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Taboo : why are real-life British serial killers rarely represented on film?

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Taboo: Why are Real-Life British Serial Killers Rarely Represented on Film?

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Abstract

This thesis assesses changing British attitudes to the dramatisation of crimes committed by domestic serial killers and highlights the dearth of films made in this country on this subject. It discusses the notion of taboos and, using empirical and historical research, illustrates how filmmakers' attempts to initiate productions have been vetoed by social, cultural and political sensitivities. Comparisons are drawn between the prevalence of such product in the United States and its uncommonness in Britain, emphasising the issues around the importing of similar foreign material for exhibition on British cinema screens and the importance of geographic distance to notions of appropriateness. The influence of the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) is evaluated. This includes a focus on how a central BBFC policy – the so-called 30-year rule of refusing to classify dramatisations of 'recent' cases of factual crime – was scrapped and replaced with a case-by-case consideration that allowed for the accommodation of a specific film championing a message of tolerance. It answers the key question of whether Establishment pressure has been brought to bear to prevent the production of potentially offensive films, and draws attention to the lack of major studio interest in this subject matter. The broad historiography around the phenomenon of the serial killer film assesses stereotypes and the mixture of fear and thrill they engender in appreciative audiences. Nevertheless it does not examine specifically the narrow genre that exists around the representation of British murderers. Via extant interviews with filmmakers, actors, police officers, victims' relatives, and archive correspondence from notorious criminals, this thesis addresses the lack of existing academic study in this specific area. It demonstrates that taboos have exerted and continue to exert an influence on commercial cinema films and how television productions have benefited from changing attitudes. It also outlines the method by which television producers and writers have circumvented issues of taste to make a number of strongly marketed programmes that have simultaneously attracted approbation and opprobrium.

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Author's declaration

This is an original piece of work. Any content that has been drawn from an external source has been referenced accordingly. The word count for this thesis is 32,597.

Introduction

Unlike the United States, Britain does not have a tradition of making commercial cinema films based on factual cases of domestic serial killers. That conundrum forms the core of this historical and empirically based thesis, which considers why the real-life British serial killer film does not exist as a viable, on-going genre. In doing so it looks at the reasons as to why such films have not been made and focuses on the freedoms within television that have allowed such stories to be told on the small screen.

Notwithstanding the proliferation of films about or inspired by the crimes of Jack the Ripper¹ – which I have deliberately discounted because the killer was never caught, thereby allowing filmmakers free rein with his character and identity – in the last 50 years Britain has produced only five feature-length films of this type. They are *10 Rillington Place* (1971), *The Black Panther* (1977), *Cold Light of Day* (1989), *The Young Poisoner's Handbook* (1995) and *Peter – A Portrait of a Serial Killer* (2011). Conversely during the same period the United States produced dozens of films depicting serial/mass murder or inspired by events involving it. A comparative selection includes *The Boston Strangler* (1968), *Deranged* (1974), *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986), *Summer of Sam* (1999), *Bundy* (2002), *Monster* (2003) and *Zodiac* (2007).

Thus the appeal of serial murder cannot be denied. Yet where once the notion may have revolted and disgusted, the serial killer as an entity has evolved to become a phenomenon that exists beyond simple criminality. The concept has mutated into an entertainment brand. Serial killers have become iconic characters, embodying heroic, even romantic, traits that appeal to the masses. Hannibal Lecter the fully functioning genius has replaced the banality of Peter Sutcliffe, lorry driver; psychopathy is the only commonality that links them.

In seeking to comprehend why British killers have not received the same treatment as their American counterparts I investigate whether there are taboos inherent within our society that set up barriers to their creation within British domestic cinema. In addition I seek to uncover evidence of a consensus within the

¹ In excess of 50 productions made for cinema and television from 1924 onwards.

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film industry to prevent material deemed unpalatable or inappropriate from securing a deal for distribution or exhibition.

Having postulated the theory that potential serial killer films have been stymied by a combination of political interference, industry disapproval and Establishment pressure based upon societal taboos, I ascertain that the principle is unsound. Taboos *have* been evident in the shared negative reactions to proposals to make films of this type but there is little if any evidence of joined-up thinking.

Thus the record of opposition is to be found not in a theoretical analysis of the narrow genre of the British serial killer film but in a rigorous examination of the trade press. I also explore the first-person narratives represented by filmmakers' memoirs, extant interviews in industry periodicals and journals, and other contemporaneous sources located in the archives of the British Library, the British Film Institute, and the British Board of Film Classification. This broadens out organically into a wider cultural examination that incorporates theatre, music and art, all of which have been criticised for propagating the very same taboos that have prevented serial killers being depicted on our cinema screens. At this point my work shifts towards an empirical/historical, rather than theoretical, aspect.

Research reveals localised concerns rather than an orchestrated national crusade to ban or block material considered to be somehow unfit for public consumption. Members of Parliament, acting for constituents whose lives had been blighted by serial murder, have campaigned against film projects and theatre productions that sought to recreate milieu and personae. And the parents of the dead, their grief magnified by frustration and rage, are cacophonous in their condemnation of anyone planning to dramatise murder in the name of entertainment. This, more than industry hand wringing or threats of political sanction, prevents films being made.

The Black Panther (1977), which *was* made, barely made an impact on audiences. A gritty, ascetic dramatisation of the crimes of Donald Nielson, it was based on court transcripts, thus rooting it in hard reality, and completed less than two years after Nielson's trial and incarceration. Its proximity to the crimes meant it suffered from public opprobrium and attacks by the popular press, which considered it

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unacceptably close to the fact. It secured no significant financial backing, lost its star when Ian Holm withdrew due to concerns over upsetting the Whittle family,² and faced heavy criticism from the Federation of Sub-Postmasters, which accused the makers of exploitation and tried to prevent the BBFC from granting it a certificate.³ The irony is that *The Black Panther* was an unvarnished recreation of a story that had kept the public captivated while it had played out for real. In the absence of evidence that the BBFC sought to somehow spike the film there is proof that local authorities were sufficiently perturbed to demand previews of it prior to its planned release.⁴ Thus perceived taboos were acted upon.

Industry observers reported other proposed films, notably competing versions of the John Christie/Timothy Evans story; only *10 Rillington Place* was made. In 1981 MGM dropped plans to make a film about the Yorkshire Ripper.⁵ It is a matter of record that the studio declared it could spend its money on more worthwhile projects.⁶ The unspoken reason is that the clamour to apprehend the killer had reached fever pitch; no one could consider shooting a movie in such a heightened climate. With the passage of time it might have been expected that the project would have been resurrected. It was not. Partly the reason was the emotional tidal wave of grief expressed by relatives of the Ripper's victims who fought to ensure that no one would profit from their deaths. However it may be suggested that Sutcliffe's murders, like those of Neilson, had no relevance beyond British shores; that the story and its protagonist, unlike Jack the Ripper, would not appeal to non-domestic audiences.⁷ An attempt to tell an alternative version of the Yorkshire Ripper story, from the perspective of the grieving partner of one of his victims, foundered when it was unable to attract backers.⁸ *Cold Light of Day*, which considered the crimes of Dennis Nilsen albeit with a renamed central character, did not secure a wide release in 1989. And *The Young Poisoner's Handbook* (1995) was an uneven, sometimes darkly whimsical, interpretation of the crimes of the "teacup poisoner" Graham Young.

² Armstrong, p. 15.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Anon, '20 councils ask to view 'Black Panther'', *Screen International*, 28 January 1978, p. 6.

⁵ Anon., 'MGM drops 'Yorkshire Ripper'', *Variety* (31 December 1980), p. 4.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 'Coli', 'Film review: The Black Panther', *Variety*, 21 December 1977, p. 20.

⁸ A. Royle and J. Parker, interviewed on BBC radio, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EE9smrc6qqo>, 2005, accessed 5 September 2017.

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The undeniable appeal of serial killers can be traced back to Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), which required considerable fictional license to bring it to the screen. The route from true crime to Robert Bloch's fictionalised account to motion picture underlines the diluting of cannibalism and necrophilia, which was considered "too repulsive"⁹ for film. Bloch's novel was based on atrocities committed by Ed Gein, a Wisconsin farmer who was arrested in 1957 for the murder of a local woman whose body had been discovered "nude, headless, dangling by its heels ... and disembowelled like a steer."¹⁰ Bloch watered down Gein's grisly story, transforming it into a Freudian tale of a reclusive, grave-robbing taxidermist who ran a seedy motel.

A connective is that his neighbours considered Gein a harmless crank. This notion of ordinariness has been employed to describe the outward public personas of some serial killers. The banality of their real lives – John Christie (clerk), Ian Brady (clerk), Myra Hindley (typist), Donald Neilson (builder), Peter Sutcliffe (lorry driver), Dennis Nilsen (job centre supervisor) – acts as a counterpoint to their secret lives and the extreme nature of their crimes.

The commercial and critical success of *Psycho* indicated the immense potential of the issue, and a boom began in films depicting multiple murder¹¹ that coincided with more relaxed standards of censorship in Britain and the United States. Hitchcock's later film *Frenzy* (1972) was adapted from a novel that is said to have drawn on several prominent British murderers including necrophile John Christie.¹² The unsavoury subject matter within the film, including a graphic rape, would have been unthinkable a few years earlier. Its inclusion may perhaps be explained by changes in commercial standards and censorship criteria on both sides of the Atlantic. Hitchcock's two films exemplify those changes. They serve as bookends to a decade in which filmmakers broke through the boundaries of what was considered tolerable on screen.

More recently serial murder stories have become a staple of semi-documentary shows that have at their core dramatised reconstructions of crimes or

⁹ S. Rebello, *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho* (London, 1990), p.13.

¹⁰ Rebello, p. 3.

¹¹ Jenkins, p. 84.

¹² K. Mogg, *The Alfred Hitchcock Story* (London, 1999), p. 178.

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elements of the lives of killers and/or victims. Finally, television has proved to be the medium of choice for writers and producers. They have discovered that they are able to simultaneously pander to the voyeuristic impulses of viewers and sate their appetite for controversial content. To do so they employ a form of lateral scripting, thus circumventing concerns around content and taste - that much misused word.

My researches took me deep into reports, previews and opinion pieces within the British film trade press in the 1960s and 1970s. I also chose to look at newspapers geographically close to the killers' crimes. Evidence emerged that filmmakers were planning productions - including rival films based around John Christie, and a study of the Moors Murderers - but that overwhelming negative public reaction combined with political pressure made their delivery impossible. Thus this gauging of the moral temperature - a litmus test for the public's reactions - led directly, albeit over several decades, to television dramatisations that presented the makers with the scale, scope and breadth to depict the stories in more depth. The majority of mooted films remained "unmade".

I opted to focus on three particularly infamous cases – Christie, Brady/Hindley, and Sutcliffe – as they presented a deliverable timescale of study starting in the 1940s and concluding in the 1980s. The crimes of Harold Shipman whilst far greater in number were founded on the same modus operandi, akin to euthanasia. The sex murders of Fred West were so extreme that they eclipsed even those of Brady/Hindley and Sutcliffe. It could be argued that such a scenario is impossible to represent on film and/or television.

Perhaps inevitably a focus on filmmaking became a parallel focus on television production with its breadth and freedoms to deliver what film could not. Despite producers' intentions there is no demonstrable appetite for hard-hitting serial killer films from the cinema-going audience in the UK. Neither is there evidence that such product would travel beyond the boundaries of domestic distribution. Alternatively television presents opportunities for foreign sales as it avoids the twin obstacles of visceral content or an overly interpretative approach in the art-house vein. It is a transition unique to British television and filmmaking.

Thus feature films based on real-life British serial killers have barely succeeded being made over the last 60-plus years due to a combination of audience

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antipathy, political pressure (stemming directly from the concerns of victims' relatives and those living within areas afflicted by or connected with infamous murder cases), a lack of sympathy for exploring killers' backgrounds, personalities and/or psyches, and the widespread public acceptance of the murderers' collective villainous persona. On a more pragmatic level, most filmmakers would struggle to fully represent such stories within the standard 90 to 120 minute running time of the average motion picture. Therefore to appreciate how dramatic television has treated British serial killers is to understand how and why films on the same subject(s) have not been successful in being green-lit. As a consequence of my research what began as a focus on a missing sub-genre in cinema – the British serial killer movie – evolved into a parallel emphasis on companion pieces made for television. What audiences might not be prepared to buy tickets for they may instead deign to watch from the comfort of their homes.

Chapter I

The Moors Murderers

Section 1

Terror is a man, but wickedness is a woman.¹³

In his 1972 memoir *What the Censor Saw*, former Secretary of the British Board of Film Censors John Trevelyan¹⁴ wrote that the Board “was firmly opposed to the making of a film based on the ‘Moors murder’ case”.¹⁵ The ‘Moors Murders’ is the name given to a series of sadistic killings carried out by Ian Brady (1938-2017), a stock clerk, who was 27 at the time of his arrest in 1965, and Myra Hindley (1942-2002), a 23-year-old shorthand typist. Between July 12, 1963 and October 6, 1965 three children and one teenager were abducted, raped¹⁶ and strangled or had their throats cut; one may have been killed with a shovel, and another teenager was bludgeoned to death with an axe. In all but one case the victims’ bodies were buried in shallow graves on moorland at Saddleworth on the outskirts of Manchester, England. The couple was caught following the murder, by Brady, of a 17-year-old youth, which was witnessed by Hindley’s brother-in-law David Smith who informed the police. What emerged six months later during the couple’s trial (for that murder and two others) was a twisted tale of compulsion, feral savagery, sexual depravity and chilling pre-planning.

Undoubtedly the most upsetting element of the trial was the presentation of a reel-to-reel audio tape, which was played in open court. The harrowing 16-minute recording featured the voice of a terrified 10-year-old girl begging for her life. The child, Lesley Ann Downey, who had vanished from a fairground on December 26, 1964, was the killers’ fourth victim. Her naked, partly skeletal body was unearthed from the moor almost ten months after she disappeared. On the tape, made by Brady, Lesley could be heard pleading to be allowed to go home to her mother:

“I have to get home before eight o’clock. I got to get... or I’ll get killed if I don’t. Honest to God. Yes.”¹⁷

¹³ H. Kennedy, *Eve was Framed: Women and British Justice* (London, 2005), p. 257.

¹⁴ Trevelyan would join Lord Longford and David Astor as a campaigner for Hindley’s release.

¹⁵ J. Trevelyan, *What the Censor Saw* (London, 1973), p. 161.

¹⁶ At the trial the Attorney General, Sir Elwyn Jones, QC, advised the jury that he believed there was “an abnormal sexual element, a perverted sexual element” associated with the deaths of Edward Evans, Lesley Ann Downey and John Kilbride. When his shallow grave was discovered, John was identified by his clothes. Sir Elwyn said: “The condition of the clothing suggests that this victim had been subjected to some form of sexual interference immediately before he died.” *Daily Mail*, 21 April 1966.

¹⁷ J. Goodman, ed., *Trial of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley – The Moors Case* (Newton Abbot, Devon, 1973). p. 116.

Among those in the courtroom at Chester Assizes that day was journalist Brian Crowther, the crime reporter for the *Daily Mirror*. Almost half a century later the effect of the recording on those gathered in court was undimmed in his memory:

There was utter silence as we listened to the little girl pleading. I had covered lots of big trials involving all sorts of killers but I had never seen grown men cry before as they did listening to Lesley. Policemen walked out of court because they could not bear it anymore. No-one who heard that tape could ever escape from the memory. Lesley was in an awful mess, she was in absolute terror and you could hear it in her voice.¹⁸

It was the playing of the tape – and the shared non-reaction of Brady and Hindley – that set the tenor of opinion: of the judiciary, detectives and the wider public. “It left a deep scar on all of us. The two least bothered people of all on (sic) the courtroom were Brady and Hindley. They were sat behind bullet-proof glass that was put up around the dock because there were fears someone would try to kill them. But they were completely unconcerned with what was going on around them. They just exchanged looks with each other every day for the six weeks they were on trial. They did not care about the evidence and did not appear to be listening to it. It is a trait I noticed in a lot of serial killers whose trials I covered. ... The trial touched the whole nation. It was all anyone could talk about for months because it somehow changed everything.”¹⁹ The child’s voice – frantic sounds – echoed “like jagged knives of pain through an appalled courtroom”.²⁰ When asked why he kept the tape, Brady replied: “Because it was unusual”.²¹

Ian Brady and Myra Hindley were tried for the murders of Edward Evans, John Kilbride and Lesley Ann Downey at Chester Assizes from April 19 to May 6, 1966. They pleaded ‘Not Guilty’ to all three murders. Brady was found guilty on all three counts; Hindley was found guilty of the murders of Edward Evans and Lesley Ann Downey, not guilty of the murder of John Kilbride but guilty of being an

¹⁸ P. Byrne, ‘I will never forget that awful tape’, *Daily Mirror*, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/ian-brady-and-myra-hindley-court-1266949>, 2012, accessed 27 February 2017.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ E. Williams, *Beyond Belief: A Chronicle of Murder and its Detection* (London, 1967), p. 325.

²¹ *Ibid.*

accessory after the fact. Both were sentenced to life imprisonment.²² Ian Brady maintained a silence over the deaths of Pauline Reade and Keith Bennett until 1985. Myra Hindley followed suit, launching a consistent campaign for parole (and, ultimately, release), which involved writing a self-serving memoir in which she failed to address the murders. Following Brady's confession – and her implication in the remaining two murders – she made her own confession to police.

²² Williams, p. 346.

Section 2

The enduring appeal of evil

Over the course of almost half a century, since the release of *10 Rillington Place* (1970), there have been no overt attributed cinematic biopics/dramatisations of British serial killers save for *The Black Panther* (1977), *Cold Light of Day* (1989) and *Peter* (2011). All were low-budget independent features that received limited distribution. The first focused on Donald Neilson (1936-2011), the second was a fictionalised and interpretative portrait of Dennis Nilsen (b 1945) and the latter was about Peter Sutcliffe (b 1946). However, in the last 18 years there has been a flurry of productions made for television – including *This is Personal: The Hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper* (2000), *Shipman* (2002), *See No Evil: The Moors Murders* (2006), *Longford* (2006), and *Appropriate Adult* (2011) – in which notorious killers' crimes have been examined from the viewpoint of observers such as police officers, relatives, penal reformers and social workers.

For more than 50 years the combination of notoriety, prurience and sensationalism around the Moors Murders has drawn to it authors, playwrights, artists, musicians, filmmakers and television producers, all exhibiting a morbid fascination with the case. It remains a taboo subject for cinema. Immediately following the trial there was a scramble to tell the killers' story.²³ Among the observers in court at Chester Assizes were the playwright and scriptwriter Mary Hayley Bell (wife of the actor John Mills), and the actor/playwright Emlyn Williams. Notwithstanding news reports (in 1966 the BBC decided to censor coverage of the trial as the substance was deemed to be too shocking; ITV limited its reports to brief segments within broader evening news bulletins)²⁴ and documentaries, the Moors Murders were not dramatised for television for four decades until two parallel projects were put into production to tie-in with the 40th anniversary of the trial. The two-part *See No Evil: The Moors Murders* was broadcast on consecutive nights on May 14 and 15, 2006. *Longford* followed on October 26, 2006. The passage of time had not

²³ Books published in the aftermath of the trial included *Satan's Children* by Judge Gerald Sparrow, *The Moor Murders* by David Marchbanks, *Trial of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley – The Moors Case* by Jonathan Goodman, and *Beyond Belief* by Williams.

²⁴ D. Smith and C. A. Lee, *Witness: The Story of David Smith, Chief Prosecution Witness in the Moors Murders Case* (Edinburgh, 2011), p. 208.

dimmed the British public's sense of horror and revulsion at the couple's crimes. Both projects were perceived as taboo busting and an affront to good taste.

There have however been at least seven theatre productions in the UK and abroad. Just over half of these predated the television projects and, crucially, all followed the abolition, in 1968, of censorship powers wielded by the Lord Chamberlain. To date no one has been successful in dramatising the story for mainstream cinema. Instead it has found an audience via television.

Section 3

Breaking the taboos

Adapting the story of the Moors Murderers for the screen runs the risk of colliding headlong with several accepted taboos. The first is the issue of violence against children and its representation on screen. The second is the notion of empathy – of seeking to demythologise the generally accepted (and ingrained) monstrousness of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley and to recognise them as human, albeit with marked defects that set them apart from 99 per cent of common humanity. (Emlyn Williams likened Brady to “some unfamiliar and repulsive beast” in a zoo,²⁵ or “the one sacred monster” talking a solitary walk in prison.)²⁶ It might be suggested that a humanising portrait of these two deliberate outcasts is too revolting for the general populace – the target audience of a mainstream motion picture – to contemplate, for Brady and Hindley are, in the public consciousness, “not like us”. The third problem emerges from a filmmaker’s perspective on the story: what is its purpose? Any filmmaker tackling this story runs the risk of pandering to the mass-market seeking vicarious thrills or offering prurient titillation. Alternatively he may adopt a sober methodology that seeks to be unsensational in approach but may nevertheless be perceived as exploitative of subject and personalities.

The overwhelming reaction to the Moors Murders by the British public was a combination of incredulity, incomprehension, disbelief and revulsion. In *Lethal Repetition* Richard Dyer describes how representations of serial killers “situate them beyond the pale of normality, as exceptional, extraordinary”.²⁷ They are variously separated from normal society by notions of monstrousness and genius, the latter often a conceit adopted by the killer him/herself. Public perceptions invariably lean towards terms such as psychopath, evil or sick that seek to place the killer apart “from normal psychological functioning”.²⁸ He warns against the knee-jerk compartmentalising of killers as freaks or aberrations. This may be explained, in part, as pandering to the killers’ own sense of intellectual or moral superiority – a literal

²⁵ Williams, p. 344.

²⁶ Williams, p. 345.

²⁷ R. Dyer, *Lethal Repetition: Serial Killing in European Cinema* (London, 2015), p. 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

extra-ordinariness²⁹ embraced by individuals such as Ian Brady who adopted the (hidden) guise of a Sadeian super being or extreme Übermensch. However Dyer also stresses that European cinema – and British cinema – present serial killers that are “typically human” despite the labels we (and they themselves) place upon them.³⁰

The debate that has raged since Brady and Hindley were jailed is whether one dominated the other and if the relationship was based upon an understanding between master and acolyte. The issue for the majority of people – public, police, judiciary, etc. – is whether Hindley was a subordinate in thrall to Brady and did his bidding out of a sense of extreme adoration, or whether she was in fact an equal (or indeed dominating) partner in their scheme to abduct and kill children. It has been suggested that Brady was a fantasist whose fantasies were made material by Hindley; that she was both catalyst and enabler. At their trial Brady was careful to try and distance Hindley from the most serious charges. And for 20 years after her incarceration Hindley denied being a “full partner” in the murders. Only in 1987 did she confess to being actively involved in the abductions and murders of Pauline Reade and Keith Bennett. To do so Hindley had to break the taboo of her memory, silence and a reluctance to share information that might somehow dilute the public’s perception and hatred of her.

This presents anyone wishing to dramatise the case with a particularly thorny problem. Do they address the widely-held view that Hindley was instrumental in the killings and enjoyed a sexual charge from her involvement and observing Brady’s reaction; or do they dare to take an alternative view (as held by Hindley supporters Lord Longford and David Astor, among others) that she was somehow coerced, bullied, blackmailed, duped or subjugated into participating, and did so reluctantly because she was in fear of her life? Most dramatists have opted for the role of equal partner as a safer, less controversial and more accepted scenario in the eyes of the public. It is also the approach taken by Hamish McAlpine in *Saddleshworth*, described anecdotally to this writer as a love story set against the backdrop of the moors that considers the relationship between the Moors Murderers before their killing spree began. McAlpine, a former film distributor and film producer who made a trio of serial killer movies including *Ed Gein* (2000), *Bundy* (2002) and *The Hillside Strangler* (2004), will make his directorial debut with *Saddleshworth* which, he

²⁹ Ibid, p. 7.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 6.

intimated to this writer, will focus on the corrupting influence of Ian Brady on Myra Hindley. Described by McAlpine as “an explanation, not a justification”, *Saddleworth* will feature newcomers in the leading roles and is set to begin filming in 2018.

Section 4

Attempts at a staging

In a column headlined ‘In defence of evil’ the playwright David Edgar argued that “drama is a test-bed on which we can test and confront our darkest impulses under laboratory conditions; where we can experience the desires without having to confront the consequences. Drama enables us to peer into the soul, not of the person who has driven his father out onto the heath, but the person who has wanted to.”³¹ Those dark impulses have inspired several writers. Invariably the focus has been on Myra Hindley.

The earliest attempt to dramatise elements of the Moors Murders case came shortly after the arrests in 1965. In the Drama department at Manchester University undergraduates had Studio Group – a Monday night ‘free space’ for student creative work (non-curriculum/non-assessed) – which had been established by Stephen Joseph in late 1963. This ensemble jointly planned to put on a play about the Moors Murders. At the heart of the piece was a dramatic parallel between Myra Hindley and Lady Macbeth. As it was to be performed in public – there was a plan to involve the production in the National Student Drama Festival in 1966 and potentially tour it to other universities – the piece was submitted to the office of the Lord Chamberlain, then the arbiter of taste and a censor of subjects deemed to be problematic in British theatre, for a licence. No licence was granted; the play was banned. The murders were still extremely raw and vivid in the public consciousness. At least one newspaper expressed shock that students were proposing to turn the events into theatre.³²

Professor Christopher Baugh, now a committee member with the Society for Theatre Research, was a student at Manchester University in 1965 and was involved with the production. In 2003 he described the Lord Chamberlain’s ruling as “an actual imposition of censorship”.³³ The eminent critic Kenneth Tynan damned the Chamberlain as “a baleful deterrent lurking on the threshold of creativity”.³⁴ Theatre censorship in Great Britain was abolished on September 26, 1968 following the

³¹ D. Edgar, ‘In defence of evil’, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2000/apr/30/featuresreview.review2>, 2000, accessed 31 March 2017.

³² C. Baugh to A. Earnshaw, email correspondence, ‘Moors Murders and Manchester University’, 3 May 2017.

³³ C. Baugh, Theatre Archive Project, British Library, <http://sounds.bl.uk/related-content/TRANSCRIPTS/024T-1CDR0032198X-0100A0.pdf>, 2003, accessed 11 April 2017.

³⁴ K. Tynan, *A View of the English Stage*. (St Albans, 1976), p. 357.

passing of the Theatres Act. Several plays were successfully produced in the years following the abolition of theatre censorship. These will be discussed in detail later.

Section 5

Big screen taboos

The case of the Moors Murders, its protagonists and the countrywide emotional fallout and sense of revulsion made it a *bête noire* for the British censor. The BBFC under the stewardship of John Trevelyan in the 1960s was reluctant to pass films that reconstructed real-life murder cases as they were rooted in reality, not fiction, and because the content could distress relatives of both murderers and victims.³⁵ “For a long time it was the policy of the Board and of the BBC and ITA (Independent Television Authority) to refuse the reconstruction of a murder of less than 50 years ago,”³⁶ wrote Trevelyan in 1973. “About 1960 this was modified by general agreement to 30 years. More recently the Board, having taken legal advice, decided to consider each project individually.”³⁷

This stance provided the go-ahead for Columbia Pictures’ *10 Rillington Place* (1971), a chronicle of the crimes of necrophile strangler John Christie, to which the Board agreed. Nevertheless it was still “firmly opposed to the making of a film based on the ‘Moors murder’ case”.³⁸ The Board adopted a different approach to foreign true-crime reconstructions. American director Richard Fleischer’s films of *Compulsion* (1960) and *The Boston Strangler* (1968) were “considered acceptable”.³⁹ The most likely factor for the BBFC’s approval may be geographic distance, which meant neither film could cause the same level of distress to UK audiences as a film inspired by a “homegrown” crime.

When contacted in early 2017 the BBFC confirmed that the specific policy mentioned by John Trevelyan (the so-called 50-year/30-year rule of refusing to classify dramatisations of ‘recent’ cases) no longer applies “and has not done so for a long time”. BBFC decisions nowadays are made in accordance with its published classification guidelines, which are the result of extensive public consultation exercises conducted roughly every five years since 1999.⁴⁰ The guidelines list “portrayals of children in a sexualised or abusive context” as one of the areas most

³⁵ J. Trevelyan, *What the Censor Saw* (London, 1973), p. 161.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ H. Renton to A. Earnshaw, email correspondence, ‘Classifying film works based on real crimes of murder’, 28 March 2017.

likely to result in cuts, alongside elements such as portrayals of sexual or sadistic violence, which make such violence look normal or appealing. In general terms, the BBFC will not normally intervene simply on grounds of potential offence. As an indicator the BBFC classified *See No Evil: The Moors Murders*, Neil McKay's drama about the Moors Murders, at 15 uncut for home entertainment in 2008.⁴¹ It is useful to note that the BBFC has no influence over the production of television dramas or feature films unless its advice is *specifically* sought by the producers during production.⁴² While the BBFC does offer an advice service, including looking at scripts and unfinished works, it stated "there have been no recent cases where our advice has been sought on productions about real life murders".⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Refer to Appendix i.

Section 6

First attempts at a feature film

For almost half a century filmmakers have tried and failed to dramatise the personalities and events of the Moors Murderers. The earliest attempt to put Brady and Hindley on screen can be dated back to 1968 – just two years after the trial. And the filmmaker attached was no less than William Friedkin, later to shock the world with *The Exorcist* (1973). Friedkin, then aged 32, was shooting a film version of Harold Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* (1968) at Shepperton Studios near London when he was interviewed by Derek Todd of *Kine Weekly*. Headlined “Friedkin to film ‘Moors Murders’” it stated: “Story of the bizarre ‘Moors Murders’, which horrified the nation recently, is to be filmed in Britain early next year by controversial young American director William Friedkin. Called *Beyond Belief*, the picture will be made by Palomar Pictures International, a subsidiary of American Broadcasting Companies, from a screenplay by Emlyn Williams.”⁴⁴

Friedkin said of Williams’s book: “I couldn’t put it down. To me, it’s the definitive contemporary study of the banality of evil.”⁴⁵ Even setting aside his paraphrasing of historian Hannah Arendt⁴⁶, Friedkin was astute in his opinion of what made the story so compelling: these were ordinary people – like you and me – who did not stand out from the crowd. Friedkin went on to refer to the project as a “bombshell”.⁴⁷ He announced his intention to cast unknowns in the leads, to shoot in “totally desaturated” colour (“to remove from it any unsuitable element of gloss”)⁴⁸ and on location – but *not* within the homes used by the killers.⁴⁹ Shooting was scheduled for February 1969. It was a project designed to provoke controversy. Moreover its proximity to the court proceedings – dubbed ‘The Trial of the Century’ by the Press – would prove to be immensely problematic.

The first rumblings of unease came via the British film industry, specifically Derek Todd, the columnist who had first reported on the prospect of a Moors Murders

⁴⁴ D. Todd, ‘Friedkin to film ‘Moors Murders’’. *Kine Weekly* (4 May 1968), p. 15.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London, 1965).

⁴⁷ D. Todd, ‘Friedkin to film ‘Moors Murders’’. *Kine Weekly* (4 May 1968), p. 15.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The latter point could be perceived as Friedkin being disingenuous, as much of Gorton, where Brady and Hindley had lived, had been demolished or was scheduled for demolition. However the house at 16 Wardle Brook Avenue, in Hattersley, where Edward Evans was murdered, was frequently unoccupied. Tenants refused to live there because of its association with the killers. It too was demolished in 1987.

movie. In an article headlined ‘Should we be exploiting the harmonics of horror’ he warned of the move towards semi-documentary films examining recent real-life murders “of a peculiarly sensational kind”. In referencing the spate of crime/drama releases – including *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), *In Cold Blood* (1967), *Robbery* (1967), *Point Blank* (1967) and *No Way to Treat a Lady* (1968) – Todd identified them as being studio pictures that boasted themes of romance, revenge, and menace (with the added message that crime does not pay), appealed to broad audiences, were highly successful and represented updated versions of the gangster perennial. However he was wary of the prospect of dramatising real-life cases, using *The Boston Strangler* (20th Century Fox) and *10 Rillington Place* (Columbia Pictures) as specific examples. He called this “a more disturbing development”, adding:

The time has come, it seems to me, when filmmakers must ask themselves: are human tragedies recently retailed (sic) in the quiet of a courtroom – and still sounding harmonics of horror – quite the right material to exploit for presentation to a mass audience? The traditional gangster film is one thing. This new trend is quite another.⁵⁰

Ian Brady was the first to express his dissatisfaction. Myra Hindley quickly followed suit. Like Brady she had received a draft contract to give her written consent to the use of her name, likeness and those of her family to be used and portrayed by actors and actresses. “They left a pound sign blank, indicating that I could name my own price. But I sent it back and said I could not believe anybody could contemplate making a film out of a book of that nature.”⁵¹ Instead she wrote to her solicitor and to Justice, the organisation that campaigns on behalf of prisoners and ex-prisoners, to block the project due to the “harrowing” effect it would have on her and Ian Brady’s relatives.⁵² In a 1,000-word letter written from Holloway Prison she stated her very strong objection to both book and film and added, “that under no consideration will I ever give permission for such a film, in which names and likenesses will be used, to be made, regardless of how high a figure is offered of financial consideration”.⁵³

⁵⁰ D. Todd, ‘Should we be exploiting... The harmonics of horror’, *Kine Weekly* (1 June 1968), p. 12.

⁵¹ P. Topping, *Topping – The Autobiography of the Police Chief in the Moors Murders Case* (London, 1989), p. 134.

⁵² M. Hindley, Letter U DJU/1/4/2 (H.M. Prison, Holloway, London, 15 June 1968), accessed 21 March 2017.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

The object of her letter, she stated, was to gather support to fight the release of the proposed film and further publication of Williams's book, "which is the most obnoxious piece of lies and fabrications that I have ever read."⁵⁴ But the key element of Hindley's letter focused on the distress that would be caused to relatives – not the families of the victims, but hers and Ian Brady's:

Our relatives, particularly my mother and grandmother and Mrs. Brady, have been subjected to merciless persecution from the Press and authors of books ever since our arrest, and any more publicity, particularly of the calibre of this proposed film, would have an adverse effect on them and would undoubtedly be detrimental to their health. As innocent people they have suffered extreme mental torture and I feel that further hounding should this film be released, would be more than they could bear.⁵⁵

Hindley ended her letter with a final exhortation for assistance "as this is a matter of extreme importance and a constant source of worry as to the effect on my family".⁵⁶ Three days later Hindley received a short legal response advising her "you would certainly be entitled and justified to refuse your permission for the film to be made".⁵⁷ The same letter revealed that Ian Brady had made a similar complaint.

Six months after Friedkin's interview in *Kine Weekly* Robert Sheldon, Labour MP for Ashton-under-Lyne (from where John Kilbride was abducted), was sufficiently appalled to raise the spectre of the project with his Labour counterpart Merlyn Rees, the Home Secretary. More pertinently, Sheldon invited Rees to "refuse permission for [Friedkin] to remain in this country for the making of this film because of its effect on parents and relatives of the victims and on the general locality".⁵⁸

Sheldon – now Baron Sheldon – was MP for Ashton-under-Lyne for 37 years, from 1964 to 2001. His comments were picked up by *Variety*, which reported that he had asked local constituents to refuse all cooperation with the film company.⁵⁹ Sheldon's stance provoked an inevitable response from Emlyn Williams, one of several writers to have covered the Moors Murders case and the ensuing trial of Brady

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. The full text of Hindley's letter can be found in Appendix iii.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Anon., Letter U DJU/1/4/2 (London, 18 June 1968), accessed 21 March 2017.

⁵⁸ Hansard (7 November 1968), vol 772 c138W.

⁵⁹ Anon., 'M.P. Hits Moors Murders Filming'. *Variety* (13 November 1968), p. 30.

and Hindley. Williams contended that his book, *Beyond Belief*, examined the lives of the killers and not their crimes. The report added: “He asserted that he has maintained that there should be no actual shooting in the locality of the murders, that pseudonyms will be used for all the leading characters and that it can be filmed without distress for anybody.”⁶⁰ Williams himself was quoted thus: “That is why I have insisted [on] having full responsibility for the script.”⁶¹

Williams’s stance was at a distance from that of Friedkin. Desaturated, unglorious and pseudonymous, it presented a template that future filmmakers would follow in an attempt to sidestep the taboos and circumvent the media furore that would forever surround the case.⁶² The template technique is closely associated with television producer Jeff Pope, who has brought supporting characters to the fore in order to explore controversial figures such as Peter Sutcliffe and Fred West (1941-1995). His way in to a storyline is to focus on an interested party such as a police officer or support worker and to tell it through their eyes. Thus he avoids directly addressing the more prurient element and deflects accusations of exploitation. Trying to psychoanalyse such individuals via television drama is futile: “I don’t think there’s anything to be gained by exploring evil. I’m more interested in proximity to it; how it can impact on me and you.”⁶³ On making *Appropriate Adult*, which had Fred West at its core, he said, “I wasn’t interested in a story about him and Rose per se.”⁶⁴ Pope argued that *Mrs Biggs* (2012) was “not a piece about the Great Train Robbery”⁶⁵ and *The Moorside* (2017) “is not about Shannon. It is about the *abduction* of Shannon Matthews.”⁶⁶ He has also used public interest as a defence for making such programmes.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² The American filmmaker Richard Fleischer remembered the nervousness of studio executives at Twentieth Century-Fox when his film of Meyer Levin’s 1956 novel *Compulsion* was being prepared. The book was a fictionalised version of the real-life thrill killing in 1924 of a boy by wealthy Chicagoans Nathaniel Leopold and Richard Loeb. The two men were jailed the same year. By the time of the film in 1960 Loeb was dead, having been murdered in prison, but Leopold had been released and was working in South America. Fox followed Levin’s lead and dutifully changed the protagonists’ names to Artie Straus and Judd Steiner. However Leopold sued (and won) when publicity for the film announced it as “Based on the famous Leopold and Loeb murder case”. Fleischer, R, *Just Tell Me When to Cry: Encounters with the greats, near-greats and ingrates of Hollywood* (London, 1994), p. 314.

⁶³ Anon, ‘Jeff Pope on making Little Boy Blue: “If Rhys’s parents had said ‘please don’t do this’ we would have stopped’, *Radio Times*, <http://www.radiotimes.com/news/2017-04-24/jeff-pope-on-making-little-boy-blue-if-rhys-parents-had-said-please-dont-do-this-we-would-have-stopped/>, 2017, accessed 12 September 2017.

⁶⁴ B. Wilson, ‘Jeff Pope interview: Why I was right to make a drama about Fred West’, *The Daily Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8733744/Jeff-Pope-interview-Why-I-was-right-to-make-a-drama-about-Fred-West.html>, 2011, accessed 12 September 2017.

⁶⁵ M. Brown, ‘ITV’s Jeff Pope: “Crime was my entrée into drama”’, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2012/sep/02/itv-jeff-pope-drama-mrs-biggs>, 2012, accessed 12 September 2017.

⁶⁶ K. Rushton and L. Lambert, ‘Shannon family in fury over ‘sick’ BBC drama’. *Daily Mail* (February 9, 2017), p. 5.

⁶⁷ B. Wilson, ‘Jeff Pope interview: Why I was right to make a drama about Fred West’, *The Daily Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8733744/Jeff-Pope-interview-Why-I-was-right-to-make-a-drama-about-Fred-West.html>, 2011, accessed 12 September 2017.

Several years after the announcement of *Beyond Belief* Ian Brady claimed to have taken legal action to block three film projects including the Friedkin film, for which he was offered a fee. In a letter to a pen pal he said he had refused to sign a release form for the Friedkin film and had dealt with two other mooted projects in similar fashion:

There have been more than 30 books on my case; five plays (one German); a London musical; a comic; some playing cards (US/Canada). So that leaves very little to exploit. I've only bothered to read the books they intend to make films from, in order to take legal action to stop them, which I've succeeded in doing three times. In case you're wondering, I get nothing from all the commercial exploitations – I'm public property.⁶⁸

Plans to make a film of *Beyond Belief* (it may also have been titled *Murder on the Moors*)⁶⁹ were quietly dropped. It does not feature in the director's 2013 memoir *The Friedkin Connection* and scholars focusing on the filmmaker's career do not discuss it. Ten years after the unrealised Friedkin/Williams project British screenwriter Michael Armstrong was approached and asked to consider turning the Moors Murders into a film script. The invitation followed Armstrong's involvement in *The Black Panther* (1977), a low-budget feature (scripted by Armstrong and directed by Ian Merrick) focusing on the crimes of Donald Neilson underpinned by a combination of gritty realism and authenticity based on court transcripts of Neilson's evidence. Recognising the taboo, the voyeuristic impulse presented by real-life crime, and the weight of public opinion, Armstrong refused point blank to be involved in anything associated with the Moors Murders:

There wasn't even a second's worth of thought before I said no. The [case of the] Moors murders broke taboos because it was children. The mistake would

⁶⁸ R. Perrie and G. Culliford, 'Maddie support is just hysteria and James Bulger's killer's shouldn't have been jailed', *The Sun on Sunday*, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/832855/maddie-support-is-just-hysteria-and-the-james-bulgers-killers-shouldnt-have-been-jailed>, 2013, accessed 15 March 2017.

⁶⁹ I. Cooper, *Frightmares – A History of British Horror Cinema* (Leighton Buzzard, 2016), p. 167.

be to try to capitalise on that. You break a taboo when you cause suffering to people that do not deserve it. That was never [my] intention.⁷⁰

It is Armstrong who hints at the unpalatable voyeuristic element of the Moors Murders case, though he stops short of uttering the term; Williams and Friedkin dodge it completely.

In a 2013 study carried out by the Culture and Media Institute (CMI), a conservative American watchdog founded to preserve traditional values and to monitor liberal leanings in the arts, it was suggested that television companies were wilfully glamorising serial killers. Evidence was presented on the basis that seven new TV series had been launched that had a serial killer character in the lead, focused on the actions of a serial killer, or his milieu, or presented the pursuit for a serial killer. The CMI claimed US networks had added *Hannibal*, *Bates Motel*, *The Cult*, *The Bridge*, *Ripper Street*, *The Following* and *The Fall* to their schedules, bringing the total number of shows to 20, as they pandered to a growing audience predilection/obsession for gruesome and violent programming. The analysis focused in particular on *Dexter*, (2006-2013), Showtime's series (then in its eighth season) that detailed the life and crimes of a serial killer who targeted other serial killers for murder. The CMI drew up a list of more than 100 deaths featured on the show and claimed it had inspired at least three murders and one attempted murder.

The CMI study also made a definite link between televisual entertainment and real-life crime – rejecting TV executives' claims that television reflected violence in society but did not encourage it – by quoting murderers who had used knowledge gleaned from the show to aid and abet their own crimes, such as using power tools to try to dismember a corpse. (The woman in question was quoted thus: “I made a few attempts to chop her up like Dexter with Masters power tools but I was afraid it was too loud and it sucked at cutting flesh ... I thought ... it would be simple, like Dexter.”)⁷¹ A spokesman for the CMI called the proliferation of seven new shows “a major trend” adding, “Television is a copycat medium. What happens first on cable

⁷⁰ M. Black, 'Controversial and 'chilling' film about Black Panther Donald Neilson is re-released', *Bradford Telegraph & Argus*, http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/14104682.Controversial_and_chilling_film_about_Black_Panther_Donald_Neilson_is_re_released/, 2015, accessed 16 May 2017.

⁷¹ A reference to the 2012 murder of San Diego military wife Brittany Dawn Killgore, 22, who was killed in a botched sadomasochistic sex kidnapping. Her killers used a power saw to cut into one of her legs after death, seemingly in a clumsy attempt to dismember the body.

migrates to broadcast TV. Everyone is trying to capture that *Dexter* audience.⁷² In 2017 the BBC said it would rein back on commissioning downbeat programmes in favour of feelgood fare. Piers Wenger, the Corporation's Head of Drama, promised a "better mix" in the wake of bleak shows such as *The Moorside*.⁷³

⁷² P. Bond, 'Study: TV's Newest Obsession is Serial Killers', *The Hollywood Reporter*, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/serial-killers-tvs-newest-obsession-577337>, 2013, accessed 22 August 2017.

⁷³ M. Moore, 'BBC takes a lighter tone as viewers tire of bleak drama', *The Times*, 25 August 2017, p. 21.

Section 7

Embracing taboos on stage

In March 1969 the German filmmaker and playwright Rainer Werner Fassbinder premiered *Pre-Paradise, Sorry Now* at the Munich Antiteater. The experimental play explored the psyche of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley and their shared belief that they were superior beings, setting their pseudo-liturgical rituals against latent and aggressive fascistoid elements in modern Germany.⁷⁴ (In 1999 Jack Helbig in the *Chicago Reader* described it as “an intellectually rich, stylistically daring but flawed work”.)⁷⁵ In 1972 the piece opened at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London and immediately came under fire from Tom Pendry, the recently elected Labour MP for Stalybridge. On seeing the play in London Pendry was mortified (“it made me sick to my stomach”) to hear reconstructed dialogue between Brady and Hindley – and by the inclusion of the screams of Lesley Ann Downey. He was convinced that the prospect of the play touring to Manchester and Salford was too distressing for relatives of the victims and sought legal advice to stop the tour, “if possible even by a court injunction”.

Backed by parliamentary colleagues representing the nearby constituencies of Wythenshaw, Gorton (where Hindley had lived), Openshaw, Rochdale, Ardwick, Widnes, Blackley, Ashton-under-Lyne, Accrington and Oldham, Pendry wrote a letter protesting that the play would cause “great mental suffering and cruelty” as “the case is too recent – and too horrific to be presented in the form of a play, especially in the area where the tragic events of six years ago occurred”. It resulted in planned performances at Manchester University and Salford University being cancelled.⁷⁶ Nineteen years later the piece was revived and staged at the Citizens’ Theatre in Glasgow – more than 200 miles from where the murders took place. Clearly sufficient time had elapsed to allow director (and translator) Robin David MacDonald free rein

⁷⁴ The Fassbinder Foundation, <http://www.fassbinderfoundation.de/preparadise-sorry-now-in-freiburg/?lang=en>.

⁷⁵ J. Helbig, ‘Pre-Paradise, Sorry Now’, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/pre-paradise-sorry-now/Content?oid=900754>, *Chicago Reader*, 1999, accessed May 16 2017.

⁷⁶ T. Pendry, *Taking it on the Chin: Memoirs of a Parliamentary Bruiser* (London, 2016), pp. 134-135.

to present a play that one reviewer described as “vivid”, “vicious”, “robust”, “challenging”, “exhilarating and exceptionally unsettling ... risk-taking drama”.⁷⁷ That same (unnamed) reviewer also highlighted the stand-off between audience manipulation and the revulsion felt by those assailed by the content of Fassbinder’s play. In exploring the psyche of the Moors Murderers *Pre-Paradise, Sorry Now* “subtly disturbs demons” in those watching, demanding “an intense response”.⁷⁸ Moreover the emotions it stirred – “a hornets’ nest” – veered from repugnance to fascination. Chiefly the playwright (and his play) dared to prick feelings of sympathy for the killers even though they represented “a strand of evil in our society that is almost too terrifying to contemplate”.⁷⁹ He also spoke of an uncomfortable sense of voyeurism in the theatre that was suffocating in its intensity. The penultimate paragraph of his review reads: “You feel self-disgust for being touched by their vulnerability, then you feel ridiculous for hating them so much. Ultimately you feel uneasy about the way you hang on every word.”⁸⁰

One of the loudest critics of Fassbinder’s play was Ann West (1929-1999), the mother of Lesley Ann Downey, whose grief was so overwhelming that it morphed into an all-consuming rage. Until her death Mrs West was the opposing force to the likes of Lord Longford and was a fixture in newspapers and on television, vociferously campaigning against any prospect of Hindley’s release. She claimed to have intervened on three occasions in order to stop the presentation of stage plays featuring Brady and Hindley as central characters and to prevent anyone – murderers, dramatists, impresarios – profiting from their crimes. “Apart from the distress that is caused to my family I have felt there were times when the sheer bad taste of certain individuals had to be curbed for the sake of decency, and to stop a ‘loony’ cult following, focused on Brady and Hindley, from developing.” She added that, “attempting to portray in the name of entertainment beasts like the two who killed my child and so many others is beyond decency” and made the forceful argument that morbidly sensationalistic plays exploited grief and terror, and pandered to the lowest

⁷⁷ Anon., ‘Dark of the Soul. Preparadise sorry Now, Citizens’ Theatre, Glasgow’, *The Herald*, http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/12614981.Dark_of_the_soul_Preparadise_Sorry_Now_Citizens_apos_Theatre_Glasgow/, 1993, accessed 19 June 2017.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

appetites in human nature.⁸¹ “So long as there are those who are prepared to make profit of various kinds out of private grief I shall fight to frustrate their plans.”⁸²

In 1977 Brian Clemens’ one-woman play *Our Kid* opened in London and received hate mail. Actress Sue Holderness, playing Myra Hindley, said the script depicted Hindley as a Lady Macbeth figure – not just Brady’s accomplice but the driving force behind the murders.⁸³ Hindley sought an injunction to block it, citing the potential distress it would cause to victims’ relatives.⁸⁴

In 1998 Diane Dubois’ *Myra and Me* opened at the 52nd Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Adverse Press coverage and the resultant concern by a sponsor caused it to be moved to a new venue. There have been others. Written by Beatrix Campbell and Judy Jones, *And All the Children Cried* was a two-hander billed as an “investigative drama”. It focused on Myra and Gail, two female child killers waiting for appointments with the parole board and their (fictionalised) thoughts and feelings. Whilst the character of Gail was a composite, the character of Myra was based firmly on Hindley. Campbell commented that, “the question of why women become murderers is endlessly vexing to society”. Angelique Chrisafis in *The Guardian* said the play “raises questions of Hindley’s role as muse to the arts establishment”. But that was not a focus for Winnie Johnson, the mother of victim Keith Bennett. She accused hosting theatre the West Yorkshire Playhouse of “making money from murdered children”, adding: “It is disgusting and unfair to me. Hindley is being glorified and I am suffering all the time.”⁸⁵ Her comments also echoed those of Ann West, who had expressed concern that playwrights were wilfully ignoring the risk of presenting a murderer to audiences “in a potentially heroic light ... the lunatic fringe might well see something glamorous in Brady’s crackpot ‘philosophy’ and deeds.”⁸⁶

A “substantially rewritten” version of the Campbell/Jones play opened in London and was reviewed by Lyn Gardner, who called it “a considered and provoking examination of why women kill children” that eschewed tabloid sensationalism. However the subject matter meant the play “can be almost unbearable

⁸¹ A. West, *For the Love of Lesley: The ‘Moors Murders’ remembered by a victim’s mother*, (London, 1989), pp. 193-194.

⁸² West, p. 197.

⁸³ Anon., ‘Marlene in Only Fools and Horses, the stage version of Calendar Girls’, *Belfast Telegraph*, <http://www.pressreader.com/uk/belfast-telegraph/20100526/283497907274927>, 2010, accessed 30 March 2017.

⁸⁴ C. A. Lee, *One of Your Own – The Life and Death of Myra Hindley*, (Edinburgh, 2010), p. 308.

⁸⁵ A. Chrisafis, ‘Play about Myra Hindley provokes hostility’, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/apr/20/childprotection.society>, 2002, accessed 11 April 2017.

⁸⁶ West, p. 196.

to watch”.⁸⁷ On its 2004 revival Neil Dowden wrote of sensitive direction and nuanced writing that forced a rethink of prejudices about crime and punishment. He pointed out the disturbing nature of Hindley’s calm inscrutability and said the play did not seek to provide answers to the questions it raised about women who murder children.⁸⁸

In 2006 23-year-old law student Henry Filloux-Bennett wrote *Wasted*, a portrait of Myra Hindley in her final days in prison with flashbacks referencing the axe murder of Edward Evans. The piece, featuring Morgan Thomas as Ian Brady and Gemma Goggin as Myra Hindley, was given a creepy element of approval when Filloux-Bennett revealed that Ian Brady had checked it for factual errors. Letters from Brady “helped to get a feel for what the man’s like”. However he was at pains to stress it had not been a collaboration between writer and killer.⁸⁹ One reviewer described *Wasted* as “pitifully limp ... a hackneyed docudrama more suited to a graveyard spot on a cable channel ... frustratingly, almost irresponsibly dull” and that it failed to explore the notion that females harming children is considered inherently more horrific.⁹⁰ Another reviewer, perhaps referencing Dubois’ *Myra and Me*, made the point that the Edinburgh Fringe “wouldn’t be complete without a play about Myra Hindley” adding that it was “less salacious and more intelligent than most”. Perhaps the most telling comment was that “its fascination with the perpetrator over the victims seems slightly distasteful”.⁹¹ As recently as 2016 a theatre group based in Cyprus presented *Myra* by playwright Michalis Papadopoulos. The play, billed as “a chilling thrill”, was performed in Greek at Nicosia’s Teatro Ena. One British holidaymaker said: “Brady and Hindley’s crimes touched so many lives, it’s possible someone connected to their victims could see this.”⁹²

The production of Filloux-Bennett’s *Wasted* prompted the BBC in Manchester to question whether child murder was fair game for the arts, and to ask if some events are so horrific they should never be used for entertainment. Secondary questions included: “why do artists revisit this story again and again on canvas, screen or stage?”

⁸⁷ L. Gardner, ‘And All the Children Cried’, *The Guardian*,

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/jan/30/theatre.artsfeatures2>, 2003, accessed 11 April 2017.

⁸⁸ N. Dowden, ‘And All the Children Cried review at BAC London’, *The Stage*, <https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2004/and-all-the-children-cried-review-at-bac-london/>, 2004, accessed 11 April 2017.

⁸⁹ Anon., ‘Moors Murders: fair game?’, *BBC Manchester*,

http://www.bbc.co.uk/manchester/content/articles/2006/08/02/020806_moors_play_feature.shtml, 2014, accessed 9 March 2017.

⁹⁰ N. McBay, ‘Wasted’, *Metro*, <http://metro.co.uk/2006/08/22/wasted-211075/>, 2006, accessed 9 March 2017.

⁹¹ L. Gardner, ‘Wasted’, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/aug/15/theatre.edinburgh20064>, 2006, accessed 9 March 2017.

⁹² J. McCloskey, ‘Killer drama: Brit holidaymakers’ fury over Myra Hindley stage show in Cyprus resort’, *Daily Star*, <http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/510362/Myra-Hindley-stage-show-Cyprus-holiday-resort-serial-killer-Ian-Brady>, 2016, accessed 9 March 2017.

How can society best deal with such wicked crimes? And if Jack the Ripper has been the subject of countless books and films, how are the Moors Murders somehow different?”⁹³ In a confession to detectives in 1987, Hindley herself admitted that her involvement in the abductions was critical to the murders that followed. She revealed that none of the victims went unwillingly with her; Keith Bennett, she recalled, went “like a little lamb to the slaughter” as Brady led him onto the moor. “It was probably because of me being a woman – they never had any fear.”⁹⁴

Nadine McBay, writing in *Metro*, lamented that Filloux-Bennett had neither addressed the motivations that provoke women (or, in this specific case, a woman) to murder children nor sought to paint a portrait of the person Hindley had become in the years after her arrest and during her imprisonment.⁹⁵ It may be suggested that seeking to explore that motivation was a taboo too far, with the piece that emerged going as far as Filloux-Bennett dared in attempting to unravel Hindley’s psyche.

⁹³ Anon., ‘Moors Murders: fair game?’, *BBC Manchester*.

⁹⁴ P. Topping, *Topping – The Autobiography of the Police Chief in the Moors Murders Case* (London, 1989), pp. 95-96.

⁹⁵ N. McBay, ‘Wasted’, *Metro*.

Section 8

Crossing the line

The question as to why Myra Hindley assisted in the murder of children is one of crime's great imponderables. She has been described as an ordinary woman gone bad, corrupted by the greater evil of Ian Brady. It has been suggested that had they never met she would have gone on to lead an unremarkable life within the working class environs of Manchester: marrying, having children, growing old and enjoying a mundane existence. Yet it may be suggested that something went badly wrong with Hindley's psyche, and that she was already damaged before she and Brady became a murderous, mutually supportive partnership. Hindley herself offered different versions of her involvement in the killings. Initially she claimed she was a dupe in thrall to her lover. Later she confessed to being an active participant. Thus her womanhood is what damned her in the eyes of the wider world. Possessing none of the maternal instincts that women are expected to embody, she is instead forever defined by the arrest photograph that depicts her staring defiantly down the lens of the camera.

Hindley's background and family life was ordinary. Yet whilst she was a run-of-the-mill Catholic lass with regular behavioural traits she was also violent and hard. Her mother commented: "Myra would have ended up as she did no matter what. If it hadn't been Brady, it would have been somebody else. She could have told someone within the family what was going on, before the crimes. There was always someone for her to talk to."⁹⁶ Hindley's prison lover, Patricia Cairns, spoke of the intense oneness that underlined the relationship with Brady, and their secret crimes:

What you have to understand about Myra is that when she falls in love with somebody, turns her beam on them, she becomes like them. She must have been getting some pleasure from it as well.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Lee, p. 345.

⁹⁷ D. Staff, *The Lost Boy – The definitive story of the Moors murders and the search for the final victim* (London, 2007), p. 117.

If there is truth in the saying that the camera does not lie, then the audio tape of Lesley Ann Downey, and Hindley's voice upon it, only adds to the burden of proof. A psychiatrist who heard the recording said of Hindley:

There's no element on that tape which betrayed any sympathy towards a little girl who was plainly in great fear. No sympathy whatsoever. It's brusque, aggressive, commanding, tough, impatient. It's very distressing to listen to.⁹⁸

The consensus of detectives, the judiciary and medical professionals is that Hindley was sadistic, cruel and equally culpable, meeting Brady head-on in their shared sensation of sex and death. When pushed at her trial Hindley agreed with the prosecution's suggestion that she had been cruel. The same psychiatrist who commented on Hindley's lack of maternal empathy said being party to the photographs Brady took of moorland burial sites indicated a strong sense of Hindley's complicity with and enjoyment of the murders and their aftermath. Like Brady, she savoured what they had done:

The marker photographs tie her into the sadistic sexual enjoyment of the crimes more than any other piece of evidence. The tape recording of Lesley Ann Downey showed cruelty; this is the celebration of cruelty.⁹⁹

The marker photographs are also souvenirs, placing Hindley within that peculiar pantheon of people that keep mementoes of murders. John Christie kept cuttings of pubic hair. Ian Brady, who meticulously obliterated all physical evidence of his crimes, nonetheless could not resist reliving them through his camera. Photographs of Hindley showed her posing on rocks at Hollin Brown Knoll close to where both Pauline Reade and Lesley Ann Downey were buried. The most damning image of all, and something that added to her notoriety as a monster, showed her clutching a puppy and smirking as she looked down at a spot on the moor. It was the grave of John Kilbride.

Police officers, psychiatrists, relatives, friends, supporters, authors, documentary filmmakers, playwrights, television scriptwriters and academics have all

⁹⁸ Staff, p. 204.

⁹⁹ Staff, pp. 224-225.

sought an answer as to why Myra Hindley partnered with Ian Brady in the killing of five youngsters. Her behaviour was and remains incomprehensible to right-thinking members of society. Peter Topping, the detective who secured Hindley's confession after 20 uncooperative years of controlled, steely silence, said Brady offered her "an excitement she had not previously known"¹⁰⁰ but that the impression he made upon her was not enough in itself to justify what she did. She could have resisted his influences but "she crossed a line that very few others would cross, and she cannot say she did that simply because of her feelings for Brady".¹⁰¹ Topping also suggests that just as Hindley might never have become a murderess had she never met Brady, so Brady might never have become a murderer "if she had not given a favourable reception to his ideas".¹⁰² She fed his madness when she should have been settling down to a normal life:

She had a capacity for participating in the sort of things the rest of us would run a mile from. ... There's a line that cannot be crossed, except by a very few people. Whatever she says, she is one of them.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Topping, p. 152.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Topping, p. 153.

Section 9

‘Infotainment’: Chasing ratings with serial murder

In 2012 Channel 5’s factual commissioner Andrew O’Connell spoke of the “factual heartland” of the broadcaster with stories told in a “simple, straightforward, old-fashioned way”. The same report listed the channel’s top-rated programme of that year: a documentary charting the first year of marriage between the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (tx: 8 April 2012) that attracted two million viewers and 8.5% of the available audience. Coming a close second was *Myra Hindley: Born to Kill?* (tx: 28 August 2012) with 1.9 million viewers and 8%. (Other top-rated titles on the Channel 5 slate included *Extraordinary People: The Girl with 90% Burns*, *World’s Scariest Plane Landings* and *Killers Behind Bars: The Untold Story*.)¹⁰⁴

The Hindley documentary was a repeat. The *Born to Kill?* brand began life in 2005 as a strand created by British production company Twofour, which advertised the initial six 60-minute films thus:

Serial Killers are the dark stars of modern culture. But is it nature or nurture that creates a serial killer? *Born To Kill?* takes an in-depth look at some of the most notorious murderers from around the world.

School teachers, school friends and family members are interviewed about the childhood of the killer. Investigating officers remember the crimes and analyse the scene of the murders. Each standalone episode focuses on one killer to gain an understanding of what drove them down the path to murder - was it madness, or the culmination of a series of traumatising events in their early lives, and is there a common pattern for this gruesome group?

Initially broadcast on Sky One in the UK, the various series – up to seven by 2015 – have been repeated and re-transmitted on several other terrestrial and satellite channels (such as Channel 5, UKTV and Really) with the production company informing potential bookers of its popularity and that “the UK transmission regularly

¹⁰⁴ A. Farber, ‘Channel 5’s factual commissioner talks to Alex Farber about Big Brother’s halo effect and his determination to deliver a strong factual slate, with the backing of owner Richard Desmond’, *Broadcast*, <http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/andrew-oconnell-channel-5/5048378.article>, accessed 5 June 2017.

reaches over 1.3 million viewers, beating the demographic average”.¹⁰⁵ By season five (2013) makers Twofour could claim that “the series has a high repeat value – it almost doubled its original audience in the UK”. And by 2015, as “a chilling new collection of serial killers are unmasked in the latest series of this hit crime show” a total of 54 hours had been produced underlining the “huge global success ... of this high-definition crime brand”. It added that: “the Series performed well and overall was 27.3% up on slot average with the ABC1 audience”.¹⁰⁶

Thus the dubious appeal of Myra Hindley continues, though her story (part of a strand/brand advertised as “a fascinating series which profiles the world’s most infamous serial killers”) was arguably marketed less salaciously than Americans such as *The Yosemite Park Slayer*, *The Cross-Dressing Cannibal* and *The Serial-Killing Saviour*. *Myra Hindley: Born to Kill?* pre-dated both *See No Evil* and *Longford*. It offered no new information or insightful commentary on Hindley, her crimes or her motivation. Instead it bore comparisons with a flurry of similar re-treads that pandered to the public appetite for rehashing grisly crimes as ‘infotainment’.

The phenomenon began in earnest in the mid-1990s and slowly built to its mass appeal in the 2000s; more than a dozen were produced between 1994 and 2016. But it can be traced back even further, to the ‘video nasty’ storm of the 1980s. In an essay written in 1996 Mary Whitehouse, founder of the National Viewers’ and Listeners’ Association (NVLA), recalled the video release of *Serial Killers*, which included interviews with sexual psychopaths and was advertised with the tagline “Unbelievable True Horror”. Mrs Whitehouse claimed that despite warnings that the film ‘contains footage which is not suitable for television and material and language which some may find offensive’ it was never submitted to the BBFC “because its makers said that it was ‘educational’.”

BBFC director James Ferman added his voice, arguing that filmmakers were using the ‘educational’ category as a loophole. Nigel Evans, Conservative MP for Ribble Valley, called for the system to be reviewed: “Films are coming in under the guise of education but they are going through sensational subjects to make a fast buck.”¹⁰⁷ Evans would also criticise the BBFC’s decision to classify *Executions*, a 56-minute documentary on death and torture. James Ferman called it a serious film and

¹⁰⁵ Anon., ‘Born to Kill? Series 2’, *Twofour Rights*, <http://www.twofour-rights.co.uk/Brand/55/born-to-kill-series-2>, 2010, accessed 17 July 2017.

¹⁰⁶ Anon., ‘Born to Kill? Series 7’, *Twofour Rights*, <http://www.twofour-rights.co.uk/Brand/60/born-to-kill-series-7>, 2015, accessed 17 July 2017.

¹⁰⁷ M. Whitehouse, ‘Time to Face Responsibility’, in Karl French, ed., *Screen Violence*, (London, 1997), p. 58.

“not a video nasty” prompting Mr Evans to comment: “The makers of the film have hidden behind the excuse that they want to portray the depravity of the death penalty. That sort of excuse could justify the making of any depraved documentary about any sick subject.”¹⁰⁸

Those same arguments about presenting a platform for debate would continue to resonate. In 2000 Alan Yentob, then Director of Television at the BBC, was forced into defending a documentary on Myra Hindley made as part of BBC2’s *Modern Times* strand after victims’ relatives criticised it as “a disgrace and an insult”. A spokesman for the victims’ families said: “Why is it that we credit any time to a murderess? Why do we give her any credit when she has committed homicide?” The film, entitled simply *Myra Hindley* and directed by Duncan Staff, contained extracts from some of the 150 letters written to Staff by Hindley as well as recordings of her voice.

Yentob described the film as “important” and sought to justify its making as it asked the central question “whether some crimes are so terrible that the people who commit them should die behind bars” and complemented the national debate over the length of life sentences. In a further attempt at defence he added that it was only the third time in three decades that the BBC had tackled the subject. *Modern Times*’ executive producer Alex Holmes denied the film was “a platform for Hindley” but instead an attempt to reach some understanding of her and Brady’s crimes adding that the investigation into the “life should mean life” argument was “an important and current debate”.¹⁰⁹ In that respect both *Modern Times* and *Born to Kill?* adopted a similar approach to that implemented by TV dramatists: they used the crimes and the accepted persona of the killers to explore the on-going fascination with the case whilst claiming to be in some way elucidatory, explorative and illuminating. (The majority of other infotainment programmes fall into the same bracket.)

Repackaging and retitling means the same material is often recycled via the use of fresh “bookending” in an attempt to update or contemporise content. An example is writer/director Clive Entwistle’s *The Moors Murders* (1999), which was swiftly re-hashed and given new narration on the death of Ian Brady in May 2017.

¹⁰⁸ I. MacKinnon, ‘Death and torture video is not nasty, censor says’, *The Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/death-and-torture-video-is-not-nasty-censor-says-1587275.html>, 1995, accessed 14 August 2017.

¹⁰⁹ Anon., ‘BBC defends Hindley film’, BBC World Service, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/659203.stm>, 2000, accessed 1 August 2017.

An indication of the appeal of such programmes can be traced back to 1965, when “hordes of reporters and sightseers” flocked to Saddleworth Moor in openly ghoulish fascination to watch police dig the peat for bodies. Or the people that queued up for a chance to sit in the public gallery at Chester Assizes for the trial. During an interview in the 1980s Ian Brady offered his thoughts on this phenomenon: “I led the life that other people would only think about. That’s why they are so obsessed with the case for over 20 years. They relate to it: the hideousness, fascinating and horrible.”¹¹⁰

Entwistle’s film presents a useful case study. It is unique in that four of the victims’ mothers appear on camera to relate their memories of their sons and daughters and, in the case of three of them, to recall their emotions when their children’s bodies were recovered. For his other “talking heads” Entwistle also uses former detectives. However there is another aspect: the reconstruction. Anonymous (i.e. uncredited) actors are used to reconstruct elements of the Moors Murders backstory. It would become a standardised template and one that is still being used today, albeit with a paucity of authentic commentators as many of the victims’ parents, police officers, lawyers and other interested parties have died in the intervening years. That template allows broadcasters to pander to a voracious audience to whom a drama-documentary/dramatisation is deemed somehow acceptable, whereas a commercial film made for the purposes of entertainment is not. Thus infotainment and its cousin, the television dramatisation, together present audiences with content and context that film cannot.

¹¹⁰ F. Harrison, *Hindley & Brady: Genesis of the Moors Murders* (London, 1987), p. 172.

Section 10

Different, but still the same

Produced for the Crime + Investigation channel, *Crimes That Shook Britain: The Moors Murders* is peppered with phrases such as “vile predators”, “depraved crimes”, “acts of evil”. Its sensational approach begins with memories of the axe murder of Edward Evans and suitably hysterical scripting. As in Entwistle’s film, journalists, former police officers, and victims’ relatives and friends provide the commentary. The impact is lessened by the programme’s inherent shallowness though the template used is the same.

There are scene-setting shots of terrace streets, and then the introduction of first victim Pauline Reade, seen applying her make-up prior to a night out. The background to John Kilbride’s abduction is outlined: he is stalked by Hindley at a market. Lesley Ann Downey waves goodbye to her mother as she heads to a funfair. Edward Evans meets Ian Brady on a railway station platform and is lured away. The killers are presented picnicking together on “the vast, barren land” of Saddleworth Moor, flirting in the office where they worked and drinking in a pub. Their appearances are mute; they are not given the personality of a shared voice. The film is careful to use familiar photographs of the victims and killers, archive footage of police searches and period newspaper reports. But whilst there are references to the Lesley Ann Downey tape it is not included. A pointless and anorexic re-tread of previous documentary recreations, *Crimes That Shook Britain* is little more than an exploitative schedule filler containing lingering shots of anguished relatives re-living awful experiences. The following piece-to-camera is typical of the emotionally manipulative content:

It was a heartbreak. Didn’t know what to do. That’s what my nightmares are, each and every night: our Les, what we see and what we heard. The tapes they played, with Lesley asking if she could go home. You could hear Hindley saying, ‘Be quiet or I’ll smack you again’. That will never leave me. I’ll never get it out of my mind. – Alan West, stepfather of Lesley Ann Downey

Section 11

Small screen acceptabilities

See No Evil: The Moors Murders is a case study in how to present a sensational story in unsensational terms. The story of the Moors Murders is *not* told, at least not in any obvious or extreme fashion. Instead the two-part TV drama presupposes (rightly, as it turns out) that its audience is broadly familiar with the facts of the killers' crimes, thereby relieving writer Neil McKay of the burden of having to play out the details. (The BBFC's published classification guidelines, specifically around "portrayals of children in a sexualised or abusive context", undoubtedly would have been a factor when it came to classifying the drama for home video.)

In his preview of *See No Evil* David Chater wrote:

There are two huge challenges when telling the story of the Moors murders. The first is how to televise events that involve unimaginable cruelty, which this production achieves with commendable restraint. Here, the killings are Brady and Hindley's terrible secret and they take place off-screen; the children never appear, and a police officer is shown rushing to be sick after listening to the tape recordings the couple made. The second challenge is to try and get inside Brady and Hindley's heads. Anyone can condemn evil; the tough part is to understand it. This well-acted production tells a repulsive story and keeps alive the memory of the victims. What it fails to do is offer any insight into psychotic behaviour.¹¹¹

In *See No Evil* Brady and Hindley, played by Bolton-born Maxine Peake and Londoner Sean Harris who, unlikely as it may seem, is said to have met the killer.¹¹² They are partnered by Joanne Froggatt as Hindley's sister, Maureen, and Michael McNulty as her husband, David Smith. It is via the latter pair's eyes that the dread tale is told: at a distance, disbelievingly, and through feelings (shared with the watching public) of shock and revulsion. *See No Evil* opens with a scene-setting view

¹¹¹ D. Chater, 'TV Choice', *The Times*, 13 May 2006, p. 40.

¹¹² Anon. 'Success beckons for Bryan', *Fife Today*, <http://www.fifetoday.co.uk/news/success-beckons-for-bryan-1-144856>, 2006, accessed 12 September 2017.

of a moorland landscape over which the following credits – laying out the film’s credentials – are superimposed:

This is a true story

Some scenes have been created
for the purposes of dramatisation
but what follows is based on
extensive research

Between 1963 & 1965
Ian Brady and Myra Hindley
murdered at least five young people

They buried four of them
on the moors outside Manchester

See No Evil begins in October/November 1964 and follows a 12-month timeline to the trial, and then beyond. The timeframe after the killers’ incarceration focuses not so much on them but on the effects of the experience on Maureen and David, who become pariahs. In that respect *See No Evil* is a domestic drama set against a backdrop of lies, deceit, murder and widespread public opprobrium, much of it directed at those associated with the killers or seen to be in the eyes of the wider public. Brady emerges as an enigma and remains so throughout. His relationship with Hindley is one of willing manipulation. Meanwhile their “oneness” is viewed vicariously through the reactions and emotions of Maureen and, to a lesser extent, David. And as the four-way dynamic is explored and evolved so it becomes apparent to the audience that Brady and Hindley have already begun their killing spree. *See No Evil* depicts only one murder, but it is a key sequence. It is presented as a flashback, intercut with Dave Smith retching and gabbling as he relates the murder of Edward Evans. The death scene is played out over a period of three-and-a-half minutes, broken down into brief, staccato sequences. The setting – a living room – is

suffused in a harsh red glow that serves to camouflage some of the luridness of the scene.

The 'red scene'

Key: CU – close up

MS – medium shot

WS – wide shot

- 58.24 WS Evans screams. Brady (blurred) swings an axe towards Evans' head.
(Duration: 2 seconds)
- 58.31 CU Screaming. MS Dave's horrified reaction. (Duration: 1 second)
- 58.38 WS Living room bathed in red light.
CU Hindley's exultant face.
MS Brady stalks past Dave. (Duration: 1 second)
- 58.44 WS Brady astride Evans' body. Brings the axe down.
CU Hindley's face, eyes wide. Wall spattered with blood.
MS Blurred movement of Brady's arm swinging the axe.
CU Dave, disbelieving. Sound of the axe's impact. (Duration: 4 seconds)
- 58.51 Camera pans up Brady's body. (Duration: 4 seconds)
- 59.10 WS Blood-soaked Brady approaches Dave.
CU Blood-soaked axe, glistening.
CU Dave, stunned. Brady, exultant. Corpse on floor at base of shot.
(The body is at no point made recognisable.) (Duration: 17 seconds)
- 59.34 CU Hindley enters the blood-spattered room and switches on the light.
CU Brady, sweating and hair dishevelled. "Now that was the messiest yet."
CU Hindley, smiling proudly.
WS Triangulation of Hindley, Brady and Dave with Evans' corpse lying on carpet, his head obscured by a cushion.
CU Brady holding the axe.
CU Dave, frightened.
CU Brady, threatening.
CU Hindley, nervous.
CU Brady. (Duration: 28 seconds)

Just as Hindley was lured in and corrupted by Brady's mind-set – as was David Smith, who immersed himself in Brady's extreme reading matter such as books by De Sade – so a film focusing on these personalities would risk communicating his amoral credo to a wider audience, and one that, like Hindley and Brady, was particularly susceptible. There is, therefore, a distinct echo of Ann West's concerns over the potentially prurient content of stage plays. Throughout *See No Evil* McKay uses audience familiarity with the Moors Murders to underline the allusions in his script. Two sequences exemplify his approach.

Scene # 1

Ian Brady and Dave Smith stand side by side as they urinate in the back yard of Hindley's grandmother's house in Bannock Street, Gorton. Looking up to another terrace house they see Joan Reade, mother of missing teenager Pauline (previously murdered by Brady and Hindley) looking out despairingly into the night from an upstairs window.

Brady: Would that be that Mrs Reade, eh? Lady whose daughter disappeared?

Dave: Yeah, Pauline. Almost two years now. That's her bedroom. I often see her Mam up there at night.

Brady: You must've known that lassie well.

Dave: Yeah. So did Maureen and Myra. Police said she'd met some lad and run off wi' 'im.

Brady: What? You dinnae believe that, eh?

Dave: She weren't that type o' girl.

Brady: Yeah, right! They're *all* that type of girl."

There is a sense of Brady teasing Dave (and, by association, the watching audience/wider world) with a slyly provocative hint of secret knowledge though Dave, gazing deeply and thoughtfully at the forlorn mother, does not pick up on the vagueness of Brady's inference. The other aspect of the scene is the notion of Joan Reade peering into the darkness for the merest glimpse of her lost child: searching the gloom with something akin to yearning/hope. And, of course, the viewer knows what Dave does not: that the Reade family would continue to hope and search for a tortuous period of more than 20 further years.

Scene #2

Myra and Maureen Hindley sit together in the cramped confines of Myra's Mini Traveller. It is night, and they are parked on the roadside at Saddleworth Moor. Maureen's six-month-old baby, Angela Dawn, has died suddenly [on April 22, 1965] and unexpectedly. Brady and Dave have gone for a stroll. Myra breaks the mood.

Myra: I'm so glad you came to me.

Maureen: Who else would I go to?

Myra: How's Mam taken it?

Maureen: She's in pieces. I sat by Angela in the hospital for ages, you know, when she was gone, but... you still wait for something. A whimper, or a breath. Anything.

Myra: It's the silence that gets you, isn't it?

Maureen: I didn't know you had ever seen anyone dead.

Myra: My friend, Michael.¹¹³

Maureen: Oh God, yeah. He drowned in Gorton. I remember how upset you were.

Myra: I'll never forget them pulling him out, laying him on the bank. I kept staring at him, willing him to come awake again, but...

Maureen: But they don't, do they?

There is an overwhelming sense of cold distance and cruelty to the siblings' conversation, and it is entirely one-sided. The sequence is presented as an over the shoulder two-shot, with Myra in the driver's seat and Maureen sitting directly behind on the back seat. Maureen, clutching her dead infant daughter's woollen bonnet, is tearful, agonised and highly emotional, using this harrowing *tête-à-tête* with her older sister to unburden her sense of shock and guilt at her child's death. Myra sits immobile, her face expressionless. She is conversing automatically, her words flatly delivered, displaying neither emotion nor empathy. Her eyes are directed on a fixed point somewhere in the darkness of the moors beyond the car's windscreen. She is in a reverie that slips when she utters the giveaway line "It's the silence that gets you, isn't it?" She is thinking not of the tiny corpse of her seven-month-old niece but of the brutalised corpses of Pauline Reade, John Kilbride, Keith Bennett and Lesley-Ann Downey buried secretly – and so tantalisingly – close to where she and her sister are

¹¹³ A reference to Hindley's childhood friend, Michael Higgins, who drowned aged 13 whilst swimming in a disused reservoir.

sitting. Somewhere in the lonely dark, Brady confesses his affinity with the moor to Dave.

Brady: I live for this place. It owns my soul.

As he speaks the camera focuses on the peat on which he and Dave are standing. The clear inference is that it is a gravesite. Dave is mourning *his* child while other parents are maddened and perplexed by the inexplicable vanishing of *their* child lying inches below his feet. It is a chilling moment and encapsulates the vibe of *See No Evil* far better than any graphic and exploitative reconstruction of rape and murder.

Reviewing *See No Evil* Caitlin Moran joined thousands in asking, “What can you say about this? How will they do it? And why are they doing it?” She was surprised by the end result, set against a “dreary but resolutely normal” mid 1960s northern English backdrop that juxtaposed real-life sorrows with then-silent, supernatural horror of Brady and Hindley’s world. That world, she wrote, was not one of fantastic, unreal, unreachable evil but something that happened “in an ordinary street, while Corrie was on”.¹¹⁴

See No Evil also represents the *modus operandi* of screenwriter Neil McKay, a specialist in this type of drama who has also written TV dramas about Peter Sutcliffe (*This Is Personal: The Hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper*, 2000), Fred West (*Appropriate Adult*, 2011) and the disappearance of Shannon Matthews (*The Moorside*, 2017). McKay’s preferred and established method is to examine crimes from the viewpoint of observers such as police officers (*This Is Personal*), social workers (*Appropriate Adult*) and neighbours (*The Moorside*). He deliberately, even scrupulously, avoids any direct focus on the killers’ crimes. Instead the killings become signposts to the central plot and the killers supporting players in their own stories (or, in the case of Peter Sutcliffe in *This Is Personal*, a barely-glimpsed supporting artiste).

¹¹⁴ C. Moran, ‘Remembering the Moors murdered’, *The Times*, 15 May 2006, p. 27.

Section 12

Neil McKay: Pandering to the voyeuristic impulse

In his lecture ‘Based on a True Story: How to Write TV Drama with Neil McKay’ held at Liverpool John Moores University in 2013 as part of the BAFTA Creative Skillset Guest Lecture Programme, McKay outlined his methodology when dealing with the dramatisation of real-life crimes. In doing so he fired a broadside at the media and presented a case for dramatists like himself as documentarians and arbiters of taste:

I start off with a huge amount of research material, transcripts, maybe books, maybe documents, transcripts of trials, all manner of stuff and information, even DVD recordings of interviews and so on. Generally people want to tell their story and people that have been involved in traumatic events and very often their main experience has been with print journalism and maybe TV journalism as well. Those people tend to be here and gone tomorrow. Very often they haven’t listened to the story and stayed with those people. And very often I think if you go to people and certain things have happened that are quite difficult, if you go to them and say, ‘I’m interested in this and I want to talk about it. I’m not just going to listen to you for half an hour or an hour and then go away and you’ll never hear from me again’ if you treat people as people and have a relationship with them I think that goes a long way.¹¹⁵

Referring specifically to the building blocks of what would become *See No Evil*, he explained:

The story of *See No Evil* for me was the story of the woman who had the bad luck to be Myra Hindley’s sister, Maureen Hindley, who had no idea what her sister was doing. *I had no interest in recreating the crimes of the Moors Murderers*, Brady and Hindley [and] almost no interest in their psychology as people. TV drama is actually full of serial killers and serial killing to the point

¹¹⁵ Based on a True Story: How to Write TV Drama with Neil McKay, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2X0NBsBXmE>, 2013, accessed 23 July 2017.

of over reliance on something which is clapped-out, worn out and not very interesting in my view. Crime has consequences and events have consequences and actually it's that to me which is most interesting rather than 'Why did Brady and Hindley do it?'¹¹⁶

The use of selective point of view is a firm indicator to McKay's *raison d'être*. It is also his route to the subject matter. He and the programmes' producers have used that, along with a series of clumsy claims that the films have been given some form of "official" backing by relatives, to argue for their validity:

You hope that if you take a point of view that doesn't put you behind the murderer's eyes, that does away with the difficulty of what you wouldn't want to do, which is portray the crimes. It becomes about the consequences of the crime.¹¹⁷

Therefore portraying the crimes is anathema to good television. It may additionally be suggested that it is also the taboo that would prevent something like *See No Evil* reaching the screen. Thus the industry (in the form of the filmmakers and broadcasters) is actively seeking to avoid potential accusations of poor taste by circumventing them at source. The formula has continued throughout all McKay's real-life dramas and found its way into the ITV Studios press kit that accompanied the transmission of *Appropriate Adult*. It was sold heavily as "a sober and thought-provoking factual drama" providing "a unique insight" into the police investigation "following meticulous research" into the murders.¹¹⁸ Each of those terms were parroted and repeated by elements of the British Press.

"At an emotional screening [of *See No Evil*] ahead of next week's broadcast," reported *The Yorkshire Post*, "the families gathered to view the three-hour drama. They approved the film, feeling it did justice not only to the truth, but to their own place in the story and their feelings about it. The writer and producer decided to tell the story through the eyes of those close to Brady and Hindley. Nothing is seen from

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ V. Frost, *Writer defends Fred and Rosemary West drama on ITV1*, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2011/sep/02/writer-defends-itv-fred-west-drama>, 2011, accessed 23 July 2017.

¹¹⁸ Anon. *Appropriate Adult* production notes, ITV Studios, 2011.

the point of view of the murderers.”¹¹⁹ The same article included a comment from producer Lisa Gilchrist, who employed the disapproval of Ian Brady alongside the support of victims’ families as a spurious tool in her defence of the project:

Ian Brady didn't want this film to be made, but we didn't need his approval. He talked about having ‘seen off’ other proposed films, ostensibly because he thought they would be distressing to the families. But the families felt it was right to do it, and it was a privilege to have them involved. It’s of immense importance that we don't forget that such evil can exist even in the most ordinary, unremarkable lives. For a generation of children, this time in 1966, when the full horror of what Brady and Hindley had done came out, it was the moment when mothers said to their children, ‘You don't go out and play any more’.¹²⁰

Brady himself scorned the filmmakers’ claims of authenticity and denounced the film as “fiction”. In a letter quoted by the *Manchester Evening News* he accused the creators of using Emlyn Williams’ book *Beyond Belief*, which he (just as Hindley had in her letter of 1968) claimed mixed elements of fact and fiction, as their template:

The writers (sic) of the drama have merely plagiarised every fictitious scene and event in that book. Fictions alleging I called Myra ‘Hessie’, shot sheep, threw bottles at sports cars, had a ‘swear box’ and used Scottish expressions were all inventions of Williams. Therefore Granada’s claim that the drama took two years to research is literally beyond belief, and should result in Williams’ executors suing for breach of copyright. Facts are common property, fictions are not.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ S. Hastings, *Lasting testament of evil and suffering*, <http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/analysis/lasting-testament-of-evil-and-suffering-1-2616635>, 2006, accessed 1 August 2017.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ D. Kirby, *Brady blasts TV murders film*, <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/brady-blasts-tv-murders-film-1030823>, 2007, accessed 1 August 2017.

Moreover Dave Smith said the film was inaccurate, and that attempts to present Hindley as maternal and empathetic towards her niece (Smith's daughter Angela Dawn, born in October 1964) "couldn't have been further from the truth".¹²² Granada Television originally intended to present a dramatisation of Smith's life during his marriage to Maureen. He and his second wife Mary agreed on the proviso that it would not focus on Brady and Hindley. The project, initiated in 2003, was to be called *The Ballad of David Smith*. It was later shelved in favour of the piece that would become *See No Evil*, with its arguably crucial on-screen characterisations of Brady and Hindley.¹²³ The formula was also successful in terms of awards.¹²⁴ Such success suggests that contentious subject matter justifies the inevitable controversy if it attracts viewing figures and awards, and can be similarly justified as responsible drama.

However each of McKay's dramatisations *have* been heavily criticised by those affected by criminality and its aftermath. *This is Personal* was attacked by victims, politicians and even Peter Sutcliffe's family. Olive Smelt, who survived an attack by the Ripper, denounced the makers for ignoring victims' opinions and continuing regardless. She did not want the programme made.¹²⁵ Bradford South MP Gerry Sutcliffe said the programme would "serve no useful purpose".¹²⁶ And a source close to Sutcliffe's family said the programme would only serve to resurrect bad memories for his relatives as well as victims' relatives.¹²⁷ Winnie Johnson, mother of Moors Murders victim Keith Bennett, was present at a private screening of *See No Evil*. She said it was "well made" and hoped it would assist in keeping the search for her missing boy in the public eye.¹²⁸ Fred West's daughter Anne Marie Davis said the thought of *Appropriate Adult* made her feel "physically sick". She went further,

¹²² D. Smith and C. A. Lee, *Witness: The Story of David Smith, Chief Prosecution Witness in the Moors Murders Case* (Edinburgh, 2011), p. 100.

¹²³ *Witness*, p. 18.

¹²⁴ *This Is Personal* was nominated in the category of Best Drama Serial in the 2001 Baftas. There were also nominations in the Royal Television Society Awards as Best Drama Serial and for Alun Armstrong, playing investigating officer Detective Superintendent George Oldfield, as Best Actor – Male. *See No Evil* won the Bafta in 2007 for Best Drama Serial and McKay received the Best Original Drama award from the Writers' Guild of Great Britain. *Appropriate Adult* was nominated for eight Baftas, winning four including Best Leading Actress, Best Leading Actor and Best Supporting Actress. There was a clutch of other nominations (Golden Globes, Screen Actors Guild) plus further wins for Watson and West (as Best Actor – Female and Best Actor – Male) in the Royal Television Society Awards. McKay picked up the award for Best Television Short-Form Drama from the Writers' Guild of Great Britain.

¹²⁵ Anon. 'Ripper TV drama fury', *Bradford Telegraph & Argus*,

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/8072781.Ripper_TV_drama_fury/, 1998, accessed 11 September 2017.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Anon. 'Moors murder mum welcomes TV drama', *Manchester Evening News*,

<http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/local-news/moors-murder-mum-welcomes-tv-1031361>, 2006, accessed 11 September 2017.

castigating the filmmakers for their exploitative and seemingly wanton trampling of relatives' feelings:

I haven't spoken about this for 10 years, and the only reason I am speaking now is because I want ITV to realise they will be causing unimaginable distress to the families of the young girls who were murdered. No one should kid themselves. The object of this drama is to make money. But the programme makers have to recognise that a lot of vulnerable young women died. They were real people and their loved ones are real people too who are still suffering and their wounds will only be reopened by a TV drama like this.¹²⁹

McKay's response is to use his *modus operandi* as a defensive crutch – such as proclaiming that *Appropriate Adult* was based largely on transcripts of West's interviews with police – as well as comments such as: “[We] ask ourselves whether this is the right thing. In the end I think it is. Other relatives feel very strongly that it should be discussed and out in the open. Making these things unspeakable is only a way of helping people to think that they can never happen again.”¹³⁰ The programme's production notes carried the further defence (again from McKay): “We reiterate however that the drama is a sober and unsensational account of a story in which there is legitimate public interest”.¹³¹ As recently as February 2017, with the broadcast of *The Moorside*, McKay's drama about the bogus abduction of Shannon Matthews in 2008, a debate raged over “whether it was too soon to mine the grim facts of the case for entertainment”.¹³² Referencing the disappearance of Madeleine McCann in *The Moorside*, about the *faux* 2008 kidnapping of Yorkshire schoolgirl Shannon Matthews by her own mother, led to Madeleine's parents, Kate and Gerry, to damn the dramatisation as “appalling” and “in poor taste”.¹³³ Matthews' grandparents said it was “sick and disgusting”¹³⁴ that the case had been dramatised whilst some MPs accused

¹²⁹ S. Morris, ‘Fred West's daughter criticises ITV drama about the serial killer’, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/mar/29/fred-west-daughter-criticises-itv>, 2011, accessed 5 September 2017.

¹³⁰ V. Frost, *Writer defends Fred and Rosemary West drama on ITV1*, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2011/sep/02/writer-defends-itv-fred-west-drama>, 2011, accessed 23 July 2017.

¹³¹ N. McKay, *Appropriate Adult* production notes, 2011, p. 7.

¹³² S. Freeman, ‘Shannon drama went where the cameras rarely venture’. *The Yorkshire Post* (February 15, 2017), p. 11.

¹³³ T. Kandohla, ‘They think it's appalling’, Kate and Gerry McCann brand new Shannon Matthews TV drama, *The Moorside*, ‘insensitive’ over scenes featuring Maddie's disappearance’, <https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/news/553704/kate-and-gerry-mccann-brand-new-shannon-matthews-tv-drama-the-moorside-as-insensitive-over-scenes-featuring-maddies-disappearance/>, 2017, accessed 5 September 2017.

¹³⁴ K. Rushton and L. Lambert, ‘Shannon family in fury over ‘sick’ BBC drama’. *Daily Mail* (February 9, 2017), p. 5.

the makers of “intrusive titillation”¹³⁵ and said the programme was “obviously voyeuristic”.¹³⁶ Both executive producer Jeff Pope and the BBC came under fire: Pope after admitting that key individuals, including Shannon Matthews herself, had not been consulted over the drama, and the BBC for “riding roughshod over its guidelines for producers”.¹³⁷ The Corporation also admitted that some non-family members had been paid for their involvement.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

Section 13

Peter Morgan: Giving the vilified a fighting chance

Dubbed “the man who rewrites history” in an *Evening Standard* headline,¹³⁹ scriptwriter Peter Morgan built his reputation by dramatising various real-life personalities including David Frost and Richard Nixon, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, Queen Elizabeth II, Idi Amin, and Myra Hindley and Frank Pakenham, aka Lord Longford. His style, variously described as “faction”, “infotainment”, “fact-based fiction”, and “docudrama”, is, according to Morgan himself, a reaction to accepted truths when, in his opinion, “history is just a series of elaborate fictions” in which those present have “wildly differing perceptions” of events.¹⁴⁰ Perhaps inevitably, Morgan was criticised (before the film was broadcast) for what was supposed by some tabloid newspapers to be an even-handed, even sympathetic approach to the accepted image of Myra Hindley.

Describing the default position of hating as “just lazy”, and argued that whilst he believed Hindley was guilty, the state was equally guilty of “an abomination” by pandering to public opinion and Hindley’s own notoriety to keep her in prison. He went further, stating that rehabilitation was possible and that Hindley deserved to be given an opportunity “regardless of her guilt and regardless of her lack of contrition” – a position, it might be argued, that was anathema to the vast majority of the British public. That widely shared opinion does not appear to have changed in years since Hindley’s death in 2002. Perhaps the key to Morgan’s approach is in this illuminating comment:

I can’t help slightly falling in love with every character I write about. And I quite like writing about people who are vilified. It gives them a fighting chance, I suppose. It interests me to represent people who are hated, although in the case of Nixon [in *Frost/Nixon* (2008)] and Amin [in *The Last King of Scotland* (2006)] that [hatred] is entirely justified.

¹³⁹ N. Curtis. ‘The man who rewrites history’, *Evening Standard*, <http://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/film/the-man-who-rewrites-history-7187030.html>, 2006, accessed 10 July 2017.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

He did not include Myra Hindley in his brief list of *bêtes noires*.¹⁴¹ Morgan also appeared to feel some sympathy for Hindley, and for Lord Longford who, he said, was in the invidious position of campaigning on behalf of “the most hated person in the country”¹⁴² and defending “what was apparently the indefensible”.¹⁴³ He pointed out that:

everybody has the right to a defence, particularly when they’re on the receiving end of tabloid journalists’ attack in the way that was by virtue of the fact that she was a woman.¹⁴⁴

Bridget Astor, widow of David Astor, former *Observer* editor and a Hindley supporter, would later claim that Morgan’s portrayal of Hindley in *Longford* was far from the mark: that the Myra Hindley she knew was self-assured and not “a little mouse”.¹⁴⁵ The inference to be drawn is that Hindley in her post-trial years was a woman to be admired. *Longford* is bookended with a radio interview with Lord Longford and as the credits roll footage is presented of the recovery of the bodies of Lesley Ann Downey and John Kilbride, and of the outside of Wardle Brook Avenue, where Edward Evans was murdered. Then a news report on the sentencing – but with images of the actors, not the real killers.

Longford allows its central character - a devout Christian and ardent advocate for penal reform - a voice to present an argument for Hindley: that nothing is unforgivable and no one is irredeemable. Thus Peter Morgan’s teleplay addresses the “monsterring” of Hindley (and Brady) via the prism of subjectivity by a sympathetic observer: Lord Longford. Simultaneously it presents its audience with an opportunity (shared with Longford, both character and real person) to re-evaluate its perception of both killers. Moreover it underlines the template that many filmmakers pursue, in which the Moors Murderers’ story is presented without focusing specifically on them, their crimes or their victims.

Longford presents the argument, espoused by Longford himself, that Myra Hindley was wholly corrupted by Ian Brady. This standpoint drives the film in parallel to another argument-cum-accusation: that Longford was in some way

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² A. Pergament. ‘Mercy, Murder collide in story of Lord Longford’, *The Buffalo News*, 15 February 2007, p. 1.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Lee, p. 318.

attracted to Hindley's charm, charisma and, crucially, her re-embracing of her Roman Catholic faith. The undercurrent is that Longford is corrupted by Hindley – not by her crimes, but by what he is persuaded to believe is her on-going redemption. His is a blinkered perspective, and one fully encouraged by her.

The cuckoo in the nest is the unapologetic Ian Brady, played with malignant relish by Andy Serkis in three key scenes amounting to less than 15 minutes on screen. Via his mockery and insults Brady seeks to burst the bubble of Longford's conviction and Hindley's religious conversion. It is Brady that delights in revealing Hindley's manipulation, and who details her complicity in the murders in something akin to a vocally expressed internal monologue:

She's strong. That came in handy as you can imagine, when they were wriggling and trying to get away. Stay clear of Myra because she will destroy you. She certainly destroyed me. There's a thought you've not had before: that Myra egged *me* on, that without her none of it would have happened. Listen to the tape, that's my advice, if you want to know what she's really like. And when you do listen, bear this in mind: it was her that insisted that they call us Mummy and Daddy. Not me.

The tape recording of the torture of Lesley Ann Downey becomes the elephant in the room, and that one that Longford prefers to close his eyes (and ears) to. His wife also makes mention of the tape; later it is sent to him, anonymously, in the post. It is presumed that the tape and its contents will shatter Longford's faith in Hindley's innocence as Brady professed. Yet it is set aside, only to be played *after* Hindley's confession. Even then, the recording (it is not the original; the voices heard belong to actors Samantha Morton and Andy Serkis) features only Hindley and Brady. Clearly any attempt to replicate the cries of Lesley Ann Downey is a taboo too far, and it is avoided.

In fact none of the victims are in any way represented on screen. They are referred to by means of archive TV newsreel, still images and in a carefully chosen clip from the 1977 BBC *Brass Tacks* debate in which the real Ann West, mother of Lesley Ann Downey, expresses her desire to kill Hindley should she ever be released from prison. Therefore *Longford* becomes about the crisis of conscience and confidence experienced by Frank Longford with Hindley and Brady as supporting

players. It is a portrait of a man struggling with himself and his convictions, and facing opposition from all quarters. Abduction, murder and the moors are very far away. The sympathy shown towards Myra Hindley is through the eyes and opinions of Lord Longford (and, eventually, his wife, on the basis of their shared sex) and Holloway Prison's governor. The inference – left to the watching audience to embrace – is that liberals and do-gooders championing Hindley's release are out of step with her crimes and, by association, popular (or at least ingrained) public opinion and the stance of the Press.

It is Brady who puts into words what many think: that Longford is Hindley's lackey and whipping boy – a self-appointed knight on a white charger defending her honour and reputation. The stand-off between the two – Brady's open malevolence freeing up the impact of his words versus the glimmer of enlightenment/realisation in the conflicted Longford's eyes – becomes the core of the film. Longford's taboo-busting is seen off by those around him: his family, Ian Brady, Home Secretary William Whitelaw and journalist Fred Harrison, who secures Brady's confession and in doing so reveals to Longford the extent of Hindley's complicity in the murders. Longford's is a lone voice and Morgan's stance is to highlight this. The film lays bare its agenda with a final meeting between its protagonists, and a face-to-face confession by Hindley to her benefactor:

I'm trying, Frank. I'm really trying to know the God that you know. But if you'd been there that night, on the moors, in the moonlight, when we did the first one, then you'd know that evil can be a spiritual experience too.

Reviews of *Longford* were generally positive. *The Financial Times* praised the partnership of Peter Morgan and director Tom Hooper for creating “a seamless narrative about obsession”. By using chunks of authentic television footage from the era “they painted a stark picture of the zealotry of a vengeful nation and its press over the supposed embodiment of evil.” The reviewer said Morgan's writing was “sensitively and intelligently delivered” by an outstanding ensemble, singling out Morton's performance for its coldness, equally manipulating Longford and the viewer. But he wasn't taken in, adding “this was no sympathetic portrayal: her

timidity was pure witchery”.¹⁴⁶ Toronto’s *The Globe and Mail* described *Longford* as “a powerful, intimate drama that is not so much about the banality of evil, but the cynicism of evil, and for that it is truly chilling.”¹⁴⁷

Nancy Banks-Smith in *The Guardian* resolutely refused to be taken in by Brady and Hindley, seeing their shared conspiracy for what it was. At the heart of the Moors Murders case were a woman, a man and five youngsters:

She seduced them and he slaughtered them. Longford, easy to woo and easy to wound, came on the scene like their last victim. The film was called *Longford*, not *Hindley*, though Channel 4’s provocative ad for the programme, showing Myra as a blessed damozel framed with roses and being nice to a dove, might suggest otherwise. She is still something of an enigma. Her ‘Bless me, father, for I have sinned’, with the confessional grille throwing latticed shadows over her face, had a peculiar poignancy. Though, God knows, she was not telling the whole truth.¹⁴⁸

Variety, reviewing *Longford* at the Sundance Film Festival, praised Serkis’ cameo, describing his acting as “a satanic mix of lunacy and lucidity that sparks the moral and ethical dilemmas of the title character”. But it had reservations about Morgan’s “dramatised ‘reimagining’” suggesting that it fabricated reconciliation between hero/dupe and villainess, and frowned on the writer’s use of expository dialogue, which “obfuscates the human drama”.¹⁴⁹ *The Times* praised the film’s low-key intimacy and Broadbent’s wise fool, “a decent man made gullible by his willingness to give everyone the benefit of the doubt”. It also focused on the standoff between Longford and Brady:

All this was so compelling that one never questioned what speculative liberties Morgan had taken as a dramatist. When Brady, made skin-crawlingly creepy by Andy Serkis, exposed Hindley’s manipulative ways in several unsettling

¹⁴⁶ S. Morton-Clark, ‘Marooned on planet mediocre’, *The Financial Times*, 28 October 2006, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷ J. Royle, ‘A good man sucked in by evil’, *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 16 February 2007, p. 7.

¹⁴⁸ N. Banks-Smith, ‘Last night’s tv: Jim Broadbent perfectly captured Lord Longford’s ability to get it all a bit wrong’, *The Guardian*, 27 October 2006, p. 27.

¹⁴⁹ D. Elley, ‘Jim Broadbent becomes Samantha Morton’s advocate in “Longford”’, *Variety* (22 January 2007), p. 4.

encounters with Longford, Broadbent's eyes expressed a lifetime's faith in redeemable humanity crumbling before us.¹⁵⁰

Ian Brady and Myra Hindley were particularly vocal in the years following their trial. Their thoughts and opinions had a degree of effect on various proposed projects destined for theatre, film and television. Peter Sutcliffe, however, did not pursue a similar tactic. Instead his wife emerged as an aggressive litigant. The next chapter explores the case of the Yorkshire Ripper.

¹⁵⁰ I. Johns, 'Broadbent excels as Hindley's holy fool,' *The Times*, 27 October 2006, p. 27.

Chapter II

The Yorkshire Ripper

Section 14

“Better let him sleep?”

Christmas, 1980. In the dying days of the year, history repeated itself. A Bradford MP, reacting to news that the American film studio MGM was planning a motion picture based on the crimes of the present-day and not yet apprehended Yorkshire Ripper, called for it to be dropped. His comments echoed those of his Parliamentary colleague Robert Sheldon 12 years earlier, whose reaction to a proposed film on the Moors Murderers was to threaten to urge the Home Secretary to ban American filmmaker William Friedkin, attached as director, from the country. The MP, unnamed in a radio report, said he was prepared to seek government assistance to prevent cinemas from playing the film.¹⁵¹ This was despite MGM’s insistence that it would be made “in good taste”. (Another echo, this time of Emyln Williams’ comments about his mooted project, *Beyond Belief*.) Moreover he made the connection between three troubling elements: the graphic nature of such a project, the potential for encouragement, and the risk of glamorising extreme violence:

It’s absolutely wrong that this sort of thing should be put on the screen, particularly when the Ripper is still at large, [as there is] the possibility of encouraging him to do more of these horrible exploits, gaining more fame and publicity. I would say to them ‘Stop it. Pay a bit more regard to the feelings of the parents and relations and friends of these innocent victims. Search your heart, particularly at this Christmastime. And stop making this really horrible film.’¹⁵²

Before the year was out it was reported in the trade press that MGM had yielded to what it described as adverse public reaction in England and dropped plans to make the movie. MGM was said to have denied that it had capitulated to a furore stirred in the British press. Executives including producer Larry Wilcox were said to be keeping a low profile but that the rationale for the decision not to make a movie “seemed right” under the circumstances with the studio foregoing the film “out of

¹⁵¹ Anon, ‘MGM criticised for Yorkshire Ripper film’, LBC/IRN, <http://bufvc.ac.uk/tvandrado/lbc/index.php/segment/0000200468010>, 1980, accessed 6 January 2017.

¹⁵² Ibid.

consideration for the feelings of the people most directly involved.”¹⁵³ The Yorkshire Ripper, named as Peter William Sutcliffe, was arrested three days later. However MGM did not put its decision into turnaround and a film about him has never been made under the studio’s banner.

To date no mainstream feature film has been made about the Yorkshire Ripper. In the UK Neil McKay wrote *This is Personal – The Hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper*, a TV film that focused on senior detective George Oldfield’s pursuit that bordered on obsession. Peter Sutcliffe’s crimes were echoed in *The Hawk* (1993), a film written by Yorkshire-born Peter Ransley and which appeared to be inspired by the Ripper’s crimes. The TV three-parter *Red Riding* (2009), from the novels of David Peace, referenced a police inquiry around a depraved killer that, again, echoed Sutcliffe’s era and crimes¹⁵⁴. And the low-budget independent film *Peter – A Portrait of a Serial Killer* emerged to little fanfare and much puzzlement. That is not to say that some filmmakers have attempted to get a production off the ground. But they, just like MGM in 1980, have met with a series of obstacles.

During the timescale of his activity the Yorkshire Ripper became almost folkloric. Like his namesake Jack the Ripper (who was never caught and has never been conclusively identified) he exerted a magnetic pull – equally repellent and fascinating – over millions of people. At football matches Leeds United fans would chant “Eleven-Nil” (11 being the number of his known victims at that time, nil being the police’s score having failed to catch him) when police played recordings of a voice, thought to be the Ripper’s, over loudspeakers at the club’s Elland Road stadium.¹⁵⁵ Another of the fans’ chants was “There’s only one Yorkshire Ripper!” to the tune of ‘Guantanamera’. Thus the Ripper, whoever he was, had entered the cultural lexicon. When he was caught, Peter William Sutcliffe was revealed to be an ordinary nobody. A senior detective who worked on the case would describe him as “a weedy wimp” adding:

He was quietly spoken, almost effeminate in his speech and manner. He didn’t give the impression of being the overpowering evil man. You would have

¹⁵³ Anon., ‘MGM drops ‘Yorkshire Ripper’’, *Variety* (31 December 1980), p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ N. Hasted. ‘The shadow of the Ripper’, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2001/aug/02/artsfeatures.fiction>, 2001, accessed 13 September 2017.

¹⁵⁵ N.W. Jouve, *The Streetcleaner – The Yorkshire Ripper Case on Trial*, (London, 1986), p. 31.

thought of him as an ideal neighbour, the sort of person you would met on the way to church on a Sunday morning.¹⁵⁶

Like Ian Brady, who fancied himself as embodying the ideal of the Übermensch, Sutcliffe lived two lives and sought to distance the dutiful son and faithful husband from the secret killer. A lorry driver, he penned the following lines, which were found in his cab after his arrest:

‘ IN THIS TRUCK IS A MAN
WHOSE LATENT GENIUS IF
UNLEASHED WOULD ROCK THE
NATION, WHOSE DYNAMIC ENERGY
WOULD OVERPOWER THOSE
AROUND HIM. BETTER LET
HIM SLEEP??’

Yet it would be a misreading of Sutcliffe to characterise him as possessing any of the facets described in his self-tribute. He was, in truth, a much-troubled man who suffered from depressions, had worked as a grave-digger, was the son of a textile worker, had lived in an over-crowded council house with his parents and five siblings, had always had trouble adjusting at school and in earlier jobs, and who, being chronically shy, married his first serious girlfriend.¹⁵⁷ He was very far from being in any way special.

The legend of the Yorkshire Ripper was born in the five years that he was on the loose across the North of England. The mystery surrounding his identity presented the possibility of painting him as daring and uncatchable – a “supervillain” in the vein of Fu Manchu or Moriarty who had outwitted the police and was evil incarnate. The bubble of his invincibility was burst following his arrest when he was revealed to be a run-of-the-mill working class man. Ordinary. Unexceptional. It would have been hard, if not impossible, to turn Peter Sutcliffe into anything other than what he was. Even the best scriptwriter would have struggled. That waning legend was further undermined when, at his trial, Peter Sutcliffe claimed to have been inspired to kill by

¹⁵⁶ M. Bilton, *Wicked Beyond Belief – The Hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper* (London, 2006), pp. 485-486.

¹⁵⁷ Jouve, p. 53.

the voice of God, which emanated from a tombstone in a graveyard in Bingley where he had worked as a young man. The claim has been much debated in the years since with the consensus seemingly that Sutcliffe created the claim in an attempt to convince the judiciary that he was mad. Sutcliffe's youngest brother, Carl, recalls this illuminating exchange with his sibling following his incarceration:

I went to visit him in prison, because I just had to know for myself whether he was really the Yorkshire Ripper.

I said, 'Have you really done this, Pete? Is this you?'

He said, 'I'm afraid so.'

I said, 'Well, why? Why did you do it, Peter?'

And he said, 'Just cleaning up, our kid. Just cleaning up.'¹⁵⁸

A précis of the route to Sutcliffe's murder spree – which is accepted to have begun in 1975; he eventually killed 13 women before his arrest in 1981 – is that he was humiliated by a prostitute who cheated him out of money. This left him with a hatred of whores and led directly to a string of assaults on prostitutes (or women Sutcliffe thought fitted the category) that in time progressed to murder of the most brutal kind. The attacks became known for their ferocious savagery and for the killer's use of tools or household implements such as claw and ball-pein hammers, kitchen knives, assorted screwdrivers, a hacksaw and a rope. One rusty screwdriver painstakingly sharpened to a point was described in court at Sutcliffe's trial as "one of the most fiendish weapons you have ever seen" by prosecuting counsel Sir Michael Havers.¹⁵⁹ What did Sutcliffe do with those weapons? He used them to systematically rip and tear at the bodies of his victims.

Sutcliffe's preferred method was to strike from behind, hitting the woman on the top or back of the head with a hammer. He would then slash at and stab the body. One victim suffered 52 separate stab wounds, inflicted (it was discovered later) by a Phillips crosshead screwdriver. Two received lacerations to the abdomen causing the intestines to protrude, and there had been an attempt to decapitate another more than a week after the murder. His final victim was stabbed through the eye. In the majority of cases Sutcliffe committed further indignities upon his victims by lifting or pulling

¹⁵⁸ C. Sutcliffe, interviewed in the TV documentary *Crimes That Shook Britain: The Yorkshire Ripper*, 2013.

¹⁵⁹ G. Burn, '... somebody's husband, somebody's son.' *The Story of the Yorkshire Ripper* (London, 1984), p. 318.

down their underwear in order to access the areas he wished to attack. However, save for one incident, he claimed no sexual activity (i.e. penetrative sex) took place.¹⁶⁰ One extra disturbing aspect was revealed many years after Sutcliffe's arrest, and it was withheld at his trial. During questioning by detectives Sutcliffe was asked to remove his clothes. He was found to be not wearing underwear. Instead he was wearing on his legs a V-neck sweater but with his legs placed inside the long sleeves. The V-neck at the front exposed his genitals. Homemade kneepads sewn onto the garment led police to believe that it allowed him to straddle his victims and masturbate as he attacked them. Michael Bilton said "it spoke volumes about his sexual motives, and his state of mind during his attacks on helpless women."¹⁶¹ The premeditated combination of murder and masturbation was also considered to be "a textbook description of the necrophilic urge",¹⁶² thus linking Sutcliffe to John Christie.

Several taboos come to the fore when reflecting on the crimes of Peter Sutcliffe and considering whether they can be incorporated into a feature film as entertainment, not least the visceral (and unpalatable) nature of reproducing his crimes. This combined with the limited geographic spread of his killing spree and, relatively speaking, the low number of victims means it would be impossible to be in any way vague or loose when depicting the death of a victim. This can be contrasted with high-number serial killers in, say, the United States or Russia where the sheer weight of numbers and, frequently, anonymous nature of victims gives potential filmmakers more latitude to put on screen murders and details conflated from multiple cases. In other words, no sole individual need be identified or focused upon.

In the weeks running up to the Ripper's arrest rage and frustration boiled over into protest that gathered momentum and reached as far as Downing Street. It manifested itself in several distinct and inter-connected ways. In Leeds a feminist group, Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), picketed a cinema that was screening the film *Dressed to Kill* (1980). The screen was pelted with red paint and there were scuffles between protesters and police. On the same evening Doreen Hill, mother of 21-year-old student Jacqueline Hill, who had been murdered in Leeds on November 17, 1980, made a heart-rending national television appeal for information that might lead to the killer of her daughter. And in London Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher demanded an explanation for the police's inability to

¹⁶⁰ Bilton, pp. 24-25.

¹⁶¹ Bilton, pp. 493-494.

¹⁶² C. Clark and T. Tate, *Yorkshire Ripper – The Secret Murders* (London, 2015), p. 346.

catch the Yorkshire Ripper, even threatening to take over the running of the investigation herself.¹⁶³ Doreen Hill would become a standard-bearer in a campaign to prevent people profiting from the Ripper's crimes. She focused her energies on chequebook journalism and, as and when they were mooted, feature films based on the Ripper and his murders. But that was still to come.

In the days after Jacqueline Hill was murdered survivors and relatives of the killer's other victims agreed to speak on camera as part of the BBC's current affairs programme *Newsnight*. In an extraordinary eight-minute package of individual point-of-view addresses this tragic ensemble looked straight into the camera and spoke directly to the Yorkshire Ripper. Collectively and with remarkable composure they ridiculed the notion of the Ripper's machismo, mocked his sexual and physical inadequacies and destroyed whatever reputation he had acquired as an untouchable mystery man. It was taboo busting at its most intense, on a national platform and yet exclusively directed at one specific individual. The piece, compiled by reporter Martin Young, acted as a funnelling of fear, resentment and frustration. In his introduction Young spoke of an almost tangible feeling of deep revulsion – a wall of hate directed at the Yorkshire Ripper. He went on:

There have been 17 attacks now, 13 of them murders. The relatives and friends of those people attacked and murdered now number literally hundreds of people. But, here in Leeds, there is no one who's not touched by the hatred the Ripper has spawned. I wanted to document that feeling of loathing. So I went to see some of the relatives of the victims. I expected to be turned away. But they wanted to talk. It was all bottled up inside them. But it wasn't me they wanted to talk to. They wanted to talk directly to the Ripper himself.

Broadcast on November 27, 1980 – just 10 days after Jacqueline Hill was stalked and murdered – the package was designed to provoke a response from the killer or someone shielding him. There follows a flavour of what was said:

¹⁶³ Bilton, pp. 442-443.

Irene MacDonald, mother of victim number 5 Jayne MacDonald: “I just see you as a beast with no feelings, and you’re a coward. ... You’re not a man, you’re a beast, and I hate you.”

Beryl Leach, mother of victim number 11 Barbara Leach: “If I were you I’d look over your shoulder. Somebody’s looking for you. Many people are looking for you and they all hate you. ... You hit them from behind. You’re a coward.”¹⁶⁴

A raw, shattering piece of television, it may well have influenced MGM’s decision to withdraw from its Ripper project.

¹⁶⁴ *Newsnight* (November 27, 1980), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzPqnHhha4U>, 1980, accessed August 6 2017.

Section 15

Chequebook Journalism and its impact

Something else happened after the Ripper's arrest, and it mirrored events in the run-up to and the aftermath of the Moors Murders trial in 1966: journalists were thick on the ground soaking up local "colour", and writers were preparing books. In regard to Brady and Hindley, David Smith was "bought up" by *The News of the World*, being paid for his version of events. He would also figure heavily in Emlyn Williams' portrait of the killers and their crimes.

In a review of Norman Mailer's book *The Executioner's Song*, which chronicled the life, crimes and execution of Gary Gilmore, Gordon Burn (author of *Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son*) talked about the phenomenon of the "true life novel", as Mailer categorised his book. It was a direct connection to Truman Capote's "non-fiction novel" *In Cold Blood*, which used interviews with killers Dick Hickock and Perry Smith to dramatise their crimes. Part and parcel of Mailer's success was the wheeler dealing that involved chequebook journalism, in which writers cosied up to subjects in order to drain them dry. Burn recalled that he was reading *The Executioner's Song* on January 3, 1981, when the news broke that a man had been arrested in connection with the Ripper murders. Within 48 hours he was in Bradford listening to tabloid reporters bragging about who had spent more to "buy up" Peter Sutcliffe's father or one of his brothers.¹⁶⁵ The one individual who remained immune to offers of payment was Sutcliffe's wife, Sonia. She sued *Private Eye* after it claimed she had accepted money from a tabloid newspaper, winning a settlement of £600,000. The sum was later reduced to £60,000. She was said to be "averse"¹⁶⁶ to speaking with the Press and has never discussed the case or her husband's crimes.

Peter Sutcliffe went to trial on May 5, 1981. The Old Bailey – the Central Criminal Court of England and Wales – in London heard the horrors of Sutcliffe's crimes and his calm, often matter-of-fact delivery of the details of what he did to his 13 known victims. The trial was a sensation, just like that of Brady and Hindley 14 years before. And it attracted the curious and the ghoulish, some of which camped

¹⁶⁵ G. Burn, 'Rereading: The Executioner's Song by Norman Mailer', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/jun/05/featuresreviews.guardianreview37>, 2004, accessed 9 August 2017.

¹⁶⁶ R. Ratcliffe, 'Cash for questions', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2006/may/08/mondaymediasection12>, 2006, accessed 12 September 2017.

overnight on the pavement with stoves and sleeping bags. They were described as “a motley rabble ... that could have come straight from a Newgate public hanging with only a quick change of costume.”¹⁶⁷ Among those that lined the public benches was a retired butcher and his wife from Harrogate in North Yorkshire (not one of Sutcliffe’s haunts) who boasted that they had attended all of his court appearances, and a mother and her teenage son from Essex, who revealed that they were “going to come every day if we can get in”. They were joined by the famous face of footballer Pat Jennings, goalkeeper for Arsenal.¹⁶⁸ It must be asked whether they would have had the same zeal for watching a movie.

At the same time as the trial was progressing, Doreen Hill, mother of the murdered Jacqueline, was in the throes of a noisy and heartrending campaign against what became known as “chequebook journalism”. Her pleas for more controls on the actions of the Press were given added weight following reports that she had received backing from Her Majesty the Queen, who viewed the scramble to buy up friends, workmates and relatives of Peter Sutcliffe with “distaste”. Having gone on television after her daughter’s death to urge the general public to identify the killer,¹⁶⁹ her stance shifted direction in the weeks and months after Sutcliffe’s arrest. It was lent added weight when, on the second day of Sutcliffe’s trial, his friend Trevor Birdsall admitted that he was in the pay of the *Sunday People*. Similarly, Sutcliffe’s father, John, had been bought up by the *Daily Mail*. Other newspapers and news organisations that had joined in the unseemly jostling for anecdotes and photographs included the *Daily Star*, the *Daily Express*, *The Sun* and ITN. On the same day as Birdsall made his admission, a letter was made public. It had been written by William Heseltine, deputy private secretary to the Queen, and had been sent to the Hill family. It stated:

I am commanded by the Queen to acknowledge your letter of February 21 and to begin by offering you both Her Majesty's very heartfelt sympathy at the tragic death of your daughter. Her Majesty can well understand your feelings about the proposal, if true, that the Daily Mail is planning to publish the story of the man accused of her murder told by members of his family, and paying them substantial sums of money to do so. Although there is nothing illegal in

¹⁶⁷ *The Times*, May 5 1981, quoted in Burn, p. 317.

¹⁶⁸ Burn, pp. 317-318.

¹⁶⁹ M. Bilton, *Wicked Beyond Belief*, (London, 2003), p. 443.

what is proposed and therefore no way Her Majesty could properly intervene, she certainly shares in the sense of distaste which right-minded people will undoubtedly feel.

Inevitably the involvement of the UK sovereign had an impact on the public consciousness (and conscience). It also galvanised opinion against the new villain – the Press – as the grim story of Britain’s most prolific (at that time) serial killer was being played out in court. Doreen Hill herself stigmatised these payments as “blood money”, a phrase that resonated with many others. But not all. Writing in *The Spectator* Auberon Waugh condemned the Queen for siding with Mrs Hill in a manipulative attempt to foment further outcry against the Press:

The fact that Associated Newspapers and the Daily Mail are capable of what may appear to many right-minded people as such gross errors of judgment does not mean that Mrs Hill has justice on her side in her campaign against the press, or that the Queen has any business to try hitching a free ride on any indignation which Mrs Hill's tragic loss may generate for her cause.¹⁷⁰

Misdirected or not, Doreen Hill’s strident vocal campaign would have a tremendous impact on the aftermath of the Yorkshire Ripper case. Her attempts to act as a censor failed. Nonetheless they led to censure of newspapers in the boldest terms. However the concept of chequebook journalism was not to end. In 1983, following his retirement, former Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Ronald Gregory was sharply criticised for accepting a fee of £40,000 for his memoirs from *The Mail on Sunday*. The sale caused controversy with Doreen Hill threatening legal action and even Sonia Sutcliffe wading into the fray: “His motive is perfectly clear. It is greed.”¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ A. Waugh, “Press, Palace and Mrs Hill”, *The Spectator*, 16 May 1981, p. 6.

¹⁷¹ Anon, ‘Chief says police let Ripper slip’, UPI, <http://www.upi.com/Archives/1983/06/27/Chief-says-police-let-Ripper-slip/1086425534400/>, 1983, accessed 5 September 2017.

Section 16

This is Personal

Delivered in the style of a police procedural, *This is Personal* is driven by professional rivalries, ego, diversions, missed opportunities, internecine warfare and one-upmanship within the team of officers tasked with identifying and catching the Yorkshire Ripper. The centre point is the figure of George Oldfield, the senior detective who gave his all in what became a duel with the mystery killer. The misogynistic and non-politically correct vernacular is robust and earthy, the milieu authentic and rooted in its time, and the depiction of the chaos and frustration of the inquiry impactful and vivid. The film charts Oldfield's growing obsession with the Ripper, the mistakes that were made as frustration turned to desperation, the nation clamours for results and, perhaps inevitably, Oldfield's deteriorating health as the enormity of his responsibility overwhelms him. It is a chronicle of failure, summing up the public mood and highlighting how pure chance played its part in ending the Ripper's reign of terror.

The spectre of the Ripper looms large. Sutcliffe himself is glimpsed but never clearly. He is viewed from behind, in profile, in silhouette, as a shadowy figure lurking in the darkness or via scores of photofits. Finally, in the film's closing moments, comes the big reveal as Oldfield confronts his nemesis and discovers him to be just an ordinary man who wouldn't stand out in a crowd.

Section 17

Retribution, vengeance, forgiveness and compassion

When a feature film was eventually made about the Yorkshire Ripper it sought to avoid “the genre clichés of misogynistic blood, gore and violence” in favour of an interpretative approach that considered the state of the killer’s mind. Writer/director Skip Kite researched news archives for 1980s footage, shot his film on location in Bradford and cast an actor who bore an uncanny resemblance to Sutcliffe. He also loudly proclaimed that he had secured the support of Richard McCann, the son of the Ripper’s first victim, Wilma McCann. The endorsement “It was like having the Ripper in my living room” would later appear on the cover of the film’s DVD release.¹⁷² It was a vital building block towards painting a picture for what would become *Peter – A Portrait of a Serial Killer*. Kite said:

I was intrigued by the fact that no one had managed to make a feature film about Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper; that no one had managed to get it to out to a commercial audience. Peter Sutcliffe did not arrive from a far off mythical land, in the middle of a stormy rain-lashed night; to paint him simply as a monster would have been too easy and, would in a sense, let him off the hook. I wanted the audience to face the fact that Peter Sutcliffe was in many ways ‘ordinary’.¹⁷³

Kite deliberately eschewed recreating the Ripper’s attacks or splattering his screen with blood and gore. Instead he opted for an esoteric approach, with Sutcliffe discussing his life, crimes and attitude to the female sex with a psychiatrist who, it transpires, is a figment of his imagination. At times resembling a theatre duologue, *Peter* is stagey and frequently confined to internal sets. It adopts a non-linear approach based on vignettes representing different stages in Sutcliffe’s life, utilising a form of commentary from friends, neighbours and even his father via period television news interviews incorporated into the narrative. It begins with the credit “It’s taken me 35 years to reach a place of forgiveness...” attributed to Richard

¹⁷² McCann later distanced himself from the project, claiming his words had been altered as he only ever referred to Sutcliffe by name, and not as the Yorkshire Ripper.

¹⁷³ S. Kite, ‘Director’s statement’, <http://www.peterthefilm.com>, 2010, accessed 12 September 2017.

McCann followed by audio of Mr McCann saying, “but he should never be allowed to walk the streets again”.

True to his word, Kite does not depict the murders. Instead he uses the carcass of a pig, on which detectives are testing various tools to record wound marks, to represent them. It provides a visceral charge. Sutcliffe is shown preparing for a murder, secreting weapons about his person. He is also seen to be wearing his bizarre leggings. Kite shows the body of Helen Rytka, her face marked with a wound, laid out in a chapel of rest. In addition there is an oblique reference to the murder of Tina Atkinson, the only victim to be killed in her own home, and where Sutcliffe left behind a bloody footprint. Dialogue is conversational, taunting, and interrogatory. And one line – “Weather letting us down a bit” as Sutcliffe gazes out of the window of his cell – is taken directly from the Ripper’s confession to detectives: they are the words he spoke to Josephine Whitaker moments before he hammered her to the ground. Neither a commercial proposition nor an art-house prospect, *Peter* did not achieve a wide release:

To film a shopping list of murders would have been easy, but I was more interested in what was going on in Sutcliffe’s mind, what turned him into a killer. I don’t know what the truth is, I’m not sure anyone does, but I wanted to put the story in front of an audience and say there you go, you decide.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ S. Freeman, ‘Heart of darkness: inside the mind of the Ripper’, *The Yorkshire Post*, <http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/analysis/heart-of-darkness-inside-the-mind-of-the-ripper-1-3027093>, 2010, accessed 12 September 2017.

Section 18

Failure to Communicate: Unrealised Ripper Movies – and a Hoax

The *Daily Mail* would assist in the mythmaking around Peter Sutcliffe when, four months after his trial and incarceration, it ran an article claiming that a new feature film was in the works. However the project, *Hail Mary*, focusing on Sutcliffe's early years, was a fantasy perpetuated by Michael "Rocky" Ryan, a notorious hoaxer who conned newspapers into variously printing stories about sex and drug orgies on Mount Everest, and Adolf Hitler living in Golders Green. The ridiculous nature of some of Ryan's tall tales contrasted sharply with his claims about the film, said to star the unlikely ensemble of Jack Palance (as Sutcliffe's father), either Billie Whitelaw or Pat Phoenix as his mother... and Robert De Niro as the Yorkshire Ripper. A spokesman for United Artists, alleged to be the studio behind the project, dismissed the story out of hand. The agent for Billie Whitelaw said her client had no connection to the film.¹⁷⁵

But for Doreen Hill, who had no idea that the film was a hoax, the prospect of seeing Sutcliffe on screen was too much: "It really hurts me to think that they could do such a thing so soon. And if it is true, if they do put all the facts in, I think anyone who sees it is going to get really angry."¹⁷⁶ As one of Robert De Niro's biographers noted, "the unfortunate mother of one of Sutcliffe's victims found herself in the desperately cruel position of trying to organise a campaign against a movie that never existed in the first place."¹⁷⁷

Alan Royle had been the common law husband of Sutcliffe's sixth victim, 20-year-old Jean Jordan, when she was murdered in 1977. Despite the best efforts of police officers that attempted to shield him from the taboo truth of her injuries, he heard grisly evidence at Sutcliffe's trial and was shattered by it. Nearly 30 years later he sought to exorcise his demons by writing down his memories and emotions. The manuscript, edited by the author and journalist John Parker, was entitled *Living in the Shadow of the Ripper*. It succeeded in piquing the interest of British publishers, and Royle and Parker were said to be partnering on a script based on it. Perhaps inevitably

¹⁷⁵ LBC/IRN, 'Yorkshire Ripper film - Rumours denied', <http://bufvc.ac.uk/tvandrado/lbc/index.php/segment/0018000432013>, accessed 6 January 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ A. Dougan, *Untouchable: Robert De Niro Unauthorised* (London, 2000), p. 177.

Royle was accused of cashing in on the Ripper killings, a charge John Parker rejected, commenting that the notion of a victim cashing in on their own tragedy was nonsensical. Royle contended that he was writing from a deeply personal perspective. His book was not about the police investigation or the killer, but about the deep psychological effect of grief. Moreover, it was an attempt to rehabilitate the memory of a young woman who, he asserted, was not a prostitute when the Yorkshire Ripper killed her:

I had remarried by the time of the trial. My wife, Sylvia, begged me not to go ... but I had to. Until then, I didn't know what Sutcliffe had done to Jean, and it all came out in the trial. Police officers tried to get me to stay out in the corridor while what happened to Jean was being discussed, but I heard it all and I just went to pieces. ... I came to London and started taking drugs and drinking and was a complete mess. ... I've been looking for years, in a way, but I've never found anyone as good as Jean.¹⁷⁸ There has never been anything written about what the killer leaves behind him. Absolutely nothing. And my book goes to the core of that. There are a lot of people out there who are like me, who are isolated and have to live in a world of murder. My book will show that people are suffering and there's no help for them. Nobody knows how the feelings come out of a person until they've been there.¹⁷⁹

The detail of Jean Jordan's extraordinarily brutal death would have tested even the strongest constitution. Sutcliffe had hit her in the head and mouth with a hammer before being disturbed. Some days after the murder he returned to Jean's body and slashed it so ferociously that her intestines protruded. He also attempted to cut off her head with a saw and a piece of broken glass. *Living in the Shadow of the Ripper* was never published, and no film adaptation was made. Perhaps Royle's cathartic exercise – a paean to a lost love – was not what true crime aficionados wished to read or filmmakers wanted to put on screen. Maybe they simply preferred the gory ferocity of serial murder.

¹⁷⁸ A. Royle. 'What happened next?' *The Observer*, <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2003/sep/07/features.magazine127>, 2003, accessed 5 September 2017.

¹⁷⁹ A. Royle and J. Parker, interviewed on BBC radio, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EE9smrc6qqo>, 2005, accessed 5 September 2017.

Richard McCann turned down an invitation from a television company to collaborate on a planned film. The son of the Ripper's first victim, Wilma McCann, he was aged six when he and elder sister Sonia ventured out onto the cold streets of Leeds to look for their mother on the morning after she was murdered. A researcher said, "It would make a good TV drama".¹⁸⁰ Neither he nor his sister were comfortable with the notion and declined to participate.¹⁸¹ In 2000 he would be invited to a preview of *This is Personal* ostensibly to give the project his blessing. His overwhelming feeling was whether viewers would consider the effect the murders had had on victims' families.¹⁸² Mr McCann struggled to deal with the enormity of his mother's death and the knowledge that she had been a prostitute. He called it "such a taboo subject"¹⁸³ that led to him bottling up his feelings. In 2014 he signed a contract to let the British writer/producer Tony Klinger adapt his autobiography, "the triumphant story of a young man overcoming impossible odds", for the cinema.¹⁸⁴ The book, published in 2004, sold 400,000 copies.

¹⁸⁰ R. McCann, *Just a Boy – The True Story of a Stolen Childhood* 2nd edn (London, 2005), p. 263.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² McCann, p. 275.

¹⁸³ L. Hull, 'I forgive Ripper for killing my mother: Son of first victim reveals how a meeting with Desmond Tutu helped him erase a lifetime of anger', *Daily Mail*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3829920/I-forgive-Ripper-killing-mother-Son-victim-reveals-meeting-Desmond-Tutu-helped-erase-lifetime-anger.html>, 2016, accessed 11 September 2017.

¹⁸⁴ <http://justaboythefilm.co.uk>

Section 19

The Curious Case of “Sutcliffe! The Musical”

In 1997 the-then Head of Channel 4, Michael Grade, vetoed a sketch that formed part of the six-part satirical series *Brass Eye*. In what amounted to a deliberate act of censorship Grade ordered the deletion of a two-minute sequence featuring the singing and dancing figure of the Yorkshire Ripper (“on day release from Broadmoor Prison”) in a news report on the ersatz West End production *Sutcliffe! The Musical*. The piece, initiated and directed by creator Chris Morris, was deemed too outrageously provocative for TV audiences, with fears that it risked breaching television guidelines. Grade had already expressed wariness over the format and content of the series; the episode, entitled ‘Decline’, was eventually aired three months later *sans* the *Sutcliffe!* segment.

Morris did not comment on either the segment or the resultant media storm. Neither did he comment on Grade’s censoring of his work other than to insert a subliminal slide (“Grade is a cunt”) into the eventual transmission. However actor Guy Masterson, who played the musical’s promoter in the piece, recalled that he felt Morris was “trying to push the boundaries of acceptability and censorship”.¹⁸⁵

He first sounded me out as to my feelings and I was game. I agreed with him that the boundaries should be pushed and I was happy to run with his idea about *Sutcliffe! The Musical*. I can’t remember his exact wording of argument, only that I agreed.¹⁸⁶

In dramatising the story of the Yorkshire Ripper for the small screen, scriptwriter Neil McKay had this to say about his decision to focus on the police investigation:

We knew it was a very sensitive subject and we went to the greatest lengths we could not to exploit the story, but to look at those parts of it that are of

¹⁸⁵ G. Masterson to A. Earnshaw, email correspondence, ‘Brass Eye – “Sutcliffe! The Musical”’, 6 September 2017.

¹⁸⁶ For the full text of Masterson’s correspondence, see Appendix v.

legitimate public interest. Peter Sutcliffe's own story we wouldn't have touched with a barge pole."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ D. Behrens, 'TV's face of the Ripper', http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/8059258.TV_s_face_of_the_Ripper/, 2000, accessed 12 August 2017.

Section 20

Perceptions

The question that must be asked is why Sutcliffe's story is perceived to be out of bounds for dramatists. In her book *Misogynies* Joan Smith wrote, "The difference between Peter Sutcliffe and Jack the Ripper is the difference between fact and fiction." She adds that, unlike Sutcliffe, Jack the Ripper "is not a person but a label connecting a set of related acts; he has no proper name, no address, no biographical details." Thus the key characteristic of Jack the Ripper is what Smith categorises as his "unknowability". That unknowability led directly to the fiasco of West Yorkshire Police's investigation into the Yorkshire Ripper, "a man they [the police] visualised as a reincarnation of Jack the Ripper", which allowed him to "roam with impunity" for more than five years. "If you devote your time to tracking down a figure from myth, if you waste your time starting at shadows, you are not likely to come up with a lorry driver from Bradford."¹⁸⁸

Smith writes of police officers struggling to physicalise the person they were hunting. Details were not so much sparse as non-existent leading some officers to refer to their quarry as "Jack", "the lad", or "chummy". Smith suggests that by assigning characteristics to the Ripper it somehow made him more substantial and gave him an identity, albeit a desperately meagre one. It also allowed police officers to speak about him as if he were a real person and not some sort of spring-heeled wraith.¹⁸⁹ Senior detectives also convinced themselves that the killer was different to other men. When Peter Sutcliffe was revealed to be the Yorkshire Ripper the nature of his 'difference' was found to be very narrow: he was simply not what anyone had expected.¹⁹⁰ His similarity to other men was what affected detectives the most. In the weeks before his trial Peter Sutcliffe was heard to remark that he was "as normal as anyone".¹⁹¹ He would later be diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic and sent to the top-security hospital, Broadmoor. That, for many, was the answer: Peter Sutcliffe was mad. As Sir Michael Havers asked at his trial: "Why would any man

¹⁸⁸ J. Smith, *Misogynies* (London, 1996), pp. 163-164.

¹⁸⁹ Smith, p. 166.

¹⁹⁰ Smith, pp. 170-171, 164.

¹⁹¹ Burn, p. 324.

want to do that to a girl?"¹⁹² How could any man who committed such crimes *not* be a raving lunatic?

Joan Smith says this diagnosis of Sutcliffe's condition is appealing to the wider population as it makes him "someone who stands outside our culture and has no relation to it". If, she argues, madness is a closed category then we can bear no responsibility. She goes on: "The deranged stand apart from us; we cannot be *blamed* for their insanity. Thus the urge to characterise Sutcliffe as mad has powerful emotional origins; it has as much to do with how we see ourselves and the society in which we live as it has to do with our perception of him and of his crimes. It is a *distancing* mechanism, a way of establishing a comforting gulf between ourselves and a particularly unacceptable criminal."¹⁹³

Neil McKay (or any other writer) would have had to negotiate several obstacles if attempting to depict Peter Sutcliffe on screen. The first is the notion of interpretation and characterisation. Sutcliffe gave 60 hours of interviews to police but has never been interviewed by writers, journalists or television broadcasters. (In court it was suggested that he was reluctant to accept there was a sexual element to his attacks because of what people would think of him.¹⁹⁴) The second is empathy and/or sympathy; any writer seeking to understand Sutcliffe faces criticism if the killer is somehow de-monstered. The third is what Nicole Ward Jouve described as "the taboo of homosexuality"¹⁹⁵.

Is Peter Sutcliffe gay? Jouve in her book *The Streetcleaner* suggests that John Sutcliffe's macho defence of his son's character points to a desperate attempt to fend off the risk of a shame that overwhelms all others: that his son is a latent homosexual. "The way John Sutcliffe assures Burn, his interviewer, that Peter 'had no affectations whatsoever' is so keen you get the impression the man had much rather have a multiple murderer than a 'puff' for a son."¹⁹⁶ Jouve also suggests that the evidence is there to support the notion of homosexuality, and that Sutcliffe's feminine or homosexual tendencies might have predisposed him to murder. She links elements of Sutcliffe's demeanour – shyness, fastidiousness – with aspects of the Marquis de Sade's personality and postulates the theory that in repressing his feelings and desires

¹⁹² Burn, p. 347.

¹⁹³ Smith, p. 189.

¹⁹⁴ Burn, pp. 339-340. This relates to Sutcliffe inserting a sharpened screwdriver into a victim's vagina. He is reported as saying that he "never ever wanted to be seen as a sexual killer".

¹⁹⁵ Jouve, p. 100.

¹⁹⁶ Jouve, p. 101.

Sutcliffe was attempting to connect with his father. She adds: “Peter Sutcliffe ... was almost pushed into psychosis on account of his inability to fulfil the roles which his world’s definition of masculinity demanded of him.” She goes further: “It looks as if the female element was being violently disallowed throughout, made into what has to be hated”¹⁹⁷ and that femininity was being punished by Sutcliffe for the ‘something missing’ in him.¹⁹⁸

Would a movie audience – *could* a movie audience – be expected so swallow a psychological exploration of what made Peter Sutcliffe tick? Or would audiences, equally repelled and fascinated, demand just a taste of the hammer-wielding maniac to assuage their desire to be thrilled, entertained and appalled?

¹⁹⁷ Jouve, pp. 101-106.

¹⁹⁸ Jouve, p. 217.

Section 21

Crime as character

The aborted MGM project would conceivably have been released sometime in the early 1980s, just in time to crash into the hysterical British tabloid debate around “video nasties” that began in 1982, built to a head in 1983 and culminated in the introduction of the Video Recordings Bill in 1984.¹⁹⁹ In his essay *‘Nasties’: A problem of identification* Martin Barker considers the focus and content of *Cannibal Holocaust*, one of 69 titles listed by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) as likely to be in breach of the Obscene Publications Act. In his introduction to it he sardonically adopts the collective voice of clean-up campaigners to claim that “these video films are simply disgusting exercises in sadism, films put together as excuses for portraying – vividly and terrifyingly – all the things most likely to disturb and degrade, and arouse in their viewers the very worst potentialities. They are exploitation films, using all that is perverse and perverting purely for the sake of money.”²⁰⁰ He adds: “The film is about savagery and its meaning. It talks (in a rather rhetorical way) about the nature of human brutality. But it neither just talks about, nor just shows, it. The film is clever for the way in which it makes these interact.” And when a tribeswoman is captured and raped, “the camera wants to participate” until the moment is shattered by the appearance of a (female) crewmember, thereby “preventing its/our voyeurism”.²⁰¹

This, then, is arguably the fear associated with any potential feature film focusing on the genuine character, real crimes and authentic milieu of Peter Sutcliffe: an unacceptable combination of brutality and participatory voyeurism. Barker goes further, suggesting that it is not the violence or sexual explicitness that is the common element [within the video nasties] but rather the *way of showing* – the relation the audience is put in as watchers. The ‘nasty’ strategy was so hated because it dared to differ from mainstream cinema in that there was a declared and definite absence of heroes and heroines, which normally form the centre point of traditional movies. “We follow them around,” he says. “We both see the world over their shoulders, and also

¹⁹⁹ M. Barker, (ed.) *The Video Nasties: Freedom and Censorship in the Media* (London, 1984), pp. 6 and 7.

²⁰⁰ Barker, p. 104.

²⁰¹ Barker, pp. 109-110.

see them confronting problems and overcoming them.”²⁰² Tampering with such conventions is dangerous and deeply subversive. A film with Peter Sutcliffe as its centre point - allowing audiences to somehow identify, connect or sympathise with him, or revel in his actions - would take the notion of subversion to an entirely new level.

Barker also quotes from the American critic Roger Ebert’s review of *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), a notorious women-in-danger film, in which he claimed that movies within that sub-genre were less about their villains than the *acts* of the villains. Thus the villain was subtly displaced from his traditional place within the film, and into the audience. Ebert concludes: “Those films are *about* human crimes, and contain them as characters. They are studies of human behaviour, no matter how disgusting, and the role of the audience is to witness a depraved character at work within his depravities.” Barker admits to being fascinated by what he believes is Ebert’s essential reading of such films: that as voyeurs, viewers are not implicated. “Because it is a circumscribed fictional encounter of victim and villain, we can hold off. If we can’t do this, the danger is that the *act*, rather than the *actor*, will become the focus of attention.” He also suggests that Ebert is demanding that films must always let us be *safe*: that as long as the world is fictionally enclosed, “we can blame the acts on the characters inside, disassociate ourselves and merely watch.”²⁰³ This has a direct correlation with the Ripper murders because the issue with Peter Sutcliffe is that he, and by association the acts of the Yorkshire Ripper – his ‘character’ – is rooted in reality.

In his 2011 book *Film and Video Censorship in Modern Britain* Julian Petley asks, given the paucity of cuts imposed on modern British films by the BBFC, whether British filmmakers have internalised the Board’s standards over the years in the realisation of that they can and can’t get away with.²⁰⁴ The issue is addressed by the-then BBFC Director James Ferman, who (in an interview conducted in 1986) reveals in the book how the DPP’s guidelines have evolved to become more sophisticated over the years. Now they will consider the moral impact of a film rather than its shock/horror factor. “For instance, you have got to consider that if a film is constructed so that you can identify with the victim or the innocent party it is most unlikely that the audience will be taught to develop a taste for cruelty or violence.” A

²⁰² Barker, p. 110.

²⁰³ Barker, p. 117.

²⁰⁴ J. Petley, *Film and Video Censorship in Modern Britain* (Edinburgh, 2011), p. 55.

biopic of Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper, would offer a diametrically opposing point of view: identification with Sutcliffe or his murderous alter ego could present opportunities for embracing sexualised violence of the most extreme kind.

Ferman also highlighted what he called the “double standard” relating to home video as opposed to cinema, in that segments of video (or DVD and Blu-ray today) can be watched selectively and repeatedly whilst films in cinemas are viewed in their entirety. The BBFC had, he said, exercised caution around video images of rape, details of criminal techniques, and extreme blood and gore, “especially if any element of sexuality is involved.”²⁰⁵ In its consideration of video content the DPP adopts the following questions as guidelines:

- (a) Who is the perpetrator of the violence, and what is his reaction to it?
- (b) Who is the victim, and what is his (her) reaction?
- (c) How is the violence inflicted, and in what circumstances?
- (d) How explicit is the description of the wounds, mutilation or death? How prolonged? How realistic?
- (e) Is the violence justifiable in narrative terms?

A work is likely to be regarded as obscene if it portrays violence to such a degree and so explicitly that its appeal can only be to those who are disposed to derive positive enjoyment from seeing such violence.

Other factors may include:

Violence perpetrated by children

Self-mutilation

Violent abuse of women and children

Cannibalism

Use of vicious weapons (e.g. broken bottle)

Use of everyday implements (e.g. screwdriver, shears, electric drill)

Violence in a sexual context

²⁰⁵ Petley, pp. 57-58.

These factors are not exhaustive. Style can also be important. The more convincing the depictions of violence, the more harmful it is likely to be.²⁰⁶ Someone who knows about violence and its effects is retired former Detective Superintendent Robert Bridgestock who, as a young officer, worked on the Yorkshire Ripper inquiry. He believes that there will one day be a movie about the Ripper, and that whoever makes it will merely be feeding audience obsession with serial killers.²⁰⁷

Censorship and the law effectively prevent filmmakers from incorporating scenes of gratuitous sex and violence into their projects. The law prevents the reproduction of any aspect of the killings of the young people caught up in the Moors Murders. BBFC guidelines markedly restrict what may be presented of Peter Sutcliffe's choice of weapons and how he wielded them. The case of John Christie, explored in Chapter III, is even more troubling as it involves arguably a timeless taboo: necrophilia.

²⁰⁶ Petley, p. 60.

²⁰⁷ See Appendix v.

Chapter III

John Christie of 10, Rillington Place

Section 22

Cinematic protest against the death penalty

The film of *10 Rillington Place* (1970) is, in every respect, a “message movie”. Its central character is John Christie who, between 1943 and 1953, strangled seven women and a 13-month-old girl at his home in London. It was the last of a triumvirate of feature films about murderers directed by Richard Fleischer, the others being *Compulsion* (1959) and *The Boston Strangler* (1968). All three focused on real-life killers though they were sometimes the subject of fictionalised identities (*Compulsion*) or criticised as distortions (*The Boston Strangler*). However *10 Rillington Place*, based on the transcript from real life by Ludovic Kennedy²⁰⁸, focused on the miscarriage of justice around the execution of Timothy Evans, who was hanged for murders committed by John Christie, rather than on the murders themselves. The book and the film that followed were an attack on the infallibility of British justice. Moreover the crusading film brought together an array of campaigners whose aim was to use it to head off attempts by retentionists to reintroduce capital punishment, which had been suspended in 1965 and abolished in 1969. Among them was Richard Attenborough, cast as Christie, who said:

I am passionately opposed to capital punishment, and when a private member’s bill was to be introduced in Parliament to bring it back, a number of chums said I should do something. They knew about the monstrous miscarriage of justice in the Christie case, and it became a cinematic protest against the death penalty. I do believe cinema has power.²⁰⁹

Kennedy’s book presupposed that Evans was innocent of the murders of his wife and infant child. In his preface to the 1970 edition Kennedy said that reviews on publication in 1961 “were almost unanimous in agreeing that it had achieved its purpose of showing how in 1950 we had hanged an innocent man”. That act, considered a gross miscarriage of justice, was what drove the book. A campaign

²⁰⁸ L. Kennedy, *Ten Rillington Place* (London, 1961).

²⁰⁹ A. Duncan, ‘Of course I’m an old ham. But I’ve never called anyone ‘luvvie’ in my life’, *Radio Times*, (17-23 December 1999), p. 25.

spearheaded by a group of newspaper editors led to a Parliamentary debate and a fresh inquiry culminating in Evans being granted a posthumous pardon in 1965. Thus the book of *Ten Rillington Place* is heavily weighted towards presenting Timothy Evans as a victim. It devotes itself to the police inquiry around the disappearance of Evans' wife and infant daughter, and to his trial and its aftermath. Conversely, Christie's trial is dispensed with in six pages. In collating evidence from the police investigation and the trial, and with comments from medical professionals who examined Christie, a portrait emerges that is both Everyman and Nobody. One doctor described him as "insignificant and unattractive, full of snivelling hypocrisy"²¹⁰ and remarked on his "bogus gentility".²¹¹ Christie's confessions, considered true in substance but false in detail,²¹² also skirted around the taboos that clung to him. Christie's *modus operandi* was to render his victims unconscious via the use of domestic gas, usually as a pretext for assisting them abort an unwanted pregnancy. He would then strangle and rape them. Kennedy points out that, in the case of one of his later victims, "he makes no mention of having gassed or ravished her"²¹³ despite the presence of carbon monoxide in her blood and sperm in her vagina.

The murder of pregnant Beryl Evans, for which husband Timothy was tried and hanged in 1950, followed the same pattern. Yet vital evidence from a doctor was suppressed when it highlighted *an attempt at sexual penetration after death*.²¹⁴ It was never presented in court, the argument being that the case was "already sufficiently horrible"²¹⁵ without such notions being put into the minds of the jury. Christie himself, in his account of how he killed Beryl Evans, was vague: "I must have been intimate with her and strangled her afterwards."²¹⁶ Kennedy suggests that his vagueness was a deliberate ploy to cover up his *modus operandi*: that he had been intimate with her *after death*.²¹⁷ Thus emerged necrophilia, one of society's great taboos.

²¹⁰ L. Kennedy, *Ten Rillington Place* (London, 1970), p. 245.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Kennedy, p. 247.

²¹³ Kennedy, p. 248.

²¹⁴ Kennedy, p. 153.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Kennedy, p. 254.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Section 23

Necrophilic longings

Kennedy makes reference to the re-emergence of Christie's "necrophilic longings"²¹⁸ and relates them directly to the cessation of sexual activity between Christie and his wife, Ethel, around the spring of 1952. Although a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act (2003)²¹⁹, there is no evidence to suggest that anyone has ever been charged with necrophilia in England and Wales.²²⁰ Certainly Christie was not. Police and the Crown Prosecution Service are reluctant to highlight such offences with the media recognising "the repulsion that the British people appear to reserve for necrophilia and necrophiles".²²¹ It has been suggested that modern Britons' knowledge of the subject is related to serial paedophile Jimmy Savile and not necrophilic murderers such as John Christie or Dennis Nilsen.²²²

Fleischer's film pursued the same agenda as Kennedy's book and presented a cogent argument against capital punishment. The approach to the subject matter won over British censor John Trevelyan, who sanctioned the film as it would "not exploit the revolting murders but should be a film that showed that even the best system of justice can make mistakes, and this undertaking was fulfilled".²²³ Trevelyan's decision, coming less than 20 years after the trials of Evans and Christie, underlined the new policy of considering potentially problematic content on a case-by-case basis. It was a major shift in the BBFC's stance on the representation of factual crime on the screen. It also proved that the right film in the right circumstances could circumvent established regulations and draw together a cabal of Establishment support.

Released to cinemas in early 1971, the film of *10 Rillington Place* formed the third point in an artistic triangle focusing on the Christie killings. In late 1969 Howard Brenton's 20-minute play *Christie in Love* had opened at the Oval House in London. And in September 1970 London Weekend Television broadcast *The Dreams of Tim Evans*, a 30-minute drama scripted by *Rillington Place* writer Clive Exton. Brenton's

²¹⁸ Kennedy, p. 231.

²¹⁹ Section 70 of the Sexual Offences Act (2003), <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/42/section/70>, is entitled 'Sexual penetration of a corpse', accessed 10 September 2017.

²²⁰ J. Roach, 'No Necrophilia Please, We're British', in Aggrawal, A. et al., ed, *Understanding Necrophilia: A Global Interdisciplinary Approach* (San Diego, CA, 2017).

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ Trevelyan, p. 161.

collection of 11 scenes included policemen digging for body parts in Christie's garden, and an interrogation. Darkly funny and macabre, it manipulates audience sympathies, presenting Christie as a victim of his own monstrous legend when in actual fact he is "a feeble, ordinary man blinking through pebble glasses".²²⁴ Exton's piece, part of the *Conceptions of Murder* series, took the view that "a powerful argument against capital punishment is that it rules out, for ever, the possibility of looking into a murderer's mind and seeing what makes him kill".²²⁵ It pre-dated *10 Rillington Place* (and perhaps was written in parallel with it) but occupied the same moral space. Exton's standpoint also chimed with Richard Fleischer's view: that aberrant killers should be studied and not executed. As much as it was a warning about the misuse of the noose, he intended his film to act as a plea for psychiatric study of extreme sexual deviants such as John Christie:

It's too bad that we spend so much money for destructive purposes rather than spending it where it could do a lot of good, in psychiatric study. And it's also too bad that we destroy the people who are involved in these crimes by legally killing them, when we could be studying them and learning something from them.²²⁶

Ian Brady and Myra Hindley would most likely have followed John Christie to the gallows in 1966 had not hanging been suspended the previous year. Their executions would have meant no confessions 20 years later and, crucially, Pauline Reade's body, located in 1987, would have remained on Saddleworth Moor.

Fleischer adopted a low-key approach to his subject that was personified by the playing of Richard Attenborough as Christie. There was criticism of the film's "schizophrenic approach",²²⁷ described as "sober documentation side by side with confected suspense"²²⁸, for the overuse of heavy breathing on the soundtrack and for the use of jump cuts, specifically when Christie's consummated rape "cuts to the thud of a spade in the garden".²²⁹ Attenborough was singled out for his "essentially actorish" approach to his character; John Hurt (as Timothy Evans) "compels total

²²⁴ R. Boon, *Brenton The Playwright* (London, 1991), p. 48.

²²⁵ TVT:P, "Conceptions of Murder". <http://bufvc.ac.uk/tvandradio/tvtip/index.php/prog/119642>, accessed 23 August 2017.

²²⁶ G. Gow, 'Don't throw them away: Richard Fleischer talks about psychology, life and fiction'. *Films & Filming* (December 1970), p. 20.

²²⁷ N. Andrews, '10 Rillington Place', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, February 1971, vol. 38, no. 445, p. 32-33.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

belief".²³⁰ However if the early murders are merely alluded to, the attack on Beryl Evans (Judy Geeson) is powerfully achieved, mainly through reactive close-ups of the actors' eyes. Thus Christie's necrophilic longings are addressed. This is as close to exploitation as *10 Rillington Place* gets yet the crucial element of the taboo is dealt with via two consecutive two-second close-ups. The construction of the scene is outlined in the next section.

²³⁰ Ibid.

Section 24

Encapsulating the taboo: The murder of Beryl

Key: CU – close up
ECU – extreme close up
MS – medium shot
WS – wide shot

The prelude to Beryl's murder is cloaked in a febrile atmosphere of forced quasi domesticity. Christie bustles about in the poky flat, moving furniture, and asks his soon-to-be-victim to open the window a few inches and to draw the blind. There is an overwhelming sense that Christie has done this before, such is his plausibility. He seeks assistance from his victim for the act to come. From his bag he produces a rubber pipe.

42.08 WS Beryl: What's that for?

42.11 WS Christie: Just a whiff of gas.

42.12 WS Beryl: Gas?

42.13 WS Christie: Like at the dentist, to take away those little twinges.

42.17 WS Beryl: But it's poisonous, isn't it?

42.19 MS Christie: Oh, no. Not the way we use it. Something we had to learn in the war, for bomb victims that needed urgent surgery.

Christie turns his back as Beryl slips off her underwear. His face is strangely immobile but it masks a combination of nervy impatience and growing anticipation. His breathing accelerates. He takes off his suit jacket as she lies down on the quilt he has put down on the floor. Both are prepared: she for a backstreet abortion that will never occur, he for asphyxiation, strangulation, rape and murder.

44.23 WS Christie: Are you ready?

44.25 WS Beryl: Yes.

44.35 Christie: There's a good girl. Now, just a little bit of the gas. You've had gas before at the dentist, haven't you? You'll know what it feels like, then. You'll feel just a little bit dizzy, I expect. Right now, breathe deeply. Breathe. Just relax. Breathe deep. Close your eyes.

Christie is attempting to replicate the soothing bedside manner of a medical professional. Up to this moment the scene has played out in wide shot or medium, utilising the space of the flat. Now the room closes in. Beryl is lying flat at the base of the screen. Christie crouches beside her. There is a forced, fake intimacy. Christie reveals the gas pipe with a flourish. Fleischer focuses on Beryl, with Christie's hand holding the homemade gas mask in position over her nose and mouth.

45.04 CU on Beryl, inhaling deeply. The sound of her breathing has a semi dreamlike quality, as if she is beginning to drift off.

45.12 CU on Christie, exhorting her to breathe. His face has hardened as he waits for her to lapse into unconsciousness. "Breathe. Breathe, Beryl." The timbre of his voice has changed. There is an audible threat in his tone. He is trembling.

45.21 ECU on Beryl. Her eyes open. She is frightened. (Duration: 2 seconds)

45.23 ECU on Christie. Eyes wide and staring. Desperate. (Duration: 2 seconds)

45.25 CU on Beryl, who realises something is wrong. Her eyes lock onto Christie's. She attempts to pull the mask away.

45.27 CU on Christie. "No, no, no, no, no. Quiet. Quiet! Be quiet!" He is sweating. No longer the caring doctor. His true self is revealed and it is ugly.

45.31 ECU on Beryl. Struggling, terrified, panicked. She yanks the mask away.

45.35 Christie: Be quiet!

45.36 CU Beryl: No! I don't want to!

45.38 MS She struggles and attempts to get up. Christie pushes her back and holds her down.

45.39 Christie: Don't make me hurt you!

45.40 Beryl screaming. "No! No!"

45.41 MS on Christie. He draws back his fist and punches Beryl in the face. She falls back, immediately unconscious. CU Christie, enraged, punches her again.

45.45 MS on Beryl lying motionless on the quilt. There is blood on her mouth.

45.46 MS on Christie as he clips off the gas.

45.50 MS Christie: "Oh, Beryl."

45.53 CU on Christie as he lowers himself to kiss the senseless woman. He rubs his face against hers.

46.08 WS of Christie smothering Beryl's unresponsive body with his. His hand reaches into his bag and takes out a length of rope. Fleischer does not make it obvious

but the inference is that Christie has begun his sexual assault though he is still clothed. His entire body vibrates and his hand shakes as it grips the rope.

46.21 WS Fleischer cuts to a friend arriving in the hallway downstairs.

46.34 CU He cuts back to a two-second shot of a determined Christie strangling Beryl (who is off-camera) with the rope.

46.39 MS The friend calls Beryl's name.

46.40 CU Christie, in the act of killing Beryl, pauses in utter shock. He is bathed in sweat from his exertions and sexual excitement. He scrambles to his feet.

46.51 MS The friend tries the door. On the other side a desperate Christie puts his weight against it to prevent her entering and seeing the corpse. "Beryl! Beryl? If you don't want to see me you only have to say so."

47.28 CU Christie opens the door and emerges onto the landing. In the next room, Beryl's baby daughter Geraldine eyes him and cries for her mummy.

With the murder of Beryl, *10 Rillington Place* shifts into a higher gear. What had previously been allusion is now made material. Yet Fleischer, like Kennedy, is less interested in sex crime than he is in the breakdown of justice. The murder is present because it is illustrative of Christie's *modus operandi* and *must* be included. Yet it is manifested in a resolutely anti-gratuitous manner. And whilst Christie's violence towards Beryl – delivered by a magnificently restrained Attenborough – is painful to observe, the full horror of the scene is represented via two extreme close-ups of eyes. The enormity of the case's inherent but unspoken taboo is encapsulated in that dreadful four-second sequence.

Section 25

Six decades of distance

The triptych *Rillington Place*, televised by the BBC and broadcast just prior to Christmas 2016 had the benefit of six decades of distance from Christie and his crimes. In that respect time was its ally, ostensibly providing the makers with a licence for prurience and on-screen ghastliness. Yet despite the passage of time and the passing of the majority of key figures associated with Christie it was not a subject that generated wholehearted support. In a review for *The New Statesman* Rachel Cooke questioned why the piece was necessary when it could not improve on Fleischer's *10 Rillington Place*.²³¹ She added that revisiting the story and telling it less well made it superfluous. Moreover the rigorous approach to production design, costume and location – with a faithfully reproduced facsimile of the interior of the murder house – added to what she felt was its forced staginess.

Cooke found a strange delicacy to *Rillington Place* that was somehow out of kilter with 21st century sensibilities blunted by the plethora of serial killer stories on television screens. She suggested that the writers had experienced a crippling case of nerves over depicting Christie's fetish for having sex with dead women and concluded by praising Tim Roth's "wholly convincing Christie, a certain owlish beneficence concealing the putrid nastiness within".²³² The answer to the BBC's wariness may lie in a comment by Roth in the run-up to transmission:

I think it might have been a bit too disturbing for some at the Beeb. We did shoot some very difficult stuff, and I'm not sure all of it made it to the final cut. It's one thing to read a scene on the page, but it's another thing to see it on screen once you've shot it. We went as far as you can go. I don't think we dealt with the necrophilia aspect.²³³

Opening with a credit that reads "Based on real events" *Rillington Place* wears its squalid, dingy drabness like a badge of honour. Its three segments are devoted to

²³¹ R. Cooke, 'Why did the BBC make a new drama about serial killer John Christie?' *The New Statesman*, <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2017/09/rise-and-fall-adam-and-eve-exploring-myth-original-sinners>, 2016, accessed 10 September 2017.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ E. J. Dickson, 'The killer downstairs', *Radio Times* (26 November - 2 December 2017), p. 20.

Christie's wife, to tragic dupe Timothy Evans and finally to Christie himself. One reviewer said, "the sheer menace of the thing is extraordinary"²³⁴ and praised the "minimal, elliptical" script.²³⁵ Writers Tracey Malone and Ed Whitmore begin with the 1950 hanging of Evans before flashing back 12 years to begin their chronicle of sex and death. The threads of Christie's story are therefore woven together via three interlocking viewpoints: wife Ethel, lodger Evans and murderer Christie. Yet Roth's comment "we went as far as you can go" both underlines and undermines the piece, suggesting that footage was shot that did not make the cut because it represented the more extreme elements of Christie's activities and reached the limits of what the BBC deemed acceptable.

Unlike Richard Fleischer, who concertinaed Christie's *raison d'être* into one three-minute sequence (the murder of Beryl), *Rillington Place* director Craig Viveiros makes his most impactful sequence the murder of Ethel. Having threatened him with exposure she is strangled in her sleep by her blank-faced husband who commits the act with brisk, almost business-like detachment. The shock factor is palpable. There are other intimations of deviancy; such as when Christie takes from a tin a fluff of what must be assumed is pubic hair. He places it reverently on a table and reaches for the flies on his trousers. At no time does he express emotion or excitement, yet the allusion is obvious and momentary, contributing strongly to the overall mood of secrecy and malevolence.

Perceived audience familiarity with the notoriety of Christie allows Viveiros, Malone and Whitmore to drift between timelines, presenting vignettes of domestic harmony and discord within a growing sense of unease. Yet disquiet looms large. It may be that 21st century viewers conditioned by fictional killers expected more gruesomeness than they actually received. One commentator, relating *Rillington Place* to a childhood fascination with detective fiction, said, "there's nothing like curling up with a fictitious death. It's probably something to do with escapism."²³⁶ The knowledge that John Christie gassed, strangled and raped his victims in real life puts paid to such notions of harmless Agatha Christie-style cosiness. If sequences of necrophilia were filmed and censored internally by the BBC prior to broadcast, then it might be suggested that the prime focus of *Rillington Place* had been thwarted – even

²³⁴ L. Mangan, 'Rillington Place review – there are nightmares here, but they are real', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/nov/30/rillington-place-tim-roth-john-reginald-christie>, 2016, accessed 10 September 2017.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ A. Graham, 'Guilty as charged', *Radio Times* (26 November – 2 December 2016), p. 49.

if its producers claimed their aim was to try and “understand”²³⁷ how Christie got away with his crimes.

The thesis has focused on the debate created by attempts, successful or otherwise, to represent on film the characters and crimes of a quartet of notorious British serial killers. Other individuals such as Peter Manuel, Dennis Nilsen and Fred West have been the focus of dramatisations based on their lives. However for the purposes on this work I have concentrated on those persons who continue to exert an influence on different generations of filmmakers.

²³⁷ Cooke.

Conclusion: Fact is darker than fiction

It's important that it's done correctly and sensitively and with restraint. I think you do feel the pressure. It's that fine line of making it human, of not playing her as just some monster, though obviously what she did was monstrous.

Maxine Peake on playing Myra Hindley in *See No Evil: The Moors Murders*²³⁸

I believe it is my duty as a performer to raise issues in the world of things we're afraid to look at.

Samantha Morton on playing Myra Hindley in *Longford*²³⁹

My sisters and my wife all thought it was a terrible idea and they didn't want me to do it. There was definitely a sense in all the papers that it was a subject not to be tackled. But I think it's the role of drama to show these things, while being mindful of the immense suffering of the victims. In the end, I think we took a very difficult subject and handled it with respect and sensitivity.

Dominic West on playing Fred West in *Appropriate Adult*²⁴⁰

If you're going to take on a subject like Christie, then it's worth examining who this man really was, what he really did. I think it's something that should be exposed.

Tim Roth on playing John Christie in *Rillington Place*²⁴¹

It has been suggested that there exists a synergy between national cinemas around the world that supports the making, exhibition and distribution of films about serial killers.²⁴² The proposition stands as a corrective to the perception that serial killing is specifically American;²⁴³ in fact serial killer films have formed a sizable part

²³⁸ A. Billen, 'Reaching a Peake of evil', *The Times*, 13 May 2006, p. 40.

²³⁹ A. Sherwin, 'TV films on Moors trial anniversary 'prolong the agony'', *The Times*, 2 March 2006, p. 31.

²⁴⁰ F. Cohen, 'Dominic West: My family didn't want me to take the part of Fred West', *Daily Express*, <http://www.express.co.uk/celebrity-news/342522/Dominic-West-My-family-didn-t-want-me-to-take-the-part-of-Fred-West>, 2012, accessed 16 September 2017.

²⁴¹ Dickson, E. J. 'The killer downstairs', *Radio Times* (26 November - 2 December 2017), p. 20

²⁴² R. Dyer, *Lethal Repetition: Serial Killing in European Cinema* (London, 2015), p. 123.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

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of European film output for decades with the genre representing a survival strategy: films that will pass onto the international/American distribution market.²⁴⁴ The same writer argues that:

for the most part, output is proportionate to the size of the different national industries, but very few have none. ... Britain and France not only have relatively large industries but also longstanding and flourishing traditions of crime fiction and hence many serial killer films.²⁴⁵

The key word in this statement is crime *fiction*, as Britain's output in terms of serial killer films is on the whole based upon fiction; factual cases continue to be in the lowest percentile of production. The dichotomy is that the public obsession with true crime, manifested in book sales, documentaries and television dramatisations, is pervasive. Among the reasons given for such proliferation of extreme content is the relaxation in attitudes, including censorship. This permits, in mass circulation, the copious audio-visual presentation of the atrocity of serial killing. The format of the serial killer film is also relatively sure-fire in terms of success, because it promises much sensation and many occasions for prurience. It guarantees more nastiness for your buck.²⁴⁶ The crucial variable in this cultural equation is that of fact, which remains encased in multitudinous taboos.

In chronicling the crimes of British serial killers, television producers have succeeded where their cinema contemporaries have not by unapologetically pandering to the voyeuristic impulse. Through a combination of emotional manipulation and professional justification, such as the actors' comments above, they have presented their various productions as worthy fare that seeks to shed new light on fascinating crimes and the enigmatic personalities at the heart of them. In doing so they have rejected criticism from those emotionally invested in the cases, such as victims' relatives, or those who bear a self-proclaimed banner of what is considered palatable on the small screen, such as the media. Moreover, it shows that what cannot be made acceptable in the cinema can be made acceptable on television. Circumvention is the

²⁴⁴ Dyer, p. 124.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Dyer, pp. 5-6.

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key, though it is prudent to be mindful of sensitivities and to adopt the right timescale. Thus Emlyn Williams' bid to dramatise the Moors Murders for film in 1968 was bound to fail; only two years had passed. Neil McKay's attempt in 2006, tying in with the 40th anniversary of the killers' trial, was wholly successful. More importantly, it was praised for its decision to look at the proceedings through the "neutral" eyes of Myra Hindley's younger sister.

Television also provides the creators of such dramas with the latitude and freedom to deliver long-form stories. The crimes committed by John Christie in the 1950s, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley in the 1960s, and Peter Sutcliffe in the 1970s took place over several years: a decade in the case of Christie, two years for Brady and Hindley and five years for Sutcliffe. Compacting such timelines into standard 90- or 120-minute film formats presents an unwinnable challenge for cinema screenwriters. Conversely television is not similarly constrained. It comfortably allows for three-hour episodic dramas in the mould of the traditional mini series. It should also be noted that in Britain terrestrial television is still capable of reaching a captive audience of several million.

It is evident that projects such as *This is Personal: The Hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper* (2000), *Shipman* (2002), *See No Evil: The Moors Murders* (2006), *Longford* (2006), *Appropriate Adult* (2011) and *Rillington Place* (2016) have all achieved the balancing act of arousing feelings of sensation and prurience whilst maintaining a sense of decorum, albeit sometimes an unwieldy one. In all cases despite claims to the contrary the killers' story *is* told but via an acceptable angle that subverts the case and crimes to appease the majority of the watching audience. Condemnation is swatted away by use of supportive family members while the public interest argument and the requirement to never forget the enormity of the crimes is set out. Actors are equally complicit in this stance.

However it may be argued that television is also guilty of a form of emasculation. The milieu of fictional killers such as Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*, Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* and Dexter Morgan in *Dexter* is built on a foundation of extreme violence and associated bloodletting borne of the imaginations of creators Thomas Harris, Bret Easton Ellis and James Manos Jr.

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Audiences that tune in demand such content but always in the knowledge that what they are witnessing is fake and never took place.

The proliferation of serial murder in the United States from the 1960s onwards was reflected and represented on film and television. In addition media coverage was prominent and intense, lending international attention to the cases of personalities such as Albert De Salvo aka the Boston Strangler, Ted Bundy, David Berkowitz aka Son of Sam, and Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono, aka the Hillside Stranglers.²⁴⁷ During this same period British cinemas were screening non-domestic product based on foreign serial killers. The titles variously included *The Boston Strangler* (1968), *Deranged* (1974), with Ed Gein renamed Ezra Cobb, and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), also loosely based on Gein. The conclusion to be drawn is that homegrown British killers such as Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, or Peter Sutcliffe, had not the same impact or international appeal, partly based on the limited geographic spread of the British Isles. However American killers were separated from British audiences not just by distance but also by significant societal differences. There was anonymity in the slayings – no one was likely to have a personal connection to the victims – and so the impact was diminished. Thus such films were viable pieces of entertainment, securing distribution, exhibition and promotion in the way that their few British counterparts could not.

It may be suggested that *Frenzy* (1972) was deemed more acceptable to elements of the British film industry – exhibition, distribution, publicity and marketing – as well as to audiences because it had been sufficiently fictionalised to distance it from any link to real life or recent events. As with later American imports there was no risk of causing distress or offence to victims' families or survivors, and the censor could deal with issues of taste and content. The same could not be said for a proposed film about Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, which, as well as facing the antipathy of the British Board of Film Censors, had also to deal with adverse media comment and criticism from politicians. A national revulsion surrounds the Moors Murders case creating an emotive and unshakeable taboo that, in terms of the commercial cinema, has never been broken. British audiences who give in to an inner

²⁴⁷ P. Jenkins, *Using Murder: The Social Construction of Serial Homicide* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2009), p. 50.

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voyeuristic impulse seemingly do not want it sullied by reality. Hence the gulf between reality and fantasy is illuminated, and fact is darker than fiction.

This thesis also clarifies the position of the UK censor. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) had a prickly relationship with exploitation studios such as Hammer and exercised significant influence over producers, directors and writers in terms of dubious content. In raising this issue with the BBFC it was established that it had *not* acted in this manner in relation to serial killer product. In fact the reverse was true: the BBFC rewrote its own regulations to allow *10 Rillington Place* to be made less than 20 years after the crimes it highlighted were committed. The *raison d'être* was that it focused not on the gratuitous nature of sex murders but instead on a gross miscarriage of justice that led directly to a change in the law on capital punishment. My research shows that any decisions or action taken against the content threatened in such films were not the result of formal or patriarchal disapproval at a national level involving the government or bodies affiliated to the government, such as the BBFC. Instead the very opposite was true: localised anger expressed by those with an emotional investment in such projects – primarily victims' relatives, survivors of attacks or police officers that had worked on the cases – was heightened, fomented and/or frequently hijacked by the print media and broadcasters.

This on-going opposition invariably had an effect on the potential for feature films about real-life British serial killers and their crimes. The will to make them appeared to peter out during the 1980s, coinciding with a major studio's decision to drop its planned production based on the Yorkshire Ripper. Yet the voyeuristic impulse present within the target audience for any dramatisation of a recent real-life crime allowed for a new direction. Thus the television semi-documentary, with its meretricious recreations of real crimes, replaced the notion of the commercial cinema film. Entertainment was exchanged for the sometimes-specious claim of elucidation and investigation, all the time indulging the mass audience voyeur. That impulse manifests itself in a yearning to embrace or be immersed in crime, and it is a universal feeling associated with real crime; fiction provides a sense of distance that real crime does not. The generally held opinion among the wider film-going audience (and, indeed, the general population) is that an attraction to real crime represents prurience:

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it is acceptable as documentary ('fact') but not film ('entertainment/exploitation').²⁴⁸ As a general rule it appears to hold water, with an acceptance that there is no crossover between fiction (Hannibal Lecter et al) and fact (Christie, Brady, Hindley, Sutcliffe, the Wests, etc.) because there is no distance or buffer between criminals, their crimes, victims and the accompanying sense of taboo. In that respect cinema (via filmmakers, writers and actors) is unable to present heroic figures, romantic images, or sexy villains. The unavoidable truth is that the real-life leading characters are predators, psychotics, deviants, paedophiles and necrophiles. As Marguerite La Caze noted: "human beings, no matter how well-meaning, are attracted to violence and death in all its forms. We want to see violence, hear violence, see dead bodies and know more about killings and murders."²⁴⁹

It is the knowledge highlighted by La Caze that often drives filmmakers – particularly when creating documentaries and/or reconstructions – and puts them off in equal measure. Fact and fiction are uneasy bedfellows when it comes to mainstream commercial entertainment. For an example of "sellability" it is appropriate to look at how poster art for the British release of Columbia Pictures' *10 Rillington Place* evolved. One design featured a sober construct based around a *faux* newspaper headline that blared, in block capitals, "WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WOMEN AT 10 RILLINGTON PLACE?" with the rider "The Most Shocking Story of the Century!" Accompanying it were black-and-white portraits of the central characters broken down into protagonists ("Ex-Policeman" for John Christie, "Suspect" for Timothy Evans, "Victim" for Beryl Evans, "Visitor" for Beryl's sister, etc.). Another design adopted a far more lurid approach, presenting an artist's rendering of Christie dragging a woman's body – clad in bra, underskirt, stockings and suspenders – towards a niche in the wall. The accompanying advertising tagline screams "THE STORY OF THE CHRISTIE SEX-MURDERS!" The motive behind the filmmakers' storytelling may have been a plea for tolerance; those tasked with marketing the end result had their own thoughts on reaching out to the mass market. Sex sells. Sex and death sells quicker.

²⁴⁸ D. Todd, 'Should we be exploiting... The harmonics of horror', *Kine Weekly* (1 June 1968), p. 12.

²⁴⁹ M. La Caze, 'The Violence of the Spectacle: Alejandro Amenabar's *Tesis* (Thesis, 1996)', *Kinoeye* vol. 5 no. 3 (2003), <http://www.kinoeye.org/03/05/lacaze05.php>

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It is the “sellability” of serial murder that has driven most of the big British television dramas of the past two decades. The advent of the semi-documentary paved the way for productions such as *This is Personal: The Hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper*, *See No Evil: The Moors Murders*, and *Appropriate Adult* to further explore the mind-set of unnatural people. The omnipresent taboo represented by living memory, rawness and relatives’ disapproval was subverted by selling the stories not as gleefully exploitative portraits of heinous killers but as sober, unsensational examinations of crime. Where the interpretive approach of *Peter – A Portrait of a Serial Killer* (2011) failed to find an audience the left-field methodology of *This is Personal* was aimed at a wider population affected by a localised murder spree that became a national scandal. Filmmakers had identified commercial appeal and located the gold at the end of the rainbow.

Recently the three-part BBC production of *Rillington Place* raised few ripples in the press. More than 60 years had passed since John Christie was hanged for a string of sex murders that also hinted at necrophilia. What had once been a cause celebre had faded to become just another television dramatisation of a historical crime. The majority of interested parties were long dead. All obstacles had been removed. Only one taboo remained: Christie’s reputation as a strangler/necrophile who ravished his victims as they lay dead or dying. The BBC’s decision to omit such scenes allowed *Rillington Place* to be broadcast to little consternation.

For all the reasons outlined in this thesis, feature films have been unable to present the lives and crimes of John Christie and his dreadful fraternity. Instead television has become the canvas on which British serial killers have been depicted and then generally via a circuitous, almost manipulative route. Audiences on sofas across the UK have come to accept that this is the manner in which they will come to know the killers, their victims and the manner of their demise. But just as feature films can only go so far – and visceral re-enactment is *still* taboo – so television operates its own self-regulation: it tells some semblance of the story but generally without the gore.

Perhaps the last word should go to Winnie Johnson, the mother of Keith Bennett who strove for 48 years to reclaim the lost body of her child from the Moor, and from the clutches of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley. Hers was an emotional, acutely

personal, opinion, which never wavered. Its sheer simplicity cuts through filmmakers' justifications, effortlessly demolishing all and any arguments for dramatisation: "When they do things like this it just prolongs the agony."²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Sherwin, p. 31.

APPENDICES

Appendix i

Film and Television

FILM

10 Rillington Place (1971)

Director: Richard Fleischer. Writer: Clive Exton. Based on *Ten Rillington Place* by Ludovic Kennedy. Production Company: Columbia Pictures.

Principal cast: Richard Attenborough (Christie), Judy Geeson (Beryl Evans), John Hurt (Timothy Evans), Pat Heywood (Ethel Christie)

UK release date: 29 January 1971

Running time: 106 minutes

The Black Panther (1977)

Director/Producer: Ian Merrick. Writer: Michael Armstrong. Production Company: Impics Productions.

Principal cast: Donald Sumpter (Donald Nielson), Debbie Farrington (Lesley Whittle), Marjorie Yates (Nielson's wife), Sylvia O'Donnell (Nielson's daughter)

UK release date: 26 December 1977

Running time: 102 minutes

Cold Light of Day (1989)

Director/Writer: Fhiona-Louise. Production Company: Creative Artists Pictures.

Principal cast: Bob Flag (Jordan March/Dennis Nilsen), Martin Byrne-Quinn (Joe)

UK release date: 1989

Running time: 79 minutes

The Young Poisoner's Handbook (1995)

Director: Benjamin Ross. Writers: Jeff Rawle, Benjamin Ross. Production Company: Mass Productions Kinowelt/Haut et Court

Principal cast: Hugh O'Connor (Graham Young), Antony Sher (Dr. Zeigler)

UK release date: 15 September 1995

Running time: 99 minutes

Peter – A Portrait of a Serial Killer (2011)

Director/Writer: Skip Kite. Production Company: Praslin Pictures.

Principal cast: Walt Kissack (Peter Sutcliffe), Gary Sharkey (Dr Spencer), Adam Lewis (Aleck)

UK release date: 2011

Running time: 84 minutes

Myra (2011)

Director: Dan PK Smyth. Writers: Caroline Burns Cooke, Dan PK Smyth. Production Company: Burns Unit.

Principal cast: Caroline Burns Cooke (Myra), Annie Simm (Child)

UK release date: 2 October 2011

Running time: 14 minutes

A monologue adapted from the short stage play *Suffer Little Children* by Caroline Burns Cooke.

TELEVISION

Conceptions of Murder: The Dreams of Tim Evans (1970)

Director: Graham Evans. Writer: Clive Exton. Production Company: London Weekend Television.

Principal cast: Hugh Burden (Christie), Don Hawkins (Timothy Evans)

Transmission date: 18 September 1970

Running time: 30 minutes

Brass Eye: Decline (Banned segment: Sutcliffe! The Musical) (1997)

Director: Michael Cumming. Writer: Christopher Morris. Production Company: Channel 4.

Principal cast: Unknown (Peter Sutcliffe), Barbara Durkin (Marigold Blenny, as 'Sonia'), Guy Masterson (Tasscam Holiday), Christopher Morris (David Sanction), John McCririck (Himself)

Original scheduled transmission date: 5 March 1997 (vetoed by Michael Grade)

Running time: 2 minutes

The same episode contained a segment on a spoof band with a song about Myra Hindley.

This is Personal: The Hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper (2000)

Director: David Richards. Writer: Neil McKay. Production Company: Granada Television.

Principal cast: Alun Armstrong (Assistant Chief Constable George Oldfield), Sue Cleaver (Sylvia Holland), John Duttine (Detective Chief Superintendent Jim Hobson), Gerard Horan (Detective Chief Superintendent John Domaille), James Laurenson (Chief Constable Ronald Gregory), Maggie Ollerenshaw (Margaret Oldfield), Richard Ridings (Detective Superintendent Dick Holland), Craig Cheetham (Peter Sutcliffe)

Transmission dates: 26 January and 2 February 2000

Running time: 2 x 60 minutes

Shipman (2002)

Director: Roger Bamford. Writer: Michael Eaton. Production Company: Yorkshire Television.

Principal cast: James Bolam (Dr. Harold Shipman), James Hazeldine (DI Stan Egerton), Jacqueline Pilton (Primrose Shipman)

Transmission date: 9 July 2002

Running time: 98 minutes

See No Evil: The Moors Murders (2006)

Director: Christopher Menaul. Writer: Neil McKay. Production Company: Yorkshire Television.

Principal cast: Joanne Froggatt (Maureen Smith), Maxine Peake (Myra Hindley), Sean Harris (Ian Brady), Matthew McNulty (Dave Smith), George Costigan (DCI Joe Mounsey), Charlotte Emmerson (WDC Pat Clayton), John Henshaw (DCS Arthur Benfield)

Transmission dates: 14 and 15 May 2006

Running time: 2 x 90 minutes

Longford (2006)

Director: Tom Hooper. Writer: Peter Morgan. Production Company: Channel 4.

Principal cast: Jim Broadbent (Lord Longford), Lindsay Duncan (Lady Elizabeth Longford), Samantha Morton (Myra Hindley), Andy Serkis (Ian Brady)

Transmission date: 26 October 2006

Running time: 93 minutes

Appropriate Adult (2011)

Director: Julian Jarrold. Writer: Neil McKay. Production Company: ITV Studios.

Principal cast: Emily Watson (Janet Leach), Dominic West (Fred West), Robert Glenister (Detective Superintendent John Bennett), Sylvestra Le Touzel (Detective Constable Hazel Savage), Monica Dolan (Rosemary West)

Transmission dates: 4 and 11 September 2011

Running time: 2 x 90 minutes

Rillington Place (2016)

Director: Craig Viveiros. Writers: Tracey Malone, Ed Whitmore. Production Company: BBC Television.

Principal cast: Tim Roth (Reg Christie), Nico Mirallegro (Tim Evans), Samantha Morton (Ethel Christie), Jodie Comer (Beryl Evans)

Transmission dates: 29 November, 6 and 13 December 2016

Running time: 3 x 60 minutes

In Plain Sight (2016)

Director: John Strickland. Writer: Nick Stevens. Production Company: BBC Television.

Principal cast: Martin Compston (Peter Manuel), Gilly Gilchrist (Samuel Manuel), Douglas Henshall (Sergeant William Muncie)

Transmission date: 7 December 2016

Running time: 150 minutes

UNREALISED PROJECTS

Beyond Belief (aka *Murder on the Moors*) (1968)

Director: William Friedkin. Writer: Emlyn Williams, based on his book *Beyond Belief*. Production Company: Palomar International.

The Christie Murders (1970)

Producer: Josef Shafiel

Mooted cast: Paul Scofield (John Christie), Michael Crawford (Timothy Evans)

The Yorkshire Ripper (1980)
Production Company: MGM

Hail Mary (1981)
Production Company: United Artists.
Principal cast: Robert De Niro (Peter Sutcliffe), Jack Palance (John Sutcliffe), Billie Whitelaw/Pat Phoenix (Kathleen Sutcliffe)

Living in the Shadow of the Ripper (2004)
Writers: John Parker, Allan Royle.

The Ballad of David Smith (2005)
Production Company: Granada Television.

Just a Boy (2014)
Producer: Tony Klinger, based on the book *Just a Boy* by Richard McCann.

I'm Jack (2015)
Director: Ron Scalpello. Writers: Celyn Jones, Mark Blacklock. Based on the novel *I'm Jack* by Mark Blacklock. Production Company: Mad as Birds.
Principal cast: Celyn Jones (John Humble)

Saddleworth (2018)
Director: Hamish McAlpine

Appendix ii

Taboos in music, art and radio

'Free Hindley'

The Moors Murderers was a short-lived punk rock band whose members included Chrissie Hynde and Steve Strange. In late 1977 it recorded songs including 'Free Hindley', which was considered too contentious to be made widely available.

The lyrics included:

In Nineteen Hundred and Sixty Four
Myra Hindley was nothing more
Than a woman
Who fell for a man
So why can't she be free?

[chorus]
Free Hindley!

Brady was her lover,
He told her what to do
A psychopathic killer
Nothing new
So why can't she be free?

[chorus]
Free Hindley!²⁵¹

Other lyrics are said to have included:

What she did was for love
The torture scenes
The boys and girls
Hindley knew but couldn't say
She was trapped by her love
What mother in her right mind
Would allow a girl at the age of nine
Be out on her own
Don't blame Hindley
Blame yourselves

The band misunderstood the depth of public feelings about the Moors Murderers; it broke up in January 1978 after a handful of chaotic gigs. 'Free Hindley',

²⁵¹ S. Price, 'Talk of the Town: Chrissie Hynde interviewed by Simon Price', *The Quietus*, <http://thequietus.com/articles/15484-chrissie-hynde-interview-simon-price>, 2014, accessed 22 May 2017.

now legendarily obscure and considered the holy grail of punk recordings, was released only on acetate and cassette tape. Chrissie Hynde spoke about the song, its roots and the context of controversy in 2011:

[Steve Strange and I] put this thing together. Everyone was always mixing it back in those days; we were all trying to get bands together. I saw him in the Vortex Club, and he came up to me one day and he said, 'I have these songs'. And he, like, sang three songs to me – just acapella – there at the bar, you know? And they were all about different criminals. There was one about Myra Hindley, called 'Free Hindley'. I still remember [it]. And it was absurd, really. Then he had another song about Al Capone and he had a song about the Kray twins. Now being a Yank I wasn't that familiar with the Moors Murderers. I didn't know about the absolute loathing they evoked in the hearts of all the English. But he asked me to come down and play guitar, and I was delighted that someone just wanted me to play guitar. We went into the rehearsal, because he had a record company guy coming down, so I learned the songs and just went down to have a play. And then he said: 'Now they want to do a piece on us for *Sounds*'. I said, 'I don't want to be in this thing' so we all wore black bin liners over our heads.

But my name was Chrissie Hindley and I think people put two-and-two together. Steve's name was unknown but I had kind of a bit of a name in London. I'd been on a paper. The next thing I know it's in the papers that it's *my* band and I was *mortified* because I had all my friends who were journalists sworn.... I swore an oath to all of them that I would never speak to any of them again if they printed anything about me at all, because I didn't ever want to be in the papers until I finally found my band.

So suddenly this thing came out saying it was my band. The papers were calling me. People were outraged. They thought it was the tackiest thing in the world. And I was, like, *bumped* because it wasn't my band.²⁵²

²⁵² C. Hynde, 'Free Hindley', YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsRKSjUIYFg>, 2011, accessed 23 August 2017.

The *Sunday Mirror*, reporting on the band, ran a story headlined “‘Moors Murderers’ in pop row” with the sub-headline “Why must they be so cruel?” It didn’t help that Steve Strange performed with The Moors Murderers calling himself ‘Steve Brady’. Shortly afterwards Hynde would write a letter to the *New Musical Express* distancing herself from the band and declaring, “I’m not in the group, I only rehearsed with them.”²⁵³

The Hanging of Myra Hindley

Twenty years later in 1997 the Royal Academy came under pressure to self-censor an exhibition, *Sensation*, that included within its selection of work by young artists a work entitled ‘Myra’: a portrait of Myra Hindley by Marcus Harvey. The painting, using the cast of a child’s hand to print paint onto an 11ft by 9ft canvas, replicated the 1965 police arrest photograph of Myra Hindley “as if blown up so that its pixels are made visible” said one commentator. The provocative nature of the piece led to it being damned by director of the anti-child abuse charity Kidscape, Michele Elliot, who described it as “sick exploitation of dead children”. She urged people to boycott the exhibition.

She was not alone. Ann West, mother of Lesley Ann Downey, said the Academy was “making a film star out of a murderer”, and Winnie Johnson, mother of Keith Bennett, called for its removal, threatening to sue if it went on show. The third voice to denounce the exhibition was that of Myra Hindley herself. In a letter to *The Guardian* on July 31 she urged the RA to withdraw the portrait on the grounds of “the emotional pain and trauma that would inevitably be experienced by the families of the Moors victims”.²⁵⁴ Some within the arts community felt differently. Harvey himself was quoted as saying that the original police photograph, which had been seen widely since Hindley’s arrest, “has a kind of hideous attraction”. And, writing in *The Times*, Isabel Carlisle suggested that whilst Harvey had chosen to reinterpret a demonising image (and in doing so giving its subject parity with film stars by “doing for Hindley what Andy Warhol did for Marilyn Monroe”) the photograph “had already reached iconic status” when Harvey chose to focus upon it. She added that the artist never dictated how the public should look at it, and that the piece was, in effect, “a lightning conductor” for storms around art and, by association with the Moors Murders,

²⁵³ C. Hynde, ‘Letters’, *New Musical Express*, 21 January 1978, p. 12.

²⁵⁴ I. Carlisle, ‘Why the RA should hang Myra’, *The Times*, 18 August 1997, p. 18.

political and moral questions (presumably around the guilt of the killer, though that is not implicit) and the never-ending anguish of the victims' relatives. She added:

It is always dangerous to judge a work of art on the basis of a newspaper photograph. If the debate around 'Myra' is to have any validity it should be put on public display, because if there are any moral judgments to be passed, it is up to us to do so. We don't need the RA to act as nanny. Motivated by the search for a new means of expression, and keenly aware of the marketing value of being controversial, young British artists will continue to push back the boundaries of what is acceptable. There will be more art that is equally hard to stomach but, unlike the Nazis, who banned their avant-garde art for being degenerate, we should be robust enough to deal with it. Banning 'Myra' would set a dangerous precedent. The right action for the Academy now is to repeat to the victims' families its shared abhorrence at the appalling crime that Hindley committed and its profound sympathy, but to go ahead and hang 'Myra'.²⁵⁵

It was a vociferous defence of artistic freedoms wholly undermined by the tasteless final line – a hooting ha-ha-ha attempt at a memorable one-line finale that missed the mark and rendered invalid what had been a considered attempt to appeal against limited thinking, knee-jerkism and raw emotion. The Royal Academy did not withdraw 'Myra' leading to protests and pickets by the group Mothers Against Murder and Violence (including Winnie Johnson). Windows were broken at Burlington House, the RA's home. As for 'Myra', it was pelted with eggs, and with ink, causing it to be temporarily removed, cleaned, restored and re-hung behind a Perspex screen. Security guards were on hand to prevent a reoccurrence.

Interviewing Harvey for *The Guardian* Simon Hattenstone said he had been left shell-shocked by the hostility towards 'Myra' but that it has been conceived as a sombre critique of the media's exploitation of the Hindley story in general and that picture in particular. In the same article Harvey said:

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

I think the photograph was used irresponsibly. The image itself took on its own life force. It became its own kind of erotic, sexy, child-murdering witch. It fitted some need we have in society to stereotype women who are not mumsy or who don't embrace their maternal instinct with both hands, and push them towards this cold SS guard. That image picked up a lot of momentum that actually distorted her chance of ever getting justice.²⁵⁶

It could be argued that Harvey was definitely swimming against the tide, though Hindley campaigners such as Lord Longford may have had some sympathy with his point of view. The RA was also criticised for presenting “a show of middling interest with few works of genuine merit” of lesser works, for deliberately courting controversy in the pursuit of headlines and revenue. But the inclusion of the 110 works that made up *Sensation* left the institution divided and somewhat battered. It also led directly to the resignations of two high-profile members: the sculptor and artist Michael Sandle (b 1936), who felt the Academy had been manipulated into showcasing a deliberately shocking exhibition,²⁵⁷ and the artist Gillian Ayres (b 1930), who was affected by the emotional reaction of Winnie Johnson when she called on the public to boycott the exhibition.²⁵⁸ Other academicians who opposed the ‘Myra’ painting or the theme of the exhibition included artist and printmaker Craig Aitchison (1926 – 2009), realist painter Peter Coker (1926 – 2004) and realist painter and printmaker Anthony Green (b 1939).

In 2004 journalist Jane Kelly claimed the Daily Mail sacked her after a colleague on the *Mail on Sunday* wrote an article (later withdrawn and never published) that revealed she had painted a portrait of a mother and child in which the father had been replaced by Myra Hindley, who was cradling a toddler and a teddy bear. The face of Hindley was adapted from the same infamous “Medusa” photograph as had inspired Marcus Harvey. The piece, entitled ‘If We Could Undo Psychosis 2’, was on show in the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool as part of an exhibition of Stuckist works called *Punk Victorian*. The Stuckism movement was founded in 1999 by Charles Thomson and Billy Childish, former boyfriend of Tracy Emin, to

²⁵⁶ S. Hattenstone, ‘Myra, Margaret and Me’, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/feb/21/marcus-harvey-margaret-thatcher>, 2009, accessed 20 August 2017.

²⁵⁷ V. Thorpe, ‘Artist quits academy over refusal to show Hindley picture’, *The Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/artist-quits-academy-over-refusal-to-show-hindley-picture-1238792.html>, 1997, accessed 23 August 2017.

²⁵⁸ T. Hilton, ‘Untitled column’, *The Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/the-critics-was-this-what-the-academy-wanted-1240282.html>, 1997, accessed 22 August 2017.

“promote contemporary figurative painting with ideas” and oppose the “pretensions of Britart - particularly anything involving dead animals or beds”.²⁵⁹

In its report on Kelly’s dismissal *The Guardian* pointed out that “The paper was more accommodating four years ago, when Kelly wrote about her acceptance to the Royal Academy summer exhibition with a painting of the then Labour renegade Ken Livingstone, inspired by the 1944 Stauffenberg plot against Hitler. But while Kelly's interpretation of Mr Livingstone conformed to Mail sympathies, her portrayal of a compassionate Hindley appears to have been anathema.”²⁶⁰ In the show’s catalogue Kelly explained some of the inspiration behind the painting:

I've always been fascinated by Myra Hindley's disastrous life and because hers was the first horrible crime I knew about as a child. I wanted to see what she might have looked like in the kind of family situation she was always denied.²⁶¹

Radio Taboo

In May 2017, just six days after the death of Ian Brady, the BBC broadcast a quiz that asked listeners to identify a figure in the news from a selection of four music clips. The clips were from ‘All the Young Dudes’ (Mott the Hoople), the theme tune to *The Brady Bunch*, ‘Suffer the Little Children’ (The Smiths) and ‘Psycho Killer’ (Talking Heads). Listeners greeted the game segment, on a Radio Leeds programme guest hosted by Nathan Turvey, with astonishment. The BBC later issued a statement: “This was clearly unacceptable and we apologise.”²⁶²

²⁵⁹ M. Wells and C. Cozens, ‘Daily Mail sacks writer who painted Hindley picture’, *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/sep/30/dailymail_pressandpublishing, 2004, accessed 22 May 2017.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ F. Milner, ed., *The Stuckists: Punk Victorian* (National Museums Liverpool, 2004).

²⁶² P. Dinham, ‘BBC apologises after ‘sick’ Ian Brady quiz on Sunday breakfast radio asks listeners to guess who the mystery person is after playing All The Young Dudes and The Brady Bunch theme’, *Daily Mail*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4529898/BBC-apologies-Radio-Leeds-Ian-Brady-music-quiz.html>, 2017, accessed 22 May 2017.

Appendix iii

Yours faithfully, Myra Hindley

Dear Sirs,

I am writing regarding a book entitled 'Beyond Belief' by Emyln Williams, about which I have received correspondence from a firm of solicitors, Messrs. Denton, Hall & Burgin, on behalf of Palomar Pictures International, a subsidiary of the American Broadcasting Companies Inc., stating that the said film company propose making a motion picture of the book.

I enclose a copy of the correspondence for your perusal, to obviate repetition (sic) in this letter. I would like to say that I object very strongly to both the book and the film, particularly the latter, because of its increased publicity potential. I expect by now that the firm of solicitors have been informed that under no consideration will I ever give permission for such a film, in which names and likenesses will be used, to be made, regardless of how high a figure is offered of financial consideration.

The object of this letter is to ask if you could help me to fight the release of the proposed film and further publication of the book, which is the most obnoxious piece of lies and fabrications that I have ever read. The book is comprised of so-called facts and "surmise", the latter being figments of the author's obviously vivid, dramatic imagination, and when I first read the book, which I did for legal reasons, I was so nauseated and shocked, that I wanted to publicly oppose this book by taking action against the author and publisher, but was not in a position to do so at that time. This is so with other books which have been printed about my case.

The main reason why I wish so strongly to oppose this film is the harrowing effect the release of same would have on my family and that of Ian Brady. Our relatives, particularly my mother and grandmother and Mrs. Brady, have been subjected to merciless persecution from the Press and authors of books ever since our arrest, and any more publicity, particularly of the calibre of this proposed film, would have an adverse effect on them and would undoubtedly be detrimental to their health. As innocent people they have suffered extreme mental torture and I feel that further hounding should this film be released, would be more than they could bear. At the moment our respective families are unaware that such a proposal has been made and I wish to do everything in my power to prevent them ever knowing. Judging by the

contents of this “contract”, this term (sic) cannot be released, without our permission, under the terms laid down, i.e. using our names and likenesses and impersonation but it is highly probable that the company will get round this by omitting to use our names, etc., but the result will no doubt be that nobody could fail to realise that the film was based on my trial. The book is in the form of a “biographical novel” in which the author freely uses our names and those of our families, along with ‘fictitious’ names of ‘subscribers’ to the book, and his so-called biographies of Ian Brady and myself contain only shreds of truth, the rest of which is nothing but iniquitous lies and rubbish.

My reasons for wishing to take action in this matter are not mercenary ones, for even if they were, the damages, if granted, would be negligible in view of the fact that our characters could hardly be more defamed than they have been by virtue of the convictions against us, but simply because of the detrimental effect on our families. You will no doubt have received a similar piece of correspondence from Ian Brady, and I sincerely hope that our combined efforts to secure your help and advice in this matter will be successful. Could you please inform me whether any action can be taken against this man, Emlyn Williams, and the film company, and whether such an action would succeed in halting the film on the grounds as previously stated, that it is unnecessary victimisation of our families?

I would also like to mention that amongst the contents of this book are extracts from a diary of mine which was written in 1961 and has nothing at all to do with my case. This diary was amongst property which was taken from my house by the police upon my arrest and was in their possession for 2 years, until it was obtained for me by the solicitor who acts for us in this case. As these extracts are quoted verbatim, I am quite certain that the police allowed Williams access to my diary, and photograph album and other photographic exhibits (permission was asked to publish the latter, which was refused.) and allowed him to peruse same and quote from it. When I took this matter up with Chief Supt. Benfield of Cheshire CID I stated that if I didn’t receive a satisfactory reply, I would take up the matter with Justice, as I considered it an abuse of police power and a contravention of the Official Secrets Act. However, Mr. Benfield said he had ‘no personal knowledge’ that Williams was allowed access to these things, which were private, and were printed without my permission or even my knowledge. I have copies of these letters if you are interested.

To go back to the matter of this film, should it be released, it would blatantly contradict a statement made by the Director of Public Prosecutions, who refused to return certain items of our property because it 'wouldn't be in the interests of the public' to do so. Should you feel that you can help in this matter and that an interview could be arranged with myself and a member of your organisation, I will be quite willing to discuss any aspect of my case, personal circumstances, and of this book, and to be quite open and frank about same.

I do hope to receive a favourable reply from you, at your earliest convenience, as this is a matter of extreme importance and a constant source of worry as to the effect on my family.

Yours faithfully,

Myra Hindley.

Appendix iv

Dear Mr Sutcliffe

On July 27, 2017 I wrote a letter to Peter Sutcliffe and mailed it to him at H.M.P. Frankland in Brasside, Durham. In it I referred to this academic project and requested his assistance. The core of my letter read as follows:

I wish to know whether you have ever been approached by feature/documentary filmmakers, television companies, playwrights, artists and/or authors intent on focusing on your crimes for the purposes of mass entertainment and commercial gain. If approaches have been made, have you sought to prevent such projects through legal action? Or have you simply refused to engage and lend them credibility? I would be most grateful for your thoughts.

Enclosed with my letter was a book of six first class stamps. On August 7 I received a plain, A4 manila envelope postmarked Durham. In it was my letter, in its original envelope, plus the stamps. With it was a three-line response from Frankland:

Mr Earnshaw

Please find enclosed your correspondence and first class stamps, dated 27th July, addressed to Mr P W Sutcliffe.

Mr Sutcliffe is unable to accept this correspondence.

Thank you.

Appendix v

Some thoughts on “Sutcliffe! The Musical”

Guy Masterson says he was informed by Chris Morris about a planned sequence purporting to show rehearsals and choreography of a song-and-dance number, which concluded with the actor playing Sutcliffe speaking the line “And I really am so very truly sorry”.

He told me about the big shoot, which I was not a part of but had yet to be shot. I thought it very courageous! And, no, there seemed to be no secrecy [around it]. My section was entirely ad-libbed. [Chris] gave me the lead and let me talk. I said lots of things that did not make the cut but were then used in the later interview. The girl – Marigold – used my joke!

Barbara Durkin, playing actress Marigold Blenny who in turn is playing Sutcliffe’s wife Sonia in the piece, laughingly delivers the line “You can see how dark he is. He’s always jumping out at you... whoah! ...like this.”

I don’t think it was wrong to do. I think it fitted into the theme of the programme and did exactly what he intended. Yes, it bordered on bad taste but it was designed to push the bounds of acceptability in middle England, which it did. Yes, it was deliberately provocative and outrageous. Was it insensitive? I don’t think so. We all know that Sutcliffe was a murderous bastard and nothing that we said – clearly in jest or irony – could alter that fact. Therefore no genuine offence could be taken by the words. People were offended because they allowed themselves to be. In my view their sensibilities were misplaced. It really pissed off the *Daily Mail*, which was great! The later piece ‘Paedogeddon’ [in 2001] set out to push the boundaries further and I actually turned down that one – having just had a child. Some of the things that he asked me to improvise around made me uncomfortable, so I didn’t do it.

Appendix vi

Some thoughts on a Yorkshire Ripper movie

Robert Bridgestock was an officer with West Yorkshire Police for 30 years, retiring in 2004 with the rank of Detective Superintendent. With his wife, Carol, he now writes crime novels under the name R.C. Bridgestock. As a Detective Constable he worked on the Yorkshire Ripper inquiry. He was Exhibits Officer on the murder of Helen Rytka in Huddersfield in January 1978 and was one of the first officers at the scene of the Josephine Whitaker murder in Halifax in April 1979 as well as being part of the team eliminating suspects. The majority of the senior detectives that worked on the Ripper inquiry are now dead. Therefore Mr Bridgestock's thoughts and opinions are all the more welcome. His comments came via email correspondence:

The public have an unquenchable thirst for crime dramas and serial killers. We know people write to and even visit them expressing their love [and] forgiving all past incidents. History shows us that where there is a demand someone will supply what is required as long as the price is right. There have been factual TV accounts about the Ripper and of course the London serial killer Jack the Ripper is made into dramas or films continually. The inevitable will happen and millions of people will no doubt watch it and therefore it will be classed as a success.

As a former Senior Investigating Officer, I wonder if this is purely sensationalising a violent evil individual. How accurate will this be; what will be edited out as not fit for public consumption? Also, what is the movie's purpose? Entertainment? A docudrama that leaves the door open for the scriptwriter and the editorial team to zoom in or stretch the truth? What is the objective: highlighting a serial killer or simply the monies available? Why not, there's been a lot written about him.

Whether we like it or not people are fascinated by killers and the brutality they use on their victims. We only have to look at TV drama and book sales to know this genre is at the forefront of what is described as "entertainment", the

graphic violence having increased over the years. It will happen like I said above – if someone commissions it. The victims' families, I would suggest, would not want a movie based on the Ripper and his crimes but sadly I don't think this would stop a production team if the cash is there. Again my concerns [are] how will this be portrayed? Moviemakers will push boundaries and take liberties to tell a story.

The bottom line is I [that] wouldn't support it on the grounds that it is insensitive. News reports and documentaries have been done. The only reason for a movie as I see it is for someone to make money. Anyone wanting to know the history can read about it. We don't need actors glamorising the brutal slaughters of a serial killer and winning an Oscar for their portrayal [by] sensationalising a murder. Factual documentaries including ALL detail I support, but a movie to me suggests people have played about [with] the truth purely for entertainment purposes, which also means to me they got paid a lot.

Appendix vii

Saddleworth

March, 2017. It is little more than ten miles – about a half hour’s journey by car – from Wardle Brook Avenue in suburban Hattersley to the rocky outcrop that is Hollin Brown Knoll. The route winds through the urban outskirts of Manchester, through tiny Pennine hamlets to the settlement of Greenfield. Then the A635 snakes up towards the moorland heights and journey’s end. To Saddleworth Moor. The rolling landscape is a wind-blasted wilderness of boulders, peat bogs, cotton grass, streams and narrow gulleys. It has a vastness that can be disorientating. It is also breathtakingly beautiful in its bleakness.

Driving uphill from Greenfield means passing Hollin Brown Knoll on the left. It sits atop a slope, approximately 40 feet above the road. Clambering among the rocks to the top is easy and swift, and once at the summit visitors are rewarded with a stunning view of the valley beyond. In the opposite direction a gently undulating plain stretches seemingly to the horizon. There are no trees, vegetation or rising rock formations. And, with just a few quick paces from the knoll’s edge, there is complete cover from the road below. Secluded, silent, and secret, it is the spot where, on July 12, 1963, Ian Brady raped Pauline Reade before cutting her throat. She was buried here, as was little Lesley Ann Downey 17 months later after being murdered at Myra Hindley’s grandmother’s home in Wardle Brook Avenue.

The A635 cuts between Hollin Brown Knoll and the moor, which slopes gently downwards. Within 100 yards of the road the land dips, providing a modicum of respite from the biting wind that chills the extremities even in spring. The ground is wet underfoot, clumpy grass emerging from patches of boggy peat in a terrain intersected by brooks and streams. Walking is problematic; care is required to avoid stumbling or turning an ankle. Rocks poke from the ground. Others lie flat, partly covered by grass. Looking back towards the road one can see the knoll looming up against the skyline. Passing cars seem strangely far away. The enormity of the moor is overwhelming. It is like an alien world. This is the route taken by John Kilbride on the evening of November 23, 1963. It was dark. Ian Brady led the way using a torch, aided by the light of the moon. Having reached a suitable spot – pre-selected by

Brady, who had hidden a spade nearby with which to dig the victim's grave – John was raped, strangled and buried.

It is impossible to grasp the utter terror the trusting 12-year-old must have felt as Brady revealed his intentions. Alone, faced with a knife-wielding paedophile intent on murder (Brady later told Hindley that he attempted to cut the boy's throat but the serrated blade was too blunt), helpless and lost amidst the inky blackness of the moor, he met his fate within yards of the road. Only Brady knows the suffering he inflicted. Saddleworth Moor was a backdrop to murder: both killing ground and graveyard. For half a century it has been tainted by the actions of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, the obsessed lovers forever reviled as the notorious Moors Murderers.

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