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REPRESENTATIONS OF BRITISH PROBATION OFFICERS IN FILM, TELEVISION DRAMA AND NOVELS 1948-2012

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Abstract *This paper offers an overview of representations of the British probation service in three fictional media over a sixty year period, up to the present time. While there were never as many, and they were never as renowned as representations of police, lawyers and doctors, there are arguably more than has generally been realised. Broadly speaking - although there have always been individual exceptions to general trends - there has been a shift from supportive and optimistic representations to cynical and disillusioned ones, in which the viability of showing care and compassion to offenders is questioned or mocked. This mirrors wider political attempts to change the traditionally welfare-oriented culture of the service to something more punitive. The somewhat random and intermittent production of probation novels, films and television series over the period in questions has had no discernible cumulative impact on public understanding of probation, and it is suggested that the relative absence of iconic media portrayals of its officers, comparable to those achieved in police, legal and medical fiction, has made it more difficult to sustain credible debates about rehabilitation in popular culture.*

Introduction

One of the problems the Probation Service has is that it is not very photogenic. We live with an image driven media and society and unfortunately probation doesn't present itself well, certainly on television. There is something about learning to play the media in a way that suits our needs and trying to accept that we are not like the police, we are not like prisons, we don't look good on television, so we actually need to play to our strengths and to give an impression of an organisation that knows what it is doing and has a very hard-headed realistic approach to crime management. Christine Lawrie, Chief executive of PBA (quoted in Fletcher 2007:9)

The work of Probation Trusts is particularly open to misrepresentation. Some of you may have watched the recent BBC drama, 'Public Enemies'. This was drama, not documentary, and therefore no closer to the real life of probation staff than the body count among staff at Holby General in 'Casualty' is a true representation of life expectancy in the NHS. The difference, however, is that we all have our own experience of doctors and nurses that

allow us to put the drama in perspective, whereas the great majority of people have no source of information about what probation does other than what they read and what they see on TV. Those of us who know could simply sigh resignedly at the ninth or tenth serious misrepresentation of probation practice in the first episode: others are likely to have believed what they saw (Graham Nicholls (2012), retiring Chief Officer, Lincolnshire Probation Trust)

The representation of criminal justice officials in the media - both news media and entertainment media - has been a legitimate subject for academic enquiry since the 1970s. There had been literary critical studies of the crime fiction genre well before this, which commented, incidentally or directly, on those criminal justice occupations that were covered in such literature - police officers, private detectives, lawyers, sometimes psychiatrists - but no studies of the same occupations in film or television, despite their predominance in post-war cinema and broadcasting. This changed in the 1970s, which saw the emergence of cultural studies, and saw criminologists become interested in sources of public opinion about crime and punishment, and in the impact of media imagery on the legitimacy or otherwise of criminal justice agencies. A decade or so later, as visibility in the media became progressively more unavoidable, both social work and probation in England and Wales began to take a more systematic interest in its public image, having made only intermittent, short-lived, forays into this field in the past (Cousins 1987; Fry 1988; Maruna 2007). The following survey of fictional representations of probation in Britain over a sixty year period, premised on the idea that a) fiction is not necessarily untruthful or unrealistic (though it may be), and that b) on some matters it can frame and inform public understanding as much if not more than factual data, is intended to serve academic, media and probation interests. It is no more than an overview, complementing studies of probation imagery in the news media (Byers 2008; Jewkes 2008), and some of the specific representations mentioned here warrant more detailed analysis, and proper contextualisation in the time and place in which they were produced.

In the period since the end of WW2, the police and the private detective have been predominant in all forms of crime fiction - literary, cinematic and televisual - mirroring and augmenting (in respect of the police if not the private eye) the dominance of police stories in news media (press and television) (Reiner, Livingstone and Allen 2000). Within the various and changing forms of police story it is possible to discern a vernacular history of policing itself, and of changing police ideals - from the beat policing of local communities in Dixon of Dock Green (BBC1955-1976), through the introduction of motor patrols in Z-Cars (BBC 1962-1978), the emergence of regional crime squads in Softly, Softly (BBC 1969-76), the war on London's organised crime in The Sweeney (ITV 1975-1978) to the emergence of the hero-pathologist and forensics expert, prefigured in The Expert (BBC1968-1974) but more fully realised in Silent Witness (1996 onwards) and "cold case" series like Waking the Dead (BBC 2000-2011), and in related (often American) television programmes and novels Leishmann and Mason 2003; Reiner 2004). While the realism or otherwise of such portrayals is always moot, certain fictional police officers have nonetheless been touchstones in public debate about policing and it has never been difficult to find examples in the press where reference to a television character is used as a

kind of shorthand to explain some aspect or other of policing in the real world, to personify it.

Probation officers have intermittently appeared as minor characters in some if not all of the above police shows: an attractive trainee officer was made pregnant and abandoned by a handsome young villain in an early episode of Z Cars; The Sweeney's top detective Jack Regan encountered a corrupt one in series one and had one for a girlfriend in series two - perhaps reinforcing a public sense that they are only subsidiary players in the real world too. In comparison to police stories in the period covered above there is hardly any fiction - in literature, film or television - in which probation officers are leading or major figures. This mirrors the near complete absence of probation stories in the news media - compared to policing, probation was rarely deemed newsworthy - but the question why relatively few novelists, scriptwriters and television and film producers have engaged with it, is less easily explained. Unlike the police the post-war probation service never cared too much about having any kind of media image, and may have benefitted from its absence. As late as the 1980s, Bill Weston, then general secretary of the Association of Chief Officers of Probation (ACOP), recognised that the Service was "virtually unknown to the public" and spelled out the advantages of a low profile: "Our job is to cope with all these offenders in the community without the community noticing. In a sense, no news is good news with us" (quoted in Milne 1988:13) The consequence of this, however, was that the reading and viewing public never formed even a rough sense of what probation stood for or entailed in practice in the way that they could from equivalent police fictions. No fictional probation officer has ever become known and admired - embedded in the mainstream public imagination - in the way that Dixon, Morse, Grissom and Rebus (or Sherlock Holmes) - have become so embedded. There have been iconic lawyers and medics too, each of whose fame may last no more than a generation, but whose temporary cultural standing is beneficial nonetheless. The rehabilitative ideal, on the other hand, of which probation officers have been key agents, has never had a popular, iconic fictional champion in the way that catch-and-convict policing has had. It has never been personified.

Whatever the reason for the relative absence of fictional probation officers, it cannot simply be that they have been low profile in the social imaginaries of ordinary people - private eyes have a similarly limited profile in the news, but at certain points in time they have become significant cultural heroes. Nor is it that the working lives of probation officers lack drama as such - they are as unlikely to be as action-oriented as a police story, but in the hands of a good novelist or scriptwriter, and with certain permissible embellishments, the lives of nurses and teachers can be dramatised, so why not probation? They remain the least visible of all criminal justice professionals - even prison officers, though they were latecomers to the media pantheon, have been more prominent and memorable on television, e.g. the fierce-but-fair Officer Mackay in Porridge (BBC 1974-1977, but much repeated since) and the abusive Jack Fenner in Bad Girls (ITV 1999-2006). Even if one argues that the relative absence of iconic probation fiction is finally to be explained by the commercial-artistic judgments of publishers and film and television producers as to what is marketable, a cultural issue remains: they are making judgements

about what will or will not resonate with mass or niche audiences, and the rehabilitation of offenders has not figured prominently in that.

While the relative absence of fictional probation representations compared to police officers, lawyers and doctors is clear, there are still probably more than many academic or probation commentators realise, and they have not been studied collectively before, or related to particular moments in probation history, in the way that is attempted here. The analysis is limited to the examples of books, films and television series that I know about (some drawn to my attention by friends and colleagues), and there may be many - especially in novels, particularly where the probation officer is a subsidiary-but-important character - that I do not know about. It stretches the definition of "probation officers" to include social workers who supervise offenders, but not social workers in general (on whom, see Thomas 1983; Henderson and Franklin 2007). It focuses on portrayals of probation officers in England and Wales (touching on Scotland, and with occasional reference to American probation novels), and the conclusions drawn may not hold good for other countries. It omits, for reasons of my limited knowledge as well as space, representations of probation officers in theatre, on radio[1] and in poetry, but a fully rounded examination of the subject would encompass the radio and theatrical versions of Alan Bleasdale's Scully which predated the television series, poems like "Social Enquiry Report" by former probation officer Simon Armitage (1989; 1992) and Alistair Findley's (2010) reflections in verse on his career in Scottish social work.

An era of hope and confidence…with reservations

Prior to WW2, and immediately afterwards, probation officer memoirs (and occasionally journalism) were the only publicly accessible alternative to governmental, professional and academic data on the probation service, a "genre" which continues intermittently to the present day but which was eventually eclipsed as a source of public information by fiction and, much later, by television documentaries) (see, for example, Ellison 1933; Harris 1937; Stokes 1950; St John 1961; Brady 2012; Kaul 2012[2]). More research would be needed to identify the first portrayal of a probation officer in a post-war British novel, but the first one in film was to be found in Good Time Girl (d David McDonald 1948), a seriously intended indictment of the approved school system for young offenders. The Home Office was not so much annoyed with its criticisms, as with the publicising of them in a popular medium. A woman probation officer, in her thirties, dressed in a twinset and a fetching little hat, appears briefly to read out a social enquiry report in a juvenile court,

[1] Geoffrey Parkinson, a legendary probation officer in the Inner London Probation Service, who remained "basic grade" for 30 years, from the 1960s onward, penned many memorable probation anecdotes in his "Tailgunner Parkinson" column in the weekly magazine New Society. Between 1972 and 1994, he wrote over a dozen BBC radio plays, at least of one which, "The Messiah of William Hamlet", included a probation officer.

[2] There is obviously a fine line between memoir and "autobiographical fiction". Katy Kaul's (2012) eBook The Probation Officer and the Whore: a true story reads as a novel but is claimed by the author as memoir rather than fiction, and for that reason it is excluded from this survey. It is written from the standpoint of a woman involved in a sadomasochistic relationship with a deeply unpleasant male probation officer. Unlike previous probation memoirs, it is not professionally illuminating.

primly but helpfully depicting a teenage girl who has fallen into bad company because her mother was feckless and her father a drunk who had taken his belt to her. The girl is sent to an approved school, for her own good. Viewers of this film in the late 1940s, whatever they made of its social criticism, would have recognised the 'social realist' idiom in which it was made. During and after WW2 the several British film studios, Ealing especially, had made a number of dramas (tinged with documentary elements) which celebrated the work of the armed forces and (later) various public services. Ealing's film The Blue Lamp (d Basil Dearden 1950) - the film in which PC George Dixon of Dock Green first appeared - made with the close co-operation of the then Metropolitan Police Commissioner - sought to shape the public image of the post-war police force, facing up to the new challenge of violent teenage criminals - in the way that earlier films had shaped perceptions of the army, navy and air force (Mclaughlin 2005).

I Believe in You (Basil Dearden 1952) then sought to do for the probation service what The Blue Lamp achieved for the police. Based loosely on the memoirs of a journalist who served as a temporary probation officer in a London court during WW2 (Stokes 1950), it featured Henry Phipps (Cecil Parker), a middle aged former Colonial Officer newly returned from Africa - as much an "icon of English national identity" as George Dixon (McLaughlin 2005:12) - wondering what uses his skills might be put to. He joins the probation service in south London, intending it to be temporary. He imbibes the spirit of probation - faith in humanity, (its Christian underpinnings underplayed) - from his missionary-esque old senior, Mr Dove, eventually takes over from him, and falls in love with the resident lady probation officer, Matty Matheson, (Celia Johnson). En route to this he ministers to a range of probation clients, his biggest challenge being to separate the redeemable from the incorrigible among the juvenile offenders on his caseload, from one of whom, in a climactic fight, he wrests a handgun that would otherwise have been used in a serious crime. Like The Blue Lamp, although with a somewhat lighter touch, the film played on post-war public anxieties about violent teenagers, but the probation service, and the magistrates for whom they worked, were shown as equal to the challenge. Thirty years later probation officer John Birkbeck (1982) was to look back with some nostalgia to I Believe in You, in the hope that the (as he saw it) deteriorating service of his day might recover something of Mr Phipps' confidence as a friend of the court, just as the police were (seemingly) re-discovering the kind of community policing that Dixon of Dock Green had once stood for.

Something of the Ealing ethos passed into both the BBC and the nascent independent television companies in the 1950s and 1960s, who both sought to make topical dramas in a social realist mode. The BBC resurrected PC Dixon in 1955, (never imagining the series would run for over twenty years), while Associated Television (ATV) made the London-set Probation Officer, which ran for only two series between 1959-62 - the first hour long drama on the network, shown at peak viewing time. Writer Julian Bond researched the series for three months, creating composite characters from probation officers he met, while two London Probation Service staff, Charles Morgan and Harry Kratz, acted as advisers to it (May and Lord 2001: 41). Probation Officer was a sincere and often sombre portrayal of efforts to rehabilitate young and young adult offenders, and was praised at the time in the House of Lords for playing "a leading part in persuading the nation to try

to make good citizens of those who would otherwise be lost" (www.cherishedtelevision.co.uk) Looking back on it, one former probation officer claimed "the probation service received an enormous and gratuitous boost in public esteem" (Jordan 1984: 82) from the series; another was more critical:

> *Our hero was rarely deskbound; his arena being the back alleys, the expresso bars and wasteland of the city rather than a view from the office window. Whilst the content of the series rapidly disappeared from memory, the image of a bustling, active probation officer remained. The image did not fit the reality. The newly trained entrant to the service was likely to be greeted by different probation officer preoccupations than talk of colleagues clambering over building sites to secure Johnny a job with a works foreman. Coffee-time chat was more likely to centre on picking up all those non-verbal nuances that occurred during the previous evening's report centre interviews.*
> (Harding 1977:18)

Probation Officer may well have drawn, for dramatic purposes, on its advisers' memories of an earlier era, when probation officers did "start the day by doing the rounds of local factories and building sites, often with the probationer, in an attempt to place people in work" (idem), but in language and spirit it was consistent with the emerging penal zeitgeist, as expressed by the Government White Paper Penal Practice in a Changing Society (Home Office 1960) which sought to embed rehabilitation as the principle above all others in criminal justice. While recognising that "real villains" existed, the series did emphasise the troubled psychology underpinning much criminal behaviour, and its depiction of probation officers as decent people doing a professional - and by no means impossible - job encouraged viewers to have confidence in the probation service.

Paradoxically, John Stroud's (1961) probation novel Touch and Go was a rather despondent counterpoint to the television series' idealism. Paradoxically, because Stroud was himself a serving social worker, and later a social work manager, who had already written two well-received novels about child care social work which were nowhere near as downbeat (Holman 2001). Frank Fletcher is a former soldier, newly-trained as a probation officer, happily married and altruistic, who takes a job in a "new town", Kellingham (a thinly fictionalised Stevenage, where Stroud actually worked). There is much sparring between Fletcher and a local police inspector as to who among the local delinquents is redeemable and who is not, and why, and gradually he comes to accept the sanguine outlook of the policeman, concluding sadly that the soullessness of the new town - emblematic of the new, post-war Britain - intensifies the alienation of young people, and makes their rehabilitation harder than it would otherwise be. Disillusioned, Fletcher moves to more satisfying work in Ludlow, Shropshire, an archetypal rural British town where he feels he may finally be able to put his ideals into practice.

The last portrayal of probation to emerge in the post-WW2 era of what we must now call qualified rehabilitative optimism occurs in Anthony Burgess's (1962) novel A Clockwork Orange, whose probation officer takes Frank Fletcher's disillusion to greater extremes. It was set in an unspecified near future (probably the late nineteen seventies) and satirised

what Burgess believed excessive faith in rehabilitation - in his eyes, a misconceived form of social engineering - would entail. Ostensibly, though the novel has deep theological undertones, the object of his ire is a new form of aversion therapy, the Ludovici technique, which conditions violence out of teenage offenders, in this instance Alex, but in so doing robs them of the capacity to make "free" moral decisions and to act assertively when endangered. A Clockwork Orange portrays the male, middle-aged probation officer - here called a Post-Corrective Adviser - as irrelevant to crime control in a violent future Britain; the improbably named Mr Deltoid (a rather pathetic embodiment of muscular Christianity) may once have had a welfare orientation, but now his task is wholly aligned with (or subordinate to) that of the police. He is also a sex pervert, with a hint that only someone so perverted would want to work with ne'er-do-wells like Alex. He is as faithfully rendered in Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film of A Clockwork Orange, (played by well-known character actor Aubrey Morris) as he was in the original novel, an ominous portent of idealism gone rancid. Obsequiously and disingenuously, he presents himself to Alex as "a good friend to you as always, the one man in this sore and sick community who wants to save you from yourself" but, under pressure, gives way to a rant:

> *What gets into you all? We study the problem. We've been studying it for damn well near a century, yes, but we get no further with our studies. You've got a good home here, good loving parents, you've got not too bad of a brain, Is it some devil that crawls inside of you?* (Kubrick 2000:76)

While this was an unfair caricature of probation in the early 1960s, it was not exactly a groundless extrapolation: the post-war service had distanced itself from its roots in Christian charity and moved towards a more scientifically, researched-based way of working with offenders (Vanstone 2004). A certain generation of probation officer – (crudely personified by Mr Deltoid, but not as nasty) felt uncomfortable with this epistemological reorientation, sceptical of empirical studies, but uncertain if their religious convictions counted for anything in a secular world - convictions which, for the lapsed Catholic Burgess, really were where the answer to the problem of evil lay. The intuition that Deltoid loathes rather than likes his clients is validated in a scene where the police, after they have arrested Alex and roughed him up, invite the cowardly probation officer to spit in his face, which he does.

An era of professionalism…with seeds of disillusion

David Matheison (1977), then the chair of Napo's press and parliamentary committee, plausibly suggested that it was in the early 1970s that social work learned to become more wary of the news media, having hitherto ignored - and been ignored by - them . Local authority social work was pilloried after the Maria Colwell child abuse case in 1974, and even the prison service was castigated for riots, escapes and threats of strikes by prison officers. "The probation service has come off relatively lightly" Matheison (1977:32) wrote, "apart from the age old criticism of 'do-gooding', but the media is now too vigilant for any group in the public sector to rest on its laurels". Matheisons's ambivalence towards "do gooding" is interesting. Once it had become a fully secular, properly professional organisation, and ceased to express its ideals though the formal framework of Christian faith, the service never quite knew how to position itself publicly in relation to

altruism, fearing it might attract criticism as sentimental, smug or hypocritical, but in the late twentieth century media representations eroded the idea that showing care and compassion and offering practical help to offenders was worthwhile or relevant.

It didn't, admittedly, begin this way. The reality of the probation service in the 1970s and 1980s did not fulfil Burgess and Kubrick's projection; Mr Deltoid bore little resemblance to the radical probation officers of that era, and captured nothing of the transition that was being made from casework, and a preoccupation with offenders' psychological troubles, to a broader concern with social justice. The woman probation officer who figured occasionally in later series of the 1980s police show Juliet Bravo (BBC 1980-85), acting as a sensible liberal foil to the sometimes brusque woman chief inspector on whom it focused was a more accurate representation, but too minor a character to stand out in the public mind. Using arguments between a police officer (whose husband was also a social worker) and a probation officer to dramatise tensions between care and control, and between realism and idealism, in a not entirely dissimilar way to John Stroud in Touch and Go, showed how little the formatting of probation imagery had changed, suggesting that positioning probation in relation to the police was the cornerstone of making it intelligible to lay audiences.

A one-off television drama, Made in Britain (d Alan Clarke 1982), which made a star of Tim Roth as teenage delinquent Trevor, never doubted that his street-wise social worker, Harry Parker, did his best for him, even if, in the end, the depth of Trevor's alienation renders him unreachable. Two 1980s television series actually aimed at teenagers featured slightly less alienated youngsters under probation supervision, while an adult novel featured a probation officer in a crisis of his own making. In Alan Bleasdale's Liverpool-set Scully (Granada 1984) Mr Flanagan (David Mallinson) was a young probation officer charged with looking after 16 year old tearaway Francis Scully. The opening scenes of the series take place in Flanagan's office - he tries to find the good in the lad, and elsewhere does home visits and liaises with his school. Scully disdains him, as he does the teacher, the school caretaker and a policeman – all the other authority figures who thwart him - but on balance it is a respectful portrayal of probation on Bleasdale's part. In Scotland, in the same era, Allan Prior's Glasgow-set Stookie (STV 1985) concentrated more on the eponymous young person's adventures with his peers than on his relationship with his social worker. An altogether more jaundiced portrait of a kindly male probation officer appears in Andrea Newman's romantic novel (1988) A Sense of Guilt. Professionally, Richard Morgan suppresses his anger in order to be the caring person he believes he ought to be, but a combination of pressures push him into a nervous breakdown, an assault on his best friend and the loss of both his job and his marriage (see Bryers 2008 for further analysis).

A fully-fledged adult television series on probation officers emerged again in 1988/89, on the eve of the "punishment in the community" debate (Nellis 2008). In Hard Cases, inspired and advised by Graham Nicolls (then from the Nottingham Probation Service), and set loosely in "the Midlands", the care/ control, idealism/realism distinction was usually contained within the probation office itself, each wing of the debate represented by a different generation of probation officer, without recourse to a police counterfoil.

Nonetheless, elements of police-probation tension remained - one officer has her naiveté about a black teenager's behaviour shattered by a more worldy-wise policewoman, while a male officer is saved from a shotgun blast by an Asian police officer. The actors spent time with real probation officers - apparently growing to respect them - and according to its producers the series would "look and sound right because the research that went into it would rival a Government enquiry" (TV Times 16-22 January 1988:18). It was indicative of the failure of previous portrayals of probation to impact on the collective memory, that one probation reviewer of Hard Cases claimed that "the probation service is virgin territory for TV drama" (Parsons 1988:8). Journalist Kirsty Milne (1988:12) characterised it as "a soap-style treatment of a probation team in action", not least because it explored the private lives of the officers. Neither of the two series, nor the novelisation undertaken by one of Britain's best crime writers, John Harvey (1987) (who wrote some of the early episodes), captured the public imagination, despite borrowing the at-the-time new idea of multiple lead characters and multiple, entwined stories (rather than single plots per episode) from the BBCs Casualty and cult American television shows such as Hill Street Blues. "The potential is there", the Times (15th January 1988) television critic had written of the first episode, but sadly it was never quite realised.

The varying characters and attitudes of Hard Cases' probation team members, and the internal team politics, were convincing: the programme did genuinely capture something of the ethos of contemporary probation, but to make it dramatic and exciting an excess of implausible action was introduced in many episodes, and there were some rather too outlandish villains under supervision. That said, there were some touching ones too - the emotionally deprived rich kid, the burnt-out ageing armed robber - and Hard Cases has to be judged an honourable attempt to portray probation, as concerned in its own way to show how socially useful probation officers were as I Believe in You had been forty years before. It did not disparage doing good. Opinion in the service varied as to its accuracy; referring to an episode which "involved the voguish issue of custodial remands" Parsons (1988:8) saw genuine if pedestrian dedication - "the producers had imagined themselves to be making a training video for CQSW students" - while another probation officer went on Channel Four's Right of Reply to complain that a scene featuring a rapist and young, inexperienced female probation officer (whom he verbally abuses) alone in a police cell would never happen in real life (Fogarty 1988). According to Milne Hard Cases did not generally go down well with probation officers themselves:

One might imagine that probation officers would be delighted to see their work so conspicuously publicised, particularly since the Hard Cases team came across as valiant and committed people doing difficult and rewarding work. However the majority of probation officers I spoke to were suspicious; some seemed to think that the series had been made with the one aim of bringing the series into disrepute (Milne: 1988)

The opening episode of Hard Cases concluded with a senior probation officer having a nervous breakdown; his office is under-resourced, the roof is leaking and when he tries to write his resignation he can't even find a pen that works, so he takes a bundle of files outside and begins to burn them, aided by a passing vagrant. A year later BBC2 screened a whole play, A View of Harry Clarke (d Alastair Clarke 1989), devoted to the

consequences of burn-out in a Scottish social worker, one of whose duties entailed writing a report on a man due in court for theft, with whom he comes to feel some affinity. The dismal nature of his job on the poverty-wracked housing "schemes", stylistically accentuated by constant rain, had driven Harry (Gryff Rhys Jones) to drink. Unable to offer real help to homeless and suicidal clients, and failing badly as a husband and father (especially to his daughter), Harry ends up in a psychiatric ward. It was a very dispiriting view of social work, but also a poignant tale of middle class anxiety about downward mobility in Thatcher's Britain (Fogarty 1989:29). Bob Munro, the social worker in Paul Sayers (1993) novel The Absolution Game is also burnt-out, barely able to reconcile the fact that the liberal clichés he is professionally required to believe are simply not adequate to the realities of his clients' lives, least of all Bill Duff, a delinquent under his supervision who has murdered an elderly shopkeeper. Duff, he muses hopefully, "needs to be whole again", then despondently recognising that "he's never been that way, not fully made, properly born or conceived" (p196) Munro concludes that he himself is "a murdering altruist" (p31) and "a bungling player in the game of absolution" (p 202) and assists in Duff's suicide, to spare him the "dark dead hole" of inevitable imprisonment.

The next significant representation - almost a decade later - was very different. A Time for Justice (Anonymous 1997) was described by its publisher, Hodder and Stoughton, as "a powerful novel of suspense, a chilling portrait of urban anarchy, and a devastatingly informed indictment of the Criminal Justice System written by an anonymous insider": it is, in essence, a tawdry fictionalisation of all that conservatives believe has gone wrong with law-and-order. Loutish thugs offend with impunity, and innocent crime victims are re-victimised by the leniency and ineffectualness of prosecutors and courts. A right-wing judge determined to restore law and order is thwarted by the liberal establishment - epitomised by an organisation called the Congress of Justice - whose luminaries subvert the necessary rigour of criminal justice. Leading lights include Jill Hull, an assistant chief probation officer in London, and Geoffrey Villers, a flashy Oxford criminologist. Jill Hull is a deeply malevolent woman professional - mean-spirited, arrogant, self-aggrandising, pretentious, feminist/femocrat and zealous anti-racist: the latter two qualities are not cast as virtues. Even worse, she is a bad mother, her own daughter having become delinquent, and is further damned by association with her partner Nick, a corrupt, cocaine-dealing Crown Prosecutor. Hull, and several other probation officer characters - notably Jimmy Haley-White, a black officer involved in running Black Empowerment Groups - are emblematic of all that the author of A Time for Justice despises about the probation service, and about elite liberals (depicted here as authoritarians-in-disguise) more generally. Whoever the author was, he or she was sufficiently attuned to the minutiae of probation debate in this era to make the case for dismantling professional probation training, one of the then Home Secretary's particular hobbyhorses:

> *Marcus [a right wing judge] believes that PSRs should be written by a new corps of probation officers and social workers directly employed by the court, not by the Probation Service or the local authority. They should carry a status analogous to that of court clerks.* (Anonymous, 1997, 177)

Anonymity did not in any obvious way make A Time for Justice any more of a talking point than it would otherwise have been, and there was no great media curiosity about who wrote it[3]. It was reviewed, although not well, in the mainstream press and probably did lend a little weight to the growing disillusion among politicians and right wing media commentators on probation that led, down the line, to the emergence of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). By caricaturing and amplifying some of the political correctness with which the service had sometimes been negatively associated in news media, it encapsulated a moment when a certain public insouciance towards probation set in, just as surely as I Believe in You and Probation Officer had captured a moment when probation seemed to embody great promise for the future.

There were other fictional portrayals of probation after this - one on TV, one in the cinema - but neither were all that interesting in themselves, and neither displaced the poisonous imagery of A Time for Justice. In the BBC six-part serial Jack of Hearts (1999) actor Keith Allen (whose own wild past had included two custodial sentences) swaggered as no-nonsense London probation officer Jack Denby who transfers to Cardiff when his partner gets a job in the university. The series opens with a dramatic night-time chase scene; the kid being pursued desperately phones Denby, who dashes to his rescue but gets seriously assaulted by the pursuers. "Although a probation officer's relationship with criminals is subtly different" wrote critic Mark Lawson (1999), "Jack of Hearts immediately has the feel of another police series". Denby was indeed moody and mistrustful of authority (and not averse to hitting recalcitrant clients), and "his round-the-clock devotion to his job was causing domestic friction with his girlfriend" (Sweeting 1999), just as it had with many a maverick television cop. The series (which had a dark, child abuse theme) crucially lacked any sense that Jack was part of an organisation that stood for something, that his tough-with-a heart values were anything other than his own. Allen was the most high profile television actor up to that point to have played a probation officer, but subsequent roles eclipsed it, and Jack of Hearts slipped from sight, without ever giving cachet to the service or its staff. Screen actor Anthony Hopkins had an even higher profile, and was once under consideration to play Bob Turney (1997) in a film of the ex-con-turned-probation officer's memoir I'm still Standing, but the project never materialised (Turney 2005:103-4).

While Jack of Hearts was not as good as Hard Cases at catching the (team)-spirit of probation, it was a model of verisimilitude compared to the The Parole Officer (2001 d John Duigan), comedian Steve Coogan's breakthrough movie, and also to the sequel to the live-action version of 101 Dalmatians. With a great comic character actor like Coogan

[3] The author has never been identified, but it seems likely to have been a political or journalistic insider who shared the then Home Secretary Michael Howard's ultra-punitive vision for criminal justice in England and Wales, yet who was also prominent enough not to want embarrassing public association with the positions taken in the novel. David Coad, the right-wing probation officer who became an adviser to Howard, journalist Melanie Phillips, and Conservative peer-novelist Jeffrey Archer were all plausible suspects, but none ever shied away from notoriety. Anne Widdecome MP, once Howard's deputy and a budding a novelist at this point, probably had greater reason to distance herself from such overt polemic. Michael Howard's novel-writing wife, Sandra, certainly had reason to do so, lest anyone conclude that such fiction signified what her husband really believed, but dared not say openly.

involved, The Parole Officer might have been a smart, acerbic satire on the punitive and managerial trends in contemporary probation but it shamefully misused his talent. He played Simon Garden, an inept, eccentric man who we first see at a disciplinary hearing, being moved to a new probation office because he has exasperated colleagues in his old one. The plot is dire, a lifeless imitation of an old Ealing comedy. Garden assembles a motley crew of his old clients, who join up out of appreciation for the help he had once given them, and set out to bring down a corrupt senior police officer, with their rusty criminal skills proving more useful than his dubious therapeutic ones. Garden was one of a long line of comic probation officers who had appeared, usually as minor characters, in earlier television sitcoms, though despite being played by Coogan, no more memorably. Mrs Shirley Chapman, a good-looking, business-like probation officer featured in Going Straight (BBC 1978), the short-lived life-after-prison sequel to the much more successful Porridge (Webber, Clement and La Frenais 2001). Unlike Coogan's rendering of Garden, who seems barely competent, it was a very respectful portrayal; the value of her exasperated professionalism was acknowledged, and she managed to get the idle ex-con Fletcher a job as night porter. Samantha Beckinsale played - an again attractive - probation officer Gillian Westcott, the second lead in the equally short-lived Time after Time (ITV 1994-1995, about the complicated relationship between her and a released prisoner determined to go straight despite the pull of his incorrigibly crooked family; they were never romantically involved but she was invariably his "better half", succeeding through feminine charm as much as professional skill. The two probation officers (minor characters) created by former probation officer Jeremy Cameron (1995) in his crime novel Vinnie Got Blown Away are somewhat comic, though recognisable, probation-types - one prison-based, one office-based - but even the smarter of the two is realistic enough to know that the lead character, a likeable young villain, a born chancer, is always one step ahead of authority, including him.

It is perhaps of significance that in popular culture, by the late 1990s, the supervisory relationship between probation officer and offender had come to be regarded as an object of humour and disdain - caring and kindness were precisely the qualities that the government was seeking to expunge from punitive probation culture, and in the general climate of the times they were easy to mock. In 102 Dalmatians (d Kevin Lima 2000) - Chloe Simon (Alice Evans) is the probation officer - cute, but no soft touch - to whom Cruella de Ville is assigned for supervision after leaving prison. "Experimental behaviour therapy" has ostensibly cured Cruella of her mania to make coats out of puppies' skins, but it is of more significance for the (highly contrived) plot that Simon's hobby is breeding dalmatians. She finally reacts to the inevitably duplicitous Cruella as an angry human being and outraged dog lover, not as a cool criminal justice professional - and thumps her. It may be reading too much into the redemptive personal aggression of Chloe Simon (and Jack Denby) to see it as signifying a cultural loss of faith in the therapeutic techniques (and the larger ideal of rehabilitation) that were once probation's hallmark, but there is a vivid contrast in what expressing "the best of oneself" means to these two and what it meant to Henry Phipps in I Believe in You, fifty years before - a sense that both his aspirations and his kindness are not only passé, but morally misplaced, even a little ludicrous.

Community service has latterly figured in television and film dramatisations, although usually as a pretext to bring edgy or unlikely combinations of characters into a dramatic situation, rather than being a focus in its own right. The Theory of Flight (1999) featured Kenneth Branagh playing a man serving 120 hours community service (for base jumping from a tall building) as the companion of a woman with motor neurone disease. Almost needless to say, they fall in love, and the film was in fact more about the sexual needs and rights of disabled people than the aptness or otherwise of community service. In the Geordie comedy Purely Belter (d Mark Herman 2000) two likely lads get sentenced to community service, but are set to work in a tower block which fortuitously overlooks their football team's pitch. One of the regulars in the popular medical drama Doctors (BBC 2000-2011) was once sentenced to community service - briefly, the series also featured a business like male probation officer. In Fast Freddie, The Widow and Me (STV 2011), Lawrence Fox was a wealthy car dealer doing 60 hours of community service in a club for young people with behavioural difficulties. In all these portrayals the offenders on community service are the focus – their supervisors are minor characters, barely relevant to the story. This format was retained, with a small but significant alteration, in writer Howard Overman's cult television series Misfits (ITV 2009-2012) – a dark comedy with a science fictional element (five young people - two girls, three guys) - in a London-based community payback group acquire random superpowers during a freak storm, which they mostly keep secret from others. Their present day probation supervisors (as proletarian as Mr Phipps was "posh") are now malevolent deadbeats who loathe the kids, their work, and probably themselves, as much if not more than Burgess's Mr Deltoid had done. But now there is a twist. At the end of Misfits' first series, the kids collectively kill their probation supervisor, Tony Morecombe after he launches a homicidal attack on them, (the freak storm having amplified his natural bad temper and hatred of stroppy kids). They clandestinely dispose of his body. In the second series, the missing supervisor's successor (and former girlfriend), Sally, becomes suspicious of the kids, so they kill her too. By the third series the killing of their probation workers - four in all - had become a running joke. This portrayal of probation staff as snide and unpleasant stooges represented a new nadir in media images of probation. Their violent deaths go unmourned. The misfit kids, just trying to get by in the world, have the moral high ground. Ken Loach's (2012) Scotland-set film, The Angel's Share was a refreshing change after this: its community service worker, Harry (John Henshaw), is a down-to-earth and good-hearted man, who is as often manipulated by his charges as he is genuinely appreciated by them, and whose kindness does help some of them to change their lives for the better. There's a slightly comic tone to this fine film, but it should not be read as signifying a mood change in portrayals of probation service staff: they do things differently in Scotland, and its "criminal justice social work service" is not under political attack in the way that the Anglo-Welsh probation service has been.

Stirling efforts to the contrary by Probation Officer and Hard Cases notwithstanding, it is perhaps dramatically easier to make points about probation's moral validity if the focus is on more serious rather than less serious offenders. Middle-aged Terry (Peter Mullen), the parole officer in Jonathan Trigell's (2004) Boy A (filmed by Channel 4 in 2007, d John Crowley) is "old school", skilled in helping a young man to resettle after serving fourteen years in prison for a murder he had committed aged 10 - but his own son, resentful of his

father's neglect, accesses confidential work files on Terry's computer and exposes the released prisoner to the tabloid pack, driving him to suicide just as a new life seemed within his grasp. For all his compassion and professional skill Terry is still a flawed man, an idealist whose vocation requires him to go against the grain of a cruel, unforgiving culture, which, through his own son, ultimately unravels his best efforts to do good. The unnamed black woman probation officer/risk manager in Channel 4's Secret Life (d Rowan Joffe 2007) is the opposite extreme to Terry - cold and cynical in her response to released paedophile Charlie, oblivious and indifferent to any signs that he has his condition under control, and to his expressed determination not to re-offend. Failed and rejected at every turn – but manifestly not beyond redemption - Charlie finally hangs himself. Former probation officer Ruth Dugdall's (2005, 2011) "novels of psychological suspense" are framed as flashbacks within the period taken by probation officer Cate Austin (divorced, single mother) to write a parole and pre-sentence report respectively. They also have the lives of serious offenders at their heart - an imprisoned woman due for release whose remorse for the deaths she caused is uncertain, and a woman convicted of assisted suicide, believing she has done no wrong - but the moral and professional challenges that Austin faces are plausible enough, and the depiction of contemporary probation (if not prison) is unpatronising.

Dugdall's novels reflect the predominance of women on the front line of contemporary British probation work, as did Public Enemies (2012), a three-part BBC drama about contemporary probation in London (see Annison 2001 on this gender shift within probation). High hopes were had of this series (in probation circles) not only because it was written by one of the most socially astute scriptwriters in television, Tony Marchant, but also advised by Napo's Harry Fletcher (2012). Probation Officer Paula Radnor (Anna Friel), newly returned to work after an investigation into why one of her seemingly compliant offenders had committed further sex crime, briskly begins risk managing Eddie Mottram (Daniel Mays), an immature and aggressive offender recently released after ten years in prison. Just old enough to remember a more welfare-oriented model of probation, Paula has her doubts about risk management, sensing that it makes reintegrating an ex-prisoner back into society more difficult, but is held reluctantly to task by her bureaucratic manager. "Ten years ago this job was about helping people", Paula says at one point, "now it's about punishing people and helping to keep the crime wave down". As she slowly accepts that her new charge is innocent of the murder to which, as a youth, he had been ill-advised to confess – she begins to treat him less as a "risk" and more as a person, but after a commendable beginning the drama went off the rails: offender and officer begin to fall for each other. What might have become a compelling story about a decent, conscience-wracked professional reacting against the bad faith of a criminal justice system whose self-serving lawyers and apparatchik managers are indifferent to truth and justice, degenerated into an implausible love match across class (and professional) boundaries, in which the promising critique of modern risk management was side-lined into obscurity. While many probation viewers were embarrassed by it, some press reviews (written after the screening of the first episode) were impressed: "I imagine that like me, most viewers won't have known much about the probation service beforehand", wrote one young reviewer, "The drama raised some serious questions about whether we, as a society, genuinely have faith in the idea of

rehabilitation" (Smith 2012). Inadvertently, this reviewer demonstrated, just as the reviewer who considered Hard Cases virgin television territory had done, that the litany of previous media portrayals of the probation service (factual and fictional combined) had had no cumulative impact on public perceptions; the realities of probation were as unknown to the public in 2012 as they had been a half, even a quarter, century before.

Conclusion

There has been no consistent media image of probation in the past sixty years, but there have been certain recurrent themes and formats set within a trajectory that has moved from hope and confidence in the mid -twentieth century to cynicism and disillusion now - albeit with exceptions at both ends of the spectrum. Alongside the image of decent professionals doing a good but difficult job, (I Believe in You, Probation Officer, Hard Cases, Made in Britain, Scully, Cate Austin in Ruth Dugdall's novels) there has been a recurrent image of probation officers as personally troubled souls - people who are either attracted to the job out of misplaced idealism or who are damaged by its impossible demands, and in turn damage their own families (A View of Harry Clarke; The Absolution Game; A Sense of Guilt; Boy A). Professionalism, whilst not absent, is never the defining feature of the image - it is the individual officer's personal qualities which are put on the line in the job, which make or break him or her - and sometimes bureaucratic rules and professional protocols get in the way of doing the right or necessary thing (as in many police fictions). The several comic probation officers have largely been decent professionals too, (Coogan's The Parole Officer being more ambivalent: decent, yes, professional, no), but it is in many respects their good-heartedness which is mocked or derided; they are either quaintly out of place, or in Coogan's case, inept. Chloe Simon's transition in 102 Dalmatians from tender to tough blandly mirrors the cultural change that had been taking place in probation in the late twentieth century, but even Mr Phipps got tough when he needed to, and broke the rules for integrity's sake. Jack Denby walked the same mean streets as many a fictional cop, with only an aslant relation to the real probation service, but he did good, and survived intact. Paula Radnor breaks the rules to become tender rather than to become tough, to let her personal qualities come through (too far!), but there was a much better drama latent within this idea than Public Enemies allowed itself to express. Mr Deltoid in book and film of A Clockwork Orange has a foot in the misplaced idealist/psychologically damaged camp, with an added mean streak, but except in terms of his alignment with the police, he did not accurately embody or anticipate the immediate future of probation. The proletarian probation workers in Misfits are meaner still, never having had ideals in the first place: within the framework of a notionally legitimate punishment they simply make the kids' lives hell.

At a stretch, A Clockwork Orange might be said to have anticipated the displacement of probation by the more total controls of technology - but the kinds of "techno-corrections" that actually emerged in the late twentieth century were surveillant rather than, as in book and film, directly behavioural. Electronic monitoring is not strictly speaking a probation task in Britain but it has been represented in popular culture, cropping up in all the major television soaps - Coronation Street, Emmerdale, Hollyoaks (twice), East Enders, Bad Girls and most recently in Prisoner's Wives (BBC 2012), as well as in Misfits (though it plays no part in the plot) (Monitoring Matters 2010:15; Nellis 2005). Channels 4's single

drama Cyclops (2001 d Bharat Nalluri), was a science fictional extrapolation of these new surveillance technologies - monitoring had gone national in 1999 - in which probation officer Esther Powell (Juliet Aubrey) supervises a released rapist by watching on her laptop everything that he sees, every place he goes, everyone he meets, through the miniature camera-tag implanted in his eye before he left prison. When, one dark night, she sees the outside of her own home on screen she understandably starts worrying; she has become the object of his surveillance as much as he has been the object of hers. When he breaks-in and attacks her she eventually dispatches him with a rather cruder and older technology, a pair of scissors driven right into his camera-eye, a ferocious assertion of retributive energy that both obliterates all rehabilitative commitments and implies that no amount of gimmicky technology is ever going to give us the security we crave from repulsive predators like this.

Cyclops' target was not only technology as such, but also probation officers who had "gone robotic", ceded too much to machines and systems. Although there is a long tradition of mostly American "correctional science fiction" (weirdly imaginative about alternative community punishments - stigmatising offenders by colouring their skins, or making them smell foul - but little interested in probation as such), media representations of probation have dwelt more on the demise of traditional professional skill in the face of intractable criminal realities, rather than in the face of replacement technologies. Thus, by the early twenty first century, neither therapeutic skill nor "tough love" were thought viable; the era when such qualities were widely endorsed as credible solutions to crime was, in the main, over. Getting real with offenders meant giving this up. Several American probation novels saw this coming: Elmore Leonard's (1992) Maximum Bob[4], Pete Blauner's (1991) Slow Motion Riot and George Pelecanos's (2005) Drama City. The probation officer leads in the first two both resign at the end, disillusioned with their task, and retrain as cop and lawyer respectively. Blauner, a journalist, worked for six months as a probation officer in New York to research his book, which deals with the conflict between a vicious, ghetto-born, young drug dealer and an idealistic male probation officer. The slogan on the cover of the book - "a kid with an impossible life and a man with an impossible job" captures precisely the sense that traditional forms of probation are no longer equal to the challenge of contemporary crime, that its high ideals are obsolete, without any purchase in a harsh capitalist underworld. The psychologically troubled female probation officer in George Pelecanos's (2005) Washington-set Drama City may not become a cop at the end, like the protagonist in Maximum Bob, but she partners up with a decent one, which both salvages her sanity and redeems her character. What these novels had in common was an abiding sense that, on the cusp of the twenty-first century, the traditional probation ethos, however glorious it might once have been, was now inadequate and misconceived; not only did it ask too much of offenders to respond to "tough love", it asked too much of officers to practice it. As such, all these novels were indeed straws in the wind, pointing at the place towards which British politicians were manoeuvring probation, where the term "probation officer" survived, but with a seriously

[4] In the short-lived television series of Maximum Bob (NBC 1998 - shown in Britain in 1999) the lead character of the female probation officer, Kathy Baker, was changed into a female lawyer, a far more familiar and conventional character in television crime series.

hollowed-out meaning – reduced to "risk management" - a job that decent people with a sense of vocation are either less likely to aspire to, or, as Paula Radnor found in Public Enemies, unable to do with integrity.

Misfits and Public Enemies were the first probation dramas to be debated online and in the Twitter-sphere - indeed Misfits was assiduously marketed on the web and there are some online episodes that have not been shown on television. The "old media" on which this paper has focused are no longer what they were - books, films and television programmes retain a presence, but can be consumed in a multiplicity of more interactive formats than were ever imagined fifty years ago. Contemporary images of probation - images of anything - are diffused more widely and more quickly, accessed on different time streams, easily repeat-viewed and re-formatted, and responded to more immediately - than was ever possible before. There never was a consistent, consolidated, stable image of probation in British popular culture - indeed, in comparison to the range and renown of cop shows in television schedules and police procedurals in crime fiction it is barely accurate to speak of an "image" - but in modern multi-media formats it would probably be even more difficult to create and sustain a durable one. Given the near inevitability of internet debate on any film, TV series or novel about probation, it is arguably necessary that probation organisations participate in it, to at least register their voice and claim a stake in "image management", (as the police long ago learned to do (Mawby 2002)), however limited their impact might be. Politically, immense damage has now been done to the probation service, and its future in a recognisable form is not assured (Raynor 2012). Few fictions abetted its demise as assiduously as A Time for Justice, or diagnosed and dramatised its failings as well as the first episode of Public Enemies, but far more troublingly probation fiction was unable to generate a compelling counter-vision, a viable, but still recognisable from of probation for the twenty first century - indeed, that was largely why Public Enemies itself ultimately failed. This lacuna in fictional representations of probation may derive from deeper cultural and political shifts of perception in the importance of compassion, altruism and rehabilitation, than from the commercial and imaginative proclivities of novelists, scriptwriters, publishers and film producers, but either way it augurs badly for inspired mainstream representations of what probation can do, could do and has done. A retreat into historical representation, whilst potentially entertaining, is not likely to restore the fortunes of rehabilitation in the here and now, but in any case the recent vogue for nostalgic police and medical dramas on television, set in the nineteen fifties, sixties or seventies (epitomised by Life on Mars BBC 2006-2007), is unlikely to produce a probation equivalent. One reason for this is the absence in the contemporary public domain of any strong, surviving memory of what the service was like in its post-war heyday, with which present days audiences could connect. A deeper reason might be the prevailing sense that such people would surely seem "too good to be true".

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