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Valuing Crime Fiction: Aesthetic Appreciation or Criminological Data?

Karen Simecek, University of Warwick

I: Valuing Narrative/s

In *Nausea*, Sartre writes “a man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him *in terms of these stories and he tries to live his* life as if he were recounting it.” Sartre diagnosed the ubiquity of narratives as one of the barriers to living an authentic life in contemporary society. Not only, according to Sartre, do people often tell stories to explain past actions but use those stories to avoid facing the choices that lie in front. One simply follows the trajectory of the narrative adopted. The issue that Sartre highlights here is not necessarily with the usefulness of narrative but with the types of narratives some adopt, narratives that are not properly tied to the self but rely on narrative tropes (such as seeing oneself in terms of aspects of one’s identity that prefigure types of actions).

The desire or need to construct narratives in understanding our lives seems inescapable. As Peter Goldie argues “our lives have narrative structure—roughly speaking, they comprise an unfolding, structured sequence of actions, events, thoughts and feelings, related from the individual’s point of view” (2002, p. 4). In other words, we experience our lives temporally, seeing previous events as contributing to where we find ourselves now, as shaping our beliefs, values and desires as well as motivating our actions. This view is also expressed by Dan Dennett who claims that

we are all virtuoso novelists, who find ourselves engaged in all sorts of behaviour, and we always try to put the best ‘faces’ on it we can. We try to make all of our material cohere into a single good story. And that story is our autobiography. The chief fictional character at the centre of that autobiography is one’s self. (1988, p. 1029)¹

¹ See also Oliver Sacks (1985), Alasdair Macintyre (1981), Jerome Bruner (1987) and Charles Taylor (1989) for others who argue for the centrality of narrative in understanding oneself and one’s experiences. See Strawson (2004) for a discussion of these views as well as for an argument against the value of narrativity.

Taking this idea further, Martha Nussbaum argues that “narratives embody forms of human life and desire” and “certain types of human understanding are irreducibly narrative in form” (1990, p. 290-291). According to those who argue for the value of narrativity, narratives are not merely useful tools but are fundamental to what and how we value things in our lives. Given such views of narrative, it is not surprising that there is an expectation that both perpetrators of crime and victims of crime (ought to) make sense of their experiences in narrative terms. To further complicate things, it is also true that those who study the causes of crime and social harm will not only draw on narratives but construct narratives in providing explanations of the causes of crime and social harm.²

However, according to Presser (2013), narrative is not simply a neutral framework in which we understand some content, i.e., the experiences of individuals, the narratives themselves shape our understanding of that experience. In other words, the content and the narrative that presents that content are inseparable.³ The idea of narratives as the causes of crime and social harm is put forward by Presser in her exposition of narrative criminology. She writes: “We do harm because of cultural logics, typically in the form of stories, that reduce the target of harm and conjure ourselves as both authorized to harm and powerless not to” (Presser, 2013, p. 109). It is also in the telling of stories that one configures value (or lack of value).

Building on Presser’s view, McGregor’s book, *A Criminology of Narrative Fiction* (2021) holds that narrative fiction has an important role to play in understanding, explaining, and reducing the causes of crime and social harm. He identifies “three specific criminological values of fiction – phenomenological [what it is like], counterfactual [how things could be otherwise], and mimetic [reflecting reality as it is] – which are all concerned with the conveyance of particular types of knowledge by narratives” (2021, p. 3). McGregor argues that each type of knowledge has aetiological value, that is, each type of knowledge has the power to reveal causes of crime and social harm. For instance, knowledge of what it is like to have a certain sort of experience may play a role in explaining how someone might come to commit a certain sort of crime (through appreciation of how such an experience made one feel, and the beliefs and desires generated by that experience). As a philosopher and aesthete, I don’t feel equipped to comment on the potential for narrative fiction to play a part in reducing crime and social harm, and so I will instead focus this discussion on the idea that it aids understanding and explanation through these three types of knowledge: phenomenological, counterfactual, and mimetic.

Understanding and explanation may seem on the surface to be pointing to the same value, however, understanding focuses on the origins or roots of crime and social harm, whereas explanation seeks to link the cause with the effect. Explanation foregrounds understanding, and therefore, both parts are essential to criminological investigation. It is through the distinction between understanding and explanation that we can chart the distinction between the role narratives play in providing the foundations of crime and social harm and how narratives help to move an agent to action, thereby showing how these stories *cause* crime and social harm. Importantly, it is not the mere telling of stories that cause crime and social harm (if it were the case, we would look very differently at those involved in producing the novels, TV series and films we enjoy so much!) but the way those stories figure in someone’s life and reflect what they take to be of value and significance. Not just the stories they construct themselves to make sense of their experiences but the stories that we tell within a society/culture.⁴

In some cases, the societal stories shape or fit neatly with the story of the self, in other cases it creates tension. It is therefore not enough to simply study narratives but to see narratives in the context of lives (and I want to emphasise the plural here) lived. I take it that this is the point of McGregor’s argument about phenomenological knowledge: through engagement with narrative

² See Presser (2008) for a good example of this.

³ See McGregor (2016) on narrative thickness for more on the issue of form-content inseparability.

⁴ See McGregor (2018).

fiction we can examine not bare narrative structures that some individual might invoke or construct but how a narrative is shaped through subjective, lived experience and how that subjective, lived experience is shaped by the stories one makes use of in their lives. However, that is not the same as arguing that we come to see what some experience is like for another; the phenomenological only need to point to the idea of the relationship between the apersonal and structural dimension of narrative and how that connects to the personal, individual, and subjective. So rather than coming to know what it is like for some particular person, we come to know what it is for individuals to be connected to narratives. As John Gibson argues

The vision of life we find in literary narratives shows us human practice and circumstance not from an abstracted, external perspective but from the 'inside' of life, in its full dramatic form ... This achievement does not consist in the stating of truths or the offering of knowledge of matters of fact. It is rather a matter of literature's ability to open up for us a world of value and significance and of all that this implies about our capacity to understand fully the import of various forms of human activity. (2007, p. 116)

Gibson's point is that rather than intimately connecting a reader with a particular lived experience, the work of literary fiction reveals how things become valuable and significant, and how that value and significance shows up in the way we live our lives. Rather than being about some individual's experience, the work's value lies in what it can reveal about human practice.⁵ It seems clear to me that McGregor's argument should be understood as aiming to show the criminological value of fiction as conveyance of particular types of knowledge (phenomenological, counterfactual and mimetic) of narratives, and through that frame, of the causes of crime and social harm.

II: Intersecting Narratives

McGregor's interest in narrative is distinct from Presser's in that he is not focused on the individual (non-fictional) stories of those who commit crime as data for criminological inquiry but instead on (exemplary) *fictional* narratives where crime and social harm show up within complex, intersecting narratives. In other words, McGregor does not seek to generalise from the particular but to see forms of human practice, or generalisations, within works of narrative fiction. Rarely are fictional narratives restricted to one character (exceptions include *Hatchet* (1986) by Gary Paulsen or the film *Cast Away* (2000) but in both cases the singular nature of the narrative is brought about by removing the character from society). It is more common that a novel (or film) will include multiple characters but told from a singular point of view (for instance, *Notes on a Scandal* by Zoë Heller or Nabokov's *Pale Fire* or *Lolita*). In such cases it's not true that it is representative of a singular narrative for the storytelling will still involve implicit narratives of others, which we are made all the more aware of when presented with unreliable narrators (of course, one of the ways we determine their unreliable status is through constructing the other, untold, suppressed narrative/s). One of the key strengths of McGregor's account in this book is that he takes seriously the idea of narratives being commonplace and shifting in relation to other narratives. The stories one tells oneself about oneself do not exist in a vacuum and this is what narrative fiction can bring into focus. McGregor argues that the criminologist ought not focus on narrative form without considering the content i.e., the characters and events embedded in that narrative, and consequently the implicit narratives of those characters. In our everyday lives, we are unable to spend much time reflecting on the interrelationship of our own narratives with those of others (and may even lack awareness of their interaction). Furthermore, the incompleteness of the narratives of ordinary life makes it hard for us to see how the interaction

⁵ See also Bernard Harrison for a similar view of the value of fiction (2014)

and negotiating of different narratives plays out. Engaging with narrative fiction enables one to take a step back and see the complexity of narrative construction and meaning within a complex whole, which may also enable us to see how one story told may leave another suppressed.

One example that demonstrates the interrelation of narratives comes from the film, *The Departed* (2006) directed by Martin Scorsese. In his discussion of the film, McGregor argues that we bear witness to an example of how competing interests within the police department helps crime rather than reducing it. Furthermore, McGregor argues, it is through the juxtaposition of the two main narratives featuring the characters Costigan (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Sullivan (Matt Damon) that we can see that the police are more vulnerable to criminals than criminals are to the police; by infiltrating a criminal gang, Costigan risks torture and death if discovered whereas by infiltrating the police, Sullivan risks a prison sentence. McGregor's claim here is that we can come to know through the narrative representation the pressures these places on the undercover police that is not present in the counter-narrative of Sullivan. He argues that this offers "data that explains the vulnerability of the police to organised criminal enterprises and could be used to improve police policy, procedure, and practice" (2021, p. 138). It is not that such knowledge could not be obtained by other means, I take it the point McGregor is making is that such works of narrative fiction present clear data by revealing how police policy, procedure, and practice might undermine itself by allowing for direct comparison through the duration of the film (I am not merely asked to consider the difference between a member of the police infiltrating a gang and a gang member infiltrating the police but am guided in how they compare, e.g. their differing emotional responses to the same events and concerns for the consequences of their actions).

Another example of the significance of intersecting narratives comes in McGregor's discussion of *Broadchurch* (2013-2017). He argues that the third season shows the damaging effects of rape myths through the way in which someone's own story is framed by the narratives others impose on them (through false beliefs, stereotyping, awareness of some but not other facts of a case). McGregor writes:

The ideal counterfactual knowledge of *Broadchurch 3* is provided by the means of the integration of narrative content with narrative form, the combination of changes in the circumstances of the rape with changes in the framework from which Trish is viewed. The content reveals both the ubiquity of rape myths, false beliefs about sexual assaults that condone sexual aggression, and the propensity of the public for victim blaming. (2021, p. 84)

Trish's own narrative remains stable (albeit only partially told) throughout, what makes it seem unstable is how other attempts of narrative framing prioritise certain features of the case and fill in the aspects of the story that are suppressed, thereby making it even harder for Trish to reveal the truth of her experience (for fear of being misunderstood, uncooperative and blameworthy).

Through this discussion of *Broadchurch*, McGregor suggests that the value of narrative reflection is in coming to recognise that the stories we tell of crime and social harm might result in distancing from the victims as well as get in the way of recognising crime and its causes. The example of *Broadchurch* season 3 demonstrates that it is narrative complexity in addition to the audience being invited to simultaneously appreciate how different rape myths lead one further away from the victim's own narrative (and how that might contribute to its suppression) that provides "data that expose the appeal of rape myths and victim blaming and is criminological to the extent that the explanation of mythology and blame could be used to improve the way in which the criminal justice system deals with violent sexual crimes" (2021, p. 85-86). What engagement with such complex narratives can do is help the audience to see *how* narrative framing (that they might employ in reality) can itself be 'misleading, unethical, and dangerous.'

One of the key benefits of McGregor's view over others is that he remains neutral as to whether understanding the self in narrative terms is valuable. Rather, he accepts that narrativity is ubiquitous (although the quality of those narratives that show up in everyday life will be varied) and that narrative fiction is valuable in virtue of the way in which exemplary narratives help to reveal important features of the role narrativity can play in understanding and explanation in both a negative and positive way. Simply put, studying narrative fiction is valuable, whereas understanding the self in narrative terms might not be. It is the former that helps us to see the problems with the latter.

III: Aesthetic concerns vs. criminological data: readers and authors

In this final section, I want to raise two related worries for McGregor's account regarding the instrumentalising of works of narrative fiction, i.e. seeing the value of certain works of narrative fiction for their criminological insights. Firstly, what are the demands on the practice of reading for gaining criminological insights? Is there a conflict between appreciating a work of art as a work of art and appreciating it as a source of criminological data? Secondly, what are the demands on authors who produce works that have criminological value? What expertise and/or knowledge are they required to bring? Is the prioritising of aesthetic concerns in conflict with showing aspects of reality through the work? Literary representation will always be an imperfect route to knowledge that leaves much out of what can be communicated via literary imagination and storytelling. It is therefore not clear what role criminological narrative fiction can play in criminology more broadly construed. In other words, how does data gathered from examining knowledge from narrative fiction (knowledge that is gained through aesthetic engagement) translate to academic discussion? To conclude, I offer a suggestion for a solution by introducing Bernard Harrison's brand of cognitivism in which he argues that the value of narrative fiction lies in the way it is reflective of the human practice of meaning making.

Problem 1

In the philosophy of literature, there is a long-established suspicion with granting that art is valuable for some instrumental reasons, rather than merely valuing 'art for art's sake'. The relevant worry to McGregor's project is that if we take works of literature as being valuable primarily for their cognitive or moral value (which includes the kinds of criminological insights McGregor argues is available through narrative fiction), then that shapes one's interaction with the work. The reader reads the work looking for the knowledge it supposedly provides, which upsets their ability to engage with the work as a work of art. Peter Lamarque argues: "A good reader attends not to some content beyond or behind the mode of presentation but to the mode of presentation itself, to the fact that what is being said is being said in this way" (Lamarque 2009: 416). In Lamarque's discussion he draws on Malcolm Budd, who argues that the appropriate kind of experience that is connected to the value of the work is the "experience of interacting with [the work] in whatever way it demands if it is to be understood ... to experience a work with (full) understanding your experience must be imbued with an awareness of (all) the aesthetically relevant properties of the work" (Budd, as cited by Lamarque, 2009, 404). Lamarque argues from Budd that "the experience must be suitably tied to the work ... [And it must be] an intrinsically not mere instrumentally valuable experience" (Lamarque, 2009, p. 404). Surely to seek criminological data from a work of narrative fiction, the concern is not with the work of art, its integral aims and how it functions aesthetically but whether it rewards criminological frameworks and research questions? Rather than trying to understand the work's functioning as an artwork, instead the criminologist is approaching with a readymade sense of the work's function prior to any engagement (the worry can be summed up by comparing the

activity of aesthetic appreciation of a work of narrative fiction and reading for criminological insights; although their maybe some overlap the two modes of engagement prioritise different aspects of the work that governs one's engagement).

Katherine Thomson-Jones puts the problem as follows: the cognitivist needs "to support a connection between the capacity of art to provide knowledge having to do with what makes it art and the success or failure of an artwork having to do with its capacity to provide knowledge" (2005, p. 376). As John Gibson comments

We may of course take what we find in a literary text and ask whether it holds true in the real world, whether, if we apply it there, we can acquire a better understanding of worldly affairs. But as soon as we have done this we have left aside literary appreciation and stepped into something more like social science: we are now investigating the world and not the literary work. (Gibson, 2004, p. 113)

The challenge, therefore, for McGregor is to show that the role of the work of narrative fiction is not a mere springboard for criminology or a (very imperfect) place for mining criminological data (that could be obtained by other means) but that it is through literary appreciation itself that enables the kind of criminological gains he claims is on offer. In other words, the cognitive gains of the works McGregor is focussed on must relate to the how the work of narrative fiction functions as a work of art. It is not sufficient that a work may provide us with ideas of the causes of crime and social harm that forms hypotheses to test in the real world, for as Gibson puts it "we are now investigating the world and not the literary work." For narrative fiction to play a central role in the practice of criminology it must do significant work *through* literary appreciation. In making clear that this is a live concern for McGregor, we can turn to his comments in Chapter 2 where he outlines his Narrative Criminology. McGregor writes "Narrative criminology is a realist framework, assuming that the study of the social world is the study of reality, but that researchers have only partial access to that reality" (2021, p. 32). This implies the following assumption: works of narrative fiction can provide access to aspects of reality that are not available by other means. In particular, he emphasises the role of narrative construction (as noted in the previous section) and the literary imagination. It therefore seems that he is committed to doing criminology through aesthetic criticism, and consequently, the focus of the research must be on the literary (or cinematic) work itself. However, elsewhere McGregor also argues that "the criminological imagination does not exhaust the criminological value of fiction and that fiction can provide actual data that compliments the data provided by traditional academic and documentary sources" (2021, p. 3). Therefore, what is gained from such works of narrative fiction had better be useable in conjunction with 'traditional academic and documentary sources' but wouldn't that in itself entail extracting data from its aesthetic context, in other words, separating content from form (or paraphrasing the unparaphrasable)?

Problem 2

It is at this point that we find another worry for McGregor since the debate is not just concerned with the practice of readers/audiences but to the practice of writing and producing works of art. For the argument to hold that such criminological data is available through the practice of aesthetic criticism and as a consequence of engaging aesthetically with the work, then the burden of producing data through aesthetic appreciation (exemplary narratives and literary imagination) falls on the authors. As Martha Nussbaum puts it, it is the author 'whose responsibility it all ultimately is, and whose conscious testimony will either reveal the value of life or cheapen it' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 140). The author must be in a position to bring to life the criminological through the aesthetic. The criminological value of a work of narrative fiction will only ever be as good as the works of narrative fiction available. What constitutes a 'good' work

had better have something to do with the quality of the narrative and the aesthetics of the work, otherwise, it begs the question why criminologists should be looking to works of art at all.

But as Iris Vidmar Jovanović argues “literature as an artform is first and foremost a storytelling activity in which one may just be interested in a way a story is given a form” (Vidmar, 2016, p. 552). Consequently, authors are motivated by aesthetic concerns: “Literary authors write aesthetically pleasing stories about who we are, but they do not ask questions about it, and do not try to provide answers to them” (Vidmar, 2016, p. 546). Any criminological relevance will surely just be a by-product of producing a ‘good story’. We celebrate certain authors for their expertise in aesthetic narrative construction not for their knowledge of certain aspects of the world. Of course, accuracy is held as a value (e.g., the negative criticism of Piggy’s glasses in *Lord of the Flies* – the scientific inaccuracy of having the character be short-sighted and therefore wear concave glasses that would not in fact be useful in starting a fire) but only in so far as it helps or hinders one’s engagement with the literary imagination. It need not be wholly accurate, just accurate enough.

What motivates authors of narrative fiction are aesthetic concerns, in other words, delivering a compelling narrative but this is not necessarily compatible with providing phenomenological, counterfactual, or mimetic knowledge of the causes of crime and social harm. McGregor mentions the TV series *Line of Duty* in the book as an example of TV revealing the ways in which organised crime groups may use corrupt officers to enable them to commit further crime but also how valuable it is to such a group to infiltrate the police force with one of their own. Season 6 of *Line of Duty* aired in the early summer of 2021 with the promise of the anti-corruption team finally uncovering the corrupt officer at the top of the organised crime group that had infiltrated the police. Many were disappointed⁶ by the final reveal when it turned out to be a mere opportunist – a police officer who stepped into a power vacuum when the leader of the organised crime group was killed. That there will always be people ready to step in for their own gains may be helpful data (especially in the sense of the police developing too narrow a profile of who might have such power and also in challenging the expectation that a conviction will end the criminal activity of a group) but it was disappointing as the narrative climax of the season and series to date. I take this as an example of a work where the criminological and aesthetic are in conflict but one in which the producers prioritised accuracy and realism at the expense of aesthetics. Will the works that are of most interest to the criminologist be the most aesthetically successful? This begs the question: how does the criminologist choose works to study? To recognise those that are most useful, doesn’t one already need to possess knowledge of such things in order to identify them in the work? So what does the work of narrative fiction provide that wasn’t known prior to engagement with it? If the criminologist focuses on exemplary works of narrative fiction (according to some aesthetic criteria), it is not clear that this *will* provide a good enough representation of crime.

The claim that such works can act as a source of data means that such works must do more than have crime and social harm as a theme; they must also offer a particular kind of treatment of that theme in order to offer any kind of insight. McGregor’s three kinds of knowledge (phenomenological, counterfactual, and mimetic) can then be interpreted as a test of whether a work offers the right kind of treatment of criminological themes to be of any use to the criminologist. The author must at least combine narrative fictional representation with sufficient knowledge of real-world causes of crime and social harm in order to have any hope of revealing mimetic knowledge; explore alternatives to real-world situations and experiences in order to reveal counter-factual knowledge; and finally, be sufficiently knowledgeable of real-world experiences of crime and social harm to be able to offer an aesthetically rich and engaging form

⁶ All episodes listed on IMDB received a user rating of greater than 7/10 apart from this episode which receives a 5.6/10. See also the 3-star review in the Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/may/02/line-of-duty-review-an-audacious-deranged-reverse-ferreting-finale>

of phenomenological knowledge that is informed by real-life lived experience (contrast with the case of *American Dirt*, 2018, which was criticised for being written by someone who has limited knowledge of the life of the people that the characters in the work represent). In each case, the author needs to have some special insight into crime and social harm in order to deliver such insights through their work. Surely an author who has done no research (and has no direct experience themselves of crime or social harm) but attempts to write narrative fiction that addresses criminological themes will not provide a useful a source of data. Therefore, the worry is that this sets the bar very high for the authors whose works are to be used as a source of criminological data and consequently, significantly limits the number of works that the criminologist can study. The consequence of this worry is that we might still accept that works of narrative fiction may have a role to play but this comes with a warning: be careful which works of narrative fiction you use in your study and remember that it cannot do all of the work, it must be treated in tandem with empirical work (whether by the author or the reader).

A solution?

I take it that McGregor is not arguing that all works of narrative fiction that have crime or social harm as a theme are equally valuable to the criminologist. If that's the case, then the worry falls in two parts: 1. How does the criminologist select the works to be studied? (Either this depends on the criminologist evaluating non-aesthetically the potential as a data source or reading vast quantities of literature in the hope of finding the right book for their research project); and 2. How does the criminologist extract the data? It's not clear how the mode of reading that enables the criminologist to gain knowledge follows pure aesthetic concerns. (McGregor's own examples sometimes focus on aspects that one without a criminologist perspective might think is a minor part of the narrative, which suggests the criminologist isn't approaching the fictional narrative on its own aesthetic terms. See for instance, his discussion of *Beverly Hills Cop*.)

One solution available to McGregor is to insist that what the work of narrative fiction offers is simply the opportunity to study human practice through the construction of narratives and making meaning that is relevant in some way to the criminological project. What this enables McGregor to argue is that *any* work of narrative fiction that has crime and/or social harm as a theme is relevant to the criminologist and consequently sidestep the worries about how the criminologist identifies useful works as well as sidestepping the issue of the demands on the authors since any attempt to construct meaning that relates to the representation of crime and social harm is relevant.

Support for this position can be found in the cognitivist position of Bernard Harrison:

It is possible to have an art of this kind, an art that is made simply by arranging words on a page, and yet that, at its occasional best, addresses realities, because the realities in question are accessible via the assessment of language for meaning, rather than truth. They are accessible by this route because the meaning of words are determined by the relationships in which words stand to the practices that in part constitute the realities of a given human world. (2009, p. 24)

According to Harrison, any work of narrative fiction can be understood as realist simply in virtue of its use of common language and appeal to common meaning in an effort to engage a reader. Realism isn't achieved through accurate representation but simply in the use of language. Rather than focusing on narratives as the thing that shapes our lives (our understanding of experience, ourselves and what we believe and value), it is the meaning of language that ought to be the thing in focus, that is, how we use language to represent ourselves and our experiences:

Literary fiction ... works by deploying words against a backdrop of imagined circumstances in such a way as to allow us to focus on the roots of social practice, with all its inherent ambiguities and stresses, of the meanings through which we are accustomed to represent our world and ourselves. (Harrison 2014, p. 2)

We rely on language having meaning in everyday communication, yet too often, meaning is established through convention leaving individuals open to not appreciating the meaning of the words they use resulting in misunderstanding between one another. Literature offers the opportunity to study how language works and how meaning reflects human needs (allowing words to track what we value and be useful in our lives), as well as showing us when this fails:

the connection between literature and reality does not run by way of the truth or falsity of statements, but by way of deeper linkages, internal to language, between the meanings of words and the practices that constitute human worlds and form the outlook and personalities of their inhabitants. (Harrison, 2009, p. 27)

However, accepting such a position puts pressure on McGregor's view in that according to this view it is not the narrative alone that is the data source but the particular use of language, that is, the representing through description and metaphor of characters, events, responses, actions within the narrative. It is not the story told but the telling of the story, in other words, *how* the story is told. Harrison's brand of cognitivism suggests greater focus on form: how narratives are used in constructing meaning, including how language is used to represent characters and events. What the criminologist of narrative fiction ought to be doing is, therefore, investigating meaning making (but understood more broadly than in relation to narrative alone). The role of narrative fiction might then be to ensure criminologists are not relying on pre-reflective thinking and assumptions about the concepts and related language they rely on in their research into the causes of crime and social harm as well as gaining better understanding of how language and meaning-making shapes conceptions of self. As Harrison comments "what the reader encounters in the text are not gaps but hermeneutic stumbling blocks: points in the text at which the common assumptions or fore-understandings about the relationships of everyday notions that he brings with him to the text are challenged and brought under pressure" (2014, p. 500). It is through aesthetic engagement with the use of language in narrative fiction that the criminologist puts to the test their understanding of the human practice of meaning making that in itself also reflects human practices that shape our understanding of ourselves and our social worlds that goes beyond narrative construction. Appreciating the role of human practice in meaning-making has as much relevance to understanding crime and social harm as it does to every aspect of the social world.

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