

## Independent researcher

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### **Morgue porn: writing a female gaze in forensic television**

#### Abstract:

Crime fiction enjoys lasting popularity but in recent decades writers across a range of media have turned their attention to the dark heart of crime fiction – forensic investigation. Advances in forensic technologies, clinical psychology, and computer generated imagery gave rise to new developments in the genre from the late 1990s that caused its popularity to escalate, particularly forensic television drama, where viewers are increasingly invited into the morgue to peer over the shoulder of the pathologist at the body on the slab. A survey of the new generation of forensic detective programmes that began with the debut of *CSI (Crime Scene Investigation)* in 2000 reveals that a disproportionate number of television pathologists are female. Writing these female pathologists contests the passivity of female characters in traditional crime drama and, crucially, accommodates a female gaze. While this appears to erode dominant representations of gender, in the case of *CSI*, the increased visibility of women in tandem with its quasi-educational style masks an even deeper level of objectification of women, and what might once have been viewed as R or even X-rated is presented on primetime television as edutainment. This analysis draws on film theory to situate *CSI* within the violent misogyny in some contemporary crime fiction writing more generally.

#### Biographical note:

Dr Toni Risson is an independent scholar who writes across a range of genres. Her food in popular culture research has explored topics as diverse as Greek migrants, cookbooks, shops, children's birthday cakes, and Australian masculinity. Toni's book *Aphrodite and the Mixed Grill: Greek Cafés in Twentieth-Century Australia* (2007) is the seminal text on the Greek café, and her work on lollies is the first investigation of a significant aspect of Australian children's culture. Recent work includes a memoir about the generational legacy of Gallipoli and Greek cafés in early twentieth-century Brisbane. Toni was the inaugural Food Area Chair of the Popular Culture Association of Australia and New Zealand and is the 2016 Queensland Business Leaders Hall of Fame fellow.

#### Keywords

Creative writing – Screen/television writing – Crime writing – Forensic television – female gaze

## Introduction

Crime fiction has proved an enduringly popular source of entertainment but while Agatha Christie holds her own in primetime television it seems we are not completely satisfied with a body in the library that is whisked away after the opening scenes. The appeal of the forensic pathologist was established with *Quincy M.D.* (1976-83), but advances in forensic science, clinical psychology and computer generated imaging gave rise to new developments in forensic drama from the late 1990s that caused the popularity of the genre to escalate. The glamour of the forensic detective overtook the allure of the psychotic killer, and the body moved centre stage. Program names like *Silent Witness* and *Waking the Dead* indicate the shift that took place as writers increasingly invited viewers into the morgue to peer over the pathologist's shoulder at the naked body on the slab.

The American television series *Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)* (2000-15) featured two female forensic detectives when it debuted in 2000. The show proved so popular that it stretched to 337 episodes over fifteen series and spawned three spin-offs – totalling, as of March 2016, almost 800 episodes (CBS 2015) and setting the scene for a new wave of forensic television drama. In forensic television shows in America, Britain and Australia, a female pathologist now seems almost mandatory. This article examines the way forensic detective series seemingly afford women a greater degree of agency by challenging the passivity of dominant female stereotypes and offering opportunities to accommodate a female gaze. It is not my intention to undertake a gender analysis of victims and perpetrators in these programmes but to, instead, examine the effects of the female pathologist as she is written into these series. While the analysis concerns television drama primarily, it draws on film theory and makes relevant comparisons with novels and films to show where *CSI* is situated in relation to the misogynist stain that has seeped into crime fiction generally. Could it be that increased visibility of women and quasi-educational style mask an even deeper level of objectification of women's bodies?

## The female pathologist

The following tabular chronology, while not exhaustive, indicates both the rising popularity of forensic drama and the high incidence of female pathologists (indicated by name):

| <i>year/s</i> | <i>programme title</i>                            | <i>female pathologist</i>                   |
|---------------|---|---|
| 1976-1983     | <i>Quincy M.D.</i>                                |   |
| 1987-2000     | <i>Inspector Morse</i>                            | Dr Grayling Russell                         |
| 1990          | <i>Post-mortem</i> (Patricia Cornwell)<br>[novel] | Dr Kay Scarpetta                            |
| 1996-2000     | <i>Profiler</i>                                   | Dr Sam Waters, then Dr Rachel Burke         |
| 1996-         | <i>Silent Witness</i>                             | Professor Sam Ryan, then Dr Nikki Alexander |
| 1997-         | <i>Midsomer Murders</i>                           | Dr Kate Wilding, then Dr Kam Karimore       |

|         |   |                                     |
|---------|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1999    | <i>The Bone Collector</i> (Dir. Phillip Noyce) [film] |                                     |
| 2000-15 | <i>CSI</i>  | Sarah Sidle and Catherine Willows   |
| 2000-11 | <i>Waking the Dead</i>                                | Dr Grace Foley and Dr Eve Lockhart  |
| 2001-7  | <i>Crossing Jordan</i>                                | Dr Jordan Cavanaugh                 |
| 2004-   | <i>Murdoch Mysteries</i>                              | Dr Julia Ogden, then Dr Emily Grace |
| 2005-   | <i>Bones</i>  | Dr Temperance ‘Bones’ Brennan       |
| 2006-13 | <i>Dexter</i>   |                                     |
| 2007-   | <i>Lewis</i>  | Dr Laura Hobson                     |
| 2009-   | <i>Castle</i>   | Dr Lanie Parish                     |
| 2009-13 | <i>Whitechapel</i>                                    | Dr Caroline Llewellyn               |
| 2011-13 | <i>Body of Proof</i>                                  | Dr Megan Hunt                       |
| 2012-   | <i>Miss Fisher’s Murder Mysteries</i>                 | Dr Elizabeth Macmillan              |
| 2013-   | <i>Endeavour</i>                                      |                                     |
| 2013-   | <i>The Doctor Blake Mysteries</i>                     | Dr Alice Harvey                     |
| 2014-   | <i>NCIS New Orleans</i>                               | Dr Loretta Wade                     |

Table 1. Chronology of forensic dramas

These programs involve varying degrees of forensic investigation: while images can be explicit and horrific in *Silent Witness* where a forensic team steers the investigation, in *Midsomer Murders* bodies are much less exposed if detectives visit the morgue to consult the pathologist, and the crimes are less gory. The high incidence of women in the role of forensic pathologist is, however, remarkable: most shows had a female pathologist/s from the beginning and *Morse* and *Midsomer Murders* changed to female characters in 1989 and 2011 respectively.

The female characters in this list represent a wide variety of women: Grace Foley is gentle and maternal; Alice Harvey is tough and steely; Sarah Sidle and Eve Lockhart are insensitive and socially awkward; Nikki Alexander and Laura Hobson are soft and feminine; Loretta Wade and Lanie Parish are African-American and the new *Midsomer Murders* pathologist, Kam Karimore, is of Indian descent; Caroline Llewellyn is frumpy and, in season four, heavily pregnant; Catherine Willows is sexy; Dr Macmillan is a lesbian. Some are slender; others have fuller figures. Some are possessed of conventional beauty or intimidating intelligence; others have a more quirky or eccentric demeanour. They are often irreverent and upbeat, despite being sometimes profoundly affected by the brutality they encounter, and none are squeamish in the face of gruesome evidence, while the male detective sometimes is.

The female forensic examiner challenges twentieth-century stereotypes, particularly in period dramas like *Miss Fisher’s Murder Mysteries*, set in the 1920s, and *Murdoch Mysteries*, set in the 1890s. Women have conventionally been portrayed as being too delicate to look at gore: female characters look away if a monster appears – out of disgust as much as terror – and if protagonists come upon a violent scene, the man shields the woman’s eyes or the woman turns away into the man’s chest so she cannot

see the gruesome sight. Such women could hardly be pathologists. The feminine has traditionally been depicted as vulnerable, delicate, emotional, helpless and irrational, and so ‘woman’ has provided the ideal victim. Western thinking has equated action, rationality and the mind with the masculine, while passivity, emotion and the body are positioned in opposition as feminine. The generic conventions of traditional crime drama writing have exploited these gendered attributes such that the victim has often been female and the expert has mostly been male – Miss Marple being an exception. The usual situation is encountered in another period drama *Endeavour* (2013-), the prequel to *Inspector Morse* (1987-2000): when detectives visit the morgue, pathologist and detectives are all male. If there is a female in the frame she is on the slab – silent and unseeing, a naked body, an object of scrutiny.

Forensic crime drama challenged that stereotype across a range of media during the 1990s, after Patricia Cornwell released a tidal wave of forensic fiction when she featured female medical examiner Dr Kay Scarpetta in her novel *Post-mortem* (1990). The action in television series *Profiler* (1996-2000) revolved around a female criminologist who was able to visualise and ‘replay’ scenes that took place inside the killer’s mind. A female detective hunted down a serial killer in *The Bone Collector* (1999) because the male investigator was disabled. These texts represent key moments in the development of crime drama and are precursors to the new generation of forensic television shows. Riding that wave of change, the female pathologist emerged as a strong character who challenged dominant representations of gender.

The development of a forensic heroine prompts the question: do forensic crime shows, particularly American shows, afford women a greater degree of agency and offer opportunities to accommodate a female gaze? *CSI* marks a turning point in the development of the genre. *CSI* is about a crime scene investigation team based in Las Vegas, two of whom are women. Catherine Willows and Sara Sidle have the transgressive potential of the female heroine to efface the gendered victim/hero dichotomy: they advance the action; they inhabit crime scenes and forensic laboratories, hitherto conceived as ‘male’ spaces; and, they are associated with rationality and the intellect, conventionally ascribed as male. Furthermore, these women wear ‘unfeminine’ dark trousers and jackets. Sidle is particularly ‘masculinised’. With unruly brown hair and a square jaw, she is attractive, but not pretty, and she is rational, precise and intelligent. Sara is dedicated to her job, and relates to things better than to people. Of greatest significance, as forensic criminologists, these women routinely look upon corpses.

The corpse embodies a Gothic aesthetic and is a form of monstrosity (Lohead 2015). Anne Lohead observes in relation to *Frankenstein* that ‘Monsters come from across the margins, from an unknown world, a place of dreams and darkness, or the realm of death. Their faces, peering at us out of the darkness, are visions of terror’ (2015: 3). Julia Kristeva explains this visitation from the realm of death in terms of abjection:

In that compelling, raw, insolent thing [...] I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. The corpse is [...] death infecting life. Abject [...] Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity,

system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite (1982: 4).

This ‘infection’ is why the corpse, for Kristeva, is central to the construction of the monstrous in horror films: it shows us what we ‘permanently thrust aside in order to live’ (1982: 3). Or as Lohead puts it, the corpse embodies our deepest fears (2015). Invested with social anxieties about death and dying, the corpse represents an inescapable future. When a corpse has suffered violence or decay – and those under forensic examination often have – it is especially monstrous. When faced with the corpse-monster, Willows and Sidle never look away.

The practice of looking is central to forensic work. Dead bodies are normally covered and then stowed away to await burial or cremation, so the displayed corpse is transgressive, and looking at the displayed corpse represents a transgressive gaze. The gaze that Sidle and Willows bear is especially transgressive because the dominant system, which aligns the subject/object dichotomy with sexual difference, matches maleness with the agency of the look. As Linda Williams notes in her observations of gendered reactions in horror films, female characters look away from violence or horror in classical narrative cinema, and those who do ‘look’ are usually punished (1983: 83). Sidle and Willows, however, in their active surveillance of victims’ bodies, are female subjects and agents of the gaze. They look at ‘the monster’ and are not punished. That these women are bearers of the scientific look suggests that *CSI* accommodates a female gaze. But the *CSI* creed – assume nothing – should be applied to this shift in gender representation.

### Stereotypes

First, stereotypes abound. In *Profiler*, Samantha Water’s uncanny ability to visualise victims’ situations positions her ability within the realm of feminine intuition rather than male logic. In *The Bone Collector*, Donaghy’s former profession as a supermodel coupled with Angelina Jolie’s physical appearance firmly position the female detective as erotic object. In *CSI*, the key authority figures – the coroner, the head of the homicide squad, and Gil Grissom, head of the crime scene investigation team – are all white males. Also, the erudite Grissom is the archetypal paternal figure: he acts as teacher to team and audience alike and is always calm, controlled, and protective. In contrast, Willows is a former lap dancer. Referring to an exotic dancer in an episode entitled “Who Are You?” one of Willows’ male colleagues asks, ‘You dressed like that?’, to which Willows replies, ‘If you want to call it dressed’ (2000). Willows is sexy, though mature and, as a single mother and divorcée, she is firmly positioned within the heterosexual realm of the nurturing feminine. In addition, despite Sidle’s ‘unfeminine’ qualities, both she and Willows have supermodel bodies that are usually encased in tight, often cleavage-revealing, suits. They are still objects of the male spectator’s gaze, if not that of the male characters. Such stereotypes notwithstanding, Willows and Sidle do advance the action and are bearers of the scientific look, and since female spectators may identify with their exploits, this suggests that *CSI* accommodates a female gaze.

### Quasi-educational style

A major development in forensic drama, and a second feature of *CSI* that warrants examination, is the show's quasi-educational style. Mystery and scientific knowledge drive forensic narratives in *CSI* and set the scene for instruction. A prime example of this is "Got Murder?" (2003), an episode in which Grissom continually instructs his team. He teaches them about the words 'syllogism' and 'kismet' and, specifically, the mysteries of the human body. Because the victim is female, scientific equipment and processes afford spectators – Grissom, team and viewer – unlimited observation of the female body and its parts and peculiarities. Gone are the days when laboratories consisted of a microscope and an X-ray machine: cutting-edge scientific apparatus, clinical psychology and visual technology – coupled with the computer-generated imagery now available to television producers – equip contemporary television pathologists with an 'inner gaze' that includes imagined flashbacks, views inside body cavities, and three-dimensional rotating anatomical models. The rise of science initiated the study of woman as 'other' rather than 'invert' (Connell 1995: 68). The rise of psychoanalysis positioned women as enigma and mystery (Kaplan 1983: 315). The rise of digital technology enables the audience to view the female body in new and deeper ways, and always with overtones of information and discovery.

This educational guise legitimises the ultimate objectification of women. In "Got Murder?" (2003), an episiotomy scar – from a cut made in the opening of the vagina during childbirth – helps to identify the victim. Later, breast milk spreading over the front of a teenage suspect's blouse alerts Willows to the fact that the girl, Nora, is pregnant. A gynaecological examination ensues, after which Willows explains that Nora has *pseudocyesis* or imagined pregnancy. The symptoms of this include a swollen abdomen, amenorrhea and milk production in both breasts – all of which are illustrated for the audience with the aid of a rotating, anatomical graphic that is not part of any representational space within the narrative. Through this educational unveiling, *CSI* simultaneously satisfies and stimulates fascination with the female body. The mystery of woman is magnified rather than diminished and patriarchal control of the female body is reinforced.

### A female gaze?

The female forensic scientist transgresses the gendered victim/hero dichotomy and looks upon the corpse-monster without being punished or controlled by the narrative. But is her gaze necessarily a female gaze simply because she is a woman? John Berger suggests that when characters like Sidle and Willows study female bodies their surveillance is actually male:

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The survey of woman herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision, a sight (qtd. in Cranny-Francis et al. 2003: 139).

Sidle and Willows routinely refer to the body as ‘the vic’, suggesting that they view a brutalised woman as an object – perhaps as a means of working through such brutality – so their gaze is not female simply because they bear the gaze as women. As Ann Kaplan points out, the gaze, of itself, is not male, but to own and activate the gaze is to assume the male position (1983: 319).

Neither is the gaze female because women write themselves. Images produced by women are not necessarily free of chauvinism or sexism, despite the second-wave feminist belief that if women ‘could control the images made of them, or even make their own images, then they would be liberated from the cages to which oppressive images consigned them’ (Cranny-Francis et al. 2003: 139-140). The novel that spearheaded the forensic fiction genre (*Post-mortem*) was written by a woman, and some of the most graphic contributions have come from women including Patricia Cornwell, Kathy Reichs and Val McDermid. In the case of *CSI*, women scriptwriters produce narratives wherein women’s bodies are objectified and where the subject/object identification that constitutes the male process of looking remains intact. Sarah Goldfinger wrote the *CSI* episode discussed above, “Got Murder?”

### **Laura Mulvey and the male gaze**

Not only does *CSI*’s educational guise mask the objectification of women, but it also masks the psychic function which that objectification performs. According to Kaplan, because of what woman represents in the male psyche, ‘screen images of women are sexualized no matter what the women are doing literally, or what kind of plot may be involved’ (1983: 311). Kaplan also explains that ‘Women in film [...] do not function as signifiers for a signified (a real woman) [...] but signifier and signified have been elided into a sign that represents something in the male unconscious’ (1983: 310). Film theorists have used psychoanalysis to explain what that sign represents. To understand the psychological relationship between gendered subjectivity and visual pleasure, one must slice through the slick surface of forensic television shows and examine what lies beneath the disproportionate incidence of female pathologists. Closer observation reveals that women’s bodies are still objects, that the gaze is still male, and that the gazing of female characters in fact masks the continuing objectification of women in these series.

The pleasure of looking (scopophilia) is, psychoanalysts claim, fundamental to the process of identity formation and desire (Cranny-Francis et al. 2003: 151). Film is a scopic regime, and to watch a film is to be ‘caught up in visual pleasures which structure the social and subjective psyche’ (Cranny-Francis 2003: 139). In a seminal article about the visual pleasures of narrative cinema, Laura Mulvey argues that the one who looks controls the object of the gaze (1989: 17). This is easy to understand by imagining a ‘Peeping Tom’ standing in the dark, spying on a woman in an interior space, and observing how the power ratio shifts if the sensor light comes on outside: the woman sees the voyeur, the look becomes mutual and the intruder flees. Mulvey showed how a male gaze is created in mainstream cinema by the look of the camera, the look of male characters, and the look of the spectator, and how, as objects of that gaze, women connote ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ (1989: 19). Three pleasures are therefore available to

the ‘ideal’ male spectator through identification with the male protagonist via the look of the camera: he views the woman as an erotic object, he identifies with the male protagonist, and he controls and possesses the woman (Mulvey 1989: 20-21). How, then, does the female spectator watch *CSI*, remembering that women transgress the gendered victim/hero dichotomy and bear the gaze without being controlled by the narrative? The ‘ideal’ female spectator may derive pleasure from identifying with the female scientist. She may enjoy identifying as object of desire. She may even identify masochistically with being dominated, deriving pleasure from positioning herself ‘as *watching* a woman who is the passive recipient of male desires and sexual actions’ (Kaplan 1983: 316, emphasis in original).

The beautiful woman, as an erotic spectacle for the characters in the film and for the spectator, is a reminder of sexual difference and therefore represents the threat of castration (Mulvey 1989: 21). Using the Lacanian model to show how the one who looks controls the object of the gaze, Mulvey described voyeurism, sadism and fetishism as distinctly male visual pleasures that operate as subconscious mechanisms for managing castration anxiety. All three mechanisms serve to disavow a female gaze, and closer examination reveals that each is evident in *CSI*.

The action of the camera is voyeuristic, duplicating the eye at the keyhole and ‘suturing’ the spectator into the narrative. In terms of forensic television, the camera ceases to exist as the spectator becomes a kind of ‘Peeping Tom’ through the gaze of the forensic scientist. The *CSI* episode “Got Murder?” exemplifies this. It begins with male birdwatchers looking through cameras and binoculars at a woman’s eyeball poised in a raven’s beak. The voyeur – birdwatcher and spectator alike – looks without restraint, but the eyeball cannot return the gaze. When the scene switches to Grissom’s eye studying the eyeball, the gaze is still male, not because Grissom is male, but because the look is voyeuristic, and penetrative, and because the eyeball seems not to look back. Voyeurism is also evident in Nora’s gynaecological examination and leaking breasts, and in later scenes when Nora spies on her parents having sex, when the *CSI* team inspects black lace underwear found in the bedroom, and when Willows collects pubic hairs from a bed. No part of the body is exempt from forensic intrusion and, under the pretext of it being ‘informative’ and scientific, anything may be exposed for the voyeur. The new visual technologies described earlier enable a deeper level of voyeurism and include imagined flashbacks inserted – like subliminal images – as momentary flashes into the narrative. When these first appeared in *Profiler*, they marked a turning point in the genre.

Voyeurism has a sadistic side because it involves pleasure through control and domination and through being able to ‘punish’ female characters. Powerful or transgressive women, in particular, are controlled from within film narratives in a form of sadism or narrative violence (Cranny-Francis et al. 2003: 160-1). Scenarios in the following *CSI* episodes, where the victim is female, demonstrate this: a dead woman posed naked in a sandbox (“Slaves of Las Vegas” 2001); a woman brutally murdered and left face-down in the toilet, her hair dyed by the killer (“Stalker” 2002); a woman raped, murdered and stuffed into a garbage bag, her hands covered in navy blue paint and bound behind her back (“The Execution of Catherine Willows” 2002); a woman’s

body discovered locked inside a cage (“Caged” 2001); and, a woman’s decomposing remains riddled with paper wasps and blowflies (“Sex, Lies, and Larvae” 2000).

Through the scientist’s ‘inner gaze’ the spectator is able to view this sadistic violation of women’s bodies by means of flashback or ‘profiling’ images. Violence is, therefore, perpetrated first by killers, then by processes of decay – birds, insects, maggots – and ultimately by examiners. To get at the truth, the forensic examiner must look closely upon and beneath and into the body. Her gaze is not completely benign as she takes a power saw to the corpse’s skull. Thus are acts of atrocity conventionally ascribed to horror/thriller genres presented as valid ‘looks’ for a broad audience; they appear through the gaze of the forensic criminologist rather than the gaze of the criminal.

Fetishism is a mechanism of control whereby castration is disavowed by the substitution of a fetish object or body fragment – legs, shoes, lips, eyes – that ‘contains’ the woman. In forensic drama the potential for this to be a literal chopping up of the female body is obvious, and *CSI* exploits that potential. After the eyeball is discovered in “Got Murder?”, the head and torso of the victim’s dismembered body are retrieved from a rubbish dump, and later, through the ‘inner gaze’ of the scientist, the spectator glimpses legs, complete with stilettos, disappearing into a garbage crusher. Close-ups are ‘psychic defences against the terror that the castrated woman represents to male viewers’ (Cranny-Francis 2003: 161), and these are routine in *CSI*. As scalpels and technology expose the body to further objectification, close-ups of hair, eyes, open mouths and vagina-like slits on pale skin are often repeated from multiple angles. In “Slaves of Las Vegas” (2001), genital trauma is examined, ligature marks on wrists and ankles photographed, breast augmentation and manicured hands noted – all of which involve close-ups. Ironically, whip marks and liquid latex on the body lead detectives to a fetish club.

Despite the transgressive potential of Willows’ and Sidle’s roles, *CSI* cannot be considered to accommodate a female gaze because of the extreme objectification of victims’ bodies and because of the functions that voyeurism, sadism and fetishism perform in the male psyche. Rather, seeing female scientists involved in processes of objectification may enhance spectator pleasure. The sight of women viewing and ‘violating’ other women’s bodies – for example, when Sidle examines a brutalised, unconscious rape victim (“Too Tough to Die” 2001) – is perhaps a source of titillation and control for spectators. Despite the transgressive potential of Willows’ and Sidle’s roles, *CSI* is designed for the male spectator: female victims are male projections, and female spectators must identify either with them as horrific and vulnerable objects or, with the bearer of the male gaze, spying on them.

### ***The Bone Collector***

A key moment in the evolution of forensic drama provides crucial insight into the way in which the male gaze exploits the female gaze in contemporary forensic television. In *The Bone Collector* (1999), Lincoln Rhymes is a paralysed forensic investigator who can move only his head and shoulders and one finger. The damage is permanent and, after four bed-ridden years, Rhymes has lost the will to live. This physical and emotional ‘lack’ creates an illusion of agency in female detective, Amelia Donaghy,

who carries out the investigation. In the opening scenes a woman is abducted and chained up in front of an underground valve from which steam will explode at a set later time. The scenario controls and punishes the woman. When the woman's body is discovered, Donaghy is forced to 'work' the grisly crime scene – by male superiors and by Rhymes. From his bed, via radio, Rhymes orders her to describe the broiled female body that hangs shackled in front of the steampipe, take photographs of it, and, ultimately, cut off the dead woman's hands so the antique handcuffs can be retrieved for his inspection. Rhymes appropriates Donaghy's eyes in a male forensic gaze that is even more sensational than the killing. She is a puppet whose gaze Rhymes owns and activates. Ironically, Donaghy's eyes are blinded by tears. She cannot sever the hands. Released the year before *CSI*, *The Bone Collector* laid a trail for subsequent forensic programmes to follow but, in this earlier guise, the manipulation of the female gaze is less disguised.

### **Violent misogyny**

Gruesome deaths and grotesque bodies are commonplace in forensic television as screen writers, intent on exploiting the narrative potential of the scientific and visual technologies now available to them, contrive to depict bodies in bizarre and shocking circumstances. Thus, human remains that had hitherto mostly been drowned, shot, stabbed, raped or perhaps dismembered are now also boiled, burned, steamed, fried, dried, desiccated, lacerated, macerated, infested, digested, mummified and, even, in a recent *CSI* episode, chromed ("The Last Ride" 2015). The pathologist, hungry to understand the corpse's history, is ready to inspect every nook and cranny of these bodies in scenes that are at once horrifying and fascinating. Nothing, it seems, is taboo, with the result that what was once classified as R or even X-rated is now presented on primetime television as a kind of edutainment. And in this schema crimes against women are worse than ever.

If *The Bone Collector* (1999) foreshadows the way in which the female 'look' is appropriated in forensic television, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2009) is a prime example of the way in which the presence of strong female characters – including the female forensic pathologist – masks the violent misogyny embedded in many crime narratives. The film's heroine, Lisbeth Salander, is a positive female role model: she is smart, she is active, she carries out a successful and deeply satisfying quest for retributive justice, and she rescues the male protagonist. But this glosses over the fact that her body and the bodies of five female victims are subjected to violent humiliation and punishment. After a lifetime of betrayal and sexual abuse, Salander is handcuffed, spreadeagled and anally raped by her legal guardian. Of the others, one is bound and left to die face down in hot embers, one is stoned to death, one is choked with a sanitary towel, one has her hands charred over a fire and her head sawn off, and the fifth is raped, murdered and left with a parakeet rammed into her vagina. Apart from this, serial killer Martin Vanger cages countless other women in the torture-basement beneath his dining room. This is gratuitous violence against female bodies. This is misogyny. Furthermore, when the male protagonist enquires about Vanger's motivation for torturing women, the killer replies, 'I do what every man dreams of' (2009). The translation of the original

title of Stieg Larsson's novel, from which the film was made, is *Men Who Hate Women*. Citing writers like James Patterson (*Kiss the Girls* 1996) and Dean Koontz (*Night Chills* 1986), feminist Melanie Newman observes that 'male novelists have for decades been selling graphic capture-rape-torture-kill novels by chucking in 'strong' female characters for balance' (2009). Salander attempts to make amends for the wrongs inflicted upon her, but a nod to feminism hardly compensates for graphic and gratuitous violence played out upon women's bodies.

Wholesale misogyny is not limited to the big screen. Crimes against women are frequently sexual and misogynist in forensic television drama generally. In one two-part episode of *Silent Witness*, the killer abducts and incarcerates, strips and tortures women before letting them loose in the woods so he can hunt them like animals ("In a Lonely Place" 2014). Similar stories in episodes of *Cold Case* ("The Woods" 2005), *Criminal Minds* ("Open Season" 2007) and *Law and Order: SVU* ("Hunting Ground" 2012) were inspired by real-life serial killer Robert Hansen who killed 17 – and perhaps more than 30 – women in Alaska between 1971 and 1983. The line is increasingly blurred between these television episodes and pornography.

Like pornography, the kind of film and television that features misogynist violence defies easy generalisations: anti-porn feminists view porn as violent, degrading and harmful (Dworkin 1981); pro-sex feminists argue that it is subversive, liberating and empowering (Juffer 1998, Kipnis 1996). The female television pathologist – as middle-aged mother in maternity wear, black woman in floral headwear, or lesbian in men's suits – may be lauded as a progressive portrayal of 'woman' because she explodes ideas about screen heroines, and because she occupies a role that calls for analysis rather than intuition, curiosity rather than delicacy. But the female pathologist – like some strong female characters generally – is a Trojan horse: she smuggles in increasingly graphic and increasingly prevalent violence against women's bodies.

It is difficult to draw a correlation between onscreen images and real abuse against women – especially when compared with, say, Judges 19 in the Bible, in which a woman is subjected to public sexualised violence and ultimately killed and dismembered – but it is of some concern that misogyny has become 'banal' in the sense in which Hannah Arendt applied the term to Adolf Eichmann's role as chief architect of Hitler's solution for 'the Jewish problem'. Arendt is a German-born American political theorist who escaped Europe during the Holocaust, and whose work deals with the nature of power. In 1961, she reported on Eichmann's trial, observing that he presented himself as an innocuous individual whose testimony relied on stock phrases and clichés. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), Arendt raised the question of whether evil is radical or simply a function of thoughtlessness, using the phrase 'banality of evil' to contest the idea that Nazi atrocities emanated from malevolence (1964: 134). She believed Eichmann's involvement in the program of genocide stemmed not from hatred of the Jews or from taking pleasure in murder, but from absence of thought (16-17). Motivated by professional ambition, he carried out orders without exercising the capacity for thought that would have brought awareness of the evil nature of genocide. Eichmann was just doing his job.

I do not intend by invoking Arendt's eponymous 'banality of evil' to suggest that viewers are potentially all psychopaths – Arendt has been similarly misread – but, rather, to argue that violence against women is normalised in forensic television shows. While the ubiquitous female pathologist appears to challenge dominant gender representation, she is the unexamined gift that enables female victims to be brutalised in scenes of gratuitous violence. By exercising the capacity for thought that eluded Eichmann, viewers may recognise in the female forensic pathologist the cliché that makes this objectification palatable. Mulvey observed that her intention in analysing the gaze was to destroy it (1989: 16). Perhaps the recent spate of crime writing that has produced 'upbeat', less explicitly violent crime shows – such as *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, *Death in Paradise* and *Partners in Crime*, not forgetting *Poirot* and *Miss Marple* – is evidence that the pleasure found in sexualised violence is, at least for some, similarly being dismantled.

### Conclusion

Might there be a way of writing death in which the victim participates in the gaze? Kristeva suggests that it is impossible to know what a female gaze might be (see, Kaplan 1983: 319) but Kaplan proposes that it begins with 'the mutual, pleasurable bonding that we all, male and female, enjoyed with our mothers' (1983: 324). The *CSI* episode "Got Murder?" acts as a metaphor for the way in which 'woman' is a passive object of surveillance in forensic television. It begins with men spying a woman's eyeball, a fragment of female flesh that is passive, contained and isolated – the ultimate object. Far from accommodating a female gaze, the patriarchal structure of looking exploits the 'look' of the female forensic scientist and performs particular psychic functions. An almost documentary style – prompted by scientific innovation and developments in image-making technology – masks a virulent male gaze and sexualised violence against women. But is the woman's eyeball necessarily excluded from the process of looking?

There is a way of thinking about the corpse as 'undead' that opens up other possibilities. Crime scene investigation takes place in a kind of liminal space, the limbo that exists between a crime being discovered and the case being closed. Here, victims communicate with examiners through their bodies and their reconstructed stories. Furthermore, as scientists re-enact a victim's final days, they effectively rewrite his/her life so that the victim seems to other characters – those who mis-knew them – more alive than ever. For as long as it is in the morgue, the corpse is not quite dead. The body, though silent, is very much alive to the forensic investigator. This is particularly evident when the investigator addresses it as if expecting a reply. In "Against the Odds", police surgeon Dr Blake murmurs, 'What happened to you, eh?' (*Dr Blake* 2016) and in "The Open Road", Alice Harvey says to a distracted Dr Blake, 'You've hardly said a word to me'. Motioning to the body, she adds, 'Or to him' (*Dr Blake* 2016). Corpse and pathologist work together to solve the crime, and the corpse is not truly dead until the case is closed, the paperwork filed away, and the body 'released'.

The gaze between corpse and pathologist may, therefore, be mutual. Though silent, the victim speaks through fragments of its body. In the same way, its eyes, though blind, might engage those of the scientist. When the scientist gazes not *at*, but *into*, the eyes

of the corpse, there is mutual gazing of a double kind: each urges the other to surrender/discover what she/he knows and both, corporately, gaze in another direction, the same direction – towards the killer who has now become their prey. These ‘looks’ represent a female gaze. In the same way that Grissom studying the eyeball represents a male gaze – not because Grissom is male, but because the look is voyeuristic – Dr Blake addressing the corpse in the hope of learning an answer might be considered a female gaze – not because he is female, but because his gaze approaches that which Kaplan describes as ‘a mutual gazing rather than the subject-object kind that reduces one of the parties to the place of submission’ (1983: 324).

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