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1/ A Funny Thing
2/ Gordon Burn and 'British New Journalism'

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Abstract

This thesis proposes that a body of British writing has emerged since the early 1980s which could be called 'British New Journalism'. In defining a new category of literature, the creative and critical elements of this thesis offer an original contribution to knowledge.

In Part I, this discrete genre is exemplified in a fictional biography, *A Funny Thing*. Underpinning the novel is a set of emerging 'rules' which are influenced by, but distinct from, those of American New Journalism. The narrative is set between the 1960s and the present day and follows the impact of Motor Neurone Disease on Norman and Freddy, a C list double act. It culminates in the mercy killing by Freddy (the narrator) of his partner. It is suggested that the integration of real, historical detail with fiction, unconventional use of footnotes and scripted material and implied critique of post-war British society locate this work within British New Journalism.

In Part II, a critical work defines the genre and examines how novels and non-fiction books within it appraise society through the lens of real lives. Gordon Burn is located as the most significant writer in this field. His role is initially traced through a study of the influence of American New Journalism on his storytelling and reference to 'rules' articulated by Tom Wolfe and exemplified by Norman Mailer and Truman Capote. Through detailed analysis of Burn's novels, biographies, and 'true crime' works which best illustrate emerging genre conventions, it is shown that British New Journalism differs from the US genre in its extension of real, fictional, famous, and ordinary lives as cyphers for dysfunction in communities and wider society. Finally, the ongoing impact of Burn and his hybrid version of New Journalism on subsequent British writers is exemplified by close reference to the works of David Peace and Andrew O'Hagan.

The thesis concludes that, while more extensive study of a wider range of writers will be useful, the research offers sufficient evidence that British New Journalism is a distinctive genre that continuous to develop and adapt to current societal strands.

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Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, and that all questions and quotes from other people's research are clearly marked as such and fully referenced. I also declare that I have never submitted any of this work to this or any other institution in fulfilment of any academic qualifications.

Introduction

I read British novelist Gordon Burn's fictionalized memoir of the 1950s' singing star Alma Cogan when it was issued in paperback in 1991. Two years later, I read his 1981 work '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' about the Yorkshire Ripper. I was struck by his technique; the appropriation of real lives and a journalistic approach to description combined to create thought-provoking narratives formed from the backstories of both known and unknown people. His central interest in the dynamics of celebrity and notoriety reminded me of the American new journalists such as Norman Mailer and Truman Capote whose writing I was familiar with. Burn's work, though, read differently, and extended individual characterizations to a wider critique of UK communities and institutions. Over the subsequent years, reading of British novelists such as David Peace and Andrew O'Hagan led me to form my research question: Is British New Journalism a discrete genre?

I approached this question both as a novelist and a reader. Burn's portrayals of celebrity and stand-up comedian Stewart Lee's memoir inspired me to write the novel *A Funny Thing* in the form of a fictional memoir which extensively uses the non-fictional device of footnotes and appendices. This novel, which constitutes the creative element of this thesis, traces the story of a C list double act from the 1960s to the present day, and culminates in the mercy killing by Freddy (the narrator) of his partner Norman, who is dying from Motor Neuron Disease. It is contended that this integration of real, historical detail with fiction and the implied critique of post-war British society locates this work within the British New Journalism genre.

The accompanying critical work begins with exemplification of the influence of the 'rules' of American New Journalism on Gordon Burn's novels and 'true crime' works. It moves on to consider Burn's unique interpretation of the principles of New Journalism and the resulting representation of British society and culture. Insight to the influence of Burn's writing on his British contemporaries Andrew O'Hagan and David Peace leads to conclusion that the body of work presented by these writers constitutes a distinctly British New Journalism which has at heart a critique of contemporary Britain.

Gordon Burn and 'British New Journalism'

Introduction to Critical

There is a long history of journalists using the tools of their trade to write fiction. The narrative conventions of the press have been used in fictional works from the 16th century until modern times: just as the ‘news ballads’ of the 1500s would guide journalism in the 1600s, so the journalism of the 17th century would shape the theme and structure of the early novel in the 18th.²⁷⁵ Daniel Defoe’s career as a journalist was central to his development as a novelist, and his contribution to the development of the form cannot be overestimated.

Although many reviews, pamphlets and journals were produced before Defoe, it was his tri-weekly journal *The Review*, opinion based on facts of the day, that established their popularity. Part of that success derived from the content; the scrutiny of the relationship between England and France (*The Review* was originally called *The Review of the Affairs of France*). Defoe wrote the journal from 1704 until 1713 before applying his skills to prose fiction. His first novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, was published in 1719 when he was 59. Within its preface one sentence might serve as the mission statement of literary journalism: ‘The editor believes the thing to be a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it.’²⁷⁶ Written in a first person autobiographical style, not only may it lay claim to be the first novel written in English, but also the first to be influenced by a journalistic presentation of facts. Defoe made the work appear more realistic by providing an editor’s comment. It might seem to give Defoe a claim on the title of First New Journalist, but of course, he wasn’t. The fact is that the editorial, and the entire novel, were a fiction from start to finish, loosely based on the account of shipwrecked Scot, Alexander Selkirk. The New Journalism that I’ll discuss in this paper might owe much of its spirit and style to its antecedents, but its conventions developed much later.

The turn towards realism initiated by Defoe continued throughout the 18th century in Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels, or Travels into Several Nations of the World, in Four Parts, by Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships* (1726), Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1748), Henry Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), and Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and*

²⁷⁵ A detailed account of the shift from the ‘news ballads’ to journalism is given in Lennard J. Davis’s, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

²⁷⁶ Preface to *Robinson Crusoe*.

Opinions of Tristram Shandy (1759). The full titles are given here to reflect not only the pseudo-autobiographical form but also the journalistic detail of the titles.

In the following century, Charles Dickens developed and enriched this tradition with his collection *Sketches by Boz* (1836). The book is divided up into clear sections: Our Parish, Scenes, Characters, and Tales. It is the last of these which is considered Dickens first work of fiction. Indeed, the story 'Mr Minns and His Cousin' was originally published three years previously as 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk', in *The Monthly Magazine*. Dickens had been working as a journalist when he made this transition. The character sketches, the scenes and the pieces on the parish are all grounded in fact: Dickens was reporting what he saw. Compare this sketch from 'Scenes', where he describes night-time London, to a scene from *Little Dorrit* (1855-1857) he would write twenty years later:

But the streets of London, to be beheld in the very height of their glory, should be seen on a dark, dull, murky winter's night when there is just enough damp gently stealing down to make the pavement greasy, without cleansing it of any of its impurities; and when the heavy hazy mist which hangs over every object, makes the gas lamps look brighter, and the brilliantly-lighted shops look splendid, from the contrast they present to the darkness around. All the people who are at home on such a night as this, seem disposed to make themselves as snug and comfortable as possible; and the passengers in the streets have excellent reason to envy the fortunate individuals who are seated by their own firesides.

and...

Three o'clock, and half past three, and they had passed over London Bridge. They had heard the rush of the tide against the obstacles; and looked down, awed, through the dark vapour of the river; had seen little spots of lighted water where the bridge lamps were reflected, shining like demon eyes, with a terrible fascination in them for guilt and misery. They had shrunk past homeless people, lying coiled up in nooks. They had run from drunkards. They had started from slinking men, whistling and signing to one another at bye corners, or running away at full speed. Though everywhere the leader and the guide, Little Dorritt, happy for once in her youthful appearance, feigned to cling to and rely upon Maggy. And more than once some voice, from among a knot of brawling or prowling figures in their path, had called out to the rest to 'let the woman and the child go by!'

The precision of the description in the second extract, as Little Dorritt and Maggy walk through the London night until daybreak, points us towards the disciplined documentation of real life demonstrated in journalism. As in the first piece from *Sketches by Boz*, we can imagine Dickens with notebook in hand walking this route. There appears to be little difference in the accuracy of the portrayal of both scenes and it is perhaps this discipline that lends to the fiction a striking veracity. Equally, it is possible to look at the first piece and suggest that what gives it its journalistic integrity is not just the precision of the detail but the literary devices incorporated within its text: for instance, to describe the winter's night as 'dark, dull, murky' is to cross the line between straightforward description to a more creative evocation. Likewise, to personify the damp on the streets as 'gently stealing down' is to enrich the scene with a style more often associated with literature, and a new intersection between fiction, journalism and reportage begins to form.

Across the Atlantic, some forty years later, Mark Twain would publish *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), a book directly influenced by people and events he reported on in many newspapers and magazines over the preceding twenty years.²⁷⁷ Twain was fully aware of the credibility a twisted fact could give to a story: 'I knew from experience the proneness of journalists to lie.'²⁷⁸ In his day, this tendency was rarely deployed in a concerted attempt to destroy the reputations of those the public traditionally held in high regard and tell truth to power. The 20th century, however, would usher in an era where truths, untruths, deduction and speculation about people and events could converge to shine a spotlight on carefully constructed public images.

In *Eminent Victorians* (1918), Lytton Strachey used the literary devices of hyperbole and irony, techniques wielded to great effect by Jonathan Swift and other earlier satirists, to pierce the perfect reputations of Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Thomas Arnold and General Gordon. The irreverence shown towards these national heroes set a tone for the time that reflected a profound shift in social relations following World War I. In the preface to the book Strachey states: 'Je n'impose; je ne propose rien; j'expose.'²⁷⁹ In addition to presenting facts, Strachey tapped into the trend to study of the human mind and behaviour to provide psychological insight into his four subjects, something that was not

²⁷⁷ I shall discuss this in more detail when analysing use of dialect and direct speech in the next chapter.

²⁷⁸ From a speech Twain gave to the *Monday Evening Club*, 1873.
marktwainstudies.com/the-alternative-facts-of-1863-mark-twains-a-bloody-massacre-near-carson/

²⁷⁹ 'I impose nothing; I propose nothing; I expose.'

common in the biographical form at the time. He dismantled monoliths, or, as Edmond Wilson observed:

Lytton Strachey's chief mission, of course, was to take down once and for all the pretensions of the Victorian age to moral superiority...neither the Americans or the English have ever, since *Eminent Victorians* appeared, been able to feel quite the same about the legends that had dominated their pasts. Something had been punctured for good.²⁸⁰

Today, Strachey's influence is still acknowledged. In a *Guardian* piece on *Eminent Victorians* in 2002, Paul Levy noted, '...the form of biography had been changed forever. Strachey gave posterity a licence to experiment.'²⁸¹

It was not only the biographer and the reporter who populated their narratives with real people and events. Novelists, too, would disguise real figures with different names and situate them in fictional events. Modernists such as James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis evolved from the past and experimented with forms and styles from both worlds to drive the shape and content of the novel to new places that reflected the uncertain socio-political landscape deriving from World War I. We know who many of the characters in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Lewis's *The Apes of God* (1930) are, but the books are clearly fictions. While both had some experience of working as critics and reviewers their works remain literature, not journalism.

One modernist, though, whose fiction was even more strongly influenced by his career as a reporter is Ernest Hemingway. His work on *The Toronto Star* had a direct impact on the content and style of his future writing. His short travel article, 'At Vigo, In Spain, is Where You Catch the Silver and Blue Tuna, the King of all Fish' (1922)²⁸² anticipates the subject matter and minimalistic style that would later be extended in longer works like the novella *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). His other publications in the 1920s suggest an attempt by Hemingway to break with the conventions of novelistic language and carve out new descriptive territory. His *Toronto Star* essay 'Pamplona In July' (1923) is journalism and an evident precursor to his novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Doug Underwood has pointed out the difference between the two: '...the novel's prose has a finer, more flowing

²⁸⁰ Wilson, Edmond. *The New Republic*. 21 September, 1932.

²⁸¹ Levy, Paul. 'A String Quartet in Four Movements', *The Guardian*, 20 July, 2002. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/jul/20/featuresreviews.guardianreview22> [accessed 21 March, 2018].

²⁸² *The Toronto Star Weekly*. February 18, 1922.

verisimilitude, not the least because Hemingway's writing is more confident and refined, and because, it is clear, he was reaching for a higher literary effect in the writing of his fictional version.'²⁸³

That Hemingway attached greater value to his fictional prose more is clear from the following statement: 'I have never considered journalism as any permanent value or in any way connected with my serious writing except as an apprenticeship.'²⁸⁴ This perception, of Hemingway and other writers and critics, had an impact on the status accorded to American New Journalism. It is only relatively recently that critical attention has been given to what is now considered an established and respected genre. This re-evaluation positions it at the cutting edge of literary endeavour and the new journalists as worthy contributors to a long literary tradition. It recognises that journalism is more than an apprenticeship for serious writing.

The shift from modernism to postmodernism in the 1960s unravelled even further distinctions between forms and genres and styles. Questions about the reliability and shape of narration, asked four centuries ago by Defoe, and an increasing drive to deconstruct language, generated ontological questions about storytelling which changed the approach of journalists to their fictions and non-fictions. The modernist idea that there could be no such thing as objective reality often placed the author within the work, made constructed concepts of real events and questioned our ideas of truth. Norman Mailer would explore this territory in his 'false biographies' and early 1960s reportage-driven works such as *Armies of the Night: History as a Novel/The Novel as History*. There are many ways in which the tenets of New Journalism and Postmodernism coincided, perhaps the most significant of which is the realisation that fiction and non-fiction could co-exist in the same piece of writing. New Journalism, though, did not accept all postmodern precepts: it held, for example, that truth could indeed be achieved through an exploration of facts and non-facts. That truth might not be absolute, but it would involve the reader in coming to their own conclusions. This hushing of the authoritative voice and ambiguity about people and events would run through many of the works of American New Journalism from Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*; it would go on to find a peculiarly British expression in works of the 1980s and beyond such as Gordon Burn's

²⁸³ Underwood, Doug. *Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700-2000*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. p. 146.

²⁸⁴ Hemingway, Ernest. Quoted from Doug Underwood's, *The Undeclared War Between Journalism and Fiction*. p.123. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057%2F9781137353481_4 [accessed 5 March, 2018].

'...*somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' and Andrew O'Hagan's essay 'The Lives of Ronald Pinn'.

Chapter 1

How has American New Journalism informed Gordon Burn's narrative technique in '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' and *Happy Like Murderers*?

Through a comparison of Burn's crime books with those of Norman Mailer and Truman Capote, I will argue that Burn adopts and extends their narrative techniques to develop an original approach to crime writing that opens fresh insights. In this chapter, I will compare aspects of language, narrative structure, and portrayal of place in Burn's works on serial killers, '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son*'²⁸⁵ and *Happy Like Murderers*,²⁸⁶ with Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*. In doing so I will demonstrate a direct link between the New Journalism established in the US in the 1960s and 1970s and the work of Gordon Burn in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s. I will then suggest that, while these constitute New Journalism according to the principles Tom Wolfe set out in *The New Journalism*,²⁸⁷ they are sufficiently technically different in intention and style to suggest a distinctive British New Journalism deriving from its American cousin. In other words, I will contend that there is a cultural and narrative specificity in Burn's work that separates it from American New Journalism.

Gordon Burn (1948 – 2009) worked as a journalist before producing four novels and numerous non-fiction works. He wrote about celebrity and fame: 'Almost everything I have written has been about celebrity, and how for most people celebrity is a kind of death.'²⁸⁸ This view of celebrity was formed when he spent a summer as a young man in Los Angeles with his cousin, Eric Burdon, the lead singer of 1960s rock group, The Animals. There he glimpsed 'an often very un-glitzy side of celebrities' lives.'²⁸⁹ The 'nihilistic cool'²⁹⁰ that musicians often tried to cultivate and promote could only truly work on followers or fans at a distance. Burn was able to see these performers up close. It was

²⁸⁵ Burn, Gordon, '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*'. London: Heinemann, 1984.

²⁸⁶ Burn, Gordon, *Happy Like Murderers*. London: Faber and Faber, 1998.

²⁸⁷ Wolfe, Tom, *The New Journalism*. 1990 ed. London: Picador, 1975.

²⁸⁸ Burn, Gordon, *The Telegraph*, 21 July 2009.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/books-obituaries/5880715/Gordon-Burn.html> [accessed 9 September 2015].

²⁸⁹ Wainwright, Martin, *The Guardian*, 20 July 2009.

<http://www.theguardian.com/profile/martinwainwright?page=47> [accessed 9 September 2015].

²⁹⁰ O'Brien, Lucy M., *Psychedelic Rock*, from <https://www.britannica.com/art/psychedelic-rock>, [accessed 2 November 2016].

not rock music that influenced Burn, though, but fame and celebrity. If Burn saw celebrity as ‘a kind of death’, then this was his first encounter with that celebrity. Damien Hurst has said ‘We both had morbid interests, and the subjects we worked on were about the dark side of life ... I don’t think we were morbid...’²⁹¹ During the summer of 1967 Burn worked for *Rolling Stone Magazine* and has said that, ‘My interest in American New Journalism was one of the main reasons why I wanted to work for the magazine.’²⁹² His two crime books would be particularly influenced by Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song*, and Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. It is interesting to note that Burn had made decisions to be a writer and what kind of writer at that time:

I recall reading *In Cold Blood* on a Greyhound bus travelling across the Midwest. I was in the same area where the story had taken place. That made the whole thing profoundly affecting. I knew *In Cold Blood* was the type of book I wanted to write.²⁹³

BURN’S INFLUENCE

Burn’s influence and stature has been neglected by many critics in Britain. This lack of study has been noted by several others, most recently Rhona Gordon, in her thesis on housing in the works of Burn, David Peace (1967 –), and Andrew O’Hagan (1968 –).²⁹⁴ Gordon compares the relative focus of media and critical opinion on O’Hagan and Peace and notes that in ‘...contrast Gordon Burn has received little critical attention to date’ (Gordon 10). This critical neglect does not, though, reflect the esteem he is held in by his contemporaries. David Peace, for example, claims that ‘Gordon saw and he felt. He empathised, animated and illuminated people. He is a writer other writers read.’²⁹⁵ Val McDermid (1955 –) has said of him that ‘His work was as courageous as it was

²⁹¹ Hurst, Damien, <http://gordonburntrust.com/index.php?id=4> [accessed 2 November 2016].

²⁹² Willetts, Paul, <http://www.paulwilletts.uk/2511763-gordon-burn> [accessed 2 November 2016].

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Gordon, Rhona, *Housing Matters in the Texts of Gordon Burn, Andrew O’Hagan and David Peace*, Thesis, 2014

²⁹⁵ Peace, David, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/sep/07/hero-gordon-burn-david-peace> [accessed 10 January 2016].

enlightening.’²⁹⁶ Although not part of New Journalism, McDermid has also been influenced by a dark side to celebrity, as she said the basis for the character Jacko Vance, in *Wire In The Blood*,²⁹⁷ a psychotic, obsessed with torture, murder, and underage girls, was based on direct personal experience of interviewing Jimmy Saville.²⁹⁸ Today, young writers such as Benjamin Myers (1976 –) have said Burn was ‘...without a doubt one of the greatest – and arguably underrated – British writers of his age.’²⁹⁹ And again, that critical neglect has not stopped the creation of the Gordon Burn Prize:

...to reward fiction or non-fiction written in the English language, which in the opinion of the judges most successfully represents the spirit and sensibility of Gordon's literary methods: novels which dare to enter history and interrogate the past...literature which challenges perceived notions of genre and makes us think again about just what it is that we are reading.³⁰⁰

I contend that Burn’s legacy is most significant in this interrogation of the past. His narrative style urges us to revisit media portrayals of serial killers and reflect on the communities that bred them. He asks that British society takes some responsibility.

LANGUAGE

Gordon Burn’s literary method focused on the narrative voice, much of which he learned from Mailer. In 2004, writing about *The Executioner’s Song*, Burn observed: ‘Nothing writerly happens until a sudden efflorescence on page 14 – a piece of poetic interior monologue.’³⁰¹ He understands how dialogue, dialect and journalistic techniques can be used to construct voices that ring true. It is on that this section shall focus.

²⁹⁶ McDermid, Val. <https://www.faber.co.uk/blog/gordon-burn-1948-2009/> [accessed 4 November 2016].

²⁹⁷ McDermid, Val. *The Wire in the Blood*, London: Harper, 2010.

²⁹⁸ Lawton, Jerry. Interviewing Val McDermid, *The Daily Star*, 3 December 2012. <http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/285812/Wire-In-The-Blood-killer-based-on-Jimmy-Savile> [accessed, 4 November 2016].

²⁹⁹ Myers, Benjamin. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/jul/22/gordon-burn> [accessed 8 September 2016].

³⁰⁰ *New Writing North*, <http://www.newwritingnorth.com/awards-prize-award-literature-page-2090.html>, [accessed 10 January 2016].

³⁰¹ Burn, Gordon, “Dead Calm”, *The Guardian*, 5 June 2004. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/jun/05/featuresreviews.guardianreview37> [accessed 8 July 2014].

Direct speech when used well has always given immediacy and an emotional power to a story. As Christopher Pelling points out in *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian*,³⁰² direct speech gives a ‘dramatic voice’ (Pelling 121) and lends the literary character the illusion of a more ‘vivid impression’ (121). The folksy tone of Herbert Clutter in Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, his phrases, such as describing his wife’s mental condition as ‘little spells’³⁰³ say as much about the farmer as any physical description or geographical location might. His use of the phrase *little spells* reflects a man who is pushing away the reality of his wife’s depression, and the baggage a mental illness might bring to the door of a family in a quiet Midwestern farming community in 1950s America. A few years later, Norman Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song* (1979) took Wolfe’s literary device of conversational speech³⁰⁴ within New Journalism to a new level, allowing the characters to tell the story with little authorial interruption. Mailer had developed this style through his earlier works *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967) and *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel/The Novel as History* (1968). In *The Executioner’s Song* Mailer takes himself out of the story and lets it unfold in a flat style:

“Now there,” Gary said to Brenda, “is a lady who knows her own mind. She’s not wishy-washy.” He grinned. “I put my feet up just to annoy her.”

“If she’s such a nice woman, why do you want to annoy her?”

“I guess,” he said, “I like an ankle slap.”

Brenda didn’t want to hope too hard, but, God willing, Gary might come around the bend.³⁰⁵

This exchange tells us much about the characters and how the author intends revealing them to the reader. Burn wrote about this when revisiting *The Executioner’s Song* in 2004: ‘The simple declarative sentence...is something that Mailer had always seemed congenitally incapable of writing.’³⁰⁶ In this example the simple, declarative sentence is what we get. But we get more than this. Gary clearly likes strong women, not *wishy-washy* women. He also sees the woman as someone to be challenged or provoked to violence. The

³⁰² Pelling, Christopher. *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian*, London, Routledge, 2000.

³⁰³ Capote, Truman. *In Cold Blood*. London, Penguin, 1966, p.18.

³⁰⁴ Wolfe, Tom. *The New Journalism*, London, Picador, 1975 p.32.

³⁰⁵ Mailer, Norman. *The Executioner’s Song*. Canada, Little, Brown and Company, p.64.

³⁰⁶ Burn, Gordon. ‘Dead Calm’, *The Guardian*, 4 June 2004.

ankle slap isn't normally associated with an adult but a child. In that choice of words Mailer tells us about Gary Gilmore's immaturity and hints at a violent nature. There is also a sexual playfulness in his relating the incident to Brenda. Her interest was obviously aroused as she remembers the story, and Mailer allows the author to intrude when he tells us her thoughts. It is not, though, an omniscient narrator as the thoughts are arrived at through the hard evidence of dialogue. Much like Mailer's fictional biography of Marilyn Monroe he uses the evidence at hand to make assumptions about real, non-fictional characters:

‘We reconstruct the past by our recollection of the mood fully as much as by our grasp of fact. When facts are skimpy, one hopes to do well at sensing the mood.’³⁰⁷

The exchange between Brenda and Gary allows Mailer to sense what she would have felt as she waited for Gilmore. This is very much in the field of New Journalism and we know that this book had a direct effect on Gordon Burn and the writing of ‘...*somebody's husband, somebody's son.*’. ‘The flatness of my book's style came directly from the Mailer book.’³⁰⁸

Andrew Wilson points out in *American Minimalism: The Western Vernacular in Norman Mailer's The Executioner's Song* that every character, with the exception of Gilmore, uses ‘free indirect discourse as well as direct speech; Gilmore's thoughts, in contrast, do not appear.’³⁰⁹ It is an important shift in new journalistic technique as it creates the character from the outside and there is no sense of an omniscient narrator: the characters tell the story with what appears to be little intrusion from Mailer. This is a case, though, of smoke and mirrors. Mailer reveals what he wants and shapes that to build his narrative. This would particularly influence Gordon Burn in the writing of ‘...*somebody's husband, somebody's son.*’, although less so in *Happy Like Murderers* as he pushed New Journalism technique further.

³⁰⁷ Mailer, Norman. ‘Before the Literary Bar’, *New York Magazine*, 10 November 1980, <http://nymag.com/arts/books/features/50435/>, [accessed 19 January 2014].

³⁰⁸ Burn, Gordon. Interview with Paul Willetts, *Book and Magazine Collector*, October, 2006, <http://www.paulwilletts.uk/2511763-gordon-burn>, [accessed, 6 November 2016].

³⁰⁹ Wilson, Andrew. ‘American Minimalism: The Western Vernacular in Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*’, *European Journal of American Studies*, 4:1, Spring, 2009, <http://ejas.revues.org/7532>, [accessed 6 March 2016].

Burn researched ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ by spending two years living in Bingley in Bradford and interviewing those involved with Peter Sutcliffe.³¹⁰ Dialogue from these interviews became a unifying factor in the story and was less an artefact, something a journalist might put down verbatim to indicate truth, than a writer’s tool to bring the people alive. This approach to story was very much a part of New Journalism’s technique to maximise a sense of authenticity; Capote had spent six years researching *In Cold Blood* and compiled 8000 pages of notes,³¹¹ and Mailer had spent – or had his researchers spend³¹² – two years researching *The Executioner’s Song*. In ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ Burn’s detail in the recorded quotes reflect a constructed authenticity in the dialogue that brings out of the shadows characters that give Peter Sutcliffe genuine roots in a community, something other than the tabloid Yorkshire Ripper. John Sutcliffe, Peter’s father, becomes an important figure in the life of the killer and particularly in the telling of his story. Burn’s use of recorded dialect gives a legitimacy to the life of the killer; it humanises John Sutcliffe’s son, reclaiming him from the image of *monster* to a man very much of his community. Again, this is a technique taken from Tom Wolfe’s devices for the New Journalism: ‘...that realistic dialogue involves the reader more completely than any other single device.’ (46). Wolfe is also quick to point out that it was no new discovery as Dickens was using it a century before.

In ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ Burn’s research on Peter Sutcliffe show him to be the son of John and Kathleen Sutcliffe, the grandson of Arthur and Ivy Sutcliffe, and the great grandson of John ‘Willie’ Sutcliffe, who ‘were a proper tartar’ (5). And John Sutcliffe would say things like ‘well-made feller’ (7) and describe the rain as ‘coming down like stair-rods’ (7). Peter would grow up hearing phrases like ‘now then, lass,’ (7) and ‘anytime tha wants’ (7). Through transcribing dialect, Peter Sutcliffe is given a place and a local discourse, within which he can be situated and understood; he is given a history, and a family. Unlike traditional journalism, where objective facts dictate the story,

³¹⁰ Collings, Austen. ‘Red Riding & the English Malady: The Influence of Gordon Burn’. *The Quietus*, 5 March 2010, <http://thequietus.com/articles/03844-the-english-malady-the-influence-of-gordon-burn-red-riding-austin-collings>, [accessed 18 August 2015].

³¹¹ Plimpton, George. ‘The Story Behind A Non Fiction Novel’. *The New York Times*. January 1966, <https://www.nytimes.com/books/97/12/28/home/capote-interview.html> [accessed 20 September 2015].

³¹² Grubel, Lawrence. *Conversations with Capote*. London/New York: New American Library, 1986, p.113.

this New Journalism technique took direct speech to create understanding through an approach to shared language and customs.

Yet Burn's use of dialect, which picks up on the sounds and cadences of the working-class area of Bingley, does more than bring authenticity to the story that he is telling; it makes concrete the barriers that have been erected in our apparently classless society. Language and class are introduced at the start of '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' and as such show us that Burn saw a connection between how history perceives people and how its influence is still felt. He quotes Elizabeth Gaskell from her *Life of Charlotte Bronte*. In September 1853, Gaskell describes passing through Bingley by train and her impressions of the locals:

Their accost is curt; their accent and tone of speech blunt and harsh... a stranger can hardly ask a question without receiving a sore crusty reply if, indeed, he receive any at all. Sometime the sour rudeness amounts to positive insult. (3)

Quoting Gaskell at the start of a book about a 20th century serial killer focusses the reader on a long history of suspicion generated towards the working class. Gaskell has a tone of superiority in her description; it is the voice of good breeding, education, and class. For Gaskell, the local accents are a fault, they are 'blunt' and 'harsh'; they do not carry her refined voice and presumably that of her readers. Her choice of words amounts to little more than cultural imperialism as she describes the 'sour rudeness' and 'positive insult' of the locals. She is telling her readers that she, and they, are not part of that world. Burn allows the quotation to go on:

Yet, if the 'foreigner' takes all this churlishness good-humouredly, or as a matter of course, and makes good any claim upon their latent kindness and hospitality, they are faithful and generous, and thoroughly to be relied upon. (3)

When she compliments the 'latent kindness' and 'hospitality' of the locals, and judges that they can be 'faithful' and 'generous', her tone shifts from the superior to the patronising. When Gaskell describes herself as a 'foreigner' to them she is therefore describing the people of Bingley as such to her and her readers. Burn has set up at the book's start a wariness of the people of Bingley in the 19th century by Gaskell and readers from outside the locality. But he ends by saying that 'little has happened in the intervening years would cause her to radically revise that view' (3). That wariness and 'foreignness'

was relevant in 1981 when it would inform many of the media reports on Peter Sutcliffe and his crimes.

Burn's use of Gaskell's first-hand account of the people of Bingley, although written over a hundred years before, conforms to Wolfe's New Journalism device of recording dialogue as fully as possible. Usually used to define and establish character, Burn uses it to define a view held of an area and its people. The community that Peter Sutcliffe grew up and worked in already set him apart. Gaskell in a brief train stop made assumptions about people she did not know. Through stories told in the idiom, dialect and accent of John Sutcliffe and Peter Sutcliffe's family and friends Burn helps rid us of that sense of foreignness that Gaskell felt. Rather than erect a barrier to understanding Burn uses dialect and idiom to create a fuller picture of the Bingley community from the inside, particularly those within Peter Sutcliffe's group of family and friends. This, though, sets up a cultural barrier as gender and social divisions become highlighted.

John Sutcliffe is aware of the social divisions within his own family. His mother, he would say, was from a 'cruder stock'. It was she who forced him, although clever, to leave school at fourteen years old, to bring some 'contribution' back: 'By gum she got it as well. She med sure of that. Oh yes.' (8) This dialect driven direct speech tells us that his mother was used to getting her own way. It is a forceful statement. The first sentence is an exclamation. The '*by gum*' is an exclamation that the mother got her way, the '*as well*' tells us that there was little doubt about it. There is an undercurrent of threat in the second sentence. '*She med sure of that.*' We do not know how she made sure of it, but it leaves us in no doubt that the result was in no doubt. These two sentences show that Peter Sutcliffe's father was forced to leave school at a young age and still felt bitter about it. As though the first two sentences weren't enough to convey his meaning, the last two-word sentence drives the meaning home: '*Oh yes.*'

The use of direct speech to involve the reader has been used throughout the short history of New Journalism. As Wolfe says in *The New Journalism* it 'establishes and defines character more quickly and effectively than any other device.' (46) Nya Braxton points out

that the murderer Perry, in *In Cold Blood*, is presented to us systematically as someone deserving of sympathy:³¹³

...living off of mush Hershey kisses and condensed milk...which is what weakened my kidneys – the sugar content – which is why I was always wetting my bed. (138)

Trying to elicit sympathy for Perry through direct speech, Capote places himself very much in the territory of fictional writing, but it is by using the tools of fiction in a true crime genre that he delivers a new kind of study of crime and the criminal. When Burn allows John Sutcliffe to speak of how his mother treated him we understand more of the kind of man who brought Peter Sutcliffe up. Although written years apart, and at first glance with little in common, both these quotations illustrate Wolfe's statement in *The New Journalism* '...realistic dialogue involves the reader more completely than any other single device' (46). This is not just a matter, though, of being familiar with local idioms. Dialogue carries with it the idiosyncrasies of the speakers' culture and a psychological profile. Contained within a few words of dialogue the reader is given a more intimate biography than what might be revealed in paragraphs of descriptive prose. Something of this I tried to explore in the creative part of this thesis. The character Freddy, a Glaswegian born man living in London, is picked up often on his way of speaking. He tries to erase his past through suppressing his Glasgow dialect. He adopts what he believes are the tones of those around him to gain success. These actions create a voice that is a hybrid, and as such a humorous curiosity. When Freddy writes a television play set in 1960s Glasgow it is written in standard English. It is rejected partly on the grounds of not 'ringing true'. He informs the reader that had it been written in dialect it would never have reached the reading stage. Playwright Alan Owen went through over a year of argument with ABC Television to retain Liverpool dialect in his play *No Trams To Lime Street* at much the same time that the character of Freddy submits his play. This informed my writing of that section of the story. Dialogue is used in the story to involve the reader, as Wolfe states, but that involvement is reached through how they speak as much as what they say.

In *The Executioner's Song*, Mailer uses the 'prairie twang' that Truman Capote mentions in *In Cold Blood* (18) to distinguish Gilmore's family and friends from the legal

³¹³ Braxton. Nya. 'The Importance of Imagery in *In Cold Blood*', <http://incoldbloodweiskopf.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/importance-of-imagery.html>, [accessed 2 September 2015].

establishment, to show them as different, and, in effect, isolated. As Wilson points out, even within these communities, there were subtle differences in the voices:

The regional dialect is accentuated for the page: ‘but, *boy*, I got tore up in that plane. I was happier than hell,’ Gilmore says to Brenda on meeting her after his release. Earlier, Brenda talks of Gilmore’s *otherness* of voice: it was ‘twangy, held back.’³¹⁴

The focus on voice, on idiom, on dialect and accent, becomes part of the story as much as the geography. The landscape of how people sound is integral to the fabric of the stories told by the new journalists; it shapes the books and colours the narrative. There is, of course, a distinction between reported dialect speech and a whole narrative in dialect. This might, as Wolfe suggests in *The New Journalism*, involve the reader ‘...more completely than any other single device’ (46).

By choosing to highlight dialect, misspellings, and contractions, Burn understands that it codifies class and cultural power. By opening ‘...somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.’ with a particular 19th century view of the people, their manner, and how they speak, Burn highlights this and signals to the reader it will play a role in the story that unfolds. In choosing to use local voices to tell the story of Peter Sutcliffe, he challenges preconceptions and notions, and involves the readers more by bringing them closer to the community.

Burn also adopts this use of language to describe and highlight the geopolitical landscape of place, time, and people. In ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ he describes the day trippers escaping the black stone semi-detached villas and Victorian terraces, and the ‘paler brick of the post war estates.’ (4) to ‘seek a breath of fresh air’ (4) by hopping on the Bank Holiday trains to Morecambe. Burn will return to that physical description of the structural environment some years later in *Happy Like Murderers*. Like that later book, the place, the home, is explored in forensic detail to give an understanding, less of motivation, but of the societal belonging and normality of these people. Fred West’s obsession with DIY would take that normality to a new metaphorical darkness which I will explore later in this chapter. In ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ calendar holidays are listed to give Bingley a structure to their community year: Whitsuntide, The Agricultural Show, the

³¹⁴ Wilson, Andrew. ‘American Minimalism: The Western Vernacular in Norman Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song*’, *European Journal of American Studies*.

‘Moonlight Express’ (4), the train that left Bingley station to the Morecambe Illuminations, St George Day Parade, Children’s Gala, *propping*³¹⁵ for ‘Plot Night’ (4), The Sunshine Christmas Club. There is a firm grasp on the past and present in this town; the continuation of tradition, a community with its roots understood and celebrated. Burn understands the importance of that community and Peter Sutcliffe’s relationship to it; he tries to place *our Pete*, as the Sutcliffe family referred to him, firmly within the customs and environments that shaped him.

This deliberate humanising of Peter Sutcliffe takes us away from the routine of ‘True Crime’ stories, which usually rely on a one-dimensional portrait of a killer, and a step by step reporting of the crime. It is no surprise that several high profile new journalists have focussed on murder as a topic. Truman Capote talking to George Plimpton in 1966 said: ‘Moreover, the human heart being what it is murder was a theme not likely to darken and yellow with time.’³¹⁶

What shifted with New Journalism, though, was that we could hear those involved speak of their own lives. These voices were not just relating facts about the night of a crime, times and whereabouts of characters; we learned about their relationships, their hopes, and their childhoods. The new journalists were looking for the normal and would have that told by witnesses – usually friends or family – in their own way. In *‘somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.’* Burn uses a quote from Peter Sutcliffe’s younger brother, Carl, to shift a media created perception of the murderer:

He’d really tek piss out of everything. He’d turn owt anybody said into a joke. You’d just say summat an’ he’d bust out in hysterical laughter, really fuckin’ loud, almost rollin’ on floor. He might have been quiet with strangers, but wi’ family he could be right silly. He’d get really excited. (142)

This shift in tone, the phonetically transcribed voice, and the description of Peter is unsettling at first for the very fact of its apparent normality. It is not the tone in which one would expect a serial killer to be spoken about; it is not the behaviour described in any media articles of the time. By including it Burn gets to the *human heart* that Capote spoke

³¹⁵ Collecting of firewood for bonfire.

³¹⁶ Plimpton, George. ‘The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel’, *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/books/97/12/28/home/capote-interview.html> [accessed 20 March 2015].

of. The anecdotal humour, though, can come across as suppressed hysteria and becomes a telling insight into the murderer's day to day behaviour; a behaviour that his family saw as 'silly' but not hiding anything sinister. Using direct anecdotal quotes allows the reader to approach the crimes and the criminals in a new way, as a part of society, not alien to it. The voices, the idiom, the dialect all help normalise stories that had entered the public domain through tabloid hyperbole and myth. By reclaiming the killer as part of a society, not outside it, the criminal acts can be analysed as part of that society. This is a crucial part of the technique of New Journalism; the analysis of a society at any given point in history. In this, the use of dialect and idiolect (personal speech profile) is part of the language it uses to set up to discuss or challenge the social and political issues imbued in formal English.

This difficulty with dialect has not been a problem for new journalists, as they were seen primarily as journalists with little connection to fiction. This was the case with Gordon Burn, but, interestingly, a review in *The London Review of Books* by Patricia Highsmith pointed out that in '*...somebody's husband, somebody's wife.*' '*...we come to know all these people as we might characters in a novel.*'³¹⁷ Later, problems about the interface between fact and fiction would arise in Britain that reflected those experienced by the American new journalists, and I will discuss those in the next chapter. Dialect and colloquial expressions are nothing new to storytelling. Conventionally, in fiction, a character speaking in dialect or using idiom, works to consolidate stereotypes within a story. Dickens introduced us to Sam Weller, a smart talking cockney, in his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*.³¹⁸ Dropped consonants and vowels, phonetic spelling, and dialect, helped the writer create the cockney figure. This use of dialect was put to humorous use by Dickens in *The Pickwick Papers*, but he was aware of its other uses, such as the creating of memorable criminal characters, like Bill Sykes in *Oliver Twist*³¹⁹ or Quilp from *The Old Curiosity Shop*.³²⁰ The criminal is often portrayed in written dialect in direct speech in Dickens; the accent can be close to impenetrable, it lacks clarity and becomes not only a secret world but a *secretive* world, a world with something to hide, something hidden, dark.

³¹⁷ Highsmith, Patricia. 'Fallen Women', *London Review of Books*, 21 June 1984. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v06/n11/patricia-highsmith/fallen-women> [accessed 12 September 2015].

³¹⁸ Dickens, Charles. *The Pickwick Papers*, London, Penguin, 2000.

³¹⁹ Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist*, London, Penguin English Library, 2012.

³²⁰ Dickens, Charles. *The Old Curiosity Shop*, London, Penguin English Library, 1972.

The use of dialect was not restricted to England; in America Mark Twain had shown that a dialect driven novel could have global success when he published *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Not content with one dialect to cover the travels of Huck and Jim, he would distinguish between them:

In this book, a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri Negro dialect; the extremist form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary “Pike-County” dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork; but by painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech...³²¹

It was not the first time that Twain had used this device. It was liberally used throughout his journalistic career and in his first novel, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). It was with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, though, that Twain demonstrated a maturity in his writing and nuanced use of localised speech: it is commonly referred to as the first great American novel:

Huck: ‘...Spose a man was to come to you and say *Polly-voo-franzy* — what would you think?’

Jim: ‘I wouldn’t think nuff’n; I’d take en bust him over de head.’ (p.79)

There is an ongoing debate about racism contained within the dialect of Jim, but Lawrence Howe has argued that this reaction stems from a fear of dialect itself.³²² He also goes on to say that ‘Huck achieves a fictional autonomy from his creator by narrating his own vernacular in reaction to what was told about him in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, with “some stretchers” by “Mr. Mark Twain” (Howe 8).

The high regard in which the novel is held is reflected in Ernest Hemingway’s words of praise in *The Green Hills of Africa*: ‘All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*.’ For T.S. Eliot it was a ‘masterpiece’.³²³ The success of such a book showed that dialect was no barrier to understanding and, more importantly, empathy. Almost eighty years later the influence of Twain could be heard in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). When Walter Cunningham says to Jem, ‘Almost died first year I come to school and et them pecans — folks say he pizened ‘em and put ‘em over on the school side of the fence’ (p. 19). His influence opened the ears of American readers to marginalised voices and will be heard in the New Journalism of Mailer and Capote.

Although a novelist, Dickens, as Twain would, took much of his characters’ personalities, traits and descriptions, from his experience as a journalist. New Journalism

³²¹ Twain, Mark. *Huckleberry Finn*, p.2. This appears as an ‘Explanatory’.

³²² Howe, Lawrence. ‘Property and Narrative in *Huckleberry Finn*: The “Jim Dilemma” Revisited. *The Mark Twain Annual*, No.7, Penn State University Press, 2009, pp.5-21.

³²³ Eliot, T.S. ‘Introduction to *Huckleberry Finn*’. <https://genius.com/Ts-eliot-introduction-to-huckleberry-finn-annotated> [accessed 16 March, 2018].

appropriated that dialect, idiom, direct speech, that had gone before in fiction, to shine a light on real characters, to take them from the shadows of press reports.

In *The New Journalism* Wolfe defended the journalistic use of ‘dialogue of the fullest, most completely revealing sort in the very moment when novelists were cutting back, using dialogue in increasingly cryptic, fey and curiously abstract ways’ (46). There is nothing cryptic, fey, or abstract about Burn’s writing, and there are no reconstructions of direct quotation in either ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ or in *Happy Like Murderers*; there is, however, ‘dialogue of the fullest, most completely revealing sort’ when he quotes Peter Sutcliffe’s brother talking of his sibling’s fall-about laughter, or when John Sutcliffe talks of his family. There are revealing quotes when one victim is described as a ‘fish-and-chip murder’, to be forgotten in a week. It is through this use of language that Burn shows ‘Yorkshire of the 1970s was a hostile environment to be living in.’³²⁴ Burn shows that in the community Peter Sutcliffe lived in even the brutality of these horrific crimes could be brought down to the flippant and the forgettable. There was something disposable about these women, something unimportant about their murders. The words Burn quotes are testament to the hostility of the environment Burn speaks of.

Despite similarities, there were certainly differences between Burn and the American new journalists at this point, not least in his reluctance, in the beginning, to fabricate to get closer to the truth of a story. There were also differences between Capote and Mailer and all the other new journalists of the time. Wolfe states as a *device* of the new journalists that they witness ‘the scenes in other people’s lives as they took place – and record the dialogue in full’ (46). Capote did not do this – as a matter of fact, he did not take any notes during the six years of interviews with the killers; Mailer let people tell the story of Gary Gilmore and recorded those stories and shaped the quotes within a spare prose, reflecting a time and a place. This is much how Burn worked in ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ Regardless of the *rules* or *devices* that Wolfe set down in 1973, New Journalism had indeed developed and was still developing by the time those *devices* were written. New Journalism seemed to be more fluid in its execution than Tom Wolfe thought, or perhaps wanted. When Gordon Burn published ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ in 1984 it was noticed, and was noticeably different. In addition to the excellent reviews the book

³²⁴ Peace, David. ‘The Red Riding Quartet’, *Crime Time* 2001.
<http://www.crimetime.co.uk/features/davidpeace.php>. [accessed 12 January 2016].

received in Britain, over in the U.S Norman Mailer commented that it was ‘...as if Thomas Hardy were also present at the writing of this account of The Yorkshire Ripper’(Collings).

What was it that Mailer saw in Burn that reminded him of Hardy? It was that both understood the centrality of realistic dialogue and idiom to convincing storytelling; Mailer’s reference to Hardy is telling in the reception and understanding of Gordon Burn. Thomas Hardy established character and story quickly in his novels. After a description of Gabriel Oak at the start of *Far From The Madding Crowd* it is a conversation on the road that sets the story going:

“Mis’ess’s niece is upon the top of things, and she says that’s enough that I’ve offered ye, you great miser, and she won’t pay any more.” These were the waggoner’s words.

“Very well; then mis’ess’s niece can’t pass,” said the turnpike-keeper, closing the gate.³²⁵

Again, it is a meeting and a conversation at the start of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* that sets John Durbeyfield on a tragic path.

Draft revisions in Hardy’s work show a willingness to incorporate dialect for authenticity. In the first chapter of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* his draft revisions show this. When John Durbeyfield meets someone on the road Hardy has his greeting as ‘Good night,’ but this is later extended with the dialect ‘t’ye’. A few lines later he says in an added part of the draft, ‘I know ‘ee by sight, not knowing your name.’

³²⁵ Hardy, Thomas. *Far from the Madding Crowd*. New Wessex ed. London: Macmillan, 1975, p.7.

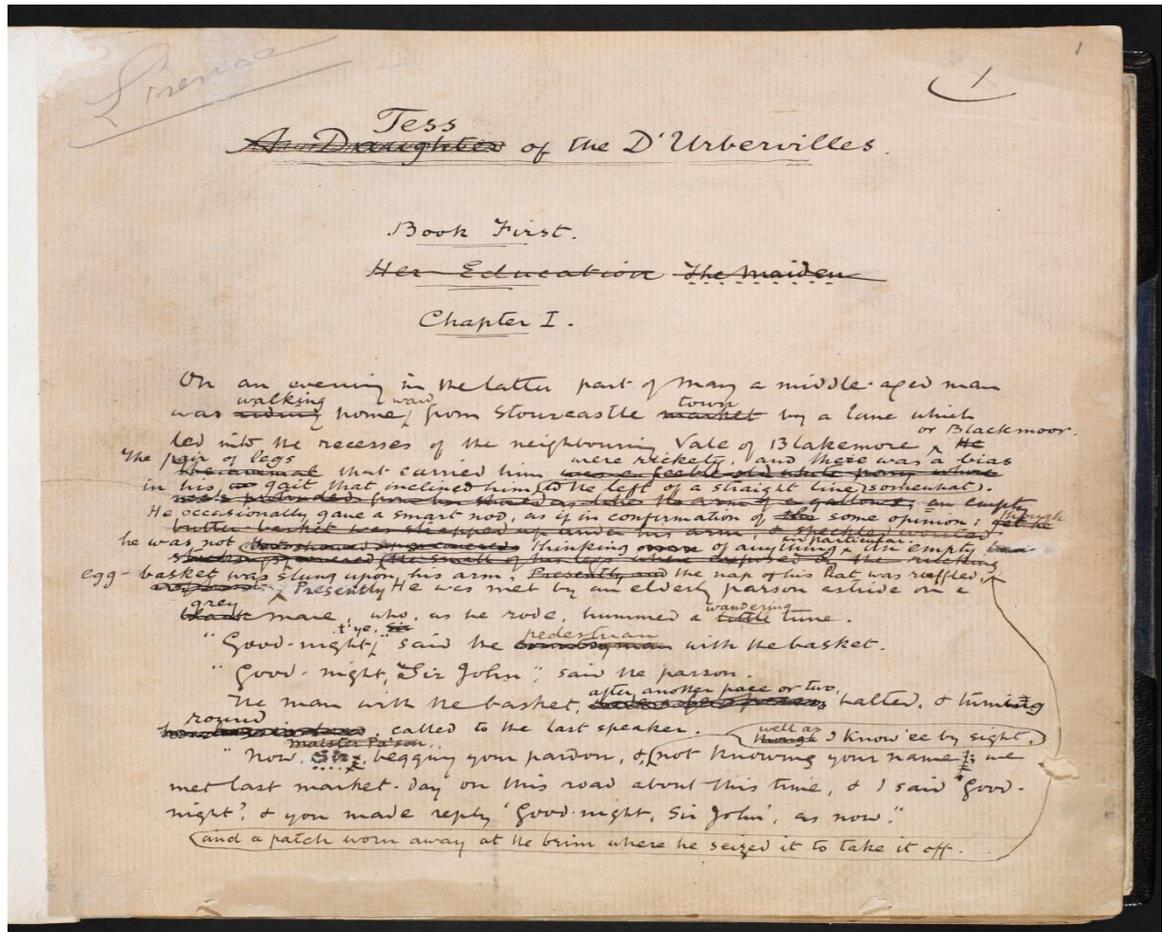


FIG 1: Manuscript of First Draft Page of Tess of the D'Urbervilles ³²⁶

The corrections and additions of local speech improves Hardy's original page. While dialect is not a necessary part of the narration – meanings and intentions can be carried without it – Hardy's editorial changes are significant not in their numbers but in the intention of the writer to create an authenticity that will improve the reading pleasure. But its function is more than this: it shows us a character, his social standing, and his community.

This foretells the technique of new journalists a century later, who would try and find truth in recorded dialogue, and that of Gordon Burn who follows them. Patricia Highsmith notes that the veracity of Burn's narrative derives not from the interview content per se, but rather the accuracy of the sound of the dialogue. She also noticed that there was no invented dialogue in '...somebody's husband, somebody's son.' that the material came from interviews, and that '... the book picks up a narrative current that keeps the reader

³²⁶ <http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/manuscript-of-the-first-and-last-chapter-of-tess-of-the-> [retrieved 4 November 2015].

turning the pages.’³²⁷ This corresponds with Wolfe’s advice in *The New Journalism* to record dialogue as fully as possible (p.46). He thought that it involved the reader more quickly. Indeed, although Hardy may not have transcribed speech, he used realistic dialogue and dialect to enrich his recurrent theme of family and past affecting the present and extended it, as Capote, Mailer and Burn would later do, into a critique of the relationship between individuals, families and communities. That critique is to be found in Sutcliffe’s family history that Burn allows the family members to describe in their own words. It is to be found in the resentment his father felt at having to leave school at an early age; it is to be found in an insecure young Peter clutching at his mother’s skirts until he was eight or nine; it is to be found in the insecure young boy bullied at school; it was to be found in the ‘weak and weedy’ (17) boy who was a disappointment to his sporty and hardy father; it was to be found in the mistress with whom his father had an open affair. Burn understood family history as well as Hardy, and Mailer, and Capote, and understood the importance of letting the family tell that history in their own words.

The power of this kind of first hand story telling cannot be ignored, and it was a device used by the American new journalists consistently, from Gay Talese’s ‘The King as a Middle Aged Man’³²⁸ onwards – regardless of the fact that, according to Schoenfelde, much of the American ‘first hand was reconstructions’. Gordon Burn used the technique throughout ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ Keith Sugden, a friend of Sutcliffe, tells us that Peter wasn’t so bad; referring to women as ‘whores’ and ‘scrubbers’, but ‘he were never *loud*’ (40). In this, Burn tells us about the society in which Peter Sutcliffe grew up. This is not to suggest the whole of Bingley society was like this. It was, though, in Sutcliffe’s close community and friendship group, where derogatory terms for women were commonplace; ‘Old cow’ (78) was how he described the first prostitute that he assaulted. Burn reinforces this through the use of graphic detail which lays the foundation, and forms the backdrop, to violence. When he killed his first victim, Emily Jackson, when he stabbed her fifty-two times and shoved a piece of wood between her legs; when he said, ‘...to show her as disgusting as she was’ (119). By refusing to speculate, and presenting facts from the voices of the community, Burn denies us the escape valve of dehumanising and othering Peter Sutcliffe. By calling someone a *monster* or *The Yorkshire Ripper*, with its echoes of *Jack the Ripper* and the baggage of myth, it distances society from them and the crimes committed. By the time Burn introduces the first murder the reader knows the

³²⁷ Highsmith, Patricia. ‘Fallen Women’, *London Review of Books*.

³²⁸ Talese, Gay. ‘The King as a Middle-Aged Man’. *Esquire Magazine*, June 1962.

community and Sutcliffe's specific social group. We also know the Sutcliffe family. Burn has invited us in and shown us its history and its present. The effect of this is not like reading a newspaper report, where detailed facts and exactitude take precedence over the interviewees' thoughts on a matter. In *The New Journalism* Wolfe called this the third device of the new journalist: '...interview him about his thoughts and emotions, along with everything else.' (47) As a result of this we have become much more involved in the story, a story told directly by those involved in the life of Peter Sutcliffe. The reader has become invested in some personal knowledge of family and community. There is now recognition of the normality of life in Bingley. Unlike Gaskell we are not just passing through; dialect and local speech no longer distance us. They place us at the heart of the story, and it is probably this fact that disturbs us most of all.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

This sense of connection to the story is achieved in both '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' and *Happy Like Murderers*, because they both take as their subject matter stories that were familiar to the British public at the time of publication and remain in the public consciousness. The crimes of Sutcliffe unfolded almost nightly on TV channels and in daily broadsheets and tabloids. The crimes of Fred and Rosemary West were laid out in a similar fashion, as bodies were discovered, and court testimony was given. A difference was that Peter Sutcliffe continued his murders while a police investigation was ongoing, with the effect that the further murders played out structurally like acts in a crime film, episodes in a TV series, or chapters in a crime novel. The media construct of The Yorkshire Ripper as celebrity was in full swing many years before Sutcliffe's capture. The author uses familiar fiction narrative structures to highlight this process of news while exploring the detail of their lives in an unfamiliar fashion. He rises above, as he puts it, the '...late-century din, above which it is coming to seem impossible for any one person, outside of multiple murderers and scandal-struck soap stars, to make themselves heard.'³²⁹ Burn gives others a voice to tell the story in '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*', but in *Happy Like Murderers* it is not just the voice but the narrative

³²⁹ Burn, Gordon, quoted from Lea, Daniel. 'Trauma, Celebrity and Killing in the 'Contemporary Murder Leisure Industry'

https://www.academia.edu/7701336/Trauma_Celebrity_and_Killing_in_the_Contemporary_Murder_Leisure_Industry [accessed 19 March 2016].

structure that he uses to bring the reader closer to the Wests and their crimes. In *Happy Like Murderers* there is a ‘narrative urgency’³³⁰ that Burn creates by using the structure of the crime novel with the biographical detail and structure that he had used fourteen years previously in ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’. From the factual, documentary, and biographical style of his early book to a more fiction influenced later book, Burn moved closer still to the American new journalists. ‘It just starts – no throat clearing, no overture, no vamping-until-ready.’³³¹ This was from Burn’s review of *The Executioner Song*, but might just as easily apply to *Happy Like Murderers*. The shift in Burn’s work from ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ to ‘*Happy Like Murderers*’ is striking in that it shows a willingness to experiment and to push the technique in a new direction, and one that would lead to an area that American New Journalism had not touched on.

Much of Burn’s technique in *Happy Like Murderers* is consistent with his previous factual crime style. Again, he would use the local language to tell us about the people and their experiences. Carol is described as ‘a well-flirted filly’(18). ‘Gwan, let the bugger go,’ (17) a gang would shout to the police trying to arrest a man who had attempted to rape Carol when she was thirteen years old. Burn writes phonetically: the town of Cinderford becomes ‘Zinnerfud’ (11), and as in ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ it has an initial distancing effect on the reader, emphasizing an *otherness* in these people. However, as the book progresses, and we become familiar with the dialect, these barriers disappear, and we feel we understand the community more. It is in the structure of *Happy Like Murderers*, though, that we see a break with the tradition of both crime biography and reportage that was touched on in ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’. Burn experiments with structure to help explore the fundamental question about why someone commits such criminal acts. He uses it to reveal that a ‘symbiotic relationship has developed between the media and “serial killers”’.³³² As a result, he suggests that serial killers can be seen as a product of modernity. Burn seems to have understood that very well when writing about the small community of ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’, where the real Peter Sutcliffe can hide his activities, and where a neighbour can

³³⁰ Simpson, Paul. ‘Just What Is Narrative Urgency?’ *Language and Literature*, Vol.23, 1, p. 3.

³³¹ Burn, Gordon. ‘Dead Calm’. *The Guardian*.

³³² Cummins, Ian, D, Martin King, ‘Happy Like Profilers: Gordon Burn, Modernity and Serial Killing’, *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*, 2014, p.168.

describe Fred West as ‘a kind man’.³³³ This idea of a ‘society of strangers’ informs much of Burn’s work, not just in the content of what he wrote, but in how he pieces together a story; how he structures a narrative. He sees the crimes as ‘a product of place and time’.³³⁴ This is at odds with the true crime template of ‘focusing on the biography and description of individual offenders’ (4). Burn has very much focused on a wider view from the start by contextualising media constructed individual murderers within a community and history.

Although ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ begins much like the 19th century novel of time and place; in *Happy Like Murderers* his approach is very different. Burn opens *Happy Like Murderers* by introducing us to the character of Carol, but he does not tell us of her relevance to the story that will unfold. We are told in the second sentence that Carol ‘lived in Quedgely until the age of four’(3). This introduction to character, with little or no physical description, pulls the reader in and sets up questions that are more familiar to readers of the mystery or thriller genre. It is a structural device, much like the introduction of Elizabeth Gaskell and her cultural and literary connotations at the start of ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’. Carol, however, has no such link to literary history, and is introduced to us as though a fictional character, a character the reader feels is being created in the narrative. Opening the story in this way means we, as readers, must follow her life: she is therefore a guide into the story. We do not know how Carol’s life is tied to that of Fred and Rosemary West, but it is this character that Burn uses to lead us into their world. We are told of her growing up, the child sexual assaults, the poverty, the violent family relationships, the promiscuous early teens, and the rebellion. Burn tells us that Carol often blamed herself for the abuse: ‘If they’d done something bad and he wasn’t to blame, then she must be’ (11), but his descriptions of the abuses show clearly that she was blameless. Burn counters the character’s perception. Having Carol lead the reader through her story and giving us no other character to hold on to, Burn forces us to identify with her, a technique used usually in first person narrative fiction. Where this differs from, and where Burn pushes the boundaries of British fiction, is that Carol is not a fictional character. As the story of her life unfolds we notice striking differences between *Happy*

³³³ Bennet, Will; MacDonald, Marianne. ‘Inside 25 Cromwell Street: The ‘Genial Neighbour’ at No25’. *The Independent*, 2 January 1995, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/inside-25-cromwell-street-the-genial-neighbour-at-no-25-1566338.html> [accessed 3 August 2016].

³³⁴ Cummins, Ian, D, and Martin King. ‘Happy Like Profilers: Gordon Burn, Modernity and Serial Killing’. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*, 7 December 2014, p. 6.

Like Murderers and ‘...somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.’ Unlike Sutcliffe’s story, the twenty-four pages of Carol’s life are not part of the protagonist’s family tree. She is not the main focus of Burn’s attention, but he insists on giving her a documented life. Twenty-four pages into the story of the Wests, we realise that Carol will again become a victim, as Burn has shown her to be throughout her life. He delivers a sentence that is shocking in its simplicity:

In September 1972, when she got into Fred West’s Ford Poplar, Carol was still a boyish-looking girl. (24)

This connection of killer and victim is described in 1961 by Mailer as two people ‘engaging in a dialogue with eternity.’³³⁵ The withholding of information for this long about the protagonist, Fred West, is a structural device, familiar from fiction, to create an enigma. The reader wonders how the doomed arc of Carol’s story, in which we are now invested, will play out in the narrative as a whole. When she jumps into West’s car the reader is chilled but recognises an almost inevitable moment in her story. Introducing West late into his own story not only creates tension, but also invites our understanding of his victim. Burn gives Carol a humanity that is missing in newspaper reports about her and the victims that followed. The structure of Burn’s narrative makes the coming together of victim and predator appear less random than might a straightforward journalistic piece. The soundbites and headlines of the daily news cycle are at odds with Burn’s methodical and slow burning narrative. Much of what Burn tells us about Carol’s feelings in these opening pages could not have come solely from a journalist’s interviews: she didn’t like hitching to Tewkesbury alone, but she ‘wasn’t worried about it’ (24); she was ‘aware that the conventional sexiness of tousled hair got her attention’ (22). Burn describes her relationship with her stepfather as ‘a bitter battle with each other, “hating each other” wouldn’t be putting it too strongly’ (22). Here, Burn underscores this analysis with the words ‘*wouldn’t be putting it too strongly*’. These are the words of the intimate; the words of someone who has witnessed this ‘bitter battle’. They are not the words of the conventional news journalist, who rarely tries to convey the mind of a character. It is much closer to what Tom Wolfe called ‘experiencing the emotional reality’.³³⁶ These things bring a fictional insight to a factual story. They allow the reader an understanding that can

³³⁵ Trilling, Diana, taken from *Norman Mailer: The Executioner’s Song*, Christopher Ricks, <https://mailerreview.org/norman-mailer-the-executioners-song-97ef5d62f20f#.mzujf2a7y>, [accessed 8 August 2016].

³³⁶ *The New Journalists*, p.41.

be lost in a journalist's first person 'I was there'³³⁷ transcription of eyewitness accounts. Here, Burn provides a backstory; he colours the events with his insightful choice of language. This is different from the generational history and documentary style that he provided in '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' However, in both he still succeeds in engaging the reader on an emotional level. By structuring the exposition of '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' around the point of view of a victim, by giving the serial killer a place, a time, and a context, Burn extinguishes the idea of an outsider; he returns the figure to his culture and his community. Burn is not suggesting that the media creates serial killers, but he seems to be agreeing with Haggerty that it provides 'the basic institutional framework and cultural context for the operation of modern forms of serial killing' (173). In *Happy Like Murderers*, Burn goes on to expose that framework, stripping away the notion of the serial killer as a lone sociopath and placing him and – in the case of the Wests – her, social, cultural and historical setting. It was by no means a new idea. In 1938 Graham Greene had used much the same approach in *Brighton Rock*: 'Man is made by the places in which he lives...'.³³⁸ However, it was the new journalists who established it as a key way of presenting their story. This is what Capote did with Hickock and Smith in *In Cold Blood* and Mailer in *The Executioner's Song* with Gary Gilmore. Burn takes this further with his characterisation of Fred West. By the time he enters *Happy Like Murderers* we have already something of the colour of the place through the life of Carol. This foregrounding of the victim and delayed introduction of the attacker is unlike both Capote and Mailer who place their killers on the first page. Burn was experimenting with the true crime genre in a way that American New Journalism had not attempted.

PORTRAYAL OF PLACE

The colour of the place in both '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' and in *Happy Like Murderers* is drawn from a dark palette. For Burn, it is not just as a means of rooting character in the readers' minds, it is also used as an emotional tool, unpicking psychological trauma for victim and perpetrator. An example is the portrayal of location through characterisation. Heather West, daughter of Fred and Rosemary, used Forest of Dean as a place of escape, a place of safety as she scribbled the acronym FODIWL (Forest of Dean I Will Live) on her schoolbag and school jotters. The strength and positivity of the

³³⁷ Ibid, p 47.

³³⁸ Greene, Graham, *Brighton Rock*. Guild Publishing, London, 1978. p.41.

statement tells us much about the character of Heather West, but she did not survive. Forest of Dean plants in the mind a pastoral landscape, a place of peace, security, and safety; but the reality of Heather West's final resting place is far from Homer's place of souls of the heroic and virtuous. This juxtaposition of fantasy image and stark reality extends the victim beyond tabloid exploitation to an emotional authenticity that shatters any stereotypical notion of victim and murderers. The use of place – in this instance resting place – allows Burn to portray a concrete order that counters the melodramatic demonization played out in the media. For Burn, place allows him to bring rationality to emotion. His fictionalised account seems more truthful than mainstream journalism.

Place has an important function in the remembering of trauma; it often gives a physicality to past actions. The Yorkshire Moors are no longer just associated with National Parks, open space, peace and tranquillity.³³⁹ The kidnap, torture and murder of children by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley between July 1963 and October 1965 have given the moors an unwelcome notoriety.



FIG 2: Police Search the Moors, 1965³⁴⁰

³³⁹ From 'Welcome to Yorkshire', <http://www.yorkshire.com/places/north-york-moors/north-york-moors-national-park> [accessed 5 July 2016].

³⁴⁰ <https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Moors+murders&view=detailv2&&id=2ED61A9C77B04DB3460EE5CC9C804F638E4610E1&selectedIndex=176&ccid=TBsFEplq&simid=607988626641586299&thid=OIP.M4c1b0512996ae4f8a56f7c1abd64df0eH0&ajaxhist=0> [retrieved 5 July 2016].

Places become *sites*, plaques and memorial stones are set to honour and remember, the physicality of memory is given its importance within communities. Burn returns the characters to their place and explores its significance on people. While this was done to an extent with the American new journalists, it was always used more as a backdrop to the crimes committed. The Clutter family's farm home in *In Cold Blood* tells us of an isolation from the town, a place where the acts could proceed uninterrupted; it tells us of the traditional American family, god fearing, and living off the land, but it is a place invaded by outside forces. The Wests' family home is part of the crime, it is not only witness to the acts, it is renovated to enable those acts.

Rhona Gordon has noted that the house as a crime scene is 'a motif that will be repeated throughout several notorious cases in the twentieth century.'³⁴¹ She goes on to argue that Burn, and later Andrew O'Hagan, 'pay particular attention to housing in their texts which signals the centrality of the murderers' dwelling in shielding and inspiring their crimes.'³⁴² From the geographical area and community history that Burn explored in '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' the view in *Happy Like Murderers* becomes more detailed and forensic. The house at 25 Cromwell Street, home of the Wests, is given a central role in Burn's story of serial killers Fred and Rosemary West. The constant work Fred West put into his house reflected the character of an obsessive, and a man with patience:

Constant digging, demolition, excavation. The house was a building site. Always Fred did the work. Fred alone or Fred working with somebody else. When he wasn't at work he was working on the house. Rewiring, replumbing, roofing, digging up floors, pouring new footings. New roof. New windows. He painted the outside. Cladding. Skimming. Decorating inside. Always rubble and noise. (185)

Later, when Burn quoted from West's police statement on the murder of his daughter, there is the same workmanlike attitude:

³⁴¹ Gordon, Rhona, *Housing Matters in the Texts of Gordon Burn, Andrew O'Hagan and David Peace*. Thesis, 2014, p.50.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

‘...put something round her neck...to make sure she was dead...I mean...if I’d started cutting her leg or her throat or something and she’d suddenly come alive...That’s what I was thinking.’ (336)

The graphic detail continues as Fred describes how he had cut and twisted off his daughter’s head: ‘I remember it made a heck of a noise when it was breaking.’ (336) Burn goes on to describe how the murderer had ‘cut and twisted her legs at the groin’ (336) and as Fred uses a bin to contain the dismembered pieces of body he is quoted as saying she ‘filled the bin shoulder ways.’ (336) The detailed descriptions of the killings and West’s obsessive DIY are devices used by Burn to show the nature of Fred West’s thought process. If we are in doubt of that Burn pulls both strands of the disturbed personality together. He describes West’s confusion about whether he strangled his daughter with her tights or a length of flex:

It was thirteen-amp, ring-main cable. Grey. Three-core. Plain copper wire...We use it for pulling posts out of the ground, things like that. All you do is just pull it round and twist it. You can’t tie knots in it...It was a bit I’d cut off when I was rewiring a house. Probably two feet to a metre long. (337)

West’s comments show the same attention to detail in both maintaining his home and murder. He treats them with the same cold matter of fact determination to do a good job. West is also showing that he is a professional in his work. There is a pride in the description. It also has the commonplace about it that Wolfe spoke of in his four devices; it was the last of these, the ‘status’ life, that would reveal the character and the ‘center of the power of realism’.³⁴³ This kind of writing is not the stuff of newspaper reports; it relies on the ordinary for its power. In *In Cold Blood* Capote does not try to use it as a narrative device within the story to gain an understanding of the murderers. To do so would have pushed *In Cold Blood* much further into the territory that the novel holds on imagination. This is not a criticism of Capote’s work but an example of how far New Journalism has travelled from those beginnings. Burn uses the house as more than just the site of horror but as a metaphor for the acts themselves, a conduit for Fred West’s disturbing thoughts and actions. West is obsessed with working on the house, drilling holes in walls and doors to watch Rosemary West’s sexual encounters, laying a new attic floor, fixing up the basement where the children would be raped by him and others that he brought home.

³⁴³ *The New Journalism*. p.47.



FIG 3: Fred and Rosemary West’s Family Home at 25 Cromwell Street³⁴⁴

Burn takes a cliché of family home and shows a corruption within it. He shows the home not to be a place of safety but a place of concealment. Just as Fred and Rosemary hide their crimes, the building becomes an extension of those secrets. It was not new to New Journalism to use the home as a jumping off point in a story, as Capote does with *In Cold Blood*, and as Mailer used in both *The Executioner’s Song* and later *Oswald’s Tale*.³⁴⁵ In the latter, Mailer takes us into the story of Lee Harvey Oswald by relating a childhood event experienced by the aunt of Oswald’s wife:

When Valya was three years old, she fell on a hot stove and burned her face and was ill for a whole year, all that year from three to four. Her mother died soon after, and her father was left with seven children. (5)

The house and home can either be a place of danger and loss, as is seen here, or in *In Cold Blood* and *The Executioner’s Song*, a place of an idyll, ‘peaceful and warm’, as Brenda describes her grandparents’ parties in *The Executioner’s Song* (5). Burn uses the house and home as dysfunctional – as in ‘...somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.’ – or nightmarish and twisted in *Happy Like Murderers*. But Burn takes all of this further by investigating the very structure of the building and the murderer’s relationship to it. He asks questions

³⁴⁴ <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-W9nOQkDDMEI/VSwm4sMceOI/AAAAAAAAAHMg/7nqJ9YII7gw/s1600/Heather%2B-%2Bgg.jpg> [retrieved 9 July 2016].

³⁴⁵ Mailer, Norman. *Oswald’s Tale*. Great Britain: Little, Brown and Company, 1995.

about the physical structure that forms the space. These are the same questions he will return to in his last novel before his death.

Does something of past events linger in the rooms, the places where they happened? Something sensed, felt, remembered, suspected, imagined, no means of perception excluded? In a room, by a wall. The uncanniness of something excluded, closed off.’³⁴⁶

Just as Peter Sutcliffe can hide in plain view in the urban environment, so can Fred West. But West goes further and adapts his house to suit a purpose beyond its function as a shelter; it is slowly customised as he returns from work nightly to continue the transformation of the family home into a corruption of that which is thought of as a *family home*. Burn’s description of Fred West and his work on 25 Cromwell Street threads through *Happy Like Murderers*, finding a line between the normal and the corrupt. The barbaric acts committed are made more horrific by our recognition of the normality of much of West’s life. Looking at his DIY is looking through the glass darkly, the normal becomes the abnormal.

The importance of the physical structure of the house at 25 Cromwell Street cannot be dismissed as a mere building where the horrific acts took place and the bodies buried. Burn understood that there is a societal connection with buildings that goes beyond the material. Gloucester City Council demolished the house in October 1996 in an attempt to create an ‘era of forced forgetting’.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Burn, Gordon, *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel*. London: Faber and Faber, 2008. p.66.

³⁴⁷ Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. p.12.



FIG 4: The area that was 25 Cromwell Street³⁴⁸

The council understood that the house had to be demolished, the land cleared, and space filled. However, even after the architects and landscapers had done their best to create a suburban landscape of blandness they could not demolish the public memories of the horrors that were committed within that space.

‘What the historian deals with are traces; that is to say the marks, perceptible to the senses, which some phenomenon, in itself inaccessible, has left behind.’³⁴⁹

At the end of *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote is brisk in his descriptions of what has become of the other characters that had been part of the story of the Clutter family; decent people who had moved on in their lives and looked to the future. This information is given in a dialogue driven two pages that Capote had no direct knowledge of. If it was given to him through the notes of his co-researcher, Harper Lee, then he did what many novelists have always done: he created a closing scene, filling in any loose ends. Norman Mailer ends *The Executioner’s Song* leaning less towards the novel, but still informs readers of what life was like for the main participants in his story after Gilmore’s execution. The last chapter is structured in numbered sections, each containing short paragraphs on what happened to those who were part of the murderous story. The last page is given to the words of a prison ‘rhyme’ (1050), which is a chilling warning to those who might come too close to evil. Gordon Burn ends his first foray into New Journalism with much the

³⁴⁸<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=25+cromwell+street+after+demolition&view=detailv2&&id=31EEF27EF8CCDA7B7B544BA4DE2E0624FAFA121&selectedIndex=11&ccid=8tQK4RJW&simid=607986573667667048&thid=OIP.Mf2d40ae112563a1459d19ea4e9f114e8o0&ajaxhist=0> [retrieved 10 July 2016].

³⁴⁹ *How Societies Remember*, p.13.

same idea. At the close of ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ we are left in a seaside town’s Chamber of Horrors attraction. Peter Sutcliffe has achieved a grotesque celebrity as ‘The Yorkshire Ripper’ and his younger brother, Carl, is complaining to the manager that the dummy before him was ‘a travesty of the original’ (272). Like Mailer and Capote he uses people who were part of the story to end the story. In *Happy Like Murderers*, however, Burn’s net is cast over wider society, and sinks deeper into community and memory. The council’s attempts to eradicate the house, and with it the memory of that space, is described in detail, from the cellar being filled in, the paving laid, the trees planted, the cobbles set, the lamps erected, the bollards installed at the front and back to stop vehicles and in the centre to stop ball games.³⁵⁰ Burn understands the council’s intention: that the old and the new will be indistinguishable; that the removal of a physical structure will leave no trace of its past. But he also understands that the house and the acts committed within it are an indelible part of a community’s history, and those roots are deeper:

Underneath is the cellar void. And under the cellar five cores of concrete buried in Severn clay. The fact of something behind. Something that is inaccessible, unknown. Beyond a doubt there is something behind. It imposes itself and won’t go away. You look at the walls. You listen to the space. (388)

In his two crime books Gordon Burn explores more than the criminal; he exposes the nature of community. His net is cast wider than Mailer and Capote’s, although he learned from both of them. American New Journalism got to the heart of its subjects and offered a closure of sorts. The executions of Hickock and Smith, and Gilmore, ended their murderous acts. Those around who were part of the killers’ stories look ahead and try to move on with their lives, the community outwardly heals. For Burn, this process is not portrayed as so straightforward. Sutcliffe is alive and in prison, his image and crimes exploited in a wax museum. He is still in society and its consciousness. He and his crimes are enmeshed in British society and forever entrenched in his community. It is with this in mind that Burn reifies this idea at the end of *Happy Like Murderers*. The concrete intended to hide the space where the Wests’ barbaric acts were committed instead makes a monument of it. There is an unsettling effect on the reader, an absence of closure,

³⁵⁰ See Fig: 4

regardless of the fact the council have attempted this very thing. Burn does not explain why the Wests murdered and raped:

With the West case, I had everything: I had access to their belongings, to the police interviews – everything, basically, that you could possibly wish to get – and you spend three years writing a book, and you still don't know what made these two people do the kind of things that they did.³⁵¹

It is this lack of resolution that separates Burn's experiments in New Journalism from his American counterparts. He was as dogged an investigative journalist as the best of them, but does not impose easy answers explaining why killers do what they do. Like Capote and Mailer he reports personal histories that might provide some insight, but blurs that line of investigation by showing us that many who shared those personal histories did not become murderers. He demonstrates the importance of place to the murderers' stories, but rather than simply provide backdrop, he brings the dwelling into the forefront of his narrative.

I started this chapter by asking how Gordon Burn was informed in his writing by American New Journalism. I compared his use of language, structure and place with that of Truman Capote and Norman Mailer. As I have shown, the technical influence of both these writers is clear in the books discussed, but what is also clear is Burn's willingness to take the evolving rules of New Journalism and use them to develop an original British voice. Capote and Mailer use the speech and idiosyncracies of broken families to construct individual protagonists who stand apart from society, making celebrities of themselves in the process; Burn, however, documents similar observations about his murderers and victims and the history of their communities, giving all their voices weight, and presents them in equal measure as part of a dysfunctional society. In doing so he extends the characteristics of American New Journalism into areas it had not yet explored.

³⁵¹ Addley, Esther. *The Guardian*. 'You Couldn't Make It Up'. Interview with Gordon Burn, 27 March 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/mar/27/fiction.media> [accessed 12 June 2015].

Chapter 2

Glen O'Brien: Did you ever dream of being an entertainer as a kid?

Madonna: No, I just had dreams of being murdered all the time.³⁵²

Gordon Burn's novels adapt the conventions of American New Journalism in such a way that they form a connected, but distinctive, genre – British New Journalism. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that New Journalism, and Truman Capote and Norman Mailer's work in particular, exerted significant influence on Burn's storytelling. I will show that the British writer's narrative technique does more than mimic his predecessors; instead, he develops a compelling modification of the US genre which derives from a uniquely British sociopolitical context. I will contrast his manipulation of the spaces between facts and fiction and his critique of fame with that of the new journalists, and posit that in going beyond the limits of historicity Burn finds a new way of expressing truth. Finally, I will conclude that his work challenges the traditional boundaries of fiction: it forms and is formed by a wider discourse in the UK about the relationship between authors, readers, the media and society.

NEW NEW JOURNALISM

The quotation at the head of this chapter opens Gordon Burn's first novel, *Alma Cogan*³⁵³ and serves to flag up a field of interest that runs through '...*somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' to his last book, *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel*: celebrity and death. In *Alma Cogan* Burn takes the eponymous pre-Beatles star and creates a detailed and credible and entirely fictional life beyond the one she lived; she is portrayed as a star on the wane as a result of changing musical, and societal trends. It was her relationship to these that led me to focus on Burn's interpretation of her story in my thesis and helped me define a particular period in the entertainment industry, post war and pre-Beatles. Although the main characters in my novel are fictitious, the places and many of the people they meet or refer to are actual people. This is not a new idea now, nor was it when Burn wrote *Alma*

³⁵² O'Brien, Glen. *Interview Magazine*, June, 1990, <http://allaboutmadonna.com/madonna-library/madonna-interview-interview-magazine-june-1990>, [accessed 14 October 2016].

³⁵³ Burn, Gordon. *Alma Cogan*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1991.

Cogan. Norman Mailer had taken American New Journalism much further than the rules set down by Tom Wolfe in *The New Journalism* when he published *Of Women And Their Elegance*³⁵⁴ in 1981, a fictional autobiography of Marilyn Monroe. Mailer chose to write the book in the first person which was a controversial decision because he had never met Monroe and used previously published works on her life³⁵⁵ in order to create a fictional truth. He took *autobiographical* facts and entwined them with fictions based on known facts:

Most conversations are lost. We reconstruct the past by our recollection of the mood fully as much as by our grasp of fact. When facts are skimpy, one hopes to do well at sensing the mood.³⁵⁶

Mailer was very aware of the journalistic taboos about truth and fact he was breaking ; in a tongue in cheek defence of his work he even put himself on trial for ‘criminal literary negligence’.³⁵⁷ Its purpose may have been self promotion; within the article however, were hints of where New Journalism was going. There was a nudge towards fiction that New Journalism had up until that point kept reined in. Mailer defined the work as ‘false biography’³⁵⁸ because the ‘facts’ given were from sources that had an agenda of promoting the star, or from other unreliable sources, not least Monroe herself.

The original American new journalists Gay Talese, Wolfe, Capote, Hunter S. Thompson, Joan Didion, the younger Norman Mailer and all those others given a mention in *The New Journalism*, reconstructed events in a more subtle form. In *In Cold Blood* Capote presents what he called an ‘immaculately factual’³⁵⁹ account of the murders, and readers, then as now, may be persuaded of the truth by the amount of detail and the years of research he dedicated to the story. However, regardless of how factual Capote said his book was, he did admit that at least three names were changed to protect those involved in the story.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁴ Mailer, Norman, and Milton H. Greene. *Of Women and Their Elegance*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980.

³⁵⁵ Including his own biography, *Marilyn, A Biography*, published in 1973.

³⁵⁶ Mailer, Norman. ‘Before the Literary Bar’, *New York Magazine*.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Plimpton, George, Interview with Truman Capote, ‘The Story Behind a Non Fiction Novel.’ *The New York Times*, January 1966
<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/12/28/home/capote-interview.html> [accessed 20 March 2015].

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

More recently, too, the account of the lead detective, Alvin Dewey Jr.'s role in the investigation (along with Capote's role) has been questioned. Did Capote manipulate the evidence that he had gathered in a way that could have unjustly affected the reader's perception of the outcome of the case? I think it more likely that the novelist and new journalist in him combined to form a compelling narrative. For this reason, Capote tells us, detectives were dispatched immediately when an informant told of the killers' whereabouts. In fact, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation 'waited five days'³⁶¹ before dispatching agents to investigate. I contend that this is a necessary matter of developing character, building dramatic tension, and dealing with the structural problems of telling a story.

Both Mailer and Capote found themselves defending their approach to representing reality within the parameters of New Journalism. By the time Mailer wrote his 'false autobiography'³⁶² of Marilyn Monroe the rules of New Journalism were being developed and in a constant state of flux. For Mailer to publish his defence of his Monroe 'autobiography' just before its publication points to a concern that the work would be misunderstood.



FIG 5: Capote, centre, with Harper Lee, Detective Dewey and his son.³⁶³

³⁶¹ Helliker, Kevin. 'Capote Classic "In Cold Blood" Tainted by Lost Files', *Wall Street Journal*, 8 February, 2013

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323951904578290341604113984>

³⁶² Mailer, Norman. 'Before the Literary Bar', *New York Magazine*.

³⁶³ https://si.wsj.net/public/resources/images/OB-WH463_blood_F_20130208161802.jpg [retrieved 15 December 2016].

His explanation was very different from that of Capote who presented his book as a factual record, which used literary devices to help the storytelling. He said: 'It seemed to me that journalism, reportage, could be forced to yield a serious new art form: the "nonfiction novel," as I thought of it.'³⁶⁴ Mailer, on the other hand, moved the journalism and reportage that Capote spoke of closer to the fiction camp. That originality needed, if not a defence, then an explanation of what he was trying to achieve. He wasn't entirely successful. Reviewers struggled with the concept of a false biography. For all the apparent flimsiness of the subject matter, and confused reception, the false biography was written within the same period that he completed *The Executioner's Song*. Both explore an idea of deeper truth being reached through fictional means.

IMAGINING CELEBRITIES

The influence of Mailer's technique is apparent in the works of Gordon Burn. Just as *The Executioner's Song* influenced Burn's writing of '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' so we can see much of *Of Women and Their Elegance* in Burn's first novel, *Alma Cogan*. Where they differ is in authorial intent. Mailer tries to show something of the 'elusive nature'³⁶⁵ of Marilyn Monroe through the information that was available to him. He therefore creates a Marilyn Monroe simulacrum, pieced together from people's recollections and writings, and considered this 'fair in literary practice'.³⁶⁶ Burn, on the other hand, is free to invent material for his fictional Alma after real Alma's death. Burn's story, however, is a broader study of fame and celebrity, and critique of celebrity as 'a kind of death'.³⁶⁷ As in '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' and *Happy Like Murderers* this is an exploration of the society which produces that *kind of death*. Although the facts of Alma Cogan up to her death are accurate, the book is less about Cogan, and more about the nature of fame and celebrity. Burn pushes again at the boundaries of Wolfe's rules of New Journalism by writing a false biographical 'future' for the dead star; to expose the corruption of fame he ties her life to that of serial killer Myra Hindley. Cogan is transformed from a subject to a character.

³⁶⁴ Plimpton, George, Interview with Truman Capote.

³⁶⁵ Mailer, Norman. 'Before the Literary Bar', *New York Magazine*.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Unknown, *The Telegraph*, 21 July 2009

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/books-obituaries/5880715/Gordon-Burn.html> [accessed 9 September 2015].

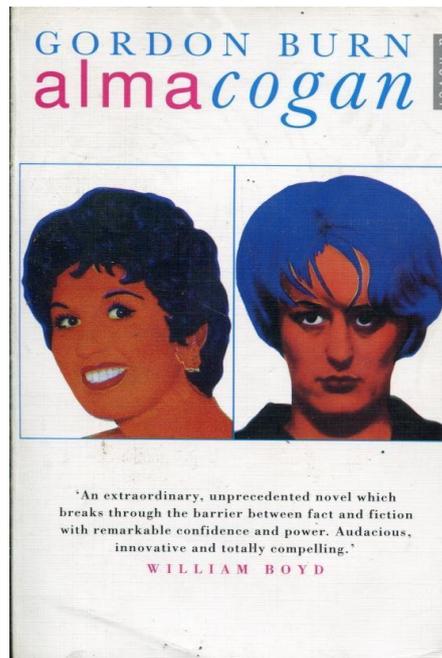


FIG 6: Cover of *Alma Cogan*³⁶⁸

It is an audacious attempt to place celebrity in as poisonous a place as possible. Burn does not represent fame as something to be sought, but rather something that brings an unpleasant and threatening experience to lives. We know where his fictitious Alma Cogan is positioned in relation to it from page one:

I have always found having my picture taken with members of the public a frankly grim and, in the end, even a distressing experience. (1)

This grim and distressing experience haunts the narrative of the novel; in the background within her story news reports comment on Myra Hindley and Ian Brady helping police find graves on Saddleworth Moor in the late 1980s. The cover of the book prepares the reader for some of this: Cogan and Hindley ‘as two opposing ideas of glamour’³⁶⁹

In contrast, Mailer’s fictitious Marilyn Monroe expresses a very different position: ‘...say what they will, there is nothing like being the center of attention.’³⁷⁰ His celebrity is

³⁶⁸ https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/7/7d/Gordon_Burn_-_Alma_Cogan.jpeg/220px-Gordon_Burn_-_Alma_Cogan.jpeg [retrieved 27 April 2016].

³⁶⁹ Gibbs, Jonathan, *Financial Times*, Review, September 14 2009, <https://www.ft.com/content/c9692dfa-9e62-11de-b0aa-00144feabdc0> [accessed January 18, 2017].

³⁷⁰ Mailer, Norman; Greene, Milton H., *Of Women and Their Elegance*, New York: Simon And Schuster, 1980. p. 95.

hungry for fame and attention, Burn's Cogan is afraid of celebrity. In an interview from the BBC television documentary, *Alma Cogan: The Girl With a Giggle in Her Voice*,³⁷¹ he articulates his response to Cogan and image when he says, '...we now sense what it means to be consumed.'

In the main Mailer tries to create his Monroe from interviews with people who knew her, and from magazine articles. Unlike the New Journalism of the past there is no confusing ideas of the journalist being there with the subjects. This time it is the subject's voice and the author takes a back seat. Mailer gives the star her voice using incidents that were researched and we know from other sources have taken place. Using these he portrays Marilyn Monroe's feelings at that time, and invites us to imagine her point of view using the 'evidence' he has provided. Anticipating a critical backlash, Mailer defends his position clearly in his imaginary courtroom scene published in the *New York Magazine*:

PROSECUTOR: It is made up.

MAILER: More or less made up.

PROSECUTOR: Could you be more specific?

MAILER: Much of the book is based on fact. I would say some of it is made up.³⁷²

New Journalism had, from the start, been charged with cherry picking from real life: '*The bastards are making it up!*', said Tom Wolfe in *The New Journalism* (24). The suspicion about the genre was compounded when Mailer did indeed make up a section of *Of Women and Their Elegance*, where Marilyn and 'Bobby' attempt to murder his wife. In the *New York Magazine* article Mailer tells us that the incident is a fabrication and that 'Bobby' did not in fact exist. This kind of fabrication exposes American New Journalism to criticism and would damage it as a genre for the future, tainting every writer labelled as a new journalist. For instance, William Zinsser said of Gay Talese's *Thy Neighbour's Wife*,³⁷³

³⁷¹ 'The Girl With A Giggle In Her Voice', BBC Television, 1991, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJ6zHNwUeBM&list=PLF6DE934E51D6BE5B> [retrieved 2 December 2016 from You Tube].

³⁷² Mailer, Norman. 'Before the Literary Bar', *New York Magazine*.

³⁷³ Talese, Gay, *Thy Neighbour's Wife*. London: Pan Books, 1981.

‘It’s a very good book. Nevertheless, it’s got to be ultimately suspect.’³⁷⁴ From the start Wolfe was aware of these dangers. In *The New Journalism* he says that ‘journalists and literary intellectuals’ (24) were sceptical of the new writing as ‘...no one was used to thinking of reporting as having an esthetic dimension’ (24). In my own work, using many factual incidents, placing my fictional characters within them, has, I believe, the opposite effect; the characters gain a credibility, or a reality, by association with real people, places and events. But Wolfe had the prescience of mind to see the problems that New Journalism would face. *The New Journalism* was a statement of intent and a defence of what these writers were doing.

The same could not be said of Gordon Burn’s *Alma Cogan*; the book was obviously entrenched in the camp of the novel rather than journalism. The fact that he chose to partially use biographical facts of a celebrity while creating an obviously fictitious existence beyond her actual death establishes that this is not a biography of Alma Cogan, but an imagined account of her life had she lived. Burn’s concern was a society that is obsessed with celebrity and celebrity culture. It was important that he chose a figure to represent who had achieved a life-changing level of fame. As Hillary Mantell said in the *New York Review of Books*, ‘...in a sense she never really existed at all, except as a construct, a confabulation, “a work of conscious and total artifice.”’³⁷⁵ Mantell recognised that the person and the celebrity are two different entities. The public Alma Cogan was artifice, created to meet a demand, and as such the public did not know the person. In his book, Burn uses this construct as a device to explore society’s relationship to celebrity. By creating a life beyond that which Alma Cogan lived, Burn peels away the sequins, the ‘fabulous dresses’,³⁷⁶ the *girl with a giggle in her voice*, revealing a more human figure; he encourages reflection on a life lived in the glare of the spotlight. No American new journalist had attempted to create a life beyond not just the celebrity, but beyond the life itself. In doing so, Burn broke new ground while maintaining some features of the genre that had influenced his writing.

³⁷⁴ Zinsser, William, quoted from *Whatever Happened to The New Journalism?*, http://www.billbeuttler.com/whatever_happened_to_the_new_journalism_11929.htm [accessed 2 December, 2016].

³⁷⁵ Mantell, Hillary. ‘On The Edge’, *New York Review of Books*. September 24, 1992 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1992/09/24/on-the-edge/> [accessed 3 December 2016].

³⁷⁶ Unknown, *Petticoat Pond*, <http://www.pettipond.com/cogan.htm> [accessed 8 December, 2016].

New Journalism was still developing and being given a very British slant. Many of those associated with American New Journalism were figures that were larger than life, writers who were as famous for their public appearances and utterances as for their works. Burn, Peace, O'Hagan and the more recent writers coming to the fore through *The Gordon Burn Prize* were not, and are not, celebrity authors in the American tradition. Capote, Wolfe, Mailer and Hunter S. Thompson were literary stars and courted publicity – and very much enjoyed that fame. The British writers did not seem to court that kind of fame but each displayed, like their American counterparts, a distinctive voice. If a reviewer misses new journalism in British writing it is perhaps that British writers have developed its form and it is less immediately recognisable than its American cousin.

PORTRAYING THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC

Comparing *Women and Their Elegance* and *Alma Cogan* we can see the writers dealing in very different ways with the public perception of celebrity, while adhering to the principles of New Journalism. As Mailer tries to get closer to the real Marilyn Monroe the celebrity product is never far behind. However much the author places Monroe in constructed scenes they seem a reflection and perpetuation of, rather than an analysis of, her celebrity. The scenes with the fictional *Bobby* are told as though relating scenes from a film. Monroe is placed in these scenes much like the character in several of her films, used and led around by a man, slightly *cookie* and vulnerable.

I could see us looking at each other forever, one year into the next. I could see my picture in the newspapers. “Starlet Questioned in Murder Case,” The pictures would be printed in all the newspapers over the world.³⁷⁷

Even the fictional telling of her story becomes ‘Marilyn as the dumb, but sexy blonde, caught up in a drama out with her control!’, film poster strapline. Mailer’s story becomes not only an endorsement of the star as a product, but, in fact, himself as a star author. As he would write about himself: ‘Mailer had the most developed sense of image’.³⁷⁸ So, for him, the image becomes of primary concern, and becomes entwined with the marketing process of the book. In his book *Stars* (1972)³⁷⁹, Richard Dyer separates publicity from promotion;

³⁷⁷ Mailer, Norman, *Of Women and Their Elegance*, p.137

³⁷⁸ Mailer, Norman, *The Armies of the Night*. London: Penguin Books, 1971.

³⁷⁹ Dyer, Richard, *Stars*. London: British Film Institute, 1979.

promotion is more strategic and emanates from the studio. Publicity, he argues, was often, though not always, ‘what the press finds out’ (69) or ‘what the star let slip’ (69). He goes on to say:

In practice, much of this too was produced by the studios, or the star’s agent, but it did not appear to be, and in certain cases... it clearly was not. (69)

Mailer uses both promotion and publicity to create his false autobiography of Monroe. The promotion was the hard-working star who loved Hollywood and the glamorous lifestyle. The *what the star let out* publicity was more complex: ‘But when you’re famous, you kind of run into human nature in a raw kind of way. It stirs up envy, fame does.’³⁸⁰ The constructed image is offered again to the reader but in a different structural context. This gives the impression of something new being said about the subject; in fact, Mailer is reconstructing it to understand the person behind it. In the resulting representation of Monroe his creative passages (‘More or less made up’³⁸¹) are as important to the reading as the factual passages. Burn, in contrast, seems to see this process less as invention, and more as a disclosure. On this, he quotes John Berger on imagination:

Imagination is not, as is sometimes thought, the ability to invent, it is the ability to disclose that which exists.³⁸²

This approach invariably involves the reader in the life of the star beyond the constructed persona. It leads us to how they exist in society. *Alma Cogan*, therefore, is not a biography of the star Alma Cogan, nor simply an attempt to understand Cogan; it is an autopsy on obsession and celebrity. Cogan herself is used as a metonym for celebrity. Combining a real-life figure with the publicity material available to us, and creating a life beyond that which she lived, reinforces the idea that *stars* are created, and that the public perception is nothing more than a hyperreal fiction. Burn’s aims were obviously very different from Mailer’s; while the American manoeuvres himself around the edges of the star using the New Journalism technique of intertwining fact and fiction to understand the interior Marilyn Monroe, Burn creates a fictional character from a star and the society that formed

³⁸⁰ Mailer, Norman, *Of Women and Their Elegance*, p. 24. From an interview in *Life* magazine, 3 August 1962.

³⁸¹ Mailer, Norman. ‘Before the Literary Bar’, *New York Magazine*.

³⁸² Burn, Gordon; Willis, Simon *Granta*, ‘Interview with Gordon Burn’, 17 April 2008, <https://granta.com/interview-gordon-burn/> [accessed 12 May, 2014]. Burn has taken the quote from John Berger’s *Permanent Red*. p.51.

her. It is still New Journalism in that he uses real people and facts are key components, but they had not been used in such a way before. Burn has a wider scope, and what he does not know is as important as what he does. In his book *The Nature of Biography* (1978), Robert Gittings suggests that although more is accessible to the biographer through technology there is still much that the writer will not know. This holds true even today, when the internet has made the minutiae of stars' lives accessible yet brought them no closer to the public. New Journalism tries to bridge the gap by a process of creative deduction based on the facts of a life and has done since its earliest days. The fictionalising of aspects of Monroe's uses facts to suggest a new truth about the star. The fictionalising of Alma Cogan's life by Burn does more: by presenting a credible fiction which locates the facts of her life as facts about the UK at particular points in time. In doing so, he uncovers much about society then, and now.

A central theme of Burn is celebrity as 'a kind of death'.³⁸³ The conflating of Alma Cogan and child murderer Myra Hindley embodies that idea by placing arguably the most horrific British crime of the 1960s within Alma's story. The portrayal of 1950s Britain is much darker than the upbeat pop songs that Alma traded in. Her story is permeated by decay, a sense of the past rotting. Alma pokes among the embers of her past fame with disillusionment. The bleak image that Burn presents us with is a long way from the frozen beauty of Monroe that stares out at us from Mailer's biography, or from the camera confident Monroe who graces the cover of the false autobiography *Of Women and Their Elegance*. The subjective viscerality of Alma's experience of celebrity is often described by her sensory perception by Burn:

The women pressed close smelling of dandruff, candlewick, camphor and powdered milk, thinly disguised by a 'top note', as the perfume manufacturers put it, of 'Evening in Paris' or Coty 'L'Aimant' or some other cheerful, rapidly evaporating technicolour stink from Woolworth's. (1)

And later, her mother's flat '...smells of neglect, decay, staleness. Dirt is ingrained in the window, the curtains are heavy with dust...urine coloured.' (162) Burn's first person account involves our perception as much as Alma's. She knows, and we know, there is something corrupt or dying in the world presented to us. From the start, Alma's milieu is claustrophobic and her fans threatening. Post war Britain is a place that wants to turn away

³⁸³ Burn, Gordon, *The Telegraph*, 21 July 2009.

from the austerity of ration books and poor housing and face toward the glamour that Alma Cogan seemed to represent. Burn's description of those fans that we might see represented in film newsreels or newspaper photos show them to be a construct as much as Cogan's image: '...when you got close to them, men and women, throbbing and pounding and exploding inside; inwardly erupting.' (2) Burn's focusses his lens as sharply on the media representation of the public as on the object of their adoration. Fame is portrayed as dangerous for the celebrity; Alma felt 'terrorised' (3) by them. Burn asks the question: if it is bad for her, is it bad for us too?

Mailer's Marilyn endures celebrity in much the same way – if on a grander scale – and has to deal with an equally needy public. Where Mailer and Burn's subjects differ, though, is in the analysis of the star's relationship with fans. Mailer's Monroe was just as needy as them. He explores that need and that fame through a step by step analysis of the image, its creation and its destructiveness.



FIG 7: Cover of Norman Mailer's *Marilyn* ³⁸⁴

There is no need for words on the cover of Mailer's first attempt to write about Monroe in *Marilyn*; the iconic image is instantly recognisable. It is glamour, it is star quality captured in a single photograph. It is what we know of Marilyn Monroe: a construct that tells us everything and nothing about the star. Mailer has said that 'We reconstruct the past...' ³⁸⁵ and from a set of images by photographer Milton H. Green, Mailer tries, in *On Women and Their Elegance*, for a second time, to reconstruct. This time he will work in the first person in order to get closer to the subject. Mailer sets out to reconstruct another past, a more

³⁸⁴ <http://bookzangle.com/images/books/00373/024764.jpg> [retrieved 3 January 2017].

³⁸⁵ Mailer, Norman. 'Before the Literary Bar', *New York Magazine*.

desperate past, and one that recalls Gordon Burn's description of celebrity as *a kind of death*. Like Cogan, Monroe *is* glamour, *is* fame; but unlike Cogan she is set apart from her fans. Cogan is touched by events in society as are her fans.

Throughout the history of New Journalism there was always a notion that it was 'replacing objectivity with a dangerous subjectivity that threatened to undermine the credibility of all journalism.'³⁸⁶ I contend that new journalists contribute to a body of knowledge about the role of celebrities in sustaining particular dominant cultures and ideologies. Mailer's 'imaginary memoir'³⁸⁷ tests the credibility of the genre more robustly than any work of New Journalism had previously attempted. He created plausible characters and scenes that were grounded in facts without being factual; often key details and some entire events which implied historicity were inventions. Burn's description of Alma Cogan's rise to fame is factually accurate; the people mentioned when she reminisces are real people; and the descriptions of 1950s and 1960s clubs and concert halls are precise. Like Mailer, he invents, but where Mailer invents to fill in gaps in Monroe's history, Burn invents to create an imaginary existence for the star beyond her actual death that is consistent with the facts and the characterisation of her real life. Instead of dying of stomach cancer in 1966, aged 34, Cogan lives on and retires three years later after she makes the decision to '...fade away with as little self-pity and as much dignity as possible' (17). She lives by the sea, takes walks with her dog, and remembers her days of celebrity. We are told that Alma wants to live in '...real time' (18). The irony here is that she joins this *real time* just as the story creates its fictional time of Alma Cogan. As she stands at a river watching two people on the other bank we sense her separation from the crowds of her past life, a shift away from fame and fans. This, though, is not a complete break with the past as the town is only a half hour away. As she hears the water lap against the hulls of boats it reminds her of '...the sound of a thousand working men drinking a thousand pints' (49). Her fame is constantly in her thoughts; it has not been erased through the decline of success and her descent into alcoholism. Her glory days at the London Palladium are recalled even at the working men's clubs where voices shout, 'Give the poor cow a chance!' (49).

³⁸⁶ Fakazis, Liz, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, New Journalism, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/New-Journalism> [accessed 5 January 2017].

³⁸⁷ Mailer, Norman, from the fly leaf of *Of Women and Their Elegance*.

It is this aspect of Burn's technique that I recognise in my own false memoir of comedian Freddy Foster. Like him, I locate my characters in a world populated by facts and fictional failures to reveal something of the sociopolitical context of then and now. A critique of the nature of success and fame is at the centre of both *Alma Cogan* and *A Funny Thing*. Although my main characters are entirely fictional, like Alma, Norman and Freddy work their way up steadily from entertainment package tours to the heights of the London Palladium and prime time television spots. I felt that they had to reach this level of perceived success before it is taken from them in order to fully expose the nature of fame. On that downward slope there is a scene where Norman, a physically tough man, breaks down in the dressing room of a working men's club in Manchester. For this to have the desired impact on the reader, he must have tasted something of the glamour of show business; he and the reader must be fully aware of the downward spiral of his career. It was also important within the greater scope of the narrative that his partner, Freddy, although shocked at his partner's breakdown, articulates to him the nature of the business they are in. Their declining career becomes a metaphor for the disease which afflicts Norman, and the response to end it all, becomes more poignant. In *Alma Cogan* Burn allows Alma no illusions about showbusiness. She accepts and understands where she is now. She does not miss the crowds, but she does miss the glamour and the paraphernalia of fame. This awareness, in both characters and readers, is central to the critique; what has been 'lost' is as unreal and constructed as the image sold to the public.

NAMING THE NEW BIOGRAPHY

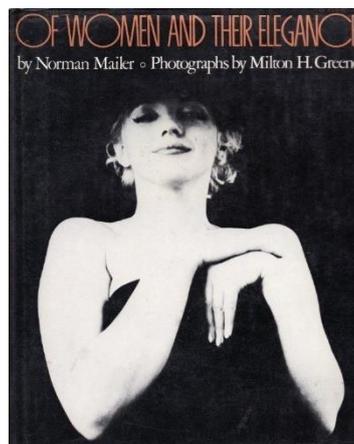


FIG 8: Cover of Norman Mailer's *Of Women and Their Elegance*³⁸⁸

³⁸⁸ <http://blankbooks.co.za/8114/of-women-and-their-elegance.jpg> [retrieved 8 January 2017].

In *Of Women and Their Elegance* and *Marilyn*, Mailer presents us with a character who buys into a symbiotic relationship with celebrity. His star wants to be noticed. As a young girl in an orphans' home she takes delight in the attention of young boys. '...it's nice, people knowing who you are and all of that, and feeling that you've meant something to them.' (24). This version of Monroe appears to be at the heart of Monroe's success, although in *Marilyn* Mailer importantly quotes Virginia Woolf:

A biography is considered complete if it accounts for six or seven selves. Whereas a person might have as many as a thousand.³⁸⁹

He goes on to comment that 'facts always attract polar facts' (18) and his working through these to establish the truth of a life runs through both books. In this sense they are as much a story of the biographer's dilemma as the subject's. In *Marilyn* he mentions two previous biographies of the star published, and comments on the 'limitations on the conventional approach' (18) they offer and warns the reader to be wary of what they read as they are often no more than 'factoids ... creations that are not so much lies as a product to manipulate emotions...' (18). Mailer, it seems, draws a distinction between these and his New Journalism. His fictionalised situations are not emotive manipulations but 'false truths' that offer more reality than the truth that was altered' (18). He questions preceding accounts of Monroe's life and the dubious, apocryphal stories told and passed around that gained more credibility in their retelling. He doubts, for instance, that her grandmother tried to smother her with a pillow when she was a baby; he raises an eyebrow at the rape that she said that she endured when she was seven. He dismisses Marilyn's anecdote about sitting in a church, aged six, feeling that she would rather be naked than wearing an orphan's uniform as a *factoid* that over the years became a fact. He is certain that 'we know she was in no orphan uniform aged 6' (32) and discredits her portrayal of the orphanage she would most certainly stay in later; her Dickensian nightmare was more likely a projection of the 'monotonous erosion of her ego' (35). Holding biography up to this kind of scrutiny and finding it wanting legitimises New Journalism as a locus to experiment with the genre. Seven years elapsed between his first and second books on Monroe, an experimental period during which he developed an emerging form – fictional biography. This was characterised by a daring interplay between fact and imagination.

³⁸⁹ Woolf, Virginia, from Norman Mailer's *Marilyn*, p. 18.

For example, the first person narration in *Of Women and Their Elegance* seems a ‘convincing’ rendering of Monroe’s voice in the sense that it melds her popular persona, which the reader accesses through the media, with imaginary material. Some of this, in the journalistic tradition, was extrapolated from interviews with her still-living friends and acquaintances; some incidents, such as the account of a plan to murder a lover’s wife, are entirely fictional. Mailer’s inclusion of this material, which would be defamatory had Monroe still been alive, reveals as New Journalism territory the interiority of the recently deceased. Where there were gaps in her story – in this case two years with very little usable detail – Mailer used his novelist’s skill to characterise her inner thoughts. For instance, the conversational tone and direct address used to narrate her story meets the reader’s media-generated expectation of the star’s inner voice, and implies autobiographical access to the ‘actual thoughts of Miss Monroe’, despite the disclaimer of factual representation (22). In his Author’s Note, Mailer defends his approach – ‘a set of interviews that never took place’ – as an attempt to understand his subject (251). In this sense, fictional biography is as true as any work of nonfiction.

Burn extends Mailer’s and New Journalism’s techniques into yet another manifestation of the form. In *Alma Cogan* he demonstrates from the start that what we are reading is a fictional account of a life partly based on known facts. In doing so he throws new light on and questions these ‘facts’. News items and biographical detail provide at first a backdrop to her time, then are drawn closer to her fictional world. By combining these with quotidian details – gestures, poses, styles of walking, glances, relationship to other people in the fictional world - Burn is carrying on the tradition of New Journalism. It is what Tom Wolfe called ‘the status life’,³⁹⁰ it shows the character’s position in the world and is ‘at the center of the power of realism’.³⁹¹ One of her particular characteristics is the ‘randomness and chance’ (53) of how she remembers things such as lines of songs. This realistic portrayal of fictional interiority coupled with objective external data leads to Burn positing a new kind of ‘truth’. Later, in his final novel *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel*, Burn will develop this style to create a very different sort of narrative that takes New Journalism to yet another place that foreshadows our current post-factual world. Perhaps though, it was ever thus. Mailer tells us in *Marilyn* to be wary of what Marilyn Monroe said of her life; to be wary, in fact, of the biographical stories we were told as they could have been made up. Personal, often unverifiable details, were entered into the publicity machine by

³⁹⁰ *The New Journalism*. p.47.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

the star and her promoters to feed a public perception. Burn, however, does not require us to be wary of anything, for the account of Alma's life beyond death is entirely fictional. If that is the case then Burn's book cannot fall into any sort of biography genre, where both Mailer's books are always placed.

In short, New Journalism in both its US and UK form, presents us with two related but distinctive critiques of celebrity in which the interplay between fact and fiction leads to a subjective constructed version of the truth about two stars. If Mailer and Burn are the lenses through which they are viewed, then Mailer offers a close-up of Monroe, while Burn presents Cogan as a small figure in the middle of a wide-angle shot. This concern for context is a defining characteristic of British New Journalism.

THE NARRATOR AND THE AUTHOR

Many recent writers have demonstrated their faith in narratives which combine real and fictional content to offer new perspectives on history. The reader is more inclined to accept the truth of a story if it is rooted in historicity. The appropriation of real people in New Journalism novels lends them a credibility that cannot be achieved through the use of fictitious characters. For this reason we are more inclined to accept Norman Mailer's self-confessed fictionalisation of Marilyn Monroe's life which is recounted in the 'first-person' in the voice of the deceased film star. This direct address gives the impression that it is derived from the truth and therefore it is received as believable. The impact of this technique is enhanced by other features consistent with the style of American New Journalism. In *The New Journalism* Wolfe defines its fourth device – 'styles of furniture, clothing, decoration...' (47) – as helping get closer to realism and the character. Facts are dressed in fictional clothing. A celebrity, their personhood, becomes part of the known in society; their character has already been imprinted in the reader's consciousness through their fame and celebrity. A skillful New Journalist creates fresh truth by convincingly bringing together what is already believed and what could be believed.

In addition to a credible portrayal of the real human subjects in this kind of fictional work, a convincing authorial voice is necessary. In *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator* Paul Dawson refers to the manifestation of contemporary omniscience in the 'immersion

journalist and the social commentator'.³⁹² In using the methodology of immersionism, a writer is directly involved with the situation under investigation and prioritises their subjective response to the experience. This role is exemplified by Capote's in *In Cold Blood*. We might also cite Mailer in *The Executioner's Song*, *Oswald's Tale* and *Armies of the Night*, and much of Burn's work, including '...somebody's husband, somebody's son.', *Happy Like Murderers*, *Alma Cogan* and *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel*.

Over the course of his writing career, Burn takes the British novel into waters uncharted by American New Journalism, relying less on the journalistic tradition espoused by Tom Wolfe and more on his own unique form of immersive investigation. I will contend that by the time he writes *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel*, Burn has become the story. His saturation in the facts of British popular and political culture make his characterisation of himself, the author, seem like a natural evolution of New Journalism in a context where access to overwhelming amounts of information immerses everyone in the news. While Wolfe is credited with radically shifting American New Journalism into fiction in his 1987 novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* it remains rooted in a well-established tradition; the subject matter of greed, politics, and racism in 1970s New York City is exposed using a journalistic approach to detail and selective first-person accounts expressed through authoritative omniscient narration. The facts and figures of housing, infrastructure, crime and corruption are detailed and, although not academically referenced, *seem* factual. Using the device of a fictional setting that resembles New York, he explores social change in the real city at that time. It is interesting to note that Paul Dawson begins his argument by stating that '...the ostensibly outmoded figure of the omniscient narrator has become a salient feature of contemporary British and American literary fiction' (1). That figure, he argues, is not an all-knowing God, but more a narrator with greater 'intellectual scope' (137). In *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, this 'outmoded' narrator was replaced by the author who is well-researched and informed: one reviewer recently described it as: '...dense with research and bulging with bombast'.³⁹³ The centrality of detailed data to the process locates it in journalism, as does the fact that Wolfe, as Dickens had done with his novels over a hundred years before, conceived it as a serialisation – bi-weekly, over 27 editions of *Rolling Stone* magazine starting in 1984. Here, Wolfe uses a fictional form to perform the kind of 'social autopsy' he advocates in *The New Journalism* (47).

³⁹² Dawson, Paul, *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator: Authorship and Authority in Twenty-First Century Fiction*. Ohio, Ohio State Press, 2013. p.136.

³⁹³ Hoby, Hermione. 'The Bonfire of the Vanities by Tom Wolfe', *The Guardian*. 10 January, 2010 [accessed 16 January 2017].

Like Wolfe, Burn offers a critique of a context through the detailed portrayal of individual experiences. Burn's investigation into celebrity and our relationship with it in *Alma Cogan*, however, casts a wider net over a much longer timespan. His subject matter, contextualised in post-war Britain, is the relationship of celebrities to the public and the fame-fuelled global marketplace. Carefully curated detail and anecdote as cited in previous chapters is instrumental in splicing Alma's world to ours. In both of these novels I would argue that the extensive research conducted by the authors is at the forefront of the narrative and leads to a reading experience that is something more than entertainment. The density of the detail that both these writers supply to the narrative points the reader towards that researcher, that journalist. In presenting such detail, both of these authors ask us to consider where we are now, whether that is through the context of New York housing policy of the 1980s or 1950s British light entertainment. Where Burn and Wolfe differ is in their relationship to the facts. Wolfe uses facts and data to produce a concrete truth within the fiction; Burn uses facts often as a starting block for questions about the role of the narrator and the reader. We might accept the conceit of a life after death story of a pop star, but when that is juxtaposed with, and brought into focus with, the life of a child murderer, uncomfortable questions are being raised about the role of celebrity and its place in society.

In *Armies of the Night* he wrote about an anti-Vietnam demonstration held in Washington in October 1967 and it was published in the United States the following year. The subtitle is *History as a Novel, the Novel as History*. The use of the word 'Novel' tells us that Mailer is fictionalising events, or using fictional tools to present real life events. Mailer places himself at the centre of the narrative; he is the narrator and the protagonist. By placing himself in the work he therefore makes himself a character, as well as the narrator, and gives a first hand account of the demonstration. The short time between the event and publication gives it the contemporaneous feel of reporting. However, the characterisation of the writer locates it outside pure journalism and releases Mailer from the constraints of the form. Reviewing *Armies of the Night* A. Alvarez said the book is:

...also about the nature of politics and power...about anxiety, middle age and marriage...about the art of writing...it's about action, totalitarianism, violence, fear, boredom and all the facets of contemporary American schizophrenia...³⁹⁴

In it, Mailer refers to himself as 'Mailer' in what he described as 'third-person personal.'³⁹⁵ The character Mailer is therefore free to go where the author Mailer's creative urge may take him. This would later have a clear influence on Gordon Burn when he wrote his last novel *Born Yesterday: the News as a Novel*, in which he characterises himself as an investigative novelist. This device raises a question about the reader's relationship with the author.

Authorship is not defined simply by the name on the cover of a book. This is particularly true of the celebrity author, which I would suggest Mailer is. His presence is there from the start and that presence, I suggest, affects how a reader evaluates the truth of his works. The author-journalist's name implies truth and that is extended beyond their person into their work. By going even further and placing himself within the narrative, the author-character's credentials become subtly inscribed in the story. But from this, questions of legitimacy arise. Is Mailer's description of the 1968 protest accurate because he was there and places himself at the centre? Or does the fact that the author speaks of himself in the third person signal to the reader that the 'Mailer' described is a fictional figure, and we should not therefore not rely on the veracity of his voice? The Gordon Burn that guides us through *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel* is simultaneously the novelist, the investigative journalist and the fictionalised narrator; so should we trust him? Which Gordon Burn is it that watches the elderly Thatcher in the park and contemplates her life and legacy? Does the real Gordon Burn really turn up at Gordon Brown's home and arouse suspicion about his intentions? Is it he who arranges a disastrous meeting with a soap star who was allegedly having dinner at Granita Restaurant in Islington the same night Brown and Blair made a deal that would shape the Labour Party and Britain for the future? Burn does not present us with a third person 'personal' narrator like Mailer's. However, his author-narrator hybrid is a characterisation device that enables him to question the truth of the media in a flexible and unusual way. Burn heaps coincidence upon coincidence that lead us into questioning the culture of rolling news. Truth, as reported, becomes, in Burn's narrative, a surreal experience; he explicitly

³⁹⁴ From the *New Statesman*, quoted from blurb at back of *Armies of the Night*.

³⁹⁵ Swift, Daniel. 'Was Norman Mailer the Last Tough Guy?', *The New Statesman*. 14 November 2013. <http://www.newstatesman.com/2013/11/last-tough-guy> [accessed 10 March 2017].

links the heroic airport worker having a cigarette break to Madeleine McCann going missing from the same place that Paul McCartney proposed to Linda Eastman 40 years before. The events of the summer of 2007 are revealed as constructs for news consumption and the coincidences that Burn draws with them twist the truth into a new form. This is a further evolution of New Journalism: instead of using fictional elements to ask us to believe a story, Burn seems to be using non-fictional techniques to ask us if not to disbelieve it, then to question it. His author-narrator guides us through the recent news-scape, doggedly trying to recover truths before the trail goes cold. He juxtaposes familiar front page stories with anecdotes and random occurrences and ponders their connection. In *Born Yesterday: The News as Novel*, the author seems puzzled by his collage of events; the fading out of Thatcher from the public eye and the lack of resolution in Madeleine McCann's narrative mirror the trajectory of the novel. Despite his extensive research and journalistic credentials, Burn does not present himself, as author, narrator or character, as any more of an authority on the significance of these events than the reader. What he does is ask questions.

In their introduction to *Twenty First Century Fiction: What Happens Now*³⁹⁶ Sian Adiseshiah and Rupert Hildyard contend that new fiction writers continue to explore 'questions posed by Lenin and Trotsky at the beginning of the last century in *What Is To Be Done?* (Lenin, 1901), and *Where Is Britain Going?* (Trotsky, 1926)' and 'invoke Paul Gauguin's questions asked by his 1897 painting, 'Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?'' With four of his works published in the twenty first century, Burn can be considered in view of this definition. The questions that concerned his predecessors are also his. How is society changing and what effect does that have on communities? From '...somebody's husband, somebody's son.' through to his last novel Burn has critiqued the nature of our society and the role of media and celebrity. Ubiquitous, rolling media coverage has changed how and what we remember. Our collective memory is shaped by the events that are given media significance. Constructed news also constructs society. In *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel* Burn cites Howard Singerman's observation that the collective memory of any generation has now 'become the individual memory of each of its members, for the things that carry the memory are marked not by the privacy, the specificity and insignificance of Proust's madeleine, but precisely by their claim to significance' (85).

³⁹⁶ Adiseshiah, Sian, Rupert Hildyard (ed.). *Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

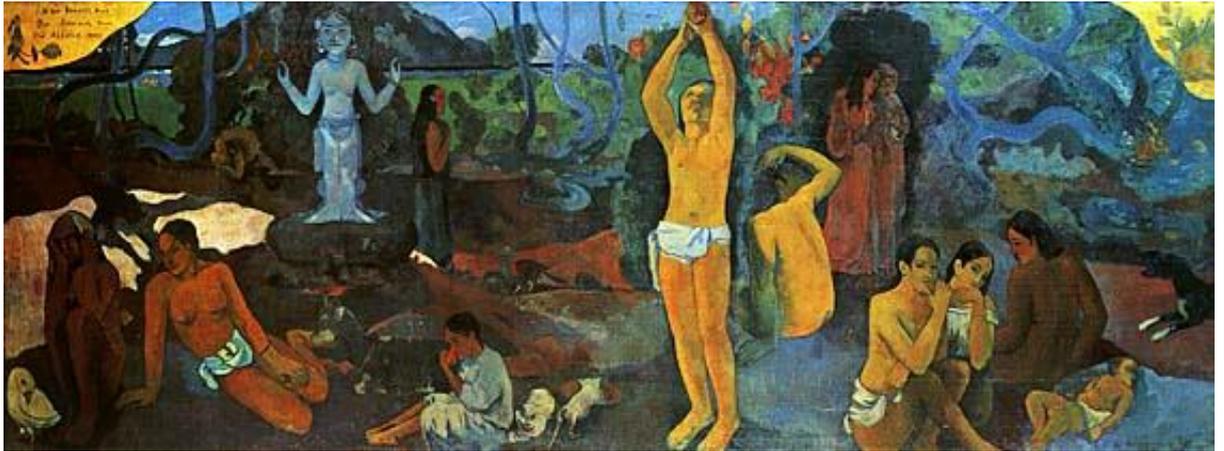


FIG 9: *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going*³⁹⁷

In *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel* Burn, through the device of the author-journalist-character, combines the interpretation of specific significant events and insignificant personal anecdotes. This characterisation technique is mirrored, at one step removed, in his portrayals of those news personalities he has randomly encountered (Margaret Thatcher in the park), or sought out (Gordon Brown at home). The narrative proximity of these incidents doesn't sustain a fully-developed plot, but does attempt to question what fiction is and the route it might be taking. By taking seemingly random news stories from a few months in 2007 Burn tries to find a line that joins seemingly disparate incidents. The use of coincidence suggests connections and is the novel's central 'structural conceit'.³⁹⁸ In using this, Burn taps into the innate human tendency to construct narrative from, and find meaning in, unconnected, random events.

The urgency that is felt in Mailer's *Armies of the Night* is also experienced in Burn's novel. Burn deliberately set himself a deadline of six weeks to complete the novel, and this journalistic approach to the writing gave it the immediacy of a news review. The narrator becomes a newscaster delivering the headlines about that single summer, searching for connections no matter how disparate. The author's research becomes reporter's notes, and a new narrative is teased out from mainstream media reports. It is also a search to find an angle, a narrative shape from what Lindsay Duguid perceptively called 'components of a

³⁹⁷ Gauguin, Paul. 'Where Do We Come From? Who Are We? Where Are We Going?' <http://www.wewebcompany.com/portale/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Gauguin.jpg> [retrieved 12 April 2017].

³⁹⁸ Lawson, Mark. 'I heard the news today, oh boy', *The Guardian*, April 5, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/apr/05/featuresreviews.guardianreview21> [accessed April 3, 2017].

fictive world'.³⁹⁹ What Burn achieves here is something other than a novel as news or news as novel, though. In fact, reviewers such as Mark Lawson and Boyd Tonkin pointed to the book as being like an art piece, a collage or installation.

This extension of the form breaks with the tradition of new journalists who focused on a story and the characters within it. Chance had little place in the practice of New Journalism yet it plays a central role in Burn's narrative. His search is for meaning, structure, and sense in stories that often contain little. Where a coincidence is not obvious, the author-narrator intervenes to reveal it, making the writer's voice explicit. Gordon Brown has a damaged eye due to a childhood accident; it is brought to the reader's attention by pointing out the distinctive unique flaw in the left eye of missing Madeleine McCann. The intensity of the research process is explicitly addressed: with 'all this in his brain' (160) the author-narrator's obsession with connection takes its toll during sleepless nights.

In the absence of a familiar narrative structure, themes emerge that help establish meaning. A sense of absence is striking. The football grounds that are at season's end silent, that betray '...a lack of presence; the very traces of life extinguished, of death stalking through the centre of life' (46). Later, Burn will ask two policeman for directions to the Prime Minister's house and have to explain the purpose of his visit. He notes that it was a 'summer of disappearances, absences, some voluntary, some not; that he was interested in the idea of absence, of erasure and self-erasure' (191-192). There are clues left by any author that point to them as the creator of a particular work; perhaps a repeated theme or a reworded, repeated idea. There are traces left, fingerprints of style. We hear echoes of the author's words in *Happy Like Murderers*, when the West's house is demolished and the space is filled in order that a community can forget. But underneath is the cellar space: '...it imposes itself and won't go away' (388). In *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel*, Burn does not hide behind his words; he tramps through the narrative, disturbing evidence, trying to find a story he can settle into. That author is here in the novel and he questions how to achieve 'self erasure'. Burn, the author, rather than character, is trying to find the story. But, like Mailer, Burn this time can't resist showing up in his own work. He doesn't skulk in the shadow, but is the protagonist, and tells the reader who he is and what he is attempting to do: 'This part of it –

³⁹⁹ Duguid, Lindsay. 'Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel by Gordon Burn', *The Sunday Times*, April 13, 2008, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/born-yesterday-the-news-as-a-novel-by-gordon-burn-mk72gp3r52f> [accessed 3 April, 2017].

the waiting and watching, looking for “something to happen”, like staring at an empty page, waiting for “inspiration”, some characters, a story – is part of the project’ (186).

This refusal to let the reader and the character forget that the author is there is a central conceit of the narrative. The narrator in *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel* picks a book from his bookshelf and describes the toy dog on the cover and we know he is referring to Burn’s second novel, *Fullalove*: the character reminds you that he is the author. As in the minimalist set of a Brecht play, the artifice is on show for everyone to see. Burn’s author is alive and well inside the text, and harder to kill off. Does this bring the reader any closer to Burn the person and his ideas? When Mailer refers to himself as writer in the third person, perhaps he anticipates that our knowledge of him as celebrated writer will attach special significance to his words on this basis; perhaps he does not. When Burn does so, it is his character that points us towards his works, and this reminder of his authorship becomes a caution against attributing to him authorial intent. Inside the text, he is, like us, a reader of work by Gordon Burn, and his intention loses its significance.

This autoreference also contextualises Burn’s work within a developing discourse about news events. In common with other new journalists, he references existing debate about media and events in his fiction. In *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel* the familiarity of content from the mainstream media allows the lay reader to engage at a superficial level with this discourse, but in foregrounding the gaps between disparate events, he encourages a deeper engagement with the function of our society. The coincidences he notes in the end, feel random, and imply that the events of our recent past are resistant to the narrative structure. Into these gaps, the reader can insert their own interpretation. This is what separates him from his predecessors and contemporaries.

The task Burn set himself was to create a novel from the news, but he does not write news. The dynamic of stories rolled out from newsrooms derives from news cycles and ever-changing news feeds; *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel* relies on patterns in events and human behaviour. It is a novel in search of a structure, that seeks not only to contain each story and coincidence, but to connect them. As it progresses, though, we see that many are connected less to each other and more to the author. The quest for narrative becomes more of a personal journey for Burn: ‘Oh, he would have liked to switch off, crawl quietly back to bed. But his mind kept scratching away’ (163). This Burn persona is narrated in Mailer’s ‘third person personal’. But in using the pronoun ‘he’, Burn complicates the author’s role since he has already told us that the character is the man who wrote *Fullalove*. These books

are part personal statement and part biography. Burn shares with the reader his writing technique; his research method becomes part of the narrative. The detail of the lives of Burn and Mailer becomes narrative content, and Burn in particular offers his own historicity to the debate; the author is absorbed into the discourse as ‘future transformation’. Authorship is relational, personal, evolving and shaped by each addition to the ongoing discourse. Mailer’s comments in ‘Before the Literary Bar’ echo this: ‘We reconstruct the past by our recollection of the mood fully as much as by our grasp of fact’.⁴⁰⁰ This idea of ‘sensing the mood’ led Mailer to ‘becoming’ Marilyn – or his idea of the star. Arthur Miller, Monroe’s husband, came close to suing Mailer after the publication of *Marilyn* because he said Mailer was in fact ‘recasting himself as Marilyn’.⁴⁰¹ The author and his subject become one, and the discourse about their relationship moves and continues with Burn years later. He contributes something more than Mailer to the new definition of news and the people who populate it. Because his author and character cannot be separated in *Born Yesterday: The News as Novel*, the reader has to go beyond reading the news reports Burn cites as inaugurative; instead they have to consider the original incidents themselves as the inception of the story that they become. By extension, the author and everything he writes become a step toward the ‘future transformations’ that constitute the discussion about authorship of the news. Like Mailer, Burn plays with the relationship between authors and their subjects. This is at the heart of New Journalism. Mailer’s book, however, does not question *itself*. Burn’s does, and his final novel is almost an essay on what a novel can be. His hermeneutic process does not generate many answers, but his search for them forms an intriguing personal news collage.

Unlike his New Journalism predecessors, Burn does not try to obscure fictional elements of his narratives, such as the entirely imaginary after-life he imagined for Alma Cogan. The stories and people contained within *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel* resonate with anyone who read or watched the news of that period. The people that inhabit the narrative we recognise. But it is the bizarre connections he makes which form an original approach to making sense of the news. No ‘new journalist’ had attempted anything of that sort before.

⁴⁰⁰ Mailer, Norman. ‘Before the Literary Bar’, *New York Magazine*.

⁴⁰¹ Carnevale, Alex. ‘North Korea, South Korea’, *This Recording*, 20 July, 2011.

<http://thisrecording.com/today/2011/7/20/in-which-norman-mailer-ruins-marilyn-monroe-for-the-rest-of.html> [Accessed 4 March, 2017].

Chapter 3

‘In memory of Gordon Burn, with love and thanks.’⁴⁰²

In this chapter I will define a new generation of British writers that was inspired or influenced by the work of Gordon Burn. In doing so I will refer to contemporary novelists who demonstrate a similar commitment to the tenets of New Journalism. I will contend that the work of Burn and others form a discrete and distinctive genre that can be called British New Journalism. To evidence this contention I will examine the novels of David Peace and Andrew O’Hagan through the lens of New Journalism and its variations as expressed by Gordon Burn and his American predecessors.

WORK, REST, AND PLAY

David Peace grew up in the Yorkshire of ‘The Yorkshire Ripper’. His murders fascinated him: ‘Millions of people were affected by the Ripper manhunt...walking past murder sites on the way to school.’⁴⁰³ It is therefore no great surprise that his first published works should deal with that time and those events. Paddy MacGuire, in his essay ‘Politics, Class, and the 1970s/80s’, states that ‘...the landscape of Peace’s novels is...one of moral decay and social and cultural dislocation.’⁴⁰⁴ This could also be said of Gordon Burn’s settings, from ‘...*somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.*’ to *Alma Cogan*, through his sporting ‘biographies’ *Best and Edwards: Football, Fame and Oblivion* and *Pocket Money*, to his last experimental novel, *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel*. The ‘moral decay’ in Peace’s work is woven into the storytelling through descriptions of murders and the unravelling of the fabric of the society he describes. The building of communities that Burn traced through the generations had positive as well as negative elements, but in Peace’s world, the system is unrelentingly rotten to the core. His villains are not the exceptional corrupt individual shaped by a complacent community, such as those Burn often focussed on, but multiple complicit members of groups that had been corrupted. At local council level, the lawlessness of the police is held up to scrutiny in *The Red Riding*

⁴⁰² Peace, David. *Red or Dead*. London: Faber and Faber, 2013, dedication.

⁴⁰³ Peace, David. “The History Man”. *The Guardian*, 10 May 2008, by Nicholas Roe. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/may/10/fiction> [accessed 22 March, 2017].

⁴⁰⁴ MacGuire, Paddy. ‘Politics and Class in the 1970s/80s’. From the essay collection *Analysing David Peace*. Shaw, Katy (ed.). Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, p.11.

Quartet which exposes the imbrication of exploitation in the agencies empowered to protect us. Characters are caught up in the disintegration of morality and are shown to be helpless figures. In the first book of the quadrilogy, *1974*, the crime correspondent Ed Dunford is pushed off the child murders story by his editor as soon as he starts to make headway; he is threatened, beaten and tortured by the police. There is a sense of hopelessness as his investigations reveal more corruption and widespread collusion between the press, the police, and government. There is also a sense of helplessness as Dunford watches the police burn a gypsy camp on the edge of town:

Around the entire camp, in the shadows down below me, lay another outer circle beyond the vans, two men deep, beating out time with their truncheons upon their shields... (46)

The scene is portrayed like an Hieronymus Bosch painting, a glimpse of a modern-day hell:

...officers stripped gypsy women and children of their clothes, throwing the rags into the flames and randomly striking out with their clubs at the naked white skin of the women. (47)

The reporter is filled ‘with a rage as impotent as it was engulfing.’ (47). This impotence will eventually find its outlet in violence when he realises all societal options of justice are closed to him.

This obstructed investigation of child murders, is used by Peace to critique not just one dysfunctional community but the entire social structure of 1970s Britain. Although this is a wider net than the one Burn cast it still meets the criteria for New Journalism. When Hunter S. Thompson wrote *Hell’s Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* (1966), it was a portrayal of surprisingly traditional right-wing Americans, not, as might have been suggested by their illegal behaviour, an anti-establishment group. Peace presents an equally contradictory power structure within Britain; one that highlights the fragility of a supposedly democratic nation. Politics has always been a part of the territory of New Journalism: an analysis of a motorcycle gang, Thompson’s report on the Democratic Party Conference in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Mailer’s exposé of war in *Why Are We In Vietnam?* and *Armies of the Night*, or Wolfe’s critique of US high society in *Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny’s*.

David Peace's novels – including the 'football' novels, *The Damned United* and *Red or Dead* – are distinctly political with a working class focus.. Much of this derives from his youthful reading of northern English writers like John Braine, Stan Barstow, Alan Sillitoe and Barry Hines. But, as Peace himself said of Gordon Burn: 'He was the writer I most admired and I learned a lot from him.'⁴⁰⁵ It was Burn who, I contend, constructed a particular template of Britishness within the New Journalism genre that helped David Peace develop such an original voice. To represent working class Britain, Burn often turned his attention to the actual work that people do: Peter Sutcliffe's days as a gravedigger and Fred West's as ice cream salesman and DIY obsessive. This depiction of the normal and the familiar placed within the killer's mind becomes a powerful literary tool, heightening narrative tension. This device also permeates Peace's *The Red Riding Quartet*; the work that people do drives the fictions. The reporter, Ed Dunford, the real estate developer John Dawson, Detective Superintendent Maurice Jobson, the lawyer John Pigott, Assistant Chief Constable, Peter Hunter, Reverend Laws: each of these characters is defined within the narrative by the job they do. Their employment is not simply a characterisation technique used to round a character; it is essential to the development of the story and its thematic concerns. The occupations not only define characters, they provide the narrative momentum. By portraying the Yorkshire Police force in the 1970s and 1980s as vice-ridden and corrupt, Peace makes a compelling statement about power – who holds it and how it is used. I would argue that Peace's portrayal of these characters contributed to an impression of the police force and its structure that helped public understanding of similar real world scandals. In common with many real world experiences, moral characters such as Dunford and Pigott, who try to expose the corruption, are instead overwhelmed by it. This sense of veracity derives to some extent from a journalistic process; while real names and situations were not used, the portrayal of the level of corruption was derived from factual evidence. For this reason, Peace's works can be categorised not just as crime fiction, but as documentation of a particular context in recent British history which still resonates with the British public. In recent years, as stories of cover ups and lies about the 1989 tragedy at Hillsborough football ground unfolded, the British public was unsurprised. The altered statements, the removal of feedback negative about South Yorkshire Police, the attempt to destroy the reputation of victims, the enablement of this by certain sections of the press; none of these things are beyond belief for

⁴⁰⁵ Peace, David. 'Author David Peace On His Bill Shankly Novel' *What's On: your guide to everything in North East*, Interview by David Whetstone, August, 2013. <http://www.thejournal.co.uk/culture/arts/interview-author-david-peace-bill-5760033> [accessed March 3, 2017].

a British audience any longer. The myth of the establishment – the police, the government, the courts, the politicians – as inherently working for the good of society is as fraudulent as the publicists’ manufacture of stars such as Monroe and Cogan. As Peace said: ‘The miners’ strike and then, of course, Hillsborough. How do you grow up having any kind of respect or faith in the police after all that?’⁴⁰⁶

Peace, using some of the techniques of New Journalism, extends Gordon Burn’s interest in how communities nurture and influence individual members; his lens goes beyond communities’ dysfunctional individuals and brings into focus those institutions that are put in place to uphold decency and order. For Peace, the local represents a microcosm of a wider national malaise. In *Red or Dead* the lead, ‘real life’ character, Bill Shankly, says: ‘I came to Liverpool to make a success of this job for this club and for this city’ (497). The job is the man and he is tied to the place. A football manager and a city. There is a moral centre to Shankly, familiar to the British public from news and history, and it sustains the 715 page novel. It has a working class heart, and it celebrates the working man: ‘But our football was a form of socialism’ (576), Bill Shankly tells Harold Wilson. This ‘quote’ is true in the new journalistic sense that it accurately reflects the public perception of these two figures. Peace was given access to taped interviews from John Roberts, the journalist and ghost writer of Bill Shankly’s ‘autobiography’. It is not known if the words are an exact quotation, but it follows the tradition of New Journalism by referring to the spirit of the truth.



FIG 10: *Bill Shankly and the people of Liverpool*⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁶ Peace, David. ‘David Peace: In the Light’. *Esquire*, <http://www.esquire.co.uk/culture/news/a4717/in-the-light-by-david-peace/> [accessed 20 January 2017].

⁴⁰⁷ https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=iuxmxUTo&id=FEF14E459F0ECA256FE3F111B9AF313002103AF5&thid=OIP.iuxmxUTo9PbFb0V_IwC6MAEsDh&q=bill+shankly&simid=608004170685548256&selectedIndex=31&ajaxhist=0 [retrieved 20 January 2017].

This placing of culture within a political context is a feature of Peace's settings. Jared Keyes, in his essay 'No Redemption: The Death of the City in the Work of David Peace'⁴⁰⁸ argues that Peace's work is partly a critique of Thatcherism and that there is in his work a 'literary disinterest' (19) in Britain post 1985, the end of the miners' strike. This idea is upheld by Peace himself: 'I'm deeply suspicious of fiction about the recent past. You need distance and time to be able to contemplate an event fully.'⁴⁰⁹ This resonates with Burn's approach when he wrote his first novel *Alma Cogan*; he looked back three decades to explore 1990s ideas of celebrity and fame. Where we are today is always central to the work of Burn and Peace. Like all works of New Journalism they ask the reader to question the society they are in, where it came from, and where it is going. Where Burn and Peace differ, though, is in the conclusions they invite. Burn celebrates the diversity and history of communities, seeing their flaws but suggesting a sense of communities surviving. Peace takes us to the end of a history, where an unredeeming rot has settled in and hope is gone. Keyes describes Peace's work as showing images of a 'dead and dying metropolis'(19). Like much of Burns' writing, the crimes committed reflect a community and cultural breakdown. For Burn, his characters are a result of the community and their standing within it. Burn spends much time describing not just personal histories of victims and perpetrators in '*...somebody's husband, somebody's son.*' and *Happy Like Murderers* but histories of the areas. Like Elizabeth Gaskell before him, Peace highlights a distinctive character in Yorkshire and its people. For example, in *GB84* a character says:

It was all too easy for most of them down here – Different planet. Different world. – Different country. Different class – They could keep it and all.⁴¹⁰

Understanding the larger political landscape implied by this description is important in understanding all of his work, whether it focuses on a serial killer, police corruption, or the life of a football manager. Events in the country at that time – the miners' strike, the aftermath of the Falklands War, the IRA attack at the Tory party conference in Brighton – are the backdrop to his narratives. As Keyes states: 'the metaphor of a still-divided Britain is central to understanding the stylistic development and spatial logic of Peace's work.'⁴¹¹ It

⁴⁰⁸ From *Analysing David Peace*. pp.19-40

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.* pp.19-20.

⁴¹⁰ *GB84*, p.192

⁴¹¹ Keyes, Jarred. From *Analysing David Peace*, p.20.

is in this that I believe Peace is closer to the political works of Norman Mailer than the celebrity driven novels of Gordon Burn. Burn's close-ups exploration of British times past, such as his examination of the lives of George Best and Duncan Edwards, tell us as much about the 1950s and 1960s as about the players themselves. His novel *The North of England Home Service* (2003) is less a study of comedy and more a recreation of post war Britain; the 1980s snooker boom in *Pocket Money: Inside the World of Snooker* (1986) is about Thatcher's Britain. But the *spatial logic* that Keyes identifies is what ultimately separates the writers. Peace's stories are stretched on a larger and more overtly political frame where characters are boxed into corners that define their relationship with society.

PAST AND PRESENT

In the previous chapter I discussed a connection with buildings that goes beyond the material with particular reference to Burn's observation of the futile attempt by the council to erase a collective memory of the house that stood at 25 Cromwell Street. Burn could not truly reconstruct that house, that time; he could only present a simulacrum informed by the present. For Peace, like Burn, the physicality of places and the things that inhabited them vie for space in public memory: the factories, the mines, and the cells.

In *1980* Peter Hunter's home is burnt to the ground, demonstrating that a position in the police force no longer offers protection. This is a metaphor for the collapse of everything he had built through corruption. A physical absence within the narrative of *1980* signals the character's downfall. This, however, does not suggest that the world is now a better place. The burning down of Hunter's home, his removal from the investigation, the handing in of his passport, the erasure of his name from the parking space, wipe Hunter from society. There remains, though, a memory of what has been lost. Without structure, he returns to a kind of primitivism. When he smears a cross on his face with the blackened ash of his burnt-out house he signals his banishment and a resort to an older order. He becomes vulnerable now to the revised social structure, in which he has become an absence. Hunter does not triumph, but others will in the future, try.

This resonates with many works that could be classified as British New Journalism. Gordon Burn gave people a past, brings them out from the anonymous shadows into the glare of tabloid sensationalism. Peace followed this example, as did Andrew O'Hagan when he came to write *The Missing* (1995), *Personality* (2003) and *The Lives of Ronald Pinn*.⁴¹²

⁴¹² O'Hagan, Andrew. 'The Lives of Ronald Pinn', *The London Review of Books*, Volume 37, Number 1, 8 January, 2015.

This cultivation of differences and aborted potential, familiar from local histories and old news, within *The Red Riding Quartet* ‘promotes audience involvement’.⁴¹³ The different voices within the quartet ‘require the reader to fill in the gaps, to cobble together coherence from inherently impossible narratives.’⁴¹⁴

This idea of a past being forever present has run through New Journalism from its beginnings. It is in the completely fictitious graveyard scene at the end of Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, and the fragmented closing pages of Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song*, where Gilmore’s presence still affects how the participants will live their lives. In Burn’s first book, ‘...somebody’s husband, somebody’s son.’, Carl Sutcliffe complains about a waxwork of his brother. The waxwork takes up a physical space ‘conceptualising our repressed past’⁴¹⁵ as John A. Riley has said of Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker*. Burn returned to this idea when he suggested that no amount of landscaping over 25 Cromwell Street could erase its memory. *The Red Riding Quartet* exposes our darkest communal memories. The horrors of the murders and the deep rooted police corruption cannot be covered up with John Dawson’s urban renewal. Here, Peace is revisiting, if not coming to terms with, his past. In an interview he revealed the long-term impact of this culture on his worldview:

Those events defined my relationship with the police; incident after incident on a personal level. The miners’ strike, and then, of course, Hillsborough.⁴¹⁶

Peace seeks to reclaim that past from the distortion of nostalgia and the revisionism of history. As Hilary Mantell has said. ‘...history is not the past – it is the method we have evolved of organising our ignorance of the past.’⁴¹⁷ In the quadrilogy and in *GB84* Peace uses the novel form to reorganise recent dark chapters of collective British memory. He states ‘I think fiction can illuminate fact.’⁴¹⁸ This aim is at the heart, too, of American New

⁴¹³ Charles, Alec. Pictures at an Atrocity Exhibition: Modernism and Dystopian Realism in David Peace’s *Red Riding Quartet*, from *Analysing David Peace*, p.62. In the essay, he is asking us to consider the Marshal McLuhan proposition of the classic detective story.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.63.

⁴¹⁵ Riley, John A. *Hauntology, Ruins and the Failure of the Future in Andrei Tarkovsky’s Stalker* <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/654650> [accessed 8 January, 2017], p.19.

⁴¹⁶ Peace, David, interviewed by Dan Davies. David Peace: Into the Light, *Esquire Magazine*, August, 2013. <http://www.esquire.co.uk/culture/news/a4717/in-the-light-by-david-peace/> [accessed January 14, 2017].

⁴¹⁷ Mantell, Hilary. *The Guardian*, Review, 3 June, 2017.

⁴¹⁸ Peace, David. In interview with Gene Gregoritis. ‘GB84: A Message From The English Tourist Board’, from *Analysing David Peace*, p.83.

Journalism. From Truman Capote's 'narrative reportage'⁴¹⁹ to Norman Mailer's 'imaginary memoir'⁴²⁰ fiction is used to get closer to truth.

The personal past can offer significant insight to stories. Genealogy is not a device particularly associated with New Journalism; nor is it one that Burn or Peace used extensively. Burn does not give readers an insight to his personal life until his last novel, where we are introduced to him as the author of the story we are reading. There is little evidence of autobiographical detail in *The Red Riding Quartet* or *GB84*, although in interviews Peace makes clear that the events described have a personal meaning for him: he grew up in the shadow of The Yorkshire Ripper, was affected by the miners' strike of 1984/1985 and lived through Margaret Thatcher's terms as Prime Minister. Andrew O'Hagan's *The Missing*, though, is very different. It opens with what at first appears to be O'Hagan's autobiography. He charts his family's life from Glasgow's East End to Irvine's New Town. The significance of the personal and autobiographical is clear. After a few pages we hear of the author's grandfather, Michael O'Hagan, '...who came from Glasgow's Calton district'.⁴²¹ This personal history hints at what is to come: 'He was missing. I'd never seen him, and I was born twenty eight years after he disappeared at sea.'⁴²² and O'Hagan links his family story with those of the victims of accidents and murders, the people who disappear, who he will later discuss: '...they never knew the trouble that could take you away for ever.'⁴²³ Like Burn, and Peace, O'Hagan casts his net wide to analyse community and society. In a review of *The Missing* Gordon Burn commented that it was '...part autobiography, part old-fashioned pavement-pounding...'⁴²⁴ which is reminiscent of Tom Wolfe's description in *The New Journalism* of Jimmy Breslin who '...made the discovery that it was feasible for a columnist to actually leave the building, go outside and do reporting on his own, genuine legwork.' (25).

⁴¹⁹ Capote, Truman, interviewed by George Plimpton. 'The Story Behind a Non Fiction Novel.' *The New York Times*. January 1966.

⁴²⁰ Mailer, Norman. 'Before the Literary Bar', *New York Magazine*.

⁴²¹ *The Missing*, p.5.

⁴²² *Ibid*, p.4.

⁴²³ *Ibid*. p.239

⁴²⁴ Burn, Gordon. *The Independent*, 25 November 1995 <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/christmas-books-1583510.html> [accessed 8 March, 2017]



FIG 11: The personal and the public disappearances⁴²⁵

Disappearance is not a new phenomenon. O'Hagan describes the concern of the nineteenth-century Salvationist, William Booth, about missing persons; he '...wanted more society, he yearned for ripened community...'⁴²⁶ Using the techniques of investigative journalism, O'Hagan tracks down those who disappear. This legwork coupled with his own personal history, goes beyond straightforward journalism and presents a profound comment on the nature of the community and society that we inhabit.

We go about in the world, leaving traces of ourselves here and there, but there are times when a person's traces will wear away – in the outside places they walked or played in, or even in the rooms they occupied for years...⁴²⁷

Just as Gordon Burn gave a backstory, and therefore life, to the victims of Peter Sutcliffe and the Wests, O'Hagan rescues the missing in society from the anonymity of statistics and makes them an individual among the 275,000 people that go missing in Britain each year.⁴²⁸ By linking them to his grandfather's story he humanises these people. Michael O'Hagan haunts a family, a community, and a society. The missing his grandson goes on to discuss are therefore the same. The relationship between family, community, and society is a recurrent concern in New Journalism and its British counterpart; from the Clutter family in *In Cold Blood*, to their murderers, Smith and Hickock, to Gary Gilmore's rootlessness. In

⁴²⁵ <http://pictures.abebooks.com/isbn/9780330341363-it-300.jpg> [retrieved 8 March 2017].

⁴²⁶ *The Missing*, p.174.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.* p.186.

⁴²⁸ Randall, David, Greg Walton. *The Independent*, 10 October, 2009

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/the-missing-each-year-275000-britons-disappear-1801010.html> [accessed 12 February, 2017].

his first book *Burn* draws our attention to the normality of Peter Sutcliffe's home life. Later, Peace explores the corruption of families by their milieu. O'Hagan's *The Missing* drew on these examples and blurred the line between the personal and the public, making otherwise anonymous figures universal.

For his first fiction book, Andrew O'Hagan explores themes that both Mailer and Burn had written of in *Of Women and Their Elegance* and *Alma Cogan* respectively.

ETHICAL LIES

At what point does the portrayal of an extant or dead person using fictionalised devices become unethical? Burn's novel *Alma Cogan* was used in part as a source⁴²⁹ for the BBC radio play *Stage Mother, Sequined Daughter*.⁴³⁰ Sandra Cogan, Alma's sister, tried to have the play banned, because of the representation of her family. She later received an apology from the BBC.⁴³¹ The former footballer, Johnny Giles, sued David Peace, and Brian Clough's family complained about his portrayals in *The Damned United*.⁴³² (Giles received an apology in court and it settled the matter). These reactions highlight the difficulty of defining what is ethical in the portrayal of real lives. Ethics is a study of human behaviour, human action, how humans behave in given circumstances. In the essay *The Ethics of Speech and Thought Representation* (2014), Phillip Mitchell discusses the similarities between the journalist and the literary journalist. These are as relevant to this question as their differences.

...chief ethical responsibilities between these representational processes are towards (a) the source of the original speech text which is to be represented and (b) towards the reader (or the news audience), the addressee of the journalistic text. (pp.534-535).

⁴²⁹ Unknown. 'John Lennon's Secret Lover'. *Evening Standard*, 8 November, 2006 <https://www.standard.co.uk/showbiz/john-lennons-secret-lover-7197903.html> [accessed 2 February, 2017].

⁴³⁰ Caulfield, Annie. 'Stage Mother, Sequined Daughter', broadcast by BBC Radio 4, 1 August, 2002.

⁴³¹ Millward, David. 'BBC Apology Over "Drunk" Alma Cogan'. *The Telegraph* 4 December, 2003, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1448422/BBC-apology-over-drunk-Alma-Cogan.html> [accessed 2 February, 2017].

⁴³² Dean, Will, 'Damned United author David Peace to pen Bill Shankly novel'. *The Independent* 15 January, 2013 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/damned-united-author-david-peace-to-pen-bill-shankly-novel-8452667.html> [accessed 2 February, 2017].

Mitchell goes on to discuss faithfulness and fairness, areas which, I suggest, are subjective, or certainly open to interpretation. The use of direct speech in quotation marks has traditionally implied a truthful account of what has been said. This is not straightforward, though, as Mailer argued in 'Before the Literary Bar'. If a conversation is being written down after the event the 'verbatim' account of the quote might reasonably be put under scrutiny. Mailer used some of Marilyn Monroe's words in *Of Women and Their Elegance* and invented others. Gordon Burn got around much of this problem by having Alma Cogan's persona speak years after she had died: an obvious fiction, albeit one with potential to cause controversy similar to that resulting from *The Damned United*. David Peace took many events that are verifiably true and a matter of historical record, and worked his fictions within that world. Joseph Wambaugh, who wrote the novel *The Onion Field*⁴³³ (1973) has said that he invents 'probable dialogue'⁴³⁴ and it is within this context that many new journalists work. Capote has said that he did not take notes during his many conversations with killers Smith and Hickock, yet when serialised in *The New Yorker* it was stated incorrectly that the dialogue in his account was verbatim. These varying approaches reveal a difficulty in this kind of storytelling. Mitchell suggests a clear line that suggests the tenets of literary journalism might 'encourage' direct speech for dramatic purposes, whereas mainstream journalism would use 'representational' strategy based on indirect rather than direct speech. He quotes Janet Malcolm's argument that writers should have 'discretion in transposing the spoken word into written form and to better capture the interviewee's meaning'.⁴³⁵ This might, of course, result in accusations of 'making it up' or even defamation, something the new journalists have been well used to.

When Andrew O'Hagan wrote *Personality* he attempted to avoid such accusations by changing every name in his story of a child star destroyed through celebrity and fame. It did, however, very little to disguise the real life similarities of his false biography to the real life of Scottish singing star Lena Zavaroni. The similarities between the fictional Maria Tambini and Zavaroni were too close to avoid identification: an unusually talented child star of Scots-Italian descent, born on the Isle of Bute, finding fame on the television talent show

⁴³³ *The Onion Field* and Burn's *Alma Cogan* were an influence on David Peace's *The Red Riding Quartet*. See David Peace's emails to Rhona Gordon, *Housing Matter in the Texts of Gordon Burn, Andrew O'Hagan, and David Peace*, p.173.

⁴³⁴ Mitchell, Phillip. 'The Ethics of Speech and Thought Representation in *Literary Journalism*', referenced to Janet Malcolm, 'The Morality of Journalism', *New York Review of Books*, 1 March 1990.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*

Opportunity Knocks, moving to London to be taken care of by a female agent, developing depression and anorexia. Such precautions would not withstand legal scrutiny if applied to a living person, but the deceased cannot be defamed, and the author was free to interpret Zavaroni's experience for his own narrative purpose. O'Hagan's novel was less about biography than post-war Britain. He said that he took some circumstances that were similar 'then made a journey as a fiction writer.'⁴³⁶ This appears to be what Gordon Burn did with his first novel, *Alma Cogan*. O'Hagan was, though, aware of the possible controversy and showed the Zavaroni family early drafts of the book. It is interesting to note that in an interview in *The Herald* (2003) O'Hagan cites Joyce Carol Oates' (1938 –) false biography of Marilyn Monroe, and Don DeLillo's (1936 –) of Lee Harvey Oswald. He may or may not have considered his own novel a false biography: he kept in touch with the Zavaroni family throughout the research and writing process. However, an ethical problem remained. Zavaroni's father commented later that 'I can't intervene anyway, because it's a changed name – that's how he's covered himself.'⁴³⁷

Here, as in *Alma Cogan*, it is outside forces that destroy the lives of the eponymous characters. The nature of celebrity is shown to be destructive in both books by the stalker-cum-fan that takes their lives. The invented obsessive who kills the object of obsession – takes the narrative beyond these singers' biographical worlds and towards a study of the nature of fame and celebrity. The question we must ask, though, is does this public interest supercede ethical responsibility for facts and reputation?

In *The Ethics of Reading* (1987) Miller states that 'without story-telling there is no theory of ethics',⁴³⁸ and from the very beginning of story-telling writers have helped people in communities understand the rules by which they live. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (18th century BC), where the hero learns, through experience, wisdom, the book implies why we must choose right over wrong and civilisation over barbarity. Later, the Greek plays – both the tragedies and the comedies – set forth moral choices and courses of action. In her introduction to *Ethics and Literature* (2007) Adia Mendelson-Maoz states that 'Often, literary texts put complex situations under a new light, and hence create an opportunity for thought experiments...'⁴³⁹ Is this the function and justification of New Journalism? I contend

⁴³⁶ MacLaren, Lorna, interviewing O'Hagan, Andrew. *The Herald*, 29 March, 2003 http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/11901821.No_it_apos_s_not_about_Lena_Zavaroni_Lorna_MacLaren_meets_controversial_novelist_Andrew_O_apos_Hagan_who_defends_his_right_to_tell_a_story_the_way_he_wants/ [accessed February 8, 2017].

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Miller, J. H. *The Ethics of Reading*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, p.3.

⁴³⁹ Mendelson-Maoz, Adia. 'Ethics and Literature: Introduction'. *Philosophia*, June, 2007, p.111.

that, yes, the psychological profile of murderers, the sociological and political landscapes of communities, the behavioural analyses of people affected by fame, and celebrity direct ‘new light’ on stories that we thought we knew. Mendelson-Maoz goes on to state that ‘...every text contains traces of social, political and ethical issues’ (112). The question of whether a text might cause distress is one of those a writer must consider. It might appear insignificant when compared with the broader ethical questions of damage to community or society, but certainly Andrew O’Hagan must have considered it when he reached out to the family of Lena Zavaroni; this approach suggests he anticipated that a comparison might be drawn between his character and the dead star. Ultimately his exploration of fame and celebrity, though, is a wide-angle shot of a context rather simply a close-up of a vulnerable singing star. In the end, O’Hagan placed the imperative of the story above the impact on the living victims.

New Journalism combines research data and the imaginative, and a set of principles on how to present this can be extrapolated from the texts cited in this thesis. From the beginning, critics of new journalists have accused them of unjustifiable interpretations. The truth here seems to settle at what the public is prepared to accept. An early example of this pragmatism is Bulwar-Lytton’s (1803-1873) novel about notorious 18th century murderer, Eugene Aram.⁴⁴⁰ The book *Eugene Aram* (1831) was incredibly popular with the public, but the author was questioned on the ethics of telling such a story about such a character. Such was the pressure on Bulwar-Lytton that by the third edition he changed his story to make Aram no longer the murderer, but a mere accomplice to the crimes. This flew in the face of all facts that were available at the time. The truth was therefore altered to satisfy public demand, which might to many seem *unethical*. In an article on the incident Shalyn Clagget quotes from Ina Shabert’s ‘Fictional Biography, Factual Biography, and their Contaminations’: ‘...the fictional elements destroy the reliability of the text as a source of factual information whereas the factual narrative interferes with the imaginative vision’ (172). I would contest this, in the contemporary reading context; it destroys nothing of the factual or the fictional. Readers today are more sophisticated in their critique of all literature. The factual biography is approached today with as much wariness about authorial intent as the fictional biography. Clagget cites Naomi Jacobs’ criticism that on encountering the historical figure in a fictional setting the reader might experience ‘dismay at the encounter’.⁴⁴¹ Clagget sees this not as a

⁴⁴⁰ Clagget, Shalyn. ‘Fiction Over Fact: Narrative Ethics In Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Eugene Aram*’, *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Volume 46, Number 2, Summer, 2016. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/655256> [accessed 8 February, 2017].

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

lack of accuracy in reporting, but a central problem of the ethics of integrating fact and fiction. She goes on to challenge ‘...the assumption that accuracy is the key criterion by which audiences judge the success of fictionalized narratives about real people’(173). Naomi Jacobs, however, is cited as saying that an historical figure must not ‘do things’ that the real figure would not have done. The question here is, why? Why would doing so determine success in a fiction based on an historical figure? The key word here is *fiction*. In *Alma Cogan*, Burn portrays the character as a heavy drinker in her later life. This was not the case in real life as Cogan did not have a later life. The fiction, therefore, is obvious. It is clear that O’Hagan was not writing a biography in *Personality*, even though much in the novel might reflect a particular celebrity figure. Celebrity is the subject in these stories. Burn’s Alma Cogan, and O’Hagan’s Maria Tambini are fictions that draw on some of what the authors know of the behaviour of particular people in a given circumstance. This is how writers create any characters. They draw on the lives and idiosyncracies of people they know. They, and the readers, ‘know’ Alma Cogan and Lena Zavaroni, because they are celebrities. The material of their lives is up for grabs as much as recollections of incidents from the author’s own life. In weaving them with fiction, the question that remains is not *Is this right?* A writer asks is this a credible response? Are the situations created believable? Is there a sense of recognition in the reader of what they are reading?

In his essay ‘The Lives of Ronald Pinn’⁴⁴² O’Hagan creates a character from the dead. Taking a name from a gravestone in a London cemetery, O’ Hagan becomes something of the intrepid reporter, placing himself in the centre of the story. He finds out as much as he can about the man who, when alive, was Ronald Pinn; his birth, his school years, his work, his relationships and his early death. From this O’Hagan constructs another life for Ronald Pinn: he has a birth certificate and passport; he uses social media – he gets Facebook followers; he has a flat, and in the hallway offers of bank accounts and credit cards slip through the letterbox. O’Hagan asks:

⁴⁴² O’Hagan, Andrew. ‘The Lives of Ronald Pinn’. *London Review of Books*, Volume 37, Number 1, 8 January 2015.

tracks down the real Ronald Pinn's mother at her home. When O'Hagan mentions her son's name: 'Her eyes widened and she seemed astonished for a second as she said the word 'Ronnie'...' ⁴⁴⁵ It is a shocking moment. O'Hagan's question about identity and truth raised at the start is brought sharply into focus by the personal, and the use of direct speech.

"It will be nice to talk to you," she said, letting me into the hall. "You must be about his age."

"That's right."

"Oh, Ronnie," she said. "There was nobody like him." ⁴⁴⁶

In these final words Pinn's mother is telling the reader, no matter how well researched, O'Hagan's creation is no more than that: an invention built around facts. The character that is no more the real Ronald Pinn than Burn's Alma Cogan is the real Alma Cogan, or O'Hagan's Maria Tambini is Lena Zavaroni. The mother's own idea of her son, built from her own experiences with him is her subjective creation: *There was nobody like him*. This is indeed true: for her.

Virginia Woolf has said that the biography might show six or seven selves but a person '...might have as many as a thousand' ⁴⁴⁷ and this is the truth that new journalists have demonstrated again and again in their false biographies and non-fiction novels. The impossibility of a single definitive truth about a human subject is made clear by Andrew O'Hagan in this exchange. He, along with other British writers such as Peace and Burn, have progressed the ethical debate about representation through the extent of their characterisations. Celebrities, nonentities, the survivors, the dead; they are all good material. The line between the public and the private, the legal and the illegal, the moral and immoral, is shifting as a result of online behaviour and responses to it. The availability of vast amounts of personal data on the internet, and tools to facilitate traditional research techniques, simultaneously make it easier and harder to draw an accurate picture.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ Woolf, Virginia, from Norman Mailer's *Marilyn*, p. 18.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence presented here, the genre British New Journalism can be defined as novels and non-fiction works written by British writers since the 1980s which critique contemporary British society using a combination of journalistic and fictional methods. The genre offers a pessimistic view of the relationship between British citizens and the post-war institutions that were put in place to foster their well-being. Popular culture is represented as predatory and damaging. The negative impact of class on individuals and the way in which celebrity and professions offer the illusion of social mobility is a recurrent theme, and the imagined cohesion at the heart of communities is exposed as desirable, but ultimately fragile and dysfunctional. These central concerns, common to works of British New Journalism, are at the heart of *A Funny Thing*. Like those writers who precede me, I offer a picture of a broken society, individuals who yearn for more and an ambiguous hope that things can only get better.

The scope of the research was necessarily limited to a few writers who have achieved critical acclaim during the last forty years and inspired the researcher's creative practice. This means that many writers who merit the epithet British New Journalist have not been cited and it could perhaps be argued that white working-class males are over-represented here. Therefore, it is suggested that future analyses might consider the extent to which writers from more diverse UK backgrounds and experiences have been inspired by the conventions and sensibilities of this genre. For example, Kapka Kassabova, Lara Pawson, Adelle Stripe, Jean Rafferty, Olivia Laing all merit further study.

It was suggested at the end of the final chapter that the internet as a resource has potential to transform this genre: access to hitherto unavailable material and insights, and the online distribution of works by writers who would not be published by mainstream publishers presents British new journalists with opportunities to extend deeper into the lives of their subjects. However, it is hoped that greater access to 'facts' will not overwhelm the imagination as, in all forms of New Journalism, both have equal value. The question of the ethical and legal limits imposed on the truth was also raised; future research and British New Journalism might usefully add to the debate about, for instance, our expectation of privacy versus public interest in an open access context. A dead person can't be defamed, but writers must continue to interrogate the public's relationship with reputations and legacies, and the truth as seen by the living. If these considerations present a dilemma, the writer might ask the following question: what would Gordon Burn do? I contend that he

would meticulously research the context and his human subjects, who they were and who they might have been, from all the sources available, and set his writer's imagination to work on them.

It is intended that this thesis will contribute to a growing appreciation of Burn's legacy and the wider body of work that, I contend, can be defined as British New Journalism.

List of Illustrations

FIG 1: Manuscript of First Draft Page of Tess of the D'Urberville's

<<http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/manuscript-of-the-first-and-last-chapter-of-tess-of-the-durbervilles-by-thomas-hardy>> [retrieved 4 November 2015].

FIG 2: Police Search the Moors, 1965

<<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Moors+murders&view=detailv2&&id=2ED61A9C77B04DB3460EE5CC9C804F638E4610E1&selectedIndex=176&ccid=TBsFEplq&sihtps://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Moors+murders&view=detailv2&&id=2ED61A9C77B04DB3460EE5CC9C804F638E4610E1&selectedIndex=176&ccid=TBsFEplq&simid=607988626641586299&thid=OIP.M4c1b0512996ae4f8a56f7c1abd64df0eH0&ajaxhist=0>> [retrieved 5 July 2016].

FIG 3: Fred and Rosemary West's Family Home at 25 Cromwell Street

<http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_W9nOQkDDMEI/VSwm4sMceOI/AAAAAAAAAHMg/7nqJ9YII7gw/s1600/Heather%2B-%2Bgg.jpg> [retrieved 9 July 2016].

FIG 4: The area that was 25 Cromwell Street

<<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=25+cromwell+street+after+demolition&view=detailv2&&id=31EEF27EF8CCDA7B7B544BA4DE2E0624FAFA121&selectedIndex=11&ccid=8tQK4RJW&simid=607986573667667048&thid=OIP.Mf2d40ae112563a1459d19ea4e9f114e800&ajaxhist=0>> [retrieved 10 July 2016].

FIG 5: Capote, centre, with Harper Lee, Detective Dewey and his son.

<https://si.wsj.net/public/resources/images/OB-WH463_blood_F_20130208161802.jpg> [retrieved 15 December 2016].

FIG 6: Cover of *Alma Cogan*

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/7/7d/Gordon_Burn_-_Alma_Cogan.jpeg/220px-Gordon_Burn_-_Alma_Cogan.jpeg> [retrieved 27 April 2016].

FIG 7: Cover of Norman Mailer's *Marilyn*

<<http://bookzangle.com/images/books/00373/024764.jpg>> [retrieved 3 January 2017].

FIG 8: Cover of Norman Mailer's *Of Women and Their Elegance*

<<http://blankbooks.co.za/8114/of-women-and-their-elegance.jpg>> [retrieved 8 January 2017].

FIG 9: *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going*

<<http://www.wewebcompany.com/portale/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Gauguin.jpg>> [retrieved 12 April 2017].

FIG 10: *Bill Shankly and the people of Liverpool*

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=iuxmxUTo&id=FEF14E459F0ECA256FE3F111B9AF313002103AF5&thid=OIP.iuxmxUTo9PbFb0V_lwC6MAEsDh&q=bill+shankly&simid=608004170685548256&selectedIndex=31&ajaxhist=0> [retrieved 20 January 2017].

FIG 11: The personal and the public disappearances

<<http://pictures.abebooks.com/isbn/9780330341363-it-300.jpg>> [retrieved 8 March 2017].

Fig 12: A real passport for a fictitious character

<<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/B5Tu903CYAAaBrw.jpg:large>> [retrieved 15 March 2017].

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