horace McCoy and Jim Thompson, with the techniques becoming so well-established that Thompson was even able to satirise them in his novel *The Killer Inside Me*. Perhaps most significantly for this study of the poetics of identification in psychopath fiction, Faulkner's positioning of psychopathic subjectivity as *normal* was of vital importance. Faulkner's psychopath, Jason, is recognisable and accessible; his domestic context and personal and professional frustrations transform his selfish psychopathy into a point of identification. For the first time in the fictional trajectory of the psychopath, the reader is able to relate to the psychopathic character – a development in the representation of the psychopath made possible by Jason's ordinariness.

This ordinariness was to become a key element in depictions of psychopathy in the twentieth century, a century that saw an exponential increase in narratives focusing on psychopathic characters. Cultural drivers for the heightened interest in the psychopath included the horrors of two World Wars and depictions became increasingly sophisticated during this period. Early twentieth century depictions saw a greater focus on the psychological impetus for the psychopath's actions and this led to increased empathy and acceptance of the psychopathic figure. Freud's theories became much more widely known in the post-war period due to the work that he did on trauma and his influence can be felt in much of the period's cultural output. The horrors of war had heightened awareness of the dark, aggressive drives at the heart of human nature and the psychopath became a convenient means of expressing the issues this raised. The emphasis on psychology, particularly from the 1940s onwards, reflects psychoanalytical and pharmacological

advances in the treatment of mental illnesses and a broader awareness and acceptance of mental illness and mental aberrance in society. Technical terms for mental conditions also became more current and precise, and psychopathy itself became more firmly established and understood due to the work of Hervey M. Cleckley. These social, cultural and scientific factors fed into literary representations of psychopathy and, in a move started by Dostoevsky, the fictional psychopath gradually became less of a monster and more a recognisable member of society. A concerted move towards homodiegetic first person narratives ensured that the reader remained in close proximity to the psychopath although, heeding Faulkner, the uninterrupted unfolding of sense perceptions took second place to self-narration and self-quoted monologues. Propinquity to the psychopath ensured a certain degree of empathetic attachment to the focalising character, which was reinforced via subsequent narrative techniques aimed at enhancing the state of entrancement and encouraging mental simulation. Moral ambivalence consequently also retreats slightly during this period, particularly in the novels of Patricia Highsmith and Jim Thompson, where the psychopath's crimes often go unpunished. This gives rise to what Horsley terms 'a fantasy of impunity sustained by lack of narrative closure' (132), a development which marks a new direction in the fictional trajectory of the psychopath.

Literary interest in psychopathy around the middle of the twentieth century also led to an increase in the number of authors aiming for an imaginative understanding of 'real life' psychopaths; documentary and non-fiction novels, which turned factual events into literary entertainment, adopted a moral tone which sought to bring a semblance of respectability. A drive to understand those psychopaths whose horrific crimes had captured the public imagination placed great store by psychological profiling of the perpetrators and their motivations, and looked to causality theories in an attempt to explain the seemingly inexplicable. The result was an attempt at nullification, at rationalising the crimes and the

criminals behind them as a way of containing them. The interface between fictional and ‘factional’ representations of the psychopath in literature is interesting, in that there is a degree of crossover between the two forms. The reader of pulp or noir fiction can feel sympathy or empathy for a character like Ripley in a relatively untroubled way, yet Truman Capote’s sympathetic treatment of Perry Smith in *In Cold Blood* was met with a storm of contemporary disapprobation which continues to concern readers today.

However, it seems that debate should centre less on sensitive depictions of psychopaths in true crime and more on popular cultural responses to psychopaths in general, as it is the lack of clear moral response which is at issue. The narrative possibilities offered by characters that are unfettered by emotion and affect are enthralling and the presentation of the psychopath and his nefarious behaviour as entertainment has shaped cultural conceptions of the figure. Capote’s sympathetic portrayal of Perry Smith was controversial, but it also tapped a human need to demystify and rationalise the seemingly monstrous and incomprehensible. *In Cold Blood* brought respectability to the true crime genre and fuelled ongoing interest in the psychopath. This interest was to influence the serial killer subgenre which emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century and was shaped by both the popular, escapist literature which valorised the psychopath and the true crime which sought to contain him. This ambivalence, and the increase of interest in the psychopath which follows from it, mirrors reader response to the figure and the dominance of the serial killer subgenre in the popular culture of the 1980s and 1990s speaks to its widespread and long-lasting appeal. It is not without irony, however, that one can note how the ‘fantasy of impunity’, explored by pulp writers such as Thompson or noirists like Highsmith, feeds the fear of random, senseless crimes and the breakdown of community which true crime literature seeks to assuage.

The serial killer subgenre, and its multiple representations of charismatic, likeable psychopaths roaming the cities, killing indiscriminately and often getting away scot-free, stoked the culture of fear in urban and rural America. The ubiquity of the subgenre meant it was also influential in bringing the psychopath into the mainstream. Thomas Harris was instrumental in this, due to the extraordinary reach and appeal of his character, Hannibal Lecter, and also by his focus on, and links with, the FBI. That the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit had a media profile of its own only added to the perceived legitimacy of the fears surrounding serial killers, which were highly exaggerated by popular culture. In *American Psycho*, Bret Easton Ellis draws on a range of precedents to create a groundbreaking psychopath who exploits the opposing dynamics of attraction and repulsion at the heart of reader engagement with the fictional psychopath. The reader becomes startlingly aware of his or her own role in this dialectic and is also cognisant of the extraordinary power of poetics as immersion shifts between imaginative involvement, where the reader remains aware and potentially appreciative of the author's handling of his material, and entrancement. Early reviews of *American Psycho*, such as Roger Rosenblatt's famous denouncement of Ellis's 'loathsome' prose (*New York Times*, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1990) and Naomi Wolf's dismissal of the novel as 'the single most boring book I have ever had to endure' (34), reveal that many commentators were unsure about Ellis's talent. This uncertainty made the novel even more powerful, by placing an untrammelled focus on its violence and alleged misogyny. During the state of entrancement, and the mental simulation that it calls forth, the reader is brought all too close to the fictional psyche of the titular psychopath and in a text which is so overtly subversive, this closeness can be difficult for the reader to accept. Yet rather than offer solutions to the dissonance created, Ellis's text seeks to confront readers with their complicity and with the moral ambivalence

created by the consumption of violence and suffering as entertainment. The novel is a cultural landmark, in terms of both its representation of psychopathy and its poetics.

The lack of resolution in *American Psycho* relates to the ‘fantasy of impunity’ explored by the pulps and to the serial killer subgenre’s flirtation with terrifying, uncontrollable monstrosity. It is also indicative of its time; the excess of the late 1980s coded into Bateman’s boundless appetite for murder. It is interesting, then, that the character of Dexter in Jeff Lindsay’s series of novels, should be a figure of retribution. Lindsay draws heavily and self-consciously on his literary forebears to bring cultural fascination with the psychopath to its logical conclusion in the heroic serial killer. As a witty and personable vigilante working for the greater social good, he represents a psychopath the reader may easily like and support. His supporting role within hegemony, as a member of the Miami Dade Police Department, further facilitates reader empathy and identification with the character. Dexter’s ‘mask of sanity’ is such that he blends seamlessly in with the crowd; his explanations of his aberrance draw the reader into complicity with him, rather than pushing him or her away. However, this psychopath is normalised to such an extent that he begins to move away from those elements which were originally so alluring as he becomes progressively more ordinary and more human. It seems ironic, yet strangely fitting, that the fullest expression of the psychopath trope should lead to its nullification. The fictional trajectory of the psychopath comes full circle, ending where it began, with the symbolic containment and neutralisation of the threat posed by this figure. Popular culture has been so filled with representations of psychopathy – a condition which affects just 1% of the population – that it has come to be seen as just one more version of normal human experience. Character traits that in fiction would formerly have been reserved for the hero have been appropriated by Lindsay’s psychopath, suggesting, perhaps, that ‘normal’ human beings are unable to offer satisfying solutions to

the problems of the modern world. If Bateman is symptomatic of 1980s excess, then Dexter is representative of the twenty first century need to curb those excesses; the ‘licenced release’ of carnival ultimately serving the ‘interests of that very official culture which it apparently opposes’ (Stallybrass and White 13).

That the most recent book in Lindsay’s series was published a little over six months ago speaks to the ongoing popularity of the character, yet in broader popular culture representations of the psychopath are sometimes now regarded with a degree of cynicism. Martin McDonagh’s 2012 film, *Seven Psychopaths*, questions the validity of psychopath narratives, positing them as hackneyed, boring and overexposed. It is impossible to predict what the next development of the psychopath narrative will be and there may be a fallow period whilst we wait to see what happens next. What remains clear, though, is the fact that psychopaths have been the main drivers of some of the most successful and enduring TV series of the last decade. Series such as HBO’s *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), Levinson/Fontana’s *Oz* (1997-2003), Showtime’s *Dexter* (2006-2013) and HBO’s *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-present) capitalised on the dramatic potential of the psychopath and this trend shows no signs of abating. AMC’s award-winning series *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) has achieved cult status and although its protagonist, Walter White, is not in fact a psychopath, global audiences have been captivated by his descent into megalomania. As he builds his meth empire, Walt becomes progressively more ruthless and callous – psychopathic traits which are increasingly valorised as the series progresses. The lure of the psychopath seems as strong as ever, but writers are faced with finding fresh ways of handling their material. Free from the confines of word count and limited narrative space, long television series can be far more successful than novels at developing characters and story arcs; it is therefore likely that the psychopath will continue

to be explored on screen, with novels functioning as a testing ground and fertile source of developments in this area.

Joyce Carol Oates's *Zombie* demonstrates that further experimentation is possible in psychopath fiction and that responses to the literary psychopath are as multiple and varied as subjectivity itself. This multiplicity is mirrored by the reading process also; the potential for seemingly endless variation ensuring that reader fascination with the enigmatic psychopath does not abate. The tantalising glimpse into the consciousness of the definitive other promises a thought-provoking literary experience; the ambivalence generated during empathetic engagement with such a figure ensuring that the experience lingers long after the reader has finished the book. The plurality of response is also enticing; the vagaries of subjectivity, emotional response and reader reception shifting from reading to reading. Going forward, perhaps the only constant will be human interest in criminality and aberrant psychology; for as long as there are literary devils, there will be people who wish to empathise with them.

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