

Making sense:
Convergence in Crime Narratives

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In the small hours of a late September morning in 1927, Police Constable George William Gutteridge was fatally shot in a quiet country lane in Essex. The case was significant in its day because of its victim and perceived barbarity, and also because it was the first case in which forensic ballistics was used to secure a conviction in a British court. Today it is largely forgotten, relegated to histories of forensic science and the local history of Essex, popping up occasionally in true crime magazines and omnibuses. My interest in this crime stems partly from family and local history (I was born in Essex and have a Gutteridge ancestor) and partly from curiosity about why this crime, which was compared in its day to the case of Dr Crippen,¹ has faded almost entirely from memory. Like any high-profile murder case, the Gutteridge murder generated a vast quantity of documentation: notes from the police investigation; evidence collated by the prosecution and defence; trial transcripts; press clippings; prison records; books and book chapters and, later, magazine articles, documentaries and dramatic film and radio reconstructions. Anita Biressi argues in her critical analysis of the true crime genre that

even as we, critics or general readers, acknowledge the extra-textual experience of particular crimes we still know of them only through the textual evidence of trial transcripts, interviews, newspaper features and so on. Any “event” is accessible only via the form of its retrospective construction.²

In this paper, I will look at the press coverage³ of the crime, investigation, trial and aftermath with an eye for its narrative constructs. Specifically, I will note commonalities with detective fiction of the day that

shed light on the shared ideology of the narratives' writers and audiences with regard to the crime and expectations of detection, capture and punishment.

Stuart Hall has argued that

In the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal "rules" by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a "story" before it can become a communicative event.⁴

This, coupled with Biressi's statement above, suggests that all of the documentation produced by this event shares a basic narrative function. Indeed, Robert Scholes argues that "For writing to be narrative no more and no less than a teller and a tale are required",⁵ and H Porter Abbott argues that narratives are something we start creating "almost from the moment we begin putting words together."⁶ Under this all-inclusive definition, it is clear that the media reports surrounding a particular crime are as much narratives as are crime fictions and true crime accounts. Constructing narrative is, as the above quotes suggest, a universal human trait, essential not only to the way in which we make sense of our world, but indeed the process through which reality is mediated and therefore by which we construct our identity. Peter Brooks argues that "Our very definition as human beings is very much bound up with the stories we tell about our own lives and the world in which we live."⁷ What I hope to show is that the crime reportage surrounding this crime and the detective and crime fiction of the same period share not simply the basic common denominator of making sense through narrative, but that journalism and fiction display a shared ideology by which they (and by extension their readers) make sense of crime, criminality and justice. Roland Barthes argues that

Narration can only receive its meaning from the world which makes use of it: beyond the narrational level begins the world, other systems (social, economic, ideological) whose terms are no longer simply

narratives but elements of a different substance (historical facts, determinations, behaviours etc.). ... one can say that every narrative is dependent on a “narrative situation,” the set of protocols according to which the narrative is “consumed.”⁸

This acknowledges that narrative is a two-way process, and that the author and audience must share a pre-conception of what is being communicated. Newspaper stories display the editorial style of the individual newspaper through such things as the use of illustrations and photographs, the number and types of headings used, which elements of the story are emphasised, the amount of descriptive language, or direct quotation, or indeed sensationalism or speculation, down to where the story appears in the newspaper itself. These constructs and the way in which the content is expressed through them are instructive of the connotations (in Barthes’ sense of the second level of signification⁹) that the author expects the audience to share.

Similarly, Stephen Knight argues that the content, plot and form of crime fiction serve to produce ontological and ideological content that reflects the period in which they were written.

The content of the text, its omissions and selections, is important. Plot itself is a way of ordering events; its outcome distributes triumph and defeat, praise and blame to the characters in a way that accords with the audience’s belief in dominant cultural values – which themselves interlock with the social structure.¹⁰

Biressi notes that the “story of crime, jurisprudence, policing and penal reform has always been conveyed as moving progressively towards an ideal balance within modern society.”¹¹ The early twentieth century was an “age of optimism”, when

Informed popular opinion thought that crime was lessening, that the established penal system was fundamentally sound, but that that system could be rendered even better by constructive and forward-looking improvements.¹²

The contemporary press reporting of the murder of PC Gutteridge illustrates an approach to crime which fits within this “forward looking” model, with authors foregrounding the detective work and the new developments in forensic ballistics that led to the conviction of William Kennedy and Frederick Browne for the murder.

In his seminal study of popular fiction, John Cawelti notes that “the classical detective story begins with an unsolved crime and moves toward the elucidation of its mystery”¹³ and, because the majority of actual crimes begin this way, real life crime and its detection have always shared a border with fictional representations of the same. “Crime and literature”, says Cawelti, “have been in it together from the beginning.”¹⁴ Indeed, Charles Dickens, one of those credited with the invention of the English detective story, went on patrol with Inspector Field of Scotland Yard in the 1850s and wrote articles for *Household Words* in praise of the London force. He went on to write Field into *Bleak House* (1852) as Inspector Bucket, the first *police* detective (as opposed to eccentric private sleuth) in English literature.¹⁵

In his definition of the ‘mystery’ story, Cawelti states

The fundamental principle of the mystery story is the investigation and discovery of hidden secrets, the discovery usually leading to some benefit for the character(s) with whom the reader identifies ... In mystery formulas, the problem always has a desirable and rational solution, for this is the underlying moral fantasy expressed in this formulaic archetype.¹⁶

What journalists call mystery and the way it is reported suggests an anticipation of a “desirable and rational solution” led by the police and legal system. As Frank Leishman and Paul Mason have pointed out,

While criminologists are acutely aware of the phenomenon of the attrition rate, which reveals that fewer than 5 per cent of all offences committed are cleared up, and only around 2 per cent actually end up in a conviction ... media coverage can thus serve to induce in the public

mind, an inflated impression of both crime solvability and police prowess in detection.¹⁷

Journalists and crime fiction authors both deal mostly with murder stories. As Robert Reiner has noted “From the earliest studies (e.g. Harris 1932) onwards, analyses of news reports have found that crimes of violence are featured disproportionately compared to their incidence in official crime statistics.”¹⁸ Similarly, crime and detective fiction deal mostly with murder and violence, which in the fiction of the early twentieth century were invariably solved, allowing the restoration of the social status quo.¹⁹ The supposition presented by the press on why Browne and Kennedy did what they did to Gutteridge can be likened to the fictional detective’s uncovering of a secret which “once discovered and explained ... is no longer capable of disturbing us” – Cawelti’s definition of the formula ending of the mystery story.²⁰

The Gutteridge murder happened in a period known in detective fiction as the “Golden Age”, when the “classic” detective story was being written and read in copious quantities. Sherlock Holmes was still eminently popular, but Agatha Christie was just getting into her stride with Poirot, Lord Peter Wimsey had been created by Dorothy L Sayers, and there were many, many others producing the same formula with varying levels of skill. Invariably the murders in these stories are committed extra-textually, posing a puzzle for the detective to solve, and they are usually set in artificially closed groups, frequently in country manor houses, villages or other symbolically “idyllic” places.²¹ W H Auden, a self-confessed detective story addict, declared that

the country is preferable to the town ... The corpse must shock not only because it is a corpse but also because, even for a corpse, it is shockingly out of place, as when a dog makes a mess on a drawing room carpet.²²

Such is the Gutteridge murder, and the press reporting on it certainly made heavy use of the “death in a country lane” angle. The physical murder of PC Gutteridge is extra-textual, posing the beginning of a murder mystery: the only witness at the point of the mail man’s discovery is also the literal body of evidence, from which various interpreters will create a coherent story that attempts to make sense of the chaos of torn flesh, mashed bullets, a blank notebook and a tyre mark in the grass.

The first reports were carried in London’s two evening newspapers (the *Evening Standard* and the *Evening News*) on the day of the murder:

**MURDERED POLICEMAN SENSATIONS
CONSTABLE’S BODY WITH FOUR BULLET WOUNDS**

One of the strangest murder mysteries of recent years centres round the death of an Essex rural police-constable, who was found with four bullet wounds in the head by a mail van driver at 6 a.m. to-day.

The dead man is P.C. Gutteridge, of the Essex County Police, and the discovery was made at the roadside near Stapleford Abbots, about seven miles north of Romford. The spot is only about 300 yards from the dead man’s home. ...

The Essex Chief Constable today called in the help of Scotland Yard, and Chief Inspector Berrett, one of the officers responsible for the successful Brixton taxicab murder investigations, arrived at the scene of the tragedy with Detective-sergeant Harris, of the C.I.D., this afternoon.

Two bullets have been found by the police near the scene of the crime – fired from a heavy revolver of the bulldog type. The constable was in a sitting position, with a pencil in his hand and a notebook on his knee. ...

The theory is that a motor gang whom the policeman held up were concerned in the tragedy.²³

The choice of headings and of the facts that lead the article demonstrate the points that the journalist deemed most newsworthy and eye-catching. Notably, the stress on the “murder mystery” aligns the press reporting with the idea of a detective story, and the early note that Scotland Yard detectives have been called in – and specifically one that is already accredited with the successful solution of another recent murder - confirms the course of the narrative towards resolution.

The use of the heading styles featured above, and of column headings such as “The Murderers’ Secret”, “The Open Notebook” or “His Wife’s Ordeal”²⁴ were a relatively recent innovation in journalism, developed in response to the new reading public of the late nineteenth century. After the Education Act of 1870, a whole new class of readership appeared – the literate working classes – which one historian describes as “a public with simple tastes, a keen hunger for information predominating.”²⁵ Pioneering editors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century realised that this readership would not be engaged with slabs of small print and verbatim reporting: an acknowledged pioneer of what became termed “the new journalism”, W T Stead, introduced “scoops”, investigative journalism, in-depth interviews, and eye-catching headings and sub-headings to break up columns.²⁶ Compare these headings from the Gutteridge reportage:

The Man from Basingstoke (*Evening Standard*, 28 Sept 1927, p.1)

THE SCENE OF THE TRAGEDY (*The Essex Chronicle*, 30 Sept 1927)

ROMFORD MAN’S STORY (*The Times*, 5 Oct 1927, p.14)

with these from various Agatha Christie novels:

The Man from the Asylum (*The Big Four*, 1927)

The Scene of the Crime (*The Murder on the Links*, 1923)

Mrs Renauld’s Story (*The Murder on the Links*, 1923).

It’s a superficial comparison perhaps, but it’s clear that headings and fiction chapter titles have similar functions for similar audiences.

In his pithy demolition of Golden Age detective fiction, Raymond Chandler makes some observations which chime with the flavour of the press reporting of this period. The death of PC Gutteridge is quickly subsumed in the eager pursuit of the detective story, and most of the

reporting is done in what Rob Reiner calls “degree zero clinical language” in which “no emotional or evaluative adjectives are used to colour the report.”²⁷ Indeed, the *Times* even avoids the detail that Gutteridge’s eyes were shot out by his assailants, a point which was noted by all other papers and used as an index to the criminals’ brutality. This, and the somewhat sycophantic reporting of police activities and the generally horrified yet sensational editorialising, suggest a readership not unlike the readers of detective stories that Chandler calls “flustered old ladies - of both sexes (or no sex) and almost all ages - who like their murders scented with magnolia blossoms and do not care to be reminded that murder is an act of infinite cruelty.”²⁸ The press reports move quickly from the death of the constable to the classic detective cat-and-mouse story, in pursuit of what Auden calls the “restitution” demanded by society on behalf of the victim.²⁹

At 7pm on the evening of the murder a man in the south London suburb of Brixton, 40-odd miles from Stapleford Abbots, found his local bobby to tell him that there was a car abandoned in the passageway beside his house. By this time a GP living at Billericay had informed police that his car, a blue Morris Cowley with the registration TW6120, had been stolen in the night (incidentally the only other reported crime in the area), and it seemed likely to the investigating officers that this was the car Gutteridge had stopped. The car in Brixton was indeed the doctor’s missing car, and Brixton police found dark red spots and a boot print on the driver’s side running board, evidence of a collision with a grassy bank, an unaccounted for 42 miles on the odometer and a spent cartridge case beneath the passenger seat. All the doctor’s medical instruments were missing.

The press had a slew of new clues to report the day after the murder, and the case was progressing as any good mystery story should. The cartridge case and three bullets recovered from the scene of the crime and autopsy were handed to Robert Churchill, the day’s foremost ballistics expert (now regarded as “the father of ballistics”).³⁰ He determined that they

were two different types of obsolete ammunition – Mark IV and Mark II – fired from a service-issue Webley .445.³¹

Golden Age detectives owe a debt to Holmes for their ratiocinative debunking of apparently mysterious crimes, which only the detectives can demolish, clue by clue, and reveal the hidden truth. Most notably, it is their scientific analyses of small signs, illegible to others, which defines them as detectives, invoking the rational god of science to resolve the irrational mystery. Similarly, the press make much of the science of forensics and particularly ballistics, which eventually proved to be the key evidence in the case and was used for the first time to bring a conviction in English law. Just three days after the crime, the *Evening Standard* put Churchill on the front page, peering down his newly commissioned comparison microscope under the headline “Murder Under The Microscope”.³²

As we’ve already seen, the Gutteridge murder was universally described as a “mystery” from day one by the press. The positioning of the crime as a mystery immediately positions the detectives as uniquely equipped to provide the solution, whose deliberations will be interpreted and narrated by the press for the fascinated reader. Much of the newspaper reporting moves swiftly from the initial “mystery” posed by the discovery of the body to the detection and anticipated apprehension of the perpetrators. To continue Cawelti’s definition “... the detective story formula centres on the detective’s investigation and solution of the crime,”³³ or, as Auden succinctly put it, “The basic formula is this: a murder occurs, many are suspected; all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is arrested or dies.”³⁴

In the Sherlock Holmes stories, Dr Watson is the narrator, describing for the reader his adventures with the great detective. He is also the “naive narrator”, allowing Holmes’ methods to be elucidated through questions that Holmes then answers for the reader’s benefit. Steve Chibnall points out

that the twentieth century has seen a paradigm shift in journalism, particularly with regard to “objective reporting”:

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the journalist’s traditional role of independent commentator on events gave way to that of professional translator and negotiator between audiences and institutions.³⁵

Thus the press can be argued to stand in Watson’s shoes and, just as Watson was chastised by Holmes, it can also be argued that they have “a fatal habit of looking at everything from the point of view of a story”.³⁶

As the narratologists quoted at the beginning of this paper argue, creating stories is also part of being human: we observe, and from our inevitably incomplete and subjective observations, we create meaningful narratives. We construct endings, morals-of-the-story and fill in blanks, until we have something that feels whole. In the case of fiction, an author is free to choose what’s revealed, when it’s revealed, what’s left for the reader to guess at and, indeed, what constitutes the story. Journalists have to make sense of information they’re given, supplemented with what they can find out and their own speculative gap-filling, arranging it into a structure that fits not only the demands of a continuing coverage (in the case of an ongoing investigation) but also the physical restrictions of column inches and the temporal demands of serialisation.

The field of media studies has also long since defined the criteria needed to make a story newsworthy and to keep it so. To parenthesise Galtung and Ruge, for an event to cross the threshold of newsworthiness, it has to have elements that fall into one or more of the following categories: unexpected, close to home, of significant dramatic impact, involving a well-known person, and be essentially negative.³⁷ In specific relation to crime, Steve Chibnall’s seminal study which examines reporting from 1945 to 1975, points out that crime reporting is “essentially negative” and adds additional “professional imperatives which act as implicit guides to the construction of

news stories” which include “immediacy” (“what has just happened”), “conventionalism” (“the situating of emergent phenomena into existent structures or meaning”) and “structured access” (sources that are accessible to journalists).³⁸ As the story ages, the threshold of “newsworthiness” becomes harder to cross, and the story requires the introduction of new elements, often in new categories, to remain in print.³⁹

While the early clues of the case were coming thick and fast in the first few days of the investigation, the newspapers optimistically printed that arrests were expected imminently after every new clue. A young boy found a Webley on the Thames foreshore and the river was dragged for discarded weapons. But none of the weapons recovered matched the cartridge case. The “man from Basingstoke” who confessed to the murder on day one turned out to be a serial confessor. A tin of bullets was found in a park wrapped in a handkerchief with the name “A. H. Miller” embroidered on it. Miller came forward and had nothing to do with the crime. A second man confessed, only to retract when he sobered up.

And that, for four months, was that. The police steadily gathered material, somewhere in which was a coherent case, but which in the absence of a denouement became a non-story for the press. Every lead led to a dead end and, while Berrett and Harris had their suspects, they had no evidence that could be constructed into a case for arrest, let alone trial and conviction for murder. But reportage demands progress – and progress that fits the chronology of newspaper issues. In pressland, even a week is a long time – five instalments for the dailies – ten for those with a daily and evening edition – plus the Saturday and Sunday editions, all without news. From as early as October, the *Times* took to printing “Police investigations into the murder of the Essex constable continue” once a week while the tabloid press kept interest alive with speculation and fabrication. On the Sunday after the murder the *Sunday News* printed an article purporting to be an interview with Rose Gutteridge:

**WIFE'S DREAM PICTURE OF P.C.'S DEATH.
BODY IN BACK OF MOTOR CAR?
Vision of Tall Leader Who Ordered Confederates To Shoot.
"COME ON, WE MUST ALL BE IN IT."**

With the important exception of the abandoned car found in London, clues in the singularly brutal murder of the Essex constable are proving elusive. It is now practically certain the revolver and cartridges found after the murder have no connection with it, while finger prints from the car have not led to hoped-for developments. The wide search continues, and has spread to Manchester and beyond.

In a dream, the recounting of which sounds like a vivid chapter from "Maria Marten" or "The Bells,"⁴⁰ Mrs. Gutteridge, wife of the policeman, saw, as she thought, the whole scene of the murder re-enacted. She believes her husband stumbled unwittingly upon a great crime and that there was a gagged and bound person—or dead body—in the back of the motor-car.⁴¹

A brief letter written by a local police superintendent who visited Rose the day this article appeared notes "the whole of it relating to her alleged dream and interview are untrue, and ... she is consulting a solicitor on the matter tomorrow."⁴² A month later, the *Daily Express* published a sensational letter from a man calling himself "Zimmerman" who stated that he had found the Morris Cowley while journeying "from a certain place in remote Essex ... with lamps lighted and engine running" and had driven it to Brixton. As to his belated revelation, he wrote:

I could quite see that the fact that I had been for many hours alone in Essex within easy distance of where the tragedy happened was a point I could not hope to explain satisfactorily to the police as I had foolishly yielded to the temptation to purloin the abandoned car I should be ridiculed as a liar for certain Therefore I have kept silent but I think now it best to tell some unprejudiced person the truth so that the police may not attach undue importance to Brixton and so find the assassin in Essex [lack of punctuation original].⁴³

Like the infamous "Dear Boss" (and other) letters received by the press during the Jack the Ripper investigations, this was dismissed by Berrett as a circulation-boosting hoax. In these instances, it is clear that some journalists

were not averse to writing outright fiction to maintain reader interest and artificially move the story along with new “clues”. Berrett’s reports note that he also actively tried to keep press coverage going, referring to articles that he “caused to be circulated” during the long months where there was nothing to report but dead ends. These articles included reminders to the public of the penalties for harbouring known criminals and appeals to “the women who know” who the perpetrators were.

These particular articles illustrate the public service role that the press undertook, assisting police enquiries by appealing to the consciences of those members of the public who might have information.⁴⁴ Numerous articles also refer to the police’s “combing out” of criminal haunts, or of the investigation being thwarted by “friends” who were hiding the criminals.⁴⁵ They also speak to a specific assumption regarding the failure of detection, one which is shared by the ideology of detective fiction: if the brilliance and science of the detectives – and not just any detectives, but Scotland Yard detectives – could not reveal the murderers, then somebody must be deliberately hiding them.⁴⁶

Clive Emsley notes that

the fascination with the detective and particularly with his need to penetrate the underworld, to know its ways, its language and its membership made him a significant literary figure from early on in the eighteenth century.⁴⁷

Penetrating the underworld has been described by many critics of Golden Age detective fiction as a key ideology of the genre. In his influential remarks comparing literary detectives and the *flâneur*, or observant stroller of the city’s streets, Walter Benjamin suggests that the genre’s ideological roots lie in the industrial revolution and the movement of populations into anonymous, impersonal cities in which “the masses appear as the asylum that shields an antisocial person from his persecutors”.⁴⁸

As the above articles show, there was an assumption that out there in the anonymous masses of readers, there were those who knew “whodunnit”.

On 9 October 1927 *The News of the World* offered a £1000 reward for information that would lead to an arrest – a huge sum given that Gutteridge’s widow was granted a special pension of £78 a year, plus £15 10s for each of her two children to the age of 16.⁴⁹ On 26 November, the coroner’s inquest recorded an open verdict. ““The Yard” baffled.” read the headline in *The News of the World* the following day.⁵⁰ On 15 January 1928, the tabloid put its reward up to £2000 and published an appeal from Gutteridge’s mother. The paper thus inserts itself into the narrative to create newsworthiness, generating for itself the next instalment.

It was at this point the case “broke”.

A small-time crook named Currie⁵¹ came forward to Sheffield police. He stated that he’d recently been involved in housebreaking with two men, Frederick Guy Browne and William “Pat” Kennedy (who was known as “Two Gun Pat”, much to the delight of the press). Browne had been top of Berrett’s original (alphabetised) list of possible suspects – he was well known as a car thief to both Berrett and Harris and known to carry guns. His criminal file was on Berrett’s desk two days after the murder. Importantly, Currie was able to tell Berrett that Browne owned a garage in Clapham.

In the last week of January 1928, Browne was arrested at his garage. The arresting officers discovered several weapons in Browne’s garage, including a .445 Webley, and a box with mixed Mark IV and Mark II ammunition, which he said Kennedy had given him. Churchill later positively identified the gun as the one which had fired the cartridge case found in the stolen car.

**SECRET RAID ON GARAGE.
DETECTIVES’ LONG VIGIL.
THREE ARRESTS.**

After an all-day observation, in which telephone lines were watched and the greatest secrecy was maintained, detectives entered a garage at the back of premises in Northcote-road, Battersea-rise, S.W., shortly after 8 o'clock last night.

Three men found near the premises were arrested.

A number of detectives were still at the garage two hours after the raid and others joined them in motor-cars.

The detectives had found it necessary to take into their confidence a number of residents before they were able to carry out their plans.

According to one report detectives were supplied with revolvers shortly before the raid.⁵²

The first press reports of Browne's arrest make no connection to the Gutteridge case, which makes this minor story about the arrest of an unnamed garage proprietor by "The Flying Squad" an odd thing to put on the front page (as the *Daily Express* did). It speaks to a very high level of cooperation between police and press: journalists were there to report their observations and interview onlookers, which suggests a tip-off from the police, but at no point do they spill the beans on who is arrested, or that Berrett is waiting in the wings to interview him about something much bigger than car theft.

If the subterfuge was to keep Kennedy in the dark, it didn't work. Shortly after Browne's arrest, Kennedy fled to Liverpool. With a bit of painstaking detection that didn't make it to the pages of the newspapers, but was singled out for praise within the police documentation as singularly thorough, he was found within a week and arrested by a local Detective Sergeant, William Mattinson, who knew Kennedy well.

I said;- "Hullo, Bill, come on".

I was approaching from his left hand side. He switched round facing me and at the same time said;- "Stand back, Bill, or I'll shoot you". He whipped an automatic pistol from his right hand coat pocket and thrust it beneath the point of my ribs on the right hand side of my body. As he did this I heard a noise – but in the excitement of the moment I can't be definite what it was. It certainly was a metallic click".⁵³

When Robert Churchill was handed the weapon, he found a bullet lodged in the barrel – in the “excitement of the moment” Kennedy had failed to release the safety catch.

For the police and press alike this was a great development. It made sense both in terms of the narrative construction required by the ongoing story in the press and in terms of the building evidence against Kennedy. He acted exactly how a villain should – a formidable adversary endangering the life of yet another policeman.

Kennedy made a statement in which he said he and Browne stole the doctor’s car and were stopped by Gutteridge, and that Browne had shot the constable. Browne said he was in bed at his lodgings at the time and knew nothing of it except what he’d read in the papers. But with one of the guns in Browne’s possession traced positively to the cartridge case in the car and, through the car, to the scene of the crime, Berrett had enough to present a coherent case to the Director of Public Prosecutions. They were charged jointly with Gutteridge’s murder and were brought to trial at the Old Bailey in April 1928.

In Golden Age detective fiction, the solution to the mystery is revealed by the detective in the denouement for which Agatha Christie is particularly famous. The detective presents and dismisses each suspect, pointing the finger at last at the real murderer who, as often as not, breaks down in a dramatic psychological unmasking in the face of such overwhelming perception into their darkest selves.

Even without the luxury of dictating the live pace and process of a criminal investigation, the press also made use of the revelatory denouement once the charges had been brought, and seemed to expect the villains to display their “true nature” once captured. After months of speculating on the type of men these “motor-bandits” must be – “desperadoes”, “outlaws”, “brigands”, it is hardly surprising that some sections of the press would use even the most spurious means to portray the

villains' "true nature" now that they had been "unmasked". The *Daily Mail* interviewed the "famous playwright" Frederick Lonsdale on what he thought of Browne at the conclusion of the trial, an article which speaks volumes of the concept of the criminal class of the day and of the views of the right-wing press:⁵⁴

The contrast between Browne and Kennedy was remarkable, although both were dreadful men. Browne actually wore the waxed moustache of the stage villain. He had deep-set eyes—very cunning ones—and a brutal chin, which, when he was excited, almost doubled in size. Throughout the trial Browne was acting. His voice, though, was coarse, screaming, shouting, high-pitched.

Kennedy, on the other hand, was the amateur criminal compared with the master—small and stupid but wicked-looking all the same. The curious thing was that he had an extraordinarily charming voice, refined and educated.

...

Browne was the worst man I have ever seen. You felt that nothing that Edgar Wallace had ever written about the criminal type was exaggerated. Browne and Kennedy were the real thing. I am quite certain that either man was capable of committing any fiendish murder you care to imagine.⁵⁵

The trial took place in April and, as was common at the time, proceedings were published blow by blow and largely verbatim. This too generates a satisfying denouement, each deposition, exhibit and cross-examination a revelation leading to the guilty verdict. Long synopses and opinion pieces demonstrated the "inevitability" of capture and the (now coherent) chain of clues. The "official" narrative was complete. The press reports and full trial transcripts went on to form the basis of the first true-crime publications on the case in the respectable *Notable British Trials* and *Famous Trials* series.⁵⁶

Browne and Kennedy were convicted in a week and sentenced to hang largely, in the absence of Currie, on the basis of the ballistics evidence and Kennedy's statement. Appeals based on claims that the two should have been tried separately and that Kennedy's statement was extracted under

duress were summarily dismissed. It was quite improbable that the prosecution of the case should fail, given that the cultural ideology of the time, as Auden's earlier statement suggests, demanded that "the murderer is arrested or dies."⁵⁷ "The ideology is clear", John Scaggs says of a review of the fate of the villains in Sherlock Holmes stories, "Crime will always be punished, either by the law or by divine providence."⁵⁸ By the time of their capture, Browne and Kennedy were the feared desperadoes of press speculation, the personification of the threat to social order signified by the brutal slaying of a village bobby. "We can only wonder," the Bishop of Barking had opined at Gutteridge's funeral, "that there are men who could do such a dastardly thing. Are they men? Did they bear the name of Englishmen?"⁵⁹

Once convicted, Browne and Kennedy were subject to an interesting journalistic treatment in the tabloid press that saw Kennedy accused of terrorism and even of being Michael Collins' assassin (based on his own self-aggrandizing boasts about connections with Sinn Fein) and Browne depicted as something of a "noble outlaw" – a man with intelligence and integrity who simply took a wrong turn in life. *Reynolds's Illustrated News*, a Sunday tabloid that ran synopses of main news stories (particularly crime, tragedy, political scandal and war news) alongside leisure articles such as serialised detective fiction (for example, at this time they ran Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*), published a serial entitled "My Exploits as a Bandit", purportedly written by Browne. The serial draws attention to the fact that a number of newspapers ran their fiction serials alongside crime reportage, and in the newspapers of the period, the vast majority of the serials were detective or crime stories.

Browne and Kennedy were hung simultaneously on 31 May 1928 at HMP Wandsworth and HMP Pentonville respectively.

When the sentence of hanging was carried out, few papers did more than briefly report that the deed was done – for them, the pronouncement of

the death sentence marked the conclusion of the story. Scaggs notes that “what is significant about crime fiction from its formulation by Poe on ... is that the punishment of the criminal is rarely, if ever, described.”⁶⁰ Scaggs relates this to the “widespread assumption ... that the crime of murder, as one of the most extreme crimes imaginable, carried with it in most societies of the time the most extreme punishment: the death penalty.”⁶¹ Similarly, few of the newspapers in 1928 did more than note that the execution had been carried out. Only the *Daily Mail* and the *London Illustrated Police News* went further. This newspaper’s illustrative content and didactic editorial style are echoes of the earliest true crime narratives, the popular seventeenth century “murder ballads” or the eighteenth century *Newgate Calendar* or *The Malefactor’s Bloody Register*, both of which sought to warn against the evils of crime by detailing violent crimes of the day and the punishment meted out on the perpetrators, complete with illustrations.⁶² Inevitability of capture – at that time by the long arm of god’s law rather than that of the police – was heavily emphasised. Joy Wiltenburg argues that rather than simple titillation or church and state propaganda,

Sensationalist crime accounts build their emotional potency on both a visceral response to violence itself and the quasi-religious dilemma posed by transgression of core values. ... Linking violent crime and criminal justice procedures with a prescribed emotional response both personal and communal, these works have been a powerful means of constructing both shared values and individual identity.⁶³

The *London Illustrated Police News*, with its ink drawings reminiscent of wood-cut images, had depicted an imaginative reconstruction of the crime itself in October 1927, of Kennedy’s near-shooting of Mattinson in February 1928, and now completed the story with illustrations of Browne walking “firmly to the scaffold” with his head held high.⁶⁴ This final instalment depicts not the penitent villain of the seventeenth century murder ballad, but the defiant pride of the modern “professional” criminal, a man with his own moral code that separated him from the rest of society.

Stephen Knight argues that

major examples of crime fiction not only create an idea (or a hope, or a dream) about controlling crime, but both realise and validate a whole view of the world, one shared by the people who become the central audience to buy, read and find comfort in a particular variety of crime fiction.⁶⁵

I hope to have shown that the relationship between accounts of the Gutteridge crime by share features with the “Golden Age” of detective fiction with which the crime coincides.

In wading through the textual evidence of “trial transcripts, interviews, newspaper features”,⁶⁶ left in the wake of the Gutteridge murder, I have found that from the most sensationalised accounts (such as the *Sunday News* report focusing on the “Red Gleam” it speculated to have appeared in the dying constable’s eyes, published in the same edition that carried the fabricated account of Rose Gutteridge’s dream⁶⁷) to the most conservative and “objective” reporting of the *Times*, narratives generated by this event, while differing in editorial style, are linked by the ideology that is also reflected in detective fiction of the period, characterised by a confidence in the ratiocinative abilities of Scotland Yard detectives, in the new tools that science and technology could bring to bear in the game of cat-and-mouse between police and criminals, the assumption that criminals would inevitably meet with judicial punishment, and an optimism that the “conquest of violence”⁶⁸ was well underway.

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¹ Crippen murdered his wife, Dora, in 1911. Her remains were found buried in the basement of their home, and Crippen was subsequently tracked and arrested. His arrest was made possible after the captain of the ship Crippen had boarded to flee to America alerted the authorities by using the radio; the first time this form of communication was used from a ship.

² A. Biressi, *Crime, Fear and the Law in True Crime Stories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 17.

³ I use the term press rather than 'media' advisedly: in 1927 television was still 26 years away; radio was just five years old and still under contract to the Fourth Estate for its news synopses (A. Briggs, *The Birth of Broadcasting*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). Cinema news bulletins at this time tend to favour 'good news' or 'adventure' news, such as aviation feats and royal activities. They seem not to pick up stories which are open ended, preferring instead those with a planned start and conclusion.

⁴ S. Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-79*, ed. S. Hall, et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 129.

⁵ R. Scholes and R. Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 4.

⁶ H. P. Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

⁷ Cited in *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸ R. Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," in *A Roland Barthes Reader*, ed. S. Sontag (London: Vintage, 1966/2000), 286-7.

⁹ 'Myth today' in R. Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Vintage, 1957/2000).

¹⁰ S. Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 4.

¹¹ Biressi, *Crime, Fear and the Law in True Crime Stories*, 43.

¹² J. A. Sharpe, *Judicial Punishment in England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 88-9.

¹³ J. G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 81.

¹⁴ J. G. Cawelti, "The New Mythology of Crime," *boundary 2* 3, no. 2 (1975): 326.

¹⁵ R. M. Morris, "'Crime Does Not Pay': Thinking Again About Detectives in the First Century of the Metropolitan Police," in *Police Detectives in History 1750-1950*, ed. C. Emsley and H. Shpayer-Makov (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 81ff, 82.

¹⁶ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, 42.

¹⁷ F. Leishman and P. Mason, *Policing and the Media: Facts, Fictions and Factions* (Exeter: Willan, 2003), 12.

¹⁸ R. Reiner, "Media-Made Criminality: The Representation of Crime in the Mass Media," in *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, ed. M. Maguire, R. Morgan, and R. Reiner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 307.

¹⁹ D. I. Grossvogel, "Agatha Christie: Containment of the Unknown," in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, ed. G. W. Most and W. W. Stowe (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

²⁰ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, 43.

²¹ Grossvogel, "Agatha Christie: Containment of the Unknown."

²² W. H. Auden, "The Guilty Vicarage," in *Detective Fiction: Crime and Compromise*, ed. D. Allen and D. Chacko (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1948), 404.

²³ "Murdered Policeman Sensations," *The Evening Standard*, 27 September 1927, 1.

²⁴ "Policeman Murdered near London," *The Evening News*, 27 September 1927, 1; "Two Bullets Found in Dead Policeman Mystery," *The Evening Standard*, 27 September 1927, 12.

²⁵ H. Herd, *The March of Journalism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1952), 236.

²⁶ H. Örnebring and A. M. Jönsson, "Tabloid Journalism and the Public Sphere: A Historical Perspective on Tabloid Journalism," in *The Tabloid Culture Reader*, ed. A. Biressi and H. Nunn (Maidenhead: Open University Press/McGraw Hill Education, 2004).

²⁷ R. Reiner, "Media, Crime, Law and Order," *The Journal of the Scottish Association for the Study of Offending* 12, no. July (2006): 16.

²⁸ R. Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder," in *Detective Fiction: Crime and Compromise*, ed. D. Allen and D. Chacko (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1950), 397.

²⁹ Auden, "The Guilty Vicarage," 402.

³⁰ M. Hastings, *The Other Mr Churchill: A Lifetime of Shooting and Murder* (London: George G Harrap & Co, 1963).

³¹ This was a period when thousands of demobbed servicemen still had their weapons – one newspaper stated that 'at a rough estimate there are still 5000 people in London alone who served in the war and

who are still in possession of .445 ammunition.' ("London Murder Search to-Day in Elephant Area," *The Evening Standard*, 29 September 1927, 10.)

³² "Murder under the Microscope," *The Evening Standard*, 30 September 1927, 1.

³³ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, 81.

³⁴ Auden, "The Guilty Vicarage," 400.

³⁵ S. Chibnall, *Law-and-Order-News: An Analysis of Crime Reporting in the British Press* (London: Tavistock Press, 1977), 33.

³⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventure of Abbey Grange*, cited in R. R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

³⁷ J. Galtung and M. Ruge, "Structuring and Selecting News," in *The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media*, ed. S. Cohen and J. Young (London: Constable, 1973/1965).

³⁸ Chibnall, *Law-and-Order-News*, 23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.; Y. Jewkes, *Media and Crime* (London: Sage, 2004).; Galtung and Ruge, "Structuring and Selecting News."

⁴⁰ *Maria Marten* was a play popular throughout the 19th century based on a famous Sussex murder of 1827, also known as 'the murder in the red barn.' Maria was killed in the barn by her lover and buried beneath its floor; legend had it that Maria's mother-in-law had a dream which revealed to her the crime and the location of the body. *The Bells* may refer to the poem by Edgar Allen Poe, but it seems unlikely in the context.

⁴¹ "Wife's Dream of P.C.'S Death," *The Sunday News*, 2 October 1927.

⁴² Letter from Supt. Wood, Brentwood Divisional Headquarters to the Chief Constable of Essex Constabulary, 2 October 1927 (Essex Police Archive).

⁴³ "New Turn in Shot P.C. Mystery," *The Daily Express*, 4 November 1927, 1.

⁴⁴ Leishman and Mason, *Policing and the Media*, 16, 36.

⁴⁵ "Murdered Essex Policeman. Inquiries in South London.," *The Times*, 23 January 1928;"Police "Comb" To Find Murderer," *The Daily Mirror*, 10 October 1927.

⁴⁶ In reality, every police officer knows that if the crime hasn't 'self-solved' within the first week (usually by way of a confession by someone close to the victim), the likelihood of solution drops rapidly to close on zero (Leishman and Mason, *Policing and the Media*, 12.). Here, the time-limit that both press and police place on how long a crime remains viable correlate.

⁴⁷ C. Emsley and H. Shpayer-Makov, eds., *Police Detectives in History 1750-1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 8.

⁴⁸ Cited in T. Bennett, ed., *Popular Fiction: Technology, Ideology, Production, Reading, Popular Fictions* (London: Routledge, 1990), 214.

⁴⁹ Untitled column, *The Times*, 10 Oct 1927, 23

⁵⁰ "'The Yard" Baffled," *The News of the World*, 27 November 1927, 4.

⁵¹ Currie is a tricky character in the story. He was motivated by the *News of the World's* £2000 reward, and Berrett's reports on his interviews with Currie carefully explain why he nevertheless believes he is a credible witness. Much to their obvious chagrin (there are letters between the Chief Constables of the forces involved where Currie's name is carefully omitted or indeed left blank), the police corroborated Currie's claim on the reward, but were embarrassed by the media circus 'our friend Currie' (Berrett's ironic phrase) created by claiming it and also by selling his story to the *Daily Mirror*. Currie was never called as witness in the subsequent trial, perhaps in an effort to deny him any more publicity.

⁵² "Secret Raid on Garage," *The Daily Mail*, 21 January 1928, 9.

⁵³ Deposition of DS William Guthrie Mattinson, Liverpool City Police, 26 January 1928, (DPP1/86), 1.

⁵⁴ This article was printed beside a piece by Viscount Rothermere (owner of the stable of newspapers that included *The Daily Mail*) entitled 'What Mussolini Really Stands For'; an article in favour of Fascism in the form of a review of a recent publication, *The Universal Aspects of Fascism* by James Strachey Barnes.

⁵⁵ F. Lonsdale, "Browne, the Stage Villain," *The Daily Mail*, 28 April 1928, 12.

⁵⁶ J. H. Hodge, ed., *Famous Trials Iii: Browne & Kennedy - Sidney Fox - Mrs Florence Maybrick - Steinie Morrison - Dr Buck Ruxton* (London: Penguin, 1950);W. Teignmouth-Shore, *The Trial of Frederick Guy Browne and William Henry Kennedy* (Edinburgh: William Hodges, 1930).

⁵⁷ Auden, "The Guilty Vicarage," 400.

⁵⁸ J. Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005), 25.

⁵⁹ "Men without Hope," *The Sunday News*, 2 October 1927, 1.

⁶⁰ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 44.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² J. Wiltenburg, "True Crime: The Origins of Modern Sensationalism," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 5 (2004): 41-52.

⁶³ Ibid.: 1379-80, 1396.

⁶⁴ *The London Illustrated Police News*, "Browne and Kennedy Executed for their Cruel Crime", 7 June 1928, 5

⁶⁵ Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, 2.

⁶⁶ Biressi, *Crime, Fear and the Law in True Crime Stories*, 17.

⁶⁷ "Red Glean in Dying Constable's Eyes," *The Sunday News*, 2 October 1927.

⁶⁸ To borrow from T. A. Critchley, *The Conquest of Violence: Order and Liberty in Britain* (London: Constable, 1970).