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# Structures of Authority: Post-war Masculinity and the British Police

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The idea of a policeman conjures up different impressions in different countries. In New York, it is of an Irishman, quick-tempered and somewhat threatening; in Paris, it is of a gesticulating figure, fussy about minor regulations; in London, it is of someone rather slow, very solid, but essentially good-humoured. There is no accident about these different national characteristics. They spring directly from the conception which each country has of what its police ought to be. In Britain, the basic conception is that police are civilians whose job is to protect and to help their fellow-citizens.

(Martienssen [1951] 1953: 14)<sup>1</sup>

[P]olicing is always also ... a *cultural* institution and performance, producing and communicating meaning about the nature of order, authority, morality, normality, subjectivity, and the like.

(Loader and Mulcahy 2003: 39)

- 1 The British police procedural of the 1950s has attracted little critical attention, a neglect that is perhaps attributable to its investment in structures of authority that would, by the end of the decade, be entering a state of crisis and transformation. This article will begin to address this neglect by examining the circumstances surrounding the emergence of the procedural in Britain and the contexts within which these novels flourished. It will also examine the extent to which the more substantial body of criticism dedicated to crime cinema in the period offers viable categories of analysis for detective fiction. Building from this existing body of criticism, the article will look at the fictional construction of police authority, exploring what this might tell us about the cultural

anxieties surrounding masculinity in the postwar period. In particular, I will consider the tensions at play in the evolving police hero and, considering his relationship to earlier modes of popular fictional heroism, ask whether the procedural can actually be seen as a generic innovation?

- 2 Cinema historians Sue Harper and Vincent Porter (2003) have argued that the 1950s witnessed a “decline of deference” that emerged from the gradual breakdown of postwar social consensus. Although economic growth and the welfare state ensured that both middle and working classes enjoyed unprecedented security and consumer choice, material benefits were offset by the emergent instability of fundamental structures and values. The international authority of the nation—and long-cherished constructions of British imperial identity—would be severely damaged by the humiliation of the 1956 Suez crisis, while at home a generational transition was under way that would, by the 1960s, profoundly trouble conventional hierarchies and “family” values. From the juvenile delinquent to the angry young man, neither the working classes nor the younger generation could be relied upon entirely to know their place. This “decline of deference” would not fully impact on policing until the 1970s, but the gradual fracturing of consensus would undermine the concept of the policeman as “citizen in uniform,” a model dependent upon the “informal control processes of deference, family, stable employment, and social inclusion” (Reiner 2011: 132). In terms of policy, the 1950s are thus perceived nostalgically as the calm before the storm—a “golden age” of police legitimacy (Loader and Mulcahy 2003: 3)—and this has deflected attention from what was, paradoxically, a radically new moment in terms of the *representation* of the police in popular culture. In cinema, fiction and on television, the British bobby, long established as a figure of fun to be mocked by eccentric amateur detectives, became a new hero for the postwar world. The iconic figure of this era was PC George Dixon, first seen—and shockingly murdered—in Ealing Studio’s crime thriller *The Blue Lamp* (1950), and then miraculously resurrected to star in *Dixon of Dock Green*, the BBC television series that ran from 1955 to 1976. Dixon represented the ideal of the policeman as “citizen in uniform,” but while this reassuring manifestation of calm rational authority would continue to dominate cinema screens until the early 1960s, fictional mediations reveal a more unsettling range of cultural anxieties.<sup>2</sup> John Creasey’s “Gideon” series, the most successful British police novels of the 1950s, present a frequently disturbing portrait of a changing society, alongside a recognition of the impossibility of containing crime more usually attributed to “hardboiled” fiction. The cases under investigation are marked by a mundane and disturbing brutality—violence is a norm rather than an exception—and the novels often leave much unresolved. In contrast to the cinema, then, Creasey’s police procedurals were less a source of reassurance than a textual space that recognised and negotiated the pressures of a changing society.
- 3 The Gideon series, originally written under the pseudonym J. J. Marric, comprises twenty-one novels published between 1955 and 1976.<sup>3</sup> To understand what is at stake in these novels, and to recognise their status as examples of what might be termed “conservative modernity,” it is necessary to consider the postwar context and the emergence of the policeman as a new national ideal. The concept of “conservative modernity” emerges from the work of Alison Light, who uses it to delineate a specifically middle-class negotiation of cultural change in the interwar years. Conservative modernity permits a gradual reconfiguration of class and gender possibilities—innovation within an overall conformity, reform rather than revolution—that remains relevant to the immediate

postwar context (Light 1991: 10–12). Indeed, Andrew Spicer, in his extensive typology of national masculinities, suggests that the war years saw the triumph of this muted national “ideal,” as the “hegemony of the debonair gentleman was challenged by the emergence of the ordinary man as hero” (Spicer 2001: 28). While conservative modernity is characteristically private, it is also emphatically competent, and the emergent hero of the postwar years was, typically, professional rather than amateur, a meritocratic figure of quiet assurance: good humoured, unostentatious, modest, occasionally eccentric, determinedly unromantic and comfortably homosocial.<sup>4</sup> However, even as this modern meritocratic figure was emerging as a dominant heroic type, the end of the war exposed the contingent construction of this new ideal. The final years of the Second World War saw numerous incidences of what N.H. Reeve has termed “uneasy homecoming syndrome”: fictions that suggested the difficulties men would experience reintegrating into peacetime society after six years of service life (Reeve 2001: 162). Wounded, repatriated or demobilised, men returning to civilian status found themselves disorientated and alienated, uncertain of their place in a home-front world that had changed out of all recognition (Allport 2009: 9–12). The spectre of the damaged ex-soldier, frustrated, misunderstood, or simply bored, would in turn come to haunt the cinema of the late 1940s. This was particularly evident in the so-called “spiv” cycle, a series of films focusing on criminal masculinities and the black-market economy, that suggested men needed an element of risk in order to constitute themselves as men.<sup>5</sup> In the films of the spiv cycle, irrespective of plot or backstory, men are understood as products of a war climate: they are part of a wounded generation. These representations were indicative of significant cultural anxiety, but beyond this lay a yet more disturbing spectre: the prospect of a new generation of damaged masculinity. What would become of the children whom the war had deprived of stable structures of authority—in particular of father figures? The “problem” of juvenile delinquency was equally a subject for 1950s cinema, which proposed solutions from corporal punishment (*Cosh Boy*, dir. Lewis Gilbert, 1952) to probationary counselling (*I Believe in You*, dir. Michael Relph and Basil Dearden, 1951), to the presentation of alternative, “healthy” masculine models, the most significant of which was the “cadet.”

- 4 In his influential study of British cinema, *A Mirror for England*, Raymond Durgnat notes the pervasiveness of the “cadet,” a young man being inculcated with the values of an experienced father figure ([1970] 2011: 174). According to Andrew Spicer, the cadet can be seen as an antidote to cinema’s surfeit of youthful, delinquent and actively criminal masculinities. Concerns about absent fathers were ameliorated by the cadet’s reassuring acquiescence with the values, priorities and beliefs of an older generation, and by the suggestion that institutions as well as individuals could function as effective parenting structures. These anxieties, and the solutions imagined for them, are illustrated by *The Blue Lamp* (Basil Dearden, 1950), which presents both cadet masculinity and its delinquent other, in the forms of young PC Andy Mitchell and the criminal Tom Riley, whose pathological masculinity is evident in his constant state of incipient hysteria.<sup>6</sup> Riley exemplifies the fear that a new generation will grow up without structure or moral compass: he spurns the values of society, and is unwelcome even in the counter culture of established criminality. The criminal underworld has rules every bit as binding as those of legitimate society—not least of which is a prohibition against killing policemen. This is enlightened self-interest: no act could be more securely guaranteed to bring unwelcome attention down on regular criminal enterprise. Riley breaks this taboo, shooting the film’s father figure, venerable PC George Dixon, in a failed robbery. The attack jeopardizes both

public and private father: Dixon not only represents the citizen policeman ideal, he is also mentor to the cadet, Andy, who he has welcomed into the family home in place of a son lost in the war. Yet from Dixon's death comes reassurance: the full force of the police family is mobilised in pursuit of the isolated and alienated criminal. Significantly, the health of the police community is shown to extend to society as a whole. Riley, hoping to get lost in the crowd at the dog races, is instead marshalled by race-goers and bookies into the path of the advancing police. Society has rejected degeneracy, it has policed itself—as befits the principle of a civilian police force. Meanwhile, the context of policing has simultaneously shown itself a worthy site of man-making. The prospect of danger has contributed to the preservation of a homosocial community ethos disappearing from an increasingly atomised culture.<sup>7</sup>

- 5 Alongside the context provided by popular cinema, the Gideon series also needs to be seen in relation to developments in crime fiction. The dominant forms of crime fiction had traditionally posited the detective as outsider. In hardboiled fiction, he is a blue-collar working man, set apart from the corrupt world of power and wealth he investigates; in classical or golden age fiction, the majority of detectives, male or female, are amateurs, solving crimes that have defeated a police force configured as unimaginative and plodding. These models leave little room for the construction of a police hero, and although examples of police novels can be found dating back to the nineteenth century, most of these fictions retain a more-or-less hardboiled detecting agent within the structures of a police force. The postwar period, though, witnessed an attempt to construct a procedural form that recognized the reality of criminal investigation. While America is usually credited with the first examples of the formula,<sup>8</sup> Creasey's Gideon novels were nonetheless in the vanguard of fictional representations of police work. Indeed, *Gideon's Day* (1955) appeared a year before *Cop Hater* (1956), the first of Ed McBain's long-running and influential 87<sup>th</sup> Precinct series.<sup>9</sup> Although the two series are divided by the national characteristics of crime and its policing, they share important features: the focus falls on a city and the diversity of its inhabitants; a team or organisation is central to the investigative process; the central detective figure largely functions within a group; crime is resolved as much through routine and chance as through inspiration; the detectives work to solve multiple cases that may or may not intersect, but in any case ensure competition for scarce investigative resources. These are major innovations and their centrality to the Gideon novels gives some indication of Creasey's ability to adapt his writing to the contemporary moment.<sup>10</sup>
- 6 Yet Creasey's command of the *Zeitgeist* has not brought him much critical attention. Martin Priestman, one of the few recent critics to comment on Creasey's work, acknowledges the foundational role of the Gideon series, and the modernity of the criminal landscape they represent. It is instructive to note, as Priestman does (2003: 177–78), that “serial killing and child sex-abuse are treated as regular occurrences rather than with the drop-everything-else horror that has come to dominate much crime fiction since the 1980s.” Nonetheless, Priestman sees conventional reassurance in the series, emerging primarily from Gideon's authoritative centrality. His view from the top—he begins as a Superintendent and is rapidly promoted to Commander—suggests “that the crimes surveyed are the *only* serious crimes in the whole of Greater London in the given period” (178). While I agree that Gideon himself is a figure of reassurance, this conclusion is debatable. The novels certainly attempt to convey the police as dedicated, reliable, well-informed professionals who will ultimately bring the weight of the law to bear on the

guilty, but the periodic structure of the first three novels equally works to emphasise the never-ending dimension of crime, and the impossibility of its containment. *Gideon's Day*, which features police corruption, drug dealing, child murder, paedophilia, armed robbery, safe-breaking, the battering to death of an old woman, knife crime, gangland contracts and the attempted murder of an informer, is just *one day*—a single twenty-four-hour period that will be replicated time and again.

- 7 The series, then, presents a tension between conservatism and modernity, convention and innovation, the construction of a police hero and a refutation of such romantic idealisation, and these conflicts suggest that the Gideon novels are overdue for close attention. The long life of George Dixon has had a distorting effect on memory, and revisiting these benchmark fictions of the 1950s suggests a more complex encounter with social change than has so far been acknowledged. Focusing on the first three novels, *Gideon's Day* (1955), *Gideon's Week* (1956) and *Gideon's Night* (1957), I hope to illustrate these tensions, and in the process bring the British procedural out of the nostalgic shadow cast by *Dixon of Dock Green*. These books, I will argue, articulate both a disturbing modernity and a narrative of national and masculine reconstruction.

## Constructing a British Police Hero: Meeting Gideon

The wrath of Gideon was remarkable to see and a majestic thing to hear. (*Gideon's Day*: 7)

- 8 Descriptions of Gideon figure him as imposing: a big man, “distinguished-looking,” with “iron-grey hair” and a “square chin” (*Gideon's Day*: 9). He does nothing in haste, walking “with a steady rhythm which, given the right circumstances, held a kind of menace” (*Gideon's Week*: 9). He is a massive, remorseless figure, a human battleship whose force and majesty is thrown into relief by repeated comparison with his second-in-command, Chief Inspector “Lem” Lemaitre, whose distinctly foreign name hints, to a British readership, at a stereotypically hysterical or over-excitabile nature, a suspicion confirmed by his repeatedly criticised habit of jumping to conclusions (*Gideon's Day*: 27, *Gideon's Week*: 12). Lemaitre is far from being a bad policeman—the narratives praise his command of routine, his eye for detail and his capacity to “get things moving” (*Gideon's Day*: 98; *Gideon's Week*: 39)—but he lacks Gideon's self-control and authority.<sup>11</sup> The comparison between the two men extends into the private sphere. Lemaitre has made the mistake of marrying a “lush and sexy type,” whose repeated betrayals have, by the third book, driven him to the verge of breakdown (*Gideon's Night*: 17). Gideon, by contrast, is a family man with six children. His marriage has not been without difficulty: a seventh child died while Gideon was working, evidence of a conflict of loyalties that lies behind an initially detached relationship with his wife, Kate. Yet, as the series progresses, Gideon and Kate gradually reanimate their marriage, as she shows renewed support for him, and he begins once more to talk to her about his work.
- 9 Structurally, the novels are very much about multi-tasking—and this represents a significant departure from earlier crime fictions that either pursue the investigation of a single murder (or related set of murders), or allow the detective to take a picaresque path through an urban environment, engaging serendipitously with a crime culture. In Gideon's day, week and night, different, unrelated crimes keep on coming, interrupting existing investigations, challenging priorities and pressurising the police. Some of them are solved quickly (and with an emphasis on the idea of a holistic society similar to that

seen in *The Blue Lamp*), others are beyond resolution and more disturbing. That crime is omnipresent, a “never-ending war” (*Gideon’s Day*: 19), is one of the key concerns shaping the series. The threat of crime is exacerbated by the proposal that the police must confront not only a criminal class, but also the potential criminality of every citizen. *Gideon’s Day* suggests that “Gideon’s greatest worry, and constant anxiety, was the formidable and increasing evidence that many law-abiding people would readily become law-breakers if they had a good chance and believed they at they would not be found out” (19). *Gideon’s Night* reiterates this fear, but in more apocalyptic tones: “Out in the dark city, within a radius of ten miles of this point there were the professional criminals waiting to take their chance, there were people who had never committed a crime committing one now...” (22–23). This belief in essential criminality, or the absence of a moral compass, could almost have been articulated by Agatha Christie, but whereas her fictions depend on the idea that any one individual could be guilty, and that in the identification of this individual the community will be absolved, in Gideon’s urban world, there is no absolution. Yet, crucially, this pervasive, all-encompassing criminality provokes not revulsion but a mode of Christian love for the sinner: Gideon is at home in this environment, and he sees a redemptive potential in the criminal that might compensate for the ethical fragility of the upright moral citizen (*Gideon’s Day*: 90, 101).

- 10 Gideon, then, is a figure who generates both fear and love amongst his subordinates, and the combination of his concern for the criminal “children” who will be subject to his power and his stable domestic life make him, in both public and private spheres, an exemplary father figure. This idealisation, however, will not be without problems, and the structures of detection within the novels reveal that the father’s authority is neither as stable nor as confident as first impressions might suggest.

## Imagining Authority: Gideon’s Panopticon?<sup>12</sup>

Unlike the fighting services, there is no need for more than a handful of senior officers and specialists. The policeman does not work in a squad under an officer. He is an independent agent... (Martienssen [1951] 1953: 16)

- 11 In *Crime and the Police*, a largely laudatory survey of police structures and functions published in 1951, Anthony Martienssen articulates a specifically postwar fear: could Britain become a police state? The civilian status of the police officer is, he believes, the greatest defence against such a fate: the policeman “must live among, and be a member of, the community he serves” (15)—only then can he protect the “private person” and act as an “essential safeguard against possible excesses of State authority” (252). Yet Martienssen’s description of the socially-embedded police officer is equally an exemplary model of disciplinary power: known by his community—and thus himself subject to surveillance—the policeman sees a level of detail, and develops an understanding of deviance, beyond the grasp of any external coercive force.<sup>13</sup>
- 12 In Martienssen’s theorizing, the police officer becomes a figure of social reassurance, protecting the law-abiding citizen from the worst excesses of both right and left: totalitarian authority and the micromanagement of the welfare state. The concept of the “citizen in uniform” can also be seen as an ideal staging post for negotiating social structures and obligations in the aftermath of a war that radically rewrote the social contract. Between 1939 and 1945, the war to preserve democracy was necessarily fought through the radical curtailment of individual liberty. Through conscription, rationing



and a range of other compulsions, the citizen's relationship to government underwent unprecedented change (Rose 2003: 14–16). In war's aftermath, the "citizen in uniform," as the epigraph suggests, represents a restoration of individual agency—choice and responsibility—to the processes of social regulation. The time was right, then, for the policeman to emerge as a model of exemplary citizenship and, by extension, masculinity.

<sup>14</sup> Seeming to encapsulate the ideal British virtues of control, restraint and tempered authority, he presented a legitimate agency to set against the unstable, degenerate forms of the demobbed soldier and the criminal spiv.

- <sup>13</sup> The emergence of the police officer as an heroic figure—or at least as a fitting subject for the protagonist's role—represents a paradigm shift not only in the relationship between citizen and state, but also in the manner through which such relationships were narrativized. Michel Foucault suggests that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw an "aesthetic rewriting of crime" ([1975] 1991: 68). As modes of punishment and the power they symbolised underwent a transition from the public display of the sovereign to the containment of the disciplinary, so the quotidian criminal was textually displaced by a narrative of exceptionality. The raw accounts of mundane crime that comprised the *Newgate Calendar* gave way to an intellectual struggle between the murderer and the detective, a class transposition in which murder became "the quiet game of the well behaved" (Foucault [1975] 1991: 69).<sup>15</sup> This model lasted well into the twentieth century, but the emergence of the police procedural at the end of Second World War can be seen to constitute a further aesthetic reconfiguration of crime. Foucault's "modest, suspicious power" (170) finds a new imaginative outlet in routine detail. The brilliant—and discreetly spectacular—deductions of the detective, and his or her confrontation with a great criminal mind, are replaced by the procedural's rigorous mapping of an ever more acutely differentiated criminality. In the "Information" rooms of Scotland Yard and elsewhere, the criminal individual is tabulated by distinguishing features, his (or less frequently, her) deviation from the respectably anonymous norm recorded to ensure the possibility of his capture and containment (Foucault [1975] 1991: 183–94). Gideon, then, does not need to detect anything. Instead, the systems of recording and the network of observers (beat policemen) ensure the identification and control of a criminality only reported to his central authority.

- <sup>14</sup> These observations concerning strategies of policing pertain to the Gideon novels' ambivalent relationship to structures of reassurance. On first appearance, Gideon's power would appear to derive from his at least semi-panoptical position. He is several times described as sitting at the centre of a web, and his office is at the centre of all information flows. Yet this knowledge does not necessarily translate into effective agency—indeed, it is perceived as a mode of personal impotence (*Gideon's Night*: 69). In *Gideon's Day*, child murderer and paedophile Arthur Sayer is identified and described almost immediately, but this is not sufficient to save his next victim. Similarly, in *Gideon's Night*, the Commander is the hub of multiple information flows, but he cannot sort through them quickly enough to save two out of three snatched babies or a kidnap victim. In this case, Gideon is central but powerless, and the fate of Netta Penn, the kidnapped woman, seems designed to emphasise the limits of police panopticism. Her name repeatedly surfaces on the periphery of the night's concerns, and police drive past the cellar that will be her tomb. The extent of her jeopardy is finally recognised, but rescue arrives too late. She is, in the end, a victim of a category error: murdered for a pathetic amount of money, by petty criminals acting out of their class. Nothing about the criminal habits of her captors



would have enabled them to be “seen” or known as killers, and in consequence, the careful collation of information by the police is rendered useless. Yet these instances of police fallibility are juxtaposed against events that seem to confirm the emergence of an effective surveillance culture. As the detectives of *Gideon’s Night* attempt to catch the Prowler—a repeat sexual offender whose attacks on women are increasing in ferocity—they enforce a lockdown on the metropolitan area, blocking bridges and underground stations, stopping buses and establishing a cordon around the city centre (57–58). This process exposes the coercive force that underpins the seemingly benign “citizen in uniform”: “Any man wandering abroad between one o’clock and half past four was likely to be questioned by the police” (150). Behind the ideal of a culture in which the common man is free to go about his business, innocent until proven guilty, lies a series of assumptions regarding normative behaviour and the appropriate place of the working man. Out of place, or out of well-regulated time, the subject is, immediately, rendered suspicious.

- 15 That this web of devolved authority exemplifies actual police practice in the 1950s is evident from Martienssen’s analysis of police structures. It is not an heroic singularity that protects the public, but an all-encompassing—and in the case of the detective, anonymous—multiplicity:

There is no generalization, therefore, that can be made about detectives except the obvious one that there is no sign by which a good detective can be recognized for what he is. (Martienssen [1951] 1953: 70)

- 16 As well as anonymity, Martienssen suggests that good detectives are characterised by curiosity, acting ability and tact: “the sixth sense which gives them an intuitive knowledge of how best to deal with any particular individual” (66). Gideon excels at the last of these qualifications and frequently demonstrates both a healthy curiosity and an ability to disguise his actions and motivations as, for example, when he pretends to be looking after his own interests while discreetly investigating the handling of the “primrose girl” murder in *Gideon’s Week* (58). However, that he also spectacularly fails to demonstrate the first quality—anonymity—troubles the reading of his power as panoptical. Gideon, while undoubtedly at the centre of the system, can hardly be read as Foucault’s “unseen seer”: “Every late edition of the morning newspapers carried a photograph of Gideon, C.I.D. There were flamboyant accounts of what he had done during the night, as well as what he had done in the past” (*Gideon’s Week*: 132).<sup>16</sup> While it might be argued that the sight of Gideon encourages a degree of self-policing, it is nonetheless the case that—for all the modernity of the procedural structure—his power is equally constituted as sovereign, and it is this residual insistence on spectacular visibility that speaks most persuasively to the anxieties surrounding masculinity in the 1950s. Gideon’s exceptionality suggests that neither detecting nor policing is his primary narrative function. Rather, his role is to embody exceptional leadership: he is designed as an exemplary man, a father figure and a mentor to a generation cast adrift by the aftermath of war.
- 17 Unfortunately, for the first three novels, Gideon is singularly bereft of anyone to mentor: he is a father in search of a son.<sup>17</sup> Unlike the cinema, which provided experienced policemen with cadets eager to follow in their footsteps, Gideon finds most candidates for cadet masculinity cannot quite live up to his exacting standards. The problems of succession can be seen as a factor quietly destabilising the confident assertion of monumental masculinity. On the surface, in the combination of unseen panoptical power

and spectacular sovereign visibility, Gideon emphasises the on-going power (and narrative necessity) of the heroic individual. Yet the more impressive his masculinity becomes, the more it throws into relief the failure of society to nurture or forge a generation of worthy inheritors. Gideon's extreme competence protests too much and paradoxically signifies not stability but its absence.

## Exemplary Paternalism: Gideon's Legacy

- 18 Gideon's status as a "benevolent patriarch" (*Gideon's Day*: 86), his easy occupation of the roles of father and symbol of authority, makes him almost a fantasy figure—a social ideal in concrete human form. Like a doctor or a priest, he cares for the community, sympathising with widows and consoling women who have lost their children, he protects fatherless young men mistakenly accused of murder, and he shows exemplary fairness in his handling of criminals. In *Gideon's Week* for example, when escaped prisoner Matt Owens intervenes to save police and property from a fellow convict's drunken violence, Gideon responds with fatherly concern and a promise of help (*Gideon's Week*: 131). As befits his pastoral role, he makes frequent house calls, departing the office to ensure that he continues to know his territory and be recognised. Yet his forays into the spaces of criminal activity, or indeed, his efforts at active reassurance, are not wholly successful. This is perhaps most clearly suggested in a storyline from *Gideon's Week* in which the detective's attempt to bring paternal authority to bear on the troubled offspring of a hardened criminal ends in conspicuous failure.
- 19 The main crime at the centre of *Gideon's Week* is a jail break, an event which exposes Ruby Benson and her two children to the vengeful return of her husband Syd. In the absence of her violent spouse, Ruby has reinvented herself: with a job, a new boyfriend and a new respectability she looks ten years younger than when Gideon sent her husband to prison. Yet young Syd, her twelve-year-old son, is captivated by the romanticism of his criminal father, and his fate is central to the book's lack of reassurance. Gideon, aware of his responsibility for depriving the boy of his father, is keen to save Syd from this baleful criminal influence; but Syd is a "son" who will not be saved. Late in the novel, a teacher proposes that no child "will ever believe that something his mother or his father does habitually is wicked. The child just assumes that his father is right, and the rest of the world is wrong" (*Gideon's Week*: 172). This suggests that criminals are made not born: the child learns criminality from environmental factors, he or she is not a "type." But this superficial liberalism is undermined by its emphasis on the potency of early nurture. While Liz, Ruby's daughter has, in a disturbingly gendered fashion, unlearned the influence of the father, Syd has been unable to escape his early schooling.
- 20 The book, then, constructs a conflict between fathers for the possession of the son. Gideon, the legitimate "father," attempts to break the child's loyalty to his criminal father by explaining the rules: "This was a challenge which couldn't be set aside. If Gideon said nothing to the boy, then the hatred would only fester and there would be a new element; birth of contempt for the police" (*Gideon's Week*: 68). Gideon stands, very literally, as the law-of-the-father: stepping into the family structure and attempting to impose his authority. But as the novel progresses, everything points towards Syd's physical and emotional proximity to his biological father. Much to the delight of Benson senior, the boy is a "chip of [sic] the old block" (160), so in thrall to his father's authority that he will do anything to gain his approval. As the plot unfolds, Benson proves himself

the ultimate in perverse parenting by using young Syd to facilitate the attempted murder of Ruby: he gives the boy poison in the guise of aspirins. The plan is foiled, but while the reader knows that young Syd did not know about the poison, neither his mother nor Gideon can be certain of this. His actions—and his unyielding hostility towards Gideon (169)—have inscribed him as delinquent. In a series of novels that figures a never-ending cycle of conflict between culture and counter culture, crime and the law, a significant battle has been lost. The novel ends with uncertainty concerning the fate of young Syd, and the ominous pronouncement that “we’ll have to work on him” (187). Gideon’s failure to parent or persuade the boy—his failure to shape a viable future citizen—undermines the reassurance of the procedural form.<sup>18</sup>

- 21 Alongside this catastrophic case of parenting by proxy, the novels repeatedly emphasise the failure of colleagues and subordinates to match up to the exemplary standards set by Gideon. Lem offers little hope, being a man of almost Gideon’s age, whose lack of developmental potentiality is repeatedly stressed (*Gideon’s Week*: 12). Abbott, the promising young man introduced at the beginning of *Gideon’s Week*, is undone by a lack of experience (143–44) and needs to be rebuilt by Gideon’s careful man management; while in *Gideon’s Night* an inexperienced young officer, Cobley, is crushed by criticism from his superior officer. This officer, Wragg, is another failed cadet, whose abuse of his new authority reveals that “he had a lot to learn about handling men” (*Gideon’s Night*: 170). Time and again, then, the books emphasise perverse parenting and the absence of succession. Even at home the lack of a son and heir is evident. In the first two books we see nothing of Gideon’s three sons: all his emotional energy is directed towards his daughters—in particular the emerging musical career of his eldest, Prue. Finally in the third book, an element of hope is offered when Matthew, the problem child, expresses an interest in a police career. Gideon’s response is unexpectedly modern, and absolutely “disciplinary”: he tells him to stay at school and go to University. The thinking behind this is Gideon’s belief in the importance of information. Asserting that even the most esoteric knowledge will come in useful, Gideon explains:

It won’t always be spectacular, but you’ve got to be a Jack of All Trades, as well as knowing the ropes and routine. Know what detection is, really? It’s patience, persistence, a good memory and a first-class power of observation. ... The more you know, Matt, the more chance you’ve got of getting on. (*Gideon’s Night*: 13)

- 22 Gideon’s advice to his son, and his understanding of police power, thus acknowledge a Foucauldian modernity. In advising Matt to learn languages and pass exams, he asks him “to substitute for a power that is manifested through the brilliance of those who exercise it, a power that insidiously objectifies those on whom it is applied; to form a body of knowledge about these individuals, rather than to deploy the ostentatious signs of sovereignty” (Foucault [1975] 1991: 220). Concepts of parenting and succession, implicit in the preoccupations of the series, are strangely unsettled here by the father’s rejection of his own image—and this stands as a moment in which the limits of Gideon’s own “spectacular” aspect are acknowledged.
- 23 If this is succession planning, it speaks to a transition in structures of hegemonic masculinity, and suggests that the spectacular Gideon is, at least in part, a residual masculine formation. His cadet will have to embody the knowledge economy, bringing together all the disparate skills manifest variously in other police workers and failed cadets. The King is not yet dead, but it is the State that will succeed him.

## The Postwar Police Novel: Gideon's Conclusions

- 24 Certain features recur in the Gideon novels: multiple narrative strands, the trope of Gideon operating at the centre of a web of information, his paternalism, his effectiveness as a police officer, and his exemplary—even monumental—masculinity. The range of violent crimes confronted, the prosaic responses that greet them and the pace of engagement give the novels an appearance of modernity. They are urban crime fictions, rooted in a realist ethic, and although they share the hard-boiled crime novel's belief that the city is the site of a never-ending cycle of crime, they respond to this pervasive corruption in a fundamentally different way. In the British procedural, the police occupy a newly quotidian mode of heroism: their investigations are disciplinary rather than spectacular, their successes born of patient surveillance rather than intellectual deduction or obvious shows of force. As with the procedural films of the 1950s, the narratives offer both threat and containment: the reader is shown a delinquent and reassured that even if this figure is a new and terrifying cultural phenomenon, the police—with their networks of information, knowledge and power—are sufficient to ensure containment and control.
- 25 However, while films such as *The Blue Lamp* offer a reasonably stable balance between threat and containment, it cannot be said that the Gideon novels achieve the same equilibrium. In another instance of the books' modernity, many of the novels end with a form of montage: the text moving through the characters—criminal and law-abiding—taking stock of their positions, and giving the reader a series of snapshot glimpses into the ecosystem of Gideon's London. The effect is to reiterate police power and simultaneously to undermine it. The novels do not end with complete closure, and while this might be read as resistance to hyperbole and triumphalism—a mode of appropriately British modesty—it is also a textual manifestation of uncertainty and doubt. These tensions are marked in the anxious final two chapters of *Gideon's Day*. In the first, Gideon is left literally and metaphorically bruised after failing to capture an armed robber. This is followed by his worried contemplation of the threat posed by the “amateur” criminal—these are men ironically trained in delinquency by their army service (service to the state) and they epitomise the spectre of the ex-combatant that had haunted postwar society. After this comes his most significant doubt, returning us to the confrontation with a corrupt officer with which the book began: “If he'd handled Foster differently, Foster might be alive now, and willingly co-operating” (*Gideon's Day*: 184). After these not inconsiderable challenges to Gideon's omnipotence, paternalism and judgement, the narrative attempts an abrupt *volte-face*. In scarcely two pages, B division capture one of the books' murderers; Lemaitre recovers the mail van robbery proceeds, and Gideon has a detective epiphany, identifying crime boss Chang's financial deceptions and putting a dent in London's drug distribution network. Suddenly, all is transformed, “it had been a wonderful day” (190). This reversal cannot stand without comment, and here the book offers an astonishingly glib piece of textual accounting, reminiscent of earlier crime fiction in which the solution of the puzzle and a symbolic happy ending mattered more than any collateral damage.<sup>19</sup> Earlier in the book, Gideon had been devastated by the murder of the child Lucy Saparelli; now the text offers this: “Thoughts of the Saparelli family, especially the mother, quietened his jubilation, but the police had done all that anyone could, and time would help, wouldn't it?” (190). The novel ends, then, in the spirit

of Agatha Christie, and with a newly modern manifestation of her comedy ending. If a major convention of the golden age is the symbolic restoration of law and social stability through marriage, then in *Gideon's Day* we get a revised version of this for the postwar age. Gideon comes home to a wife who, after several years of semi-estrangement, suddenly *does* understand him. Kate is waiting for him, with tea and sandwiches and a welcoming ear: "it was good to be home" (191). The series then walks a tightrope between comfort and doubt. We have a father, but no reliable cadet; we have authority, but crime is exponentially increasing, becoming an industry beyond the control of one man, even a man as mighty as Gideon. Creasey's series thus demonstrates a superficial modernity—it attempts "an aesthetic rewriting of crime" (Foucault [1975] 1991: 68)—but this is underpinned by what is in fact an exemplary instance of Alison Light's conservative modernity, in which the character of Gideon functions as a rallying call to the youth of the nation, attempting to assert a postwar masculinity that is nowhere near as stable and confident as Gideon's monumentality would have us believe. This is reform rather than revolution. The novels acknowledge the disciplinary realities of social construction and policing, and they exhibit a range of contemporary concerns about appropriate masculinities, but in the final instance, they resort to the comforts of generic habit. The manner in which the procedural novel ultimately resolves its tensions and anxieties is a regression to the conventions of the interwar golden age detective novel.

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## NOTES

1. For further examples of attitudes towards and conceptions of the police in the 1950s, see Geoffrey Gorer (1955).
2. Andrew Spicer (2011: 51–55) provides a succinct summary of the police detective’s cinematic transition from “father figure” to “tough guy,” a gradual transition from certainty to ambivalence within which paternalism remains a remarkably resilient, if not always secure, feature.
3. After Creasey’s death in 1973, a further five Gideon novels were written by William Vivian Butler.

4. For a fuller account of the national ideal in this period see Gill Plain (2006: 10–17). Of particular relevance here is the argument that “Englishness presents itself as a neutral ‘norm’ against which other nations appear excessive and irregular” (11), and the suggestion that masculinity should be “self-evident not self-absorbed, seen rather than spoken” (17).
5. See, for example, *They Made Me A Fugitive* (dir. Cavalcanti, 1947) and *Night and the City* (dir. Jules Dassin, 1950).
6. *The Blue Lamp* was the most popular British film of 1950, and box office statistics provide useful support for the “decline of deference” thesis. *The Blue Lamp*’s respect for the police and authority can be compared with the ridicule of *Carry on Constable*, the third most popular British film of 1960 (Harper and Porter 2003: 249).
7. The pattern of reassurance established by *The Blue Lamp* continues throughout much of the decade. See, for example, *The Long Arm* (dir. Charles Frend, 1956).
8. Lawrence Treat’s *V as in Victim* (1945) and Hillary Waugh’s *Last Seen Wearing...* (1952) are usually cited as influential early manifestations of the sub-genre.
9. John Creasey, *Gideon’s Day* ([1955] 1964); Ed McBain, *Cop Hater* ([1956] 2012).
10. In a career that began in 1932, Creasey is estimated to have written close to 600 novels. His previous series included a range of insouciant amateurs, including the “Toff” and the “Baron,” and a very different type of police hero, Inspector Roger “Handsome” West of the Yard.
11. I am grateful to the anonymous reader for pointing out the irony of Lemaitre’s name, given his comparative lack of both public and private mastery.
12. The Panopticon, first conceived by Jeremy Bentham as a penitentiary architecture in the 1840s, is adopted by Michel Foucault as a means of describing the operation of disciplinary power. Importantly, for this analysis of police authority, the “panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and recognize immediately” (Foucault [1975] 1991: 200). The Panopticon induces “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power,” within which the inmate is “seen, but he does not see” (201, 200). Panoptic power can thus be exercised by the few over the many, and the information gathering of modern policing can be construed as just such a mode of surveillance (206).
13. Read today, there is a disturbing irony to Martienssen’s conclusions about how best to safeguard the citizen: “If the powers of local authorities were slowly whittled away, if, for apparently excellent administrative reasons, a large number of police forces were merged together under single control, if the police were gradually to become servants of the Government rather than protectors of their fellow-citizens ... and the police [were to become] a ‘national’ rather than a ‘local’ institution, then it would indeed be possible for Britain to be turned into a Police State” (1951: 30–31).
14. The extent to which women achieved “citizenship” in the course of the Second World War is open to debate. Although the vote had been won, double standards and gendered assumptions were slow to change, and, indeed, women’s increased visibility in the public sphere during the war years gave rise to as much resentment as recognition (Rose 2003: 73–92; 107–150; Plain 2013: 77–90). Unsurprisingly, then, it would be a long time before the policewoman was imagined as anything more than a shadowy support to the specifically male agency of the “citizen” policeman. Martienssen, something of an advanced thinker, devotes a chapter to the policewoman and thinks her wider use across the full range of policing activities is long overdue; but policewomen are, however, conspicuous by their absence in the Gideon novels of the 1950s. When they do appear elsewhere in the popular culture of the decade, for example, in *The Blue Lamp*, their function is to deal with specifically female problems such as delinquent teenage girls, children and attacks of hysteria.
15. The *Newgate Calendar* was a popular series of late-eighteenth century broadsheets that provided accounts of historical and contemporary crimes. In the nineteenth century, the stories



were collected and published in book form. These lurid accounts of famous crimes, which preceded the emergence of a detecting agent, were usually accompanied by a moral lesson aimed at discouraging children from wrongdoing. For a useful analysis of the ideological operation of the stories, see Stephen Knight (1980).

16. The phrase “unseen seer” comes from Dennis Porter’s influential analysis of crime fiction (1981: 124).

17. This problem is equally applicable at a public structural level. *Gideon’s Day* bemoans the lack of new recruits into the police force (94).

18. *Gideon’s Month*, the fourth book in the series, continues the preoccupation with the fate of the young, focusing on an investigation into children trained as pickpockets, and tracking a disturbing case of child abuse. The book ends with a despairing plea from Gideon: “these kids ... What kind of lives do they lead? What gets into the mind of a mother to do it to her child? ... Until we can stop it, we’re going to have generation after generation of criminals, and we simply can’t stop it” (*Gideon’s Month*: 185).

19. For example, see Agatha Christie’s *The Moving Finger*, which writes off two corpses with the cheery dismissal, “We’ve all got to die some time!” (Agatha Christie [1943] 1948: 189).

## ABSTRACTS

The British police procedural novel of the 1950s has attracted little critical attention, perhaps because the decade is seen as a “golden age” of police legitimacy (Loader and Mulcahy 2003). This perception is reinforced by the cinema of the period, where the police are predominantly represented as embodying traditional masculinities and demonstrating familiar national virtues. They are also shown to be policing a society that was itself fundamentally homogenous. Yet this template bore little resemblance to the realities of crime in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and it needs to be set against developments in the crime novel. While cinema used the genre to reassure, it is less clear whether the police procedural of the period attempted or achieved the same end. This hypothesis is explored through an examination of John Creasey’s popular Gideon books. Characterised by open endings and a disturbing level of violence, these novels demonstrate a significant transition in the representation of the police in British crime fiction, suggesting that the 1950s procedural was not a source of reassurance, but a textual space that recognised and negotiated the pressures of a changing society.

Le roman policier britannique des années 1950 a peu intéressé les critiques, peut-être parce que ces années sont perçues comme « l’âge d’or » de la légitimité policière (Loader and Mulcahy 2003). Cette perception est renforcée par le cinéma de cette époque, dans lequel la police est présentée comme l’incarnation de la masculinité traditionnelle et des vertus nationales. Pourtant, ce modèle n’a aucun rapport avec la réalité de la fin des années 1940 et du début des années 1950 et doit être évalué à la lumière des développements apparus dans le roman policier. Alors que le cinéma utilise le genre pour rassurer son public, cet élément est bien moins évident dans le roman.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** roman policier, masculinité, cinéma britannique, années 1950, délinquance, John Creasey

**Keywords:** J. J. Marric, police procedural, masculinity, British cinema, 1950s, delinquency

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