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LITERATURE, LAW AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

# The Criminal Type in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain: Hamilton, Gorse and Heath

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This article uses Patrick Hamilton's fictionalisation of aspects of the case of Neville Heath, who was sentenced to death for murder and hanged in 1946, as the focal point for a discussion of how notions of criminality were shifting in Britain in the wake of the Second World War. Hamilton's novel *The West Pier* (1951) and its sequels *Mr Stimpson and Mr Gorse* (1953) and *Unknown Assailant* (1955) show the author engaging with contemporary media portrayals of criminality, and in reviews critics vacillate between considering Hamilton's protagonist as either exemplary or exceptional. In Hamilton's novels and reactions to them, and in the depiction of the Heath case, anxieties about criminality, masculinity and shifts in the social order, are seen to be to the fore.

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In the autumn of 1946, Neville George Clevely Heath was tried for the murder of Margaret Gardner, whose body had been found in a London hotel in June the same year. Heath, a former RAF pilot who had been court martialled more than once, had a criminal record encompassing theft and deception, including occasionally wearing a uniform to which he was not entitled. He had also been charged with the murder of another woman, Doreen Marshall, who had disappeared while on holiday in Bournemouth in July 1946. Her body was discovered in a local beauty spot, with injuries similar to those inflicted on Gardner. Until the passing of the 1957 Homicide Act, it was usual for a defendant charged with multiple murders to stand trial for just one of the offences, and Heath was arrested in connection with Gardner's murder prior to the discovery of Marshall's body. Heath's defence, however, chose to bring the second case into evidence in order to bolster their claim that Heath was suffering from 'partial insanity' (O'Connor, 2013: 349).

The Homicide Act would introduce the concept of diminished responsibility into English and Welsh Law, but at the time of Heath's trial, insanity in a legal context was still defined by the M'Naghten Rule, under which the defendant was deemed sane if they knew what they were doing at the time of the offence and knew it to be wrong (O'Connor, 2013: 348–9). The medical witness who spoke in Heath's defence, Dr W. H. Hubert, suggested that Heath was suffering from 'moral insanity', but this served mainly to imply that Heath could have been aware of the illegality of his actions while not considering them 'morally wrong' (Critchley, 1951: 26). While this made apparent the limited nature of the current judicial definition of insanity, the latter was the definition against which Heath's mental state at the time of the crime nevertheless had to be gauged. Heath was found guilty and was hanged on 16 October 1946, coincidentally on the same day as the defendants who had been convicted by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg. As Matthew Grant shows, both Heath and Josef Kramer, who was tried by an earlier British Military Tribunal at Lüneberg for crimes committed at Auschwitz and Belsen, were described in the press as 'sadistic', a term that placed them in a category of exceptional brutality (2018: 1169–71). In the case of Kramer, Grant suggests that this served to 'place discursive distance between

the war experience of Britain and that of the enemy' (2018: 1171). Aligning Heath with Kramer in turn distanced Heath from 'the typical British serviceman' (Grant, 2018: 1171), allowing any potential connection between Heath's crimes and his war service, and thus the connection between war service and brutality in civilian life, to be downplayed.

The British popular press took a keen interest in the appearance and demeanour of the Lüneberg defendants, attempting to identify a correlation between their criminality and how they looked (Stewart, 2019), and, despite his defence's attempt to focus on his mental state, something similar happened in the case of Heath, an apparently charismatic individual, who was characterised as having had 'a playboy lifestyle' (Grant, 2018: 1160). Printing an image of Heath's face that was labelled to indicate what they deemed his positive attributes, including his 'Broad Forehead', 'Eyes Set Well Apart' and 'Sensitive Mouth', the *Daily Mail* suggested that his was the 'Face any woman would trust', noting in a caption that 'The only slightly criminal characteristic is Heath's almost lobeless ears' (Ramsey, 1946: 3). With the exception, then, of his ears, Heath's appearance does not match what, in the *Daily Mail's* view, would usually be expected of a criminal, but this lack of fit does not provide grounds to question the mapping of criminality onto physical features. Instead, Heath is the exception who proves the rule, and the fact that he does not look typically criminal reinforces his deadly duplicity. What this example also underlines is the impossibility at the time of the trial of knowing quite what *was* going on inside his head; Heath did not give evidence in his own defence.

The vacillation between the individual and the group, the 'type' as exemplary and as exceptional, will be considered here. My focus will be on the work of playwright and novelist Patrick Hamilton, who had an interest in crime and criminality throughout his career and whose engagement with the Heath case and its representation is particularly notable and to date not frequently discussed. Hamilton's preferred mode was realism, a type of writing that has been associated with surfaces, and the construction of meaning from surface appearance, but often, as in the *Daily Mail's* labelled portrait of Heath, surface becomes a way of intuiting depth. The connection

or potential connection of an individual to a group or groups is also relevant to such representations and takes on added point when the protagonist is characterised as criminal. In a discussion of Graham Greene's 1938 novel *Brighton Rock*, Matthew Levay suggests that Greene 'utilises the form of the case study to explore the psychological impetus for violent self-creation' and that in so doing Greene echoes 'the case study's insistence that the individual is not an isolated entity but is best understood as the representative of larger groups or patterns of human behaviour' (2010: 324). The question of how an individual, an exception – like Greene's Pinkie Brown, or even Heath – might connect to the category of the criminal and in turn to society at large is one that is grappled with by Hamilton particularly in his novel *The West Pier* (1951).

Although the novel was published in 1951, the action of *The West Pier* largely unfolds in the interwar period. This choice of time-setting needs consideration, given that the novel and its two sequels, *Mr Stimpson and Mr Gorse* (1953) and *Unknown Assailant* (1955) allude to the case of Heath; for one thing, the central character is called Ernest Ralph Gorse. But the main points of comparison arise not in relation to what Gorse does – he is a swindler, a thief and an exploiter of women but not, within the action of these novels, a murderer – but in how he is represented, or, more precisely, how Hamilton depicts and critiques the media's representation of Gorse's crimes. For example, in *The West Pier*, we are told:

In much later years it was rumoured that Gorse had Hypnotic Eyes with women. Indeed, pictures of these alleged Hypnotic Eyes, isolated from his face, were published in the newspapers. But all this was merely press folly and sensationalism. Gorse had no hypnotic quality: all he did was to use common sense and take the greatest pains in a particular field of activity in which he was naturally gifted (Hamilton, 1992: 255–6).

The *Daily Mirror's* account of the case from 27 September 1946, after Heath was sentenced, includes such an image of Heath's eyes, with the comment that they 'fascinated women' ('Daily Mirror' Reporter, 1946: 5); but aside from alluding to

the forms and devices of a style of popular news reporting with which the novel's readers might be presumed to be familiar, this quotation from *The West Pier* illustrates another aspect of the novel and its sequels that is relevant to the present discussion. Even though they are positioned as retrospective, these narratives make pointed use of prolepsis, or foreshadowing. Prolepsis, as a narrative device, can be seen as deterministic, in that it states from the outset the situation that will be reached by the end. Interestingly, where the Gorse trilogy is concerned, Gorse's fate is foreshadowed but never actually narrated. Hamilton's use of foreshadowing was noted by Julian Maclaren-Ross in an account of Hamilton's work that was published in 1956. Maclaren-Ross reminds us that the perspective of the narrator is that of a 'fictitious future biographer' of Gorse (1956: 58). There are hints throughout of worse crimes that Gorse will eventually commit and Maclaren-Ross might reasonably have expected that these worse crimes would indeed be depicted in future volumes. In fact, at the time when Maclaren-Ross was writing, Hamilton, struggling with alcoholism and wounded by the negative response of his publisher Michael Sadleir to *Unknown Assailant*, had 'abandoned' the series (Jones, 1991: 326–70). The curtailment of the sequence notwithstanding, in relation to the published volumes, the criminal's appearance becomes a form of warning, if only it can be decoded in time.

The depiction of Heath as a specimen to be scrutinised and assessed can be mapped onto the twin developments in the analysis of criminality that Allan Sekula identifies in his influential article 'The Body and the Archive' (1986) as having arisen in the mid-nineteenth century:

The law-abiding body recognized its threatening other in the criminal body, recognized its own acquisitive and aggressive impulses unchecked, and sought to reassure itself in two contradictory ways. The first was the invention of an exceptional criminal who was indistinguishable from the bourgeois, save for a conspicuous lack of moral inhibition: herein lay the figure of the criminal genius. The second was the invention of a criminal who was organically distinct from the bourgeois: a biotype. The science of criminology emerged from the latter operation (15–16).

In her book *The War Inside*, Michal Shapira follows David Garland in suggesting that British thinking about crime did not develop from this latter, broadly speaking Lombrosian model, which attempted to identify a 'criminal type':

Instead, the homegrown British tradition was closely linked to the daily practical demands of legal authorities, such as providing psychiatric evidence before courts, or assisting prison medical officers with the classification of offenders. In British scientific thinking about crime, most criminals were seen to be generally normal individuals; only a minority required treatment (2015: 142).

Despite this, watered-down versions of the two ways of understanding criminality identified by Sekula were still very much in circulation in popular culture in the mid-twentieth century, and, as the newspapers' representations of Heath indicate, it was possible to hold simultaneously what seem to be contradictory views: to believe that criminality could be read from appearance but to believe also that some criminals could 'pass' as normal, even charming. Where literary representations are concerned, crime writers in the twentieth century tended to be more interested in the 'exceptional criminal' than in the ordinary or habitual criminal, but the 'Moriarty' figure, the criminal mastermind, becomes less prominent in interwar detective fiction. Instead, the factors that lead to crime in texts from this period include, for instance, worries about inheritance or a desire to marry out of one's station rather than a lust for power. The crime under investigation in classic detective fiction is almost always an ingenious one-off rather than part of an habitual pattern of behaviour, albeit that a second crime might prove 'necessary', not least to allow for plot development. In detective fiction, analysis of what it might feel like to, as Sekula has it, 'lack [...] moral inhibition' (2015: 16) is not often to the forefront either, because the investigation and the investigator rather than the criminal, tend to be the focus in such works. There are exceptions, especially in the 1930s: C. S. Forester, Francis Iles and Nicholas Blake all wrote novels from the perspective of the criminal and commentators of the

period, such as Dorothy L. Sayers, made efforts to encompass these apparent outliers within the genre. What were initially characterised as generic 'deviations' came to be recognised as a subgenre (Stewart, 2017: 124–5).

Reviewing *The West Pier* in 1951, Arthur Calder-Marshall approaches the issue of Gorse's relationship to Heath, and the relationship between the criminal and society, from a different angle, suggesting that:

By the year 1946 Mr Hamilton had established his claim to certain areas of the urban wilderness sufficiently strongly for it to be remarked that the flagellant murderer George Nevil Heath [sic] had obviously belonged to the *Hangover Square* crowd. It was as if a creature of Mr Hamilton's brain had broken from the lines of type and run amok in the real world, without the constraint which that author laid upon his meanest villains (Anon [Arthur Calder-Marshall], 1951: 564).

Notably, *Hangover Square*, Hamilton's novel of 1941, is set in 1938–9 and contains a number of moments of anticipation of historical events that the reader knows will be coming (principally the outbreak of the Second World War) but which the protagonist, George Harvey Bone, can, for much of the novel, only nervously anticipate. If Heath's, and indeed Gorse's, appearance masks his depravity, Bone enacts this split between civilisation and barbarity differently, switching throughout the novel between two different states of consciousness, one of which is explicitly murderous. Netta Longdon, the focus of Bone's hopeless desire when he is in his 'normal' mood, is the object of an *idée fixe* with deadly intent when he is in his 'dead' mood, and the novel culminates in the murder of both Netta and her friend Peter, an erstwhile member of the British Union of Fascists. Netta is also characterised as having fascist sympathies and thus although their politics is not Bone's principal motivation for killing her and Peter, the implication is that the pair to some extent deserved their end. The moral qualms their deaths might provoke in the reader are smoothed over by Bone committing suicide immediately after he has killed them. In



terms of Calder-Marshall's suggestion that Heath is like a fictional character without (or rather outwith) the constraints of fiction, it is the threateningly virile and brutish Peter, rather than Bone, whom he resembles.

In describing Heath as having 'broken from the lines of type', Calder-Marshall refers to the words on the page, but an echo is also discernible of comments he makes at the start of his review:

Each age produces its typical figures [...] the type figures of today are the displaced persons: not merely those Stateless unfortunates trying to create semblances of a society on the sites of old concentration camps, but their predecessors from Stephen Dedalus onwards, the faithless, the uprooted, the lonely souls who crowd the lodging-houses of modern cities [...] Gorse is an atavistic type, of the sort that achieves distinction in a war, but in peace, for lack of a socially approved enemy, falls on society itself (Anon, 1951: 564).

Calder-Marshall's conceptual leap from the literal displacement of 'displaced persons' (or DPs) to the 'atavistic' Gorse is striking, but a point is being made here about the anomie of modernity and the existential as well as practical consequences of rootlessness: notably, while *The West Pier* makes skilful use of the Brighton setting with which Hamilton, a native of Hove, was very familiar, Gorse also spends a good deal of his time on the move from one town to another, fleeing the consequences of his actions. In using the word 'type', Calder-Marshall also echoes the narrator, who in the opening pages of *The West Pier*, characterizes Gorse as a particular 'type, rare but identifiable [...] by a shrewd observer, they can be discerned and classified without mistake' (Hamilton, 1992: 3). It is noted that while characterised by 'dumbness and numbness [...] [d]uring wars, or in periods of social upheaval, they appear, as if vengefully, to come into their own, to gain ephemeral power and standing' (1992: 13–14). This characterisation of Gorse as potentially recognisable to the reader asks the reader to draw not only on their experience but on individuals they know by reputation. In a letter to his brother Bruce about *Mr Stimpson and*

*Mr Gorse*, Hamilton again uses this word, expressing a concern about his depiction of Mrs Plumleigh-Bruce, who is Gorse's unfortunate victim in that novel: 'I have written about a *type*, while completely neglecting to create an individual – the result being *lifelessness* and *unreality*' (Jones, 1991: 326, emphasis in original). As these comments indicate, by the interwar years, the word 'type', used as a standalone noun rather than as a qualifier, had come to have a largely negative or derogatory connotation.

Considering Gorse as a 'type' nuances any sense that the trilogy could be read as a straightforward roman à clef and means that Hamilton gives himself freer rein to refashion both Heath's story and his context. Rather than being a portrait of an individual, the trilogy is more akin composite portrait. In a criminological context, composites, as developed by Francis Galton, were supposedly a way of identifying types, a method that focused on habitual criminals. The sense that there might be a correspondence between appearance and action or potential action is what is under the surface of the labelled photograph of Heath, but questions of photographic identification have further resonance in relation to Heath's case. Although Heath was identified as a suspect in the murder of Margery Gardner prior to the discovery of Doreen Marshall's body, for fear of prejudicing any future criminal case the Metropolitan Police decided only to circulate a photograph of him to other forces rather than to release his photograph to the public, a decision that was later criticised by, among others, Marshall's parents (O'Connor, 2013: 99). Heath, who had written to the police after the discovery of Gardner's body, claiming that he had lent his hotel room key to another man, gave a false name when he was eventually arrested and, confronted with his own photograph, initially denied that it was of him (O'Connor, 2013: 301). The fixation on Heath's appearance in newspaper reports can therefore be read as a belated attempt to recognise him. It is now too late to warn the public not to approach him, but there seems to be a vague hope here that a lesson could be learned for the future. The photograph is of a specific individual, but it is implicitly being used to warn the reader against the type of which he is a specimen. The idea that Heath may not be unique is both reassuring and not. If he is not unique, we can learn to avoid his type; if he is, it is already too late.

If for Galton common offenders can be grouped into categories, then the (paradoxically) exceptional criminals, many of whom are mentioned by name by Hamilton, seem also, in his analysis, to form a class. Gorse is compared to George Smith and Thomas Neill Cream at the start of *The West Pier*, but in the opening pages of *Mr Stimpson and Mr Gorse*, Hamilton goes further and refers to more recent criminals:

He would have served [...] as a perfect model for, or archetype of, all the pitiless and not-to-be-pitied criminals who have been discovered and exposed in the last hundred years or so in Great Britain.

He had a touch of Burke and Hare of Edinburgh [...] of Dr Pritchard of Glasgow; a touch of the multitudinously poisoning Palmer; of the strangely acquitted Madeleine Smith; of Neale Creame [sic] the Lambeth harlot-poisoner; of George Smith, the bath-murderer; of Frederick Bywaters, Ronald True, Sydney Fox, Frederick [sic] Mahon, Neville Heath and George Haigh.

And added to this he had a pronounced touch of one who thought never of murder but incessantly of money – the false and foolish claimant to the Tichborne Estate (Hamilton, 1992: 285).

Gorse is described as an 'archetype' but the list of criminal names that follows includes some who would succeed him as well as his predecessors, including Heath himself. The fictional Gorse therefore seems, temporally, to transcend the historical record, but this comparison also reminds the reader that the criminals mentioned here are themselves 'known' to the public only through their representations either in the press or in crime writing. Hamilton's mistakes with some of the proper names here – 'Neale Creame' instead of Neill Cream, 'Frederick' rather than Patrick Mahon – could be simply careless errors on his part, but they also invite the knowing reader to identify and correct the slip, and, in the process, reveal their own immersion in the cultural narratives that are being cited. Commenting on the comparisons Hamilton draws here, Maclaren-Ross notes, drily:

These are big claims – the criminological equivalent of declaring a promising young novelist to be the equal of Hardy, Conrad and Henry James – but they will doubtless be justified by the iniquities that Gorse has still to commit (1956: 58).

Though the majority of these criminals committed, or were accused of committing, murder, the circumstances of their crimes or alleged crimes were enormously varied. Perhaps their only common factor is their notoriety. Hamilton mocks the popular discourse about historical and current criminal cases that was prevalent both at the time he was writing and the time he was writing about, and which tended to reduce these individuals to a few stock identifying features (the ‘bath-murderer’; the ‘harlot-poisoner’). These are based on their actions rather than their personalities, which remain largely opaque.

The inclusion of Heath alongside Victorian and Edwardian murderers cuts against the distinction that Orwell famously made in his essay ‘Decline of the English Murder’ (1946) between ‘classic’ and ‘contemporary’ murders. Orwell identifies the period between 1850 and 1925 as having prompted a wealth of ‘newspaper write-ups, criminological treatises, and reminiscences by lawyers and police officers’ (1946: 99) relating to particular notable criminal cases, and suggests that more recent crimes are unlikely to live in the public memory in the same way. Orwell’s counter-example is the case of Elizabeth Jones and Karl Hulten, who undertook a crime spree that included murder but which, in Orwell’s view, signally lacked the underpinning of ‘strong emotions’ or the motive rooted in the preservation of respectability that characterises, for instance, the Madeleine Smith case (Grant, 2013). The idea that violent and apparently motiveless crimes could be subject to the multiple re-tellings and long-running public interest that these earlier cases have generated seems to Orwell highly unlikely. At the same time as critiquing the environment that might have led to crimes such as Jones’s and Hulten’s, he decries their sensationalised representation. In this context, including Gorse alongside George Smith could be

viewed as making him safe by placing him at a distance. On the other hand, the reader is reminded that even though they might now be distant in time, those other criminals should not be viewed through a nostalgic lens.

One might presume that fiction would be better equipped than other kinds of discourse to provide insight into criminal psychology. In fact, the reader learns little about Gorse's interiority over the course of this series of novels. We share his reflections on how particular practical problems might be overcome, and his anxiety at the points when it seems he might be about to be caught, but we are not party, as readers, to any prolonged consideration of the morality of his behaviour on his part. Writing to his brother Bruce after the publication of *The West Pier*, Hamilton commented:

I will *never* get really into [Gorse's] skin [...] it is impossible to tell (it is for me at any rate) what really goes on in the heads of the criminal-maniac, Brides-in-the-Bath-Smith, Ronald True, Neville Heath, Haigh, etc. type. They are, I think, sort of *somnambulists*. They live in a sort of dream – an evil dream (Jones, 1991: 312, italics in original).

Both a cause and a consequence of the difficulty he expresses here is that Hamilton, also well-known as a playwright at this period, makes extensive use of dialogue, and often brings into focus the thoughts of Gorse's interlocutor rather than those of Gorse himself.

In *The West Pier*, Gorse pursues a young woman called Esther and sends anonymous letters to cause a rift between her and his well-meaning and blameless friend Ryan. Esther opens up to Gorse about her savings, encouraging him to guess how much she has put away and eventually admitting that it amounts to £68 15 shillings.

‘Well – I'd call that a pretty tidy sum – if you ask me,’ said Gorse. ‘And where do you keep it all?’

‘In the Post Office. Of course, I hardly ever draw on it. But it gives you a sort of feeling of security.’

'Yes, it must,' said Gorse.

'And I do draw on it a little, every now and again [...] I've gone and told you another lie...'

[...]

'What is it this time?' asked Gorse.

'Well – my money isn't really in the Post Office. My mother tells me to say it is, that's all. It's at home.'

'At home!' said Gorse.

'Yes.' (Hamilton, 1992: 150–1).

Having established the location of her money without really trying, Gorse endeavours to borrow a small sum from Esther before they part, having arranged to meet again:

Gorse indulged in more deep thought on his way back to Norton Road.

He now had two schemes on hand. One concerned Ryan. The other concerned Esther. Esther's sixty-eight pounds, fifteen shillings had interested the precocious and enterprising young man very much (Hamilton, 1992: 155).

In both these examples, Hamilton omits key pieces of information that the reader might expect to be given, most strikingly, in the first instance, what Gorse thinks when he learns about Esther's savings and her ready access to them, and, in the second example, what he is actually thinking about on his way home. The reader may well consider Esther to be foolish when she shares information about herself as a way of establishing a degree of intimacy with Gorse; Gorse is often shown getting the better of his interlocutor and the reader is invited to take his side of the argument, only later being asked to step back and consider the moral consequences. This strategy can be compared to the technique Hamilton employs in his play *Rope* (1929), in which Brandon and Granillo discuss their feelings about the murder that they commit, at the very start of the action, and then hold a party during which they flirt with revealing their crime to their guests, who include the family and friends of their victim, Ronald Kentley. Having seen the killers conceal it there, the audience

shares the secret that Ronald's body is in a chest that is centre stage throughout the action. In each case, the reader, or audience member, is asked not necessarily to sympathise with the perpetrators but to enjoy the tension created by the possibility that they might inadvertently reveal their crime.

Hamilton might have felt ill-equipped or simply unwilling to delve into the workings of the criminal mind; although he read some Freud in the 1920s, he was not convinced by Freud's ideas and found them incompatible with his Marxist beliefs (Jones, 1991: 187). For the reader Hamilton's reluctance to depict Gorse's interiority can compound the enigmatic nature of Gorse's behaviour, the sense that it is beyond explaining, or that, for Gorse himself, it requires no explanation. But from another perspective, Gorse's behaviour is contextualised to a greater extent than Heath's was. Writing in 1951 in the introduction to the *Notable British Trials* volume on the Heath case, Macdonald Critchley, a medical practitioner, took the competing descriptions of sanity and responsibility in medicine and the law as the chiefly 'notable' characteristic of the case. He suggested that under the law as it stood, the verdict and sentence were correct, but 'Had there been in existence a concept of diminished responsibility and also some special psychiatric institution, Heath might perhaps have found his way there under an indefinite sentence' (Critchley, 1951: 50–1). This claim fits with Critchley's belief that Heath was 'a victim of psychopathy, not of insanity' (1951: 40), with the former condition being insufficiently understood in a judicial context and revealing the oversimplified nature of the distinctions made by the M'Naghten Rule.

Nigel Walker and Sarah McCabe suggest that the term "psychopath" began to be heard in roughly its modern sense in British criminal courts about the end of the 1939–1945 war' but that, particularly in the higher courts, it 'cut no ice' with lawyers (1973: 215). However, some who worked at the intersection of psychiatry and law did try to bring the term into wider use in the interwar years. Edward Glover, co-founder of what became the Portman Clinic, member of the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency and President of the British Society of Criminology, had something of a public profile in the mid-twentieth century as a contributor to radio discussion programmes and publications about psychology and

criminology aimed at a general readership. In 1922, in a speech to members of the Magistrates' Association, a group whose members, with advice from the probation service, would have a key role in sentencing in the lower courts and in dealing with juvenile offenders, he noted that the psychopath's childhood was characterised by 'anti-social demonstrations' and that later

he may become a liar, cheat or imposter, has frequent clashes with the law and exhibits no sign of guilt for his misdemeanours. His emotions are extremely unstable and frequently his sexual life is abnormal. In extreme cases he may be guilty of crimes of violence [...] he may appear extremely plausible and exercise a certain amount of charm, so that he has little difficulty maintaining an aspect of normality and is usually taken by his fellows to be normal (Glover, 1960: 16–17).

Glover suggests that identifying psychopathic tendencies as evidenced by less serious offending and offering treatment could prevent escalation to more serious crimes: the inability to feel or express a sense of guilt or responsibility for a criminal offence is significant because in a judicial context this could often be taken to indicate incorrigibility and could therefore have an impact on sentencing. This situation further compounds the sense that the psychopath presents a challenge to the very narrow definition of insanity offered by the M'Naghten Rule, especially because of the explicit association of psychopathy with anti-social conduct at this period. David Jones notes that David Henderson, a student of Adolf Meyer, one of Glover's teachers, and a key figure in defining psychopathy in a criminological context, believed that 'psychopathy had to be understood not simply as a problem for society; here were psychological states that could only be fully understood in terms of their social context' (Jones, 2015: 174). While the popular press provided one narrow form of context when they characterised Heath as a man about town, what was lacking, as Critchley notes, was any detailed sense of the factors earlier in Heath's life that might have influenced his behaviour.



In 1957, Giles Playfair and Derrick Sington used Heath as a case-study in their book *The Offenders*, a volume that went to press just as the Homicide Act, which, as I have noted, modified but did not abolish capital punishment, came into law. Glover's focus on the early life of the defendant is echoed by Playfair and Sington who devote much of their essay to exploring Heath's childhood and the signs that might have been discerned there for a propensity towards violence, noting that no information about Heath's early life was shared with the court. Playfair and Sington campaigned for the abolition of both capital punishment and prisons, believing that greater efforts should be made to treat, rather than punish, certain categories of criminal. They assert that Heath was 'indubitably a psychopath' (Playfair and Sington, 1957: 3), while admitting that this is the 'broadest and vaguest of psychiatric classifications' (5) and arguing that psychoanalytic theory can help explain not only Heath's behaviour, but attitudes towards him:

All men have their dreams, their fantasises. If these concern shameful or forbidden actions, as they often do, especially in one's sleeping hours, the so-called normal man is prevented by fear of punishment or fear of public opinion or by conscience, or a combination of all three, from trying to realise them. If, on the other hand, they are legitimate desires, he will work methodically to attain them; he will bide his time [...] But the psychopath cannot be prevented or deterred by fear of punishment or fear of public opinion; the only public that he recognises, fundamentally, is himself, and this is a public without a conscience (39–40).

The wish to punish the psychopath stems, Playfair and Sington argue, from the ordinary citizen's desire to believe that 'there are people more wicked than he is, and he can and does believe this when criminals are convicted who have practised what he has only imagined and hated himself for imagining. They are his scapegoats' (1957: 40). Characteristic of the general public's desire to assuage its own guilt about sending convicted criminals to the gallows is the attribution of a supposedly 'rational' motive for the crime, one that helps in constructing the criminal as an

evil, forward-thinking mastermind rather than as mentally ill. This is how Sington and Playfair explain the widely circulated rumour that Heath murdered his second victim Doreen Marshall in order to try to give weight to an insanity defence. To all appearances, Heath is a rational individual and the rumour attempts to extend this rationality even to his criminal activities.

In Heath's case, the reading of criminality back onto appearance extended beyond the focus on his face, with its associations to anthropometrical techniques of reading character. Other aspects of his self-presentation were also subject to scrutiny, not least because, in the absence of testimony from Heath himself, other signifiers came more sharply into focus. The newspapers commented on the care he seemed to have taken with his personal grooming, but the *Daily Mail* suggested that he had crossed a barely discernible boundary of social acceptability: 'the handkerchief was a little too far out of his breast pocket, the Air Force tie (to which he had forfeited the right) a trifle too aggressively knotted' (Ramsey, 1946: 3). Elsewhere, I have discussed how the sartorial choices of Patrick Mahon, tried and found guilty of murder in 1924, were similarly dissected, the conclusion being that, especially in the context of a court hearing, making an effort with one's appearance could all too easily be read as a cynical performance (Stewart, 2017: 142–3). As Matt Houlbrook has argued, the widespread introduction of 'ready-to-wear suits and hire purchase' in the 1920s 'made fashionable menswear more affordable, while the impulse to read identity from sartorial details persisted' (2016: 37). Indeed, the ability to 'read' small details such as the set of a pocket handkerchief became more important precisely because ready-made clothing potentially made it easier to cross social boundaries. *Mr Stimpson and Mr Gorse* illustrates how well-attuned Gorse is to the ways in which such small details can speak. When he first encounters Mrs Plumleigh-Bruce, who will become his next extortion victim, he is described as having made careful choices where his appearance is concerned:

He wore in these days [...] dark blue suits which were well made. His shoes were expensive and always immaculately clean. So also were his shirts and ties. He carried a rimless monocle [...] When he was younger the monocle

had been made of plain glass. Now he had the sense to have a lens made, one suitable to a person with slightly short sight. On his left finger he wore a gold ring with a cornelian stone upon which was engraved the crest of a family to which he did not belong (Hamilton, 1992: 288).

In allying himself with groups to which he does not belong – a particular family, or, as he does later, a regiment – Gorse creates a sense of self which is projected outwards, offering his interlocutors a way of classifying and interpreting him. For the reader, the fact of these choices being made so cynically (the replacement of plain with prescription glass) is a key to his character that those who interact with him within the narrative are unable to share, or at least, not until it is too late.

An example of such belated recognition occurs at the climax of the final volume in the trilogy, *Unknown Assailant*, where we see Gorse explicitly engaging with how his crimes have been depicted in the print media. His latest embezzlement victim, Ivy, has had her suspicions raised by Gorse's 'mysteriously cheap' briefcase, which she recognises as being out of kilter with the story he has told her about himself. Gorse decides to leave Ivy tied up in some woods, in order to enable himself to make a getaway, and he does what the narrator describes as 'a weird and yet perhaps very characteristic thing':

He felt in his breast pocket for his wallet, and produced from it a cutting from a newspaper.

The cutting was from the *News of the World* and the matter dealt with was the case, already known to Ivy, of the girl who had been tied to a tractor and robbed of her money not far from King's Lynn. [...] [Gorse] was fantastically proud of this reference to himself (as "the unknown assailant") in the famous newspaper, and at last he was able to show it to someone to whom he could identify himself as the unknown assailant (Hamilton, 1992: 648).

In using the description 'unknown assailant', the newspaper, known for dealing in salacious and scandalous content, borrows quasi-legal terminology. There is a paradox in Gorse claiming that this label refers to him, because of course once

the 'unknown assailant' has a name, he will no longer be 'unknown'. What Gorse takes pleasure in is the idea of both remaining 'unknown' but having one person, the unfortunate Ivy, acknowledge his skill at evading capture. Gorse, then, revels in the label of 'unknown assailant'; for Heath, retrospectively labelled a charming man about town by the press, no current diagnostic category could re-inscribe his vicious behaviour as a symptom of illness rather than a demonstration of criminality.

The kinds of anxieties about the fit or lack of fit between appearance, social status and personality that are evident in both the depiction of Heath's crimes and in Hamilton's fiction were increasingly prevalent in the post-Second World War period. War is an agent of social change but also of disconcerting social disruption and, as contemporary reviews of Hamilton's work indicate, the Second World War was seen, in this regard, to intensify the class disruption that was experienced in the wake of the First World War. It also intensified fears about how dangerous, violent masculinity could be controlled and defined, whether within the confines of the courtroom or in the pages of fictional and factual narratives of crime. This is another reason why, in the early 1950s, Gorse could speak to both then and now.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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