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## Troubled men: ageing, dementia and masculinity in contemporary British crime drama

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# **Troubled Men: Ageing, Dementia and Masculinity in Contemporary British Crime Drama**

## **Abstract.**

Focussing on three recent British film and television crime dramas, *Mr Holmes*, *The Fear* and the English language version of *Wallander*, this article argues that older men in these texts are a site through which contemporary social and cultural anxieties about ageing and dementia are played out in highly gendered ways that link to social and philosophical reflections on power, autonomy and selfhood. The dramas, while very different in affective orientation and tone, nonetheless all produce reflections on the meanings of memory loss within figurations of masculinity in the crime genre which have a broader significance for thinking through the representational dilemmas of dementia.

## **Keywords**

Crime drama, dementia, masculinity, narrative, ageing

## **Introduction**

In the closing scene of the final instalment of the BBC co-produced, English language version of *Wallander* (2008-2016), the eponymous detective tells his father that 'it's just moments now, Dad, everything, just moments now ... they don't join up my memories, my life doesn't join up'. For the detective, whose job it is to see that everything 'joins up', and to demonstrate to the reader or audience that the past can be reconstructed into an orderly arrangement of cause and effect, the challenges of Alzheimer's disease is understood as instituting a crisis of selfhood and autonomy, expressed, in part, as the loss of ability to narrate. In this article, I explore the representation of male figures with memory impairment and dementia in three British

crime dramas: *Mr Holmes* (2015), *Wallander* and *The Fear* (2012), by focussing on the dynamic between genre and gender. Following Charlotte Brunsdon's suggestion that crime drama 'in its many variants works over and worries at the anxieties and exclusions of contemporary citizenship' (2000: 197), I suggest that a gendered cultural fear of age-related mental deterioration and a concomitant loss of authority and autonomy is one of the anxieties currently being worried at and worked over in recent British crime drama.

The affective and emotional tone of these dramas varies considerably but, taken together, they produce a range of reflections on the widely reported 'crisis' in the mental health of an ageing population (Swinnen and Schweda 2015). In a cultural climate prone to anxiety and aversion in confronting dementia (Basting 2009) how do crime drama's traditional reassurances of enigma resolution and narrative closure respond to the crisis of narration that dementia and forgetfulness appears to pose? Whilst the oft quoted 'crisis of masculinity' appears to have abated in the critical lexicon, nonetheless are there specifically gendered aspects to the portrayals of forgetfulness that this genre is uniquely placed to exploit?

### **Age, dementia and narration in British crime drama**

British crime and detective narratives across film, television, literature and its various adaptations frequently have 'older' men and women at their centre. British television alone includes, to name but a few, the eponymous Christie sleuths *Poirot* and the multiply incarnated Miss Marple, the 'loved' *Inspector Morse* (Thomas 1995), the middle aged, middle Englander Tom Barnaby in the much derided blood-soaked yet weirdly soothing *Midsomer Murders* (Bergin 2013), and 'Jack' of the similarly long running *A Touch of Frost*. Consistently, these older detectives are characterised by

cerebral acumen and cognitive competence. Thus the dementia induced forgetfulness and confusions of Kurt Wallander and Mr Holmes are exceptional and noteworthy, suggestive of emergent cultural concerns and generic trends.

The term ‘dementia’ is itself an umbrella term which describes ‘a syndrome, a collection of symptoms and signs for which there are many causes and which manifests itself in a variety of ways’ (Hughes 2011 cited in Comisso 2015: 378). For the purposes of the analysis that follows, I use the term to index a ‘continuum’ of age-related conditions which involve memory loss, disorientation and confusion. Indeed, my assumptions are that these popular texts contribute to, rather than merely reflect, the circulation of ideas of what dementia means. I argue below that *Wallander* and *Mr Holmes* demonstrate the consequences of forgetting for figures (detectives) for whom the ability to narrate, to re-present actions and consequences in a way that renders them both comprehensible and meaningful is itself part of ‘who they are’ and therefore especially significant when they no longer can. As I will elaborate, my third example, *The Fear*, also draws on gendered generic tropes as it evokes the deconstruction of a ‘toxic’ masculinity.

A number of scholars have debated the limits of conventional narrative techniques for adequately representing dementia - a condition and a subject position understood to challenge the very possibility of narrative. They argue that post-enlightenment, modern, rational understandings of the self are already predicated on an idea that ‘selfhood’ entails that ability to narrate which is curtailed by Alzheimer’s, dementia and other forms of cognitive impairment and memory loss. Given this they ask how ‘post narrative’ selves can be narrated? (Kruger-Furhof 2015). The ethical implications of the ways that dementia is characterised as attacking the ‘self’ has, as Swinnen and Schweda suggest, been a concern of dementia studies across the

humanities and social sciences as they try to ‘bring alternative philosophical models of personhood to the fore in order to stress that persons are more than their brain, that personal identity does not rest on mental continuity, and that the story of dementia exceeds that of tragic loss and decline’ (2015: 11). In a recent insightful discussion of what is at stake in popular film, Folkmarson Kall suggests that some of this critical ethical work might be produced in the *reading* of texts and that ‘more productive readings are not only possible but also of significant importance for rethinking conceptions of Alzheimer's disease and other conditions of dementia as leading to a loss of selfhood and identity’ (2015: 269). The readings of crime dramas that follow are produced with a similarly strategic intention of interrogating these dilemmas of representational practice. I suggest that this is connected with the ways that the genre is generative of particular understandings and reconfigurations of masculinity. As Rebecca Feasey suggests, the crime genre has produced ‘some of the most tormented and troubled images of the male on contemporary television’ (2008: 80). Indeed, the long history of ‘male angst’ (Perberdy 2011) which associates portrayals of masculinity in crime drama quite specifically to generic expectations of torment, philosophical reflection and moral and ethical uncertainty offers suggestive links to a condition which has also garnered philosophical and ethical reflection.

### ***Wallander*: Paternal Reflections**

*Wallander* (BBC, 2008-2016), with Kenneth Branagh as both star and executive producer of the series is based on the novels of Henning Mankell and is a co-production between the BBC, Yellow Bird (who also produced the Swedish language version) and Left Bank productions. The BBC series was only one of several versions of the *Wallander* stories circulating simultaneously and transnationally, with two

Swedish language adaptations being broadcast or otherwise available in the UK and elsewhere in the same period. It is also part of a wider British appreciation of Scandinavian drama, particularly (though not exclusively) crime drama, which has amassed significant academic and media attention over recent years. Branagh's version of the Swedish Police detective has appeared in four series of three 90 minute episodes, prestigiously programmed on the BBC. The series has been widely credited with both technical innovation and aesthetic sophistication, borrowing on the cultural capital of 'Indy cinema' in both its choice of Director of Photography (Anthony Dod Mantle), its deliberately slow pace, while accruing particular forms of cultural capital from Branagh (Peacock 2014; Piper 2015:108). Helen Piper's excellent analysis of the series places it within the broader 'emergent voices' of twenty first century television detectives and draws attention to its formal characteristics:

*Wallander* both epitomises and develops the early twenty- first-century foregrounding of a widescreen high-definition aestheticized landscape, and cements its visual rupture from television crime drama of the 1990s. ... Careful composition and framing, often of spectacular sequences, quickly became a hallmark of the series, as was its vivid and expert colour grading.... A strategy in which Close-framing and a muted, dark colour palette ... is punctuated periodically by spectacular set pieces ... wild and desolate environments produce odd natural mutations, or suffer the scars of humanity's self-torture (Ibid.: 108-9).

One of the 'spectacular set pieces' analysed by Piper is the opening, pre-credit sequence of the very first episode portraying the 'lurid and horrifying brilliance of a

self- immolation in a yellow rape field’ (109) that Piper connects to a wider ‘thematic and narrative’ use in the series of the landscape, captured through ‘languorous slow pans ‘ which are coupled with ‘long takes of human subjects’ framed ‘with such calculation that sequences begin to approximate a form of meticulous filmed portraiture’ (109). My reading of the final two episodes of the series, adapted from the novel *The Troubled Man* (Mankell 2011), develops a number of the elements that Piper foregrounds and which are suggestive of new ways of reading the figuration of ageing and dementia. These are the ways that the series foregrounds what Wallander himself scathingly refers to as the ‘inner life’ of the detective and his family; how this links to the invocation of the landscape; and the significance of the partially anglicised Swedish setting.

As Piper rightly notes, the series thematically links the landscape to subjectivity. In the first two series, much of Kurt’s anxiety centres on his father, Povel (David Warner), an artist with whom he has a tempestuous and difficult relationship. Povel’s diagnosis and experience of dementia both prefigures Kurt’s own, and is explored in its own right through depictions of his obsessive re-working of a landscape painting series that enigmatically works as both symptom and transcendence of his deteriorating mental condition. The relationship between the two men is also continued after Povel’s death through recurring visual references to these paintings. This is a crucial relationship for the series which pulls no punches in representing the difficulty Kurt has in coping with his father’s aggressive frailty or the pain of his loss when Povel dies (‘The Fifth Woman’). Piper’s analysis also highlights the unusual configuration of the series, both set and shot very clearly in Sweden but with British actors speaking in English. She argues that this secures some of the social and cultural specificity of the original source material which, as I shall

return to, is concerned to highlight the failures of the Swedish welfare state. Through displacement, this also reconfigures the traditional 'routine social problems that preoccupied an earlier cycle of British TV drama' that Piper suggests are at least in part replaced with *Wallander's* unusual preoccupation with its central character and the prioritisation of an 'existential crisis in which Kurt is almost permanently embroiled' (Ibid.: 113-114). As well as potentially signalling a 'social apathy towards injustice' (Ibid.: 121) this prioritisation of Kurt's 'subjectivity over other meaning possibilities' (Ibid.) resonates with the changing profile of the broader European crime fiction genre characterised by the loss of convincing, and, thus, comforting, narrative resolutions whereby:

The old patterns of reassurance, with the inevitable triumph of the intellect and restoration of a supposedly rational, ordered, and secure world, repeatedly give way in the face of a contemporary need to foreground the complexities, ambiguities, and uncertainties of the self and society (Mullen and O'Beirne 2000: ii).

Such uncertainties of self and society are neatly encapsulated in the portrayal of Wallander's disintegration, and that of his father, while that coupling foregrounds a gendered iteration.

The thematic significance of dementia in *Wallander* is evident from the very first episode where Povel taunts Kurt with his impotence in the face of the illness, while his taunt, 'you can't solve it', explicitly links to Kurt's desire for the certainties that detection (and detective fictions) ostensibly offer. Strikingly, the ways that the series repeatedly labours Wallander's world weary angst evinces concern with the

difference made by the version of him troubled by dementia. How might we understand this troubling addition to Wallander's usual tormented, harassed and depressed self? I suggest that in the context of Wallander's semi-permanent existential crisis the inscription of Alzheimer's disease onto his default anxiety and anger, the conclusion of the series might usefully be read his groping for the connections which will both solve the crime and piece himself together, and indeed suturing these elements together. This specific figuration of Alzheimer's disease offers, as critics were quick to perceive, a surprisingly hopeful representation of Wallander's loss of memory since it draws Wallander closer to his father and daughter, and also suggests that there are indeed, things better forgotten, explicitly the series' opening sequence in which a fifteen year old girl, in the middle of a blossoming rape field, sets herself on fire. The final two episodes of *Wallander*, I suggest, mirror, amplify and even, to some extent 'resolve' the preoccupations of the series suggested here.

### **'The Troubled Man'**

The emphasis placed in the first two series on the relationship between Kurt and his father, Povel, is echoed in the final scene of the series where an hallucinatory symptom of Kurt's condition allows reunion. This ostensible familial resolution takes place within the narrative frame of the crimes to be solved. Significantly, the crimes posed by the frame involve the violent fall out of failed parent-child relationships, while their investigation is hampered by Wallander's increasingly erratic behaviour and his failing ability to link up the elements of evidence. Symptomatic preoccupations include a failure to notice that the missing of one investigation is actually in his car; and in another case, he accuses a key witness of attempting an

arson attack, when a fire at Kurt's home follows his forgetting of a kettle on the lighted gas hob. These incidents signal not only the 'diagnosis' of his degenerative illness but also, specifically, the waning of Wallander's ability to detect, to be the one who 'solves' the enigma by piecing together the fragments into a coherent whole. Nonetheless, and against the odds the crime IS solved and the detective's fear and confusion finally gives way to a surprisingly hopeful resolution.

Two elements of this representation of dementia are particularly interesting. The first is the way that forgetting is figured as at least partially offering relief from endless witnessing, and remembering, of the kinds of horror and degradation relentlessly depicted by recurrent explosions of graphic violence and its gory aftermath, suggesting that forgetting might offer solace as well as anguish, anxiety and anger. While the series registers the trauma for the detective whose witnessing of violence has created such sustained anguish, it rewards viewer's own series memory (cf. Piper 2009) with references to scenes from previous episodes, such as the rape field suicide noted above that was broadcast some 8 years previously. The viewer's memory of witnessing the scene allows alignment with the traumatised detective. But it is also interesting to note how this scenario plays out in gendered terms, particularly in relation to the gendered dynamics of care, responsibility and the paternal. The stress on autonomy, control and the perceived shame of dependency, arguably masculinist principles, is exposed in the final episode to be ethically bankrupt, flawed and misdirected with potentially disastrous consequences.

Peter Simonsen's reading of the novel on which the final episodes are based stresses that the troubled man of the title is Wallander himself, rather than his daughter's missing father-in-law whose murderous cold war treachery provides the ostensible crime to be deciphered. Suggesting that:

None of this (Cold War story, Louise's death) is really central. The centre here is Wallander himself. Wallander is troubled, and as usual, by the decline of the welfare state and its old solidarities, which have lost out to the globalized, neoliberal world and its new forms of crime and egotism (2009: NP).

Simonsen adds that the novel 'raise(s) the question that they cannot answer: who will take care of the old and the infirm? That is to say who will take care of us in an insecure future after the death of the welfare state?' (Ibid.: NP). However, the translation from the specific context of Sweden to the transcultural space that this series produces makes this question less central. As Piper suggests, the transnational production offers a central character permanently mired in a generalised angst and exhaustion which dilutes the particular social questions of the original and contrasts with many earlier British crime dramas (Piper, 2015:121). In the final fantasy resolution of generational reconciliation that this version presents, the question of social care for the elderly is glossed over in favour of the staging of our final glimpse of Kurt, not only reconciled with his father, but also his daughter and granddaughter. This finale involves a sharing of the responsibility to remember and, although the narrative certainties of the 'solution' may be lost, Kurt's anxious testimony that 'it's just moments now ... they don't join up...my memories, my life doesn't join up, can't remember' is answered by his father's phantom with the reassurance that 'someone else will remember. Someone will remember for you'.

This comforting, relatively upbeat ending is further underscored by the open expanse of sunny shoreline on which the scene is played out which contrasts sharply with an earlier scene in the episode when Wallander first hears his diagnosis. In that

earlier scene, the back of Kurt's head and shoulders are placed centre frame as he stands looking out through huge picture windows onto a suitably austere, brooding seascape. The horizontal bars of the muted grey/blue and grey/greens of the horizon, sea and land are bisected with the thin vertical lines of the window frame and form a pattern of fragmentation that seemingly radiates from Kurt's centred head, offering a visual reinforcement to the doctor's chilling prognosis announced in voiceover. Shadowed against the light, the wildness of the landscape contrasts with a tonally clinical and stark white modern interior. In narrative terms the efficient delivery of information given to Kurt, and the viewer, is brutal: 'there will be moments of disorientation and possibly some more acute episodes, it is time to be making some adjustments'. The bleakness of the diagnosis is confirmed by the melancholic anguish suggested by the soundtrack's languorous music and by the framing of Kurt in the window whereby its glass cuts him off from the living landscape, confining him within the sterile clinic as the doctor's receding voice suggests the loss of a consoling human presence. This invocation of impending isolation, mania and confusion is graphically realised shortly afterwards when Wallander goes missing, and is then found by his daughter in a heath-like field, where he is raging, tearing at his clothes and demanding, 'Are you my daughter?', in what many commentators recognise as a Lear-like fashion (O'Donovan 2016; Bamigboye 2016).

The invocation of Shakespeare's fallen giant of a patriarch is suggestive in relation not only to the casting of Branagh, well known for his Shakespearean credentials, but also in relation to Wallander's ongoing difficulties with masculine familial roles (being a good father and being a good son) and the series' hyperbolic revelling in the angst and pain of its central protagonist, inevitably linked to the generic tropes of conflict between family ties and his duty as a policeman, vested with

public authority and a moral obligation to protect the vulnerable. In the final scene, Kurt is freed both from and into 'new' familial roles and this new freedom is emblematised in his finally escaping from the literal constraints of the repeated, reflective shots of him framed in windows and mirrors which render him simultaneously obscured and revealed. In the sunlit open air of the beach, joined by his (albeit dead) father and his daughter and granddaughter, Kurt's memories and the (public) burden that they represent is lightened, shared and passed on.

Strikingly this is a story in which dementia is fully realised both in terms of narrative suspense and the invocation of elegiac mourning for the imminent loss of character/self, with the 'final episode' heralding the viewer's loss of anticipation for more of the drama, if nothing else. Even as Wallander's story arc comes to a more or less definitive close we are also given to understand the limits of the ways in which the diagnosis curtails the ongoing self. In other words, our privileged access to the character allows for both identification and empathy and so ameliorates to some extent the stigmatising and alienating aspects that many representations of dementia have been accused of producing (Burke 2007; Swinnen 2012; Wearing 2013). Figuring the isolated detective as finally embedded in mutual relations makes this a hopeful and complex reflection on the possibilities that dementia could mean not just the loss but the transformation of self, even as the series shies away from the questions raised by the source novel over the more explicitly social and political questions of care and communal responsibility.

### ***Mr Holmes* memory, narrative, fiction**

It is hard to imagine a drama further along the spectrum of the crime genre than *Mr Holmes*, though there are some similarities with *Wallander*. It too casts a veteran

British actor in the title role, Ian McKellen, whose range of theatrical and Hollywood credentials are comparable to Branagh's. It is also a BBC co-production, made under the BBC Films banner. Based on Mitch Cullin's novel, *A Slight Trick of the Mind* (2005) rather than Conan Doyle's original Sherlock Holmes stories, the screenplay portrays the great detective thirty years after retirement. The film's title, *Mr. Holmes*, immediately suggests a relationship to and a distancing from the BBC's highly successful post-millennial version of the Sherlock Holmes stories, *Sherlock* (2010- ). In addition to the BBC's self-consciously updated 21<sup>st</sup> century version of *Sherlock*, the CBS television series *Elementary* ( 2012 -) and the film version of *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) starring Robert Downey jr and directed by Guy Ritchie, meant that, like *Wallander*, *Mr Holmes* entered the marketplace amongst a number of competing reinventions of the character. This multiplicity is not unique to the current period since representations of Holmes accompany 'almost every historical, cultural and technological development in the moving image' (Barns cited in Turnbull 2014: 109) and can be linked, as Kestner has argued, to 'modes of modelling manliness for the historical epochs in which these were produced' (1997: 2). My interest here is in the consequences of 'ageing' this iconic figure and the rendering fallible of his famously celebrated intellect.

The on screen rejuvenation of Holmes in *Sherlock* through the reasonably youthful Benedict Cumberbatch in the title role can be seen as a counterpoint to the version of the detective we find in *Mr Holmes*. Here, the elderly detective's failing memory, like Kurt Wallander's, is envisaged as a crisis of narrative, of the ability to 'story' events from the past such that they can be understood and thus (re)solved. Unlike *The Fear*, as I shall come to, or *Sherlock* or *Wallander* that have contemporary settings, *Mr. Holmes* is a period drama and as such fits within the established

detective sub-genre populated by elderly and apparently benign detectives such as Poirot and Miss Marple whose television presence has quietly ensured a positive ongoing narrative of old age that counters the typical equation of aging with limiting and depreciating cognitive faculties. The temporal setting is important as action shifts between two distinct post war periods, the narrative's 1940s present and its 1918 past where Holmes's final professional case is recounted through/as flashback.

In the film's post Second World War present, a retired Mr Holmes keeps bees, lives with a war widowed housekeeper and her son, Roger, who befriends him, and who is nearly killed in the process of solving the 'mystery' of Holmes's dying bees. The convoluted narrative plots two stories, the minor mystery of the dying bees and the attempt by Holmes to remember the outcome of his final case, some 30 years earlier, involving a mysterious young woman whose husband refuses to let her procure gravestones for her miscarried babies. The attempt, and failure, to reconstruct the 'crime' and indeed to discover what the crime is, takes Holmes as far as Japan in search of a plant apparently growing in the ruins of Hiroshima with a reputation for helping to cure memory loss. The Japanese sub-plot also involves a missing father, whose son blames Holmes for the disappearance. Whilst the viewer is eventually rewarded with the pleasures of enigma resolution typical of the genre, the elaborate plot is not so much a vehicle for a classic 'whodunit' as for a story of ageing and waning ability to remain the autonomous, autocratic detective able to reconstitute and retell the past, and thus master the present. Ageing renders Holmes vulnerable and dependent on others when his memory begins to fail and the film offers a trajectory for the character that teaches him to accept this dependency and, alongside this, to finally accept and appreciate the art of fiction. In a film that is highly reflexive about the art and power of narrativisation, stories and books are shown to have significant

power to shape the world and multiple instances of how fictions shape reality are offered. Examples include the confusions created by Watson's unreliable accounts of the detective's exploits (even the iconic Baker street address turns out to be one of Watson's fictionalisations), the ways that Holmes manipulates the truth in order to secure the peace of mind of the Japanese family and, indeed, the way the film draws attention to its own narrative technique of 'foreshadowing'.

This emphasis is significant for the film's representation of the forgetfulness of dementia and the importance of different moral orders of memory. Significantly Holmes learns during the course of his investigation not merely 'what happened' but also how to come to terms with both the inevitability of dependency and the necessity of acknowledging a fundamental relationality to others. This lesson in turn allows him to find ways of remembering other important people in his life, thus finally alleviating a lifelong loneliness. Holmes learns that stories, fictions, have an important place in assuaging the grief and loss that is endemic to the human condition. Indeed, the film can be read as a story which foregrounds the inevitability of forgetting, even as it highlights the value of remembering people in ways not reliant on rationality and individual cerebral competency. At the same time, the film softens the anxiety and fear provoked by forgetting, in a resolution that shows the healing of the household's generational rifts through stories and other forms of manipulating or enhancing memory.

In bid to measure and rationalise forgetting, Holmes is required by his doctor to track episodes of forgetfulness by inscribing dots in a diary. Each dot represents a forgotten name or instance of forgetfulness and the proliferation of dots on the page give Holmes, and the viewer, a neat visual summary of his deteriorating condition. The serious threat posed by Holmes's forgetfulness is also clear in the near death of

the child, Roger, and the other accidents that ensue from his failings. However, forgetfulness in this film, whilst clearly linked to what Holmes refers to dismally as ‘senility’, is not only linked to the vicissitudes of ageing. Links are made to other forms of forgetting and younger people, such as Roger’s forgetting of the ‘invisible stories’ of his forgotten infancy told to him by his late-father, a paternal gift that his mother cannot replace and which are only restored through Holmes’s ‘stories’ and mysteries. Similarly Holmes’s final ‘forgotten case’ is revealed as the suicide of a young woman that he failed to prevent and which significantly hinged on the willed forgetfulness by her husband of their miscarried children and thus of parental responsibility. Forgetfulness in this film requires significant work to resolve and heal, and fictionalisation or narrativisation, the traditional art of the detective, is part of that work. The dots are, in the final scene, replaced by stones which Holmes uses to memorialise and thus remember his dead friends and family. The conclusion thus recasts the lone, upright and abrasive Holmes as a man willing to acknowledge his dependency on others, alive and dead.

The film’s reflection on the significance and validity of a range of ways of remembering and narrating counters the more apocalyptic, ‘monsterizing’ ideologies of the disaster scenarios of dementia. It suggests a model of a provisional forgetfulness which allows for the possibility that partial memories can be enhanced in ways that encourage the development of relationality and communication, rather than assuming their complete demise. Whilst the tone of this representation is highly sentimental and idealised, nonetheless, in a cultural landscape that has been accused of dehumanising and denying the valid narrations of people with dementia, these gentle emotional tones might in fact be culturally significant. Arguably, this is particularly the case when a character with the cultural weight of Sherlock Holmes is

invoked, offering a version of the figure which is a counterpoint to other circulating versions but also sufficiently congruent for recognition.

### **Concluding remarks: *The Fear*: Gender, Power, Patricide**

To conclude I want to briefly look at *The Fear* (2012) as a final example of a crime drama that has a male protagonist with dementia at its centre. As we have seen, *Wallander* in keeping with its 'Nordic noir' sensibility uses the recurrent theme of dementia to offer a variety of social as well as personal perspectives on its world-weary and angst-ridden central character so that the illness can begin to be read as an ambiguous form of both release and torment. *Mr Holmes* produces a narrative in which dementia and forgetting are part of the detective's experience of emotional development that enables the production of an affective tone of gentle and pleasurable nostalgia which links the film to similar comforts on offer in other period crime dramas characterised by ageing protagonists. As in *Wallander*, this allows the figuration of forgetfulness to ameliorate the worst excesses of masculinist privileging of rational autonomy to produce selves which register both the innate vulnerabilities of being human and the specific negotiation with this required by ageing men.

*The Fear*, by contrast and as its title suggests, is a crime drama whose affective dynamic is very different. In this narrative, where once again patriarchal authority and paternalist assumptions are at stake, no measure of resignation and humility in the face of waning power is accomplished. Instead, the dominant affective tone is anxiety, anger and disorientation. The film is also different since its protagonist is a criminal, not a detective, and unlike *Wallander* and *Mr. Holmes*, it ends with the death of the protagonist. Despite these differences, *The Fear* shares with

*Wallander* and *Mr. Holmes* a concern with masculine guilt and loss of memory in a previously powerful figure.

The four part Channel 4 series centres on the cognitive decline and disorientation of successful Brighton underworld boss, Richie Beckett (Peter Mullan) and the ramifications of his illness for the illicit family business. From the opening sequence of the first episode, a menacing tone is established through a noir-like atmosphere of confusion as we witness a man inexplicably follow a series of mobile phone text instructions to 'walk', at night on a shingle beach where the viewer is offered glimpses of men lying in wait with knives and then, in a series of dramatic cuts and dynamic point of view shots a bullet hurtles toward his head. Again, centring on family dynamics, *The Fear* arguably works to produce a measure of viewer identification and alignment with the, in many ways, highly unsympathetic protagonist, achieving a paranoid positioning which attaches a free-ranging guilt that the denouement, the death of the unsympathetic patriarch, does little to alleviate. As in *Wallander* and *Holmes*, themes of the enduring guilt of a man who holds himself responsible for the death of a young vulnerable woman expose the burden of paternalism on the male psyche; in all three cases men are left haunted and confused by their real or imagined accountability for the death. The burden of this (somewhat overdetermined) patriarchal script is revealed in the variously configured psychic disintegrations that the characters endure. The ideological significance of this theme in gendered terms is interesting, suggesting as it does that the burden carried by these men is correspondingly unendurable. Reading the figuration of dementia in this way highlights how the condition is used to thematise a range of discontents, covertly with the prevailing gender order and its violence for instance.

In using the condition primarily as an allegory or as an illustration of a broader theme (alienation or sociality as we have seen with *Wallander* and *Mr Holmes* respectively), the question of how the representation produces meanings around the illness, specifically in relation to the disintegration of ‘personhood’ imagined as congruent with the later stages of the condition, has not, so far, been foregrounded in my reading. *The Fear*, however, raises questions about how fictions manage the experience of disorientation and confusion to produce suspense and thus open up ambivalent forms of identification only for the character to be ultimately erased. It casts an interesting light on the ethical dimensions of representing the condition in popular fictions and indeed, *The Fear*, along with the US series *Boss* (2011-12), is used by Capstick, Chatwin and Ludwin as an example of ‘epistemic injustice’, that is an injustice against the capacity to know and to be recognised as someone who knows which they argue, is all too often produced in representations of dementia, culminating in a dehumanising tendency ‘in that people with a diagnosis of dementia are frequently presumed to be unreliable narrators, unable to give a meaningful account of themselves or their lived experience’ (2015:232). In crime drama, specifically they suggest: ‘representations of men with dementia are typically taken out of the domestic sphere and situated in contexts of illegality and corruption which carry veiled implications of what we might call “retributory pathology”’ (2015: 237). Here then, epistemic injustice operates as a form of retribution in which ‘dementia may be a punishment for a criminal or morally unscrupulous past ... a powerful and abusive male character is ultimately brought down, not by former adversaries or people he has wronged but by the ravages of rapidly progressing brain disease’ (Ibid.: 237). The authors also take issue with the ‘catastrophic decline’ that *The Fear* depicts, pointing out that it is completely at odds with the lived reality of the gradual onset of

dementia usually experienced. Whilst I agree that Capstick, Chatwin and Ludwin highlight important aspects of *The Fear* through the lens of the ethical question they raise, I would suggest that there is more to be said, not least because *The Fear* does not escape the ‘domestic sphere’. Indeed, this is primarily a story of the dramatic loss of control and descent into confusion and rage of a hyper masculine figure explored largely through the fall-out for his family. Rather than distributing a ‘retributory pathology’ the series could be read as figuring his decline into confusion and (equally problematic) offering of redemption.

Far from actually forgetting, as with *Mr Holmes*, dementia offers a privileged, though enigmatic and confused access to the past wherein guilt is ultimately assuaged. As with *Wallander* and *Mr. Holmes*, the death of a young girl troubles the protagonist’s conscience, though as it turns out, erroneously. Initially we are invited (or forced) to share, through subjective camerawork and restricted positioning, the protagonist’s confusion as to what has taken place and how past and present relate. However, as the series progresses and the various confusions are resolved, we are invited to collude with the logic of the drama that views the confused and deranged male authority figure as both too dangerous and too damaged to be allowed to live. In the final sequence of the series we return to the initial scene and this time as we see him shot dead we understand that we are in fact witnessing a scene of quasi-suicidal, quasi-patricidal ‘mercy killing’ by his wife, who has been revealed as the guilty *femme fatale*. In order to end the cycle of extreme violence that has ensued from his unpredictable behaviour and which threatens his family and recognising that he is ill, Richie enigmatically but authoritatively makes his intention to die to save the family known ‘I may be ill but I’m not stupid’ he tells his sons after an anguished plea: ‘I can’t go on like this, I can’t do it, help me’. Sacrificing himself to the (stereotypically

portrayed) Albanian gang that he and his younger son have enraged, Richie walks on the beach where the gang waits to butcher him. In the second iteration of the scene, we know that the text messaged instructions come from his son and are necessary because by the time he arrives at the beach Richie has forgotten why he is there. In terms of epistemic (in)justice then, *The Fear* certainly conforms to a view of dementia which renders it a dangerous pathology and crudely advocates for death as an alleviation of the suffering it causes. Here, the recirculation of the dominant fiction is highly pernicious, as is the suggestion that this death is partly redemptive because it maintains the masculine code of honour explicitly threatened by the condition's annihilation of specifically gendered forms of power. Further to this, similarities in the film's structure and opening to those of the classic noir/ melodrama *Mildred Pierce* (1941) (also on a moonlit beach) offer a noirish twist whereby the condition itself can be read as a conduit for uncovering the guilt of a woman that further confirms the masculine code of honour.

The particular pleasures offered by crime and detection narratives are frequently said to hinge on comforting promises to the reader/ viewer to resolve the puzzles thrown up, to restore the confusions of past events with a revised ordering and to bestow coherence and order on enigmatic fragments and incidents. Gillian Beer, links the emergence of the detective story in the nineteenth century to a preternatural sensitivity 'to the processes of forgetting and to the extent of what has been forgotten' (1989: 17) that she suggests resulted from a new awareness of 'vast swathes of "prehistory"' and 'the problem of storying events prior to the human and regardless of the human' (Ibid.: 21). As she suggests 'the detective or mystery story emerges as the form in which it remains satisfyingly possible to go back and rediscover the initiation of a history ' (Ibid.: 18)

Something of the same logic might help us understand the tensions in the detective and crime dramas discussed here. In a cultural climate in which fear surrounding individual forgetfulness and the spectre of a dementia ‘epidemic’ loom very large, crime dramas can offer a chance to explore these fears through incorporation into their narratives and at the same time work toward a resolution and reparation that is ultimately comforting in that it works as a denial of the troubling confusions that have been revealed. In *The Fear*, this can be seen in the gratifying resolution of a ‘paranoid plot’, which potentially renders the viewer as anxious and confused as the protagonist. In *Mr Holmes*, connection and social integration is made possible through accepting mutual support in remembering and creating new stories. In *Wallander*, forgetting not only enables Kurt to become reconciled with his family but ultimately helps him to lift and share some of his weight of existential angst that has been his defining characteristic.

Returning to Charlotte Brunsdon’s formulation, these crime dramas are structured by anxieties over how cognitive frailty and impairment trouble masculine identifications, gendered roles and the related ability to author(ise) the self. The compromises in terms of autonomy, self-reliance and power that these men experience as a result of age-related forgetfulness suggest that these are masculine accommodations of perhaps wider significance. In working over and worrying at these the genre produces some ambivalent consolation by reconstituting family relationships and recovering (some) narrative certainties. In the process, and by contrast to many of the representations of dementia which are currently circulating, they adopt a sometimes surprisingly optimistic tone, and suggest that possibilities for emotional growth can be found even in the midst of an otherwise bleak condition.

Thus, these 'troubled men' function to trouble ideas about dementia, ideas about masculinity and ideas about the crime genre.

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